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The Theme of "Tampering with the Earlier Scriptures"
in Early Commentaries on the Qur'ān

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

CALGARY, ALBERTA

OCTOBER, 2004

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ABSTRACT

The Qurʾān occupies a place of privilege at the centre of Muslim life and thought. The meanings of the words of Muslim scripture have been explored by Islamic scholars for more than 1200 years in a tradition known as *tafsīr*. *Tafsīr* is an important intellectual discipline which reveals a great deal about the emergence of Islamic self-identity. It is possible to trace the development of a variety of important themes through this genre.

One of the liveliest themes in Muslim thought, particularly as presented in works of polemic, is the accusation of the falsification of the scriptures which preceded the Qurʾān. Works of polemic have traditionally associated a number of Qurʾānic verses with the accusation of falsification. These verses generally employ verbs and expressions suggestive of “tampering.”

This study traces the development of the theme of scriptural falsification within two commentaries on the Qurʾān written during the formative period of Islam. One is the earliest complete commentary in existence, and the other is the commentary usually characterized as marking the beginning of classical exegesis. The study provides description and analysis of the exegetes’ interpretation of 25 verses at the intersection of the traditional Muslim and western scholarly associations with the semantic field of tampering in the Qurʾān.

Analysis of the *tafsīr* passages reveals repeating narrative patterns. One of the evident concerns of both commentaries is to tell a story of resistance to the authority of the prophet of Islam by the people of the book, particularly the Jews of Muḥammad’s Madīna. The exegetes portray the Jews and their responses to Muḥammad using a range of techniques which are recognizably literary.

On the basis of the evidence in the commentaries, this study advances the argument that powerful narrative patterns influence the interpretation of the tampering verses and thus also become an essential part of the development of the theme of tampering. In addition to expanding the understanding of this particular theme, the exploration of the commentaries also sheds light on the related themes of the authority of Muḥammad and early Muslim views of other scriptural communities.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The polemical theme of scriptural falsification

The Islamic doctrine of the corruption of pre-Qur'ānic scriptures is a common topic of inter-faith conversation wherever in the world Muslims meet with Jews and Christians today. The origins and development of this doctrine have been topics of academic curiosity ever since the beginning of the scholarly investigation of Muslim polemic. Some scholars have argued that the doctrine began with the words of the Qur'ān. They indicate a group of verses in the Qur'ān which refer to various actions of tampering. Other scholars have argued that the Qur'ān itself does not make an accusation of the corruption of previous scriptures. This argument over the Qur'ānic origin of the doctrine can be investigated by studying what the earliest Muslim exegetes understood the 'tampering verses' to mean. Research into early commentary on these verses in turn leads into a fascinating world of Muslim claims of authority and the responses to these claims by other faith communities.

Muslims believe that somehow, at some time in the past, Jews and Christians 'altered' or 'falsified' the revelations which God gave them, so that their scriptures are now 'corrupted.' The doctrine of scriptural corruption, known in Arabic by the term *tahrīf*, is all but ubiquitous in the Muslim world. In Kate Zebiri's survey of recent Muslim popular literature on Christianity, all of the authors who write on the subject of scripture claim that the text of the Bible is corrupt.¹ Zebiri writes that among contemporary Muslims the doctrine of the textual corruption of the former scriptures is "virtually unchallenged."² The

¹ *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 50. The list of 18 popular works surveyed is made up of sources which were available in Muslim bookstores in the West. Zebiri notes that some Muslims who participate in inter-faith dialogue question the traditional opinion on *tahrīf*, denying that there was any question of conscious or deliberate falsification. *Muslims and Christians*, 163. However, these authors are not among the most popular. The writings of Ahmed Deedat, which have gained more exposure worldwide than those of any other Muslim writer, are so combative on this and other subjects that Zebiri declines to include them in her survey. *Muslims and Christians*, 58.

² *Muslims and Christians*, 6. M.Y.S. Haddad writes that in a survey of contemporary Arab authors, the majority believe that "the original book revealed to Moses was no longer in existence at the time of Muhammad." Only one author was found to disagree. *Arab Perspectives of Judaism. A Study of Image Formation in the Writings of Muslim Arab Authors 1948-1978* (Thesis, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1984), 91.

effects which this doctrine has had on conversation among people of faith in the three great monotheistic communities can well be imagined.³

However, the doctrine has attracted western scholarly scrutiny for a variety of other reasons. Ignaz Goldziher wrote that the question of scriptural falsification was “the central point (*Kernpunkt*) of Muslim polemic”—an essential key to tracing the development of theological polemic against the *Ahl al-kitāb*.⁴ John Wansbrough wrote in a similar vein that the doctrine of *tahrīf* was “destined to bear the major burden of Muslim external polemic.”⁵ The theme of *tahrīf*, along with the associated doctrine of abrogation, has also been found to be a revealing motif in the development of Islamic self-identity.⁶ That process required Islam to measure itself against the previous, existing religions, as well as to set itself apart from them. On a wider canvas, Moshe Perlmann and Hava Lazarus-Yafeh have portrayed the Muslim falsification charge as a popular polemical theme which had been circulating amongst other religious communities at the time of—and prior to—the rise of Islam.⁷ Wansbrough has included the doctrine of *tahrīf* in a list of basic themes of Muslim polemic which could be seen to have been adopted and adapted from their use among

³ David S. Powers writes, “The doctrine of scriptural distortion . . . has contributed to the tendency of Muslims and Jews to disregard and ignore one another’s scriptures.” “Reading/Misreading One Another’s Scriptures: Ibn Ḥazm’s Refutation of Ibn Nagrella al-Yahūdī,” in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks, eds. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 109. W. Montgomery Watt suggested that when Muslims encountered religious disagreements with the conquered peoples, the doctrine of corruption “made it easy to rebuff any arguments based by Christians on the Bible.” *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and misperceptions* (London: Routledge, 1991): 30. Hugh Goddard’s recent study shows that ancient arguments against the authenticity of the Bible continue in modern Egypt. “The Persistence of Medieval Themes in Modern Christian-Muslim Discussion in Egypt,” in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, Samir Khalil Samir & Jørgen S. Nielsen, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 226-7. But these may be only the milder effects. M.Y.S. Haddad argues that contemporary Arab authors use their assertion of the corruption of the Torah to construct a politically-motivated—and deeply negative—image of the Jews. *Arab Perspectives of Judaism*, 118-119.

⁴ “Über muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-kitāb,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* xxxii (1878), 363, 364, cf. 344.

⁵ *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 41.

⁶ *The Sectarian Milieu*, 109f.

⁷ Moshe Perlmann, “The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism,” in *Religion in a Religious Age*, S.D. Goitein, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), 106. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19-20. Cf. Tor Andrae, *Les Origines de l’Islam et le Christianisme* (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1955), 202-204; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 191; Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 41, 109; Jean-Louis Déclais, *Les Premiers Musulmans Face a la Tradition Biblique: Trois récits sur Job* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996), 99 n. 38.

Jewish and Christian communities in the Middle East at the time of the emergence of Islam.⁸

How did the Islamic doctrine of scriptural corruption come into being? Was it an understanding which the first generations of Muslims shared? How did it develop into the hardened accusation which is made so readily by many Muslims today? This dissertation is a contribution toward the study of the question of how the doctrine of the corruption of earlier scriptures developed in Islam.⁹ Its area of focus is the development of the tampering motif by Muslim exegetes in the formative period of Qur'ānic exegesis. That development is to be traced through direct literary analysis of commentaries on the Qur'ān written by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767)¹⁰ and Abū Ja'far ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). The investigation will centre on the explanations in those commentaries of all of the verses in Muslim scripture which are commonly connected with the doctrine of scriptural corruption.

Through the investigation of the operation of a single theme in selected works of *tafsīr*, this dissertation is secondly a contribution toward the study of the earliest period of Qur'ānic commentary, from the second to the fourth Islamic centuries. This area of research has been opened up in recent decades through the publication—indeed, sometimes even discovery—of early *tafsīr* works. It is a new field wide open to the exploration of language, themes and movements in early Islam. The formative period of Qur'ānic interpretation is a largely unexplored area of academic research. A great number of interesting possibilities present themselves to the scholar.¹¹ Thus far, relatively little scholarly work has been done on the early commentaries.

Exploring the *tafsīr* works from the formative period involves discovering how the

⁸ *Sectarian Milieu*, 40-44. See Andrew Rippin, "Literary analysis of Qur'ān, *tafsīr*, and *sīra*: the methodologies of John Wansbrough," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 157.

⁹ Watt wrote in 1991, "There has so far been no detailed study of the way in which this doctrine of corruption was elaborated." *Muslim-Christian encounters*, 33. Martin Accad writes in a recent article, "It is true that *tahrīf* became *eventually* a central point of debate between Muslim and Christian polemicists, but it might be useful to attempt to trace its entry into the Islamic discourse in order to determine the exact nature of the argument." (Accad's italics) "The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse of the Ninth to the Fourteenth Centuries: An exegetical inventorial table," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 14 (2003), 72.

¹⁰ The notation 'd. 150/767' means 'died in 150 A.H./767 A.D.'

¹¹ "The development of grammar, of theology, of sectarian trends and of mysticism are all potentially traceable through a close analysis of these early works." Andrew Rippin, "The Present Status of Tafsir Studies," *The Muslim World* 72 (1982), 230.

earliest Muslim exegetes developed meaning from the text of Muslim scripture. The main lines of their methodology become visible as the development of a motif such as tampering is traced through the commentaries. At the same time, the commentaries give intimations of how each exegete's methodology influences his interaction with the text of scripture. The commentaries to be examined are part of the literary record of the development of Islamic identity in the second to fourth Islamic centuries. This dissertation is therefore, thirdly, a contribution to the study of the intellectual history of early Islam.

The exploration of the tampering motif will begin in chapter 2 with a survey of the Qur'ānic references to the earlier scriptures, as well as of verbs and other expressions from the Qur'ān's semantic field of tampering. This is necessary because—as quickly becomes apparent from familiarity with the commentaries—the exegetes wrote within the context of the Qur'ān's verbal atmosphere. Chapters 3 and 4 will describe and analyze the explanations of the relevant 'verses of tampering' in the commentaries of Muqātil and al-Tabarī. These analyses will conclude with concise summaries of the commentaries' understanding of the most important Qur'ānic verbs and expressions of tampering.

Chapter 5 will follow the direction set in the analyses by pursuing indications in the commentaries of a narrative structure looming over the development of the tampering theme. There the argument will be made that the methodology of exegesis practiced by 'narrative' commentators exerts an influence on the meanings derived from the text of scripture. The final chapter will consolidate the findings of description and analysis, and suggest directions which may be fruitfully pursued in further research on the basis of those findings. Possible links between the Islamic doctrine and similar accusations within the Muslim community—as well as among other faith communities—will also be touched upon.

This introductory chapter will now proceed into a survey of major scholarly studies on the doctrine of *tahrīf*, followed by a description of general trends in how Muslim scholars have understood the theme of tampering over the course of the Muslim tradition. It will be seen through this survey that the doctrine has been linked with verses from the Qur'ān. This leads naturally to an indication of the verses which scholars have connected with the doctrine, and to the question of whether the accusation of falsification can indeed be found

in the Qurʾān itself. The commentaries to be examined in this dissertation will then be introduced, along with their authors. The chapter will end with the articulation of the thesis statement for this study.

1.2 Scholarly study of the doctrine of *tahrīf*

Scholarly study of the doctrine of *tahrīf* has investigated the accusation as a flashpoint of polemic. Some scholars have included the tampering motif in broader surveys of polemical themes. Other have focused on the theme itself. Most have agreed with Goldziher that the accusation of scriptural falsification is the central theme—or at least one of the major themes—of Muslim external polemic. The major scholarly books and articles on *tahrīf* highlight a diversity of authors, genres and eras of Muslim scholarship. Taken together, they constitute a kind of history of Muslim thought on Judaism and Christianity.

The work of Moritz Steinschneider was pivotal for the scholarly exploration of the theme of *tahrīf*. He drew attention to a number of works which discuss the Muslim accusation in his *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache, zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden*.¹² Steinschneider provided bibliographical information on such works as those ascribed to Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064),¹³ al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111),¹⁴ and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328).¹⁵ Of particular importance for the study of the corruption charge was his highlighting of Ibn Ḥazm’s *Izhār tabdīl al-Yahūd wa’ l-Naṣārā li’ l-Tawrāt wa’ l-Injīl wa Bayān Tanāquḍ mā bi-Aydihim min dhālika mimmā lā yaḥtamilu’ l-Ta’wīl*.¹⁶ Steinschneider also included a section on Jewish literary responses to the Muslim accusations of the Bible’s falsification and abrogation.¹⁷

¹² Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1877.

¹³ *Kitāb al-fiṣal fi’ l-mīlāl wa’ l-ahwā’ wa’ l-niḥāl*. Steinschneider, 99-101.

¹⁴ *al-Rad al-Jamīl ‘alā man Ghayyara al-Tawrāt wa’ l-Injīl*. Steinschneider, 48-49.

¹⁵ *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ* (‘Sound reply to those who altered Christ’s religion’). Steinschneider, 32-34, 36.

¹⁶ “Exposure of the alterations introduced into the Torah and the Gospel by Jews and Christians, and elucidation of the contradictions [contained in the versions they possess] thereof, which cannot be explained away through [metaphorical] interpretation.” Steinschneider, 22-23, 140.

¹⁷ *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, 320-325.

The publication of Steinschneider's study provided an occasion for Ignaz Goldziher to explore the themes treated in Muslim polemical literature in his article, "Über muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-kitāb."¹⁸ Among other prominent themes, Goldziher stressed the significance of the Muslim accusation (*Anschuldigung*) that the possessors of earlier scriptures had changed and falsified the books of revelation in their possession. He described the accusation of falsification as "the principle (*hauptsächlichste*) polemic moment,"¹⁹ and "the primary charge (*Hauptbeschuldigung*), which Islam raised against the *Ahl al-kitāb* from the beginning."²⁰ With evident wonder, Goldziher traced the attempts to reconstruct the 'original' contents of the Torah, Psalms and Gospel by Muslims who were not familiar with the scriptures themselves.²¹ He then pinpointed the importance of Ibn Ḥazm's work *Izhār tabdīl al-Yahūd* for the Islamic doctrine of corruption.²² He also noted the diverse views of al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Ṣinhājī [al-Qarāfi] (d. 684/1285),²³ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyā (d. 751/1350),²⁴ Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) and al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442),²⁵ and Ḥājji Khalifa (d. 1067/1657)²⁶ on the question of tampering. While some Muslim polemicists attacked the authenticity of earlier scriptures, wrote Goldziher, other writers—and indeed sometimes the same writers—found abundant prophecies of the coming of Muḥammad in the scriptures as they then existed.²⁷ Goldziher brought the history of the doctrine of *tahrīf* right up to the second half of the 19th century by describing the then just-published Turkish translation of the *Izhār al-Ḥaqq* by Raḥmat Allāh al-Hindī (1818-91).²⁸

Ten years after Goldziher's article, Martin Schreiner was still referring extensively to Steinschneider's survey, calling it "an eloquent witness to the close contact between

¹⁸ *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* xxxii (1878), 341-387.

¹⁹ "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 344.

²⁰ "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 364.

²¹ "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 348-360.

²² "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 363-368.

²³ "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 369-372.

²⁴ "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 372-5.

²⁵ "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 368.

²⁶ "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 368-9.

²⁷ "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 372-379.

²⁸ "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 343-344.

Muslims and Jews.”²⁹ In the polemic between those two groups, Schreiner found the prominent points to be the question of the falsification of the Hebrew Bible, the ‘prophecies of Muhammad’ in the earlier scriptures, and the abrogation of the Jewish law.³⁰ Schreiner discussed the attitude toward the Bible as portrayed in a number of famous *ḥadīth*.³¹ He described the views of the Muslim scholars al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/965) and al-Bīrūnī (d. 442/1048),³² of al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) and al-Ghazālī,³³ and of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209).³⁴ He included a substantial section on Ibn Ḥazm, but left Ibn Ḥazm’s position on *tahrīf* to Goldziher.³⁵ From the Jewish side of the controversy, Schreiner presented the polemic of Sa‘adiyā (882-943),³⁶ the Karāites,³⁷ Jehuda Halēwī (1075-1141),³⁸ and Abraham ibn Dāwūd (c. 1246-1316).³⁹ Schreiner felt that by the time of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Muslim writers had begun to reckon with “the objection of the Jews, who referred to the uninterrupted transmission of the [biblical] text.”⁴⁰

Hartwig Hirschfeld’s shorter 1901 article, “Muhammadan Criticism of the Bible,” focused mainly on the accusations of Ibn Ḥazm in his *Book of Religions and Denominations*.⁴¹ Hirschfeld also provided translations of passages from Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāhiz (d. 255/869)⁴² and al-Shahrastānī.⁴³ He speculated on the influence of Islam on the Karāites, and the influence of the Karāites on the Zāhirites.⁴⁴ Finally, Hirschfeld noted the “protest” of Maimonides (1135-1204) to the Muslim accusation of Jewish

²⁹ “Zur Geschichte der Polemik zwischen Juden und Muhammedanern,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* xlii (1888), 591.

³⁰ “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 592.

³¹ “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 592-593.

³² “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 596-601.

³³ “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 618-621.

³⁴ “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 639-648.

³⁵ “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 612-618.

³⁶ “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 601-607.

³⁷ “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 607-612.

³⁸ “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 621-625.

³⁹ “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 629-639.

⁴⁰ “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 641.

⁴¹ *Jewish Quarterly Review* 13 (1901), 225-230, 232-234.

⁴² “Muhammadan Criticism of the Bible,” 230-232.

⁴³ “Muhammadan Criticism of the Bible,” 222. From his “Refutation of Christianity.”

⁴⁴ “Muhammadan Criticism of the Bible,” 223-225.

falsification of the Torah.⁴⁵

Scholarly study of the theme of *tahrīf* took a large step forward through the publication of the first major article devoted exclusively to this subject in 1922. Ignazio Di Matteo explored the theme of *tahrīf* through the works of major commentators on the Qurʾān as well as through the works of Muslim polemicists.⁴⁶ He saw a historical development in the doctrine, in which the Qurʾān and the early traditionists spoke of the authenticity of the biblical text, while polemicists coming much later were divided. The commentaries which he examined were those of al-Ṭabarī⁴⁷ and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.⁴⁸ Di Matteo found some Muslim polemicists to agree with what he considered the ‘older’ view, but shows how other polemicists explained *tahrīf* as the corruption of the text of scripture. He began his survey of Muslim polemicists with al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (d. 246/860) and his “Refutation of the Christians.”⁴⁹ Other substantial descriptions of significant figures include those of al-Bīrūnī and his *Kitāb al-āthār al-bāqiya*,⁵⁰ ‘Abd Allāh al-Turjumān (d. 823/1420) and his *Tuhfat al-arīb fi al-radd ‘ala ahl al-ṣalīb*,⁵¹ and Abū-l-Faḍl al-Malikī as-Su‘ūdī (d. 942/1535) and his *Takhjil man harrafa al-injil*.⁵² Di Matteo also took note of the influence of al-Hindī and provided a handy summary of his attack on the Bible in *Izhār al-Haqq*.⁵³ In the following year, Di Matteo published a separate article in order to detail the accusations of Ibn Ḥazm.⁵⁴

The article on “Tahrīf” in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* was written

⁴⁵ “Muhammadan Criticism of the Bible,” 234-235. Hirschfeld also discussed a number of the Qurʾānic tampering verses, along with traditions linked to them in *Sira* and *ḥadīth*, in the context of his discussion of the “Medinan Revelations” in *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), 103-109.

⁴⁶ “Il ‘tahrīf’ od alterazione della Bibbia secondo i musulmani,” *Bessarione* xxxviii (1922): 64-111, 223-60. English abstract: M.H. Ananikian, trans., “Tahrif or the alteration of the Bible according to the Moslems,” *The Muslim World* 14 (1924): 61-84.

⁴⁷ “Il ‘tahrīf’ od alterazione,” 88-97.

⁴⁸ “Il ‘tahrīf’ od alterazione,” 91-96.

⁴⁹ “Il ‘tahrīf’ od alterazione,” 223-226. Di Matteo described this work in more detail in his “Confutazione contro i Cristiani delo Zaydita al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm,” *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 9 (1921-2), 301-64.

⁵⁰ “Il ‘tahrīf’ od alterazione,” 228-234.

⁵¹ “Il ‘tahrīf’ od alterazione,” 243-6.

⁵² “Il ‘tahrīf’ od alterazione,” 247-252.

⁵³ “Il ‘tahrīf’ od alterazione,” 252-8.

⁵⁴ “Le pretese contraddizioni della S. Scrittura secondo Ibn Ḥazm,” *Bessarione* 39 (1923), 77-127.

by Frants Buhl.⁵⁵ Buhl used the largest part of the article to discuss verses from the Qurʾān which have traditionally been associated with the tampering theme. He freely characterized these as accusations made by Muḥammad himself, and attempted to provide a historical framework for “the vague way in which Muḥammad in the Qurʾān speaks of falsifications of scriptures by the ‘possessors of a scripture.’”⁵⁶ Buhl wrote that this could best be done with the understanding that Muḥammad had at first appealed to the evidence of the earlier scriptures, but that when the Jews ridiculed his claims, he began to accuse them of corrupting their scriptures.⁵⁷ Buhl also indicated the extent of the diversity of views on *tahrīf* among Muslim scholars, from the accusation of textual falsification to the theory of erroneous interpretation. Buhl’s rather outspoken remarks on *tahrīf*, which appeared in the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* as well,⁵⁸ will provide a jump-off point for the thesis of the dissertation later on in this chapter.

While Schreiner had focused on the controversial material between Muslims and Jews, Erdmann Fritsch examined the history of Muslim polemic against Christians.⁵⁹ He devoted a portion of his study to “Der Vorwurf der Bibelfälschung.”⁶⁰ He gave special attention to the ‘reproach’ made by the later Muslim writers [al-Ṣinhājī] al-Qarāfī,⁶¹ and Ibn Taymiyya, whom he portrayed as following in the footsteps of Ibn Ḥazm. Fritsch first noted that for the Muslim polemicists ‘Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. 240/855) and al-Jāhiz the corruption (*Verderbnis*) was to be found not in the original text of the earlier scriptures, but rather came from translators and copyists.⁶² He suggested that these were good examples of the careful (*behutsam*) way in which Muslim scholars treated the question of the falsification of the Bible prior to Ibn Ḥazm.⁶³ But with Ibn Ḥazm and his

⁵⁵ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M.Th. Houtsma *et al*, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), Vol. IV, 618-619.

⁵⁶ “Tahrīf,” (EI1), 619.

⁵⁷ “Tahrīf,” (EI1), 618.

⁵⁸ H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, eds. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965), 560-561.

⁵⁹ *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter: Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache* (Breslau: Verlag Müller & Seiffert, 1930).

⁶⁰ *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 54-74.

⁶¹ in his *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira ‘an al-aswila al-fājira*.

⁶² *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 57-8.

⁶³ *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 57. Fritsch adds later in the article that prior to Ibn Ḥazm, Muslim polemicists took an unprejudiced (*unbefangen*) approach to the text of the New Testament. (64)

followers—the “advocates of the radical theory of falsification,” Fritsch called them—the accusation came to include such sophisticated assertions as the story of Ezra’s recollection of the Torah after it was lost,⁶⁴ rumoured discrepancies among Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch,⁶⁵ and the impossibility of the sinful acts of prophets.⁶⁶ A special feature of Fritsch’s article, in comparison to other articles to this point, is his extensive description of polemic against the New Testament—including critical discussion of its canonization,⁶⁷ denial of its reports of the crucifixion of Jesus,⁶⁸ and accusations of a wide variety of contradictions.⁶⁹

A fine scholar-friendly treatment of *tahrīf* was published by two French authors in 1980.⁷⁰ Jean-Marie Gaudeul and Robert Caspar gathered key texts on the theme and presented them in the Arabic original along with a French translation. The article shows the complexity of the theme within the text of the Qur’ān by indicating both the wide range of vocabulary related to tampering, and the positive references to the earlier scriptures.⁷¹ Definitions of the term *tahrīf* are drawn from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Qaffāl (d. 365/976), and the modernist Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905).⁷² The article illustrates the accusation of falsification of the text of the earlier scriptures with passages from Ibn Ḥazm and al-Juwaynī.⁷³ It then presents excerpts from authors who refused to make the accusation of corruption but who rather found false interpretation of an intact text: Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), Ibn Khaldūn, and Muḥammad ‘Abduh.⁷⁴ Caspar closes the article with a discussion of views of *tahrīf* by such authors as Ibn Khaldūn and especially Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935) which show not only a knowledge of traditional Muslim positions but also

⁶⁴ *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 59-60.

⁶⁵ *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 60-61.

⁶⁶ *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 62-3.

⁶⁷ *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 64-5.

⁶⁸ *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 66-70.

⁶⁹ *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 70-74.

⁷⁰ Jean-Marie Gaudeul and Robert Caspar, “Textes de la Tradition musulmane concernant le *Tahrīf* (Falsification) des Écritures,” *Islamochristiana* vi (1980), 61-104.

⁷¹ “Textes de la Tradition musulmane,” 62-65.

⁷² “Textes de la Tradition musulmane,” 65-78.

⁷³ “Textes de la Tradition musulmane,” 78-89.

⁷⁴ “Textes de la Tradition musulmane,” 89-96.

some understanding for Christian and Jewish concepts of revelation.⁷⁵ An additional strength of this article is the authors' careful composition of questions to ask of the material.

Camilla Adang also takes a multi-genre approach to the accusation of *tahrīf* in her *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Ḥazm*.⁷⁶ Bracketed by the views of these two polemicists, her survey of Muslim writers also includes Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), al-Ya'qūbī (d. 292/905), al-Ṭabarī, al-Mas'ūdī, al-Maqdisī (d. 355/966), al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) and al-Bīrūnī. She thus draws information from the disparate genres of historical and chronological writing, polemic and apologetic literature, *kalām* and *tafsīr*. Adang divides her subject matter up into the views of the writers on such topics as proofs of prophethood and abrogation. In her chapter on "The question of the authenticity of the Jewish scriptures," she documents a variety of approaches to the meaning of *tahrīf*.⁷⁷ As may be expected, her description of Ibn Ḥazm's arguments are particularly thorough.⁷⁸

In the article on "Tahrīf" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition,⁷⁹ Hava Lazarus-Yafeh summarized the foregoing 120 years of scholarly descriptions of the doctrine. She enumerated the Qur'ānic verses which have been associated with an accusation of *tahrīf*, and considered some exegetical treatments of the verses. She indicated that a number of Muslim writers understood *tahrīf* to mean "distortion of the meaning of the text," but suggested that a more common understanding among Muslim authors was "falsification of the text itself." Christians and Jews defended their scriptures from Muslim accusations of falsification, wrote Lazarus-Yafeh, from an early period. Ibn Ḥazm produced systematic arguments against the authenticity of the biblical text in the fifth Islamic century in his *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī al-milal*. Lazarus-Yafeh notes that the accusation of scriptural forgery was a polemical motif both in pre-Islamic times among Samaritan and Christian authors, as

⁷⁵ "Textes de la Tradition musulmane," 96-104.

⁷⁶ Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.

⁷⁷ *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, 223-248.

⁷⁸ *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, 237-248.

⁷⁹ P.J. Bearman *et al.*, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), Vol. X, 111-112.

well as concerning the text of the Qurʾān between Sunnī and Shīʿī authors.⁸⁰

The foregoing descriptions of scholarly articles clearly show that Muslim scholars have made the accusation of tampering with earlier scriptures a major part of their polemic against Jews and Christians.⁸¹ The survey also shows that Muslim writers over the centuries have not been unanimous on what they have understood by the charge of tampering. To distinguish the most common views in works from the Muslim tradition, scholars have employed the terms *tahrīf al-maʿnā*, distortion of the meaning or interpretation of the words of scripture, and *tahrīf al-naṣṣ*, falsification of the text itself.⁸² Many Muslim writers throughout the history of Islamic scholarship have favoured the former conception. Other writers have championed the latter view, some of them to great effect.⁸³

As representative of the view of *tahrīf al-maʿnā*, a number of scholars have highlighted the approach of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm. Though a work of polemic, and written relatively early (9th C.), his “Refutation of the Christians” envisioned corruption to the interpretation of the Bible, but not to the text itself.⁸⁴ Ibn Qutayba also viewed the Torah as a revealed scripture and an historical source.⁸⁵ The historian Ibn Khaldun, in a famous statement near the beginning of his *Muqaddimah*, wrote that “thorough scholars” cannot accept the statement that Jews had altered the Torah, “since custom prevents people who

⁸⁰ In *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), Lazarus-Yafeh set a chapter on “Muslim arguments against the Bible” in the context of a variety of Muslim approaches to the earlier scriptures, including study of the Bible in search of the prediction of Muḥammad and Islam.

⁸¹ Georges Anawati, at the end of yet another fine scholarly survey of Muslim polemic, remarked on the striking consistency of Muslim objections to Christianity. The tone of the polemic could vary, he wrote, but never its basic lineup of accusations. He placed the Islamic charge of corruption at the head of the list. “Polémique, Apologie et Dialogue Islamo-Chrétiens: Positions classiques médiévales et positions contemporaines,” *Euntes Docete* XXII (1969), 448.

⁸² Lazarus-Yafeh, “Tahrīf,” (EI2), 112. Gaudeul and Caspar, “Textes de la Tradition Musulmane,” 61.

⁸³ Scholars can differ widely in their characterization of the relative strength of these two approaches in the Muslim tradition. While Lazarus-Yafeh describes the accusation of the falsification of the text as “the more common understanding” (“Tahrīf,” (EI2), 111), Jane McAuliffe finds that “the assertion of whole-sale textual corruption remains an uncommon stance.” “The Qurʾānic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 153.

⁸⁴ Lazarus-Yafeh, “Tahrīf,” (EI2), 112. Buhl, “Tahrīf,” 619. Di Matteo, “Confutazione contro i Christiani,” 319. Di Matteo, “Il *tahrīf* od alterazione,” 225. But cf. David Thomas, “The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 32-37, 38 n. 28.

⁸⁵ Camilla Adang, “Medieval Muslim Polemics against the Jewish Scriptures,” in Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A historical survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 146.

have a (revealed) religion from dealing with their divine scriptures in such a manner.”⁸⁶ If tampering had taken place in relation to the text of the Torah, it is confined to its interpretation.⁸⁷ Another relatively late medieval writer who favoured “alteration of the sense” over corruption of text was Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā‘ī (d. 884/1480) in his *Al-aqwāl al-qawīmah fi ḥukm al-naql min al-Kutub al-qadīmah*.⁸⁸ Muslim writers who took the approach of *tahrīf al-ma‘nā*, including Ibn Qutayba and al-Biqā‘ī, were more likely to search the Jewish and Christian scriptures for passages which could be read as prophecies of the mission of Muḥammad.

For the view of *tahrīf al-naṣṣ*, many scholars have identified the 11th-century Spanish polemicist Ibn Ḥazm as the first to systematize the doctrine of textual falsification and to offer actual citations from the Bible in support of his accusation.⁸⁹ Lazarus-Yafeh explains handily in her *Intertwined Worlds* that Ibn Ḥazm presented many examples of what he considered to be chronological and geographical inaccuracies, theological impossibilities, and preposterous behaviour of prophets in the Hebrew Bible.⁹⁰ He then did the same with the Christian Gospel.⁹¹ For many Muslims, his arguments have been convincing. “Ibn Ḥazm’s impact on later Muslim polemics was great, and the themes which he raised with regard to *tahrīf* and other polemical ideas . . . became the standard themes of later Muslim polemical literature against both Jews and Christians.”⁹²

⁸⁶ *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), Vol. I, 20. Both Lazarus-Yafeh and McAuliffe note the curious fact that this statement is omitted from most printed Arabic editions of *The Muqaddimah*. Lazarus-Yafeh, “Tahrīf,” *EI2*, 112. McAuliffe, “The Qur’ānic Context,” 156, n. 33. Ibn Khaldūn’s statement did not mean, however, that he was encouraging Muslims to read the Torah. Later in his work he wrote, “The religious law has forbidden the study of all revealed scriptures except the Qur’ān.” *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. II, 438.

⁸⁷ See Goldziher, “Über muhammedanische Polemik,” 368; and Gaudeul and Caspar, “Textes de la Tradition Musulmane,” 91-92. Ibn Khaldūn’s perspective was informed by a more realistic idea of how the New Testament Gospels came together, and a greater appreciation for differences in concepts of revelation. *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. I, 476-77, 192.

⁸⁸ Di Matteo, “Il *tahrīf* od alterazione,” 247. Steinschneider describes the work in *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, 389-393.

⁸⁹ Goldziher, “Über muhammedanische Polemik,” 363. Schreiner, “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 613. Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 57. Accad, “The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse,” 72-73.

⁹⁰ *Intertwined Worlds*, 26-35.

⁹¹ Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), is a recent full-length description and analysis of Ibn Ḥazm’s influential attack.

⁹² Lazarus-Yafeh, “Tahrīf,” 112.

One Muslim scholar who wrote in support of the corruption of the text of the Torah prior to Ibn Ḥazm was al-Maqdisī.⁹³ Many subsequent Muslim writers echoed Ibn Ḥazm's arguments, such as al-Qarāfī, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.⁹⁴ Thus the two tampering accusations appeared to continue on their parallel tracks for more than half a millenium.⁹⁵ Then in the mid-19th century, the Muslim accusation of *tahrīf al-naṣṣ* took a kind of quantum leap through the controversy between Muslim scholars and European Christian missionaries in the India of the British Raj.

Mawlana Raḥmat Allāh Kayrānawī (“al-Hindī,” 1818-91) is credited with moving the textual corruption accusation forward through a famous public debate and through a widely-published book. Interestingly, the most influential Indian theologian of the modern period, Shāh Walī Allāh, had previously declared that he did not believe in the corruption of the text of the Torah. He had explained in his *Al-Fawz al-Kabīr fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* that ‘tampering with meaning’ means corrupt interpretation (*ta’wīl*), misconstruing a verse arbitrarily, and deviation (*inhirāf*) from the straight path.⁹⁶ Likewise a contemporary of Raḥmat Allāh, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, conceived of tampering as referring essentially to

⁹³ Adang, “Medieval Muslim Polemics,” 149-151. Adang characterizes al-Maqdisī’s attitude toward the Torah as “ambivalent,” because he also searched for annunciations of Muḥammad in the Torah (149). In contrast to Ibn Ḥazm, al-Maqdisī wrote in a courteous tone and was generally fair and accurate in his descriptions of the beliefs and practices of the Jews (151). al-Maqdisī was also candid about his motivation for making a case to Muslims for the alteration of the text of the Torah: “I have explained all this to you, so that you will not be discouraged when they say that Muhammad is not mentioned in the Torah” (from his *Kitāb al-Bad’ wa al-Ta’rikh*, cited in Adang, “Medieval Muslim Polemics,” 150).

⁹⁴ Lazarus-Yafeh, *EI2*, “Tahrīf,” 112. However, Goldziher quotes from a manuscript of al-Jawziyyah the approach to a popular aspect of the tampering accusation taken by this 14th-century student of Ibn Taymiyya: “It is an entirely false idea when it is asserted that Jews and Christians have agreed together to expunge [the name of Muḥammad] out of their scriptures in all the ends of the world where they live. No one among learned Muslims asserts this, neither has Allah said anything about this in the Qur’ān, nor has any of the Companions, Imams or Qur’ān scholars expressed himself in this sense.” “Über muhammedanische Polemik,” 373. Lawrence Browne gives his translation of part of Goldziher’s quote in “The Patriarch Timothy and the Caliph al-Mahdi,” *The Muslim World* 21 (1931), 44.

⁹⁵ Ibn Taymiyya wrote in the 14th century that the Islamic position towards textual corruption was still diverse and ambiguous: “If . . . they [Christians] mean that the Qur’ān confirms the textual veracity (*alfāz*) of the scriptural books which they now possess—that is, the Torah and the Gospels—this is something which some Muslims will grant them and which many Muslims will dispute. However, most Muslims will grant them most of that.” cited by Martin Accad in “The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse,” 73.

⁹⁶ Arabic translation by Muḥammad Munīr al-Dimashaqī (Deoband: Mukhtār and Company, 1986), 7. Cf. G.N. Jalbani, *Teachings of Shah Waliyullah of Delhi* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1967), 9. Shāh Walī Allāh also discussed the theme of *tahrīf* in Book VI of his *Hujjat Allāh al-Bāliḡha*, English translation in Marcia K. Hermansen, *The Conclusive Argument from God* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 346-352.

exegetical interpretation rather than actual verbal corruption of the text.⁹⁷ But neither of these moderate views had the popular appeal of the case Raḥmat Allāh made for textual corruption in a public debate which took place in Agra in 1854—in the politically-charged atmosphere just prior to the Mutiny.

Raḥmat Allāh seized upon a strategic plan for publicly confounding European Christian missionaries who had been freely preaching and publishing evangelical faith in northern India during the first half of the 19th century. For the first time in the history of Muslim polemic, the Indian theologian used works of historical criticism written in Europe to make the case that Christians themselves knew of the corruption of the Bible.⁹⁸ The substance of Raḥmat Allāh's polemic in the debate, as well as other materials which he had prepared, appeared in print first in 1853 in the Urdu *I'jāz-e 'Īsāwī*, then more significantly in 1867 in the Arabic *Izhār al-Ḥaqq*.⁹⁹ Kate Zebiri writes that the Arabic work has had a great influence on Muslim polemicists since the late 19th century: "The *Izhār* is a seminal work for modern Muslim refutations of Christianity."¹⁰⁰ In support of this observation, much of what M.Y.S. Haddad describes as the material which Arab authors use to accuse the Torah of corruption comes from the *Izhār al-Ḥaqq*. He writes that 20th-century Arab authors did not add substantially to Raḥmat Allāh's polemic.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 55.

⁹⁸ Christine Schirrmacher, "Muslim Apologetics and the Agra Debates of 1854: A Nineteenth-century Turning Point," *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 13 (1994), 74-84.

⁹⁹ Avril A. Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1993), 294-297.

¹⁰⁰ *Muslims and Christians*, 47.

¹⁰¹ *Arab Perspectives on Judaism*, 103-114. An interesting investigation could be made into the role of external provocation in the polemical achievements of Ibn Ḥazm and Raḥmat Allāh—arguably the two most influential Muslim cases for the corruption of the text of the Bible. Emilio García Gómez wrote that Ibn Ḥazm was reacting to a work by the Spanish Jew Ibn al-Naghrīla which had accused the Qur'ān of contradictions. García Gómez wrote that Ibn Ḥazm had not seen the work he was refuting, but rather was working from what he had read in a previous Muslim refutation whose author he doesn't name. "Polémica religiosa entre Ibn Hazm e Ibn al-Nagrīla," *Al-Andalus* 4 (1936-1939), 1-6. See also Roger Arnaldez, "Controverse d'Ibn Hazm contre Ibn Nagrila le Juif," *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* 13-14 (1973), 41-48; and David S. Powers, "Reading/misreading one another's Scriptures," 110-111. However, Sarah Stroumsa questions the involvement of Ibn al-Naghrīla in "From Muslim Heresy to Jewish-Muslim Polemics: Ibn al-Rāwandī's *Kitāb al-Dāmigh*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 (1987), 767-772. Raḥmat Allāh's provocation was the Swiss scholar and missionary Karl Pfander and his polemical work, *Mizān al-Ḥaqq*, which had been circulating in northern India in Persian and Urdu translations for more than a decade before the Agra debate. Schirrmacher, "Muslim Apologetics," 76.

According to scholars of the Muslim tradition, then, discussions of the tampering theme in Muslim works proceeded mainly along these lines of *tahrīf al-ma‘nā* and *tahrīf al-naṣṣ*. Or, as Jane McAuliffe has described it: “two parallel trajectories can be traced through the centuries-long interplay of polemic and apologetic which launched these works. One line of exegetical analysis has occupied itself principally with scorning the Jewish and Christian scriptures, while the other set about searching them.”¹⁰² McAuliffe finds that this “inherent tension” has never been directly addressed in the corpus of classical Islamic thought, nor has that tradition found a way to resolve “this lingering contradiction.”¹⁰³

1.3 Development of the tampering motif in Qur’ānic exegesis

Scholars of the Muslim tradition have found that Muslim writers on both sides of the tampering question connected their statements about the earlier scriptures with particular verses in the Qur’ān. If this is the case, then it would be worthwhile to know which verses have been connected with the theme of tampering and how those verses have been understood by Muslim exegetes. Can the Islamic doctrine of the textual corruption of the earlier scriptures actually be traced to those verses? A number of scholars of the Qur’ān argue that the link cannot be made.

Muslim polemicists have typically based their accusation of scriptural falsification on

¹⁰² “The Qur’ānic Context,” 144.

¹⁰³ “The Qur’ānic Context,” 153. Kate Zebiri documents the same ambivalence in her survey of Muslim popular literature on Christianity. She writes that though all of the authors assert that the text of the Bible is corrupt, all equally appeal to verses from the Bible to support their views—“either on the basis that some authentic passages have survived, or because some verses can be reinterpreted rather than rejected, or simply in order to put forward a hypothetical argument which is based on premises that one’s opponents can’t reject.” *Muslims and Christians*, 50.

a series of verses in the Qurʾān.¹⁰⁴ Ignaz Goldziher wrote, “The chief passages (*Hauptstellen*) which later polemicists maintained to have been stated regarding this [accusation] are: 2.73 [79]; 3.72 [78]; 4.48 [46]; 5.16 [13], 45 [41], 52 [48].”¹⁰⁵ Other scholars have observed these verses—as well as a wide selection of others—linked with the theme of tampering in the Muslim tradition. Moritz Steinschneider drew attention to polemical use of 2.75, 79, 159, 174 and 211; 3.78 and 187; 5.15 and 77.¹⁰⁶ Hartwig Hirschfeld indicated 3.78-9, 5.44, and 5.63.¹⁰⁷ In his exploration of the theme, Ignazio Di Matteo investigated the exegetical tradition on 5.41-48, 2.75-79, 2.41-42, 5.13-15 and 4.46.¹⁰⁸ Frants Buhl highlighted verses containing *ḥarafa* II (2.75, 4.46, 5.13 and 5.41); *lawā* (3.78, 4.46); and *badala* II (2.59, 7.162); and found 2.79 to be “a direct charge of having falsified the text.”¹⁰⁹ Josef Horowitz wrote that “even in the Qurʾān we find the Jews reproached” with 4.46, 5.13, 5.41, 3.71 and 6.91.¹¹⁰ Arthur Jeffery wrote, “the charge of *tahrīf* is ultimately based on a passage in the Qurʾān (2.70 [75], cf. 4.48 [46], 5.16 [13], 5.45 [41]).”¹¹¹ W.M. Watt discussed the verses containing *ḥarafa* II (2.75, 4.46, 5.13, 5.41) and *badala* II (2.59, 7.162), mentioned the verses of concealing (2.42, 76, 140, 146,

¹⁰⁴ Hirschfeld wrote of Ibn Ḥazm: “His object in criticizing the Bible was to substantiate the charges brought by Mohammed against Jews (and Christians) of falsifying their holy Writs. His strict way of interpreting the Qurʾān led him to take this accusation in its literal sense” “Mohammedan Criticism,” 226. Pulcini adds that in order to warn Muslim readers against developing a sanguine approach to the Bible from Qurʾānic passages which appear favourable to the earlier scriptures, Ibn Ḥazm made use of Q. 2.146, 3.71 and 3.78. *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 174-175. Adang adds Ibn Ḥazm’s reference to 4.46 (though the phrase Ibn Ḥazm cites is also in 5.13 and 5.41). “Medieval Muslim Polemics,” 152, 159 n. 104. Ibn Ḥazm further attempted to prove alteration by quoting 48.29 (“That is their likeness in the Torah, and their likeness in the Gospel. . .”) and noting that “we do not find any of this in [the books] that the Jews and the Christians possess and which they claim to be the Torah and the Gospel.” Case closed! The reference in Ibn Ḥazm is *Al-Fisal fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwā’ wa al-Nihal* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma’rifa, 1395/1975), Vol. I, 215f. Translation in Adang, “Medieval Muslim Polemics,” 152.

¹⁰⁵ “Über muhammedanische Polemik,” 344. David Thomas typifies the approach of many western scholars when he writes that Muslim doubts about the authenticity of Christian scripture “are, of course, related to verses in the Qurʾān. . . .” “The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 30.

¹⁰⁶ *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, 320-321.

¹⁰⁷ “Mohammedan Criticism,” 223.

¹⁰⁸ “Il ‘*tahrīf*’ od Alterazione,” 80-96.

¹⁰⁹ “*Tahrīf*,” *EII*, 619.

¹¹⁰ “*Tawrāt*,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M.Th. Houtsma *et al*, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), Vol. IV, 707.

¹¹¹ “Ghevond’s Text of the Correspondence between ‘Umar II and Leo III,” *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944): 280. Elsewhere Jeffery indicated the same four verses, plus 2.79 and 3.78, as “references to the tampering with Scripture.” “The Qurʾān as Scripture,” *The Muslim World* 40 (1950), 259-260.

159, 174; 3.71; 5.15; 6.91), and also indicated 2.79 and 3.78 and.¹¹² Adel-Théodore Khoury cited 2.75-76; 5.13, 41.¹¹³ John Wansbrough highlighted 2.59 (like 7.162) as “one of many Quranic passages assumed by exegetes to refer to a conscious and malicious distortion of the word of God.”¹¹⁴ Gaudeul and Caspar grouped the relevant verses in six *séries*: *tahrīf* at 2.75, 4. 46, 5.13, 5.41; *tabdīl*, 2.59 and 7.162; *kitmān*, 2.42, 2.140, 2.146, 2.159, 2.174, 3.71, 3.187; *labs*, 2.42, 3.71; *layy*, 3.78, 4.46; and *nisyān*, 5.13, 5.14, 7.53, 7.165.¹¹⁵ Mahmoud Ayoub indicated that 2.75, 4.46, 5.13 and 5.41 have been interpreted by Muslims to back the accusation of alteration.¹¹⁶ Mustansir Mir saw the accusation of “distorting the scriptures” as coming from 4.46 and 5.41 (*tahrīf*), 3.78 (*layy*), and 5.15 (*ikhfāʾ*).¹¹⁷ John Burton examined exegesis of the four verses containing the verb *ḥarafa* II (2.75, 4.46, 5.13, 5.41), eight verses containing *katama* (2.42, 2.140, 2.146, 2.159, 2.174, 3.71, 3.187, 4.37), and one verse with *badala* II (2.211).¹¹⁸ Steven Wasserstrom associated 2.75, 4.46, 5.13 and 5.41 with the “theory of tahrif.”¹¹⁹ David Thomas cited 2.75, 4.46f., 5.13, 5.41, 3.78, and 2.79.¹²⁰ Camilla Adang writes: “The *tahrīf*-verses are S. 2:75-79; 4:46; 5:13; 5:41.”¹²¹ Jean-Louis Déclais linked the following verses with the “eventual” doctrine of falsification: 2.75-79, 3.77-78, 4.44-46, 5.13, 5.41, 6. 91 and 7.161-162.¹²² Hava Lazarus-Yafeh associates the charge of *tahrīf* with 2.75, 4.46 and 5.13; she further links *tabdīl* with 2.59 and 7.162, and *lawā* with 3.78.¹²³ Pulcini noted ‘changing’ in 2.59, 2.75,

¹¹² “The early development of the Muslim attitude to the Bible,” *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 16 (1955-56), 51-53.

¹¹³ *Polemique Byzantine Contre L'Islam (VIIIe-XIIIe S.)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 210, 211.

¹¹⁴ *Quranic Studies*, 189. Elsewhere Wansbrough noted that the *Sīra* links *kitmān* with 2.42 and *tahrīf* with 2.75. *Sectarian Milieu*, 109.

¹¹⁵ “Textes de la Tradition Musulmane,” 62-63.

¹¹⁶ “Uzayr in the Qurʾān and Muslim Tradition,” in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, W.M. Brenner and S.D. Ricks, eds. (Denver, CO: University of Denver, 1986), 16, n. 13.

¹¹⁷ *Dictionary of Qurʾānic Terms and Concepts* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987).

¹¹⁸ “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies* 4 (1994), 95-106.

¹¹⁹ *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 174.

¹²⁰ “The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic,” 30.

¹²¹ She also indicates verses which accuse of confounding the truth, concealing, substituting words, and twisting with tongues. *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 223n.

¹²² *Les premiers Musulmans Face a la Tradition biblique*, 99 n. 38.

¹²³ “Tahrif,” 111. Elsewhere she draws attention to 2.79. *Intertwined Worlds*, 20-21.

2.79, 4.46, 5.13; ‘twisting’ in 3.78, 4.46; ‘concealing’ in 2.146, 2.159, 2.174, 3.71, 5.15, 6.91; and ‘forgetting’ in 5.14.¹²⁴ In a recent study of the corruption theme, Abdullah Saeed points to 2.59, 2.79, 3.78; and, as “highlighting *tahrīf*,” 2.75, 4.46, 5.13, and 5.41.¹²⁵ Martin Accad describes *tahrīf* as “an ambiguous accusation” in 2.75, 4.46, 5.13 and 5.41.¹²⁶

It will be observed in this survey of scholarly lists that the Qur’ānic verses which are most frequently associated with the Islamic doctrine of scriptural corruption are 2.75, 4.46, 5.13 and 5.14.¹²⁷ These four verses are in fact the verses which contain the Arabic verb *ḥarafa* II, of which *tahrīf* is the verbal noun. Two other verses which appear very frequently in these lists are 3.78 and 2.79.¹²⁸ Along with these six verses scholars have indicated some 20 other verses with varying frequency. A striking feature of these lists is that scholars have only cited verses from sūras 2-7.

A number of scholars who have studied the verses in the Qur’ān relevant to the tampering theme have made the claim that the words of Muslim scripture themselves do not amount to an accusation of the textual corruption of earlier scriptures. This view made its scholarly appearance in a 1955 article by W.M. Watt, “The early development of the Muslim attitude to the Bible.”¹²⁹

Watt wrote that a study of the Qur’ānic approach to the earlier scriptures must distinguish between “what the Qur’ān actually says” and “all later interpretations.”¹³⁰ After an examination of Qur’ānic passages containing verbs and expressions of tampering, he concluded that “the Qur’ān does not put forward any general view of the corruption of the text of the Old and New Testaments.”¹³¹ There are clear accusations in the Qur’ān that passages in the Bible were concealed, Watt wrote, and indeed there are also accusations of *tahrīf* in the Qur’ān. But by this, the Qur’ān “does not mean tampering with the written

¹²⁴ *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 14-15.

¹²⁵ “The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures,” *The Muslim World* 92 (2002), 420-421.

¹²⁶ “The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse,” 72.

¹²⁷ Some 18 times each.

¹²⁸ Some 13 and 12 times, respectively.

¹²⁹ 50-62.

¹³⁰ “The early development,” 50.

¹³¹ “The early development,” 53.

text,” he claimed.¹³²

A similar statement of this position has also come from the Muslim scholar Mahmoud Ayoub:

Contrary to the general Islamic view, the Qur'an does not accuse Jews and Christians of altering the text of their scriptures, but rather of altering the truth which those scriptures contain. The people do this by concealing some of the sacred texts, by misapplying their precepts, or by “altering words from their right position.” However, this refers more to interpretation than to actual addition or deletion of words from the sacred books.¹³³

Watt and Ayoub thus assert that the meaning of the Qur'anic verses of tampering is different from how those verses came to be interpreted and, indeed, from what came to be “the general Islamic view.”¹³⁴

A recent statement of this position appeared in an important article on “The Corruption of the Scriptures” by John Burton:

Many non-Muslims are still firmly of the belief that Jews and Christians are accused in the *Qur'an* of having tampered with the texts of the revelations to the prophets now collected into the Old and New Testaments of their Bible. This is because they regularly encounter such charges in their reading. The accusation is a commonplace charge levelled against the People of the Book by the Muslims, not, however, because of what the *Qur'an* says, but because of what the Muslims say the *Qur'an* says. In other words, it is mere exegesis.¹³⁵

Burton's distinction between “what the Qur'an says” and what Muslims say, and his characterization of Qur'anic exegesis as “mere,” deserve comment. The question which must be posed is whether it is possible to speak of the meanings of the Qur'an apart from what its readers or listeners have understood it to mean. In other words, is it possible to

¹³² “The early development,” 53. Watt repeated this view in his later book *Muslim-Christian Encounters*, and there added, “Manuscripts of the Bible are still extant which antedate Muhammad, but there is absolutely no suggestion in the Qur'an that the whole Bible has been corrupted at some time in the distant past, nor that there had been the collusion between Christians and Jews which would have been necessary in order to corrupt the Old Testament.” (p. 32)

¹³³ “Uzayr in the Qur'an and Muslim Tradition,” 5. Ayoub immediately adds, “The problem of alteration (*tahrif*) needs further study.”

¹³⁴ Another scholar who made a similar claim was Ignazio Di Matteo. After reviewing the exegetical treatment of key tampering passages in the Qur'an by al-Ṭabarī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Di Matteo concluded: “According to the Qur'an, the text of the holy scriptures have been altered neither before Muhammad, nor even during his life-time by those Jews and Christians who were not favourably disposed towards his mission. In the Qur'an *tahrif* means either false interpretation of the passages bearing upon Muhammad or non-enforcement of the explicit laws of the Pentateuch, such as the stoning punishment.” “Il ‘Tahrif’ od Alterazione,” 96. Cf. Ananikian, trans., “Tahrif or the alteration of the Bible,” 70.

¹³⁵ “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 95.

speak of “what the Qur’ān says” apart from the tradition of Qur’ānic commentary?

Surely one of the most important scholarly insights in Qur’ānic Studies in recent years is that the style of the Qur’ān is allusive and elliptical.¹³⁶ The Qur’ānic text frequently lacks words or units of information which might otherwise be considered essential to a clear expression of meaning. Muslim scripture gives the impression of being addressed to an audience which could supply the missing details to which the text only refers.¹³⁷ Even narrative in the Qur’ān is “often unintelligible without exegetical complement.”¹³⁸ In the case of the tampering verses, the reader usually encounters ambiguity about many parts of a sentence, including the identities of the subject and object, and the nature of the central action.¹³⁹ As the exegete Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wrote in explanation of one of the verses to be examined below, “the literal sense (*zāhir*) of the Qur’ān does not indicate what they actually altered.”¹⁴⁰

Therefore, instead of asking whether the Islamic doctrine of scriptural corruption is to be found in the Qur’ān, the approach of this investigation will be to ask what exegetes have understood the Qur’ānic verses of tampering to mean. It is possible to research what the earliest Muslim commentators had to say about the relevant verses. Earlier we noted the lists of verses which scholars have associated with the doctrine of corruption. Those lists have in many cases been drawn up from works of Muslim polemic, and therefore are not

¹³⁶ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 1, 42, 57; Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 24-25. See also Rippin, “Literary analysis of Qur’ān, *tafsīr*, and *sīra*,” 159-160; and G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge, 1999), 48.

¹³⁷ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 1.

¹³⁸ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 131. Wansbrough characterized Muslim scripture as a “torso” needing completion by the *Sira-maghāzī* literature. *Sectarian Milieu*, 45. Norman Calder preferred the image of a Chinese painting, in which the missing details do indeed need to be filled in—but only according to independent structures. “*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the description of a genre, illustrated with reference to the story of Abraham,” in *Approaches to the Qur’ān*, G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds. (London: Routledge, 1993), 115.

¹³⁹ “[The Qur’ān] almost never mentions by name those who ask, challenge, seek guidance, doubt, or abuse, which is one of the reasons the Qur’ān has been named a ‘text without a context.’” Stefan Wild, “The Self-Referentiality of the Qur’ān: Sura 3:7 as an Exegetical Challenge,” in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 422. Wild is referring here to Matthias Radscheit, *Die koranische Herausforderung: Die tahaddī Verse im Rahmen der Polemikpassagen des Korans* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1996), 14-23.

¹⁴⁰ *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār Ahyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1973), Vol. III, 135. Cf. Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur’an and its Interpreters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), Vol. 1, 121.

completely adequate for a study of Qur'ānic commentary. Determination of the essential commentary passages must somehow incorporate the vocabulary of scripture itself. "The full Qur'ānic accusation must be culled from a broad range of verses assembled through the keyword search of six basic terms and their cognates, terms which carry such connotations as changing, substituting, concealing, confounding, twisting (the tongue) and forgetting (*tahrīf, tabdīl, kitmān, labs, layy* and *nisyān*)."¹⁴¹ Here McAuliffe is referencing, and basically relaying, the verbs of tampering Gaudeul and Caspar set out in their "Textes de la tradition musulmane."¹⁴² The plan for this dissertation is to investigate early exegesis of the verses at the intersection of the scholarly lists on the one hand, and the semantic field of tampering in the Qur'ān on the other. Chapters 3 and 4 will describe and analyze how the exegetes explained this 'broad range of verses.'

The rationale for investigating the tampering theme within *tafsīr* alone is related to the importance of the sacred text in Muslim faith and life. In the introduction to her study of the theme of "Qur'ānic Christians" in a succession of *tafsīr* works, Jane McAuliffe noted the remarkable proliferation of attempts throughout Islamic history to understand and appreciate the meanings of the Qur'ān. She suggested that "The sheer size and linguistic coverage of this religious science clearly indicate its centrality and significance for charting the development of Islamic intellectual history."¹⁴³ Daud Rahbar also made a strong argument for the importance of *tafsīr*: "Truly speaking, the entire history of Islam is one of exegesis of the Qur'ān; and it is only by viewing the entire history of Islam *in its relation to the Qur'ān* that we can attain any unity of perspective on that history. All other ways of viewing that history will present a disjointed and fragmentary picture."¹⁴⁴ Investigating the theme of *tahrīf* in early commentaries on the Qur'ān will therefore reveal an essential part of the history of this idea.

Limiting the scope of research to *tafsīr* works also allows the Qur'ān to serve as a touchstone for the range of meanings. Norman Calder called this phenomenon "the

¹⁴¹ "The Qur'ānic Context," 144.

¹⁴² "Textes de la tradition musulmane," 62-63.

¹⁴³ *Qur'anic Christians: An analysis of classical and modern exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 8.

¹⁴⁴ "Reflections on the Tradition of Qur'anic Exegesis," *Muslim World* 52 (1962), 298 (Rahbar's italics).

centripetal force of the quranic text.”¹⁴⁵ Works in other genres, such as polemic, are free to pursue arguments without constraint.¹⁴⁶ The exegetical tradition, indeed, shows a great freedom of interplay between the Islamic scholastic disciplines and the text of the Qur’ān. But finally the text cannot be ignored. The study of commentary thus also facilitates the examination of the views of a professional class of exegetes and its audience.

1.4 Exegesis during the formative period of Islam

During the past 30 years, scholarly access to the commentaries from the formative period of Qur’ānic exegesis has greatly improved. Some of the early *tafsīr* works have only recently become available in printed editions. When John Wansbrough examined the commentaries of the formative period in the mid-1970s, most of the texts were in manuscript form. But since the publication of his *Quranic Studies* in 1977, all of the significant early texts have been published.¹⁴⁷ The dating of early works of Qur’ānic commentary continues to be a difficult process up to the present day. But the exegetical work ascribed to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, a primary source in this dissertation, appears to be authentic.¹⁴⁸ The early commentaries of al-Farrā’ and ‘Abd al-Razzāq will also be referred to in this dissertation where relevant. In addition to the commentaries attributed to these three early exegetes, this dissertation will examine the relevant passages in the great

¹⁴⁵ “*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 106.

¹⁴⁶ The approach of this dissertation is also distinguished from research on the development of the theme of *tahrīf* in a variety of genres, such as biography, polemic and historical writing in addition to *tafsīr*. Examples of the investigation of several different genres are Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*; and Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*.

¹⁴⁷ Andrew Rippin, “*Quranic Studies*, part IV: Some methodological notes,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 9 (1997), 40. Fred Leemhuis dates this process to “the last ten years.” “Discussion and Debate in Early Commentaries of the Qur’ān,” in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 322.

¹⁴⁸ Andrew Rippin, “*Tafsīr*,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Vol. X, C.E. Bosworth *et al*, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 86: “We are on somewhat firmer ground for discussion of the formative period of *tafsīr* with a series of books the character of which is more cohesive and thus more likely to be authentic, although certainly not free of later interpolation, reformulation and editorial intrusion.” Rippin includes a work ascribed to al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/830) alongside works attributed to Muqātil, al-Farrā’ and ‘Abd al-Razzāq. Claude Gilliot writes in a similar vein, “Avec le Commentaire de Muqātil b. Sulaymān (m. 150/765) nous sommes déjà en terrain plus sûr, même si le texte édité pose plus d’une question.” “Les Débuts de l’Exégèse Coranique,” *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 58 (1990), 90.

commentary by al-Ṭabarī.

The *Tafsīr* of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān was edited between 1980 and 1987 by ‘Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Shihāta and published in four volumes in Cairo.¹⁴⁹ Muqātil was born in Balkh, lived in Marw, Baghdād and Baṣra, and died in 150/767. He is said to have taught in Mecca, Damascus and Beirut as well.¹⁵⁰ Muqātil’s commentary has been described by scholars as one of the earliest Muslim exegetical works in existence.¹⁵¹ The style of exegesis it typifies belongs to the most primitive form of commentary on the Qur’ān, suggests Kees Versteegh.¹⁵² Yeshayahu Goldfeld praised the *Tafsīr* as “probably the best organized and most consistent Islamic commentary.”¹⁵³ However, Muqātil and his commentary seem to have lost favour among orthodox Muslim scholarship,¹⁵⁴ on the evidence that he is infrequently cited in later works. A number of accusations are made against Muqātil by later scholars, among them writing about Allah in anthropomorphic language; using too much material from the ‘people of the book’; immodestly trying to specify what is vague and anonymous in scripture; and especially giving exegetical

¹⁴⁹ Both Kees Versteegh and Claude Gilliot report encountering difficulties in trying to avail themselves of the full commentary. Kees Versteegh, “Grammar and Exegesis: The Origins of Kufan Grammar and the *Tafsīr Muqātil*,” *Der Islam* 67 (1990), 206, n. 1. Claude Gilliot, “Muqātil, Grand Exégète, Traditionniste et Théologien Maudit,” *Journal Asiatique* 279 (1991), 39, n. 1. Gilliot supposed that the publication was delayed “par la censure des autorités d’al-Azhar.” “Muqātil, Grand Exégète,” 39, n. 1. Dr. Versteegh suggested the same to me in a personal interview in Nijmegen, February 6, 2003.

¹⁵⁰ M. Plessner-[A. Rippin], “Muqātil ibn Sulaymān,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, C.E. Bosworth *et al*, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), Vol. VII, 508.

¹⁵¹ Yeshayahu Goldfeld, “Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān,” *Bar-Ilan Arabic and Islamic Studies* 2 (1978), xiv. Regula Forster, in a recent book, calls the commentary “the oldest complete edited Qur’ān commentary in good condition.” *Methoden mittelalterlicher arabischer Qur’ānexegese am Beispiel von Q 53, 1-18* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2001), 11.

¹⁵² “Grammar and Exegesis,” 210. Versteegh provides the most extensive discussion of the dating and transmission history of Muqātil’s *Tafsīr*. He concludes that the text of the commentary stems from Muqātil. “Grammar and Exegesis,” 206-209. Plessner-[Rippin] finds the early date likely but “not undisputed.” “Muqātil ibn Sulaymān,” 509. Wansbrough was not able to date Muqātil’s commentary earlier than 200/815. *Qur’anic Studies*, 144. Norman Calder agreed, and described it as a redaction belonging to the 3rd/9th century. “The Ummī in Early Islamic Juridic Literature,” *Der Islam* 67 (1990), 113, n. 6. On the question of redaction, see also Andrew Rippin, “Studying early *tafsīr* texts,” *Der Islam* 72 (1995), 319.

¹⁵³ “The Development of Theory on Qur’ānic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship,” *Studia Islamica* 67 (1988), 23.

¹⁵⁴ Fred Leemhuis takes a different approach to the situation by describing Muqātil’s *tafsīr* as “an interesting source for an early popular Islam which, perhaps, at the time of its composition was not yet divorced from orthodoxy.” “Discussion and Debate,” 232.

traditions without a proper *isnād*.¹⁵⁵ These Muslim accusations influenced some early western scholarly descriptions of Muqātil;¹⁵⁶ and Goldfeld wrote that partly due to this, “Orientalism has not yet paid this work the attention it deserves.”¹⁵⁷ Muqātil is also sometimes labeled a Murji’ite or a Zaydite, though it is hard to detect any such tendencies in his writings.¹⁵⁸ The edition of the *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* which I am using in this study is the Shihāta edition printed recently in Beirut.¹⁵⁹

The second commentary of this study is the *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān* of Abū Ja‘far ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. Ṭabarī was born in 839 at Amul in Tabaristan, lived in Baghdād, and died 310/923. He was a prolific writer and provided the standard history of the first centuries in Islam, in addition to many other works. Goldziher considered Ṭabarī to be “one of the greatest characters of Islamic scholarship of all time.”¹⁶⁰ “The great virtues of his *History* and *Commentary* are that they form the most extensive of extant early works of Islamic scholarship and that they preserve for us the greatest array of citations from lost sources.”¹⁶¹ Ṭabarī’s huge collection of exegetical traditions became a standard work upon which later commentators frequently drew. To the present day it is “a mine of information for historical and critical research by western scholars.”¹⁶² One of the famous Muslim tributes to Ṭabarī’s *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān* came from the jurist Abū Ḥamīd al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 1015): “If a person has to go to China to obtain a copy this work, it will not have been too

¹⁵⁵ Claude Gilliot, “Muqātil, Grand Exégète,” 50-68. Cf. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 136; Versteegh, “Grammar and Exegesis,” 214; Plessner-[Rippin], “Muqātil ibn Sulaymān,” 508; Goldfeld, “Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān,” xxviii-xxix; H. Birkeland, “Old Muslim Opposition against Interpretation of the Koran,” *Avhandlinger utgitt av Det Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo*, II, *Hist.-Filos Klasse*, 1955, No. I, 26-27. Yeshayahu Goldfeld characterizes the strong criticism of Muqātil’s commentary as “nurtured by envy and inferiority.” “The Development of Theory,” 23.

¹⁵⁶ Notably Ignaz Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970 [1920]), 57-60. Cf. Goldfeld, “Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān,” xiv-xv.

¹⁵⁷ “The Development of Theory,” 23.

¹⁵⁸ Plessner-[Rippin], “Muqātil ibn Sulaymān,” 508. Cf. Gilliot, “Muqātil, Grand Exégète,” 79-81.

¹⁵⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, ‘Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Shihāta, ed. (Beirut: Mū’sasat al-Tārīkh al-‘Arabiyya, 2002), 5 volumes.

¹⁶⁰ *Richtungen*, 86. Cf. Andrew Rippin, “Al-Ṭabarī,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), Vol. 13, 322: “since his lifetime [Ṭabarī] has been seen as the most important intellect of his age.”

¹⁶¹ Bosworth, “al-Ṭabarī,” 13.

¹⁶² R. Paret, “al-Ṭabarī, Abū Dja‘far Muḥammad ibn Djarīr,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M.Th. Houtsma et al, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), Vol. IV, 578.

much [effort].”¹⁶³

Until relatively recently among western scholars, Ṭabarī’s famous commentary was considered lost. When Nöldeke wrote the first edition of his *Geschichte des Qorans* in 1860, he could only conjecture and wish: “If we had this work we could do without all later commentaries. Unfortunately it seems to be completely lost. It was, like the great historical work of the author, an inexhaustible source out of which later writers drew their wisdom.”¹⁶⁴ Goldziher later wrote, “It was therefore a pleasant surprise for the scholarly world in east and west when, because of a complete manuscript kept in the book collection of the Emir of Hā’il, a full edition of the enormous work was presented in 30 volumes in Cairo in 1903.”¹⁶⁵ In all, only a few manuscript copies of the commentary have survived to the present time. The edition of the commentary referred to in this dissertation is the one edited by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākīr and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr.¹⁶⁶

For the purposes of this study, Ṭabarī’s *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān* is an appropriate endpoint because it marks both the beginning of classical Qur’ānic commentary and the close of the formative period of Qur’ānic exegesis.¹⁶⁷ “Ṭabarī’s Commentary is an example in its own sphere of the dividing line between two ages: an ‘introductory’ period of oral narrative, and the period of written records, which initiated the closing in of the exegetical *sunna* upon itself.”¹⁶⁸ Abdelmajid Charfi suggested that with the *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān* Islamic thought ‘settled’ after a period in which great freedom of Qur’ānic interpretation had been permitted.¹⁶⁹ Another good reason to end the present study with this work is that, as Rippin notes, Ṭabarī’s commentary gathers together in a single volume the major exegetical

¹⁶³ Cited by Goldziher in *Richtungen*, 86. Tributes to the commentary continue up to recent times, for example in “Reflections on the Tradition of Qur’anic Exegesis,” 303. There Daud Rahbar writes that Ṭabarī’s commentary is the “mother of all commentaries on the Qur’ān and a thorough analysis of it is due.”

¹⁶⁴ Cited in Goldziher, *Richtungen*, 86-87.

¹⁶⁵ *Richtungen*, 87. Otto Loth noted that the manuscript was discovered in Cairo around 1871. “Ṭabarī’s Korancommentar,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 35 (1881), 591. Cf. also Heribert Horst, “Zur Überlieferung im Korancommentar aṭ-Ṭabarīs,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 103 (1953), 290.

¹⁶⁶ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākīr and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr, eds. (Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1969).

¹⁶⁷ McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians*, 13.

¹⁶⁸ Abdelmajid Charfi, “Christianity in the Qur’an Commentary of Ṭabarī,” *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980), 145.

¹⁶⁹ “Christianity in the Qur’an Commentary of Ṭabarī,” 145.

methodologies employed up until that point in time, including the methodologies of Muqātil, al-Farrā' and 'Abd al-Razzāq.¹⁷⁰

This dissertation is an exploration of what Muqātil and Ṭabarī understood from the verses in the Qur'ān which contain verbs and expressions of tampering. This material will then be used to describe the development of the theme of tampering in the two commentaries. The methodology appropriate to the study of themes and motifs in the early commentaries on the Qur'ān is a close reading of the *tafsīr* texts and the analysis of these texts as works of literature. "A *tafsīr*, after all," wrote Norman Calder, "is a work of art."¹⁷¹ The particular theme will be investigated not only through what the exegetes have to say about individual verses, but also as much as possible within the total context of the commentary. This will then lead to discoveries about the exegetical approach of the commentator, his way of coming at the meaning of the text of scripture, and possible larger concerns of which *tahrīf* may be only one element.

The approach to the *tafsīr* texts pursued here is one of several possible methodologies for reading the early Qur'ānic commentaries. I am reading them to trace the development of a theme or motif, in a similar way to how biblical scholars have researched themes in the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible or New Testament. I am not studying the early commentaries in order to isolate and analyse different styles of exegesis, or to trace the use of grammatical terminology, or to look for evidence of the development of the Qur'ān, as other scholars have done.

This dissertation is not a search for the "original meaning" of the Qur'ān. The aim is not to demonstrate whether or not corruption has taken place in the earlier scriptures, nor whether the Qur'ān means to say that Jews and Christians falsified their scriptures. Rather, the objective here is to show how two early exegetes interpreted the Qur'ānic verses which

¹⁷⁰ "Tafsīr," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), Vol. 14, 240. Cf. Claude Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval," *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, General editor (Leiden: Brill, 2001), Vol. II, 111.

¹⁷¹ Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 106. See also John Burton: "exegesis is entirely and wholly a literary activity." "Law and exegesis: The penalty for adultery in Islam," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds. (London: Routledge, 1993), 269.

have been associated with the accusation of corruption.¹⁷² In particular, the explanations of verses which contain verbs and expressions of tampering will be described and analyzed. In setting out to trace the ‘development’ of the tampering theme, I mean not a development over time within the entire Muslim community, but rather the development of the theme within each commentary.

Western scholars have sometimes characterized the Islamic doctrine of scriptural corruption as a ‘Qur’ānic’ accusation, and have stated that the accusation of textual falsification arose very early in Islamic history—indeed was the first view to be held by Muslims. In spite of the referential nature of the Qur’ānic text, and in spite of the scholarly views described earlier that the words of the Qur’ān cannot be understood to mean an accusation of falsification, these scholars write as if the accusation is clearly made in Muslim scripture itself. This position is well typified by the articles on “Tahrīf” in the first and second editions of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, summarized above. In the first edition, Frants Buhl wrote about the passages in the Qur’ān “where Muḥammad accused the Jews of falsifying the books of revelation given them, i.e. the Thora, *ḥarrafū*.”¹⁷³ He further wrote that of the possible positions on tampering held by Muslim scholars, it was “the opinion usual in the early centuries after Muḥammad that the Jews had actually altered the text.”¹⁷⁴ Buhl explained that the position of textual corruption was decidedly the simplest and most logical, “for it was based on the first impression which the words of the Qur’ān naturally made and had made in the early days of Islām.”¹⁷⁵ Thus for him, Ibn Ḥazm’s harsh position represented the earliest view.

This wording about the Islamic doctrine being an accusation which the Qur’ān itself made continued in the article on “Tahrīf” published in 1998. Lazarus-Yafeh wrote there,

¹⁷² Herbert Berg makes a comparable distinction in his study of “Ṭabarī’s Exegesis of the Qur’ānic Term *al-Kitāb*,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXIII (1995), 761. Berg set himself to explain how Ṭabarī and his authorities understood the word *kitāb*, rather than to say how the term was understood by those who first heard the Qur’ān according to *Sira* and *asbāb al-nuzūl* accounts. (761)

¹⁷³ “Tahrīf,” (EI1), 618. Buhl added that Muḥammad conceived the accusation when the Jews of Maḍīna did not acknowledge an attestation of his prophethood from the Torah and instead began to ridicule him.

¹⁷⁴ “Tahrīf,” (EI1), 619.

¹⁷⁵ “Tahrīf,” (EI1), 619.

“In the Medinan sūras [the accusation of forgery] is a central theme.”¹⁷⁶ Elsewhere she had written, “In the Qur’ān [the accusation that Jews and Christians had falsified their Scriptures] is a central theme.”¹⁷⁷ In a further article, she stated, “The contradictions between the Qur’ānic and Biblical stories, and the denial of both Jews and Christians that Muḥammad was predicted in their Holy Scriptures, gave rise to the Qur’ānic accusation of the falsification of these last by Jews and Christians respectively.”¹⁷⁸ The same wording continues into articles published very recently, such as Abdullah Saeed’s article, “The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures.”¹⁷⁹ Saeed begins his article with the comprehensive expression, “the Qur’ānic accusation that the scriptures of the Jews and Christians have been falsified, corrupted, altered and changed.”¹⁸⁰ Similar phrases appear in other recent scholarly publications.¹⁸¹

This dissertation will demonstrate that exegetes from the formative period of Qur’ānic commentary did not in the first instance understand from the words of the Qur’ān that Jews and Christians had falsified their scriptures. For these exegetes, the conception of textual corruption was decidedly not “the simplest and most logical,” as Buhl claims, nor was it the ‘natural impression’ which the words of the Qur’ān made on them. On the evidence of the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī, the situation was much more complex than Buhl envisioned. The commentaries develop a wide and lively variety of actions of tampering with the revelation of Allah. They have little good to say about the communities to whom Allah entrusted his revelations in the distant past, and even less good about those who responded

¹⁷⁶ “Tahrīf,” (EI2), 111. Lazarus-Yafeh continued, again with unusual freedom: the accusation was “apparently used to explain away the contradictions between the Bible and the Qur’ān and to establish that the coming of the Prophet and the rise of Islam had indeed been predicted in the ‘true’ scriptures.”

¹⁷⁷ *Intertwined Worlds*, 20.

¹⁷⁸ “Tawrāt,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition, P.J. Bearman et al, eds., . . . 394.

¹⁷⁹ *Muslim World* 92 (2002), 419-436.

¹⁸⁰ Curiously, Saeed’s article argues that a selection of classical exegetes did not understand the Qur’ān to be making the accusation of falsification. But even so, he does not qualify his statement at the start of the article.

¹⁸¹ Another example in a major source is Charles J. Adams: “. . . the Qur’ān particularly charges the Jews with having ‘corrupted’ or ‘altered’ their scriptures. . . .” “Qur’ān: The Text and its History,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), Vol. 12, 171-172. Other recent examples include articles appearing in the recently-published *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān* include Uri Rubin, “Children of Israel,” Vol. I, 305; and Frederick Denny, “Corruption,” Vol. I, 440. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, General editor (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

to the prophet of Islam. But their negative evaluations of the “people of the book” do not generally attach to the revealed books themselves. Among the actions of tampering which the exegetes describe, they transmit traditions about Jewish falsification of the Torah. However, these traditions remain isolated and seemingly tentative amid an array of other more dominant traditions. The reasons for this, as we shall see, include the constraints of the Qur’ānic material on the earlier scriptures, the vague and ambiguous character of the Qur’ānic references, uncertainties about the meaning of Arabic expressions, and the influence of structures external to the text of scripture—in particular narrative structures.

The words of the Qur’ān which ‘made their impression’ on these exegetes begin with verses which contain the Arabic verbs *ḥarafa* II and *badala* II, from which the technical terms *tahrīf* and *tabdīl* come. From there the scriptural words of tampering move out in successive concentric circles into a large semantic field. In that field verbs and other expressions of tampering jostle with descriptions of the earlier scriptures which appear to be uniformly positive. In the following chapter the Qur’ānic material on the earlier scriptures, as well as the semantic field of tampering, will be explored.

2. The Qur'ān on the Earlier Scriptures

Muslim commentary on the Qur'ān (*tafsīr*) is a literary genre which displays certain specific identifiable characteristics. The most straightforward of these characteristics is the inclusion of the entire canonical text of the Qur'ān within the *tafsīr*. A *tafsīr* presents the text of scripture, divided into segments and interspersed with the comments of the exegete. Norman Calder suggested that any work which does not have this character cannot be said to belong to the “central tradition of *tafsīr*.”¹

The *tafsīr* genre provides the exegete with certain reassuring parameters. The text of the Qur'ān exerts a “centripetal force”² on his work of commentary. He may well have the complete text of scripture, or at least a good part of it, by memory. He works from within this familiar world of the Qur'ān, a world just large enough that information found incompatible with it can be safely excluded.³ The text of scripture fills his mind with a repertoire of expressions and phrases which he can use in his exegesis. The two exegetes of this study often explain the meaning of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān itself,⁴ using a system of cross reference to illuminate points of etymology or grammar.

The Muslim scholar who commits to providing a continuous explanation of the text of the Qur'ān, however, must also submit to the constraints of the genre. The polemicist or theologian is free to make any assertions he likes, choosing and citing his authorities as it

¹ “*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 101.

² Calder, “*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 106.

³ Abdelmajid Charfi complains that Ṭabarī followed the Qur'ānic text “without consideration of historical accuracy in its modern sense,” and that the Qur'ān was his “only criterion” for judging Christian beliefs and for interpretation of Gospel texts. “Christianity in the Qur'an Commentary of Ṭabarī,” 145, 146.

⁴ Versteegh finds that “Muqātil's main principle is the explanation of the Qur'ān from the Qur'ān.” “Grammar and Exegesis,” 216. But this is a general principle of Qur'ānic commentary up to the present. According to Ibn Taymiyya: “If someone asks, ‘What is the best method of interpretation?’ the answer is that the soundest method is that whereby the Qur'an is interpreted through the Qur'an. For what is summarily expressed in one place is expatiated upon in another. What is abridged in one place is elaborated upon in another.” Jane Dammen McAuliffe in *Windows on the House of Islam*, John Renard, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 36, translating from Ibn Taymiyya's *Muqaddima fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. See also Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr,” in A. Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: 1988), 56; and Fred Leemhuis, “The Koran and its Exegesis: From memorising to learning,” in Jan Willem Drijvers and A.A. MacDonald, eds., *Centres of Learning: Learning and location in pre-modern Europe and the Near East* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 101.

suits his argument. But because a *tafsir* contains the full text of the Qurʾān, the exegete cannot ignore the scriptural wordings on subjects which he is addressing.⁵ To do so would be to risk the charge of inconsistency from an astute reader.

In the case of the tampering motif, the Qurʾān contains a substantial amount of material referring to earlier scriptures, as well as another body of material which appears to refer to various actions of tampering. This material needs to be explored in order to envision the conceptual and terminological environment within which the exegetes were writing. A larger view of the Qurʾānic material on the earlier scriptures will provide a context for the tampering verses which may in turn facilitate the evaluation of nuances in the commentaries.

This chapter offers an analysis of the Qurʾānic material on both the earlier scriptures and the language of tampering. The material on the earlier scriptures will be investigated by word study techniques which are familiar from Biblical studies. The language of tampering will be analyzed through the concept of the semantic field of tampering. Knowledge of the wider semantic field of tampering will provide valuable perspective on the verses of tampering and their exegesis by Muqātil and Ṭabarī in subsequent chapters. Some of the writing in this chapter will be concerned with fine etymological distinctions and careful counting of word frequencies. But this detailed analysis is necessary in order to set the stage for the discussion of the tampering verses by the exegetes. Late in the chapter, a chart will set out the interaction of both groups of material in a visual fashion.

One striking observation, which may be here forecast, is that the largest concentrations of references to the earlier scriptures come in the very sūras which contain the highest frequency of verbs and expressions of tampering. The full implications of this fact, however, will only become clear at the end of the analysis of the commentary tampering passages in subsequent chapters.

⁵ Charfi notes that Muslim authors writing specifically in refutation of the Christians would choose a position on a theme like *tahrif* and simply argue it. By contrast, almost all commentators agreed to apply “the classical Islamic view of revelation (*wahy wa-tanzil*)” to the Gospel and the other earlier scriptures. “Christianity in the Qurʾan Commentary of Ṭabarī,” 146-147.

2.1 References to earlier scriptures in the Qurʾān

The Qurʾān contains a substantial amount of material related to earlier scriptures. Sometimes these scriptures are identified by name; other times they are identified by the prophet to whom they were revealed. In other cases, earlier scriptures are indicated by terms which are less distinct, and these terms were understood in various ways by the exegetes. In many Qurʾānic contexts there appears to be a self-consciousness about the relationship between previous scriptures and the words which are conceived of as being presently revealed. Specific references to earlier scriptures seem to be uniformly positive and respectful.

2.1.1 *Scriptures mentioned by name*

Three particular earlier scriptures are mentioned by name in the Qurʾān: the Tawrāt, the Injīl, and the Zabūr.⁶ The names Tawrāt and Injīl first appear at the beginning of the third sūra, together at Al Imrān 3. The name Zabūr first appears at Nisāʾ (4).163.

The term Tawrāt appears some 18 times in the Qurʾān.⁷ It appears six times in the third sūra⁸ and seven times in the fifth sūra,⁹ but not at all in sūras one, two, four and six.¹⁰ Beyond the fifth sūra, the word Tawrāt occurs only five times.¹¹

The term Injīl occurs some 12 times in the Qurʾān.¹² The pattern of its occurrence is

⁶ Arthur Jeffery, "The Qurʾān as Scripture" *The Muslim World* 40 (1950), 202.

⁷ cf. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Tawrāt," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, P.J. Bearman *et al*, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1998), Vol. X, 393.

⁸ at 3.3, 48, 50, 65 and 93 (x2).

⁹ at 5.43, 44, 46 (x2), 66, 68 and 110.

¹⁰ Though the names of the three previous scriptures do not appear in the second sūra, Muqātil finds them all referred to already at 2.4. He completes the scriptural phrase "and what was sent down before you" with "upon the prophets, meaning *al-Tawrāt* and *al-Injīl* and *al-Zabūr*." *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 84.

¹¹ at 7.157, 9.111, 48.29, 61.6 and 62.5. Lazarus-Yafeh asserts that all 18 occurrences appear in "sūras from the Medīnan period." "Tawrāt," (EI2), 393. Though the present study does not rely on the traditional chronology, it is interesting to note the pattern of occurrence in the first four large sūras of the Qurʾān.

¹² cf. Carra de Vaux [G.C. Anawati], "Injīl," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, B. Lewis *et al*, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1971), Vol. III, 1205. Karl Ahrens and other scholars suggest that the Qurʾānic term *Injīl* comes from the Greek *euangelion* via the Ethiopic *wangēl*. "Christliches im Qoran," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 84 (1930), 24.

similar to that of the term *Tawrāt*: three times in the third *sūra*,¹³ five times in the fifth *sūra*,¹⁴ and beyond the fifth *sūra* only four other times.¹⁵ Indeed, in all but two of its occurrences, the term *Injīl* appears in tandem with *Tawrāt*.¹⁶

The singular noun *Zabūr* occurs some three times in the *Qurʾān*. The root *z-b-r*, however, appears a total of 13 times.¹⁷ Its pattern of occurrence is quite different from the other two names of scriptures: in the first five *sūras*, *Zabūr* appears only once and its plural form only once.¹⁸ The singular *Zabūr* never appears together with the other two names of scriptures. In fact, it does not even appear in the near contexts of the other names.

The pattern of occurrence of the terms *Tawrāt* and *Injīl*, with its concentration in the first five *sūras* and its sparseness beyond, may be compared to the patterns of occurrence of the *Qurʾānic* terms of tampering to be described later in this chapter. In particular, the flurry of occurrences of both terms in 5.43-68, immediately following the fourth occurrence of *ḥarrafa* at 5.41, is worthy of note.

The verses in which these scriptures are mentioned by name provide some basic information about the *Qurʾānic* approach to them. The reader first learns that Allah sent down the Torah (*Tawrāt*) and the Gospel (*Injīl*).¹⁹ The Torah and the Gospel were revealed after the time of Abraham.²⁰ Subsequently, Allah taught ʿĪsā the Torah and the Gospel,²¹ and ʿĪsā in turn confirmed the truth of the Torah.²² The Gospel confirms the Torah.²³ The Torah contains “the command (*ḥukm*) of Allah.”²⁴ Allah prescribed for the Jews in the Torah, “A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a

¹³ at 3.3, 48 and 65.

¹⁴ at 5.46, 47, 66, 68 and 110.

¹⁵ at 7.157, 9.111, 48.29 and 57.27.

¹⁶ *Injīl* appears on its own only at 5.47 and 57.27.

¹⁷ cf. J. Horowitz - [R. Firestone], “*Zabūr*,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Vol. XI, P.J. Bearman *et al*, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 372; and Dawid Künstlinger, “Die Namen der ‘Gottes-Schriften’ im *Qurʾān*,” *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 8 (1937), 74-75. The plural form *zibur* is treated below in “Other writings.”

¹⁸ at 4.163 and 3.184, respectively.

¹⁹ 3.3.

²⁰ 3.65.

²¹ 3.48, 5.110.

²² 3.50, 61.6.

²³ 5.46.

²⁴ 5.43.

tooth, and for wounds retaliation” (5.45).²⁵ Jews and Christians are said to be able to find “the messenger, the *ummī* prophet” mentioned in the Torah and Gospel.²⁶ The Qur’ān offers what it terms a ‘similitude’ of true believers from the Gospel: “like a seed that sends forth its shoot, then makes it strong, it then becomes thick, and it stands straight on its stem, delighting the sowers—that he may enrage the disbelievers with them.”²⁷

Of the three Zabūr references, we find in two of the verses the concept that Allah gave the Zabūr to David.²⁸ At 21.105 the third occurrence of Zabūr is set in the form of a saying of Allah, that he wrote in that book, “The earth shall be the inheritance of my righteous servants.”²⁹

²⁵ closely resembling Exodus 21:23-25; cf. Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21; cf. J. Horowitz, “Tawrāt,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M. Th. Houtsma et al, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), Vol. III, 706. Another passage which may be claiming to relay words from the Torah—thought that name is not specified—is 2.83-84: “And when we took compact with the children of Israel: ‘You shall not serve any save Allah; and to be good to parents’” This resembles parts of the decalogue in Exodus 20. M.S. Seale claims that the Qur’ān provides “a version of the Ten Commandments, even though an incomplete one” at 17.23-37. “How the Qur’an Interprets the Bible,” in his *Qur’an and Bible: Studies in Interpretation and Dialogue* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 74-75. Hartwig Hirschfeld points out that Muslim commentators like al-Tha’alibī also found the decalogue at 17.23-37, as well as at 6.152-154. *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), 81-82. See also William M. Brinner, “An Islamic Decalogue,” in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks, eds. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 67-84; and Stefan Schreiner, “Der Dekalog in der jüdischen Tradition und im Koran,” *Kairos* 23 (1981), 24-30.

²⁶ 7.157.

²⁷ 48.29. Lazarus-Yafeh suggests that this may be a quotation from the Psalms (cf. Psalms 1:3; 72:16; 92:14). “Tawrāt,” (EI2), 393. But Carra de Vaux hears in 48.29 an echo of Jesus’ parable of the sower. “Indjil,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M. Th. Houtsma et al, eds. (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1927), Vol. II, 502. Regarding the Qur’ānic approach to the Gospel, Sidney Griffith writes, “In a number of passages the Qur’ān clearly presumes in its audience a prior knowledge of Gospel character and narratives.” “Gospel,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, General editor (Leiden: Brill, 2001), Vol. II, 342.

²⁸ 4.163, 17.55. Al-Ṭabarī writes on *zabūr* at 4.163: “It is the name of the book that was revealed to David, just as he named the book that was revealed to Moses as the *tawrāt* and that which was revealed to Jesus as the *injil* and that which was revealed to Muḥammad as the *furqān*, because that is the name by which what was revealed to David was known. The Arabs say *zabūr Dāwūd*, and because of that the rest of the peoples know this book.” *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. IX, 402. Muqātil comments on *zabūr* at 4.164: “It contains neither statute nor command, neither obligation nor permitted nor forbidden, [but has] 150 sūras.” *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 462.

²⁹ Horowitz and Firestone identify this with Psalm 37:9, 11 and especially verse 29. “Zabūr,” (EI2), 372. Lazarus-Yafeh calls it an exact quote. “Tawrāt,” (EI2), 393. Horowitz writes, “Apart from Sūra xxi.105 the Qur’ān contains other passages bearing a close resemblance to verses from the Psalms, especially from Psalm civ. Moreover the majority of the passages in the Qur’ān which remind us, by sense and sound, of the Bible, are from the Psalms.” “Zabūr,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, M. Th. Houtsma et al, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1934), Vol. IV, 1184. See also Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, 73-77, and Richard Bell, “Muhammad’s Knowledge of the Old Testament,” in *Presentation Volume to William Barron Stevenson* (*Studia Semitica et Orientalia* II) (Glasgow: Glasgow University Oriental Society, 1945), 14, for further suggestions of parallels between the Qur’ān and the Psalms.

2.1.2 “The book”

In addition to references to particular scriptures, the Qur’ān contains many references to *kitāb* or *al-kitāb*.³⁰ In some of these occurrences, there are clues which help the reader identify a particular book. In other passages, however, it is not clear whether a book is meant, or if so which book that might be.³¹ By context, many of the occurrences of *kitāb* may be reasonably related to one or more of the earlier scriptures.³²

A great many occurrences of *kitāb* in the Qur’ān seem to be referring to verbal material that is conceived of as being given at the time of the address.³³ An example of this would be 2.89: “When there came to them a *kitāb* from Allah, confirming what was with them.” Meaning literally “a writing,” *kitāb* is sometimes used in the sense of a letter, a document of manumission, or a contract.³⁴ The term may also refer to a decree or prescription.³⁵

When “the book” is associated with Moses, it is reasonable to assume that the Torah is in view. The first canonical reference of this kind is at 2.53: “And when we gave to Moses the book and the salvation (*furqān*), that haply you should be guided.” The phrase “we gave to Moses the book” repeats at 2.87, 6.154, 11.110, 17.2, 25.35, 32.23, and 41.45. At 37.117, Aaron is included with Moses in “and we gave them the manifesting book.” A similar phrase apparently indicating the Torah is “the book of Moses,” at 11.17 and 46.11. A third variation is at 6.91, “Who sent down the book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to men?”

Other verses of the Qur’ān offer a variety of clues that the earlier scriptures may be indicated by “the book.”³⁶ For example, at 2.44 the children of Israel are addressed with

³⁰ Occurrences of *kitāb* both singular and plural number 261. cf. Berg, “Ṭabarī’s Exegesis of the Qur’ānic Term *al-Kitāb*,” 761. Jeffery gives an overview of these occurrences in “The Qur’ān as Scripture,” 47-55.

³¹ Wansbrough comments, “*Kitāb* as scripture is seldom differentiated in the Qur’ān, and exactly which scripture is meant can be elicited only from context.” *Quranic Studies*, 75.

³² Herbert Berg finds that “for a large number of Qur’ānic passages that contain the word *kitāb*, al-Ṭabarī and the early exegetes understood the word to refer to one of or both of the scriptures of the Jews and Christians, namely the Tawrāt and the Injil.” “Ṭabarī’s Exegesis,” 768.

³³ Julius Augapfel, “Das *kitāb* im Qurān,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* xxix (1915), 385-386. Cf. Adams, “Qur’ān: The Text and its History,” 160-161.

³⁴ Jeffery, “The Qur’ān as Scripture,” 47. Ṭabarī also defines *kitāb* as “a writing” in the introduction to his commentary. J. Cooper, trans., *The Commentary on the Qur’ān by Abū Ja’far Muḥammad ibn Ja’r al-Ṭabarī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 43.

³⁵ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 75; cf. Augapfel, “Das *kitāb* im Qurān,” 393.

³⁶ Augapfel, “Das *Kitāb* im Qurān,” 386-390.

the question, “Will you bid others to piety, and forget yourselves while you recite (*tatlūna*) the book?” The same phrase about reciting the book is used about both Jews and Christians at 2.113. A second verb describes the action at 10.94: “If thou art in doubt regarding what we have sent down to thee, ask those who recite (*yaqra’ūna*) the book before thee.” At 6.156, “the book” seems to indicate a more elastic concept: “The book was sent down only upon two parties before us, and we have indeed been heedless of their study (*dirāsa*).” All of these verses could be reasonably interpreted to allude to the Torah and/or the Gospel.

The phrase “the book of Allah” occurs some nine times in the Qur’ān.³⁷ From its context at 5.44, this phrase seems to indicate the Torah: “Surely we sent down the Torah, wherein is guidance and light; thereby the prophets who had surrendered themselves gave judgment for those of Jewry, as did the masters and the rabbis, following such portion of the book of Allah as they were given to keep and were witnesses to.” At 2.101, “a party of them that were given the book reject the book of Allah behind their backs.” It would be reasonable to assume that the phrase here refers to an earlier scripture.³⁸ Other occurrences of the phrase are more difficult to identify, and this is reflected by an ambivalence in the exegetical tradition.³⁹

In 2.177, “true piety” is described as, among other things, believing in “Allah and the last day, and the angels, and the book (*kitāb*), and the messengers.” A similar formula appears twice in the Qur’ān with *kitāb* in the plural. The messenger believes in “Allah, his angels, his books (*kutub*) and his messengers.”⁴⁰ In 66.12, Mary “confirmed the words of her Lord and his books.” A further use of the plural comes 98.2-3: “A messenger from Allah, reciting pages (*suhuf*) purified, therein true books.”⁴¹ These and other occurrences of

³⁷ Wansbrough says it occurs nine times, “(five of which may well mean ‘decree’).” *Quranic Studies*, 75.

³⁸ At 2.101, Muqātil explains “the book of Allah” as “what is in the Torah from the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad.” *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 126.

³⁹ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 75. See Berg, “Ṭabarī’s Exegesis,” 772-773 on *kitāb allāh*: “in his commentary to the Qur’ān’s use of the expression the *kitāb* of Allah, al-Ṭabarī explains the term using the full variation of the term *kitāb* generally except, oddly, the Qur’ān itself.” (773) At the occurrence of “the *kitāb* of Allah” in 3.23, Ṭabarī explicitly says, “it is the Torah.” *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 290.

⁴⁰ 2.285; cf. 4.136, where the belief is both in the book which Allah sent down before, and in the books of Allah.

⁴¹ These are four of the five occurrences of *kutub* in the Qur’ān. The fifth is at 34.44.

kitāb do not seem to come with the suggestion that a corrupted text is in mind, or that an earlier scripture has been or is in the process of being corrupted. The straightforward impression to take from them is that the writings or prescriptions being alluded to are thought of in a positive and respectful way.

2.1.3 Other writings

The Qurʾān also contains a number of other terms for written records which may be understood to refer to earlier scriptures. These include references to scrolls, parchments, tablets and revealed books.⁴² For example, 53.36-37 mentions “the scrolls (*suhuf*) of Moses and Abraham.” The same writings are called “the ancient scrolls” (*suhuf al-ūlā*) at 87.18.⁴³ There is also mention of parchments at 6.91 in connection with “the book which Moses brought”: “You put it into parchments (*qarāʾis*).”⁴⁴ A second word for parchment appears at 52.1-3: “By the Mount (*Tūr*) and a book inscribed in a parchment (*raqq*) unrolled.”⁴⁵

The word tablets (*alwāh*) comes three times in Sūra al-Aʿrāf in the context of an extended narrative about Moses and the children of Israel. At 7.145, Allah declares, “We wrote for him on the tablets (*al-alwāh*)⁴⁶ of everything an admonition (*mawʿizat*), and a distinguishing (*tafsīl*) of everything.” In the meantime the children of Israel make a golden calf and Moses discovers it. He puts down the tablets (7.150) in order to discipline his brother Aaron. His prayer to Allah seems to calm him down. “And when Moses’ anger abated in him, he took the tablets; and in the inscription (*nuskha*) of them was guidance (*hudan*), and mercy (*rahmatun*) unto all those who hold their Lord in awe” (7.154).⁴⁷

⁴² Künstlinger, “Die Namen der ‘Gottes-Schriften’ im Qurʾān,” 71-84, gives a wide variety of terms which he says refer to scripture in the Qurʾān. Besides those treated here, Künstlinger investigates such terms as *dhikr*, *hikmat*, *furqān*, *qawl*, and *āyat*.

⁴³ The phrase *al-suhuf al-ūlā* also appears at 20.133. Further on *suhuf*: Künstlinger, “Die Namen der ‘Gottes-Schriften’ im Qurʾān,” 72-74.

⁴⁴ The second occurrence of this word is at 6.7: “had we sent down on thee a book on parchment (*qirʾāsin*). . .”

⁴⁵ an *hapax legomenon*. On “parchment,” see Julian Obermann, “Koran and Agada: The Events at Mount Sinai,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages* lvii (1941), 30.

⁴⁶ see Obermann, “Koran and Agada,” 37, on “tablets.”

⁴⁷ Of the remaining three occurrences of this root in the Qurʾān, one is the singular *lawḥ* in, “Nay, but it is a glorious *qurʾān* in a guarded tablet” (85.21-22).

Another term for revealed writings, *al-zubur*, appears at 3.184, 16.44 and 35.25; at 26.196 it comes in a possessive construction, “the scriptures of the ancients (*al-awwalīn*).”⁴⁸ Two of these verses put the term *zubur* in a parallel relationship with “the clear signs” (*bayyināt*) and “the illuminating book” (*al-kitāb al-munīr*).⁴⁹ A third occurrence lists *zubur* with “the clear signs” and “the remembrance” (*al-dhikr*).⁵⁰ At 26.196 the term could be said to be in parallel with “the revelation (*tanzīl*)” in 26.192.⁵¹

2.1.4 The Word of Allah

From among other expressions in the Qurʾān which might be taken to allude to the previous scriptures, mention should be made of *kalām* and *kalim*. These words appear in the *harrafa* passages to be studied later; and Muslim exegetes, including those examined in this dissertation, tend to identify these terms with particular scriptures.

Of the four occurrences of *kalim* (“words; utterances”)⁵² in Muslim scripture, three occurrences come in three of the four *harrafa* verses in focus in this dissertation (4.46, 5.13, 5.41).⁵³ *Kalim* is the object of the tampering verb in these verses. The fourth occurrence is at 35.10: “Whosoever desires glory, the glory altogether belongs to Allah to him good words (*kalim*) go up, and the righteous deed—he uplifts it.”

The term *kalām* (“speech; word) similarly occurs only four times in the Qurʾān, always in association with Allah. One of those occurrences comes in the first *harrafa* II verse of this study (2.75), where it is also the object of the tampering verb. A second occurrence is explicitly linked with Allah’s revelation to Moses: “He said, ‘Moses, I have chosen thee above all men for my messages and my utterance (*kalāmī*); take what I have given thee, and be of the thankful.’ And we wrote for him on the tablets of everything of

⁴⁸ Horowitz, “Zabūr,” (EI1), 1184. Horowitz adds that occurrences of *al-zubur* at 54.43 & 52 refer to heavenly writings in which human deeds are recorded.

⁴⁹ 3.184, 35.25.

⁵⁰ 16.44.

⁵¹ cf. Horowitz - [Firestone], “Zabūr,” (EI2), 372.

⁵² collective form of *kalima*.

⁵³ Wansbrough commented that in these verses, “*kalim* requires to be understood as scripture.” *Quranic Studies*, 76. Thomas O’Shaughnessy agreed that *kalim* refers to the revealed words of the Torah. *The Koranic Concept of the Word of God* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1948), 16. Investigation of the commentaries below will reveal whether Muqātil and Ṭabarī understood the term thus.

admonition, and a distinguishing of everything” (7.144-145). The other two appearances of *kalām Allāh* do not seem to be associated with an earlier revelation, but rather with a Muslim statement of faith (9.6) and a commandment to fight (48.15).

2.1.5 *The Claim of Confirmation*

Another indication of the approach to the earlier scriptures in the Qurʾān comes from the language of confirmation. A series of verses seems to claim that what Allah is now revealing to the addressees of the Qurʾān has essential links to revelations of the past.

The term *muṣaddiq*, from *ṣadaqa* II, means confirming, attesting, or pronouncing to be true,⁵⁴ as in its first Qurʾānic appearance, “And believe in that I have sent down, confirming (*muṣaddiqan*) that which is with you, and be not the first to disbelieve in it” (2.41). This active participle occurs some 18 times in the Qurʾān. Of that total, 14 occurrences are distributed throughout sūras 2-6. Beyond Sūra 6 there are four occurrences, two of them in Sūra 46.⁵⁵ In addition to this, the term *taṣḍīq*,⁵⁶ verbal noun of *ṣadaqa* II, appears at 10.37 and 12.111.

The object of the participle and verbal noun is generally one of a number of indistinct phrases which could be understood to refer to earlier scriptures. The most frequent object is *mā bayna yadayhi*⁵⁷ and similar phrases at 2.97; 3.3, 50; 5.48; 6.92; 35.31; 46.30; and 61.6. A second frequent object is “what is with them”⁵⁸ and similar phrases at 2.41, 89, 91, 101; 3.81; and 4.47. The subject of confirmation in those verses is generally “what I have sent down” (2.41) and similar phrases. “A book (*kitāb*)” or “the book” is frequently specified; at 2.89 “a book from Allah”; and in one of the *taṣḍīq* verses, “this *qurʾān*” (10.27). Other subjects include “a messenger” (3.81) and “a messenger from Allah” (2.101).

The Torah appears as the object of confirmation at 3.50, 5.46 and 61.6. In those

⁵⁴ Wansbrough renders *muṣaddiq* as “verification of earlier prophets and scriptures,” *Quranic Studies*, 65.

⁵⁵ at 6.92, 35.31, 46.12, 30, and 61.6.

⁵⁶ confirmation, attestation; belief; assent, agreement, approval.

⁵⁷ frequently translated “that which was before it,” but which means literally “what is between his two hands.” Cf. McAuliffe, “The Qurʾānic Context,” 148.

⁵⁸ *mā maʾakum*

verses, the subjects are 'Īsā and the scripture send down upon him, the Injīl. At 46.12, the Torah is updated by "*hādha kitāb*": "Before it was the book of Moses for a model and a mercy; and this is a book confirming, in Arabic tongue, to warn the evildoers, and good tidings to the good-doers."⁵⁹ At 3.49, angels say to Zakariyya, "Allah gives you good tidings of Yaḥyā, confirming a word (*kalima*) from Allah."

In two of the verses there appear parallel phrases which shed light on the meaning of confirmation. The first is at 5.48: "We sent to you the book in truth, confirming (*muṣaddiq*) what is before it from the book, and guarding it in safety (*muhaymin*)." The second is at 10.37: "it is a confirmation (*taṣḍīq*) of what is before it, and a distinguishing (*tafṣīl*) of the book, wherein is no doubt."

The impression given by these verses containing *muṣaddiq* or *taṣḍīq* is that the revelation conceived of as being sent down by Allah in the present is thought to align with what Allah has sent down in the past.⁶⁰ There seems to be a claim of correspondence. These verses vouch for the truth of earlier revelations, which is the sense of *ṣadaqa* II. At the same time these verses bring the authority of past revelations to bear on the present revelation. This helps the reader understand the context for the verses of tampering in the Qur'ān, and also indicates one expression which may have been in the minds of the exegetes when they set about to explain the meaning of the verses of tampering.

2.1.6 Characterizations of the earlier scriptures

The Qur'ān sometimes provides qualitative descriptions of the earlier scriptures it is referring to. A striking example is at 6.154: "Then we gave Moses the book, complete for him who does good, and distinguishing every thing, and as a guidance (*hudan*) and a mercy (*rahma*)." These and other epithets repeat throughout the Qur'ān. The Torah is characterized as containing "guidance and light (*nūr*)."⁶¹ The same phrase is used to describe the

⁵⁹ "An exegetically justifiable paraphrase for this would read: 'Before the Qur'ān was the Tawrah as a guide and a mercy. This Qur'ān is a book in an Arabic tongue which confirms the Tawrah in order to warn. . . .'" McAuliffe, "The Qur'ānic Context," 142.

⁶⁰ "The general position of the Qur'ān is that it confirms previous revelations, and in particular . . . of the Torah and the Evangel." Watt, "The Early Attitude," 50.

⁶¹ 5.44.

contents of the Gospel.⁶² The Gospel is also called “a guidance and an admonition (*maw‘īza*) to the godfearing.”⁶³ The Torah is said to contain “the judgment (*ḥukm*) of Allah.”⁶⁴ The book given to Moses is described as a guidance to the children of Israel.⁶⁵ Allah also gave “the book of Moses” for a standard (*imām*) and a mercy.⁶⁶ The tablets which Allah wrote for Moses contain “an admonition and a distinguishing (*tafṣīl*) of everything.”⁶⁷ The book given to Moses and Aaron is described as the “manifesting” (*mustabīn*) book.⁶⁸

In other contexts, the Qur’ānic approach to the earlier scriptures can be seen in the actions which are associated with them. At 3.93, for example, is an appeal to opponents in the midst of a polemical situation to “Bring you the Torah now, and recite it, if you are truthful.” A similar understanding is given at 10.94: “If thou art in doubt regarding what we have sent down to thee, ask those who recite the book before thee.” These verses seem to indicate that the Torah was readily available, and could be produced to resolve disputes or answer questions. A third situation of this type is in view at 5.43, where the Torah is said to be with (*‘inda*) the Jews, and to contain Allah’s decision. At 5.44, the prophets and religious leaders of the Jews are said to have judged the Jews according to the Torah, and these leaders were entrusted with the protection (*ḥafīza* X) of “the book of Allah.”⁶⁹ Similarly, the “people of the Gospel” are urged to make their judgments according to the contents of Gospel.⁷⁰ All of the people of the book are also challenged to “stand fast” or act according to the Torah and Gospel.⁷¹

These Qur’ānic descriptions of the earlier scriptures appear to be uniformly positive

⁶² 5.46.

⁶³ 5.46.

⁶⁴ 5.43.

⁶⁵ 17.2, 32.23.

⁶⁶ 11.17, 46.12.

⁶⁷ 7.145.

⁶⁸ 37.117.

⁶⁹ But cf. 62.5 - “The likeness of those who were entrusted with the Torah, but who subsequently failed in those, is as the likeness of a donkey who carries huge burdens of books.”

⁷⁰ 5.47.

⁷¹ 5.66, 68. cf. 7.169, in the context of a narrative about the children of Israel: “And those who hold fast to the *kitāb*, and perform the prayer—surely we leave not to waste the wage of those who set aright.”

and respectful.⁷² The most natural impression to take from them would be that they represent a conception of sacred texts which are available and intact. There does not seem to be any hint, in any of the verses mentioned above, that the revelation which Allah is presently sending down contradicts the contents of the earlier scriptures. There is no evident suggestion in these verses that any of the scriptures exists in an altered state. The associations of the terms *kalām* and *kalim* ('word/words') with the verb *harrafa* will be thoroughly examined below. Otherwise, the references to earlier scriptures in the Qur'ān would not seem to trigger thoughts of their corruption.

These descriptions of the earlier scriptures in turn provide a context for the exegetical development of the motif of tampering. The exegete who wants to write about the earlier scriptures will be constrained to keep in mind what the Qur'ān itself says about them. If he chooses to go against the characterizations found in Muslim scripture, he risks his reader's accusation of contradicting the word of Allah.

2.2 The Semantic Field of Tampering

In the Qur'ān there is a range of language which appears to indicate a variety of actions of tampering. The precise explanation of these actions is not given in the Qur'ān, nor are the actors or the objects of their actions frequently specified. Yet a number of verbs and associated expressions seem to work together to form a semantic field of tampering. An accurate investigation of the dimensions of this semantic field in the Qur'ān is crucial for determining which passages in the commentaries must be examined for the exegetical

⁷² Lazarus-Yafeh wrote: "The Qur'ān accepts the *Tawrāt* and *Indjīl* as genuine divine revelations taken from the same Guarded Tablets as the Qur'ān itself and brought by true messengers to both Jews and Christians respectively." "Tahrīf," (EI2), 111. Another scholar, Carra de Vaux, referred to "the great reverence with which the Qur'ān" speaks of the Gospel. "Indjīl," (EI1), 503. William Muir concluded, after an extensive survey of Qur'ānic passages which refer to the earlier scriptures, "The highest value is attributed by the Corān to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. They are always spoken of with veneration. There is not a single expression regarding them throughout the Corān, but what is dictated by profound respect and reverence." *The Corān: Its Composition and Teaching; And the Testimony it Bears to the Holy Scriptures* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1895), 222. Recently, Abdullah Saeed has echoed Muir's conclusion: "In no verse in the Qur'ān is there a denigrating remark about the scriptures of the Jews and Christians. Instead, there is respect and reverence. Any disparaging remarks were about the People of the Book, individuals or groups, and their actions." "The Charge of Distortion," 429.

development of the tampering motif.

Various scholars have indicated the roots which might be considered essential to the semantic field of tampering. Wansbrough identified three roots: *kitmān*, *tabdīl* and *tahrīf*.⁷³ Buhl also indicated three roots, but not the same three: in place of *kitmān* he put *layy*.⁷⁴ Lazarus-Yafeh included the three roots of Wansbrough, and added *layy*.⁷⁵ Mustansir Mir draws attention to *tahrīf*, *layy* and *ikhfāʿ*.⁷⁶ Caspar and Gaudeul identify a larger field of six roots which relate to alteration: *tahrīf*, *tabdīl*, *kitmān*, *labs*, *layy*, and *nisyān*.⁷⁷ This part of the dissertation will investigate all seven roots identified by these scholars, plus a third verb of concealment, *sarra* IV.

The methodology for studying a semantic field is set out by Toshihiko Izutsu in his *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*.⁷⁸ Izutsu calls his method of semantic analysis a “contextual interpretation” in which the semantic category of a word is described in terms of the conditions in which it is used.⁷⁹ The aim of the procedure is “To bring together, compare, and put in relation all the terms that resemble, oppose, and correspond with each other.”⁸⁰ Not every context is helpful for determining the meaning of a word, but Izutsu identifies seven cases in which a passage may assume “strategic importance for the method of semantic analysis.”⁸¹ The passage may contain a “contextual definition” of the word in question. Failing that, there may be a synonym or another term in parallel relationship with the word. Meaning can also be drawn from a contrasting term or from the negative form of the word. Further meaning may come from a semantic cluster from which the term in focus appears to be inseparable. The use of a word in a non-religious context may also shed light on its meaning in a religious context.

Izutsu defines a semantic field as any set of patterned semantic relations between

⁷³ *Sectarian Milieu*, 109.

⁷⁴ “Tahrif,” (EI1), 618-619.

⁷⁵ “Tahrif,” (EI2), 111.

⁷⁶ *Dictionary of Qurʾānic Terms and Concepts*, 55.

⁷⁷ “Textes de la Tradition Musulmane,” 62-63; affirmed recently in McAuliffe, “The Qurʾānic Context,” 144.

⁷⁸ (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966), 35-41.

⁷⁹ *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*, 13.

⁸⁰ *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*, 36.

⁸¹ *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*, 37f.

certain words of a language. He writes, “A word rarely stands aloof from others and maintains its existence all alone; on the contrary, words manifest everywhere a very marked tendency to combine with certain others in the contexts of occurrence.”⁸² It will be seen in this study that the eight verbal roots of tampering begin very quickly to interact and entangle. Their meanings also seem to be influenced by the objects attached to them, and by repeating idioms and associated verbs in the surrounding contexts.

The eight roots will be studied generally in the order in which they appear canonically in the Qur’ān. The group of concealment verbs will be given with *katama*. In examining each of the roots, major attention will be given to usages which might be reasonably connected with the theme of tampering with the revelation of Allah. Some observations will also be made on other theological uses, or even on mundane uses if these seem helpful for clarifying meaning. At the end of this section the occurrences of the various terms in the semantic field of tampering in sūras 2-7, as well as indications of earlier scriptures in the same sūras, will be set out in the form of a chart.

2.2.1 *Labisa* II, to confound

The first root in the semantic field of tampering to appear in the Qur’ān is the verb *labisa* II. It occurs in the form of a command, “Do not confound (*labisa* II) the truth (*haqq*) with vanity (*bāṭil*)” (2.42). The context is the beginning of a long passage addressed to the “children of Israel.” The same phrase comes at 3.71 in the form of a challenge to the children of Israel, “Why do you confound the truth with vanity?”

Form II of *labisa* means to confuse, to conceal, make dubious, cloak.⁸³ This verb occurs seven times in the Qur’ān, and five of those occurrences are in Sūra 6. In addition to “truth,” the objects of *labisa* include belief (*īmān*) (6.82) and religion (*dīn*) (6.138). Allah is the subject of *labisa* at 6.9 & 65: “We would certainly have confused for them the thing which they themselves are confusing” (6.9).⁸⁴ The verbal noun *labs* means confusedness,

⁸² *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’ān*, 40.

⁸³ Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon: Derived from the best and most copious Eastern sources* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), Book I, Part 7, 2647.

⁸⁴ Ṭabarī pulls in this phrase from 6.9 to explain the first occurrence of *labisa* II at 2.42. *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 567.

dubiousness, obscureness.⁸⁵ It appears once, at 50.15: “they are in uncertainty (*labs*) as to the new creation.”

2.2.2 Verbs of concealing: *katama*, *sarra* IV, *khafiya* IV

Three verbs for concealing make up a significant part of the semantic field of tampering. The verb *katama* appears just after the first occurrence of *labisa* II, in the very same verse. The context is a diatribe against the children of Israel, and the audience is commanded, “do not conceal (*katama*) the truth (*ḥaqq*) willingly” (2.42). This phrase appears together in a parallel construction with “do not confound,” and thus takes from it the sense of hiding for the sake of confusing.⁸⁶ In the Qur’ān, the root *katama* appears only in Form I, which means to conceal or suppress.⁸⁷ All of the 21 Qur’ānic occurrences of this root—but one—are in the imperfect. The verbal noun *kitmān* does not appear in the Qur’ān.

“Truth” is the object of that first significant appearance of *katama* in the Qur’ān. This might be taken to refer to Allah’s revelation. Immediately preceding the imperative to *not* conceal is another command, “believe in that I have sent down, confirming that which is with you” (2.41). Verb and object, as well as adverb, appear again in 2.146: “there is a party of them conceal the truth and that wittingly.” Preceding this verse in the immediate context is the phrase, “the evildoers whom We have given the book.” All three words appear a third time in a polemical question in 3.71, “People of the book! Why do you . . . conceal the truth and that wittingly?” This verse comes right after another question, “Why do you disbelieve in Allah’s signs (*āyāt*)” (3.70).

Another object which could be taken to refer to revelation is “testimony”: “And who does greater evil than he who conceals (*katama*) a testimony (*shahāda*) received from Allah?” (2.140). Other objects which appear to refer to Allah’s revelation are “the clear signs” (*bayyināt*) and “the guidance” (*hudan*): “Those who conceal the clear signs and the guidance that We have sent down, after we have shown them clearly in the book—they shall be cursed by Allah and the cursers” (2.159).

⁸⁵ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 7, 2648.

⁸⁶ Rudi Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1980), 18.

⁸⁷ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 8 Supplement, 2998.

The book (*kitāb*) is specified as the object of *katama* in 2.174: “Those who conceal what of the book Allah has sent down on them, and sell it for a little price.” The same object seems to be in view in 3.187, where the audience is described as “those who had been given the book.” The message is, “You shall make it clear unto the people, and not conceal it.” This use of conceal is associated in this verse with rejecting the book “behind their backs” and selling the book “for a small price.”

Uses of *katama* which do not seem to be related to Allah’s revelation include the very first canonical appearance of the root in 2.33. In an account of Adam’s “naming,” Allah tells the angels, “I know what things you reveal, and what you were hiding.” This and similar phrases are used to indicate that Allah knows what is hidden to human view, for example the thoughts of people who enter houses not their own (24.29). In the story of Allah’s command to the Children of Israel to sacrifice a cow, the inner thoughts of the people were exposed: “Allah disclosed what you were hiding” (2.72). On the Day of Judgment, unbelievers will not be able to conceal from Allah “one tiding” (4.42). One section of this category of uses of *katama* would be the hiding of thoughts before the messenger. In 3.167, people hide their true thoughts in the heart when giving a reason for not fighting. The people of the book profess faith in the messenger, but they in fact don’t believe, and “Allah knows very well what they were hiding” (5.61).

Non-theological uses of *katama* also help to bring out its meaning. For example, the object of concealment in 5.106 is the “testimony of Allah” (cf. 2.284), but the context is legal and a “bequeathing” at the time of death is intended. Similarly, a “pledge” or “trust” is concealed in 2.284. In 4.37, the ‘niggardly’ appear to conceal their wealth. At 2.228, in the context of a ruling on divorce, it is not lawful for women to hide “what Allah has created in their wombs.”

The verb *katama* appears several times together with contrasting verbs. Examples given above include 2.33: “I know what things you reveal (*badā* IV), and what you were hiding.” The verb *badā* IV means “to disclose, reveal, manifest.” Another contrasting verb is *bāna* II in 3.187: “You shall make it clear (*bāna* II) unto the people, and not conceal it.” And a third pairing comes at 21.110, “Surely he knows what is spoken aloud (*jahra*) and

he knows what you hide.” *Jahra* is the verbal noun of *jahara*, which means “to be brought to light; to declare publicly, announce.” These three contrasting verbs suggest that the fault of *katama* is a failure to make public a truth in the custody of certain individuals.

The pattern of *katama* in the Qurʾān appears to be worth noting. Of the 21 occurrences of this verbal root, nearly half—ten—come in the second sūra. The verb appears three times in the third sūra, twice in the fourth sūra, three times in the fifth, and only three times elsewhere. This allows the root to establish its presence and significance firmly early in the course of a canonical hearing/reading of the Muslim scripture.

A second verb of concealing, *sarra* IV, appears in the context of the first *harrafa* verse at 2.77: “Allah knows what they keep secret (*sarra* IV) and what they publish.” Form IV of *sarra*, which occurs 20 times in the Qurʾān means to conceal, suppress or keep secret.⁸⁸ This verb does not appear frequently in sūras 2-7, but it does occur at 5.52: “for that they kept secret within them.” An occurrence of the verb in ordinary usage comes in the Qurʾānic story of Joseph, with Joseph himself as the object. “So they hid him as merchandise; but God knew what they were doing” (12.19).

A third verb of concealing, *khafiya*, appears in 2.284 immediately after a double occurrence of *katama*: “Whether you publish what is in your hearts or hide it (*khafiya*), Allah shall make reckoning with you for it.” Form IV of *khafiya* means to hide, conceal or cover.⁸⁹ One of the 17 occurrences of this form in the Qurʾān is in the context of the third appearance of *harrafa* IV at 5.15, where the messenger is to make clear to the people of the book “many things you have been concealing (*khafiya* IV) of the book.” An occurrence of *khafiya* which explicitly connects to the revelation of Allah comes at 6.91 (cited earlier in connection with mention of earlier scriptures): “They measured not Allah with his true measure when they said, ‘Allah has not sent down aught on any mortal.’ Say, ‘Who sent down the book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to men? You put it into parchments, revealing them, and hiding (*khafiya* IV) much; and you were taught that you knew not, you and your fathers.’”

⁸⁸ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 4, 1337.

⁸⁹ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 2, 776.

2.2.3 *Baddala*, to substitute

The third root to appear in the canonical progression is the verb *badala*. Most of the occurrences of this verb in the Qurʾān are in Form II, which means to change or alter to something else.⁹⁰ Because of the frequency of its discussion in the pages below, *badala* II will be indicated by *baddala*.

A number of the 33 Qurʾānic occurrences of *baddala* seem to indicate the substitution or change of words, and identify this as an evil act. The first appearance of the verb is of this kind: “Then the evildoers substituted (*baddala*) a saying (*qawl*) other than that which had been said to them” (2.59). The context is a narrative about Moses and the Children of Israel. The very same verb form and object comes again in 7.162, similarly in the midst of a story about Moses and the “twelve tribes.”

The object of *baddala* is “the word of Allah” (*kalāma llāh*) at 48.15: “. . . desiring to change the word of Allah.” The subject seems to be the Bedouins, and the concern is participation in battle. In another passage, the object is “a *qurʾān*” and the opponents of the messenger command him to change it. Allah instructs the messenger to reply, “It is not for me to alter (*baddala*) it” (10.15). Elsewhere, objects indistinct in themselves may be interpreted to indicate revelation. An example is 2.211: “Whoso changes (*baddala*) the blessing (*niʿma*) of Allah after it has come to him, Allah is terrible in retribution.” This clause is immediately preceded in the verse by the command, “Ask the children of Israel how many a clear sign (*āya*) we gave them.”

While some of these occurrences of *baddala* appear to suggest a tampering action associated with the revelation of Allah, a series of verses in the Qurʾān declares confidently that humans cannot change the words of Allah. “No man can change (*lā mubaddila*) the words (*kalimāt*) of Allah” (6.34). The same Form II active participle is used in 6.115, where the object is “his words.” At 18.27 we find the very same phrase as in 6.115. The same object is used with the verbal noun of *baddala* at 10.65: “There is no changing (*tabdīl*) the words of Allah.” A related expression comes at 50.29, where Allah declares, “the word (*qawl*) is not changed (*baddala* pass.) with me.”

⁹⁰ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 1, 167.

A notable use of *baddala* with Allah as the subject is 16.101: “And when we exchange (*baddala*) a verse (*āya*) in the place of another verse.” Here Allah is the subject of a construction which in most other Qur’ānic contexts seems to imply a negative action. Another interesting use of the verb is in the phrase, “thou shalt find no changing (*tabdīl*) the wont (*sunna*) of Allah” (33.62) in relation to the slaughter of hypocrites. An identical phrase appears to relate to divine involvement in battle at 48.23. However, the *sunna* of Allah seems to indicate something quite different at 35.43, where the theme is the sending of warners and the appropriate human response: “And thou shalt never find any changing (*tabdīl*) the wont of Allah, and thou shalt never find any altering (*tahwīl*) the wont of Allah.” The parallel relationship with *hāla* II brings ‘transforming’ and perhaps ‘turning’ to the sense of *baddala*.

2.2.4 *Harrafa*, to tamper with

The fourth root in the semantic field of tampering to make its appearance is the verb *harafa*. Though this verb—especially through its Form II verbal noun *tahrīf*—is one of the best known Arabic words for tampering, it in fact occurs only a few times in the Qur’ān. The verbal noun *tahrīf* does not appear at all. Four of the six occurrences of this root appear to be associated with the revelation of Allah, all in Form II *harafa*. Its first occurrence is of this type: “. . . a party of them that heard Allah’s word (*kalām*), and then tampered with it (*yuharrifūnahu*)” (2.75). Because of the frequency of its discussion in the pages below, *harafa* II will be indicated by *harrafa*.

Harrafa is generally defined as “to change.” However, chapters 3 and 4 below will show that early exegetes understood a range of meanings from this verb. Edward Lane gave the sense of *harrafa* as “he altered.” He cited a series of uses of Form II, including causing (hearts) to turn away; turning (a knife) obliquely in nibbing; and imitating the cutting (of a sword) with its edge.⁹¹ He further offers that the verbal noun *tahrīf* came to signify the perverting of language; the altering of a word in form; the mistranscribing of a

⁹¹ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 2, 549.

word in any manner; or the altering of a word by substituting one letter, or more, for another, or others.⁹² Interestingly, Lane points out that the Form II active participle is used outside of the Qurʾān in an expression for Allah, *muḥarrifu al-qulūb*, meaning the turner, incliner or mover of hearts.⁹³

The other three occurrences of *ḥarrafa* in the Qurʾān share the same object and possibly the same subject. The first of these is 4.46: “Some of the Jews tamper with (*yuharrifūna*) words (*kalim*) from their places (*mawāḍiʿ*).” The wording of 5.13 and 5.41 is very similar. The object “*kalim*” in these verses, along with “*kalām*” in 2.75, might be taken to allude to the previous scriptures, as noted in section 2.1.4 above. The subject of all three verses may be the Jews, or at least the people of the book. The context of all three seems to be a discussion of Allah’s dealings with the children of Israel. While these contextual clues do not help to precisely define the action signified by *ḥarrafa*, they certainly bring to mind an action of tampering with divine revelation.

Apart from these four occurrences of *ḥarrafa*, the root appears only twice elsewhere in the Qurʾān, and little information can be gained from those uses. In 8.16, a physical action is indicated: “Whoso turns his back that day to them, unless withdrawing (*mutaharrif*) to fight again. . . .” (Form V). Form V has the sense of “to turn off, branch off, take a turning.” The final appearance is at 22.11: “And among men there is such a one as serves Allah upon the very edge (*ḥarfin*). . . .” The noun *ḥarf* refers to the (cutting) edge (of a knife or sword), and also means “a border, rim, or verge.”

Muslim exegetes have sometimes attempted to provide a definition for the verb *ḥarrafa*, as we shall discover in the examination of Ṭabarī’s commentary below. The 13th-century scholar al-Rāzī discussed the verb in his commentary *Mafāṭih al-Ghayb* where *ḥarrafa* first appears at 2.75.⁹⁴ He cited al-Qaffāl to the effect that *tahrif* means alteration (*taghyīr*) and substitution of one thing for another (*tabdīl*).⁹⁵ The origin of the word is in the act of bending (*inḥirāf*) or slanting in order to avoid something, said al-Qaffāl, quoting

⁹² Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 2, 549.

⁹³ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 2, 551.

⁹⁴ *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. III, 132-5.

⁹⁵ *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. III, 134.

8.16 (*mutaḥarrif*) for support. The meaning of *tahrif* is thus to cause something to deviate (*imāla*) from what is true, as a writing reed is called ‘corrupted’ (*muharraf*) if its point has been trimmed askew (*mā’il*).⁹⁶ In relation to the Jews, al-Rāzī indicated four possible types of *tahrif*: substitution of one term in the Torah for another; false interpretation (the sense al-Rāzī preferred); insincere adherence to Muḥammad’s words; and inverting the precepts of Allah in the Torah—for example a punishment of beating instead of stoning.⁹⁷

Arthur Jeffery defined *harrafa* as “to change the letters,” apparently on the strength of *harafa* sharing the same root letters with *harf* (“letter,” pl. *hurūf*).⁹⁸ Jeffery explained, “Each radical in the root of a Semitic word is a *harf*, and to make play with these radicals in a word would be to do what is meant by *harrafa*.”⁹⁹ Julian Obermann offered an explanation of the entire phrase which appears at 4.46: “Literally, *yuharrifūna al-kalima ‘an mawāḍi’ihi* can only mean that they, the Israelites, changed the wording, of a sentence or statement, as to its given order: *they altered the words from their (rightful) places*.”¹⁰⁰

2.2.5 *Lawā*, to twist

Another root which occurs in association with alteration of Allah’s revelation is the verb *lawā*. The verb first appears in 3.78: “There is a sect of them twist their tongues with the book, that you may suppose it part of the book, yet it is not part of the book.” The context is a discussion of “a party of the people of the book” (3.72f.) who “speak falsehood against Allah” (3.75; cf. 3.78). The accusation of twisting also comes soon after accusations of confounding and concealing (3.71).

⁹⁶ *al-Taḥfīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. III, 134. Cf. Gaudeul and Caspar, “Textes de la Tradition musulmane,” 65.

⁹⁷ *al-Taḥfīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. III, 134-5. Cf. Di Matteo, “Il ‘Tahrif’ od Alterazione,” 65. Watt writes that “The meanings ascribed to the word *yuharrifūna* in commentaries and dictionaries are the outcome of the subsequent discussions and do not necessarily give much insight into the meaning of the passage at the time of revelation.” “The Early Development,” 51-52. Again, as queried in chapter one above, is it possible to speak of the meaning of the Qur’ān apart from commentary?

⁹⁸ “Ghevond’s Text of the Correspondence between ‘Umar II and Leo III,” *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944), 280.

⁹⁹ “The Qur’ān as Scripture,” 260.

¹⁰⁰ Obermann, “Koran and Agada,” 40, italics are his. Whether or not a phrase in a text “can only mean” one thing seems to be open to discussion. In any case, the aim of this dissertation is not to determine what the verbs of tampering in the Qur’ān can only mean, but rather to discover what exegetes in the earliest era of commentary understood them to mean.

The verb *lawā* appears only five times in the Qurʾān. In Form I, the verb means to twist, turn round, contort, curl, curve or bend.¹⁰¹ At 3.78, the object of the verb appears to be “their tongues” rather than “the book.” In 4.46, the object is not clear and the Jews are “twisting with their tongues and traducing religion.” In this clause, twisting seems to be in a parallel relationship with traducing (*taʿn*). *Taʿn*, the Form I verbal noun of *taʿana*, means “piercing, attack, accusation, defamation,” and thus lends a sense of verbal insult to *lawā*. The context of 4.46 also appears to be a highly-charged polemical situation in which those who were given a share of the book “purchase error” (4.44f.). The accusation of twisting comes immediately after an accusation of tampering with words from their places (4.46).

The other occurrences of *lawā* seem to refer to physical actions. At 3.153, the verb appears in a context of conflict: “When you were going up, not twisting about for anyone.” In 63.5, the hypocrites “twist their heads” and turn their faces away from Allah’s messenger. The verb seems to be used metaphorically for a moral action in 4.135: “If you twist or turn away (*ʿarada* IV), Allah is aware of the things you do.”

2.2.5 *Nasiya*, to forget

The final root in the semantic field of tampering is the verb *nasiya*. This verb occurs in close proximity to other roots of tampering in 5.13-14. The accusation is first made of the Children of Israel, “they have forgotten a portion of that they were reminded of” (5.13). Then in the next verse the very same phrase is applied to the Christians.

The verb *nasiya* means to forget, and it can take on the morally culpable sense of “to neglect.”¹⁰² Most of the occurrences of this verb in the Qurʾān are not related to God’s revelation. But 5.13 comes in the midst of the discussion of how the children of Israel broke their compact with Allah. An accusation of perverting words from their meanings comes immediately before the accusation of forgetting, and the two appear to be in a parallel relationship. An accusation of concealing follows soon afterward (5.15).

This sense of *nasiya* may also be in mind in 2.44, where the children of Israel are

¹⁰¹ Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 8 Supplement, 3015.

¹⁰² Lane recorded an occurrence of *nasiyahu* which he understood to mean, “he constrained himself to dismiss it from his mind.” *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 8 Supplement, 3033.

questioned, “Will you bid others to piety, and forget yourselves while you recite the book?” The verb seems to have the deliberate active sense of “neglect” in 2.238, “Forget not to be bountiful one towards another.” Adam also seems to be held responsible for neglecting his covenant with Allah in 20.115, where “he forgot, and We found in him no constancy.” Other uses of the verb where forgetting is clearly negative are in 39:11, where a man forgets Allah and calls upon idols instead; and in 2.287, where “if we forget” is identified with the “mistake” in the prayer which ends the *sūra*.

A notable occurrence of Form IV of *nasiya* is 2.106, where Allah causes a verse (*āyat*) to be forgotten. The verb comes together with “We abrogate,” and the two verb forms appear to be connected a parallel relationship.

2.2.6 The operation of the semantic field

Izutsu writes that “Every word has, as it were, its own choice of companions, so much so that the entire vocabulary of a language forms an extremely tangled web of semantic groupings.”¹⁰³ The survey of verbs in the semantic field of tampering above has offered many examples of verbal clusters in which objects help to distinguish the meanings of verbs, and verbs help to identify subjects. Cases of verbal description of terms from their contexts has been seen to be minimal. However, the verbs of this group frequently appear with synonyms, antonyms, or other verbs set in a parallel relationship. Indeed, in at least five cases discrete verbs of tampering have been noted to appear together in the same verse.

A lack of awareness of this wider semantic grouping of tampering leads to a limited and naïve view of the Qur’ānic material on the verbs *harrafa* and *baddala*, and thus may cause a scholar to miss a wealth of material in the commentaries relevant to the tampering motif. With this in mind, the descriptions and analyses in chapters 3 and 4 below will include the exegesis of verses containing all eight verbs surveyed above. In addition to verses containing these eight verbs, the net will be flung out still further to include the exegesis of verses containing idiomatic expressions. Though some of these additional verses may be neither included in the semantic field nor indicated by scholars of polemic, they contain expressions which can trigger thoughts of tampering in the minds of exegetes.

¹⁰³ *Ethico-Religious Concepts*, 40.

The chart below sets out the occurrences of the verbs in the semantic field of tampering in sūras 2-7 of the Qurʾān. Along with these verbs, the occurrences of three idiomatic expressions are noted: “sell for a small price,” “write the book with hands,” and “throw behind backs.” Also provided in the chart are the occurrences of specific names of earlier scriptures, and the expression *muṣaddiq* (“confirming”). The eight verbs are given in italics. Names of earlier scriptures and claims of confirmation appear in capital letters. Included with the verbs are the Qurʾānic subjects and objects, if given.

The chart offers a preview of how the verbs and expressions of the semantic field might be expected to “tangle” in a reading of sūras 2-7 of the Qurʾān. But a full appreciation of their interactions can only come after a study of the exegesis of these many verses in the commentaries, in which Muqātil and Ṭabarī explain the meanings of the tampering verbs through definition, using yet other verbs, and—most vividly—through the use of narrative. The 25 verses¹⁰⁴ which are the focus of the commentary material described and analysed in detail in chapters 3-5 below are indicated by the numbers in parentheses after the verse references.

¹⁰⁴ One verse which is indicated once in the scholarly lists but not included in the chart below is 5.77: “Say, ‘People of the Book, go not beyond the bounds in your religion, other than the truth, and follow not the caprices of a people who went astray before, and led astray many, and now again have gone astray from the right way.’” Because this verse contains neither a reference to an earlier scripture or its confirmation, nor a verb or expression of tampering, it is left aside.

<u>VERSE</u>	<u>TERM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>OBJECT</u>
2.41 (1)	CONFIRMING sell for small price	what I revealed children of Israel (C of I)	what is with you signs of Allah
2.42 (2)	<i>labisa</i> II <i>katama</i>	C of I C of I	truth with vanity truth
2.59 (3)	<i>baddala</i>	evildoers of C of I	a saying
2.75 (4)	<i>harrafa</i>	hearers of Allah's word	the word of Allah
2.77 (5)	<i>sarra</i> IV	ditto	
2.79 (6)	write with hands sell for small price		the book (<i>kitāb</i>) what they have written
2.89	CONFIRMING	a book from Allah	what is with them
2.91	CONFIRMING	truth	what is with them
2.97	CONFIRMING		what went before
2.101 (7)	CONFIRMING throw behind backs	a messenger from Allah those given the book	what is with them the book of Allah
2.106	<i>nasiya</i> IV	Allah	a verse
2.140 (8)	<i>katama</i>	people of the book (P of B)	testimony from Allah
2.146 (9)	<i>katama</i>	those given the book	truth
2.159 (10)	<i>katama</i>		evidence and guidance
2.174 (11)	<i>katama</i> sell for small price		what Allah sent down
2.211 (12)	<i>baddala</i>	C of I	the blessings of Allah
3.3	CONFIRMING TORAH & GOSPEL	Allah/the book	what went before it
3.48	TORAH & GOSPEL		
3.50	CONFIRMING TORAH	Jesus	Torah
3.65	TORAH & GOSPEL		
3.71 (13)	<i>labisa</i> II <i>katama</i>	P of B P of B	truth with vanity truth
3.77	sell for small price		covenant of Allah
3.78 (14)	<i>lawā</i>	a part of P of B	tongues with the book
3.81	CONFIRMING	a messenger	what is with you
3.91	TORAH (x2)		

<u>VERSE</u>	<u>TERM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>OBJECT</u>
3.187 (15)	<i>katama</i> throw behind backs sell for small price	those given book ditto ditto	the book
3.199	sell for small price	P of B	signs of Allah
4.37 (16)	<i>katama</i>		bounties Allah gave
4.46 (17)	<i>harrafa</i> <i>lawā</i>	some of the Jews ditto	words from places tongues
4.47	CONFIRMING	what we have sent down	what is with you
4.163	PSALMS		
5.13 (18)	<i>harrafa</i> <i>nasiya</i>	C of I C of I	words from places what reminded of
5.14 (19)	<i>nasiya</i>	Christians	ditto
5.15 (20)	<i>khafiya</i> IV	P of B	much of the book
5.41 (21)	<i>harrafa</i>	Jews	words from places
5.43	TORAH		
5.44 (22)	TORAH sell for small price	Jews	signs of Allah
5.46	CONFIRMING (x2) TORAH (x2) GOSPEL	Allah, Jesus	Torah
5.47	GOSPEL		
5.48 (23)	CONFIRMING	We/the book in truth	what came before it
5.66	TORAH & GOSPEL		
5.68	TORAH & GOSPEL		
5.110	TORAH & GOSPEL		
6.91 (24)	<i>khafiya</i> IV		much
6.92	CONFIRMING	a book we sent down	what came before it
7.157	TORAH & GOSPEL		
7.162 (25)	<i>baddala</i>	evildoers of C of I	a saying

2.3 Conclusions

1. Expressions of tampering, specific references to earlier scriptures, and language of confirmation all appear to occur in the same sūras of the Qur'ān. In sūras 2-7, passages populated with verbs and terms which suggest tampering appear to alternate regularly with contexts thick with occurrences of the words *muṣaddiq*, Tawrāt and Injil. It was noted in chapter 1 that the 26 verses connected with the accusation of falsification by scholars of polemic all occur in sūras 2-7. After an investigation of the semantic field of tampering, it may also be noted that the main verbs and expressions of tampering occur largely in these same sūras. Where these verbs and expressions occur beyond Sūra 7, they have not generally triggered thoughts of tampering with the earlier scriptures in the minds of polemicists and exegetes.

The patterns of occurrence of specific names for the earlier scriptures, and the term *muṣaddiq*, are also striking. 'Torah' and 'Gospel' appear frequently in sūras 3 and 5, but rarely beyond Sūra 7. Similarly, the language of confirmation is strong in sūras 2-6, but sparse elsewhere.

2. The subjects and objects of verbs and expressions of tampering are generally vague and ambiguous. They may be suggestive, or allusive, as influenced by reader or context, but they are seldom specific. The objects of tampering verbs are most often indistinct expressions like "truth," "words," "signs" or "testimony." The closest which a verse containing the alteration verbs *ḥarrafa* or *baddala* comes to suggesting one of the earlier revelations is "the word of Allah" at 2.75. An actual name of one of the earlier scriptures never appears as the object of a verb of tampering. Furthermore, neither the word *kitāb* nor any other term for a written document appears as the object of an alteration verb.

Verbs of concealing, however, may indicate a writing as object. In 2.174 the object of *katama* is "what Allah sent down of the *kitāb*"; and in 5.15 the object of *khafiya* IV is "much of the *kitāb*." The term *kitāb* also appears in two other *katama* verses, though not as object (2.146 and 2.159); and the expression "the book which Moses brought" appears near *khafiya* IV in 6.91.

Also noteworthy is the occurrence of *kitāb* in two verses frequently indicated by

scholars of polemic, 2.79 and 3.78. At 2.79 the action concerns ‘writing the book with hands’ and selling what those hands have written. At 3.78 the action in focus is ‘twisting tongues with the book.’

3. These observations on the occurrences of verbs, terms and expressions in sūras 2-7 set up a series of expectations for the exegesis of the tampering verses in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī. One possible expectation is that the exegete who wants to demonstrate coherence of meanings within Muslim scripture will need to consider how he can explain the verses of tampering in such a way that his explanations harmonize with the Qur’ānic characterizations of the earlier scriptures. If there is a contradiction of meaning among tampering verses, positive characterizations of earlier scriptures, and claims of a relationship of confirmation in the Qur’ān, it remains unresolved in Muslim scripture. This apparent tension heightens the anticipation of what the exegetes will do with it.

Another expectation is that because of the ambiguity of the subjects and objects of the tampering verbs, Muqātil and Ṭabarī will be free to pursue a variety of exegetical options. Perhaps they will provide the reader with a single interpretation. Perhaps they will simply map out the options and leave it to the reader to decide. We will now explore the understanding of these verses during the formative period of *tafsīr* in the commentaries themselves.

3. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān on the Qur'ānic verses of tampering

This chapter and the following chapter will present the exegesis of the Qur'ānic verses of tampering by Muqātil and Ṭabarī. The methodology pursued in this presentation will be literary analysis, including close observation and careful description of the texts themselves.

The aim of these two chapters is to describe what the two exegetes offer in their explanations of some 25 verses which have been associated with the Islamic doctrine of the corruption of the earlier scriptures. The material in the commentaries which clearly relates to the tampering theme will be examined in greatest detail. In many cases the original Arabic words will be given so that the nuances of the exegetes' development of the tampering motif can be subsequently pursued. In the descriptions of Muqātil's exegesis of the tampering verses, some straightforward observations will be offered about the context of the verse in the Qur'ān. If the individual verse is part of a so-called "homily of rebuke,"¹ then the larger scriptural text unit promises to illuminate the meaning of the verse itself. Following this up, descriptions of commentary passages in chapters 3 and 4 will frequently include observations about the contexts of the passages in the commentaries. These are given in the understanding that what the exegete writes immediately before and after will have an influence on his interpretation of the tampering verse.

Each chapter will begin with an introduction to the method by which the exegete explains the text of the Qur'ān. These introductions will integrate personal research with scholarly perspectives. Footnotes throughout the chapters will provide relevant information given neither in the scriptural locution nor the commentary passage at hand. This will include information from other parts of the Qur'ān or the commentary; from other early Muslim texts such as the commentaries of al-Farrā' (d. 207/822) and 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827), the *Sīra* and *ḥadīth*; and from scholarly studies on the Qur'ān or its exegesis. The first part of each chapter will offer thick description in order to facilitate analysis later in the chapter. In chapter 5 the narrative elements in the descriptions will be further scrutinized for their relationship to larger narrative structures.

¹ A term used by Julian Obermann in "Koran and Agada," 23.

3.1 Muqātil's style of exegesis

Kees Versteegh describes Muqātil's commentary as "by far the most independent and interesting of the early commentaries."² The *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* presents the complete text of the Qurʾān in its canonical arrangement, broken into fragments of verses and interspersed with commentary. Pieces of scriptural text relate to explanation through a series of connectives or frequently through absence of a connective. The connective *yaʿnī* appears most often; *yaqūl* also appears as well as (less frequently) *ay*. Muqātil provides glosses for a great number of Qurʾānic words. Some words he consistently glosses in the same way, such as *ṣadaqa* II for *amuna* IV.³ He will sometimes also give a second gloss for his own gloss. The glosses provide lexical explanations for words which the exegete either doesn't like or thinks the reader will not understand.⁴

Occurrences of the name of Muḥammad, *nabī* or *rasūl* are followed in the commentary by the phrase "may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him." The expression "upon whom be peace" is generally attached to the names of lesser prophets. After the name Allah, or references to the divinity, one usually finds *subḥānahu* ('praise him'), *ʿazza wa jalla* ('powerful and exalted') or *taʿāla* ('the sublime').

A striking feature of the commentary is the frequency with which Muqātil provides proper names for the unidentified pronouns of scripture, as well as for such generic terms as "believers." In his shorter explanations, he gives paraphrases for scriptural clauses and offers extra information where the reader may be curious to know missing details. A large proportion of his longer explanations is narrative material. The formula *wa-dhālika an/anna* usually introduces a narrative which is offered as the occasion of the verse's revelation.

² C.H.M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qurʾānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 130. Regula Forster remarks that the fluency of Muqātil's commentary comes from the fact that he did not yet need to discuss alternative interpretations, and thus could simply give his own explanations. "Methoden arabischer Qurʾānexegese: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, at-Ṭabarī und ʿAbdarrazzāq al-Qāshānī zu Q 53,1-18," in *Sinnvermittlung: Studien zur Geschichte von Exegese und Hermeneutik*, I.P. Michel and H. Weder, eds. (Zurich: Pano, 2000), 397.

³ Wansbrough gives some examples of these "minimal units of explication" in *Quranic Studies*, 129; and Versteegh provides a fuller list in "Grammar and Exegesis," 211-212.

⁴ Versteegh suggests that Muqātil "corrects" the scriptural text freely, evidently replacing expressions with his own "without any qualms," "Grammar and Exegesis," 214.

Muqātil often signals a return to the canonical text with *fa-qāla subhānahu*. Another expression, *nazalat fi*, commonly indicates the person(s) about whom the exegete believes Allah revealed the verse.

Muqātil's commentary is missing a number of elements which are familiar from commentaries of later periods. When he wants to explain the meanings of scriptural words, he does not refer to the use of these words in pre-Islamic poetry or *ḥadīth*. Rather, he limits his comparative material to scriptural *shawāhid*, introducing cross-references by the expressions *naẓīruha* ('comparable to that'), *mithla qawlihi ta'ālā* ('similar to his saying') and *ka mā qāla* ('like what he said'). A fine example of reference to other parts of the Qur'ān comes in the extended explanatory section following Baqara (2).1-5, where quotations from 3.1-7 are used to support not only Muqātil's interpretation of 2.1-5, but also the narratives and identifications which he himself has supplied. Muqātil sometimes takes time to gloss or explain his cross references as well.

Two other elements virtually missing from the commentary are *variae lectiones* and alternative glosses. Muqātil does not explain grammatical or stylistic phenomena. He does not provide *isnāds*,⁵ a lack for which he was greatly criticized by later scholars. He was apparently not interested in doctrines such as *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*,⁶ or the claim that there are no foreign words in the Qur'ān. Claude Gilliot demonstrated that Muqātil's remarks on a number of Hebrew figures represent a period prior to the development of the doctrine of the sinlessness of prophets.⁷ The exegete's discussion of the thoughts of Joseph at 12.24, the behaviour of David with Bathsheba, and the story of Solomon and the statue, for example, show a freedom of interpretation which was not open to Muslim scholars of a later period.⁸

⁵ A couple of these appear at 2.32 and 4.48, though they seem out of place and their function is not clear.

⁶ One case in point his exegesis of 2.23-24, his first good opportunity to present the doctrine. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 93-94.

⁷ "Muqātil, Grand Exégète," 70, 84.

⁸ Gilliot, "Muqātil, Grand Exégète," 70-72. Not only did Muqātil openly discuss the stories of these earlier figures, but he also commented freely on well-known stories from the life of the prophet of Islam (at 33.36-38, 33.50-52, and 53.24). Gilliot, "Muqātil, Grand Exégète," 72-78. The exegete even goes so far as to compare the circumstances of David and Bathsheba with those of Muḥammad and Zaynab. Gilliot, "Muqātil, Grand Exégète," 74-75. This raises the question as to whether the objection to Muqātil and his commentary among medieval Muslim scholars was actually due to anthropomorphism and lack of *isnād*. In a personal interview in Nijmegen on February 6, 2003, Dr. Kees Versteegh suggested that Muqātil's discussions of sexual behaviour have posed a problem for more recent Islamic authorities in Cairo.

Muqātil seems to take anthropomorphic and deterministic passages at face value,⁹ again a tendency for which he was taken to task by others. Gilliot remarks, “The criticism levelled at Muqātil actually betrays a discernible historical trend of backward projection, whereby ancient scholars come to be judged according to standards which only find widespread acceptance long after the scholar in question has died.”¹⁰ On the other hand, Muqātil’s comments about the abrogation of verses are familiar from later standard commentaries.¹¹

The style of the commentary is what Wansbrough described as “unhurried, almost chatty.”¹² Indeed, the reader detects no anxiety about exegetical “problems.” Versteegh suggests that Muqātil “takes it for granted that the text [of the Qur’ān] with a few glosses and with a lot of historical explanations is perfectly clear to the believers.”¹³

The *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* is a commentary which tells the text of the Qur’ān as one continuous story. The reader senses an intention on the part of the exegete to explain the disjointed words of scripture by providing a narrative framework. The importance of the *narratio* in Muqātil’s commentary has been noted by Wansbrough.¹⁴ Narrative takes the central place as the generator of meaning, and indeed seems to dominate the scriptural text itself.¹⁵ The effect of this narrative style of exegesis is to give continuity and wholeness to the text of the Qur’ān. Muqātil attempts this through a number of identifiable devices.

First of all, the use of connectives—as well as the absence of connectives—between scriptural text and commentary tends to smooth out the disjointed nature, incompleteness and vague references of the verses. Muqātil repeats scriptural units given earlier in order to keep text and commentary moving forward together. Just prior to a verse, he will often

⁹ Versteegh, “Grammar and Exegesis,” 215. Versteegh writes that there is no trace of Muqātil either emphasizing or de-emphasizing scriptural passages touching on these themes. Cf. on the accusation of anthropomorphism, P. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et Langage mystique: Nouvel Essai sur le Lexique technique des Mystiques musulmans* (Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq Éditeurs, 1970), 28; Gilliot, “Muqātil, Grand Exégète,” 83; and Binyamin Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur’ān in the Theology of al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm: Kitāb al-Mustarshid* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 4-5.

¹⁰ “Exegesis of the Qur’ān: Classical and Medieval,” 106-107.

¹¹ Versteegh, “Grammar and Exegesis,” 214. A good example in the passages of this study comes at the end of 5.13. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 462.

¹² Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 133.

¹³ Versteegh, “Grammar and Exegesis,” 214. Actually, ‘narrative explanations’ would be a better description of what Muqātil offers than ‘historical explanations.’

¹⁴ *Quranic Studies*, 140, 127.

¹⁵ Rippin, “Tafsīr,” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 238.

introduce the object which Allah is about to describe.¹⁶ He will often anticipate scriptural material yet to come, and sometimes will tell the story in advance of the scriptural reference (almost as if he can't wait!).¹⁷ In order to fill in narrative details of the version of a prophetic story at hand, he freely ransacks versions of the story in other parts of the Qur'^{ān} by means of cross-reference. All of these devices have the effect of binding the present verse or narrative to what comes before and after in the text.

Muqātil's style of writing also has a story-telling feel. He often seems to paraphrase scriptural clauses in the mood of "in other words. . . ." His double-glossing and "supercommentary"¹⁸ bring to mind a conversation between exegete and audience. His identification of anonymous references,¹⁹ known as *ta'yīn al-mubham*,²⁰ creates familiarity with the text and enhances the quality of the narrative.²¹ He sets up a system of representative characters who keep popping up throughout the narrative to bring the vague scriptural references back to the story. He elaborates as fully as possible the Qur'^{ān}'s own narrative indications, and at times seems to provide extra (though apparently unnecessary?) information just to entertain the curious reader.

¹⁶ termed by Wansbrough "stage directions," *Quranic Studies*, 124. An early example is when Muqātil introduces 2.4 with, "Then he mentioned the believers of the people of the Torah, 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions. . . ." *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 81.

¹⁷ A striking example of Muqātil telling the story before the verses is at 2.51-55. He first provides long narratives about the children of Israel "taking the calf" and about the 70 leaders demanding to see God, and then gives the words of 2.54-56 at one go. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 104-108.

¹⁸ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 129.

¹⁹ As Versteegh expresses it, "Nothing and nobody is left anonymous." "Grammar and exegesis," 214. Versteegh gives the "absurd" example of Muqātil's naming the ant who talked to Sulaymān *al-Jarmī* (at 27.18, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. III, 299). Roberto Tottoli gives another good example of this kind of identification from Muqātil's exegesis of 37.102-7 (*Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. III, 615). Not only does Muqātil confidently identify Abraham's son of intended sacrifice to be Isaac, but he also informs the reader that the ram sacrificed in Isaac's place was named *Razīn*—"one of the billy-goats that had been grazing in paradise for 40 years prior to the sacrifice!" *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'^{ān} and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2002), 99.

²⁰ "Literally, the identification of what God deliberately left unidentified." Burton, "Law and exegesis," 270.

²¹ "In the Muslim haggadah the exegetical device known as *ta'yīn al-mubham* (identification of the vague and ambiguous) served to establish a connection between scriptural phraseology and external referent, in the interest of narrative continuity." Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 7.

In the following description of Muqātil's exegesis, reference will also be made to the *Sira* of Ibn Ishāq for clarifications on wordings.²² Ibn Ishāq wrote at about the same time as Muqātil, and his *Sira* shows many similarities to Muqātil's *Tafsīr*. While Muqātil presents the verses of the Qur'ān in canonical sequence and provides a narrative structure so that the verses flow smoothly like a story, Ibn Ishāq tells a story in chronological sequence and provides verses so that the story reads like salvation history. Because of these similarities, a comparison of their wordings for the purposes of description and analysis promises to provide added perspective.

3.2 Commentary on verses containing verbs of alteration

As noted in chapter one, scholarly lists of verses associated with the Islamic doctrine of the corruption of earlier scriptures most frequently indicate the four verses containing the verb *ḥarrafa*. For some, there is an even more compelling basis for their importance. Abdullah Saeed writes, "Of the terms related to 'distortion' and 'corruption' of the text used in the Qur'ān, the popular Muslim view takes the derivatives of the term *tahrīf* as the basis of its insistence on the deliberate falsification of *Tawrāt* and *Injīl* by Jews and Christians, respectively."²³ For this reason, the *ḥarrafa* verses will be examined in the greatest detail below. Three verses containing a second verb of alteration, *baddala*, will also be examined. Other Arabic verbs of change, such as *ghāra* II and *hāla* II, do not appear in the Qur'ān in contexts which have been understood to suggest tampering with the earlier scriptures.

²² Other recent translations from and descriptions of Muqātil's commentary include Regula Forster, *Methoden mittelalterlicher arabischer Qur'ānexegese*, 11-19; Leigh N.B. Chipman, "Adam and the Angels: An examination of Mythic Elements in Islamic Sources," *Arabica* XLIX (2002), 434, 435, 448 (on Q 2.30 & 33); and Andrew Rippin's translations of Muqātil on Sūra 1 in *Windows on the House of Islam*, John Renard, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 29-31; and Sūra 98 in *Classical Islam: A sourcebook of religious literature*, ed. and trans., Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi and Andrew Rippin (London: Routledge, 2003), 105-107. The edition of Ibn Ishāq used here is *Sirat al-Nabī*, Muḥammad Muḥiyā al-Dīn 'Abd al-Hamīd, ed. (Cairo: Maktaba Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣabīh wa Awlād, 1963), four volumes.

²³ "The Charge of Distortion," 420.

Baqara (2).58, 59

“And when we said, ‘Enter this township, and eat easefully of it wherever you will, and enter in at the gate, prostrating, and say, Unburdening; We will forgive you your transgressions, and increase the good-doers.’ Then the evildoers substituted (*baddala*) a saying other than that which had been said to them; so we sent down upon the evildoers wrath out of heaven for their ungodliness.”

The first verse containing a verb of alteration to appear in the canonical progression of the Qurʾān is 2.59. This verse comes in the middle of a long section of scriptural narrative about the children of Israel (2.49-74). The verb of alteration in 2.59 is *baddala*, defined above. Muqātil explains this verse by telling a story about Banū Isrāʾīl from the distant past, when that community was led by Yūshuʿa ibn Nūn.²⁴ He tells the story, in fact, before giving the scriptural words of 2.59. The action of alteration which Muqātil understands here is a verbal substitution or replacement of one expression with another.

When Banū Isrāʾīl was about to enter through the gate of a town called “Īlyā” (Jerusalem was known as ‘Aelia Capitolina’ by the Romans), recounts Muqātil, Allah commanded them to say the expression “*hiṭṭatun*” at the moment of entering. In the event, the good-doers voiced the expression which they had been commanded to say. Others, however, said “*haṭā saqamāthā*,” which Muqātil interprets to mean “red wheat (*hiṭṭa hamrāʾ*).”²⁵ The exegete also explains the way in which this was said: “They said that mocking (*istihzāʾ*) and altering (*tabdīl*) what they had been commanded.”²⁶

Along with the verbal alteration of an expression came a substitution of posture as well. Allah had commanded Banū Isrāʾīl to enter the town prostrate, which Muqātil pictures as “bending upon one side of their faces.”²⁷ The disobedient people, however, entered the gate lying down.

²⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 109-110.

²⁵ Uri Rubin writes on Muqātil’s phrase that *sumqātā* means ‘red’ in Aramaic. *Between Bible and Qurʾān: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton, N.J.: The Darwin Press, 1999), 85-86. Scholars have tried to understand the scriptural expression and to explain what Muslim exegetes have identified as the substituted expression. Wansbrough, following the lead of Hirschfeld and Speyer, noted the suggestion of the alteration of ܫܢܘܩܐ (sin) into ܫܘܩܐ (wheat). *Quranic Studies*, 189. Other interesting discussions on *hiṭṭa* include: James A. Bellamy, “Some Proposed Emendations to the Text of the Koran,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 13 (1993), 566-7; and Bell, “Muhammad’s Knowledge,” 11.

²⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 110.

²⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 109.

Baqara (2).75

Are you (pl.) then so eager that they should believe you (pl.), seeing there is a party of them that heard the word of Allah, then tampered with (*yuharrifūna*) it, and that after they had understood it, knowingly?

The verse with the first occurrence of *harrafa* comes at the start of a unit of verses about the responses of the people of the book. Preceding 2.75 is a long piece of narrative about Moses and the children of Israel which begins at 2.49. The passage 2.75-79 contains another tampering verb, *sarra* IV at 2.77, plus an important expression of tampering, “write the book with hands,” at 2.79. Muqātil’s interpretation of both of these verses will be given in separate sections below.

Muqātil’s exegesis of 2.75²⁸ centres on an extended narrative about Moses and seventy leaders whom he had appointed. He offers the story after giving in segments the first part of the verse: “Are you then so eager that they should believe you seeing there is a party of them that heard the word of Allah” The exegete then passes from scriptural text to narrative through the expression *wa dhālika anna*. This phrase functions roughly in the same way as the English introductory phrase, “This is about how” In Muqātil’s story, the seventy leaders (*al-sabʿīn*) had demanded from Moses that he show them Allah publicly.²⁹ But instead of revealing himself to the seventy, Allah had killed them as a punishment for their request. Now Allah revives the seventy,³⁰ and this time they say, “We know now that you do not see your Lord, but rather you hear his voice. So let us hear his voice.”³¹ Moses is skeptical about the request,³² but he goes ahead and prays, “Oh Lord, truly these your servants Banū Isrāʾīl want to hear your word (*kalām*).” Allah responds by giving a list of requirements for anyone who wanted to hear his word. The requirements are

²⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 116-117.

²⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 116. Mention of the 70 whom Moses chose comes in the Qurʾān at 7.155.

³⁰ Elements of the narrative to this point are given within the Qurʾān itself. Prior to 2.75, the children of Israel tell Moses, “‘we will not believe thee till we see Allah openly’; and the thunderbolt took you while you were beholding. Then we raised you up after you were dead, that haply you should be thankful” (2.55). Also at Nisāʾ 153, “The People of the Book will ask thee to bring down upon them a Book from heaven; and they asked Moses for greater than that, for they said, ‘Show us God openly.’ And the thunderbolt took them for their evildoing.” The phrase “they said, ‘Show us God openly,’” is identical in Muqātil’s narrative here and at Nisāʾ 153.

³¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 116.

³² He said, *a mā hādha fa-ʿasā*, “Is this possible?” *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 116.

to isolate oneself from women for three days, to wash oneself thoroughly on the third day, to then clothe oneself with new clothes, and finally to approach the mountain. “Then I will make them hear my word (*kalāmī*),”³³ promises Allah.

The seventy men comply with Allah’s requirements, then proceed with Moses to the mountain. Moses tells the men that they will see a cloud cover the mountain, and that they will see a fire within the cloud. They will also hear a voice. “So prostrate yourselves before your Lord,” Moses instructs the seventy, “and see what he will command you, then do it.” The seventy reply that they will do so. Moses then climbs the mountain and is hidden from the men by a cloud. They see a light in the cloud and hear a voice coming out of the cloud like the sound of a trumpet. They lie down prostrate. Allah says, “I am your Lord, there is no god except me, the living, the eternal—I who brought you out of the land of Egypt by an exalted hand and powerful arm. Do not worship a god other than me, do not associate anything with me, and do not make an image of me. You will not see me, but you will hear my word (*kalāmī*).”³⁴

However, as soon as the seventy hear the word (*kalām*) of Allah, writes Muqātil, they all fall unconscious from terror. And when they regain consciousness, they find themselves lying prostrate. So they say to Moses, “We were not able to hear the word (*kalām*) of our Lord. You stand between us and our Lord so that he will speak with you, and then you tell us.” Moses prays once more, telling Allah that Banū Isrāʾīl was not able to hear his word (*kalām*), and asking him to speak again. Allah agrees to Moses’ request and begins to give commandments to his prophet. Moses then tells the seventy, who affirm, “We have heard our Lord and we obey (*tāʿa* IV).” The commandments and prohibitions of Allah come to an end, the cloud ascends and the voice departs.³⁵ The seventy raise their heads and return to their community. There the people ask the seventy, “What did your Lord command you and prohibit you?”³⁶

In answer to this question of the common people, writes Muqātil, some of the seventy

³³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 116.

³⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 117.

³⁵ Paul Nwyia provided a French translation of Muqātil’s story up to this point, and suggested that it was one of the oldest Muslim descriptions of a religious experience of God. *Exégèse coranique et Langage mystique*, 84-85.

³⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 117.

report truthfully what they heard. Others from among the seventy report what they heard, but then add an extra clause at the end of Allah's saying. "If you are not able to give up what he has forbidden you," they advise, "then just do what you are able."³⁷

The exegete now shifts from the story back to the words of the verse through the expression *fa-dhālika qawluhu* ('so that is [Allah's] saying'). He repeats the parts of the verse which he has already given, slipping in a piece of gloss between them which he'd forgotten earlier, then immediately introduces the next part of the verse, "then tampered with it, and that after they had comprehended it." Muqātil gives no further comment on the verb *harrafa*.

Baqara (2). 211

Ask the Children of Israel how many a clear sign we gave them. Whoso changes (*yubaddil*) Allah's blessing after it has come to him, Allah is terrible in retribution.

Muqātil recounts the many clear signs given to the Children of Israel with a formulaic list: "We parted the sea for them and destroyed their enemies and send down on them manna and quails and the cloud and the rock."³⁸ But the Jews of Madīna did not respond to Allah in a way which was appropriate to these many signs given to their forefathers, writes Muqātil. "They disbelieved (*kafara*) in the Lord of these blessings when they disbelieved in Muḥammad."³⁹ The exegete then links this action of disbelief with the scriptural phrase "whoso changes Allah's blessing after it has come to him" with one of his characteristic connectors, "so that is his saying, praise him."⁴⁰ He thus understands the

³⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 117. The *Sīra* narrative related to 2.75 is much shorter than that given by Muqātil, but similar in outline. The ending of that narrative, however provides a significant variant: "Then [Moses] went back with them to the Children of Israel and when he came to them a party of them changed (*harrafa*) what they had been commanded; and when Moses said to the Children of Israel, 'Allah has ordered you to do so-and-so,' they . . . contradicted (*khilāf*) what Allah had said to them." Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 379. Muqātil's narrative may also be profitably compared with the story in the Torah where Yahweh asks Moses to choose "70 of Israel's elders," at Numbers 11:16-30. There their function is to aid Moses in leading the Israelites in the wilderness. Yahweh promises to "come down" and speak with Moses. In the event there is also mention of "the cloud." Yahweh takes the spirit that was on Moses and puts it on the 70 elders. There is also mention of 'consecration' in this story, but the command is to the general population of Israelites in preparation for eating the meat which God will provide for them.

³⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 180.

³⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 180.

⁴⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 180. *fa-dhālika qawlahu subhānahu*.

verse to mean an action of disbelief in Muḥammad by the Jews living in Madīna during the rule of the prophet of Islam in that city.

Nisā' (4):46

Some of the Jews tamper with (*yuharrifūna*) words from their places saying, “We have heard and we disobey” and “Hear, may you (sing.) not hear” and *rā'inā*, twisting with their tongues and defaming religion. If they had said, “We have heard and obey” and “Hear” and “Regard us,” it would have been better for them, and more upright; but Allah has cursed them for their unbelief, so they believe not except a few.

Nisā' 46 is one verse in a unit of verses which begins rather abruptly at 4.44 with a question, “Hast thou not regarded those who were given a share of the book?” Prior to 4.44 is an extended section of legal material which is addressed to the “believers.”⁴¹ Surrounding 4.46 in near proximity are expressions of tampering (“purchase error” at 4.44, and “invent a falsehood against Allah” at 4.50), plus a claim of the confirmation of earlier scriptures at 4.47.

Muqātil's exegesis of Nisā' 46⁴² consists largely of short segments of the verse followed by short phrases of explanation, some as brief as a single word. There is no extended narration in the commentary on this verse, even though the verse seems to indicate speeches from the Jews to an unspecified listener.

The Jews “tamper with the words out of their places.” This same phrase, *yuharrifūna al-kalima 'an mawādi'ihī*, appears at 5.13 and 5.41.⁴³ In this first explanation of the phrase, Muqātil writes that the Jews do this action “through tampering (*tahrīf*).” *Tahrīf*, verbal noun of *haraḥa* II, does not appear in the Qur'ān, but became the technical term for alteration. The “words,” writes Muqātil, is the description of Muḥammad. He further explains “out of their places” as “out of its declaration (*bayān*) in the Torah.” And he finally qualifies the action in view as “twisting with their tongues,”⁴⁴ a phrase which

⁴¹ Islāhī makes a division between 4.43 and 4.44 on similar grounds. A.H. Mathias Zahniser, “Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Sūras: *al-Baqara* and *al-Nisā'*,” in Issa J. Boullata, ed., *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 28, 39.

⁴² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 376-377.

⁴³ At 5.41 the phrase is slightly different, with *min ba'd* in place of *'an*. W.M. Watt gives a list of the many ways this phrase has been rendered in English in *Muslim-Christian Encounters*, 31.

⁴⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 376.

appears later in the verse.

Following this longer explanation of the *harrafa* phrase, Muqātil intersperses segments of the speech of the Jews with commentary in the following manner:

“We have heard” / your saying / “and we disobey (‘*aṣā*),”⁴⁵ / your command so we do not obey (*tā‘a*) / and “Hear,” / us O Muḥammad, we tell you / “and be thou not given to hear” / from you your saying O Muḥammad. [It is] unacceptable what you say / and “observe us (*ra‘ina*)” / meaning observe us, we hear you.⁴⁶

Muqātil’s explanation of the next phrase, “Twisting (*layyan*) with their tongues and slandering (*ta‘nan*) religion,” will be explained separately below. Here it may simply be noted that from these words he understands disrespect toward Muḥammad and Islam. The

exegete then explains the speech which the Jews should have given in much the same way in

⁴⁵ Watt suggests that the action here concerns bilingual wordplay: “*shāma‘nū we-‘āsīnū* and *sami‘nā wa-‘aṣaynā*, meaning respectively ‘we hear and do’ and ‘we hear and disobey.’” The Jews “seem to say the Hebrew ‘*āsīnū*, but their actions show that they have in fact said the Arabic ‘*aṣaynā*.” “The Early Development,” 52. Richard Bell agrees, and locates the Hebrew phrase in Deuteronomy 5.27. From this, Bell conjectures that Muḥammad had actually heard this phrase and the *shema‘* in a synagogue service. “Muḥammad’s Knowledge,” 14. Alfred Guillaume suggests another possibility: “when they said ‘we hear’ and ‘*aṣaynā* they were playing on the similar-sounding Hebrew word *asīnu* (with *sīn*) meaning ‘we carry out.’” *The Life of Muḥammad: A Translation of Ishāq’s Sirat Rasūl Allāh* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967), 264, n. 1. See also Obermann, “Koran and Agada,” 41f., for discussion of the assumption of “mishearing” and the possible Hebrew words involved.

⁴⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 376. The enigmatic scriptural word ‘*rā‘ina*’ has drawn many explanations from Muslim exegetes and western scholars alike. Muqātil discussed the term at its first occurrence in the Qur’ān, at 2.104. On “O believers, do not say, ‘Observe us,’” he writes, “This is about how the believers said to the prophet, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, ‘*rā‘ina sam‘aka*,’ like their saying amongst themselves in the time of ignorance. *Rā‘ina* in the speech of the Jews is a term of abuse (*shatm*). When the Jews heard the associators saying that, it amazed them. So they said something similar to the prophet, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him. A man from the helpers—Sa‘d ibn ‘Ibādāt al-Anṣārī by name—said to the Jews, ‘a man from you said it to the prophet,’ may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, to Aḍar ibn ‘Anqahu. So Allah, powerful and exalted, admonished the believers, saying, ‘O believers, do not say,’ —to the prophet, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him—‘*rā‘ina*.’” *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 128-129. Dawid Künstlinger identified *rā‘ina* as the imperative of Form II *ra‘ā*, and compares it to the Hebrew imperative *r‘enū* of the Jewish table prayer. Jews and Christians have addressed God in this way in prayer. But Muḥammad could not allow the expressions “watch us” or “Our Shepherd,” because in the Arab view to call Allah “Shepherd” would be blasphemy. Muḥammad will have heard this prayer of the Jews and Christians, wrote Künstlinger, and forbade its use. “*Ra‘ina*,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies London Institution* 5 (1930): 881. Watt wrote that the Qur’ān seems to want to stop the Jews from saying *rā‘ina* because it resembles the Hebrew root for “evil” (*ra‘*). He added that this “looks like a piece of Jewish mockery of Muḥammad.” “The Early Development,” 52. Andrew Rippin, in his discussion of *asbāb* reports on this term, similarly suggested that the “inter-lingual play” is between Arabic *ra‘ā* and Hebrew *ra‘*. “The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in Qur’ānic exegesis,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* LI (1988), 17-18. Very recently, Frederick Denny wrote that *rā‘inā* is “an insulting corruption of an Arabic phrase, ‘*rā‘inā*,’ meaning ‘Please listen to us.’” “Corruption,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, General Editor (Leiden: Brill, 2001), Vol. I, 440. Further explanations can be found in Jeffery, “The Qur’ān as Scripture,” 260, n. 4; and Obermann, “Koran and Agada,” 45-46.

which he explained the speech they gave.⁴⁷

At the end of his commentary on Nisā' 46, the exegete explains that the object of Allah's curse is Jewish unbelievers: "Though they know that Allah is their Lord, and that he is their creator and their sustainer, they disbelieve in Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, and in what he brought. This was revealed about (*nazalat fi*) Rifā'a ibn Zayd ibn al-Sā'ib and Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf and Ka'b ibn Asayd, all of them Jews."⁴⁸

Mā'ida (5):13

"So for their breaking their compact we cursed them and made their hearts hard, they tampering with (*yuharrifūna*) words from their places; and they have forgotten a portion of what they were reminded of; and you (sing.) will never cease to light upon some act of treachery on their part, except a few of them. Yet pardon them, and forgive; surely Allah loves the good-doers."

Mā'ida 13 is part of a unit of verses which are concerned with the people of the book. The first impression is that this unit begins abruptly at 5.12 after a section of legal material addressed to "believers." Suddenly there is a shift from second person to third person with, "Allah made a covenant with the children of Israel." This impression, however, did not occur to Muqātil, because he understands 5.11 to refer to a major incident of Jewish treachery, and this story subsequently influences his interpretation of 5.13.⁴⁹ The following verses also contain references to two verbs in the wider semantic field of tampering at 5.14 (*nasiya*) and 5.15 (*khafīya* IV).

Muqātil's exegesis of Mā'ida 13⁵⁰ is a follow-on to his commentary on the preceding verse, 5.12. In explaining 5.13 itself, the exegete provides glosses for a number of the phrases, as well as completion of open-ended expressions. In addition to containing the third occurrence of the verb *harrafa*, 5.13 contains another verb from the semantic field of tampering, *nasiya*, which will be dealt with separately below. The commentary also

⁴⁷ On the appearance of the phrase, "We hear and we obey" at 5.7, 24.51 and 2.285, see Julian Obermann, "Koran and Agada," 31-34.

⁴⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 377.

⁴⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 458-460. Ibn Ishāq also finds 5.11 to relate to a story of treachery. *Sirat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 403.

⁵⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 461-462.

includes an interesting example of the application of the *naskh* principle.

The exegete begins by identifying the “curse” of the verse’s first phrase with “transformation” (*maskh*). He further completes the scriptural phrase “and made their hearts hard,” by adding, “against faith in Muḥammad.”

On “tampering with words out of their places”—the phrase that first appeared at 4.46—Muqātil offers no new information about the verb *ḥarrafa*. But he writes, as he did in his exegesis of 4.46, that “the words (*kalim*) are the characteristic (*sifa*) of Muḥammad.” And immediately following this he offers a longer explanation of the tampering action he understands from the verse. On “they have forgotten (*nasiya*) a portion of what they were reminded of,” Muqātil writes:

This is about how Allah, powerful and exalted, made a covenant with Banū Isrāʾīl in the Torah that they would believe (*amuna* IV) in Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, and to give credence (*saddaqa*) to him. He is written [in what is] with them in the Torah.⁵¹ Then when Allah, powerful and exalted, sent him, they disbelieved (*kafara*) in him and envied (*ḥasada*) him, and said, “This one is not from the descendents of Ishāq, but rather he is from the descendents of Ismāʿīl.”⁵²

In this passage, the exegete introduces into the discussion of tampering two significant considerations. One is the claim that the command to respond appropriately to the prophet of Islam is part of the covenant which the children of Israel made with Allah. The second is that the motivation of envy, awakened in the children of Israel when they saw that Muḥammad was not of their own kind, led them to reject him.

As for the “act of treachery (*khāʿina*)” which the children of Israel can be expected to do, the exegete identifies it as faithlessness (*al-ghishsh*) towards the prophet.⁵³ The “few” who do not engage in treachery, according to Muqātil, are ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām and his

⁵¹ *huwa maktūbun ʿindahum fi al-tawrāt*. The wording for the scriptural phrase, “written down with them in the Torah and Gospel” (7.157), is *maktūban ʿindahum fi al-tawrāt wa al-injīl*.

⁵² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 461.

⁵³ ʿAbd al-Razzāq further qualifies the situation referred to in “you will always catch some of them committing some act of treachery” (5.13). He characterizes the action as faithlessness (*khiyāna*), lying (*kadhib*) and immorality (*fujūr*). *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīz*, *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, (Beirut: Dar el-Marefah, 1991), Vol. I, 183.

companions,⁵⁴ who are believers.

For this unbelieving and treacherous behaviour of most of the children of Israel the Qurʾān prescribes tolerance: “Yet pardon them, and forgive.” But here Muqātil states that this divine ruling is only in force “until Allah brings his command in the matter of Banū Qurayza and Naḍīr, and the command of Allah concerning them was killing, and captivity, and expulsion.”⁵⁵ The second command did indeed come, continues Muqātil, and as a result “the forgiveness and pardon became abrogated (*mansūkh*); the sword verse⁵⁶ in Barāʾa abrogated it. And when that command came, Allah Almighty killed them and captured them and expelled them.”⁵⁷

Māʾida (5):41

“O messenger, let them not grieve you (sing.) that vie with one another in unbelief, such men as say with their mouths, ‘we believe’ but their hearts believe not; and the Jews who listen to falsehood, listen to other folk, who have not come to you (sing.), tampering with (*yuharrifūna*) words from their places, saying, ‘If you (pl.) are given this, then take it; if you (pl.) are not given it, beware!’ Whomsoever Allah desires to try, you cannot avail him anything with Allah. Those are they whose hearts Allah desired not to purify; for them is degradation in this world; and in the world to come awaits them a mighty chastisement.”

Muqātil gives a comparatively large amount of space to his exegesis of Māʾida 41.⁵⁸ His commentary on the verse consists of 14 scriptural pieces interspersed with his explanations. He offers gloss, attribution, identification of vague references, and completion of open-ended phrases. Typical is the tendency to give names to the unnamed, even the need-not-be named, such as two adulterers, assorted Jewish scholars, and the people among whom the adulterers are eventually stoned. But most remarkable about his exegesis of this

⁵⁴ In Muslim tradition, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām was a convert to Islam from the Jewish community in Madīna. J. Horowitz, “ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, H.A.R. Gibb *et al*, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1960), Vol. I, 52. Further sources on this figure are H. Hirschfeld, “Historical and Legendary Controversies between Mohammed and the Rabbis” *Jewish Quarterly Review* x (1897): 109-116 (including a translation of the three questions on p. 111); and Stephen M. Wassertrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 175-178.

⁵⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 462.

⁵⁶ *āyatu l-sayf*, Sūrat al-Tawba (9):5.

⁵⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 462.

⁵⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 474-478.

verse is the large narrative section he offers, three full pages in the commentary. This narrative shows many similarities to a narrative in the *Sīra*, therefore that version will be referred to for comparison and clarification.

The exegete finds that the words of the first part of the verse, up to “but their hearts don’t believe,” were revealed in relation to Abū Lubāba. Muqātil tells how Abū Lubāba indicated his throat to the Banu Qurayza,⁵⁹ meaning to say that “Muḥammad has come to command death among you. So do not refuse the judgment of Sa‘d ibn Mu‘adh.” Muqātil adds that Sa‘d ibn Mu‘adh was their ally.⁶⁰

Muqātil does not pursue this brief story, nor does he fill in the details.⁶¹ Instead, he passes to another narrative with the subsequent words of scripture, “and the Jews who listen to falsehood.” He identifies these as the Jews of Madīna, and gives a list of particular individuals among them: Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf,⁶² Ka‘b ibn Usayd, Abū Lubāba, Sa‘id ibn Mālik, Ibn Šūriyā, Kanāna ibn Abū al-Ḥuqayq, Shās ibn Abū al-Ḥuqayq, Shās ibn Qays, Abū Rāfa‘ ibn Harīmala, Yūsuf ibn ‘Āzar ibn Abū ‘Āzab, Salūl ibn Abū ‘Āzab, Salūl ibn Abū Salūl, and al-Bakhām ibn ‘Amr.⁶³ That they “listen to other folk who have not come to you,” means these Jews of Madīna are listening to the Jews of Khaybar and are now about to pose a question to Muḥammad on their behalf.

At the phrase, “tampering with the words out of their places,” Muqātil states that

⁵⁹ The editor Shihāta suggests, “this gesture means that Muḥammad will surely give a judgment of killing and slaughter concerning you.” *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 474.

⁶⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 474.

⁶¹ This incident is narrated in the *Sīra* as part of the story of the raid on the Banū Qurayza. *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. III, 715-729. After Muḥammad has besieged the Banū Qurayza for 25 nights, they ask Muḥammad to send them Abū Lubāba so that they can consult him. The Jews ask Abū Lubāba whether they should submit to the judgment of Muḥammad. He says yes, and points to his throat to mean slaughter. The Banū Qurayza then submit to the prophet’s judgment. The tribe of al-Aws, who were allies of the Banū Qurayza, asks the prophet for fair treatment of their allies. The prophet appoints Sa‘d ibn Mu‘adh, one of al-Aws, to pronounce the judgment upon Banū Qurayza. The judgment of Sa‘d ibn Mu‘adh is “that the men should be killed, the property divided, and the women and children taken as captives.” *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. III, 721. Cf. M.J. Kister, “The massacre of the Banū Qurayza: a re-examination of a tradition,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986), 61-96.

⁶² In Muslim tradition, Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf was the son of an Arab father from the Ṭayyi’ and a mother who belonged to the Jewish clan of Banū al-Naḍīr. Ka‘b is reputed to have opposed the rule of the prophet of Islam in Madīna. W. Montgomery Watt, “Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, E. van Donzel *et al.*, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), Vol. IV, 315.

⁶³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 474.

“the words” are the commandment of stoning. This is the third and final occurrence of the phrase in the Qurʾān, and it differs from the other two references in that here *min baʿd* appears instead of *ʿan*. Muqātil again glosses “out of their places” as “out of its declaration (*bayān*) in the Torah.” The exegete offers no further gloss or etymological information on the verb *ḥarrafa*. But he immediately begins a long narrative with the characteristic words, *wa dhālika an*. The story Muqātil offers⁶⁴ goes like this:

A man named Yahudha and a woman named Busra, both Jews living in Khaybar, had committed adultery (*zanā*) while married (*aḥṣan*).⁶⁵ The other Jews of Khaybar do not want to stone the couple, because both are from the nobility. So they decide to send the couple to Muḥammad, and let him determine their punishment. They are hoping for a more lenient sentence than stoning, thinking that “in his religion is flogging rather than stoning.” But they are not quite sure of the outcome, and voice the warning, “if he commands stoning for the two, beware of him.” So the Jews of Khaybar write to the Jews of Madīna (Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, Kaʿb ibn Usayd, Mālīk ibn al-Ḍayf and Abū Lubāba), and send the letter along with a delegation, including the guilty pair. They request the Jews of Madīna to ask the prophet of Islam what the ruling should be for adultery. “If he prescribes flogging to you, accept it,” they write. Muqātil explains that flogging (*jald*) means beating the adulterers with a rope of palm fibre smeared with pitch. The punishment, known as *tajbīya*, also included blackening their faces and mounting them on a donkey facing the donkey’s tail.

The Jews of Khaybar have warned their Madīnan counterparts that if Muḥammad happens to give a sentence of stoning, “beware of him, because he will steal what you possess.” So Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, Mālīk ibn al-Ḍayf, Kaʿb ibn Usayd and Abū Lubāba approach the Prophet, and ask him what the punishment for adultery should be. The angel Gabriel, writes Muqātil, comes to Muḥammad at that point and tells him, “stoning.” The angel further tells him to appoint Ibn Ṣūriyā as a mediator between himself and the Jews. Muḥammad then proceeds to the Jews’ house of study to meet their religious leaders. He

⁶⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 475-477.

⁶⁵ On the sense of *aḥṣan*, see John Burton, “The Meaning of ‘Iḥṣān,’” *Journal of Semitic Studies* XIX (1974), 47-75; and Burton, “Muḥṣin,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition. C.E. Bosworth et al, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), Vol. VII, 474-5.

says, “Oh community of the Jews, send out to me your scholars.” In response, the religious leaders send out ‘Abd Allāh ibn Šūriyā, Abū Yāsir ibn Akḥtab and Wahb ibn Yahūdha and announce, “These are our scholars.” But Muḥammad prevails upon them until they disclose that ‘Abd Allāh ibn Šūriyā is their greatest living Torah expert.⁶⁶ Ibn Šūriyā, a young man, is brought forward. Present to witness the encounter is ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām. Muḥammad then addresses the Jewish Torah expert:

I adjure you by Allah, other than whom there is no god, the god of Banū Isrāʾīl, who brought you out of Egypt, and parted the sea for you, and drowned the people of Pharaoh, and revealed to you his book, making clear to you what he permits and what he forbids, and sheltered you with the cloud, and sent down manna and quails. Did you find in your book that stoning is the punishment for the one who commits adultery?⁶⁷

Ibn Šūriyā is stung to honesty by the prophet’s impressive adjuration and immediately blurts out, “Oh Allah, yes! If it were not that I feared that I would burn in the fire or be destroyed by the punishment, I would certainly have concealed (*katama*) from you when you asked me, and not confessed to you.” Hearing this confirmation of the ruling given to him by Gabriel, Muḥammad declares, “Allah is greater! I am the first to revive one of the *sunnas* of Allah.”⁶⁸ The prophet of Islam then pronounces the sentence for the two adulterers, and they are stoned beside the door of his mosque among Banū Ghanm ibn Mālīk ibn al-Najjār.

In a continuation of the story, Ibn Šūriyā adds a further speech: “By Allah, O

⁶⁶ Burton, “Law and exegesis,” 276. Literally, “This is the most knowledgeable one in the Torah who remains.”

⁶⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 476. The last phrase is literally, “that the stoning is upon whomever is married.”

⁶⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 476. *anā awwalu man aḥyā sunna min sunani llāh*. The phrase *sunnat Allāh* appears eight times in the Qurʾān: 33:38, 33:62 (x2), 35:43 (x2), 40:85, 48:23 (x2). “Our sunnah” also appears once with Allah as speaker, at 17:77. Rosalind W. Gwynne discusses these occurrences in “The Neglected Sunnah: Sunnat Allāh (The Sunnah of God),” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 10 (1993), 456-458.

Muḥammad, the Jews do indeed know that you are a true prophet, but they envy you.”⁶⁹ But after this confession, writes Muqātil, Ibn Ṣūriyā somehow lost faith (*kafara*). And in response to this, writes the exegete, Allah revealed Mā’ida 15: “Oh people of the book, our messenger has come to you, making clear to you much of what you were concealing from the book.”⁷⁰ Muqātil exegetes this cross reference to mean, [concealing] “what is in the Torah about the command of stoning and the description of Muḥammad.”⁷¹

Muqātil goes on to quote a second part of Mā’ida 15, “and effacing much,” and to gloss it as “not telling it.” In exegeting the second phrase from the cross reference, Muqātil shifts into a new story of confrontation between Muḥammad and the Jews.⁷² The key word seems to be “effacing” (*‘afā*). Muḥammad says to the Jews, “If you want, I will tell you many things.” Ibn Ṣūriyā responds, “I adjure you by Allah that you tell us much from what you command that you will efface.” Ibn Ṣūriyā then quizzes the prophet: “Tell me about three characteristics (*khiṣāl*) which nobody knows except a prophet.” Muḥammad invites Ibn Ṣūriyā to ask whatever he wants.

Ibn Ṣūriyā says, “Tell me about your sleep.” The prophet answers, “My eyes sleep and my heart is awake.” Ibn Ṣūriyā affirms the truth of the prophet, then says, “Tell me about the likeness of the child. Where does he resemble the father, and where the mother?” The prophet answers, “Whichever of them reaches sexual release first, gives the likeness.” Ibn Ṣūriyā once more affirms the truth of the prophet, then poses a third question: “Now tell me what belongs to the man and what belongs to the woman from the child, and from which of them is it?” The prophet answers, “The skin, blood, nails and hair belong to the

⁶⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 477. The *Sira* version of this narrative is in many ways similar to what is offered by Muqātil. The notable difference, which is relevant to the development of the tampering motif, is that the *Sira* adds a narrative about a specific act of *kitmān*. Ibn Ishāq recounts, “When the apostle gave judgment about them he summoned them to the Torah. A rabbi sat there reading it having put his hand over the verse of stoning. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām struck the rabbi’s hand, saying, ‘This, O prophet of Allah, is the verse of stoning which he refuses (*abā*) to read to you.’ The apostle said, ‘Woe to you Jews! What has induced you to abandon (*tark*) the judgment of Allah which you hold in your hands?’” *Sirat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 406. The *Sira* then also includes the Jews’ explanation of why they ‘abandoned’ the stoning penalty, hinted at near the beginning of Muqātil’s narrative and also found in Ṭabarī’s exegesis of 5.41.

⁷⁰ The *Sira* finds rather that this was the occasion of revelation of 5.41. *Sirat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 405.

⁷¹ Muqātil does not provide this information in his exegesis of 5.15. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 463.

⁷² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 477.

woman, and the bone, nerves and veins belong to the man.” A third time Ibn Šūriyā affirms that this is true, then asks, “Who is your *wazīr* from among the angels, and who brings you revelation (*wahī*)?” The prophet answers, “Gabriel.” Upon affirming the truth of the prophet a fourth time, Ibn Šūriyā submits (*aslama*).

After these two narratives, Muqātil returns to the words of scripture and rather quickly wraps up his exegesis of 5.41. He recaps that the words “If you are given this then accept it” are spoken by the Jews of Khaybar to the Jews of Madīna, and gives the names of the four Madīnan protagonists once more. He also adds something not mentioned earlier, that if Muḥammad prescribes the stoning penalty it will mean that he is a prophet.⁷³

Muqātil further writes that Allah did not desire to purify the hearts of the Jews from disbelief “when they concealed (*katama*) the commandment of stoning and the description of Muḥammad.”⁷⁴ Rather, the Jews will have to suffer “degradation” in this life. This refers to the tribe of Qurayza, which were destined to suffer “killing and captivity.” Similarly, the tribe of Naḍir had to suffer “expulsion from their homes and possessions and gardens” and emigration to the Syrian towns of Adhra‘āt and Ariḥā.⁷⁵

al-A‘rāf (7).162

“Then the evildoers of them substituted (*baddala*) a saying other than that which had been said to them; so we sent down upon them wrath out of heaven for their evildoing.”

The wording of this verse is very similar to 2.59. In the first part of 7.162, the only difference to 2.59 is the addition of the word “of them.” This verse is also preceded by a verse which mentions entering the gate of a town and the *hiṭṭatun* expression. Muqātil treats 7.162 only briefly.⁷⁶ As at 2.59, he understands the verse to refer to the verbal replacement of one expression with another, and the substitution of one posture for another.

Instead of the expression which they had been commanded to say, writes Muqātil, the

⁷³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 477-478.

⁷⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 478.

⁷⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 478. See also at commentary on 4:52.

⁷⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. II, 69.

evildoers said “seeds on a piece of hair (*hibba fi sha‘ara*).”⁷⁷ As for the posture in which they entered the gate, he describes it here as “crawling on their backside.” Both of these details are considerably different from what the exegete wrote at 2.59. Two other differences of detail in this story come at 7.161: the town in which they are commanded to dwell is here called *bayt al-maqdas* (cf. *Īlā‘* at 2.59); and the appropriate bending posture of prostration is described by the expression *inhinā‘* (cf. *mutaharrif* at 2.58).

3.3 Commentary on verses containing verbs of concealment

The Arabic verbs of concealment in the Qur‘ān are *katama*, *sarra* IV, and *khafiya* IV. Verses containing *katama* are by far the most abundant. However, scholars of polemic indicate the verses containing the other two verbs with the same frequency.

Baqara (2).42

“And do not confound the truth with vanity, and do not conceal (*taktumū*) the truth wittingly.”

In addition to a verb of concealment (*katama*), this verse contains a second verb of tampering (*labisa* II), which will be treated separately later. Muqātil understands this verse to be the words of Allah spoken to the Jews.⁷⁸ He interprets the phrase “do not conceal the truth” to mean, “do not conceal the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad.”⁷⁹ What is it that the Jews know (*antum ta‘lamūna*) but will not reveal? According to Muqātil, they know that Muḥammad is a prophet and that his description (*na‘i*) is in the Torah.⁸⁰

Just prior to his explanation of “do not conceal the truth,” Muqātil uses the verb *katama* to explain two other actions of Jewish response. At 2.41, he understands “sell not my signs for a little price” to refer to the action of Jewish leaders to conceal the information about Muḥammad in the Torah from the lowly people of the Jews.⁸¹ At 2.42, the exegete

⁷⁷ Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur‘ān*, 86.

⁷⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 101-102.

⁷⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 102.

⁸⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 102.

⁸¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 101.

finds that the ‘confounding’ action of the Jews is that they acknowledge (*qarra* IV) some of what they read about Muḥammad in the Torah, but conceal another part “in order to speak the truth concerning that.”⁸²

Baqara (2).77

“Know they not that Allah knows what they keep secret (*yusirrūna*) and what they publish.”

Muqātil interprets 2.77 in the light of a story which he tells in explanation of the preceding verse, 2.76. At 2.76 he offers a short narrative about Jewish response to Muḥammad.⁸³ In this story, a Muslim man meets some Jews who are his allies, and asks them, “Do you find Muḥammad in your book?” The Jews answer, “Yes, the prophethood of your master is true, and we recognize (*‘arafa*) him.” When another group of Jews, headed by Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf, get wind of this, they take their fellow Jews aside and quiz them secretly (*fī al-sirr*), “Will you tell the companions of Muḥammad what Allah has opened to you?” The exegete writes that “what Allah has revealed to you” (2.76) means “what is clear to you in the Torah from the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad.”⁸⁴

In his exegesis of the phrase “what they keep secret” in 2.77,⁸⁵ Muqātil merely offers the expression “under the open sky” (*fī al-khalā’*)—from the same verb used in 2.76 for “go privily.” Then he quotes the Jews again from the narrative at 2.76 in a slightly different way. Here they affirm, “We find Muḥammad in our book and we certainly know him.”⁸⁶ The exegete understands the verse to refer to an action of withholding information about Muḥammad which is clear to them in the Torah.

⁸² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 101.

⁸³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 117-118.

⁸⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 118. Al-Farrā’ offers a similar explanation for the phrase, “shall you tell them what Allah has opened to you” (2.76): “This is from the saying of the Jews amongst themselves, ‘Do not tell the Muslims that you find the characteristics (*sifa*) of Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, in the Torah, and you don’t believe it, because this would become for them a proof against you.’” *Kitāb Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān*, Aḥmad Yūsuf Najātī and Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Najjār, eds. (Beirut: Dār al-Sarūr, n.d.), Vol. I: 50.

⁸⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 118.

⁸⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 118.

Baqara (2).140

“Who does a greater wrong than he who conceals (*katama*) a testimony that has come to him from Allah? And Allah is not heedless of the things you do.”

A series of four verses in the middle of the second sūra containing the verb *katama* begins with 2.140. In this verse, Muqātil understands the “testimony” (*shahāda*) to be “the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad in the Torah and the Injīl.”⁸⁷ Allah had made this matter clear to the people of the book, but they concealed this testimony which is with them (*‘indahum*). Muqātil then gives a cross reference to 3.187 to support his own explanation of ‘making clear’: “And when Allah took a covenant from the people of the book, to make it clear.” The wording of 3.187 continues, “. . . and not conceal it. . . .” The exegete repeats that the unspecified pronoun in 3.187 refers to “the matter of Muḥammad.”

Muqātil understands this verse to refer to an action by the people of the book to conceal information about the prophet of Islam which could be found in the scriptures in their possession.

Baqara (2).146

“Those to whom we have given the book recognize it as they recognize their sons, even though there is a party of them conceal (*yaktumūna*) the truth and that wittingly.”

Muqātil explains this verse by telling a story about an encounter between the Jews and the prophet of Islam.⁸⁸ He specifies Abū Yāsir ibn Akḥtab, Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf, Ka‘b ibn Usayd, Salām ibn Šūriyā, Kanāna ibn Abū al-Ḥuqayq, Wahb ibn Yahudha and Abū Nāfa‘ as participants in this encounter.⁸⁹ The Jews ask Muḥammad, “Why do you circumambulate the *ka‘ba* when it is merely erected stones?” In reply, Muḥammad asserts, “You know concerning the circumambulation of the *bayt ḥaqq*, that it is the *qibla* which is written (*maktūb*) in the Torah and Injīl, but you conceal and deny (*jahada*) the

⁸⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 143.

⁸⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 147-148.

⁸⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 148.

truth that is in the book of Allah.”⁹⁰

One of the Jews, Ibn Šūriyā, protests that this is not so: “We have concealed nothing of what is in our book.” Muqātil explains that this was the occasion for the sending down of “Those to whom we gave the book know it.” The book in question is the Torah, he writes, and the object of Jewish knowledge is that the *bayt al-ḥarām* is the *qibla*. The “truth” (*ḥaqq*) which the Jews are concealing is therefore the information about the *ka‘ba* in the Torah.⁹¹ Muqātil understands this verse to mean an action by the Jews to conceal and deny information which is recorded in the earlier scriptures.

Baqara (2).159

“Those who conceal (*yaktumūna*) the clear signs and the guidance that we have sent down, after we have shown them clearly in the book after we made it plain to people in the book—they shall be cursed by Allah and the cursers.”

In his exegesis of 2.159, Muqātil offers another short narrative.⁹² Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf and Ibn Šūriyā are again the Jews specified here. Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal, Sa‘d ibn Mu‘ādh and Hāritha ibn Zayd ask the Jews about the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad, about stoning, and about other things. But the Jews concealed these things. Muqātil interprets the “clear signs” (*bayyināt*) as the information about stoning and the permitted and forbidden which Allah made clear in the Torah. The “guidance” (*hudan*) in turn, means the information about Muḥammad in the Torah. In order to further explain this verse, Muqātil references

⁹⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 148.

⁹¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 148.

⁹² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 152.

29.49, “And none denies our signs but the unbelievers.”⁹³ In this cross-reference, writes the exegete, the “signs” (*āyāt*) refer to Muḥammad, and the one who denies (*jaḥada*) is the one who denies (*kadhaba* II) the Torah. It is the Jews who are guilty of this, and thus shall be cursed.

Muqātil understands this verse to mean the action of the Jews to conceal and deny information in the Torah about several matters.

Baqara (2).174

“Those who conceal (*yaktumūna*) what of the book Allah has sent down on them, and sell it for a little price—they shall eat nothing but the fire in their bellies; Allah shall not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection neither purify them; there awaits them a painful chastisement.”

In addition to a verb of concealment, *katama*, this verse contains the expression “selling for a little price,” which will be dealt with separately below. Muqātil once more understands this verse to refer to Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf and Ibn Ṣūriyā as representatives of the Jewish leaders.⁹⁴ The *kitāb* with which they were tampering is the Torah. The information in that book which they concealed was the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad. The parallel relationship of “selling for a little price” to *katama* also lends meaning to the concealment verb for the exegete. Muqātil writes that the Jewish leaders “chose to disbelieve” in Muḥammad.⁹⁵ This suggests that the concealment of information in scripture is similarly a deliberate act. Muqātil understands this verse to mean an action by particular Jewish leaders in Madīna to conceal information in the Torah about the prophet of Islam.

⁹³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 153. The context of Muqātil’s cross-reference in the Qur’ān is relevant for this study. At 29.46 are the commands to not argue with the people of the book, and to say to them, “we believe in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to you.” Those given the *kitāb* earlier will believe in the present *kitāb*, according to 29.47. And at 29.49, the clear signs are in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge. On those verses, Muqātil identifies the two books as the Torah and the *qur’ān*, respectively; writes that the people of the book who respond well to the *qur’ān* are ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions; adds that these same are “those given knowledge” in the Torah; and understands the “signs” to be the “sending out (*ba‘th*) of Muḥammad in the Torah.” “He is recorded (*maktūb*) in the Torah,” concludes Muqātil. “Then they concealed (*katama*) his matter (*amr*) and rejected (*jaḥada*).” *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. III, 385-6. Such interpretations, now familiar from *sūras* 2-7, would appear to be myriad in the balance of Muqātil’s commentary.

⁹⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 156.

⁹⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 156.

Al Imrān (3).71

“People of the book! Why do you confound the truth with vanity, and conceal (*taktumūna*) the truth, and you know?”

This verse appears near the beginning of an extended passage in the Qurʾān which Muqātil understands to be rich in tampering references. The wording of 3.71 after “People of the book” is almost identical to the wording of 2.42. Muqātil deals with 3.71 only very briefly.⁹⁶ Its meaning, he writes, is that the Jews acknowledged (*qarra* IV) part of the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad, but concealed another part. He thus identifies ‘acknowledging’ as the opposite action to concealing. The “truth” which the Jews “know,” according to the exegete, is that Muḥammad is a prophet and an apostle.

The context of the passage in Muqātil’s commentary appears to qualify the tampering action which he pictures at 3.71. At 3.70, he understands that the people of the book “bear witness” that “Muḥammad is the apostle of Allah and his description (*naʿī*) is with you (*maʿakum*) in the Torah.”⁹⁷ In explanation of 3.72-73, he tells a story about Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf and Mālik ibn al-Dayf confusing the lowly people of the Jews. At the beginning of the day they say that the description of Muḥammad is in the Torah, but at the end of the day they say they were mistaken. “We looked in the Torah, and all of a sudden (*fa-idhā*) the description which is in the Torah is not the description of Muḥammad.”⁹⁸ The two Jewish leaders further instruct the other Jews not to tell others about the matter of Muḥammad, lest the others argue with them. Muqātil suggests here that the motivations of the Jewish leaders are envy towards Muḥammad and a desire to maintain their religious superiority.⁹⁹

With this context in mind, Muqātil understands 3.71 to mean an action by the Jews of Madīna to conceal information about Muḥammad in the Torah. They refuse to acknowledge that information openly in an effort to assert their special standing with God.

⁹⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 284.

⁹⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 283.

⁹⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 284.

⁹⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 284.

Āl Imrān (3).187

“And when Allah took compact with those who had been given the book: ‘You shall make it clear unto the people, and not conceal (*taktumūna*) it.’ But they threw it behind their backs, and sold it for a small price—how evil was that their selling!”

“Those who had been given the book” are the Jews, according to Muqātil, and the book in question is the Torah.¹⁰⁰ Allah had made a covenant with the Jews to make clear “the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad” in the Torah. Instead, the Jews concealed both the information about Muḥammad and the covenant stipulation “that you follow (*tabi‘a*) him.” The expressions “throw behind backs” and “sell for a small price” will be examined separately later. Here it can simply be noted that these expressions too are associated with “concealing (*kitmān*) the matter of Muḥammad.”¹⁰¹

The tampering action which Muqātil is picturing here is further qualified by his exegesis of the following verse, 3.188. There he tells a story of a Jewish confession of faith in the prophet of Islam. The Jews say in the presence of Muḥammad, “We recognize (*‘arafa*) you and we believe (*saddaqa*) you.” However, writes the exegete, “that was not in their hearts.”¹⁰² The issue in this short narrative is duplicity. Muqātil thus understands 3.187 to refer to an action of the Jews as a people to fail to act appropriately according to the knowledge about Muḥammad which they possess in the Torah.

Nisā’ (4).37

“Such as are niggardly, and bid other men to be niggardly, and themselves conceal (*yaktumūna*) the bounty that Allah has given them. We have prepared for the unbelievers a humbling chastisement.”

Muqātil identifies the subject of this verse to be the chiefs of the Jews, specifying Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf.¹⁰³ The Jewish leaders used to command the lowly people of the Jews “to conceal (*kitmān*) the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad.” Their motive for this, writes Muqātil, was fear lest the ordinary Jews “disclose it and explain it. So they erased (*mahā*)

¹⁰⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 320.

¹⁰¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 320.

¹⁰² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 321.

¹⁰³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 372.

it from the Torah.” Editor ‘Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Shihāta puts quotation marks around the foregoing clause and notes that it is missing from one of the two main manuscripts he is consulting.¹⁰⁴ Muqātil then interprets the “bounty” (*fadl*) of Allah to be the matter and description (*na‘i*) of Muḥammad in the Torah.

Muqātil understands this verse to refer to an action by Jewish leaders to command the Jews under their influence to conceal the information about Muḥammad in the Torah. That the exegete would interpret “conceal” with “erase” is unusual, and—in the perspective of his explanations of this series of eight *katama* verses—seems out of place.

Mā’ida (5).15

“People of the Book. Now there has come to you our messenger, making clear to you many things you have been concealing (*tukhfūna*) of the book, and effacing many things. There has come to you from Allah a light, and a book manifest.”

A third Arabic verb for concealing, *khafiya* IV, appears for the first time at 5.15.

Muqātil explains this verse only very briefly.¹⁰⁵ He identifies the locus of tampering (“the *kitāb*”) as “the Torah.” The objects which people have concealed (*khafiya* IV perf.), he writes, are “the matter (*amr*) of stoning and the matter of Muḥammad.”¹⁰⁶ The actors are not specified here, but at 5.13 they are the Jews, and at 5.14 they are the Christians. The exegete further explains the scriptural “effacing (or forgiving, ‘*afā ‘an*) much” to mean “disregarding (*jāza* VI) much of what you hid (*katama*).” His use of *katama* as a synonym for *khafiya* IV suggests that Muqātil understands 5.15 to mean the action of unspecified people of the book to conceal the information about stoning and about Muḥammad which is in the Torah.

al-An‘ām (6).91

“They measured not Allah with his true measure when they said, ‘Allah has not sent down aught on any mortal.’ Say: ‘Who sent down the book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to men? You put it into parchments,

¹⁰⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 372 n. 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 463.

¹⁰⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 463.

revealing them, and hiding (*tukhfūna*) much; and you were taught that you knew not, you and your fathers.’ Say: ‘Allah.’ Then leave them alone, playing their game of plunging.”

Muqātil explains the phrase “hiding much” in the light of a narrative which he recounts to explain an earlier part of the verse.¹⁰⁷ He glosses *khafiya* IV with *sarra* IV, and explains that the objects of concealment were the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad and the matter of stoning in the Torah.¹⁰⁸ Muqātil’s narrative is linked to the scriptural phrase, “Allah has not sent down aught on any mortal.” He writes that this phrase descended concerning a Jew named Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf. Mālik was arguing with ‘Umr ibn al-Khaṭāb about whether “the prophet” is written about (*maktūb*) in the Torah. In the heat of the argument Mālik became angry and exclaimed, “Allah has not sent down a book on anyone!”¹⁰⁹ In response, the prophet of Islam quizzes Mālik about the book which Moses brought.¹¹⁰

In light of this narrative, it is clear that Muqātil understands this verse to mean an action by a particular Jewish scholar to deny what is written about Muḥammad in the Torah.

3.4 Commentary on verses containing other verbs of tampering

In addition to verses containing verbs of alteration or concealment, scholarly studies on the doctrine of scriptural corruption indicate additional verses. The scholarly lists intersect with the Qur’ān’s semantic field of tampering at verses which contain the verbs *labisa* II (‘to confound’), *lawā* (‘to twist’) and *nasiya* (‘to forget’).

3.4.1 Confounding

The phrase “confound (*yalbisū*) the truth with vanity” appears at both 2.42 and 3.71,

¹⁰⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 574-575.

¹⁰⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 575.

¹⁰⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 574. Cf. Muqātil on 2.1, “Allah has not sent down a book after Moses”—though Mālik is not one of the speakers in that encounter. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 81.

¹¹⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 574. Muqātil adds that the Jews removed (‘*azala*) Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf from the fellowship of the rabbis (*rabāniyya*) after this incident!

cited above. In both cases, Muqātil glosses *labisa* II with the verb *khalāṭa*.¹¹¹ He explains at 2.42 that the Jews “mix things up” by acknowledging one part of the matter of Muḥammad and concealing another part, “so that they may speak the truth concerning that.”¹¹² There the exegete also makes reference to 3.71, and quotes part of a third verse which contains *labisa* II, 6.82: “. . . and have not confounded their belief with evildoing.” He immediately glosses the cross reference, “meaning have not mixed (*khalāṭa*) with associating (*shirk*).”¹¹³

Muqātil’s exegesis of the second occurrence of the phrase adds the story about two Jewish leaders changing their instructions to the Jewish populace within a single day, described above. At the beginning of the day, the leaders tell them to “believe in the *qur’ān*.” But by evening, they say, “We looked in the Torah, and suddenly the description which is in the Torah is not the description of Muḥammad.” The exegete remarks that in this way the Jewish leaders “make their religion (*dīn*) obscure (*labisa ‘alā*) for them. Perhaps they are in doubt concerning their religion.”¹¹⁴ In both passages, the matter of Muḥammad with which the Jews are tampering is that he is a prophet and an apostle, and that his description is “with” the Jews in the Torah.¹¹⁵

At 2.42 and 3.71, Muqātil understands the verb *labisa* II to refer to an action of Jewish leaders to confuse the lowly people by hiding information about Muḥammad which is in the Torah, and by giving them mixed messages about how they should respond to the prophet of Islam.

3.4.2 Twisting

“And there is a sect of them twist (*yalawna*) their tongues with the book, that you may suppose it part of the book, yet it is not part of the book; and they say, ‘It is from Allah,’ yet it is not from Allah, and they speak falsehood

¹¹¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 101, 284.

¹¹² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 101.

¹¹³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 102. At 6.82, Muqātil gives a similar gloss for “have not confounded their faith with evildoing”: “meaning have not mixed (*khalāṭa*) their faith (*taṣḍīq*) with associating (*shirk*), and have not worshipped other than him.” *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 573. In the context of that explanation, Muqātil makes no mention of the Jews, a book, or an action of tampering.

¹¹⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 284.

¹¹⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 102, 283-4.

against Allah, and that wittingly.” *Āl Imrān* (3).78

The expression “twisting tongues” appears at 3.78 and also in one of the *ḥarrafa* verses examined above, 4.46. In his exegesis of 3.78, Muqātil immediately identifies the “sect” as a group of four Jews: Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf and Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf and Abū Yāsir Juday ibn Akḥtab and Sha‘ba ibn ‘Amr.¹¹⁶ He finds “twist their tongues with the book” to mean, “with twisting (*layy*): tampering (*tahrīf*) with the tongue concerning the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad.”¹¹⁷ However, in the remainder of the verse the exegete pictures a quite different action of tampering. Here the locus of tampering is the Torah itself. On “it is not part of the book” Muqātil writes that the Jews wrote something other than the description (*na‘t*) of Muḥammad, “and they erased (*maḥā*) his description.”¹¹⁸ The Jews wrote a description which was not the description of the prophet of Islam, and was not from Allah. This exegesis seems to relate to the story about Jewish leaders which Muqātil tells at 3.72,¹¹⁹ as well as to his understanding of 2.79, to be described below.

At 4.46, “twisting (*layyan*) with their tongues” appears in parallel with “slandering (*ta‘nan*) religion.” In order to explain these actions, Muqātil describes a claim made by the Jews. “They say, ‘The religion of Muḥammad is nothing, but what we are upon, that is the [true] religion.’”¹²⁰ On a later part of the verse, “It would have been better for them,” Muqātil writes, “than the tampering (*tahrīf*) and the slander (*ta‘n*) of religion.”¹²¹ Here Muqātil’s phrase “the tampering and the slander of religion” appears to gloss the scriptural “twisting with their tongues and slandering religion.”

¹¹⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 286.

¹¹⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 286.

¹¹⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 286. The verb *maḥā* (also “to wipe off, rub out, scratch out,” etc.) does not appear in the Qur’ān in relation to the theme of tampering with earlier scriptures; but it appears at 17.12 in the sense of “make dark,” and at 13.39 and 42.24 in the sense of “blot out” (with Allah as subject). In Muqātil’s commentary *maḥā* appears first in his explanation of 2.79 (see below), and later in his comments on 4.37 (noted above).

¹¹⁹ described in section 3.4.1 above.

¹²⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 376. The *Sīra* also offers an explanation of the actions of twisting and slandering. It quotes the full passage 4.44-46, prefacing it with the following occasion of revelation: “Rifā‘a was a notable Jew. When he spoke to the apostle he twisted his tongue and said: ‘Give us your attention, Muḥammad, so that we can make you understand.’ Then he attacked (*ta‘ana*) Islam and reviled (*‘āba*) it. So Allah sent down concerning it” *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 400.

¹²¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 377.

Muqātil understands the verb *lawā* to mean a verbal action of Jews in inappropriate response to the prophet of Islam. However, the Qurʾānic contexts of the two occurrences appear to influence his exegetical direction. In one case his interpretation concerns the information about Muḥammad in the Torah, and in the other case he finds an action of insult toward Islam.¹²²

3.4.3 Forgetting

The phrase “they have forgotten (*nasiya*) a portion of what they were reminded of” appears at both 5.13 and 5.14. Muqātil understands the first occurrence to refer to the Jews¹²³ and the second occurrence to the Christians.¹²⁴

On the forgetting of the Jews, Muqātil writes:

This is about how Allah, powerful and exalted, made a covenant with Banū Isrāʾīl in the Torah that they would believe (*amuna* IV) in Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, and give credence (*ṣaddaqa*) to him. He is written [in what is] with them in the Torah.¹²⁵ Then when Allah, powerful and exalted, sent him, they disbelieved (*kafara*) in him and envied (*ḥasada*) him, and said, “This one is not from the descendents of Ishāq, but rather he is from the descendents of Ismāʿīl.”¹²⁶

Instead of offering a gloss for *nasiya*, Muqātil portrays an action of the Jews to disbelieve in and envy the prophet of Islam. The action takes place after the appearance of the prophet, when the Jews recognize that he is not of their own kind.

On 5.14 Muqātil writes that Allah took a covenant with the *Naṣārā* as well—in the Injīl—concerning faith in Muḥammad: “that they believe in Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, and follow him (*tabīʿa*) and declare him true (*ṣadaqa* II), since he is written with them in the Injīl.”¹²⁷ This time the phrase “they forgot a portion”

¹²² This is also the direction of al-Farrāʾ’s interpretation of “twisting with their tongues” at 4.46. He writes that this means they say *rāʿinā*, “aiming (*wajuha* II) it toward the abuse (*shatm*) of Muḥammad.” This action indicates what is meant by twisting (*al-layy*), he writes. *Kitāb Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, Vol. I, 272. At the first occurrence of the term *rāʿinā* at 2.104, al-Farrāʾ similarly writes that this is a word of abuse (*shatm*) with the Jews. Vol. I, 69.

¹²³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 461.

¹²⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 462.

¹²⁵ *huwa maktūbun ʿindahum fi l-tawrāt*. The wording for the scriptural phrase, “written down with them in the Torah and Gospel” (7.157), is *maktūban ʿindahum fi l-tawrāti wa l-injīl*.

¹²⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 461.

¹²⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 462. The final phrase is, *wa huwa maktūbun ʿindahum fi l-injīl*.

is glossed, “they neglected (*taraka*)¹²⁸ a portion”; and “what they were reminded of” is identified as “what they were commanded about faith in Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, and the attestation (*taṣḍīq*) to him.”¹²⁹

In 5.13 and 5.14, Muqātil understands the verb *nasiya* to mean an action on the part of the people of the book to transgress their prior agreements with Allah. The Jews choose to disbelieve in the prophet of Islam out of envy. The Christians choose to neglect Allah’s command concerning Muḥammad. In both cases Muqātil specifies that the necessary information about Muḥammad is recorded in the scriptures which they have.¹³⁰

3.5 Commentary on verses containing expressions of action

A number of verses which have been associated with the accusation of scriptural corruption fall outside the semantic field of tampering. The verbs in these verses do not immediately bring tampering to mind, but nevertheless the expressions of which they are part have triggered thoughts of various tampering actions. The expressions are “write the book with hands,” “sell for a little price,” “throw behind backs,” and “invent a falsehood against Allah.”

3.5.1 Write the book with hands

“So woe to those who write the book with their hands, then say, “This is from Allah,” that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their

¹²⁸ The gloss of *taraka* suggests a stronger sense for *nasiya* in Muqātil’s mind. *Taraka* has a range of meanings from “leave” to “omit.”

¹²⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 462.

¹³⁰ Caspar and Gaudeul indicate two other *nasiya* verses, 7.51 and 7.165 (“Textes de la Tradition Musulmane,” 63), but Muqātil does not understand these to refer to the earlier scriptures. However, at a verse not included in the scholarly lists, 2.44, Muqātil finds an action of inappropriate response to Muḥammad (“Will you bid others to piety, and forget yourselves while you recite the book?”). He writes that the Jews encourage the companions of the prophet of Islam to follow (*tabi‘a*) Muḥammad, but neglect (*taraka*) themselves and don’t follow him. Muqātil identifies the book they recite as the Torah, “in which is the announcement (*bayān*) of the matter (*amr*) and description (*na‘t*) of Muḥammad.” *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 102. This explanation shows a sense of an intact Torah in the possession of the Jews and a failure to act upon its attestation of Muḥammad, similar to Muqātil’s understanding at 5.13 & 14. Rippin writes in relation to treatments of 2.44: “From the Muslim perspective, as reflected in the entire body of *tafsīr*, here was the evidence of the major sin of the Jewish rabbis, summed up in the term *kitmān*: the knowledge of the true status of Muḥammad while concealing that fact in order to mislead the entire community.” “The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*,” 3.

hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings.” Baqara (2).79

Apart from the four *harrafa* verses described above, the verse which is indicated most frequently in scholarly articles on *tahrif* is 2.79. Muqātil understands this verse to mean an action by Jewish leaders in Madīna to alter the text of the Torah.¹³¹

Muqātil explains that “those who write the *kitāb* with their hands” refers to writing something other than the description (*na‘t*) of Muḥammad. He writes: “This is about how the chiefs of the Jews of Madīna erased (*maḥā*) the description of Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, from the Torah, and wrote other than his description, and told the Jews something other than the description of Muḥammad.”¹³² In explaining a later part of the verse, “what their hands have written,” Muqātil offers: “meaning in the Torah of the alteration (*taghyir*) of the description of Muḥammad.”¹³³

As noted above, the exegete finds a similar meaning in his interpretation of 3.78, in which the language of a *kitāb* and a claim that something is “from Allah” reappears. There too he writes that the Jewish leaders wrote something other than the description of Muḥammad and erased his description.¹³⁴ Muqātil therefore understands the expression “write the book with hands” at 2.79 to mean an action by Jewish leaders in Madīna during the career of the prophet of Islam there to insert false information into the Torah in their possession.

3.5.2 Sell for a little price

Another expression in 2.79 which came to be associated with tampering in the minds of the exegetes is “selling for a little price.” The language of commerce first appears in the

¹³¹ *Tafsir Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 118.

¹³² *Tafsir Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 118.

¹³³ *Tafsir Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 118. The verb *ghāra* II does not appear in the Qur’ān in relation to the theme of tampering with earlier scriptures. Of its six occurrences, it appears twice in 13.11: “Allah changes (*yughayyiru*) not what is in a people, until they change what is in themselves.” The verb also appears twice at 8.53 in a phrase similar to that of 13.11. At 47.15 the flavour of the rivers of milk in the garden is unchanging; and 4.119 contains the mysterious phrase, “surely I will command them and they will change Allah’s creation.” *Taghyir*, the verb noun used by Muqātil, though it does not appear in the Qur’ān, eventually became a technical term for scriptural alteration alongside *tahrif* and *tabdil*. See for example Goldziher, “Über muhammedanische Polemik,” 344.

¹³⁴ *Tafsir Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 286.

Qurʾān in 2.16. In explanation of the clause, “Those are they who have bought error at the price of guidance,” Muqātil offers a story of Jewish response to Muḥammad:

This is about how the Jews found the description (*naʿt*) of Muḥammad the prophet, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, in the Torah before he was sent, and believed in him, assuming that he was from the descendents of Ishāq, upon whom be peace. Then when Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, was sent from among the Arabs, from the descendents of Ismāʿīl, upon whom be peace, they disbelieved (*kafara*) in him out of envy (*hasad*), and “purchased error with guidance.”¹³⁵

Similar phrases are found elsewhere in the Qurʾān, and Muqātil often understands these to refer to the Jewish response to the prophet of Islam.¹³⁶

The specific phrase, “sell (*sharā* VIII) for a little price” first occurs at 2.41, then repeats some eight times in the Qurʾān.¹³⁷ At 2.41, the object of the verb is “signs” (*āyāt*), and Muqātil understands the phrase to mean an action of Jewish leaders to conceal the matter of Muḥammad from the lowly people of the Jews.¹³⁸ The exegete then offers a description of the living situation of the Jewish leaders which he subsequently repeats many times in his commentary: “The chiefs had among them food from everything [that was held in] common from their seed and their fruits; and if they had followed (*tabiʿa* III) Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, this food would certainly have been withheld from them.”¹³⁹ When “sell for a little price” appears together with the verb *katama*, Muqātil similarly understands the Jewish leaders to be concealing information about Muḥammad for gain.¹⁴⁰ At 2.79, however, the exegete appears to associate the leaders’ financial motivation with writing falsehoods in the Torah.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 91.

¹³⁶ At 2.86, 2.175, 3.177, 4.44; cf. 2.90, 2.102. At 2.90 Muqātil again finds the motivation of envy of Muḥammad “since he was from the Arabs”; at 2.175 and 4.44 he writes that the Jewish rejection of Muḥammad took place after the prophet of Islam was sent. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 122, 156, 376.

¹³⁷ 2.79, 2.174, 3.77, 3.187, 3.199, 5.44, 9.9, 16.95.

¹³⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 101. Referred to above in section 3.3 in the description of Muqātil’s interpretation of Q. 2.42.

¹³⁹ A comparable expression comes in al-Wāḥidī: “The Rabbis and the learned ones used to receive provisions from the rest of the Jews and they feared that they would not receive it if they revealed the (true) description. . . .” Cited by Andrew Rippin in “The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*,” 16.

¹⁴⁰ at 2.174 and 3.187. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 156, 320-321.

¹⁴¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 118-119.

Muqātil thus understands the scriptural expression “sell for a little price” to indicate a financial motivation among Jewish leaders for tampering with the Torah. His characterization of Jewish leaders as ‘greedy for gain’ will be taken up again in the description of the commentary’s narrative framework in chapter 5 below.

3.5.3 Throw behind backs

“When there has come to them a messenger from Allah confirming what was with them, a party of them that were given the book reject (*nabadha*) the book of Allah behind their backs, as though they knew not.” Baqara (2).101

The expression “throw behind backs” appears only twice in the Qur’ān, but polemicists and exegetes have traditionally associated this idiom with actions of tampering. At 2.101, Muqātil interprets the phrase to mean an inappropriate response to information about Muḥammad in the Torah.¹⁴² The “messenger from Allah” is Muḥammad, who comes to the Jews “confirming (*saddaqa*) that he is a prophet and an apostle with them (*ma’ahum*) in the Torah.”¹⁴³ But a group of Jews reject what is in the Torah about the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad through two specific actions: they do not follow (*tabi’a*) him, and they do not make clear to the people that “Muḥammad is an apostle and prophet according to his attestation (*taṣḍiq*) which is with them.”¹⁴⁴

At 3.187, cited above, “throw behind backs” appears together with the verb *katama* and the expression “sell for a small price.” In this verse we find the wording which Muqātil has already used at 2.101, “make it clear to the people.” In his explanation of 3.187, Muqātil adds that included in the covenant which Allah made with the children of Israel in the Torah was the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad and the stipulation that they follow (*tabi’a*) him.¹⁴⁵ But the Jews threw the covenant behind their backs by concealing (*kitmān*) the matter of Muḥammad.¹⁴⁶

Muqātil understands the expression “throw behind backs” to refer to an action of

¹⁴² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 126.

¹⁴³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 126.

¹⁴⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 126.

¹⁴⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 320.

¹⁴⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 320.

Jewish leaders to transgress their covenant with Allah by failing to acknowledge, broadcast and submit to the authority of the prophet of Islam.

3.5.4 Invent a lie against Allah

“Whoso forges (*farā* VIII) falsehood against Allah after that, those are the evildoers.” *Al Imrān* (3).94

The expression “invent a lie against Allah” does not occur in any verse connected by scholars to the doctrine of scriptural corruption. However, W.M. Watt described this expression as a “corollary” of the charge of concealing,¹⁴⁷ and the ambiguity of *farā* VIII (“forge or fabricate a lie, or falsehood”)¹⁴⁸ could possibly bring textual falsification to mind.¹⁴⁹ When Muqātil first treats the expression at 3.94, he interprets it in light of a story about Jacob which he tells at 3.93.¹⁵⁰ There the focus is food which Allah made lawful to Israel and which Israel forbade themselves. The challenge, “Bring the Torah and read it, if you are truthful,” also comes at 3.93. Muqātil writes that inventing a lie against Allah in this context would be to say that Allah had prohibited a certain food in the Torah.¹⁵¹

The expression also occurs in close proximity to tampering verses at 4.50 and 6.93. At 4.50, the lie which the Jews invent is their saying, “We are sons of Allah and his beloved ones.”¹⁵² Similarly at 6.21, the lie is the statement that Allah has a partner (*sharīk*).¹⁵³ Then at 6.93, Muqātil understands “inventing a lie against Allah” to refer to the story of Musaylama ibn Ḥabīb the liar (*kadhhab*) “when he claimed that Allah inspired him with prophethood.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ “The Early Development,” 51.

¹⁴⁸ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 6, 2391.

¹⁴⁹ Toshihiko Izutsu offers this expression as an example of a semantic cluster: “In the Qur’ān the verb *iftarā* (‘to invent’, ‘to forge’) most frequently takes as its grammatical ‘object’ the noun *kadhīb* (a ‘lie’), thus forming a well-nigh inseparable group.” *Ethico-Religious Concepts*, 40.

¹⁵⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 290.

¹⁵¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 290.

¹⁵² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 378. This is the claim of Jews and Christians at 5.18.

¹⁵³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 554.

¹⁵⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 575. Here the exegete is following the wording of the verse itself, “he said ‘I am inspired (*waḥā* IV)’ when he was not inspired in anything.” Musaylama appears in Muqātil’s *tafsīr* once more in the ‘rabbinical’ test of prophethood story at 18.9. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. II, 575. Cf. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 122.

There are two other occurrences of this expression in the Qurʾān,¹⁵⁵ but the verses examined above suffice to show that the exegete understands “invent a lie against Allah” to signal a variety of tampering actions which are not associated with falsification of earlier scriptures. A similar expression with the same object, *kadhib*, appears twice in an important tampering context. At 3.75, Muqātil interprets the phrase “speak a lie against Allah” to mean that Jews are lying about what is in the Torah concerning “the prohibition of shedding blood and taking wealth unlawfully.”¹⁵⁶ The second occurrence comes at 3.78, where it is associated with an accusation of textual falsification. The ‘lie’ that the Jews speak is that what they have written is the description of Muḥammad.¹⁵⁷

3.6 Analysis of Muqātil’s exegesis

3.6.1 Muqātil’s understanding of the alteration verses

Again, because of the prominence of the *harrafa* verses in the scholarly lists of verses associated with the accusation of alteration, Muqātil’s exegesis of these four verses will be analysed in the greatest depth. Muqātil reveals his understanding of *harrafa* in these verses largely through the narratives he offers. He also supplies a simple gloss for the Qurʾānic text which often indicates what he considers synonyms for important terms in this study. Sometimes he will further specify the content of vague terms such as *kalim*. Wherever possible, he gives particular names for the anonymous scriptural references.

Adding words to a verbal report

Muqātil develops the meaning of *harrafa* in Baqara 75 by telling a story about the Jews at the time of Moses. At the start of the commentary on this verse, the people in the foreground are the Jews of Madīna, and the issue is their believing in, or declaring the truth of, Muḥammad. And in his commentary on the following verse, Muqātil continues to describe the Jews of Madīna and their response to the prophet. In the extended narrative

¹⁵⁵ At 6.144 and 7.37.

¹⁵⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 285.

¹⁵⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 286.

offered to explain the meaning of “a party of them that heard the word (*kalām*) of Allah then tampered with it,” *kalām* is used repeatedly to refer to a verbal communication of Allah. They *heard* the *kalām*, according to the verse and reinforced in the commentary. And the action of the group from the seventy Jews which explains for Muqātil the meaning of *harrafa* is their adding to the verbal report of the commandments of Allah an extra alleviation clause. The exegete offers this story before actually giving the part of the verse in which *harrafa* appears. After giving the tampering clause from the verse, Muqātil gives no further comment on the verb *harrafa*, which signals that he had already explained the tampering action indicated by the verb before introducing that part of the verse.

It is the addition of a kind of escape clause to the verbal commands of Allah which Muqātil finds to be the tampering (*harrafa*) indicated by the verse. There is no indication in Muqātil’s exegesis that *kalām* refers to a written record, or that the tampering envisioned in the verse had to do with a written record. There is no mention here of the Torah. Also, no explicit connection is made here between the Jews of Maḍīna and the 70 Jewish leaders of Moses’ time, in order to suggest that the Jews would be inclined to alter their scripture in response to the appearance of Muḥammad.

Thus the verb *harrafa* appears in the verse, and it is repeated in the commentary, but Muqātil does not understand this verb to mean here a material alteration of the text of the Torah (or any other scripture). *Kalām* is the object, repeated by Muqātil, and it does not mean for him a written text of scripture. Therefore, Muqātil understands the use of *harrafa* in Baqara 75 to indicate an action of tampering other than causing a material change in an earlier text of scripture.

Abusing the prophet and slandering religion

The meaning of *harrafa* in Nisā’ 46 for Muqātil reflects an action which is described in the same verse. The exegete offers the term *tahrīf* to qualify the action which he envisions from the verb *harrafa*, but he does not give a definition of the term. Instead, he characterizes the action with a phrase from further on in the verse itself, “twisting with their tongues.”

He identifies the object of the verb as the description of Muḥammad. And he glosses the mysterious phrase ‘out of its places’ as ‘out of its declaration (*bayān*) in the Torah.’ The meanings of *bayān* also include clearness, plainness, and *obviousness*. Muqātil means to say here that there is something that is clear from the Torah which the Jews know but are for some reason not acting upon. The most straightforward conclusion to draw from this is that Muqātil envisions an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews of Madīna. There is no suggestion in this exegesis that the Jews of Madīna are in possession of a previously corrupted text. There is also no indication of an accusation that the Jews are in the process of corrupting a text in their possession.

The speeches which follow in the verse provide for Muqātil the illustration of what he means by the verb *harrafa*. By all indications—in the verse itself, in the exegete’s brief glosses at 4.46, and in his exegesis of 2.104—these are speeches of resistance or attempts to abuse. Muqātil’s comment on “twisting with their tongues and slandering religion” is that the Jews are denigrating the religion of Muḥammad in contrast to their own. He therefore understands the speeches to signify disrespect or insubordination to Muḥammad. In his explanation of 2.104, where *rā’inā* first appears, he understands this mysterious word to be a term of abuse among the Jews.¹⁵⁸ The object of the verb “twisting” in this scenario is not the Torah or the description of Muḥammad therein, but rather the religion of Muḥammad in the present encounter.¹⁵⁹ When Muqātil uses the term *tahrīf* a second time, he joins it with “slandering religion” in such a manner as to show that he understands the *tahrīf* of the Jews to be their twisting with their tongues.

It is the Jews’ action of abuse toward the prophet of Islam which Muqātil finds to be the tampering (*harrafa*) indicated by the verse. There is no hint here of a concept of a material alteration of the text of the Torah. Rather, in his commentary on the expression *muṣaddiqan* in the verse which follows, Muqātil claims an attestation of the prophethood

¹⁵⁸ Al-Farrā’ also wrote that the Jews said *rā’inā* “aiming (*wajuha* II) it toward the abuse (*shatm*) of Muḥammad.” *Kitāb Ma’ānī al-Qur’ān*, Vol. I: 272.

¹⁵⁹ Wansbrough wrote that at 4.46, “the action explicit in *tahrīf* could only apply to the written word.” *Quranic Studies*, 76. However, Muqātil seems to have understood the tampering action to be the speech of the Jews in conversation/confrontation with Muḥammad. The same could be said of Ṭabarī’s understanding of the verse, described below. Cf. Burton, “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 101.

and apostleship of Muḥammad “with you in the Torah.” The attestation is *with (maʿ)* the Jews. There is no suggestion here that the attestation is no longer with them because the text has previously been corrupted.

Refusing to acknowledge the truth

The exegesis of the verb *ḥarrafa* in Māʾida 13 is dominated by the concept of covenant, a key term which appears in the Qurʾānic verse immediately prior. Muqātil presents the idea that the covenant which Allah took with the people of Israel included a clause to anticipate and accept Muḥammad. Muqātil supplies a gloss on ‘the words’ (*kalim*), that they are the characteristic (*sifa*) of Muḥammad. An important feature of this passage is the phrase, “He is recorded [in what is] with them (*ʿindahum*) in the Torah.” The most natural conclusion to draw from Muqātil’s use of this expression is that he envisions an intact text of the Torah is in the possession of the Jews of Madīna. At issue for the exegete is not a previously corrupted text, but rather an inappropriate response to what is in the text. The basis for this conclusion is that according to Muqātil, when Muḥammad appeared “they disbelieved in him and envied him, and said, ‘This one is not from the descendants of Ishāq, but rather he is from the descendants of Ismāʿīl.’” The narrative logic is that the description of Muḥammad is there in the Torah which they possess, but that when he appears they refuse to acknowledge it out of envy.

In his exegesis of the following verse, Muqātil seems to understand the Christians in a similar way. What is clear about Muḥammad, and the covenant agreement to follow him and to believe in him, “is written (*maktūb*) with them (*ʿindahum*) in the Injīl.” The forgetting of the Christians is glossed *taraka*, which could mean to neglect, but could also mean omit, renounce, abandon or pass over. It is not clear what Muqātil has in mind here, but it is hard to see how he could take the meaning of forgetting beyond neglect. Certainly the theme of rejection, denial, and failure to believe is the general mood.

It is the Jews’ action of deceit toward the prophet of Islam in a contemporary response which Muqātil finds to be the tampering (*ḥarrafa*) indicated by Māʾida 13. In the

exegete's mind, the scriptures of the Jews and Christians contain a covenant in which the proper response to Muḥammad is specified. But the envy that has grown in the hearts of the people of the book, born out of ethnic pride, has caused them to conceal and to neglect the truths written in the divine books they possess.

Setting aside a Torah command

In Muqātil's exegesis of *harrafa* in Mā'ida 41, the long narrative about the Jews and the verse of stoning takes centre stage.¹⁶⁰ Since Muqātil gives no etymological or grammatical explanation for *harrafa*, the meaning of the verb in this case must come out of the narrative he offers. Elements in Muqātil's narrative, such as the house of study, asking for the best Torah scholar, the prophet's question about finding the ruling in the book, and Ibn Šūriyā's remark that he might have concealed the Torah judgment if Muḥammad had not adjured him to honesty, all point to a scenario in which an intact Torah is in the possession of the Jews of Madīna at the time of the prophet of Islam. There is no suggestion in the story that the text of the Torah which the Jews of Madīna possess in their house of study has previously been corrupted. Rather, the ruling against adultery is found in that book, but the Jews don't want to apply it because of the status of the adulterers, and therefore they don't acknowledge it openly. Ibn Šūriyā confesses to Muḥammad that he found the stoning penalty in the Torah, and there is no indication here that he is referring to a Torah which has since been corrupted. Ibn Šūriyā is described as a young man, which suggests both that he is bright and fresh,¹⁶¹ and that the Torah in which he 'found' the stoning penalty is a recent copy.

A number of elements in this story make it a prime generator of meaning and momentum and influence the understanding of the verse: First of all, the dishonesty and deviousness of the Jews of Khaybar, and the connivance of the Jews of Madīna, are revealed to the reader right at the start. A test of prophethood is set up, the details of which

¹⁶⁰ Georges Vajda claimed that the stoning verse story was "the most typical case for the illegitimate alteration of the Torah, upon which the Muslim tradition insists with the greatest complacency." "Juifs et Musulmans selon le Ḥadīṭ," *Journal Asiatique* cccxix (1937), 92.

¹⁶¹ The *Sīra* also describes Ibn Šūriyā as a top scholar, "the most learned man of his time in the Hijaz in Torah studies." Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 239.

Muḥammad does not know but which the reader is privy to.¹⁶² The conditions of successfully passing the test are provided beforehand, along with the possibility that Muḥammad may succeed—and that the Jews know he may succeed. With the help of Gabriel, Muḥammad devises a clever strategem for flushing out the Jewish scholar who knows the Torah best. He adjures Ibn Ṣūriyā, with insight into his Jewish religion, in such a way that he cannot but tell the truth. And the climax is striking: this young, bright scholar who knows the Torah best of all admits that he found the stoning penalty in that scripture; and then adds for good measure—while he is still feeling sworn to honesty and before he mysteriously disbelieves again—“By Allah, Oh Muḥammad, the Jews do indeed know that you are a true prophet, but they envy you.” Muḥammad has successfully passed the test of prophethood that was cynically placed before him, and his exultation at reviving “one of the *sunnas* of Allah” becomes an epiphany of self-discovery.

There are details in the narrative, and in Muqātil’s ‘supercommentary’ on the story, which help further to qualify what the exegete sees to be the meaning of *ḥarrafa* in 5:41. Ibn Ṣūriyā tells Muḥammad he would have concealed (*katama*) the Torah ruling from him if he hadn’t been afraid of eternal punishment. Then immediately after the mention of Ibn Ṣūriyā’s apostasy, Muqātil quotes 5:15, which uses another verb for concealing (*khafīya*). The exegete explains this cross reference to mean hiding what is in the Torah about the command of stoning and the description of Muḥammad. Muqātil again says, later in his comments on 5:41, that the action of the Jews, for which God does not want to purify their hearts, is concealing (*katama*). Taken together, these details show that the tampering action which the exegete understands from *ḥarrafa* here is concealing or neglecting a judgment which can be found in an existing book—not an action of textual alteration.¹⁶³

¹⁶² On the ‘rabbinical’ test of prophethood, see Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 124-125.

¹⁶³ Concealing is also the concern of the version of this story found in Bukhārī. There it is ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām who challenges the Jews to bring the Torah and recite it, after the Jews have told Muḥammad that they find no stoning punishment for adultery in the Torah. The Jewish scholar who used to teach the Torah to the Jews put his hand on the “verse of stoning,” and proceeded to read what was above and below his hand. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām removed the scholar’s hand from the page, and the Jews had to acknowledge that the verse of stoning was there in the Torah. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Al-Arabi, 1955), Vol. VIII, 213-214 (*kitāb al-tawḥīd*, bāb 51).

Muḥammad's exultation at reviving "one of the *sunnas* of Allah"¹⁶⁴ is also a very important indicator of meaning. The prophet of Islam is here claiming a link with Allah's revelations of the past. The attestation of his prophethood in this narrative is his ability to make a judgment which is contained in the Torah. His authority is measured here against the accepted authority of an earlier scripture.¹⁶⁵ The "proof" of his authority is that the judgment he makes is written down in the Torah and—crucially—can be read from the Torah *at that very time and place*. To suggest at that point that the Torah in the hands of the Jews is corrupted would destroy the proof of authority which is being advanced.¹⁶⁶

It is not clear why Muqātil tells the additional story of three things which only a prophet knows at this point. It seems to be triggered by his cross-reference of 5:15 and the phrase, "effacing much." But then one would expect the exegete to explain the phrase at 5.15 rather than here. Perhaps after telling one story of a test of Muḥammad's prophethood, he finds it natural to tell a second. Another possibility is that the involvement of Ibn Ṣūriyā in both stories prompts the exegete to tell them together, with the Torah expert's conversion coming at the end of one story, and his apostasy at the end of the other.

Substituting one saying for another

Muqātil's exegesis of the *baddala* verses is dominated by the story of the Banū Isrā'īl entering Jerusalem at the time of Joshua. At 2.59 and 7.162 he understands the

¹⁶⁴ Where the phrase *sunnat Allāh* is found in Muslim scripture, it relates to the slaughter of hypocrites at 33:62 and divine involvement in battle at 48.23. At 35.43 the theme seems to be the sending of warners and the appropriate human response. See uses of the phrase in *tafsīr* and other genres in Gwynne, "The Neglected Sunnah," 458-462.

¹⁶⁵ More on this in chapter 5. At 2.101 and 3.81, a messenger from Allah confirms "what is with them." In his comments on 2.101, Muqātil writes that the messenger is Muḥammad, who confirms what is in the Torah about his description! 3.81 refers to a covenant with the prophets in which one of the stipulations was to believe in a messenger to come who would confirm what is with them.

¹⁶⁶ This conclusion is supported by the fact that during the first centuries of Islam, the stoning verse story was connected with various other verses in the Qur'ān. For example, 'Abd al-Razzāq narrates the story to explain 5.44 ("Surely we sent down the Torah, wherein is guidance and light; thereby the prophets who had surrendered themselves gave judgment"). 'Abd al-Razzāq concludes his exegesis of 5.44 by claiming that the stoning verse story shows Muḥammad to be one of the 'surrendered prophets' who gave judgment according to the Torah. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīz*, Vol. I, 185. In his *kitāb al-tafsīr*, Bukhārī tells the story around the words spoken by Muḥammad, "Bring you the Torah now and recite it, if you are truthful" (3.93). *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. V, 170 (*kitāb tafsīr al-qur'ān*, bāb 58). What is clear from these two uses of the story is that the narrative was understood to demonstrate Muḥammad's ability to judge in accordance with a ruling in an intact Torah.

action of change to be the verbal substitution of one expression for another. He also mentions the alteration of the entering posture. The transgression at issue is disobedience to a divine command compounded by a mocking attitude. As noted above, Muqātil's two versions of the entering story do not agree in the details of what the wrongdoers said and did. At 2.111, he understands the tampering action to be the failure of the Jews of Madīna to believe in Muḥammad, in spite of the blessings which Allah had given to their forefathers.

3.6.2 Muqātil's understanding of the concealment verses

The 11 verses containing the verbs *katama*, *sarra* IV and *khafiya* IV are all understood in a similar way by Muqātil. In each case, he identifies the locus of the tampering action as the Torah. At 2.140 and 2.146, he mentions the Injīl as well. The actors are consistently Jews in Arabia at the time of Muḥammad, according to the exegete, and in many verses he specifies that they are particular leaders of the Jewish community in Madīna. At 2.140, Muqātil adds the *Naṣārā* of Najrān at the time of Muḥammad to the *Yahūd* of Madīna. The object of tampering in all but one passage is information about the prophet of Islam. The exegete claims in his comments on 2.146 that the focus of concealment is rather the information about the *qibla* in the Torah. At 5.15 and 6.91 he adds the matter of stoning to the matter of Muḥammad, and at 2.159 he indicates these two objects plus commandments of what is permitted and forbidden.

Muqātil writes that the Jews are concealing this information. He appears to understand all three verbs to refer to a similar action: at 5.15 he gives *katama* as a synonym of *khafiya* IV, and at 6.91 he glosses *khafiya* IV with *sarra* IV. The meaning of the action he pictures is qualified by the words he gives to accompany the concealing verbs. At 2.146 he sets *katama* in a parallel relationship with *jaḥada*, and at 2.159 he links *katama* with both *jaḥada* and *kadhaba* II. At 2.42 and 3.71 he finds 'acknowledging' to be the opposite action to concealing. The motivation for this concealing, Muqātil writes at 3.73, is envy and ethnic pride. The exegete thus understands concealing to be an action of inappropriate and ill-conceived response to the truth in scripture about the prophet of Islam.

The frequency of concealing verbs in sūras 2-7, and as a consequence the frequency of concealing explanations in the commentary, has a cumulative effect. Verbs of concealing appear more often than verbs of alteration.¹⁶⁷ The accusation of concealing assumes an intact text of scripture. It thus doesn't go together logically with the accusation of falsifying the text, which would then remove the narrative theme of the culpability of the Jews for responding inappropriately to the truth which is in their possession.

3.6.3 Muqātil's understanding of other tampering verses

The theme of inappropriate response to the prophet of Islam dominates Muqātil's exegesis of verses containing the verbs *labisa* II, *lawā* and *nasiya*. However, his interpretation of one of the *lawā* verses, 3.78, brings out a noteworthy statement of the accusation of textual falsification. The phrase, "twist their tongues with the book," would appear to refer to an act of verbal tampering, and Muqātil glosses it as such. But when he explains the subsequent clause in the verse, he speaks of the Torah and of the actions of erasing and writing. At 4.46, Muqātil takes the similar phrase "twisting with their tongues" in the direction of Jewish verbal disrespect in the presence of Muḥammad. There the context provides the words of a conversation and the parallel verb "traducing." There is no mention of tampering with a text. This leads to the conclusion that Muqātil's statement of textual falsification at 3.78 is triggered not by *lawā* but rather by the scriptural clause, "that you may suppose it part of the book, yet it is not part of the book; and they say, 'it is from Allah,' yet it is not from Allah." As noted above, this clause bears a resemblance to the wording of 2.79, about which the exegete also makes a statement about textual falsification. His understanding of 3.78, therefore, is influenced by his interpretation of 2.79.¹⁶⁸

Muqātil understands verses containing *labisa* II to refer to actions by Jewish leaders to confuse the Jewish community by concealing information about Muḥammad in the Torah

¹⁶⁷ Here Watt's statement that "more is said about inventing falsehood than about concealing" is potentially misleading. "The Early Development," 51. Watt has in mind the verb *farā* VIII ('invent a lie against Allah'), dealt with in section 3.5.4 above. As was seen there, this verb seldom appears in a tampering context in the Qur'ān, and scholars of polemic have not connected verses containing this verb with the accusation of altering the earlier scriptures.

¹⁶⁸ See also the analysis of Muqātil's interpretation of 2.79 in section 3.6.4 below.

and by giving mixed messages about how to respond to the prophet of Islam. He interprets the *nasiya* verses to mean choices by the people of the book to disbelieve in Muḥammad in spite of the clear commandments in their scriptures to believe in him and follow him.

3.6.4 Muqātil's understanding of verses containing expressions of action

The scriptural expression of action which is most suggestive of an act of falsification for Muqātil is the phrase “those who write the *kitāb* with their hands” at 2.79. As described above, the exegete explains this expression to mean that Jewish leaders in Madīna erased the description of Muḥammad from the Torah and wrote in its place a false description which did not match the prophet of Islam. This verse contains neither the verb *ḥarrafa* nor any other verb in the semantic field of tampering. And yet it triggers for Muqātil his strongest statement of the falsification charge.

Andrew Rippin writes that among the *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports that are available for 2.79, virtually all centre on “the notion of the malicious alteration of Jewish scripture.”¹⁶⁹ Attention must also be drawn to the tradition in the *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* which seems to relate to the wording of 2.79:

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās said, “O society of Muslims! How can you question the people of the book, when your book which he has sent down to his prophet, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, is the more recent news from Allah and you recite it undistorted (*yushab*); and when Allah has told you that the people of the book changed (*baddala*) what Allah wrote, and altered (*ghāra* II) the book with their hands, then said, ‘It is from Allah,’ that they may sell it for a little price? Won’t the knowledge that has come to you stop you from asking them? No, by Allah, we have never seen a man from them ask you about what has been sent down to you.”¹⁷⁰

The phrases “with their hands” and “from Allah, that they may sell it for a little price” are identical in scripture and tradition.¹⁷¹

It would appear that this tradition was in circulation already at the time of Muqātil, and

¹⁶⁹ “The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*,” 15-16.

¹⁷⁰ In the *kitāb al-shahādāt*, bāb 31. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. III, 163. The tradition repeats in slightly different wordings in the *kitāb al-tawhīd* and the *kitāb al-i’tisām bi-al-kitāb wa al-sunna*. Goldziher highlighted this *ḥadīth* and called it the “*locus classicus*” of the accusation of falsification in the Tradition literature. “Über muhammedanische Polemik,” 344. Schreiner also gave the tradition a prominent place. “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 593.

¹⁷¹ The version of this tradition in the *kitāb al-tawhīd*, bāb 42 has “they wrote with their hands.” *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. VIII, 208.

that the similarities of wording led him to recount it in his exegesis of 2.79. The question which this exegesis raises is why Muqātil's citation of a strong tradition of falsification at this point appears to be so out of keeping with both the context in the commentary and his understanding of the majority of the tampering verses in the Qurʾān.¹⁷² An answer to this question will be advanced in chapter 5 in relation to the operation of the narrative framework in Muqātil's *Tafsīr*.

The three other expressions of action bring to mind a variety of other tampering actions for the exegete. He associates “sell for a little price” with a financial motivation for concealing information about Muḥammad in the Torah or, in the case of 2.79, for writing falsehoods. The leaders of the Jews are consistently named as the actors, and their tampering action is part of their oppression of the “lowly people.” The exegete interprets “throw behind backs” to mean a willful rejection by Jewish leaders of the authority of the prophet of Islam. Its rare occurrence is associated with tampering contexts. Finally, “inventing a lie against Allah” signifies for Muqātil a more general action of speaking falsely about what Allah has commanded in the past, or indeed speaking theological falsehood which is true blasphemy.

¹⁷² This is a question which Goldziher failed to pursue in his discussion of the *tahrīf* theme in the *aḥādīth*. “Über muhammedanische Polemik,” 344-5. The tradition cited above from the *kitāb al-shahādāt* seems to be the only tradition in Bukhārī about alteration of the Torah. At the same time Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* contains many traditions which tell of interactions between the Jews and Muḥammad in the narrative style of Muqātil's commentary and the *Sīra*. These other traditions seem to assume an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews. Examples from *kitāb al-tawḥīd* (bāb 51) are the version of the stoning verse story associated with 3.93, and the tradition which Goldziher himself quoted, “The people of the book used to read the Torah in Hebrew and give its interpretation (*fassara*) in Arabic for the people of Islam.” Vajda cited the tradition in Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal about a rabbi reading the Torah in the synagogue and stopping at the description of Muḥammad; and the story in Ibn Saʿd of Muḥammad adjuring a Jew to tell him whether his description was to be found in the Torah. “Juifs et Musulmans selon le Ḥadīṭ,” 92. Lazarus-Yafeh noted Ibn Saʿd's story about traditionists who read the Torah every week. “Tawrāt,” (EI2), 394. M.J. Kister collected a large number of traditions about the Torah from a wide variety of sources, and found general acceptance of the opinion that the Torah contains information about Muḥammad and his community. “Ḥaddīthū ʿan banī isrāʾīla wa-lā-ḥaraja: A study of an early tradition,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972), 225. Numerous traditions advance specific sayings as being from the Torah and other earlier scriptures, including *Kitāb Dāniyāl*. Kister, “Ḥaddīthū,” 226-236. In one tradition, “Reading the Torah was made lawful by the Prophet's permission.” Kister, “Ḥaddīthū,” 231. Traditions which report Muḥammad as saying, “neither believe nor disbelieve the people of the book,” or as forbidding ʿUmar to read or copy the Torah—though certainly reflecting ambivalence about previous scriptures—do not constitute accusations of falsification. Schreiner suggested that even when there is accusation of falsification in these traditions, it concerns interpretation (*Erklärung*) rather than text. “Zur Geschichte der Polemik,” 593.

3.6.5 Conclusion

It is clear from the analysis of Muqātil's exegesis of the tampering verses that he did not understand the verbs *harrāfa* and *baddala* to refer to an act of textual falsification of the earlier scriptures by the people of the book either in the distant past or in Madīna at the time of Muḥammad. Rather, he explains the verses containing these verbs with a variety of tampering actions which revolve around response to authority. He recounts stories of verbal alteration of divine commands from the history of the children of Israel. He also tells stories of inappropriate Jewish response to the prophet of Islam.

Muqātil understands 2.79 to refer to a Jewish act of falsification of the text of the Torah. This understanding carries over into his exegesis of 3.78. The trigger for this interpretation is not the appearance or *harrāfa*, *baddala* or any other verb in the semantic field of tampering, but rather the phrase, "write the book with their hands" (2.79). Muqātil places the action in Madīna at the time of Muḥammad's rule as part of an inappropriate Jewish response to the appearance of the prophet of Islam. He does not advance here or elsewhere a suggestion of the corruption of earlier scriptures prior to the rise of Islam.

The remainder of Muqātil's interpretations of some 25 verses of tampering in this chapter portray a variety of actions of tampering which assume intact scriptures in the hands of the people of the book. He mostly tells about how they conceal the contents of the books which are with them. The concealment is largely done by remaining silent while Muslims are asking for information from the Torah, or when God has put on them the responsibility in a past covenant to announce the information about Muḥammad to the people. In fact they give mixed signals to the common people by changing their message in the course of a single day. Tampering actions also include verbal demonstrations of disrespect toward the prophet of Islam, or rejection of his authority, or refusing to follow and obey him according to the stipulations of the covenant. The Jews take the law of God so lightly that they set aside important commandments just because they lacked the will to apply them. The Torah seems to remain solidly in the background of all of these various actions of tampering.

4. Al-Ṭabarī on the Qur'ānic verses of tampering

The *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* comes to us as a massive collection of opinions about the meanings of Muslim scripture as Ṭabarī found them toward the end of the third Islamic century. The unwieldy size of the work has prevented it from ever becoming very popular. For the scholar of Islamic origins, however, a key advantage of the commentary is its abundance of material.

Another advantage of the commentary is the felicitous arrangement of the exegetical comments, which allows the scholar to quickly locate the discussion of any particular part of any verse. Ṭabarī treats each verse of the Qur'ān separately. He first quotes the complete verse, then offers his commentary in segments according to the distinct phrases or clauses of the verse. He signals the start of a new segment with the formula, “Remarks concerning the interpretation of his [Allah's] saying, Almighty ,”¹ after which he gives the phrase or clause from the verse.

In each segment, then, he offers a collection of opinions on that part of the verse.² The opinions come in the form of *hadith* which are attributed to authorities of the past and connected to them in each case through an *isnād*. Ṭabarī's commentary contains more than 35,400 such traditions attested through 13026 different chains of transmission.³ Traditions are attributed most often to 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās and Mujāhid. Heribert Horst found that a single *isnād* leading from Muḥammad ibn Sa'd Kātib al-Wāqidī back to Ibn 'Abbās appears some 1564 times.⁴ Other authorities cited frequently—including in the passages examined in this study—are Qatāda, al-Suddī, al-Rabī' and Ibn Zayd. In terms of exegetes of the formative period, 'Abd al-Razzāq is included in a number of the most common *isnāds*,⁵ while al-Farrā' appears in the guise of Ṭabarī's Kūfan grammarian.⁶

¹ cf. Loth, “Ṭabarī's Korancommentar,” 601.

² Calder identifies the citation of named authorities as his second structural characteristic of Qur'ānic commentary. “*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 103.

³ Horst, “Zur Überlieferung im Korankommentar at-Ṭabarīs,” 291.

⁴ “Zur Überlieferung im Korankommentar at-Ṭabarīs,” 294.

⁵ See the *isnād* charts of Horst, “Zur Überlieferung im Korankommentar at-Ṭabarīs,” 296, 301.

⁶ Cooper, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān*, xiii.

In each segment of Ṭabarī's commentary on each verse, he groups the traditions according to different possibilities of interpretation for the phrase or clause in question. He will sometimes preface a group of traditions with the formula, "Interpreters disagree concerning the meaning of God's having said that." After presenting the views of his authorities, Ṭabarī will frequently indicate which interpretation he prefers, sometimes prefacing his views by *qāla Abū Ja'far*, and often by the formula, "For me, the first of these remarks in merit is . . ." He argues his case on the basis of parallel Qur'anic passages, grammar, poetry, theology, or whatever seems to work for him in the context. In one of the *harrāfa* passages, for example, Ṭabarī argues for one interpretation on the basis that "two men" gave it, and that both were "companions of the apostle of Allah."⁷

The material cited by Ṭabarī from his authorities includes a wide variety of literary types. Most often he cites glosses of words, or identification of pronouns. In many passages, including the passages of this study, Ṭabarī relays units of narrative. These narratives may be accounts of biblical figures of the distant past, or reports of the dealings of the prophet of Islam with various groups. Sometimes a narrative tradition about the prophet will be brought in to serve as a *sabab al-nuzūl*. Norman Calder observed that Ṭabarī preferred narrative—both popular and Qur'anic—to theological dogma.⁸

Frequently Ṭabarī will supply his own paraphrase or amplification of the verse, into which he inserts glosses and identifications cited earlier in his traditions. He offers etymological explanations or definitions of words he considers difficult or important. He frequently takes time to try to resolve evident grammatical difficulties in the verse, quoting lines of Arabic poetry as *shawāhid*. If he is familiar with variant readings on any part of the verse, he will include a discussion of the possibilities.

Scholars of *tafsīr* have noted the divergence and even the contradiction⁹ within the material which Ṭabarī cites. In contrast to Muqātil's confident setting forth of a single

⁷ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākīr and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr (Cairo, 1955-), Vol. X, 308.

⁸ Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 108. We shall have opportunity to test this reading in the description and analysis sections below.

⁹ Charfī, "Christianity in the Qur'an Commentary of Ṭabarī," 145.

explanation of the verse, Ṭabarī's exegesis is a polyvalent reading of Muslim scripture¹⁰ —with not only differing interpretations but open disagreement among the chosen authorities.¹¹ The exegete usually indicates which interpretation of a verse he favours, frequently supporting his reading with lexicographical and grammatical criteria. His preference may or may not have the support of a traditional authority; his opinion may not appear to be based in any way on historical criticism. At times he may bring in quite sophisticated discussions of dogmatics or law.¹² But what is Ṭabarī's role in the selection and presentation of this diverse material?

Charfi suggests that the plurality of interpretations offered by the exegete create an impression in the reader's mind, "seeking to influence his feelings rather than to provide any intellectual conviction."¹³ Other scholars would like to give Ṭabarī the creative role of an exegete-theologian.¹⁴ He appears to have been upholding an Islamic orthodoxy of his time, and omits, for example, any reference to Muqātil, "presumably because of his tarnished reputation as a reliable source."¹⁵ Bosworth concludes, "His own dogmatic beliefs appear to have been basically within the framework of 'orthodox' Islam as conceived, e.g. in the environment of Ibn Ḥanbal just before al-Ṭabarī's time and that of al-Ash'arī after him."¹⁶

The following descriptions and analyses of Ṭabarī's exegesis of the tampering verses will follow the order of chapter three: alteration verbs, concealing verbs, other verbs of tampering, and expressions of action. In this chapter, however, analysis of each category of exegesis will immediately follow description.

¹⁰ Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 103, cf. 121-122.

¹¹ Tottoli highlighted this characteristic of Ṭabarī's commentary as the feature that "determined its persuasive force and its unifying power and allowed the story of salvation to take root in the collective memory of the community of believers." *Biblical Prophets*, 102.

¹² Rippin, "Al-Ṭabarī," 321.

¹³ Charfi, "Christianity in the Qur'an Commentary of Ṭabarī," 145.

¹⁴ Claude Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue, et théologie en Islam: l'exégèse coranique de Tabari (m 311/923)* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1990), 281. cf. Loth, "Ṭabarī ist eben nicht Historiker in unserm Sinne, sondern, wie Mas'ūdī richtig bemerkt hat, Theolog—in des Wortes höchster Bedeutung." "Ṭabarī's Korancommentar," 602.

¹⁵ Rippin, "Al-Ṭabarī," 321. Goldziher noted that Kalbī and Wāqidī were also on Ṭabarī's black list. *Richtungen*, 87, n. 6. And yet Ṭabarī makes use of Ibn Ishāq, whose narratives are so similar to Muqātil's.

¹⁶ Bosworth, "al-Ṭabarī," 12.

4.1 Commentary on verses of alteration

4.1.1 Description

Ṭabarī's exegesis of the *ḥarrafa* verses will be examined first in this section. Again, the descriptions of the *ḥarrafa* interpretations will contain greater detail because of the prominence of these verses in the lists given by scholars of Muslim polemic, as well as in the popular Muslim doctrine of scriptural corruption today. These longer descriptions will also serve to demonstrate Ṭabarī's overall exegetical routine. His exegesis of the three verses containing *baddala* will then be described in a more concise fashion.

Baqara (2).75

Ṭabarī divides Baqara 75 into four segments for his commentary.¹⁷ He provides simple glosses for several of the phrases at the start of the verse. He identifies the unspecified pronouns "they" and "you" as the Jews and the companions of Muḥammad. He gives a grammatical explanation of the word *fariq* ('party') along with a couple of lines of poetry to exemplify its use. In the course of his commentary on the verse he brings in the views of six authorities, for eight *ahādīth*, complete with *asānīd*. The exegesis also includes an example of paraphrase or amplification, in which Ṭabarī assumes the second person voice, expands on the verse, and applies it directly to the Jews at the time of Muḥammad.

Ṭabarī immediately says that the interpreters (*ahl al-ta'wīl*) disagree about the meaning of the phrase, "there is a party of them that heard Allah's word, and then tampered with it, and that after they had comprehended it, wittingly." According to the first view, those who tampered were the Jewish scholars (attributed to Mujāhid), and the locus of the tampering was the Torah (al-Suddī). The exegete relays a scenario from Ibn Zayd, who also saw the object of tampering as the Torah. According to this scenario, the Jewish religious leaders tampered with the sanctions and prohibitions in the Torah, changing them. Whenever a person with a righteous claim came to them with a bribe, they would bring out the book of Allah and judge according to that. But if a person making a false claim brought

¹⁷ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 244-249.

them a bribe, they would bring out to him a second book,¹⁸ according to which he would be judged to be truthful. If, however, a man came to them inquiring concerning a matter wherein there was neither truth nor falsehood, and did not offer a bribe, they would enjoin him to act truthfully.¹⁹ According to Ibn Zayd's account, at this point Allah sent down Baqara 44: "Will you bid the people to piety and forget yourselves, while you recite scripture? Do you not understand?"

But other interpreters with whom Ṭabarī is familiar say that the Jews indicated in this verse heard the word of Allah "like the prophets heard," then tampered with it after hearing it (al-Rabī'). Ibn Iṣḥāq said that "they heard the word of Allah" cannot mean "they heard the Torah"—because all of the Jews heard the Torah. Rather, this phrase concerns those who asked Moses to see their Lord, and whom were subsequently struck by lightning.

The narrative which came from "some of the learned" through Ibn Iṣḥāq is that the Jews said to Moses, "O Moses, something prevents us from seeing Allah, so make us hear his speech (*kalām*) when he speaks with you."²⁰ Moses then made this request of Allah, and Allah granted it. Allah said, "command them to purify themselves, and to purify their clothes, and to fast." The Jews did so. Then Moses went out with them as far as the mountain al-Ṭur. When the cloud covered the Jews, Moses commanded them to fall down prostrate. Allah spoke with Moses, and the Jews heard his word (*kalām*) commanding them and forbidding them. They understood what they heard. Then Moses and the Jews returned to the rest of Banū Isrā'īl. "And when they arrived," writes Ṭabarī, "a party of them tampered with (*harrafa*) what he had commanded them." Moses said to Banū Isrā'īl, "Allah commanded you such-and-such," but the group of Jews indicated by "a party of them" said, "On the contrary, he said such-and-such"—in contradiction to what Allah had said to them.

Ṭabarī indicates his preference for this second interpretation of the verse—"the closest to what the ostensive reading²¹ indicates." Allah had in mind a group of Jews who

¹⁸ literally "that book," *dhālika l-kitāb*. *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 246.

¹⁹ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 246.

²⁰ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 247.

²¹ J. Cooper for *zāhir al-tilāwa*. *The Commentary on the Qur'ān*, 403. *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 247.

heard his word (*kalām*) at the time of Moses. “Then they tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) that and changed (*baddala*), after hearing it and knowing it and understanding it.” Allah wanted to stress the gravity of the lie²² which the Jews brought, after he had confirmed the proof (*hujat*) and demonstration (*burhān*) for them. And so, in this verse Allah notifies his believing servants of the vanity of their hopes about “the faith of their surviving descendants in the truth, light, and guidance which Muḥammad had brought them.” Here Ṭabarī provides a paraphrase or amplification of the verse:

How do you expect these Jews to affirm your truthfulness (*taṣḍīq*), when you inform them by what you tell them of the reports from Allah of something invisible which they have not witnessed or seen? Some of them heard from Allah his word (*kalām*) and his command and his prohibition, then changed (*baddala*) it and tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) it and denied (*jahada*) it. Those of their surviving descendants who are among you are more likely to deny (*jahada*) the truth you have brought them, not having heard it from Allah but only from you. And it is more probable that they will misrepresent (*ḥarrafa*)²³ what is in their books from the characteristic (*sifa*) and description (*naʿt*) of your prophet Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, and change (*baddala*) it knowingly, and deny (*jahada*) it and lie (*kadhaba*), than those who were in direct contact (*bashara* III) with the word of Allah (*kalām allāh*) from Allah, exalted his praises, then tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) it after they had understood it and known it, intentional doers (*ʿamada* V) of tampering (*tahrīf*).²⁴

The phrase “they heard the word of Allah” cannot be the understood (*mafhūm*) meaning of “they heard the Torah,” writes Ṭabarī, because both the tamperer (*muḥarrif*) and the non-tamperer among the Jews heard the Torah.²⁵ Rather, specific Jews who tampered with what they heard is in view in this verse. “They had been granted directly (*mubāshara*) the hearing of the word of Allah Almighty, which he did not grant to anyone other than the prophets and apostles. Then they changed (*baddala*) and tampered with (*ḥarrafa*) what they heard from that.”²⁶

At the end of his commentary on 2.75, Ṭabarī provides an important explanation of what he understands the verb *ḥarrafa* to mean. He writes that the meaning of the scriptural phrase “then they tampered with it” is “then they changed (*baddala*) its meaning

²² *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 247.

²³ Thus Adang in *Muslim Writers*, 228. Burton gives “distort.” “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 100.

²⁴ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 247-8.

²⁵ Cf. Cooper, *The Commentary on the Qurʾān*, 403, note.

²⁶ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 248.

(*maʿnan*).”²⁷ The sense of *harrafa* here is that “they bend (*māla*) its direction (*jīha*) and meaning (*maʿnan*) to something else.”²⁸ Ṭabarī further explains that those who tampered with the word of Allah fully understood that what they were reporting was contrary to the correct interpretation, and knew that by tampering with it they were uttering nonsense and lying.²⁹

Therefore, concludes Ṭabarī, this verse is Allah’s report about the boldness of the Jews to accuse (*buht*), and their targeting of animosity (ʿ*adāwa*) to him and to his apostle Moses in earlier times. But the verse also applies to a similar targeting of animosity by the descendents of those earlier Jews toward Allah and his apostle Muḥammad, out of injustice (*baghy*) and envy (*ḥasad*).³⁰

Nisāʾ (4).46

Ṭabarī divides Nisāʾ 46 up into seven segments, and under each he lists the views of the interpreters on that part of the verse.³¹ He offers the opinions of eight authorities in 23 *ahādīth*, almost half of them from Mujāhid. His exegesis of the verse incorporates grammatical explanation, gloss, definition, identification of unspecified pronouns, attribution, short narrative, paraphrase and amplification.

He begins the passage with a long grammatical explanation of the phrase, “some of the Jews (*hādū*).” There are disparate views over whether this phrase would be more correct with *man* inserted between *hādū* and the verb *yuharrifūna*. He gives the views of the Arabic experts of Kūfa and Baṣra, and discusses the common usage of Arabic speakers, giving examples from poetry and from the Qurʾān. For example, he uses 4.44, “have you not seen those who were given a portion from the book,” to identify *hādū* as the Jews. Later in his exegesis of this verse, Ṭabarī offers a grammatical explanation of the expression *anzurnā*

²⁷ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 248. Ṭabarī adds here in more technical language: “and its interpretation (*taʾwīl*) is ‘and they change (*ghāra* II) it’, and its original (*aṣl*) is derived (*inḥirāf*) from the deflection of the thing from its direction (*jīha*), which is its inclination (*mayl*) from it to other than it.”

²⁸ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 249. Cf. Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 229; Saeed, “The Charge of Distortion,” 423.

²⁹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 249. The last two words of this quote are participles of *batāla* and *kadhāba*.

³⁰ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 249.

³¹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 430-439.

(“regard us!”).³²

On the phrase, “they tamper with the words,” Ṭabarī offers a definition similar to the one he offered at 2.75. This phrase means “they change (*baddala*) their meaning (*maʿnan*) and alter (*ghāra* II) them from their interpretation (*taʿwīl*).”³³ The exegete also gives an explanation of “out of their places,” glossing it as “out of their places (*amākin*) and their meanings (*wujūh*)”³⁴ He notes Mujāhid’s view that “words” (*kalim*) means the Torah, but says no more about this line of interpretation.

The largest part of Ṭabarī’s explanation of 4.46 is taken up with explaining the speeches of the Jews and the words they should have said.³⁵ According to his description, when the Jews say, “We heard and we disobey,” they mean that they heard the command of Muḥammad and they will not obey (*tāʿa*) him. When they say, “Hear, and be thou not given to hear,” they mean they want Muḥammad to listen to them, but they will not submit to (*qabila min*) his command. The Jews used to say “observe us (*rāʿinā*)”³⁶ in order to mock (*hazaʿa* X) the apostle of Allah. By using this expression they wanted to counteract (*baṭala* II) him and give the lie (*kadhaba*) to him. For among the Jews, reports Qatāda, there was abomination (*qabiḥa*).³⁷

In this section, the exegete and his chosen authorities offer a range of vocabulary to describe the tampering action which they envision. Ṭabarī writes that the Jews used to say “hear, be thou not given to hear” in order to insult (*sabba*) the prophet of Islam and to hurt (*adhiya* IV) him with abomination (*qabiḥ*). He cites Ibn Zayd to confirm that the Jews used this expression as an insult (*adhan*), abusing (*shatm*) the prophet and deriding (*istihzāʿ*)

³² *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 430-432.

³³ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 437.

³⁴ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 432.

³⁵ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 433-7.

³⁶ Ṭabarī’s exegesis of *rāʿinā* comes at 2.104. There he cites a large number of traditions which attempt to explain this mysterious word. Some interpreters offer the gloss *khilāfan* (‘in contradiction’); others gloss it *arʿinā samʿaka*, which Ṭabarī understands to mean “listen to us and we will listen to you”; yet others offer *al-khaṭṭāʿ*. More relevant to the tampering theme is the way in which the traditions understand the word to have been pronounced: in a mocking way (*istihzāʿ*), and in an insulting way (*sabb*). *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 459-467. Künstlinger discusses Ṭabarī’s explanation at 2.104 in “Rāʿinā,” 877-879.

³⁷ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435.

him.³⁸ The action of tampering (*tahrīf*) with the word (*kalām*), according to Mujāhid and al-Hasan, is done “with their tongues”; and religion is defamed through abuse (*sabb*) of the prophet.³⁹ Mujāhid adds that that Jews meant to say that whatever the prophet would say would not be acceptable (*maqbul*) to them.

Ṭabarī’s explanation of “twisting with their tongues” will be presented in a separate section below. The Jews would have done better, writes Ṭabarī, if after hearing the saying of Muḥammad they would have pledged to obey his command. They should have accepted (*qabila*) what he brought them from Allah. Their honesty and straight dealing with the prophet of Islam would have been more proper for them.⁴⁰

The last clause of the verse brings out an interesting expression from Ṭabarī, a kind of paraphrase or amplification which draws in narrative links from outside the verse. The meaning of, “But Allah has cursed them for their unbelief (*kufr*), so they do not believe (*amuna* IV) except for a few,” is:

But Allah, blessed and almighty, humiliated these Jews, whose characteristics he described in this verse, and drove them away, and removed them from good sense. They sold the truth for their disbelief, meaning by their rejection (*juhūd*) of the prophethood of his prophet Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, and what he brought to them from his Lord: of guidance and clear proofs. And so they do not believe, except a few. He says: they do not believe (*ṣaddaqa*) in Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, and what he brought to them from his Lord, and they do not acknowledge (*qarra*) his prophethood except a few. He says: they do not believe (*ṣaddaqa*) in the truth which you brought them, O Muḥammad, except a little faith.⁴¹

In this closing paraphrase, the exegete’s concern is with the response of the Jews to the prophet of Islam. It is their inappropriate response to the truth which has brought Allah’s curse upon them. The frequency of verbs and expressions of response earlier in the passage serves further to highlight this theme. Indeed this theme seems to give coherence to Ṭabarī’s explanation of the tampering action in the verse.

³⁸ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 434.

³⁹ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 434.

⁴⁰ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 436.

⁴¹ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 439.

Mā'ida (5).13

For his exegesis of al-Mā'ida 13, Ṭabarī divides the verse up into six segments. He passes on the opinions of six authorities in some 12 traditions.⁴² The commentary includes grammatical explanations of “so for” (*fa-bimā*) early in the verse⁴³ and “treachery” (*khā'ina*) later on.⁴⁴ It also includes a detailed discussion of the correct reading (*qira'*) for *qāsiyatan* in the phrase “we made their hearts hard.”⁴⁵ More importantly for the theme of this dissertation, the passage contains an accusation of falsification of the Torah. It closes by noting a claim of abrogation of the command to “forgive”—similar to what Muqātil made, except that Ṭabarī attributes the claim to Qatāda.

Ṭabarī begins his exegesis with a strong opening statement on the covenant (*mīthāq*) referred to at the beginning of the verse.⁴⁶ Allah is telling Muḥammad not to be surprised when the Jews cause anxiety (*hamma*), spread out their hands to him and his companions, break the covenant which is between the prophet and them, and act treacherously (*ghadara*). That is only to be expected, given the record of their ancestors with the covenant which Allah made with them in the past. The exegete catalogues some of the kindnesses which Allah showed to the children of Israel: “I sent from them 12 chiefs (*naqīb*) who were chosen from all of them, in order to detect information about the giants, and I promised to help them, and I gave them their land as an inheritance, and their homes and their possessions, after showing them from the crossing and the signs in the destruction of Pharaoh and his people in the sea, and parting the sea for them, and the walking of the crossing.” But the Jews broke the covenant which they had bound (*wathaqa* IV) with Allah, so he cursed them. If this is what the best Jews did in spite of Allah’s kindness to them, asks Ṭabarī, why be surprised if their “low people” do the same thing?⁴⁷

Ṭabarī then advances an important interpretation of the phrase, “They tamper with the

⁴² *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 125-135.

⁴³ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 125.

⁴⁴ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 131-2.

⁴⁵ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 126-8.

⁴⁶ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 125.

⁴⁷ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 125.

words out of their places”:⁴⁸

He says, powerful his mention: We hardened the hearts of these who broke our covenants from the children of Israel, removing (*manzūʿan*) from them the good, taking away from them the success (*tawfiq*). They do not believe, and they are not rightly guided (*hadā* VIII), and Allah certainly removed the success and the faith from their hearts. They tampered with (*harrafa*) the word (*kalām*) of their Lord which he sent down upon their prophet Moses, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, and it is the Torah. So they changed (*baddala*) it and wrote with their hands other than what Allah, exalted and powerful, sent down upon their prophet. They said to the ignorant of the people, “This is that word (*kalām*) of Allah which he sent down upon his prophet Moses” — may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him — “and the Torah which he revealed to him.” And this characterized the Jews in the centuries after Moses, some of who reached (*daraka* IV) the era of our prophet Muḥammad,⁴⁹ may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him. But Allah, exalted his mention, included them among those about whom he initiated the report from the time of Moses, since (*idh*) they were their descendents, and followed their way (*minhāj*) in the lie (*kadhib*) against Allah, and the falsehood (*firyā*) against him, and the breaking of the covenants, which he made with them in the Torah.

In this passage, Ṭabarī indicates an action of tampering with the Torah itself. He specifies that the Jews changed the text and wrote something of their own invention. Then they tried to pass off this new writing as the revelation which Allah gave to Moses. The exegete says that this tampering action continued from the period after Moses up to the time of Muḥammad. He then follows up this long passage with a tradition from Ibn ʿAbbās that the “words” indicated in the verse mean “the legal punishments (*hudūd*)⁵⁰ of Allah in the Torah.”⁵¹

Ṭabarī’s explanation of the phrase, “and they have forgotten a portion of what they were reminded of,” will be presented in a separate section below. On the phrase, “and thou wilt never cease to light upon some act of treachery on their part, except a few of them,” the exegete finds both a general description and a specific situation. He writes that the way in which the Jews broke their covenant with Allah demonstrates in general their perfidy (*ghadr*) and their faithlessness (*khiyāna*). Ṭabarī cites Qatāda to the effect that the

⁴⁸ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 128-9.

⁴⁹ This sentence is: *wa hādha min šifati l-qurūn allafī kānat baʿda mūsā mina l-yahūdminman adraka baʿdahum ʿašra nabīna Muḥammad. Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 129. Burton’s translation of the whole clause: “That conduct went on from the period after Moses up to the time of Muḥammad.” “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 102.

⁵⁰ Burton, “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 102: “penal provisions.” Saeed, “The Charge of Distortion,” 425: “punishments specified.”

⁵¹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 129 (trad. 11586).

“treachery” of the Jews referred to in this verse is their faithlessness and falsehood (*kadhib*) and immorality (*fujūr*).

But there was a particular event in the life of the apostle of Allah when, after he approached the Jewish tribe Banū Naḍīr, they planned to murder him and his companions.⁵² Ṭabarī agrees with Mujāhid and ‘Ikrima in connecting the “treachery” of the verse with the day the prophet “entered their walls.”⁵³ The prophet had wanted to ask the Jews for help concerning the blood money (*diyya*) of the ‘Amarī tribe, but on the way Allah warned him of the Jewish tendency to cause him trouble.⁵⁴

The commentary on 5.13 ends with a discussion of the divine command to pardon and forgive the Jews for their treachery. Ṭabarī paraphrases this part of the verse: “Pardon, O Muḥammad, these Jews who intend murder in spreading out their hands to you and to your companions; and forgive them their crimes, giving up the objection to their reprehensible behaviour. I love whoever does good by pardoning and forgiving the one who does evil to him.”⁵⁵ The exegete notes the tradition from Qatāda that this command to forgive was subsequently abrogated. Yes, said Qatāda, the prophet of Islam was to pardon and forgive as long as the command to fight had not been given. But then al-Tawba (9).29 superseded the earlier command: “Fight those who do not believe in Allah and the last day, and not forbid what Allah and his apostle have forbidden—such men as practise not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book—until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled.” Those intended here are the people of the book, said Qatāda. “So Allah, exalted his praise, commanded his prophet, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, that he fight them, until they surrender (*salama*), or ‘settle down’ (*qarra*) through *jizya*.”⁵⁶

⁵² *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 133.

⁵³ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 131-2 (trads. 11590-92).

⁵⁴ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 133.

⁵⁵ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 134.

⁵⁶ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 134-5.

Mā'ida (5).41

On al-Mā'ida 41, Ṭabarī offers a very long passage of commentary, chock full of fascinating narrative.⁵⁷ He divides the verse into five sections for his exegesis. He passes on 21 traditions which he attributes to 10 authorities, some of them substantial narratives. He includes gloss, identification of unspecified pronouns, attribution, paraphrase, amplification of scriptural phrases, definition, grammatical explanations, and narrative. The narratives, though long and detailed, will be described as fully as possible because of their importance in determining what Ṭabarī and his chosen authorities have in mind for the tampering action in this verse.

The exegete notes right at the start of his commentary that the interpreters of the Qur'ān (*ahlu l-ta'wīl*) have disagreed (*khalafa* VIII) on whom is meant by this verse. Some of the interpreters say that this came down concerning Abū Lubāba ibn 'Abd al-Mundhir. When the prophet of Islam was besieging the Jewish tribe Banū Qurayza, Abū Lubāba pronounced a command of "slaughter" (*al-dhabh*) upon them. Other interpreters say that this verse came down concerning an anonymous Jew who asked his ally from the Muslims for a ruling from the apostle of Allah. This Jew had killed another Jew and wanted to know what judgment the prophet of Islam would give on his crime. The murderer told his Muslim acquaintance that if the prophet gave a judgment of paying blood money (*diyya*), he would accept it. But if the prophet ruled capital punishment (*al-qatl*), he wouldn't even bring the case before him. This second interpretation emerges again later on in Ṭabarī's commentary through a tradition attributed to Qatāda.

A third group of interpreters claim, however, that the occasion of revelation for 5.41 was the Jew 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṣūryā and how "he apostatized (*radda* VIII) after his submission (*islām*)."⁵⁸ This third interpretation claims the bulk of the material provided by Ṭabarī in explanation of 5.41.

The first narrative which Ṭabarī offers to support the third interpretation is a tradition from Abu Hurayra (Ibn Ishāq is mentioned in the chain of transmission):⁵⁹ The religious

⁵⁷ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 301-318.

⁵⁸ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 303.

⁵⁹ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 303-304 (trad. 11921).

leaders of the Jews were gathered in the house of study when the apostle of Allah had come to Madīna. A married man and a married woman from the Jews had committed adultery. The religious leaders decided to bring this man and woman to Muḥammad and ask him for a judgment on their act of adultery. In this way they appointed Muḥammad arbitrator (*ḥakam*) over the two. They said among themselves, “If he judges their deed with *tahmīm*, then obey him—for in that case he is only a secular leader (*malik*).” *Tahmīm* is explained as flogging the guilty with a whip, blackening their faces, seating them upon donkeys, and turning their faces toward the rear of the donkeys. “But if he gives a sentence of stoning, then beware of him, because he will steal (*salaba*) what is in your hands.” So they approached the prophet of Islam and said, “O Muḥammad, this married man committed adultery with this married woman. Pass judgment on the two. We have appointed you as arbitrator over them.” The apostle of Allah then proceeded to the house of study (*midrās*) where the Jewish religious leaders were. He addressed them, “O community of the Jews, bring out to me your scholars.” So they brought out ‘Abd Allāh ibn Šūriyā, known as the ‘one-eyed.’ Some of the Banū Qurayza said that they also brought out Abū Yāsir ibn Akḥtab and Wahb ibn Yahūda. The religious leaders said, “These are our scholars.” So the apostle of Allah questioned them until they disclosed concerning Ibn Šūriyā, “This is the most knowledgeable one in the Torah who remains.” The prophet of Islam then coaxed (*khalaba* III) Ibn Šūriyā, a young man known for establishing prescriptions (*sanna*) for the Jews. Muḥammad pressed the question upon him,⁶⁰ saying, “O Ibn Šūriyā, I adjure you by Allah, and remind you of him whose hands are upon Banū Isrā’īl: Do you know that Allah gave a sentence of stoning for whomever commits adultery, in the Torah?” Ibn Šūriyā answered, “By Allah yes!⁶¹ By Allah, O Abū al-Qāsim, they certainly know that you are a sent prophet, but they envy (*ḥasada*) you.” So the prophet of Islam gave the command concerning them, and the two were stoned beside the door of his mosque among the Banū ‘Uthmān ibn Ghālib ibn al-Najjār. Then Ibn Šūriyā disbelieved (*kafara*) after that, so Allah sent down, “O Messenger, let them not grieve thee that vie with one another in unbelief,

⁶⁰ *alazza*. The editor suggests a gloss of *alahḥa* (*lahḥa* IV). *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 304 n. 2.

⁶¹ *allāhumma na‘am*.

such men as say with their mouths, 'We believe' but their hearts believe not."⁶²

Ṭabarī immediately continues his exegesis with a second narrative, a tradition attributed to al-Barā' ibn 'Āzab:⁶³ A Jew who had been blackened and flogged passed by the prophet of Islam. The prophet called one of the Jewish scholars and asked him, "Do you find the legal punishment (*ḥadd*) of adultery among you thus?" The scholar answered, "Yes." But Muḥammad persisted with the scholar, "Then I adjure you by him who sent down the Torah upon Moses, do you find the legal punishment of adultery among you thus?" This time the scholar answered, "No," then added, "and if you had not adjured me in this way, I would not have told you—rather, it is stoning." The Jewish scholar explained that because of the frequent occurrence of adultery among their nobility, the Jews had given up (*taraka*) the sentence of stoning. They put another punishment in the place (*makān*) of stoning, that is blackening and flogging. In response Muḥammad declared, "O Allah, I am the first to revive your command, since they put it to death."

Without a break, Ṭabarī passes on a third narrative, a tradition again attributed to Abū Hurayra:⁶⁴ A Jewish man came to Muḥammad and indicated that one of the Jews had committed adultery. The Jews said among themselves: "If this prophet is sent, you know that stoning is an obligation (*fard*) upon you in the Torah, but you concealed (*katama*) it, and you agreed amongst yourselves about its punishment. Now we will ask this prophet, and if he gives us a legal ruling of what is an obligation upon us concerning stoning in the Torah, we gave that up (*taraka*)." Then they approached the prophet of Islam and said, "O Abū al-Qāsim, a man of ours has committed adultery. What punishment would you prescribe?" Muḥammad did not reply to them, but rather he stood up and proceeded immediately to the *midrasa* of the Jews. He found them studying the Torah carefully (*darasa* VI) together in the House of *al-midrās*. He appealed to them, "O assembly of the Jews. I adjure you by Allah who sent down the Torah upon Moses, what do you find (*wajada* impf.) in the Torah concerning the punishment for adultery?" They said, "We find blackening and flogging." But their rabbi at the side of the room kept quiet. When the

⁶² *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 304.

⁶³ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 304-5 (trad. 11922).

⁶⁴ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306-7 (trad. 11924).

prophet of Islam saw his silence, he peppered him with questions.⁶⁵ The rabbi said, “By Allah, since you adjure us, we find their sentence to be stoning.”

Muḥammad took the opportunity to ask him, “Who was the first to make concessions (*rakhaṣa* V) for you in the command (*amr*) of Allah?” The rabbi explained that once a Jewish king named Ibn ‘Amm had committed adultery, but was not stoned. Then later, when a commoner committed adultery, the king wanted to stone him. But the people insisted that the commoner not be stoned until the king was also stoned. “Then they agreed (*ṣalaḥa* VIII) amongst themselves on a punishment short of stoning, and they gave up (*taraka*) stoning. In response the prophet of Islam declared, “I impose (*qaḍā*) what is in the Torah.”⁶⁶ According to this tradition, this was the occasion of revelation for the entire passage al-Mā’ida (5),41-44.⁶⁷

After relating these three long narratives, Ṭabarī gives his ruling on which of the interpretations he favours.⁶⁸ It is clear that a “people from the hypocrites” is in view, he writes. Yes, it is conceivable (*jā’iz*) that Abū Lubāba or others still could be meant by this verse. But since Abū Hurayra and al-Barā’ ibn ‘Arab—both companions of the messenger of Allah—went for the third option, the correct interpretation would be that the verse came down concerning ‘Abd Allāh ibn Šūriyā.

In summing up this interpretation, Ṭabarī offers a characterization of the people whom he understands to be guilty of the tampering action. His amplification of the first part of the verse includes the following:

O apostle, let them not grieve you who vie with one another in rejection (*juḥūd*) of your prophethood, and the denial (*takdhīb*) that you are my prophet, from those who said, “We believe (*saddaqa*) in you, O Muḥammad, that you are Allah’s delegated apostle, and we know that for certain, through our discovery (*wujūd*) of your characteristics (*sifa*) in our book.”⁶⁹

Ṭabarī supports this characterization by repeating the confession made to the prophet

⁶⁵ for *alazza yanshuduhu*. *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306.

⁶⁶ Burton cites the specification of the Torah as an example of *ta’yīn*, seeing this as an advance on traditions about Muḥammad judging according to the ‘book of Allah.’ “Law and exegesis,” 280.

⁶⁷ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306-7.

⁶⁸ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 308.

⁶⁹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 308.

of Islam by Ibn Sūriyā: “By Allah, O Abū al-Qāsim, they definitely know that you are the sent prophet, but they envy (*hasada*) you.” He adds that though these words passed the lips of Ibn Sūriyā, they did not match (*muṣaddiq*) what was in his heart. Thus, in this verse Allah informed Muḥammad of what was hidden in the conscience of Ibn Sūriyā.

The exegete continues to characterize the Jews in glosses and paraphrases throughout his explanation of this verse. On “the Jews who listen to falsehood, listen to other folk, who have not come to thee,” Ṭabarī finds the source of grief to be the Jews’ denial (*takdhīb* and *juhūd*) of the prophethood of Muḥammad. He writes that Allah describes the blameworthy (*dhamīm*) characteristics of the Jews thus:⁷⁰ their deeds are evil (*radī*’); they regard the prohibited as lawful; their foods are evil and their eating places vile (*danī*’); they accept bribes and take property illegally (*suht*). In fact, these Jews are “a people of falsehood (*ifk*) and lying (*kathib*) against Allah, and tampering with his book.”⁷¹ Further on in his exegesis, Ṭabarī appears to characterize the Jews as fornicators (*bāghūn*).⁷²

The verse itself indicates that it is “the Jews who listen to falsehood, listen to other folk, who have not come to thee.” However, who are the two groups implied by the clause? Ṭabarī’s authorities do not agree,⁷³ but he favours the view that it is the Jews of Fadak who do not come directly to the messenger for a ruling, and the Jews of Madīna are the “other folk” whom the Jews of Fadak listen to instead.⁷⁴

At this point Ṭabarī gives more material on the process whereby the Jews of the past gave up the stoning penalty, attributed to al-Suddī.⁷⁵ He writes that Allah had sent down upon the children of Israel the command, “When anyone of you commits adultery, stone him.” The Jews did not abandon (*zāla*) this judgment until one of their nobles committed adultery. The narrative then follows the pattern of the second and third narratives above. But in this version, the Jews decide that Allah’s ruling on adultery is “unbearable” (*shadda* VIII), and they agree to modify (*ṣalaḥa* IV) it. The adulterous woman’s name is given here

⁷⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 309.

⁷¹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 309.

⁷² *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 313. *bāghūn* can also mean wrongdoers, oppressors or committers of outrage.

⁷³ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 310.

⁷⁴ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 311.

⁷⁵ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 310-11.

as “Busra,” and it is her father who sends someone to ask the prophet of Islam for a ruling. This father also candidly reveals misgivings about the encounter with Muḥammad: “We fear that he may expose (*fadaha*) us, and tell us what we do.”⁷⁶

On the clause, “they tamper with the words out of their places,” Ṭabarī provides another important explanation of his understanding of the meaning of *harrafa*, to supplement what he wrote about this phrase at 4.46 and 5.13:

These listeners to the lie tamper with (*harrafa*)—listeners to other folk, from them they do not come to you after from the Jews—*al-kalim*. Their *tahrif* was this: their changing (*taghyir*) the judgment (*hukm*) of Allah, almighty his mention, which he sent down in the Torah concerning married women and married men (*muḥṣina*) of adultery by stoning, to flogging and blackening. So he said, almighty his mention, “they tamper with the words,” meaning: these Jews; and the meaning: the judgment (*hukm*) of the words (*kalim*).⁷⁷

In other words, Ṭabarī identifies the object of the tampering action as “the judgment” of the words.⁷⁸ The exegete also provides an explanation for the phrase, “from its places.” He writes that this means, “after Allah had put them into context.”⁷⁹ As for the words *min ba‘d* in the phrase “from (*min ba‘d*) its places,” this can be taken to mean “out of (‘*an*) its places”—which is the wording in 4.46 and 5.13. Ṭabarī offers an example to support this reading. He writes that when anyone says, “I came to you out of (‘*an*) my leisure from the activity,” they really intend, “after (*ba‘d*) my leisure from the activity.”⁸⁰

Ṭabarī includes yet another account of the same narrative situation which he related earlier in his exegesis—this time triggered by the phrase, “If he gives you this, then take it, and if he does not give it, then beware.”⁸¹ He attributes the tradition to Ibn ‘Abbās:

A woman from the Jews committed adultery. Allah had given a judgment in the Torah to punish adultery with stoning. But the Jews did not want (*naḥisa*) to stone her, so they said, “Hurry to Muḥammad. It might be that there will be with him concession (*rukḥṣa*). If

⁷⁶ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 311.

⁷⁷ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 313.

⁷⁸ Burton, “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 102: “God contents Himself with saying, ‘they alter words’ since His listeners will realise that He means, ‘they distort [the ruling conveyed by] the words.’”

⁷⁹ Burton’s translation in “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 102. Literally “after Allah placed that its places.” *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 313.

⁸⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 313.

⁸¹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 315.

there is concession, then accept it.” So they went to the prophet of Islam and asked him, “O Abū l-Qāsim, if one of our women commits adultery, what do you say concerning her?” The prophet, “What is the sentence (*ḥukm*) of Allah on adultery in the Torah?” The Jews said, “Never mind the Torah;⁸² we want to know what you say.” The prophet of Islam said, “Bring me your scholars in the Torah, which was sent down upon Moses.” Then he adjured them, “By him who saved you from the people of Pharaoh, and by him who parted the sea, and saved you and drowned the people of Pharaoh, tell me: What is the judgment of Allah in the Torah concerning adultery?” They said, “His sentence is stoning.” So the prophet of Islam pronounced this very ruling for the Jewish adulteress, and she was stoned.

Near the end of his exegesis of 5.41, Ṭabarī offers an alternate scenario in explanation of the meaning of the verse, from a tradition attributed to Qatāda. The story is about retaliation rights between the Jewish tribes of Banū Naḍīr and Banū Qurayza.⁸³ Whenever the Banū Naḍīr killed someone from the Banū Qurayza, they did not allow the Banū Qurayza to retaliate, but rather only gave them blood money (*diyya*). This was because of what the Banū Naḍīr considered as their superiority over the Banū Qurayza in nobility. But when the Banū Qurayza killed someone from the Banū Naḍīr, the Banū Naḍīr would accept nothing less than retaliation (*qawad*). When the prophet of Islam arrived in Madīna, the Banū Naḍīr wanted to present just such a case to Muḥammad. However, one of the hypocrites explained to them that if the one they’d killed had been killed with premeditation, the prophet of Islam would inevitably award equal right of retaliation.⁸⁴ “If he accepts blood money from you, take it,” advised the man. “but if not, be on your guard about him.”

Ṭabarī gives one last tradition to explain what his various authorities understand the tampering action in the verse to be. According to a saying attributed to Ibn Zayd, “they tamper with the words out of their places” means “they do not impose (*wada‘a*) what

⁸² Burton, “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 102. Literally, “We called from the Torah.”

⁸³ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 315-316 (trad. 11937).

⁸⁴ Burton, “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 104. Cf. Burton, “Law and exegesis,” 281.

Allah sent down.”⁸⁵

However, the exegete continues up to the end to highlight the character of the tamperers. In his comments on “Whomsoever Allah desires to try, thou canst not avail him anything with Allah,” Ṭabarī for a third time specifies the sin of the Jews and hypocrites as their denial (*juhūd*) of the prophethood of Muhammad.⁸⁶ Further, “Those whose hearts Allah desired not to purify,” are polluted by “the filth (*danas*) of unbelief and the stain (*wasakh*) of *shirk*.” For such people, writes the exegete, Allah desires only degradation (*khizy*) in this world—“that is humiliation (*dhull*) and despicableness (*hawān*)”—and in the world to come the eternal chastisement of hell.⁸⁷

Baqara (2).59 and al-A‘rāf (7).162

Ṭabarī’s interpretation of 2.59 follows on from his exegesis of the preceding verse and the narrative situation set up there. God commanded the children of Israel to pronounce a certain word when they entered a town (2.58). At 2.59, Ṭabarī’s exegesis is mainly taken up with the saying and entering posture which the children of Israel substituted in place of what God had commanded them.⁸⁸

The exegete immediately glosses *baddala* with *ghāra* II, and writes that this verse is concerned with the *tabdil* and *taghyīr* which the children of Israel committed. Then he offers 17 traditions which attempt to identify the substitution. The first of these traditions is traced back to the apostle of Allah.⁸⁹ Here the children of Israel entered the gate crawling on their backsides instead of bowing prostrate. And instead of saying *hiṭṭa* as they were commanded, they said *hibba fi sha‘ira*, “seeds on a piece of hair.”⁹⁰ Other traditions assert that the substituted expression was “wheat on a piece of hair” (*hiṭṭa fi sha‘ira*),⁹¹ or even “red wheat.” The most elaborate description of the Jewish saying is in a tradition attributed

⁸⁵ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 316 (trad. 11938).

⁸⁶ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 316.

⁸⁷ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 318.

⁸⁸ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 112-119.

⁸⁹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 112 (trad. 1019).

⁹⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 112 (trad. 1019).

⁹¹ Guillaume translates a similar phrase in the *Sira* as “Wheat is in the barley.” *Life of Muhammad*, 250 (Ibn Ishāq, *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. II, 378).

to Ibn Mas‘ūd.⁹² It purports to give a transliteration of the actual sounds the children of Israel made, *haṭā samqā yā azba hazbā*, because it then gives its meaning “in Arabic”: “a grain of red wheat pierced with a black hair.” Variations of the improper posture include entering on the backside while shielding the face.⁹³

Ṭabarī’s traditions also add some explanations to qualify the substitution action. When they said *hiṭṭa*, they were “mocking” (*haza’ a X*).⁹⁴ A tradition attributed to Ibn Zayd specifies that they were mocking Moses.⁹⁵ Later in his exegesis of the verse, Ṭabarī characterizes the action of the children of Israel as disobedience (*ma‘ṣiya*).⁹⁶

At 7.161-2, Ṭabarī picks up on the children of Israel’s “disobedience” (*‘iṣyān*) of Moses.⁹⁷ In explaining this second occurrence of the verses, the exegete does not repeat the traditions he gave earlier, but rather simply supplies one possibility for the substituted saying—“wheat on a piece of hair”—and refers the reader to his citations at 2.59.⁹⁸ Here again *ghāra* II is given as a gloss for *baddala* and explained as an action of verbal substitution. In neither passage is the Torah or any kind of book mentioned.

Baqara (2).211

At 2.211, the object of the verb *baddala* is “Allah’s blessing.” Ṭabarī interprets “blessing” as “Islam, and what he required from the law of his religion.”⁹⁹ To change Allah’s blessing means to alter (*ghāra* II) what Allah covenanted with the children of Israel concerning Islam, and its practice and the entrance into it. Ṭabarī sees the covenant with the Jews to include information about the prophet of Islam and what he brought, that he is Allah’s prophet and apostle. This covenant was in the book of the children of Israel. But the response of the Jews was that they disbelieved (*kafara*) in all of this.¹⁰⁰

⁹² *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 114 (trad. 1029).

⁹³ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 115 (trads. 1030, 1031).

⁹⁴ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 114 (trad. 1025).

⁹⁵ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 115 (trad. 1033).

⁹⁶ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 116, 119.

⁹⁷ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. XIII, 178.

⁹⁸ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. XIII, 179.

⁹⁹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. IV, 272.

¹⁰⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. IV, 272.

In making this interpretation, Ṭabarī seems to have followed a series of traditions which he cites about the meaning of *baddala*. Traditions attributed to Mujāhid, al-Suddī and al-Rabī^c all interpret “change Allah’s blessing” as to “disbelieve” in it.¹⁰¹ Ṭabarī also includes in this short passage his own paraphrase of the verse’s challenge to the children of Israel: “O you who believe in the Torah, and trust in it. Come into Islam one and all!”¹⁰²

4.1.1 Analysis

Ṭabarī offers a joyful abundance of material in explanation of the *harrāfa* and *baddala* verses. In comparison to Muqātil, he develops the meaning of the verses in a much wider variety of ways. Like Muqātil, Ṭabarī provides gloss or substitution for terms within the verse, and offers narration of actions which are to explain the words of scripture. A major difference, however, is the multiplicity of perspectives which Ṭabarī supplies in the form of traditions attributed to his chosen panel of authorities. The exegete also gives very helpful definitions of terms central to this study, stopping to tender grammatical or etymological suggestions which Muqātil evidently passed over. Ṭabarī sets up relevant scriptural verbs in parallel or in association with other verbs, and offers yet further information through the objects he attaches to key verbs.

Verbal Changes of Interpretation

On Baqara 75, Ṭabarī takes a stand with the interpreters who understand the verse to refer to the account of the children of Israel who asked to see Allah at the time of Moses. He does indeed relay Ibn Zayd’s story about “two books,” but when he states his preference, he makes an argument against that story developing the meaning of *harrāfa* in the verse. In 2.75, *kalām Allah* for Ṭabarī is not the Torah, and though he does list this opinion early on, he later explicitly rejects this option. The description of the tampering action itself differs from the story which Muqātil told in that the group of Jews concerned reported to the people something which contradicted what Allah had commanded. In any case, the tampering action for Ṭabarī is not the alteration of a text, but rather the perversion

¹⁰¹ *Jāmi^c al-Bayān*, Vol. IV, 273 (trads. 4042, 4044 and 4045).

¹⁰² *Jāmi^c al-Bayān*, Vol. IV, 272.

of the speech of Allah which a group of Israelites heard at the time of Moses.

Ṭabarī also provides important etymological information about his understanding of the meaning of the verb *ḥarrafa*. He uses strong verbs of alteration (*baddala*, *ghāra* II) in his definition, but says that the change which took place was in the meaning and interpretation of the words of Allah. He also offers a pair of synonyms in his definition: *ḥarrafa* is explained by *māla*, and *mayl* renders *inḥirāf*.

There is therefore no suggestion here that the verse refers to a corrupted text of scripture, or that the verbal tampering of a group of Jews at the time of Moses entered into the text which resulted from Allah's revelation to Moses. However, Ṭabarī does indeed take full advantage of the Moses-era story to make a case for the obstinate response of the Jews at the time of Muḥammad. He strongly suggests that if a group of Jews in Moses' time heard the word of Allah himself and deliberately changed it, the Jews of Madīna will be even more likely to deny the preaching of the prophet of Islam. Even beyond that, they will likely be ready to tamper with the material in their scripture which refers to Muḥammad.

In casting this aspersion, Ṭabarī seems to place *ḥarrafa* in parallel with the verb *baddala* as well as with verbs of response like *jaḥada* and *kadhaba*. This seems to indicate an elasticity in the meaning of both *ḥarrafa* and *baddala*. To this may be added the gloss of *baddala* as *ghāra* II at 2.211, along with its multiple gloss there as *kafara*. These two verbs would seem to be able to include a variety of actions which could be included in the larger concept of 'tampering.' Certainly at 2.59, 2.75 and 2.211 Ṭabarī does not connect any of the verbs of alteration with textual falsification.

Ṭabarī's interpretation of *baddala* at 2.59 and 7.162 is similar to his understanding of *ḥarrafa* at 2.75 in the sense that he understands the tampering action in both *baddala* verses to be that of verbal distortion.¹⁰³ And at 2.211, his understanding of *baddala* is similar to Muqātil's exegesis of disbelief in Muḥammad.¹⁰⁴ This points toward meanings of *baddala*

¹⁰³ Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 228.

¹⁰⁴ Burton seems to claim that when Ṭabarī writes at 2.211 that the Jews must not alter the covenant concerning Muḥammad in their book, the exegete is referring to an act of textual falsification: "At this point, *kitmān* has finally been transmuted into outright *tahrīf*." "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 105. But as we have seen, the context in the commentary emphasizes disbelief instead. The mistake is thinking that verbs of alteration always indicate material change.

and *harrafa* which are related to the response of the Jews to the prophet of Islam.

A Twist of the Tongue

On Nisā' 46, Ṭabarī develops the meaning of the verse largely with reference to a speech of certain Jews which seems to be alluded to in the verse itself. He reinforces the definition of *harrafa* which he gave at 2.75, that the change (*baddala, ghāra* II) which is taking place is in the meaning and interpretation.¹⁰⁵ He also gives a helpful gloss for “out of their places,” explaining it with a second word for “places” and with “meanings.” Ṭabarī notes the opinion of Mujāhid that the locus of tampering is the Torah, but he doesn't pursue this line. Instead, he proceeds to explain a verbal action of tampering.

That action, a speech of some Jews, is explained by a series of glosses, often supplied by the exegete's selected traditions. Along with the glosses come attributions of motive on the part of the Jews. The Jews make a deliberate choice, after hearing the command of the prophet of Islam, not to obey him. They insult and abuse him. They mock Muḥammad and slander his religion. They oppose him and ‘give the lie’ to him.

In all of this, the Jews are “twisting with their tongues.” The tampering action (*tahrīf*) which Ṭabarī envisions is a movement with their tongues to change meaning and show disdain for the truth of the prophet. The exegete further develops this picture with his explanation of what would have been more appropriate for the Jews to say and do. The Jews should have chosen to obey the command of Muḥammad, and should have accepted what he brought to them as from Allah. And in his final summing up of the thrust of the verse, Ṭabarī asserts that the Jews have earned Allah's curse by their denial or rejection of the prophethood of Muḥammad. The prophet brought them guidance and clear proofs, but most of the Jews chose to neither believe in nor acknowledge his prophethood.

The richness of the vocabulary of response in this passage creates a strong impression that Ṭabarī found the meaning of *harrafa* here in the way the Jews of Madīna spoke with the prophet of Islam. He offers three verbs for “to insult” or “to mock” (*sabba, adhiya* IV and *haza'a* X) along with their matching nouns (*sabb, adhan* and *istihzā'*). He further gives

¹⁰⁵ Saeed, “The Charge of Distortion,” 424.

two nouns of abuse and disdain (*shatm* and *istikhfāfan*). To characterize the actions of the Jews he uses two strongly negative terms (*makrūh* and *qabiha*). The term *juhūd* (“rejection”) appears in his paraphrase to signify the response of the Jews to the prophethood of Muḥammad. The proper response would have been to accept (*qabila*) his authority and to acknowledge (*qarra* II) his prophethood. The exegete is clearly concerned to safeguard the respect which the prophet deserves. This concentration of expressions of response may also be taken as an indication of a larger concern for Ṭabarī beyond the tampering motif—which may in turn influence his development of the motif.

They wrote something else with their hands

Out of his four commentary passages on the *harrāfa* verses, Ṭabarī makes his strongest sustained accusation of the alteration of a text of scripture in his exegesis of Māʿida 13. He sees this tampering action as part of a larger scenario of Jewish faithlessness both to the covenant which Allah had made with them, and to the agreements they had with the Muslims.

Ṭabarī writes that Jewish leaders changed the Torah and “wrote with their hands” something other than what Allah had revealed. They then passed this new writing off as the very word of Allah which he had revealed to Moses. The wording of Ṭabarī’s charge that the Jews wrote something which they pretended was the Torah is identical to the scriptural wording of 2.79, and resembles the wording of 3.78. The exegete claims that this was the practice of the Jews in the period after Moses and up to the time of the prophet of Islam. Ṭabarī cites no other authority for this interpretation, but rather appears to give these views as his own. Here he makes no mention of changing interpretation or verbal word-play.¹⁰⁶ Later he brings in a tradition from Ibn ʿAbbās to specify that the “words” which the Jews “tampered with . . . out of their places” were the legal punishments of Allah in the Torah.

If this is an accusation of falsification of the Torah, it is not clear why Ṭabarī chooses

¹⁰⁶ However, Abdullah Saeed writes that Ṭabarī seems to understand the change of text to be through false interpretations, writing down those interpretations, and then claiming they are from God. If there is the possibility of tampering with either text or meaning at 5.13, Saeed suggests that the commentary leans toward change of meaning “in the form of attributing false interpretations to God.” “The Charge of Distortion,” 425.

to make this charge only at 5.13, when the same phrase, “tampering with words out of their places” also appears at 4.46 and 5.41. At 4.46 he found the tampering action to be “with the tongue.” At 5.41 he portrays the tampering action as a failure to enforce a Torah command. He gives no indication in those passages of the accusation of textual alteration.

Relaxing the application of a Torah command

The four extended narratives which Ṭabarī offers in his exegesis of 5.41 help greatly in understanding what he has in mind for the tampering action referred to in the verse. He presents the same basic story which Muqātil offered, but he adds information about the method of the Jewish action and the reasons for it. Though the exegete makes note of two other possibilities for the occasion of revelation of the verse, he indicates his preference for the stoning narrative both explicitly and by the abundance of material he devotes to it.

The first narrative establishes the basic outlines of the tampering action. The Jewish religious leaders are hoping for a lenient sentence on a couple from their midst who have committed adultery. They appoint Muḥammad as an arbitrator, but at the same time create a test of his true status. Muḥammad outwits the religious leaders by determining the identity of their best Torah scholar, and by swearing that scholar to honesty. The scholar, Ibn Sūriyā, affirms the sentence of stoning on adultery contained in the Torah. He adds that the Jews know about the status of Muḥammad, that he is a prophet sent by Allah, but they won't acknowledge the truth because they envy him. The tampering action is that though the punishment for adultery is clearly spelled out in the Torah, the Jewish religious leaders do not disclose it and do not want to apply it.

The second narrative dispenses with the test of prophethood and the religious leadership, but brings in an unnamed Jewish scholar for questioning. This scholar too will not tell the truth about the punishment for adultery until he is adjured by his God. But when Muḥammad adjures him, he not only affirms the stoning penalty but explains how a different sentence came to be applied. The frequency of adultery among the Jewish nobility led the people to give up the harsh sentence. They agreed to put a different punishment in the place of stoning, and eventually came to apply a more lenient sentence to noble and

common adulterers alike. The exclamation of Muḥammad in this account is instructive: he claims to be the first to revive a Torah command which the Jews have stopped applying. The tampering action in this narrative is that the Jews gave up the application of the sentence for adultery specified in the Torah, and that they replaced it with their own sentence.

The third narrative includes the test of prophethood and gives the added information that the Jews—prior to approaching Muḥammad—were fully aware of the stoning punishment in the Torah, but chose to conceal the verse and to give up its application. In place of Ibn Šūriyā is the silent rabbi at the side of the Jewish house of study. Only this single Jew responds to the adjuration of Muḥammad and admits that they find the sentence of stoning in the Torah. The prophet of Islam asks for the history of the relaxation of this obligation, and learns that it started with the adultery of a specific king of the Jews. Because the king was not stoned, the sentence could not be applied to a common adulterer either, and so the Jews agreed among themselves on a more lenient punishment. After hearing this history, Muḥammad claims to be imposing a penalty that is in the Torah. The tampering action in this narrative is that the Jews conceal what they know is in the Torah, relax the application of the stoning penalty, agree on another sentence in its place, and give up the Torah punishment.

The fourth narrative also does away with the test of prophethood, and simply presents the Jews as wanting Muḥammad to give a more lenient judgment than stoning. An interesting difference here is that only a woman is taken in adultery. The account indicates at the start that Allah had given the sentence of stoning in the Torah. When the prophet of Islam asks the Jews about this Torah ruling, they want to quickly pass over that and hear his own judgment. But Muḥammad summons the “scholars in the Torah” and asks them about the ruling. They answer without prevaricating that Allah’s ruling is stoning. The tampering action in this account is that though the ruling on adultery is clear from the Torah, the Jews do not want to apply it. They want leniency and that is why they involve the prophet of Islam. They want to bypass what they already know from the Torah.

A striking feature of all of these traditions is that they rely for their narrative dynamic on the existence of a character who knows the Torah well. It may be Ibn Šūriyā in

particular, the “greatest Torah scholar left”; it may be the honest rabbi at the side of the study house; it may be an unnamed scholar whom Muḥammad summons to the scene; or it may even be a group of Jewish scholars. In all four accounts, it is the Jewish scholar who is the source of the affirmation that the punishment for adultery in the Torah is stoning. There is no Gabriel in these narratives to whisper into the ear of the prophet of Islam. Rather, the prophet asks the Torah scholar, “what do you find in the Torah?” regarding the punishment for adultery, and then persists in extracting an honest reply. Indeed, in terms of the narrative, the only way to confirm that the Torah contains the stoning punishment is to find out from a Torah scholar.

The straightforward conclusion to draw from this is that the tampering action which Ṭabarī and his traditions envisioned involves an intact Torah and a scholar who knew its contents well. The exegete does not make an explicit statement about the condition of the Torah one way or the other. In other parts of his commentary he has referred to the Jews writing a *kitāb* other than the Torah, or has passed on accusations of adding to and subtracting from the Torah. But at 5.41 at least, the narrative pull of these four stories provides the main clue for the meaning of *tahrīf*. The variety of verbs which the exegete and his traditions employ to characterize the tampering action in relation to the stoning punishment is striking: to give up (*taraka*),¹⁰⁷ make concessions (*rakhiṣa* V),¹⁰⁸ abandon (*zāla*),¹⁰⁹ ameliorate (*ṣalaha*)¹¹⁰ and desist (*naḥisa*).¹¹¹

The punchline of these accounts is that the prophet of Islam passes a test of prophethood which the Jews set up for him. In two of the accounts, Muḥammad triumphantly proclaims that he is reviving a Torah command. In order for the narrative to gather to its conclusion of the authority of the prophet of Islam, there must come a confirmation that the judgment he gives matches the judgment of the Torah. That comes in these accounts from a Jewish scholar who knows what is in the Torah at hand.

Other parts of Ṭabarī’s exegesis of 5.41 appear to confirm this conclusion. In his

¹⁰⁷ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306.

¹⁰⁸ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306.

¹⁰⁹ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 311.

¹¹⁰ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306.

¹¹¹ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 315.

amplification of the phrase “they tamper with words from their places,” the exegete specifies that the change took place in the “judgment” or “sentence” of the words which Allah caused to descend in the Torah. Ṭabarī appears to be making a distinction between the words of the Torah and the application of the stoning punishment. He gives no indication that he understands a change in the words of the Torah text itself.¹¹² This would match the narrative element that the Jews in the past abandoned the application of a punishment they considered to be too harsh.

In other paraphrases, the exegete appears to devote his attention to characterizing the Jews in their actions of the past and in their present response to the prophet of Islam. His vocabulary highlights their rejection and denial of the prophethood of Muḥammad, based on envy. Along with this Ṭabarī offers a variety of pejorative epithets aiming to portray the Jews as dishonest, wicked, immoral and filthy. These extra pieces seem to support the narrative thrust of the four stoning accounts. The failure of the Jews to apply a judgment of Allah which they know is in the book which he has revealed is just one more proof of their unaccountable obstinacy.

4.2 Commentary on the verses of concealment

4.2.1 Description

Ṭabarī interprets the 11 verses of concealment to mean, in general, that the people of the book have hidden information about the prophet of Islam which they find in the books in their possession. The information about Muḥammad is referred to by a variety of terms such as his *amr* and his *sifa*. Sometimes Ṭabarī suggests motivations for the concealment, such as disbelief, fear and greed. In some passages he indicates larger associated responses, such as refusal to obey Allah or the prophet of Islam. Among the noticeable differences to the methodology of Muqātil is the way that Ṭabarī will eagerly take up the grammatical questions first, for example the lack of *lā* in the second part of 2.42.¹¹³ Ṭabarī discusses

¹¹² Saeed, “The Charge of Distortion,” 426.

¹¹³ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 569. For al-Farrā’, the lack of *lā* in the second part of the verse was evidently the only exegetical question worth pursuing. *Kitāb Ma’ānī al-Qur’ān*, Vol. I, 33-34.

variant readings, for example for “you put it (*tajʿ alūnahu*)” at 6.91.¹¹⁴ He is also much less likely than Muqātil to name particular human characters as subjects of the action.

Because of his citation of multiple traditions, Ṭabarī’s exegesis offers a variety of options for subject, locus and object of tampering. The largest circle of actors is at 5.15: “All the people of the book from the Jews and Christians who lived during the time of the apostle of Allah.”¹¹⁵ The most frequent subject is the Jews. “The Jews and the Christians” are specified as the tamperers at 2.140 and 2.146. At 2.42, 2.159 and 2.174 it is their religious leaders and scholars in particular who are in view.

Ṭabarī and his traditions indicate “the Torah and the Injīl” as the locus of tampering in seven of the 11 verses. At 2.174, 5.15 and 6.91 the Torah alone is mentioned. At 2.159, 3.71 and 4.37 he finds a third locus indicated: the books which Allah sent down to the prophets of the Jews.¹¹⁶

In Ṭabarī’s commentary, 10 of the 11 concealing passages indicate that it is the ‘matter’ or ‘description’ of Muḥammad which is being concealed. Indeed, it is virtually the only object of concealment in eight of the passages. At 2.159, Ṭabarī adds to the matter of Muḥammad “the soundness of his *milla*, and his truth.”¹¹⁷ He finds the mention of “Islam” in the former scriptures to be an object of concealment in six of the verses,¹¹⁸ often in tandem with Muḥammad. Two of the passages connect the name of Muḥammad to a covenant which Allah made with the Children of Israel to make Muḥammad’s matter clear to the people, that he is “Allah’s messenger sent with the truth.” Other objects of concealment in Ṭabarī’s commentary are the Torah’s true testimony about the identity of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes (at 2.140),¹¹⁹ and the information about the *qibla* (at 2.146).¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. XI, 526.

¹¹⁵ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 140.

¹¹⁶ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 249; Vol. VI, 506; Vol. VIII, 354; respectively. At 2.77, Ṭabarī simply indicates “their books.” Vol. II, 256.

¹¹⁷ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 249.

¹¹⁸ at 2.140, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 125, 126; at 2.159, Vol. III, 250; at 2.174, Vol. III, 328; at 3.71, Vol. VI, 506; at 3.187, Vol. VII, 460 (that it is the religion of Allah which is imposed on his servants); at 4.37, Vol. VIII, 352.

¹¹⁹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 124.

¹²⁰ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 187f.

The exegesis of 5.15 seems to be out of step with the other passages as far as the object of tampering is concerned. There Ṭabarī indicates only “the stoning of married adulterers.”¹²¹ In support of this object he retails a narrative, yet another version of the stoning story. When the Jews asked Allah’s prophet about stoning, he flushed out the “most knowledgeable” and adjured him to honesty. Ibn Ṣūriyā explains in this version that so many Jews had to be killed from the application of the stoning punishment that they “shortened” the punishment to flogging.¹²² Ṭabarī brings in this story as the *sabab al-nuzūl* of the phrase in 5.15, “People of the book, now there has come to you our messenger, making clear to you many things you have been concealing of the book.”¹²³

A remarkable feature of Ṭabarī’s exegesis of the verses of concealment is the frequency of occurrence of the phrase, “they find him written (*maktūb*) with them (*‘indahum*) in the Torah and the Gospel.”¹²⁴ The phrase appears 12 times in this exact wording, plus once indicating the Torah alone; and it appears 15 times in similar expressions, such as “they find him written with them.”¹²⁵ Only two of Ṭabarī’s 11 concealing passages do not contain such a phrase.¹²⁶

In his exegesis of the verses of concealing, Ṭabarī does not introduce etymological explanations which help distinguish the individual meanings of the three verbs. Rather, he seems to suggest that he understands all three verbs to have a similar sense. At 2.77, he glosses *sarra* IV with *khafiya* IV.¹²⁷ At 5.15, he glosses *khafiya* IV with *katama*,¹²⁸ and his cross-reference of 2.76 there makes an indirect connection to *sarra* IV at 2.77. Then at 6.91, he glosses *khafiya* IV with both *sarra* IV and *katama*.¹²⁹

An interesting feature of Ṭabarī’s exegesis of two of the *katama* verses is that he

¹²¹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 141.

¹²² *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 142.

¹²³ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*. Ṭabarī also cross references 2.76 at this point: “And when they go privily one to another, they say, ‘Do you speak to them of what Allah has revealed to you, that they may thereby dispute with you before your Lord?’” It was noted above in chapter 3 that Muqātil brings in 5.15 in his exegesis of 5.41. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 577.

¹²⁴ This is of course the Qur’ānic phrase at 7.157.

¹²⁵ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 257 (at 2.77).

¹²⁶ At 5.15 and 6.91.

¹²⁷ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 256.

¹²⁸ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 141

¹²⁹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. XI, 526

brings the verbs *harrafa*, *ghāra* II and *baddala* into his interpretations. At 2.174, he writes that the Jews used to gain a “little price” for their “*tahrīf* of the book of Allah.”¹³⁰ He immediately explains that he means, “their interpretation (*taʿwīl*) of it toward other than its intent (*wajh*), and their concealing of the truth.” Further on in the same passage, Ṭabarī repeats that this verse is about those who tamper with (*harrafa*) the signs of Allah, “and alter (*ghāra* II) their meaning (*maʿānī*).”¹³¹ At 3.187, it is similarly the expression “sell for a little price” which seems to trigger the use of verbs of alteration. The Jews gained an advantage by hiding the truth “and their *tahrīf* of the book.”¹³² In this clause, the verbal nouns *kitmān* and *tahrīf* appear to have been put in parallel. Further on in the passage, Ṭabarī explains the “evil” of the Jews’ transaction with another clause of parallel verbal nouns: “their squandering (*tadyīʿ*) of the covenant, and their *tabdīl* of the book.”¹³³

4.2.1 Analysis

Ṭabarī’s use of verbs of alteration in the exegesis of *katama* verses raises the question of the meanings of the tampering verbs in his mind. It does not seem logical to conclude that Ṭabarī understands an action of alteration from a concealment verb. The other possibility is that there is room in his understanding of *harrafa* for an action of concealing. Whether or not this is the case, the overall impression on reading the exegesis of the concealing verses is that the commentator is preoccupied with a variety of Jewish responses to Muḥammad, most of them negative. There is the clear sense that the Jews know/recognize/understand the truth but are responding to the truth wrongly: they are abandoning and intentionally disobeying what Allah commanded;¹³⁴ neglecting to follow Muḥammad;¹³⁵ refusing to tell what they know;¹³⁶ deliberately choosing to disbelieve;¹³⁷

¹³⁰ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 328.

¹³¹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 329.

¹³² *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 464.

¹³³ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 464.

¹³⁴ at 2.146. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 189.

¹³⁵ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 189.

¹³⁶ at 2.159. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 250.

¹³⁷ at 3.71. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 506.

and, frequently, denying the authority of Muḥammad.¹³⁸ These are the actions which Ṭabarī and his traditions see behind the Jewish concealment of their scriptures. The exegete's use of the imperfect with these actions ('you know,' 'you find') heightens the sense of a continuing crime of inappropriate response. One of the concealment verses suggests the motivation for concealing in a verb of greed, *bakhila* (at 4.37). Most of Ṭabarī's traditions interpret this to be stinginess with the truth about Muḥammad,¹³⁹ but a tradition attributed to Ibn Zayd finds it to mean Jewish avarice "with what Allah gave them of income."¹⁴⁰

The frequency of concealment verses in sūras 2-6 of the Qur'ān, and thus the substantial amount of material on concealment from Ṭabarī and his traditions, has an impact on the development of the tampering motif in the commentary. Indeed, even in his exegesis of *ḥarrafa* at 5.41, concealment is the main action in focus.¹⁴¹ Concealment of information about Muḥammad and other matters implies true content in an intact text of scripture. This understanding will tend to prod the commentator to moderate accusations of textual corruption.¹⁴²

A striking similarity in Ṭabarī's exegesis of the concealment verses to Muqātil's exegesis of the same is in what the two exegetes consider to be at the heart of the matter. Muḥammad is Allah's apostle and prophet to all people.¹⁴³ What he brought is from Allah. The covenant which Allah took with the children of Israel stipulates that they believe in Muḥammad and what he brought, and obey him. The Jewish leaders know this information from the Torah and bear a special responsibility to make this clear to the common people. "From the Muslim perspective, as reflected in the entire body of *tafsīr*, here was the evidence of the major sin of the Jewish rabbis, summed up in the term *kitmān*: the

¹³⁸ at 2.77. *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 256 (trad. 1350); at 3.187, Vol. VII, 459.

¹³⁹ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 350-354.

¹⁴⁰ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 352.

¹⁴¹ Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion," 427.

¹⁴² Adang draws attention to an example of moderation in Ṭabarī's exegesis of one of the concealment verses, 6.91. He first cites a tradition attributed to Sa'īd ibn Jubayr which identifies the Jewish rabbi Mālik ibn al-Ṣayf as the one who said the scriptural words, "Allah has not sent down aught on any mortal." *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. XI, 521-22 (trad. 13535). But the exegete indicates his preference for another interpretation which finds the reference to be to the hypocritical Qurayshites instead—because the Jews do not deny God's revelations. On the contrary, writes Ṭabarī, the Jews "acknowledge (*iqrār*) the *ṣuhuf* of Abraham and Moses, and the *zabūr* of David." *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. XI, 524-5. *Muslim Writers*, 230.

¹⁴³ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 572 (on 2.42).

knowledge of the true status of Muḥammad while concealing that fact in order to mislead the entire community.”¹⁴⁴

4.3 Commentary on other verbs of tampering

4.3.1 Description

Ṭabarī’s interpretations of the verses containing the verbs *lawā*, *labisa* II and *nasiya* encompass a variety of actions of tampering which range from inappropriate response to the prophet of Islam to falsification of the book of Allah.

Twisting

In his interpretation of 3.78, Ṭabarī and his *ahl al-ta’wīl* make use of a trio of verbs which indicate an action of adding something to the book of Allah.¹⁴⁵ Those who “twist their tongues with the book” were the Jews who lived “around the city of Allah’s apostle in his era.” Ṭabarī glosses “they twist” as “they tamper (*harrafa*).”

The Jews twist their tongues with the book,

in order that you think that what they misrepresent (*harrafa*) in their speech (*kalām*) is from the book of Allah and his revelation (*tanzīl*). Allah says, powerful and exalted: but that which they twist their tongues with and misrepresent (*harrafa*) and tell, is not from the book of Allah—pretending as they twist their tongues with *tahrīf* and falsehood (*kadhib*) and deception (*bāṭil*). So they add (*laḥiqa* IV) it to the book of Allah. . . . That with which they twist their tongues, and tell, is not from what Allah sent down to any of his prophets. Rather, they tell what is from themselves, inventing (*farā* VIII) against Allah.¹⁴⁶

Ṭabarī uses the verb *laḥiqa* IV a second time in explaining “they speak falsehood against Allah, and that wittingly.” He understands this to mean that they intentionally (*‘amada* V) speak a lie against Allah, and bear false witness against him, and “add (*ilḥāq*) to the book of Allah what is not from him.”¹⁴⁷

The traditions which the exegete cites continue in a similar vein. A tradition attributed

¹⁴⁴ Rippin, “The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*,” 3.

¹⁴⁵ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 535.

¹⁴⁶ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 535. Cf. Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 229.

¹⁴⁷ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 535-6.

to Qatāda finds that the Jews “tamper with the book of Allah, and introduce something new (*badaʿa* VIII) into it, pretending that it is from Allah.”¹⁴⁸ A second tradition connected with Ibn ʿAbbās says that the Jews used to “add (*zāda*) in the book of Allah what Allah did not send down.”¹⁴⁹

Later in his exegesis of 3.78, Ṭabarī explains the original meaning of *layy* as “twisting (*fatla*) and reversal (*qalb*).”¹⁵⁰ Then at 4.46, Ṭabarī explains the action of “twisting with their tongues” as “a movement (*tahrīk*) from them with their tongues,” changing the meaning of a speech toward what is reprehensible (*makrūh*). The Jews did this to show disdain (*istikhfāfan*) for the truth of the prophet.¹⁵¹ Ṭabarī further explains that “twisting with the tongue” means tampering (*harrafa*) with meaning (*maʿnā*).¹⁵² He then cites a number of traditions which emphasize the aspect of mocking (*hazaʿa* X) and slandering (*taʿana*).¹⁵³ A tradition from Ibn Zayd adds a verb to extend this aspect: the Jews twist with their tongues in order to “counteract” (*baṭala* II) the religion.¹⁵⁴

Confounding

At 2.42, Ṭabarī immediately glosses *labisa* II with *khalāṭa*. But then he seems to sit back and takes a chatty approach to the phrase, “and do not confound the truth with falsehood.”¹⁵⁵ Someone may wonder, writes the exegete, how disbelievers (*kuffār*) could have any truth to confound. In reply, Ṭabarī explains that the situation is one of hypocrisy. In public, the Jews display belief in Muḥammad, but actually they are concealing (*baṭana* X) disbelief in him.¹⁵⁶ They say that Muḥammad is a delegated (*mabʿūth*) prophet; they openly acknowledge (*iqrār*) him and what he brought. However, they conceal what they really think: though they aver (*qarra* IV) that he was sent to others, they deny (*jahada*) that he

¹⁴⁸ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 536, (trad. 7292).

¹⁴⁹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 536, (trad. 7294). Cf. Saeed, “The Charge of Distortion,” 428.

¹⁵⁰ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 537.

¹⁵¹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435.

¹⁵² *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435.

¹⁵³ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435-6.

¹⁵⁴ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 436 (trad. 9706).

¹⁵⁵ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 567-8.

¹⁵⁶ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 567.

was sent to them. In reality, claims Ṭabarī, Allah sent the prophet of Islam to the entire creation.¹⁵⁷ This is how disbelievers can mix the truth with falsehood.

Ṭabarī refers to this earlier explanation when he exegetes 3.71.¹⁵⁸ There he repeats that the people of the book publicly attest to (*taṣḍīq*) Muḥammad and what he brought from Allah, but that doesn't match what is "in their hearts of Judaism and Christianity."¹⁵⁹ A tradition ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās looks ahead to the wording of 3.72 and the story of people planning to feign belief to Muḥammad and his companions in the morning and then show disbelief in the evening. Their intention is to "confound (*labisa* II) their religion, so that they do just like us, and desist (*rafaʿa*) from their religion."¹⁶⁰ As at 2.42, a number of traditions suggest that the "truth" which is being confounded with "falsehood" is Islam with Judaism and Christianity.¹⁶¹

Forgetting

On the phrase "and they have forgotten a portion of what they were reminded of" at 5.13, Ṭabarī discerns a nuance in "forgotten" similar to what Muqātil found. He writes that "they gave up (*taraka*) a part."¹⁶² He cross-references another verse, "and they forgot Allah, and he forgot them,"¹⁶³ and glosses its meaning as, "they gave up the command of Allah, and Allah gave them up."¹⁶⁴ He also relays a more colourful tradition attributed to al-Ḥasan, "they gave up the handle (pl. of *ʿurwa*) of their religion, and the duties (*wazāʿif*) of Allah, exalted his praise, without which their deeds cannot be accepted."¹⁶⁵

At 5.14, Ṭabarī gives slightly more space to the phrase "they forgot a portion of what they were reminded of" when applied to Christians (*Naṣārā*).¹⁶⁶ He offers a revealing

amplification of the verse:

¹⁵⁷ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 568.

¹⁵⁸ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 505.

¹⁵⁹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 504.

¹⁶⁰ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 504 (trad. 7223).

¹⁶¹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 504 (traditions 7224-6); cf. at 2.42, Vol. I, 568 (trad. 825).

¹⁶² *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 129.

¹⁶³ Sūrat al-Tawba (9).67.

¹⁶⁴ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 129.

¹⁶⁵ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 130.

¹⁶⁶ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 135-6.

We took a covenant with the Christians to obey (*tāʿa*) my obligations, to follow (*ittibāʿ*) my apostles and attest (*taṣḍiq*) to them, but they inserted (*salaka*) in my covenant that I took with them the way of a straying community from the Jews. Thus they changed (*baddala*) their religion, and destroyed (*naqada*) it and abandoned (*taraka*) a part of my covenant which I took with them to be faithful (*wafāʿ*) to my covenant, and neglected (*dāʿa* II) my command.¹⁶⁷

Ṭabarī does not mention the “Injil” as the locus of tampering, but a tradition attributed to Qatāda states that “they forgot the book of Allah in their midst and the covenant of Allah which he made with them, and the commandment of Allah which he commanded them.”¹⁶⁸

4.3.2 Analysis

A number of the actions which Ṭabarī understands from the verses containing these three verbs of tampering are actions of disrespect, duplicity and disobedience. Certainly the sense of “confounding” is dishonesty in response to the prophet of Islam. The understanding of “forgetting” is the Jewish neglect of the obligations which God placed upon them.

“Twisting tongues,” or “twisting with tongues,” would appear to refer to a verbal action. At 4.46, Ṭabarī clearly understands this to be the sense.¹⁶⁹ But at 3.78, his focus is on the *kitāb Allāh*, and he describes an action of adding to scripture. Camilla Adang remarks on the exegesis of 3.78, “the context suggests that al-Ṭabarī understands these additions as oral, not textual. When these rabbis twist their tongues, they distort the real meaning of the words into something objectionable, scorning Muḥammad and his religion.”¹⁷⁰ If Adang means by ‘context’ a comparison with the exegesis of 4.46, she is right to say that the tampering is verbal. If she means by ‘context’ the larger exegetical passage on 3.71-78, this also seems to point away from a falsification of text. However, the ‘context’ of the exegesis of 3.78 itself, with the verbs *laḥiqa* IV, *badaʿa* VIII and *zāda*, makes a strong case for textual falsification.

¹⁶⁷ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 135-6.

¹⁶⁸ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 136. At the end of his exegesis of 5.14, Ṭabarī includes among the wrongs of those who “stretched out their hands against you” (5.11) “their *tabdīl* of his book, and their *taḥrīf* of his commands and his prohibitions.” *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 140.

¹⁶⁹ Burton, “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 101.

¹⁷⁰ *Muslim Writers*, 229.

A question about Ṭabarī's understanding of 3.78 is: why did he refer to "the book of Allah" as the locus of tampering without specifying the Torah, even though he had clearly identified the Jews of Madīna as the subject? At 5.14 he similarly refers to the *kitāb Allāh* in relation to a tampering action of the Christians, but doesn't specify the Injil as the locus.

4.4 Commentary on verses containing idiomatic expressions

4.4.1 Description

Write the book with hands

Ṭabarī's exegesis of 2.79 contains a straightforward description of a tampering action by the Jews, as well as a tradition attributed to ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān which makes a clear accusation of Jewish falsification of the Torah.¹⁷¹ According to Abū Jaʿfar, "those who write the *kitāb* with their hands" means:

those who tampered with (*harrafa*) the *kitāb* of Allah from the Jews Banū Isrāʾīl, and wrote a book according to how they interpret it from their interpretations, opposing what Allah sent down upon his prophet Moses, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him. Then they sold it to a people who had knowledge neither of it nor of what is in the Torah, being ignorant of what is in the *kitāb* of Allah."¹⁷²

Here Ṭabarī equates the expression "*kitāb* of Allah" with the Torah, and he states that the Jews tampered with that scripture.

Ṭabarī transmits a number of traditions which simply say that the Jews wrote a *kitāb* which they deceptively sold for gain.¹⁷³ Another tradition portrays the Gentiles (*ummiyyūn*) as doing the same.¹⁷⁴ He also includes a tradition attributed to Abū al-ʿAliya which connects 2.79 to the wording of 4.46: "They took up (*ʿamada*) what Allah sent down in their book from the description of Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon

¹⁷¹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 267-274.

¹⁷² *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 270.

¹⁷³ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 270-271 (trads. 1388 and 1393).

¹⁷⁴ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 270 (trad. 1389).

him, then tampered with (*harrafa*) it from its places.”¹⁷⁵ In the midst of these traditions appears a tradition attributed to ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān and traced by Ṭabarī back to the apostle of Allah himself.

Al-Wayl [“woe”] is a mountain in the fire, and this is what [Allah] sent down concerning the Jews, because they tampered with (*harrafa*) the Torah, and added (*zāda*) in it what they liked, and erased (*mahā*) from it what they disliked, and erased the name of Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, from the Torah. Therefore Allah’s anger was upon them, and he took up (*rafa‘a*) some of the Torah.¹⁷⁶

Sell for a little price

The main thrust of Ṭabarī’s exegesis of the expression, “sell for a little price,” is his contention that the Jewish leaders concealed information about Muḥammad from the people in exchange for various advantages. The advantages are generally conceived of as material. Ṭabarī glosses “little price” with the expressions “a trifle you covet (*tama‘*),”¹⁷⁷ “a paltry (*khasīs*) sum,”¹⁷⁸ and “an offer of a little of the goods of this world.”¹⁷⁹ The Jewish leaders should explain about Muḥammad to the people without seeking remuneration (*ajr*) for it, writes Ṭabarī.¹⁸⁰

At 2.79, the wording of the verse itself offers a reason for the material interpretation: “what they earn (*kasaba*).” There the exegete understands the Jews to be consuming what the common people give them in exchange for what they write.¹⁸¹ However, when the expression first appears at 2.41, Ṭabarī adds a second motivation to the financial: “The ‘little price’ is the pleasure (*ridān*) they take in leading the people of their community and religion who follow them, and the recompense (*ajr*) they take from whomever they explain

¹⁷⁵ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 271. Lazarus-Yafeh’s rendering of this tradition, that the Jews “removed from its place” the description that was “included in the original divine version of the Torah,” does not seem to accurately reflect the text. *Intertwined Worlds*, 20-21.

¹⁷⁶ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 271.

¹⁷⁷ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 565.

¹⁷⁸ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 566.

¹⁷⁹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 566. Ṭabarī offers another phrase at a verse which does not contain the selling expression, 3.78: “a paltry sum from the ephemeral things of this world (*ḥutām al-dunyā*).” *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 536.

¹⁸⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 566.

¹⁸¹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 273.

these things to, for whatever they explain to him.”¹⁸²

At the five other occurrences of “sell for a little price” in sūras 2-7, Ṭabarī shows a certain ambivalence in his identification of what it is that the Jews are giving away in the exchange. At 2.174, it is a Jewish action to conceal the matter of Muḥammad from the common people in order to gain a small offer of goods from this world.¹⁸³ Here Ṭabarī describes the little price as “the bribe (*rishwa*) which they were given.”¹⁸⁴ Similarly at 3.187, the exegete finds that the Jews concealed the name of Muḥammad.¹⁸⁵ Such people deserve the exclamation at the end of the verse, “How evil was their selling!” Thirdly, at 5.44 the rabbis are giving away neglect (*tark*) of the judgment in the verses of Allah’s book which he sent down upon Moses.¹⁸⁶ The judgment in view is the punishment of stoning for adultery in the Torah. According to one tradition, the Jews concealed this.¹⁸⁷ But Ṭabarī also writes at 5.44 that the Jews are gaining ill-gotten property (*suht*) by their tampering (*tahrif*) with the book of Allah, their alteration (*taghyir*) of Allah’s judgment on adultery, and their substitution (*baddala*) of yet other commandments. At 3.199, where scripture provides a positive reference to people of the book who “do not sell the signs of Allah for a little price,” Ṭabarī seems to think exclusively of verbs of alteration. Good people do not tamper with (*harrafa*) and substitute (*baddala*) what Allah sent down to them in his books about the description (*na‘t*) of Muḥammad or about Allah’s statutes and proofs.¹⁸⁸

Throw behind backs

When “throw behind backs” first appears at 2.101, Ṭabarī explains that this expression (*mathal*) means “to get rid (*rafada*) of something.”¹⁸⁹ When Muḥammad came to the religious leaders and scholars of the Jews, writes the exegete, he confirmed the Torah

¹⁸² *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 273.

¹⁸³ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 328.

¹⁸⁴ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 329.

¹⁸⁵ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 464.

¹⁸⁶ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 344.

¹⁸⁷ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 345 (trad. 12021). Cf. 344 (trad. 12019).

¹⁸⁸ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 500. Jane McAuliffe’s translation of Ṭabarī’s two verbs here as “change” (*harrafa*) and “alteration” (*baddala*) is reasonable, but misses the nuances in the exegete’s use of these words which the present study has revealed. *Qur’ānic Christians*, 168.

¹⁸⁹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 404.

and the Torah confirmed him. But the scholars rejected the book of Allah—the Torah—by denying (*jahada*) it and refusing to accept (*rafada*) it after they had acknowledged (*qarra* IV). They did this out of envy and injustice toward the prophet of Islam.¹⁹⁰

At 3.187, Ṭabarī glosses the expression “throw behind backs” to mean “they abandoned (*taraka*) the command of Allah and neglected (*dāʿa* II) it.”¹⁹¹ One of the traditions he cites identifies the object of tampering as the covenant, following the wording of the verse itself (*mīthāq*).¹⁹² Two other traditions describe the tampering action envisioned here as a two-part process: “they used to read it, only they gave up (*nabadha*) the doing of it”;¹⁹³ “they threw (*qadhafa*) it between their hands, but abandoned (*taraka*) the doing of it.”¹⁹⁴ It may also be noted that according to a tradition attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, the command from the covenant which the people of the book rejected was that they obey the prophet of Islam.¹⁹⁵

Invent a lie against Allah

It was noted in chapter 3 that though the expression “invent a lie against Allah” could perhaps be taken as an action of tampering with scripture, Muqātil did not understand it that way. Ṭabarī’s interpretation of the phrase shows a similar understanding: he explains that it means speaking a lie against Allah. For example, at the first occurrence of the phrase at 3.94, he refers back to the discussion in the previous verse of what foods the children of Israel made unlawful (*tahrīm*) for themselves before the Torah was sent down (3.93). The previous verse contains the striking challenge, “Bring the Torah and read it, if you are truthful.” At 3.94, Ṭabarī writes, “Whoever lies (*kadhaba*) against Allah, from us or from you, after your bringing of the Torah and your reading of it. . . they are the disbelievers.”¹⁹⁶

The exegete’s explanation of the phrase at 4.50 is also very brief.¹⁹⁷ He gives several

¹⁹⁰ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 403.

¹⁹¹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 458.

¹⁹² *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 464 (trad. 8331).

¹⁹³ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 463 (trad. 8330).

¹⁹⁴ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 464 (trad. 8332).

¹⁹⁵ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 460 (trad. 8320).

¹⁹⁶ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VII, 16.

¹⁹⁷ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 460.

examples of lies which the people of the book invent: they say “we are the sons of Allah and his beloved ones”; they say that no one will enter heaven except Jews and Christians; and they claim that they have no sin. They say these things, Ṭabarī writes, and then “attribute them falsely to (*khalāqa* VIII ‘*alā*) Allah.”¹⁹⁸

4.4.2 Analysis

The tradition which Ṭabarī attributes to ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān in his exegesis of 2.79 is indeed the sharpest accusation of textual falsification encountered in this study. There *ḥarrafa* of the Torah is explained by the verbs for adding and erasing immediately subsequent to it. Ṭabarī himself, however (‘Abū Ja‘far’), appears to modify the tampering charge. He portrays the tampering as an action of Jews to write a *kitāb* different from the Torah, and then pass it off as the Torah. Adang writes that Ṭabarī “probably” means to say that the tamperers wrote “a separate book, alongside the Torah.”¹⁹⁹ The exegete does not use the verbs of subtracting from and adding to the Torah which specify a falsification of the text. In this reading, the meaning of *ḥarrafa* is that the Jews produce a writing from their own minds and then deceive the people by selling it to them as the Torah.

Andrew Rippin drew attention to three traditions included in Ṭabarī’s exegesis of 2.79 which seem to simply indicate writing books and claiming that they are from God.²⁰⁰ He suggested that these traditions may have nothing to do with the Torah or its alteration, and speculated that the *kitāb* in view might be the Mishnah or the Talmud.²⁰¹ Other scholars who have pursued this line of explanation are Goldziher,²⁰² Hirschfeld,²⁰³ Watt,²⁰⁴ and Lazarus-Yafeh.²⁰⁵ Support for this suggestion in Ṭabarī comes in his commentary on 2.42 and 3.71, where Ibn Zayd explains “confounding the truth with falsehood” as mixing up

¹⁹⁸ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 460.

¹⁹⁹ *Muslim Writers*, 228.

²⁰⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 270-271 (trads. 1388, 1389, and 1393).

²⁰¹ “The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*,” 16.

²⁰² Goldziher noted that al-Maqrīzī associated 2.79 and the accusation of falsification with the Mishnah, rather than with the earlier scriptures, in his *Kitāb al-Khiṭaṭ*. “Über muhammedanische Polemik,” 368.

²⁰³ *New Researches*, 104.

²⁰⁴ “The Early Development,” 51.

²⁰⁵ *Intertwined Worlds*, 20.

“the Torah which Allah sent down upon Moses” with “that which they wrote with their hands.”²⁰⁶

For the Jews to write a book which is not the Torah, and then claim that it is the Torah, is in Ṭabarī’s mind a reprehensible action that is certainly included under his larger umbrella of ‘tampering.’ But he may simply understand it to mean that the Jews are using a second book alongside the Torah. In the story attributed to Ibn Zayd at 2.75, the Jewish leaders keep a book with false rulings alongside the Torah, and choose which book to use based on the bribes of the supplicants. In this scenario, the Jews write a book which is definitely not the Torah, but the Torah itself remains unscathed. Similarly at 2.79, Ṭabarī finds that the Jews wrote a book out of their own interpretations, and that their deception of the uneducated people is based on the lack of ability of the riffraff to distinguish between the false book and the Torah. Another reason to believe that Ṭabarī may have had more than one book in mind comes from a scenario which the exegete offers in explanation of the phrase “what the Satans recited over Solomon’s kingdom” at 2.102:

The Jews who were in Madīna during the time of the prophet contended with him through the Torah, but found the Torah to be in full agreement with the Qur’ān, commanding them to follow Muḥammad and to assent to all that the Qur’ān enjoins. They instead disputed with him on the basis of books which people wrote down from the dictation of soothsayers (*kuhhān*) who lived during the time of Solomon.²⁰⁷

The verses which contain the phrase “sell for small price” focus on the motive of financial gain mainly for an act of concealing or failing to announce information about Muḥammad in the former scriptures. At 2.79, their greed is associated with an act of writing a false book. And at 2.41, the motive of the Jewish leaders is a desire to maintain their position of authority over the common people. As in Muqātil, the expression seems to pick up its sense from the context of the verse.

In Ṭabarī’s exegesis of “throwing behind backs” at 2.101 and 3.187, the verb *nabadha* picked up meaning from its association with the verbs *rafada*, *taraka* and *dā’a* II. At 2.101, the exegete understood that the Jewish leaders denied and discarded the Torah’s attestation of the prophethood of Muḥammad. At 3.187 he was concerned with the neglect

²⁰⁶ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 568 (trad. 826); Vol. VI, 505 (trad. 7227).

²⁰⁷ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 405. Cf. Ayoub, *The Qur’ān and its Interpreters*, 128-9.

of the covenant, particularly the stipulation to obey the prophet of Islam.

Finally, Ṭabarī understands “inventing a lie against Allah” to be a verbal action, not an action of tampering with the text of scripture. On the contrary, the context at 3.94 (“Bring the Torah and read it,” 3.93) assumes that the Torah can be produced and checked to verify the claim which is being made about the lawfulness of foods.

4.5 Conclusions

1. Ṭabarī’s exegesis of a large circle of verses of tampering gives the general impression that the exegete and his chosen traditions assumed an intact Torah text in the hands of the Jews of Muḥammad’s Madīna. This impression comes, for example, from the repeated occurrence of phrases such as “they find him written with them in the Torah and the Gospel.” The frequency and variety of expressions such as “the matter of Muḥammad in the Torah” also suggest to the mind of the reader the assumption of an intact text. Di Matteo was struck by the speech put in the mouth of Muḥammad in traditions cited by Ṭabarī at 5.41, “I judge according to that which is found in the Torah.”²⁰⁸ Such phrases indicate a concern for continuity between the earlier scriptures and the recitation which is conceived of as being sent down to the prophet of Islam. The sense of continuity is further strengthened by Ṭabarī’s exegesis of the language of covenant and confirmation.

Ṭabarī portrays the literate leaders of the Jews as being privy to special knowledge because of their familiarity with the Torah. A striking expression of this comes in his exegesis of 2.40, where he writes that the Jews had knowledge of past narratives “which no one else knew to be correct and true.”²⁰⁹ This knowledge should have inclined the Jews to accept the authenticity of the prophet of Islam, because he was reciting these things without having studied “the books in which these things were reported.”²¹⁰ Again at 2.41, in his amplification of the phrase “be not the first to disbelieve in it,” Ṭabarī urges the rabbis to attest the truth of the *qurʾān*, “since with you is the knowledge of it which no others

²⁰⁸ “Il ‘taḥrīf’ od alterazione,” 82-83.

²⁰⁹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 554.

²¹⁰ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 554-5.

have.”²¹¹ In the mind of the exegete, “the rabbis of Muhammad’s days were better qualified than anyone to inform people about the descriptions of the Prophet as found in the Torah.”²¹² Their ability to attest to Muhammad, responsibility to inform the illiterate, and culpability should they not do so, were all firmly based on the assumption of an intact Torah in their hands.

2. The definitions of the verb *ḥarrafa* which Ṭabarī explicitly offers point firmly toward change of interpretation. He registers this meaning the first two times he encounters the verb, at 2.75 and 4.46. Adang summarizes Ṭabarī’s definition as, “changing its meaning and interpretation, deliberately bending its original meaning to something else.”²¹³ Ṭabarī does not repeat this definition at 5.13, nor does he give an alternative definition there, even though he seems to indicate a falsification of the Torah itself. At 5.41 he specifies that the *tahrīf* of the Jews was their changing of the judgment of Allah.

3. Ṭabarī makes an accusation of addition to the text of the Torah in his exegesis of 3.78. He also transmits traditions which specify alteration of text at 3.78 and 2.79. These traditions employ strong verbs of addition and deletion. At 5.13 his exegesis of *ḥarrafa* indicates that the Jews tampered with the Torah. Though he does not use verbs of addition or deletion in this passage, his interpretation seems to envision falsification of text. This suggests at the very least that accusations of textual falsification were among the traditions which Tabari collected and reported in his commentary, and that these accusations had become attached to specific verses in the Qur’ān.

These accusations of textual falsification are then definitely part of the total group of actions which Ṭabarī envisions in his exegesis of the tampering verses. The question which this raises is why these accusations appear so tentative and isolated among such a wide variety of tampering actions which assume an intact text. Why does the accusation seem to appear at one of the *ḥarrafa* verses (5.13), but not at the other three? Why do the sharpest accusations come at verses which contain no verbs of alteration?

It was noted in chapter 3 that the wording of 2.79 appears to have a relationship with a

²¹¹ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 563.

²¹² Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 228.

²¹³ *Muslim Writers*, 229. This definition is also given twice at a *katama* verse, 2.174. *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 328-9.

tradition cited in Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, in which two phrases are identical with scripture (indicated with quotation marks): the people of the book distorted the book "with their hands," then said it is "from Allah, that they may sell it for a little price." The wording of 3.78 also resembles that of 2.79, in that the actors apparently referred to claim that something is "from Allah, yet it is not from Allah." Though the verb of tampering in 3.78, *lawā*, seems to indicate a verbal action, both Ṭabarī and Muqātil understood an action of textual falsification from the verse. Further, in his exegesis of 5.13, Ṭabarī pictures the Jewish leaders "writing with their hands" something different from what Allah revealed, then claiming to the illiterate people that what they wrote was the word of Allah. Perhaps it is this reference to claiming divine authority for a writing (*kitāb*) which Allah did not reveal which triggers the accusation of falsification at 2.79, 3.78 and 5.13.

Another possible explanation for Ṭabarī's understanding of a falsification of text at 5.13 is the immediate Qur'ānic context of the verse—and indeed in the context of Ṭabarī's exegesis of 5.13 within the commentary. The exegete gives special attention to the scriptural term "treachery." His explanation of the verse begins with a reference to the Jews acting treacherously (*ghadara*) and "stretching out their hands" to Muḥammad and his companions.²¹⁴ In his explanation of "thou wilt never cease to light upon some act of treachery on their part," he specifies the plan of the Banū Naḍīr to murder the prophet of Islam.²¹⁵ The reference is to 5.11: "O believers, remember God's blessing upon you, when a certain people purposed to stretch against you their hands, and He restrained their hands from you."²¹⁶ Is it possible that in the context of a portrayal of the ultimate treachery of the Jews toward Muḥammad, Ṭabarī chose to offer an interpretation of *harrafa* which emphasized the extremes to which a faithless people might go?

A third possibility for the isolated and tentative character of Ṭabarī's accusations of falsification at 2.79, 3.78 and 5.13 will be explored in the next chapter: the influence of the narrative framework. In any case, these accusations do not resemble the doctrine of scriptural corruption as it came to be known. These are not the fully-developed concept of a

²¹⁴ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 153.

²¹⁵ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 157.

²¹⁶ The *Sira* also links 5.11 with the plot to murder Muḥammad. Ibn Ishāq, *Sirat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 403.

general corruption of the text of the Torah throughout the regions where Jews and Christians lived. The scenarios are one-dimensional. The object of deletion in ‘Uthmān’s tradition at 2.79 is the name of Muḥammad. The Jewish leaders in Ibn Zayd’s tradition at 2.75 use a second book of rulings about what is permitted and forbidden. Legal punishments is also the concern of the Ibn ‘Abbās tradition at 5.13. At 3.78, Ṭabarī and his traditions do not actually indicate what the Jews added to the book. The many doctrinaire categories of Ibn Ḥazm’s later polemic are not in view here. Neither are sophisticated ‘historical’ arguments advanced. Adang notes that Ṭabarī tells the story of the destruction of the Torah in Babylonian times and the rewriting of the Torah by Ezra in his *Ta’rīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, but he does not give this story in his *Tafsīr*.²¹⁷ Even in the *Ta’rīkh* account, Ṭabarī simply assumes that Ezra miraculously remembered and rewrote the entire Torah as it had existed prior to its destruction.²¹⁸

John Burton writes at the conclusion of his study of Ṭabarī’s exegesis of the *harrāfa* and *katama* verses,

One notes a curious reluctance on the part of al-Ṭabarī to accuse the Jewish scholars of altering the texts of the Tora. Although the earlier authorities on which he leans and on whose views he draws liberally, show no such hesitation, he himself appears to prefer to moderate their charges by speaking of the Jews’ tampering with the interpretation of the revealed texts in their possession.²¹⁹

If Burton is thinking about Ṭabarī’s exegesis of 2.79, which he mentions but does not explore in his study, he is right. There the exegete’s own statement certainly appears moderate alongside ‘Uthmān’s ‘unhesitating’ accusation of addition and deletion in the Torah. He is also right if he is thinking about Ṭabarī’s rejection of the Ibn Zayd tradition of the rabbis and the two books as the interpretation of 2.75.²²⁰ Burton’s statement would definitely characterize the overall impression which Ṭabarī’s exegesis of the tampering verses leaves. However, the exegete showed that he could himself make use of verbs indicating textual alteration in his commentary on 3.78—a passage which Burton neglected

²¹⁷ *Muslim Writers*, 230-231.

²¹⁸ Lazarus-Yafeh examines the use of the Muslim Ezra stories in exegesis and polemic in *Intertwined Worlds*, 50-74.

²¹⁹ “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 105.

²²⁰ “The Corruption of the Scriptures,” 100.

to explore.

4. The stories which Ṭabarī narrates in his many tampering passages portray actions which are included in a larger category of ‘tampering with scripture’ but do not point in the direction of textual falsification. In fact, most of the stories rely for their narrative dynamic on the assumption of an intact text. The Jews of Madīna feel animosity toward Muḥammad and express this in their rejection of his authority. The Jewish religious leaders know the truth about Muḥammad from the scriptures which they read, but they give the lie to him and deny him. They don’t acknowledge that Muḥammad’s recitations are from God. They hide what they know about Muḥammad because they fear that if they told the truth they would lose both income and authority. In placing emphasis on concealment as the nub of Jewish culpability, Ṭabarī is simply following the rhetoric of scripture itself: “Who does greater evil than he who conceals a testimony received from Allah?” (2.140). The Jewish leaders also mislead the illiterate Jews who don’t know the difference between the Torah and a book of Rabbinic interpretations. They mock and insult both Muḥammad and his religion. The Jews neglect the enforcement of the explicit laws of the Torah, putting more lenient punishments in their place.

Ṭabarī’s way of portraying these actions is literary. He “records several scenarios in which the ‘people of the book’ clearly recognize in their scriptures both their covenant obligations and the authentication of Muhammad’s prophethood, but defiantly ignore the one and refuse acknowledgement to the other.”²²¹ This leads into the subject of the next chapter. If Ṭabarī frequently explains the meaning of tampering verses through narrative material, what is the role of a narrative framework of Jewish resistance to Muḥammad’s authority in the exegete’s development of the tampering motif?

²²¹ McAuliffe, “The Qur’ānic Context,” 146.

5. Method and Meaning in the Commentaries

The preceding chapters have presented a full description and analysis of the exegetical treatment of the tampering verses in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī. These chapters have developed in detail what the two exegetes understood by the verbs and expressions which are found in the semantic field of tampering. Familiarity with the exegesis of the verses of tampering, however, brings intimations of concerns which reach outside of the particular passages thus far described and analyzed. The reader repeatedly glimpses hints of larger literary patterns in the commentaries which appear to influence the interpretation of individual verses. The tampering motif, it follows from these intimations, cannot be adequately known from the interpretations of the particular tampering verses alone. In other words, while an examination of the individual exegetical treatments of the tampering verses by these exegetes has provided a good idea of the language of tampering in their commentaries, more investigation is needed in order to fully understand the operation of the tampering motif. The aim of this chapter is to articulate the claim of the influence of literary structures on the tampering motif, and to substantiate this claim through appeal to a broad spectrum of materials in the commentaries. The claim of structural influence will begin with Muqātil's *Tafsīr* and then proceed into the commentary of Ṭabarī. The dimensions of the proposed structures, their function, and their influence will be explored. The results of this exploration will then be applied to the understanding of development of the tampering motif in the commentaries. This is not an exploration of exegetical method for its own sake, but rather an inquiry into how method relates to meaning, in particular the significance of the exegetical passages on tampering. The chapter will conclude with a demonstration of the influence of larger structures in the development of the tampering motif within a separate but related work, the *Sīrat al-Nabī* of Ibn Ishāq.

The existence of larger patterns which loom over the exegetical treatment of individual verses in Muqātil's commentary was suggested by an expression in John Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies*. Wansbrough found evidence for the operation of a "narrative framework" in Muqātil's *Tafsīr*.¹ He used this expression to describe a narrative

¹ *Quranic Studies*, 123, 125, 137, 141.

structure—or series of literary patterns—which allows an exegete to explain the meaning of otherwise seemingly vague and unrelated verses. Kees Versteegh also uses the phrase “an overall frame” to characterize the accumulated effect of Muqātil’s practice of giving the circumstances of revelation and specifying the persons to whom the verse was applied.² This concept will be brought into use in order to deepen the understanding of the tampering motif in the commentaries of this study. The exploration will begin with Muqātil’s commentary and proceed to inquire how far the suggestion of a narrative framework could be relevant to Ṭabarī’s development of the theme.

Wansbrough’s use of the concept of “narrative framework” was part of his larger exploration of the method of exegesis which he found best exemplified in Muqātil’s commentary, and which he termed “haggadic exegesis.”³ The name is suggestive of a style of commentary which explains the meanings of the words of scripture by telling stories.⁴ A characteristic feature of many of the Muqātil passages referred to in this study is the formula *wa dhālika ‘anna* followed by a story.⁵ Wansbrough found this style of exegesis to be the earliest form of Qur’ānic commentary.⁶ He made a link between haggadic exegesis as modeled by Muqātil and the sermons of popular preachers.⁷ In his examination of the commentary he found a number of literary devices which he felt must indicate “oral delivery”: inconsistent use of connectives;⁸ “supercommentary”;⁹ compulsive identification of the vague and anonymous;¹⁰ “stage directions” following *qāla*;¹¹ and serial repetition and circular explication.¹² For an historical link between the popular sermon

² “Grammar and Exegesis,” 210.

³ *Qurānic Studies*, 122-148.

⁴ Herbert Berg writes that Wansbrough borrowed the name from “Jewish scriptural interpretation.” *The Development of exegesis in early Islam: the authenticity of Muslim literature from the formative period* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 79. Cf. Norman Calder: “The terminology is sectarian, though probably intended to reflect the universality of hermeneutic approaches.” “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 105; and Andrew Rippin: “The basic inspiration and thrust of Wansbrough’s approach may once again perhaps be traced to modern biblical studies.” “Literary analysis of Qur’ān, *tafsīr*, and *sīra*,” 161.

⁵ Cf. *Qurānic Studies*, 124.

⁶ *Qurānic Studies*, 121. Cf. Kees Versteegh, “Grammar and Exegesis,” 210.

⁷ *Qurānic Studies*, 145-148.

⁸ *Qurānic Studies*, 129, 145.

⁹ *Qurānic Studies*, 129, 145.

¹⁰ *Qurānic Studies*, 136.

¹¹ *Qurānic Studies*, 145.

¹² *Qurānic Studies*, 145, 130-131.

and haggadic exegesis, Wansbrough drew on the work of Johs. Pedersen, Geo Widengren and Ignaz Goldziher. The activity of the popular preachers, or *quṣṣās*, “consisted in interpreting the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*, enforcing law, and impressing people with fear and hope.”¹³ The preachers told popular tales, including narratives about the prophet of Islam and his companions.¹⁴ Starting out as a high official in the mosque, the preacher seems to have slipped in reputation due to a tendency toward what Pedersen calls “less controlled activity.” “As his aim was to impress his audience he was tempted to use the means fittest for that purpose.”¹⁵

Goldziher wrote about the popular preacher in his *Muslim Studies*.¹⁶ There he recounted many stories from Muslim tradition about the excesses for which the preachers eventually came to be caricatured. But he also noted references in the tradition to a time in the early days of Islam when the name *qāṣṣ* had a favourable connotation.¹⁷ Some of these preachers are said to have encouraged the Arabian troops in their wars. But others were “mentioned with distinction as expounders of the Koran.”¹⁸ Within this category Goldziher distinguished “homiletic exegetes” as well as “tellers of sacred stories.”¹⁹ On the evidence of extracts from sermons offered by al-Jāḥiẓ, Goldziher concluded that the work of the preachers was at one time seen as a positive aspect of the religious life of Islam.²⁰ Regarding the contents of the sermons, he mentioned stories about biblical characters, but did not make reference to anecdotes about Muḥammad and his companions.²¹ Goldziher added an interesting comment on the way in which the preachers tried to give their audience the impression that they were the experts of sacred history.

¹³ Johs. Pedersen, “The Islamic Preacher: *wā‘iz, mudhakkir, qāṣṣ*,” in *The Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, Vol. I, S. Lowinger, ed. (Budapest 1948), 237.

¹⁴ Geo Widengren, “Oral tradition and written literature among the Hebrews in the light of Arabic evidence, with special regard to prose narratives,” *Acta Orientalia* 23 (1959), 237.

¹⁵ Johs. Pedersen, “The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher,” *Die Welt des Islams* 2 (1953), 216. For more details on the worsening reputation of the *quṣṣās*, see Ch. Pellat, “*Qaṣṣ*,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, E. Van Donzel *et al*, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), Vol. IV, 734-735.

¹⁶ *Muslim Studies*, C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern, translators (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971), Vol. II, 150-159.

¹⁷ *Muslim Studies*, Vol. II, 152.

¹⁸ *Muslim Studies*, Vol. II, 153.

¹⁹ *Muslim Studies*, Vol. II, 153.

²⁰ *Muslim Studies*, Vol. II, 153.

²¹ *Muslim Studies*, Vol. II, 156. Goldziher’s main focus in the discussions was prophetic traditions.

“They left no question unanswered because it would have damaged their reputation before the populace if they had admitted their ignorance.”²² As examples, he cites the *qāṣṣ* who pretended to give the name of the golden calf, and another preacher who “knew exactly the name of the wolf who had eaten Joseph”—even though in the story Joseph had escaped the meal!²³

Goldziher also made an explicit link between the oral activities of the *quṣṣās* and the written *Tafsīr* of Muqātil in a passage from his survey of Muslim exegesis, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*:²⁴

That *tafsīr*, rejected by serious people, appears in that warning of Ibn Ḥanbal in a group with apocalyptic legends and fables about the war, playgrounds (*Tummelplätzen*) of random, fantastic notions without certification, which Islamic theology required as the condition of trustworthy knowledge already in its early period. In the explanation of the Qurʾān, that delight in telling fables was active especially in a particular circle of people. There were various biblical legends, which Muḥammad himself had summarized in the style of a compendium, often in a contaminated way. The believers wanted to know yet more about these stories. This certainly appealed to their appetite for new things and knowledge far more than the precise comprehension of the legal prescriptions. The demand corresponded to the supply in abundant measure. There was found a crowd of curious religious teachers, who filled in the gaps of the Qurʾān out of their dealings with the Jews and Christians, and who received from them, often in a misunderstood way, twice-told tales supplemented even further out of their own imaginations and presented as explanations of the Qurʾān, people of the type of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (died 772), to whose characterization is stated, that he got his “knowledge of the Qurʾān” from Jews and Christians and put the same in harmony with their books.

To it refers the warning against the teachings of the possessors of scripture. That fable telling (*Fabulieren*) was driven to a downright exaggerated measure through the class of religious story tellers (*quṣṣās*; sing. *qāṣṣ*) who already appeared in the early period, and in whose activity the fantastic element predominated. . . .

These people naturally revelled in the portrayal of the last things, and what they told out of foreign sources of information, or added from their own imaginations, they presented as attested exegesis of the Qurʾān. There was no secret for them, and it gave them neither trouble nor scruple to offer as plausible their fantasy pictures—which they attached to the Qurʾān through misleading dependence on respected informants.

As examples of this exegesis through ‘fantasy pictures,’ Goldziher cites Muqātil’s interpretations of the Qurʾānic verses 17.59 and 67.2.²⁵ However, these citations seem to have been taken from secondary sources in Muslim tradition, because Goldziher’s

²² *Muslim Studies*, Vol. II, 156-157.

²³ *Muslim Studies*, Vol. II, 157. This brings to mind the claim of Muqātil, in his commentary on 27.18, to know the name of the ant who spoke with Sulaymān. Cf. Versteegh, “Grammar and Exegesis,” 214.

²⁴ *Richtungen*, 57-59.

²⁵ *Richtungen*, 59-60.

complaints do not match the exegesis of these verses in the edited version of Muqātil's commentary.²⁶

Wansbrough assumed a long period of oral composition and transmission prior to the first fixed texts of Arabic literature.²⁷ If the process whereby the oral popular sermon became written haggadic exegesis is not altogether clear,²⁸ reasoned Wansbrough, the material used by the preacher certainly made its way into the earliest commentaries.²⁹ He characterized that material as didactic in an entertaining way, pious and edifying.³⁰

In the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī, the reader glimpses the outlines of a narrative structure of Jewish response—and primarily resistance—to religious claims surrounding the prophet of Islam. The Jewish response is represented by the Jews of Madīna during the career of Muḥammad in that city. The Muslim claims include the assertion that Muḥammad is a true prophet and messenger of Allah, and the declaration that the words he is reciting are indeed revelations from Allah. In this chapter I will describe the indications of this narrative structure in the commentaries. I will describe how the narrative structure shows itself in the exegesis of the tampering verses. I will then make the case that the narrative structure exerts an influence on the exegetical development of the tampering motif. Finally, I will substantiate my argument of narrative influence in the commentaries by demonstrating the development of the tampering motif within a separate but related work, the *Sīrat al-Nabī* of Ibn Ishāq.

5.1. The narrative framework in Muqātil's Tafsīr

The exegical devices used by Muqātil in his *Tafsīr* have been described at the beginning of chapter three of this study. Among those various devices Wansbrough distinguished four “narrative elements”: anecdote, prophetic tradition, identification of the

²⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. II, 537 (on 17.58); Vol. IV, 389 (on 67.2): no *Bock* or *Stute* here!

²⁷ *Quranic Studies*, 146.

²⁸ *Quranic Studies*, 148.

²⁹ *Quranic Studies*, 147. See also Regula Forster: “Muqātil steht zwar mit seiner Arbeitsweise in der Tradition der Erzähler von biblisch-qur'ānischen Geschichten (der sog. *quṣṣās*).” “Methoden arabischer Qur'ānexegeese,” 389.

³⁰ *Quranic Studies*, 147-148.

vague and ambiguous, and the description of the occasions of revelation.³¹ Of these four, Wansbrough characterized the first three as “typically haggadic.”³² He explained that while the occasion of revelation is certainly present in haggadic exegesis, it is only there in an “underdeveloped form.”³³ The occasion of revelation only really came into its own in halakhic exegesis, he claimed, because the basic purpose of the occasion of revelation was to establish a chronology of revelation. Haggadic exegesis is not interested in this function, he wrote. However, he noted, if the occasion of revelation is not a device typical of narrative exegesis, it has an important role to play in the narrative framework.³⁴

Andrew Rippin has disputed Wansbrough’s claim that the “essential function of the *sabab al-nuzūl*” was to be found in works which focused on deriving law from the Qur’ān.³⁵ He writes that a study of a wide range of *asbāb* materials reveals rather that the purpose of the occasion of revelation was not halakhic but rather haggadic. “Its function is to provide a narrative account in which the basic exegesis of the verse may be embodied.”³⁶ In other words, the primary purpose of the *sabab* was literary rather than legal. It was part of the imaginative effort of the exegete to construct an overarching narrative framework in which vague and disjointed fragments of scripture could find meaning. Thus Rippin would include the occasion of revelation in a list of the “typically haggadic” exegetical devices in Muqātil’s *Tafsīr*.

Wansbrough did not appear to draw his observations about Muqātil’s exegetical method from a sustained examination of the exegete’s commentary. Rather, he seems to have taken most of his examples from Muqātil’s interpretation of Sūra 18.³⁷ Wansbrough evidently did not look closely at the opening of the commentary, the exegesis of Sūrat al-Baqara, where Muqātil first demonstrates his exegetical method and gives the first

³¹ *Quranic Studies*, 141.

³² *Quranic Studies*, 141.

³³ *Quranic Studies*, 141.

³⁴ *Quranic Studies*, 141.

³⁵ *Quranic Studies*, 141. Rippin, “The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*,” 1-20.

³⁶ Rippin, “The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*,” 3. In a restatement of his thesis at the end of the article, Rippin uses the phrase, “a basic narrative framework.” “The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*,” 19. If Rippin is right, his modification of Wansbrough strengthens the claim of this chapter about the importance of larger literary structures and their influence on individual motifs.

³⁷ *Quranic Studies*, 122 ff. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. II, 572-607.

indications of the narrative framework. In order to properly understand both the method and the framework, therefore, an investigation of Muqātil's interpretation of Baqara is essential.

When Muqātil's exegesis of the first 162 verses of Baqara is examined closely,³⁸ it reveals strong evidence for the the existence of a narrative framework. The passage contains many examples of anecdote and occasion of revelation. Indeed, the anecdote which Wansbrough translated from Muqātil's exegesis of 18.9 and gave in full in *Quranic Studies* is typical of the kind of brief story found in the opening section of the commentary.³⁹ The prophetic tradition does not in fact make its appearance in this section of the commentary.⁴⁰ However, identification of the vague and anonymous diversifies into a number of distinguishable narrative elements. As specializations of the category *ta'yīn al-mubham*, Muqātil employs both characterization and personification. The repeated identification of vague objects of tampering as "the matter of Muḥammad" heightens the narrative dynamic. Muqātil also uses a literary technique of linking stories from the distant past with the story of Muḥammad in Madīna through a series of important themes. This

³⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 81-153. Scholars have variously identified the extended opening section of Sūrat al-Baqara which was traditionally understood to concern the People of the Book. According to the *Sīra*, "In reference to these Jewish rabbis and the hypocrites of Aws and Khazraj, the beginning of Sūrat al-Baqara up to the one-hundredth [verse] came down, according to what I have been told, but Allah knows." Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 372. Andrew Rippin makes a division between a section of "Biblical history" up to 2.141 and a section on "Islamic identity" beginning with 2.142. *Muslims: Their beliefs and practices*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2001), 28. Neal Robinson distinguishes the part of the sūra up to 2.152 from what comes after it, understanding "O you who believe" (2.153) to signal the start of a section on "legislation for the new nation" which was "revealed" on a different occasion from that which precedes it. *Discovering the Qur'an: A contemporary approach to a veiled text* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 211. Hartwig Hirschfeld shared the same opinion on 2.152 and the 10 verses which follow it (though numbered differently). *New Researches*, 109, 144, 145. Mustansir Mir—and through him Iṣlāhī,—sees the section on the Abrahamic legacy continuing up to 2.162, after which he understands a section on the Sharī'a to begin with the words, "Your God is one God." "The Sūra as a Unity: A Twentieth Century Development in Qur'ān Exegesis," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds. (London: Routledge, 1993), 217. A.H. Mathias Zahniser discusses some of the scholarly views in "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Sūras," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 28-38. In a recent study David E. Smith ends a unit on the "Failure of the Children of Israel" at 2.118, and describes the next section (2.119-167) as "Reaffirmation of the authority of the Qur'ān and Muḥammad through the appropriation of the Abrahamic tradition." For Smith, the 'basic Islamic legislation' begins at 2.168. "The Structure of al-Baqara," *The Muslim World* 91 (2001), 122-3.

³⁹ *Quranic Studies*, 122. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. II, 574-576. The story begins typically with *wa dhālika anna* (p. 574).

⁴⁰ Wansbrough wrote that Muqātil "favoured" the prophetic tradition, and cited two examples from the exegete's interpretation of Sūra 18. *Quranic Studies*, 133.

device could perhaps be termed “liaison.”

One of the main narrative techniques in Muqātil’s exegesis of 2.1-162 is the identification of the unspecified subjects and objects of the verses. In this whole section, the Jews living in Madīna during the story of Muḥammad in that city play the major narrative role. The immediacy of their introduction is striking. Muqātil understands the very first words of the sūra, “*Alif Lām Mim*. That is the book” (2.1-2a), to refer to an encounter between two Jews and the prophet of Islam.⁴¹ References to the Jews continue all the way up to the exegesis of 2.160.⁴² Though no word for “Jews” occurs in the first 28 verses of the sūra, Muqātil uses the expression *al-Yahūd* 12 times in his exegesis of these verses, plus five more times in his explanations of cross-references. He also refers to the chiefs (*ru’ūs*) of the Jews once and the “people of the Torah” twice.⁴³ After the story of Adam, the expression “children of Israel” occurs twice in 2.40-47, though still not “Jews.” In his explanation of those verses, however, Muqātil identifies the Jews of Madīna 11 times, plus the chiefs three times and the lowly people (or riffraff, *sifla*) of the Jews twice.⁴⁴ After the extended narrative of Moses and the children of Israel, the term “children of Israel” appears twice, *Hūdan* once (at 2.111), and *Yahūd* three times (first at 2.113), in 2.75-123. Muqātil’s exegesis of the same passage, however, mentions the Madīnan Jews in general 42 times, the chiefs four times, the riffraff twice, and the “people of the Torah” three times.⁴⁵ Finally, after the story of Abraham, the term *Hūdan* appears twice in 2.134-162, while the exegete mentions the Jews 22 times, the chiefs once, and the people of the Torah twice.⁴⁶ In all, Muqātil identifies the Jews of Madīna 112 times as the actors of the mostly vague and anonymous first 162 verses of Baqara.

Muqātil does indeed mention other actors in this section of commentary: the

⁴¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 81.

⁴² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 153.

⁴³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 81-96.

⁴⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 100-102.

⁴⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 116-135.

⁴⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 140-153.

associating Arabs of Makka,⁴⁷ the martyrs of Badr,⁴⁸ the *Nasārā* of Najrān,⁴⁹ and even the Byzantines of *Qusṭanīniya*.⁵⁰ However, none of these communities gets the sustained treatment of the Jews. Muqātil also takes the identification of the Jews further than that of any other group by characterizing them extensively through gloss and anecdote. At many points he glosses general references to “disbelievers” (*kafara*), “the ungodly” (*al-fāsiqūn*) or “the evildoers” (*al-zalimūn*) with simply “meaning the Jews.” The frequent anecdotes—more effective in painting the actors with memorable narrative colour—portray the Jews as dishonest, scheming and unaccountably obstinate. A good example of a negative Jewish characteristic introduced into the exegesis of 2.1-162 is envy. Muqātil first signals this quality (*ḥasad*) in his explanation of 2.16.⁵¹ Later, evidently with scriptural warrant at 2.90 (*baghy*) and 2.109 (*ḥasad*), he extends the charge that the Jews rejected Muḥammad when he appeared because they saw he wasn’t one of their own kind.⁵²

The general references to “the Jews” are often accompanied with the naming of particular members of the community in Madīna. For example, the sons of Akḥṭab—Juday, Abū Yāsir, and Huyayy—appear frequently, as does Ibn Ṣūriyā.

However, identification makes way for another literary technique in Muqātil with the serial repetition of a pair of evocative names. The name of Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf appears in the very first exegetical segment of this passage,⁵³ and repeats eight more times in the exegesis of the first 159 verses.⁵⁴ Muqātil introduces Ka‘b in his explanation of the phrases of 2:1 and 2.2a, “Alif Lam Mim. That is the book.” The exegete writes: “That is about how Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf and Ka‘b ibn Usayd said, when the prophet (may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) called the two of them to *islām*, ‘Allah has not sent down a book after

⁴⁷ Entering as actors only after the Jews, at 2.7. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 88.

⁴⁸ At 2.154. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 150-152.

⁴⁹ Especially beginning at 2.113. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 113.

⁵⁰ At 2.114. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 133.

⁵¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 91.

⁵² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 122, 130-131. Cf. Wansbrough on 2.89 and 109 in the *Sira*. *Sectarian Milieu*, 16.

⁵³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 81.

⁵⁴ At 2.5, 2.14, 2.41, 2.76, 2.101, 2.135, and 2.146.

Moses' —denying (*takdhīb*) it."⁵⁵ In his subsequent appearances, he is the leader of a group of disbelieving and obstinate Jews who oppose the authority of Muḥammad. At 2.14, Muqātil identifies the scriptural "Satans" as Ka'b and his friends.⁵⁶

The name of 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām appears shortly after Ka'b's, at 2.3,⁵⁷ then repeats nine more times in the first 130 verses.⁵⁸ Muqātil's introduces 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām in his exegesis of 2.4. In a kind of 'stage direction' just prior to the scriptural words, "who believe," the exegete writes: "Then he mentioned the believers of the people of the Torah, 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions, among them Usayd ibn Zayd and Asad ibn Ka'b and Salām ibn Qays and Tha'laba ibn 'Amr and Ibn Yāmīn."⁵⁹ His appearances throughout Muqātil's exegesis of Sūrat al-Baqara show him to be an honest and honourable Jew who believes in and follows Muḥammad. In the long narrative section which Muqātil offers after the words of 2.5, 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām is challenged by the disbelieving Jews to give up his faith, but he and his companions stand firm.⁶⁰ At 2.13, the Jews are exhorted to "believe in Muḥammad like 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām and his friends have believed." But the Jews refuse, calling the converts ignorant.⁶¹

The frequent and regular repetition of these names, and the anecdotes which Muqātil retails about them, serve to personify the two stereotypical Jewish responses to Muḥammad. Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf becomes a cipher for the obstinate rejection of the authority of the prophet of Islam by the Jews.⁶² 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām correspondingly represents the honest acceptance of the prophethood and apostleship of Muḥammad based on knowledge

⁵⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 81.

⁵⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 91.

⁵⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 81.

⁵⁸ At 2.5 (x3), 2.13 (x2), 2.83, 2.121 (x2), and 2.130.

⁵⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 81.

⁶⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 86-87.

⁶¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 90.

⁶² Rudolf Sellheim found that in the *Sīra*, Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf becomes the designated enemy of Allah "after Badr," and subsequently draws the special anger of the prophet on himself. "Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte die Muḥammed-Biographie des Ibn Ishāq," *Oriens* xviii-xix (1965-7), 81.

of his description in the Torah.⁶³

Another literary device of Muqātil in the category of *ta'wīn al-mubham* is the repeated identification of the mysterious object of tampering as the matter (*amr*) of Muḥammad. It was noted in earlier chapters of the paper how frequently Muqātil found this to be the unspecified object in the tampering verses for words as diverse as “truth,” “sign” and “testimony.” This identification will be analysed in greater depth below. Here it needs to be noted that indicating the matter of Muḥammad repeatedly from the beginning of the commentary characterizes many of the tampering actions as personal responses to the prophet of Islam. If the object of tampering was taken to be a wide variety of objects, such as for example alleged sins of prophets in the Torah or affirmations of the divinity of Jesus in the Gospel, there would be no cumulative effect on the narrative dynamic. But by repeating the identification Muqātil reinforces the central narrative pattern, and at the same time links the prophetic voices of the past with the Muslim story and lends coherence to the commentary.

Muqātil links stories from the ancient past with the story of Muḥammad—and keeps the narrative flow of his exegesis moving—through reference to themes such as covenant, confirmation and authoritative scripture. A good example of this is in Muqātil’s exegesis of 2.40-41, where all three concepts appear together.⁶⁴ The first time Muqātil discusses the theme of covenant in his commentary is where the word covenant (*‘ahd*) first appears in the Qur’ān, at 2.27. “The ungodly, such as break the covenant after its solemn binding,”⁶⁵ means the Jews. The covenant was taken in the Torah. And the covenant was “that they

⁶³ H. Hirschfeld observed regarding ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām: “It is a prominent feature of Moslim tradition whenever the characteristics of a class of individuals are under discussion, that one person is made the representative of the common idea and held responsible for anything said or done by any person belonging to that class, or anything that might have been said or done by them. Historical veracity is in this respect not so much sought after, the chief object being to throw a brilliant light on a certain point.” “Historical and Legendary Controversies,” 109. J. Horowitz also wrote: “In Muslim tradition he has become the typical representative of that group of Jewish scribes which honored the truth, admitting that Muḥammad was the Prophet predicted in the Torah, and protecting him from the intrigues of their co-religionists.” “‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition, 52. Steven Wasserstrom adds that the words in the mouth of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām are “Muslim reimaginings of the primordial confrontation with Judaism.” *Between Muslim and Jew*, 176.

⁶⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 100, 101.

⁶⁵ this phrase repeats at Sūrat al-Ra‘d (13):25.

would worship Allah and not associate anything with him, and that they would believe in the prophet.”⁶⁶ At the second occurrence of the term covenant, 2.40, Muqātil adds more information. The children of Israel also agreed to believe “in the prophets and the book.”⁶⁷

Verse 41 introduces the language of confirmation (*muṣaddiq*) for the first time. Muqātil explains that “covenant” refers to the agreement which God made with the Jews in the Torah. He very quickly specifies that an essential stipulation in that covenant was that the Jews would believe in Muḥammad.⁶⁸ “But they disbelieved in Muḥammad,” Muqātil writes.⁶⁹ As to the phrase, “confirming that which is with you,” Muqātil again links this with the Torah.⁷⁰ The matter of Muḥammad is to be found in the Torah, he writes, but the Jewish leaders have concealed this information.⁷¹ On a series of four occurrences of *muṣaddiq* in the passage 2.89-101, the exegete writes that the recitation sent down to Muḥammad declares the truth of what is in “the books that were before it” about Muḥammad and his prophethood.⁷² Muqātil’s interpretations of covenant and confirmation link ancient past with Muslim story very effectively, and the Torah functions as a constant between them. In this connection, it is surely significant that while the word “Torah” does not appear at all in the first two sūras of the Qur’an, Muqātil names the Jewish scripture explicitly some 58 times in his exegesis of 2.1-159.⁷³

All of the exegetical devices described above— anecdote, occasion of revelation, identification, characterization, personification and liaison—are literary techniques. By using these techniques in order to explain the meanings of the otherwise apparently vague, anonymous and disjointed fragments of scripture, Muqātil skillfully provides them with sense and coherence by constructing an overarching narrative framework. The structure

⁶⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 95.

⁶⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 100. Here Muqātil cross-references Mā’ida (5).12 and indicates that “believe in my messengers” means “in Muḥammad.”

⁶⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 100.

⁶⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 101.

⁷⁰ Uri Rubin has investigated the theme of biblical “attestation” of the prophet of Islam in a wide variety of early Muslim works in his *The Eye of the Beholder: The life of Muḥammad as viewed by the early Muslims* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1995), 21-43.

⁷¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 101.

⁷² At 2.89, 91, 97 and 101.

⁷³ First at 2.4. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 84.

which he establishes at the beginning of the commentary, in his exegesis of 2.1-162, continues to serve him as he proceeds to explain the rest of scripture.

If there is indeed an overarching narrative framework at work in Muqātil's commentary, what is the story? In its largest dimensions, the story is that Allah acted in history through an Arabian prophet named Muḥammad.⁷⁴ Muḥammad was sent as a true prophet of Allah, and Allah revealed his word through this particular prophet in recitations called the *qur'ān*.⁷⁵ Further, the Muslim story specified that "God's salvific design had been achieved only with the revelation granted Muhammad."⁷⁶

This outer framework can then be segmented into a number of subordinate structures or patterns. For example, one of the best-known patterns of the story is the response to Muḥammad from the Arab "associators" in Mecca.⁷⁷ The strongest narrative pattern in Muqātil's exegesis of Baqara 1-162 and of the tampering verses in general is the Jewish response—and primarily resistance—to religious claims surrounding the prophet of Islam. In this subplot, the Jewish response is represented by the Jews of Madīna during the career of Muḥammad in that city. The Jews are portrayed as possessing scripture which prophesies the coming of a prophet. This should have prepared them to receive Muḥammad readily, and indeed part of the story is that were hoping for military deliverance from hostile

⁷⁴ Andrew Rippin: "the sequence of world events centered on the time of Muhammad was directed by God." "Literary analysis of Qur'ān, *tafsīr*, and *sīra*," 154. John Wansbrough: "the spiritual, intellectual, and social transformation brought about by the mission (*mab'ath*) of an Arabian prophet." *Sectarian Milieu*, 7.

⁷⁵ Muqātil signals this very early on in his exegesis of Sūrat al-Baqara, in his explanation of the unspecified doubt and belief referred to there. At 2.2: that the *qur'ān* "came from Allah and he sent it down upon Muḥammad." At 2.3: "they believe in the *qur'ān* that it came from Allah most high and that he sent it down upon Muḥammad." *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 81. Frequently in the subsequent commentary, Muqātil uses these and similar phrases to identify the unspecified objects of doubt, belief and disbelief.

⁷⁶ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 109.

⁷⁷ Wansbrough found four "stages" in what he described as the "emergence of the Islamic kerygma" in the *Sīra*: "(a) initial proclamation, (b) pagan rejection, (c) opportunist and hypocritical submission, (d) Jewish rejection." *Sectarian Milieu*, 23. In the passages of Muqātil's commentary investigated in this study, Wansbrough's fourth 'stage' is by far the most prominent. Rudolf Sellheim wrote about three layers or *Schichten* in the *Sīra*, and considered the middle layer ("prophetic legend") to be the one related to Jews and Christians. "Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte," 48, 53f.

Arabs through the coming of the prophet.⁷⁸ But while a few Jews respond with integrity to the appearance of the prophet of Islam on the basis of the prophecies in their possession, the leaders of the Jews and the larger part of the Jewish population reject him out of a variety of evil motives, including obstinacy.⁷⁹ The issue which arises repeatedly in anecdotes is whether the Jews will acknowledge the prophethood of Muḥammad, will attest that the recitations he speaks are from Allah, and will believe in and obey him. A central concern, therefore, is the authority of the prophet of Islam. The story continues into a phase of deteriorating relationships between Muḥammad and the Jewish tribes of Madīna, which includes Jewish treachery against the prophet of Islam and a series of harsh Muslim responses to the tribes.⁸⁰

Wansbrough made the claim that the narrative framework has a number of literary functions. The narrative framework, he wrote, both provides a setting for commentary on the text of scripture and serves to emphasize the Hijāzī background to Islam.⁸¹ The text of the Qurʾān is referential, allusive and elliptical. Verses of the Qurʾān repeatedly leave open the questions of who is the subject of the action, who or what is the object, and indeed what kind of action is envisaged. The scriptural contexts of the verses seldom provide further clues. As a result, apart from extensive commentary many verses of the Qurʾān appear

⁷⁸ Muqātil tells this story at 2.89, where the scriptural phrase is “they aforesaid prayed for victory over the unbelievers.” He explains that the Jews used to pray for assistance through the emergence (*khurūj*) of Muḥammad against the idolatrous Arabs. The Jews said that they found the prophet in their book and that they anticipated his help. Muqātil writes, “Then when Allah, powerful and exalted, sent Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, from outside of the children of Israel, they disbelieved in him [though] they recognized him.” *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 122. On the connection of 2.89 with Muslim traditions about Jewish knowledge of the coming of a prophet, see Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 29; and Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 5-6, 16.

⁷⁹ Rippin describes this pattern as “the continual motif of Jewish rejection of the alleged prognosis of Muḥammad/Aḥmad in the Torah.” “The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*,” 4.

⁸⁰ In Marco Schöller’s summary of the story of the prophet’s conflict with the Jews according to al-Kalbī, the phase of Jewish treachery and especially harsh Muslim responses appears to be paramount. “*Sīra and Tafsīr*: Muḥammad al-Kalbī on the Jews of Medina,” in *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources*, Harald Motzki, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 23-25. Schöller suggests that many aspects of al-Kalbī’s version match the “orthodox” account of Ibn Ishāq (p. 24). Wansbrough noted that both al-Kalbī and Ibn Ishāq—as well as Muqātil—employed a “narrative framework.” *Quranic Studies*, 137.

⁸¹ *Quranic Studies*, 123. See also Rippin, *Muslims*, 37: “The integration of the text [of the Qurʾān] with the stories of the prophets of the past (primarily Biblical) in the material known as the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, ‘stories of the prophets,’ and with the story of the life of Muḥammad as embedded in books of *Sīra* (‘life story’) such as that of Ibn Ishāq (d. 767) was designed both to prove the theological fact of the reality of revelation and to provide a context for interpretation for an otherwise historically opaque text.”

meaningless. The narrative framework supplies a context from outside of the text of scripture and lends coherence to the individual verses.

Use of the narrative framework by Muqātil “compels the reader to accept the Qur’ān document as a source for the life of Muhammad and thus for conditions in the Hijaz during the seventh century.”⁸² With his choice of the verb ‘compel,’ Wansbrough implied that the narrative framework has power to influence meaning. He followed up this suggestion in his comment on the relationship of ‘the story’ to the text of scripture within Muqātil’s commentary: “. . . it may be said of [Muqātil] that the scriptural text was subordinate, conceptually and syntactically, to the *narratio*.”⁸³ If the narrative framework was indeed paramount in Muqātil’s commentary, even to the point of subordinating the words of the Qur’ān, then it is also able to influence the treatment of individual themes and motifs such as tampering with earlier scriptures.

Narrative method, the elements of haggadic exegesis, and arguably the influence of narrative on exegesis did not end with Muqātil. Not only did the narrative approach continue in exegetical literature, but it can be found in genres as diverse as *hadīth*, *Sīra*, *maghāzī* and *ayyām*. “The substance of Bukhārī, Muslim and Tirmidhī,” claimed Wansbrough, “is that of Muqātil, Sufyān, and Kalbī. It is also that of the entire exegetical tradition, excluding the masoretic literature, up to and including Suyūṭī.”⁸⁴ Calder specified that the second exegete in this study was also part of this tradition: “From Ṭabarī to Qurṭubī, no exegete within the Sunnī tradition relinquishes the story.”⁸⁵ In his article on the history of trends in *tafsīr*, Calder gave examples of how Ṭabarī appeared to resolve many exegetical questions—or at least make his choice of preferred interpretation—on the basis of narrative.

One of the important questions to be asked following the exploration of the operation of the narrative framework in the exegesis of the tampering verses is, to what extent did

⁸² *Quranic Studies*, 123. Cf. Rippin: reports of the occasions of revelation were employed out of a desire “to historicize the text of the Qur’ān in order to be able to prove constantly that God really did reveal his book to humanity on earth.” “The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*,” 2.

⁸³ *Quranic Studies*, 127.

⁸⁴ *Quranic Studies*, 183.

⁸⁵ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 119.

narrative considerations determine the meaning of the verses of the Qur'ān in Ṭabarī's commentary? The question is further focused by a remark in *Quranic Studies*. "Formally haggadic elements in the exegesis of Ṭabarī and his successors," wrote Wansbrough, "were functionally of another order, and had been adapted to a different set of priorities."⁸⁶ What are the differences between the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī in relation to narrative exegesis? How do these differences affect their development of the tampering motif?

5.2 The narrative framework in the exegesis of the tampering verses

The narrative patterns revealed in Muqātil's commentary on Baqara 1-162 are also at work in the exegesis of the tampering verses by both Muqātil and Ṭabarī. Chapters 3 and 4 described the contents of these passages in the commentaries and analysed their development of the meanings of the Qur'ānic vocabulary of tampering. This section will analyse the same passages for their indications of a larger narrative framework looming over the exegesis of the particular verses. It will also enquire as to whether the exegetical devices seen to operate in Muqātil's exegesis of 2.1-162 carry through in the exegetes' explanations of the tampering verses. It will end by posing the question of whether the narrative framework thus erected can be seen to exert an influence on the exegesis of the tampering verses.

Indications of the narrative structure of Jewish response which will be highlighted in this section include the predominance of 'the matter of Muḥammad' as the object of tampering; the interpretation of 'covenant' to mean a divine stipulation to believe in and follow Muḥammad; the exegesis of the 'confirmation' of the earlier scriptures to mean Muḥammad's attestation of their authority; the profusion of the vocabulary of Jewish resistance; and the tendency to personify paradigmatic response, especially in the commentary of Muqātil. Each feature will be examined for the contribution it makes to the narrative framework.

⁸⁶ *Quranic Studies*, 146.

Narrative indications will first be explored in the commentaries' tampering passages already described and analyzed above. Verses from the Qur'ān containing keywords which seem to interact with the narrative currents will be noted. The indications will then be traced through other exegetical materials such as the contexts of the tampering passages in the commentaries.

5.2.1 The matter of Muḥammad

The narrative pattern which dominates the development of the tampering motif in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī is the response of the Jews of Madīna to the claims of Muḥammad. One of the most important indicators of this influential pattern is the frequency of identification of the object of tampering as the description of the Arabian prophet in the Torah. This expression occurs repeatedly in various forms. Often the object of tampering is simply "Muḥammad."⁸⁷ Muqātil most frequently mentions the *amr* ('matter')⁸⁸ of Muḥammad, then his *na't* ('description'),⁸⁹ his *ṣifa* ('characteristics'),⁹⁰ his *ba'th* ('sending')⁹¹ and its *bayān* ('declaration').⁹² Ṭabarī and his chosen authorities use all of these expressions,⁹³ and add the *ma'rifa* ('knowledge')⁹⁴ of Muḥammad, his *mab'ath* ('mission'),⁹⁵ his *nubūwa* ('prophethood'),⁹⁶ his *sha'n* ('matter'),⁹⁷ his *ism* ('name'),⁹⁸ and his *dhikr* ('mention').⁹⁹

The matter of Muḥammad is the main object of tampering in the commentaries.

⁸⁷ Ṭabarī at 2.42, 2.146, 2.159, 3.187 and 4.37.

⁸⁸ Muqātil at 2.41, 2.42, 2.44, 2.76, 2.140, 2.174, 3.71, 3.73, 3.78, 3.187, 4.37, 5.15 and 6.91.

⁸⁹ Muqātil at 2.16, 2.42, 2.44, 2.79, 3.70, 3.72, 3.78 and 4.37. "The substantive *na't* is used [in Muqātil's *Tafsīr*] only in the specific meaning of 'characteristics of the Prophet.'" Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ānic Exegesis in Early Islam*, 140.

⁹⁰ Muqātil at 4.46.

⁹¹ Muqātil at 2.41.

⁹² Muqātil at 2.44, 4.46.

⁹³ Ṭabarī: *amr* at 2.42, 2.140, 2.146, 2.159, 2.174, 3.71, 3.187, 4.37 and 6.91; *na't* at 2.42, 2.75, 2.77, 2.79, 3.71 and 4.37; *ṣifa* at 2.42, 2.75, 2.140, 2.159, 4.37 and 5.41; *ba'th* at 2.42 and 2.174; *bayān* at 2.27 and 2.159.

⁹⁴ Ṭabarī at 2.42.

⁹⁵ Ṭabarī at 2.77, 2.159 and 3.71.

⁹⁶ Ṭabarī at 2.77, 2.159, 2.174, 3.71, 3.187 and 6.91.

⁹⁷ Ṭabarī at 2.174 and 3.71.

⁹⁸ Ṭabarī at 2.79, 2.174, 3.187 and 4.37.

⁹⁹ Ṭabarī at 6.91.

Muqātil finds it to be the object of tampering in two of the four *harrāfa* verses, and in seven of the eight *katama* passages. Ṭabarī concludes that the matter of Muḥammad is not the object of tampering in the *harrāfa* verses. However, at 2.75 he claims that this is exactly the information which the Jews of Muḥammad’s Madīna would be likely to tamper with.¹⁰⁰ As noted earlier, all of his *katama* passages mention this matter. At 2.79, both Muqātil’s explanation and Ṭabarī’s ‘Uthmān tradition focus on the description of Muḥammad as the object of Jewish tampering.

The ‘matter of Muḥammad’ assumed by these exegetes to be found in the earlier scriptures are the assertions that Muḥammad is a true prophet and apostle, that what he is reciting is in fact a revelation sent down from Allah, and that the Jews had made a covenant with Allah that they would believe in Muḥammad and obey him.¹⁰¹

The scriptural warrant for this conviction that Muḥammad will be found in the former scriptures is not spelled out in the first five sūras of the Qur’ān. But 7.157 contains the phrase which the exegetes frequently use in their statements of the location and object of tampering: “Those who follow the messenger the prophet *al-ummī* whom they find written with them in the Torah and the Injīl” (*yajidūnahu maktūban ‘indahum fī al-tawrāt wa al-injīl*).¹⁰² In explaining this verse, Muqātil does not advance a text from the earlier scriptures as proof for this claim,¹⁰³ but Ṭabarī transmits a substantial tradition about Muḥammad’s description in the Torah from ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr [ibn al-‘Āṣ]:

He is described in the Torah with his Qur’ānic characteristics, “O prophet, we have sent you as a witness, a bringer of good tidings, and a warner, and a refuge for the gentiles (*ummiyyīn*). You are my servant and my messenger; I have named you ‘the trusting.’ He is not harsh nor rough nor crying in the streets (*aswāq*); he does not reward evil with evil, but pardons and forgives. We will not take him until by him we have caused the crooked people to say, “There is no god except Allah,” and by him we

¹⁰⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 248. Similarly at 5.41—though the main object of tampering is the stoning verse in the Torah—the Jewish denial of the prophethood of Muḥammad is still in view. *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 316.

¹⁰¹ Muqātil at 2.2-4, 2.42, 2.88, 2.90, 2.101, etc. Muqātil also claims that the Torah declares that Muḥammad’s religion is Islam. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 131 (at 2.109).

¹⁰² Cf. Goldziher, “Über muhammedanische Polemik,” 372.

¹⁰³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. II, 67.

have opened the uncircumcised hearts, the deaf ears and the blind eyes.”¹⁰⁴

Ṭabarī writes that ‘Atā’ ibn Yasār, who heard this Torah passage recited, then met Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and asked him for verification. Ka‘b replied that the quote was correct except for the grammatical forms of the adjectives in the last phrase.¹⁰⁵

Another Qur’ānic locus for the conviction that Muḥammad’s description is to be found in the earlier scriptures is 61.6, where ‘Īsā ibn Maryam is quoted as saying, “Children of Israel, I am indeed the messenger of Allah to you, confirming the Torah that is before me, and giving good tidings of a messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be *aḥmad*.” These ‘good tidings’ from ‘Īsā were assumed to be found in the Injīl. In his *Tafsīr*, Muqātil writes that *aḥmad*, “in the Syriac language,” is “*fāraqliṭā*.”¹⁰⁶

The culpability of the Jews of Madīna for not responding favourably to the appearance of the prophet of Islam is based in the commentaries on the assumption that they know the information about Muḥammad in the Torah in their possession. Ṭabarī expands on this assumption by claiming that not only did the Jews have this information with them, but that they were the only ones privy to this information. “The prophethood of Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, and his characteristics and his sending were only with (‘*inda*) the people of the book and no others (*dūna ghayrahum*).”¹⁰⁷ In this and many other statements, the exegetes freely use the expressions “with them/you” (‘*indahum/kum, ma‘ahum/kum*) or “between their hands” (*bayna aydihim*). These indeed are scriptural expressions. The effect of the repetition of these

¹⁰⁴ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. XIII, 164 (trad. 15225). The first part of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr’s quote matches Q. 33.45 and resembles 48.8. See also Watt’s translation of Ibn Sa‘d’s version of the tradition. “The Early Development,” 57-8. Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957), Vol. I, 360-361. Bukhārī connects the tradition with 48.8. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. VI, 44-45 (*kitāb al-tafsīr*, bāb 273).

¹⁰⁵ Which, from a literary perspective, lends a touch of verisimilitude to the tradition. *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. XIII, 164 (trad. 15225). Further to 7.157 and treatments of the verse by Muqātil and Ṭabarī see Isaiah Goldfeld, “The Illiterate Prophet (nabī ummī): An Inquiry into the Development of a Dogma in Islamic Tradition,” *Der Islam* 57 (1980), 67; and McAuliffe, “The Qur’ānic Context,” 149-150.

¹⁰⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. IV, 316. Cf. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 23, on Muqātil’s exegesis and his remark: “This indicates that the identification of the Quranic ‘Aḥmad’ with the Paraclete of the New Testament is much earlier than is usually assumed by modern scholars.” Further on 61.6 and its exegesis by Muqātil and others see McAuliffe, “The Qur’ānic Context,” 151, 158 n. 65.

¹⁰⁷ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 251 (at. 2.159). As noted in chapter 4 above, Ṭabarī signaled this claim already at 2.40-41. *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 554, 563.

phrases in the commentaries is to make the Jewish rejection of the truth of Muḥammad's prophethood very personal, even tactile, and to accentuate their culpability and obstinacy.

The function of this narrative element in the larger framework is to focus attention on the Jewish response to the prophet of Islam. According to the commentaries, Muḥammad is indeed prophesied in the scriptures which the people of the book have in their possession. The reader/listener of the commentaries 'knows' this information. The precise form of the prophecies is left somewhat mysterious. Some of the characters who are familiar with the scriptures respond appropriately to what they read there. But a larger number of characters choose to disregard that information. The 'people of the book' are thus clearly culpable in the story for a negative response to Muḥammad. Those who do not disclose the matter of Muḥammad are shown to be liars or tamperers.¹⁰⁸

5.2.2 Part of the Covenant

The culpability of the Jews for their negative response to Muḥammad is further dramatized in the commentaries by the assertion that God's covenant with the Jews in the past included the stipulation that they believe in and obey the prophet of Islam when he would be sent. The theme of covenant and its connection to the tampering motif appears in the tampering passages of the exegetes especially at 5.13 and 3.187. That the exegetes would be inclined to discuss the covenant God made with Israel in these passages is clear from the surrounding context in the Qur'ān. Both verses contain the keyword (*mūthāq*); 5.12 specifies that the covenant is with the children of Israel, and that the stipulations of Allah himself included the command to believe (*amuna* IV) in his messengers and assist (*ʿazara* II) them.

¹⁰⁸ It is worth noting that in none of the commentary passages investigated in this study is the object of tampering Jewish and/or Christian credal statements which later became the staples of medieval polemic. Neither does there appear to be a significant concern for the actual contents and textual condition of the earlier scriptures, as there was with Ibn Ḥazm and his followers. There is indeed mention of *qibla*, Abraham, the stoning verse, legal prescriptions (the 'permitted and forbidden'), and other objects of tampering. But by far the most frequent object of tampering is information about Muḥammad. This appears to be based not on a demonstration of familiarity with the contents of the earlier scriptures themselves, but rather on the Qur'ānic assertion that the messenger and *ummī* prophet can be found "written down with them in the Torah and Gospel" (7.157). Another observation on the minor objects of tampering is that the focus of concern with the *qibla*, the ruling on adultery, and the "effacing" of Jewish prohibitions, is the authority of the prophet of Islam. The state of the text of the Torah does not seem to take centre stage.

There are other passages in Muslim scripture which make possible the exegetical connection of the covenant to the response to Muḥammad, and these were no doubt in the minds of the exegetes as they explained the tampering verses. In 3.81, Allah makes a covenant with the prophets in which he commands them: “I have given you of book and wisdom. When there shall come to you a messenger confirming what is with you, you shall believe (*amuna* IV) in him and you shall help (*naṣara*) him.”¹⁰⁹ The prophets then promise to do so. Also in 7.157, right after the claim that the *ummi* prophet is recorded in the Torah and Gospel, comes the promise, “Those who believe (*amuna* IV) in him and honour (*‘azara* II) him and help (*naṣara*) him, and follow (*tabi‘a* VIII) the light that has been sent down with him—they are the prosperers.”

Muqātil’s exegesis of the first appearances of “covenant” at 2.27 and 2.40 was noted above. Ṭabarī likewise first raises the covenant theme at 2.27, but moves considerably beyond Muqātil in describing the contents of the covenant. The covenant imposed upon the people of the book in the Torah was to follow (*ittibā‘*) Muḥammad when he was sent forth, and to attest to the truthfulness (*taṣḍīq*) of both the messenger and of what he brought from their Lord.¹¹⁰ The Jewish religious leaders were to make his affair clear (*tabyīn, ikhbār*) to the people, and not conceal it. And his affair in the scriptures included the information “that he was a messenger from Allah to whom obedience (*tā‘a*) has been prescribed.”¹¹¹ At 2.40, Ṭabarī specifies that the literate Jewish rabbis were required by God to announce “that they find him written with them in the Torah as the prophet of Allah, and that they believe in him and in what he brought from Allah.”¹¹² The coupling of obedience to Allah with obedience to Muḥammad in the covenant so conceived is striking. Another interesting feature of these two passages is Ṭabarī’s pattern of cross-reference: at 2.27 he refers ahead to 2.40, and quotes 3.178; at 2.40 he quotes 5.12 twice, and offers 7.156-7 and 9.111 as evidence of information about Muḥammad and Islam in the covenant.

Ṭabarī’s explanations of covenant also highlight the evil of the Jewish response to

¹⁰⁹ On 3.81 and “the covenant with the prophets” see Jeffery, “The Qur’ān as Scripture,” 127-9.

¹¹⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 411.

¹¹¹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 413.

¹¹² *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 557.

Muḥammad by detailing the ‘boons’ or mercy of God in his dealings with Israel in the past. At 5.13, after providing a formulaic recital of the gracious things which God did, he writes that the Jews still broke the covenant. Ṭabarī concludes his paraphrase: “If this is what their best people did, in spite of my kindness to them, don’t be surprised if their low people do the same thing.”¹¹³ The Jewish failure to respond positively to Muḥammad is not an understandable reaction to a cruel and tyrannical deity, but rather is an unaccountable rebellion against a God who only treated them kindly.

The theme of tampering thus fits into a larger narrative framework in which a concept of covenant is at work. The earlier scriptures contain the record of a binding contract between Allah and the children of Israel. Among the stipulations of that covenant is belief in, support of, and obedience to Muḥammad when he appears. *Tahrīf* is the action of concealing those particular stipulations, not publicising them to the common people, and/or refusing to act upon what Allah has commanded. Therefore, they are clearly culpable, and the curse of Allah rests upon them. The concept that the children of Israel are breaking an ancient divine covenant in their response to Muḥammad gives depth and ‘historical’ authenticity to the exegetes’ portrayal of the deceitfulness and treachery of the Jews.

The function of this narrative element in the larger framework is to introduce a note of dramatic and moral tension into the story of the response to Muḥammad’s claims. Not only are the Jews responding negatively to the prophet while in possession of scriptural attestation to his prophethood. They are also defying God by breaking an agreement he had made with them before the prophet appeared. This double culpability makes the Jews especially worthy of God’s chastisement and curse—an expression which appears frequently in both Qur’ān and commentaries. That the Jews have been evil and disobedient in the past is a matter of common knowledge. Now in their response to Muḥammad they are shown to be acting in character. They have lost God’s favour by breaking their covenant with him in past and present. The proof of that covenant is to be found in the book with which they are tampering.

¹¹³ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 125, cf. 130-131.

5.2.3 A link of correspondence

Another indication of a larger narrative framework surrounding the tampering motif is the theme of correspondence between the earlier scriptures and the recitations of the prophet of Islam. The Qur'ānic material on this claim was surveyed in chapter 2. Exegesis of this material in the commentaries tends to accentuate the guilt of the Jews by showing them to be denying a link of confirmation between their own scriptures and the words of Muḥammad. When the term *muṣaddiq* first appears at 2.41, Ṭabarī glosses the scriptural phrase “in confirmation of what is with you” as “the *qur'ān* confirms what is with the Jews of Banū Isrā'īl from the Torah.”¹¹⁴ He explains that the *qur'ān*, the Torah and the Gospel intersect precisely in the command to acknowledge (*iqrār*) the prophethood of Muḥammad, to attest (*taṣdīq*) him and to obey (*ittibā'*) him. This command is in all three scriptures, writes Ṭabarī, so if the Jews attest to what was sent down to Muḥammad, they attest to the Torah as well.¹¹⁵ In his exegesis of the phrase “what is with you,” Ṭabarī is straightforward in saying that the Torah and the Gospel are with the Jews, and he cites a tradition which claims, “they find Muḥammad. . . written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel.”¹¹⁶

Ṭabarī provides further explanation of *muṣaddiq* at several other occurrences of the term in sūras 2-6. At 4.47 he glosses “confirming” as *muḥaqqaq*,¹¹⁷ with the sense of verifying or substantiating. He offers an interesting discussion of the scriptural term which is set in parallel with *muṣaddiq* at 5.48, *muhaymin*.¹¹⁸ Ṭabarī and a large number of traditions provide a variety of glosses for *muhaymin* (‘guarding it in safety’): providing evidence (*shahīd*) that it is true and from Allah, assuring (*amīn*) it, guarding (*hāfīz*) it, supervising (*raqaba*) it, and entrusted (*mu'taman*) with it. The *qur'ān* does not contradict (*khalafa* III) the Torah which Allah sent down on Moses, which is guidance and light.¹¹⁹ All of these expressions indicate a concept of the trustworthiness of the earlier scriptures.

An anecdote which Ṭabarī transmits in his explanation of *muṣaddiq* at 2.97 gives a

¹¹⁴ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 560.

¹¹⁵ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 560-561.

¹¹⁶ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 561 (trad. 816).

¹¹⁷ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 440.

¹¹⁸ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 377-382.

¹¹⁹ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. XI, 530 (at 6.92).

good idea of the spirit of much of the material on the earlier scriptures in his commentary. In a tradition attributed to al-Sha‘bī, ‘Umar tells about being present with the Jews on the day of their study (*midrās*) and being amazed “at how the Torah confirmed the truth (*taṣḍīq*) of the *furqān*, and how the *furqān* confirmed the truth of the Torah.”¹²⁰ ‘Umar presses the Jews to say whether they know (*‘alima*) that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah. One of their learned and important men answers—though once more only because he has been adjured by God—that they do indeed know that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah. ‘Umar then expresses amazement a second time: If they know that he is the messenger of Allah, why do they not follow (*tabi‘a*) him and attest to (*ṣaddaqa*) him?¹²¹

The claim that Muḥammad is confirming God’s earlier revelation also comes out strongly in the exclamation of triumph which the prophet of Islam makes at the end of the ‘stoning verse’ narratives. This exclamation is worded variously in the different accounts: In Muqātil’s *tafsīr* Muḥammad says, “I am the first to revive one of the *sunnas* of Allah.”¹²² Ṭabarī’s commentary offers two expressions, the first addressed to God: “O Allah, I am the first who revived your command” (al-Barā’ ibn ‘Āzab); and the second a claim of self-identity: “I impose (*qadā*) what is in the Torah” (Abū Hurayra). Taken together, these exclamations show a striking concern to portray continuity between the ruling in the Torah and the ruling of the prophet of Islam. These stories authenticate the claim of Muḥammad’s true prophethood by demonstrating that the judgment he gives on a difficult legal problem lines up with Allah’s judgment contained in the Torah.¹²³

The prophethood of Muḥammad in both commentaries, therefore, is based upon the alleged continuity of his recitations with the revelations of the past, rather than upon a claim of discontinuity because those scriptures had been previously falsified. The problem in

¹²⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 381 (trad. 1608).

¹²¹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 381.

¹²² Ibn Ishāq’s version of the exclamation begins the same way as Muqātil’s but then includes a reference to the *kitāb* of Allah: “I am the first to revive the order of Allah and his book and to practise it.” *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 406.

¹²³ At 5.44, ‘Abd al-Razzāq finds the prophet of Islam to say, “I impose (*hakama*) what is in the Torah.” ‘Abd ul-Razzāq adds, after reporting Muḥammad’s exclamation of triumph, that he is one of the “submitted” prophets who make judgments according to the Torah. *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīz*, Vol. I, 185. Vajda indicated that in the versions of Muslim and Ibn Māja, Muḥammad exclaims, “Allah, I am the first to revive your command after they killed it.” “Juifs et Musulmans selon le Ḥadīth,” 97.

focus is that the earlier scriptures are not being applied, and the prophetic authenticity of Muḥammad is demonstrated through his act of reviving divine rulings contained therein. The narrative seems to be more concerned to show continuity than to suggest corruption.

The function of this narrative element in the larger framework is to further accentuate the depth of perversity in the Jewish rejection of Muḥammad. According to the commentaries, the prophet of Islam rules in accordance with the Torah. This authenticates the Muslim claim that Muḥammad is a true prophet of God. The Torah is drawn into the story as the proof-text for that claim. Its role is not as a symbol of Jewish falsification. Quite the contrary. Its role is as a source of authority—indeed as the only possible authority whereby a claim to prophethood can be judged.¹²⁴ As such, the theme of correspondence deepens the culpability of the Jews for their negative response to the prophet of Islam.

5.2.4 Rich vocabulary of resistance

When the exegetes portray the encounter between the Jews and the prophet of Islam, they employ a wide range of vocabulary to describe the response—especially the negative response—of the Jews. Some of this vocabulary echoes the language of the Qurʾān itself.¹²⁵ Other descriptions simply gloss the verbs and terms which the Qurʾān applies. But the exegetes go well beyond this wordpool to accentuate a set of characteristics which becomes very important in their picture of the Jews. This attempt at characterization is an important indication of the narrative structure behind the exegesis. Characterization is a literary technique. The profusion of the vocabulary of Jewish response must therefore be seen as evidence of a narrative dynamic at work. This vocabulary will be explored according to the increasing degree of evil and culpability on the part of the Jews.

The appropriate response to the claims of Muḥammad is described by the exegetes in

¹²⁴ Julian Obermann wrote, “the word of God that had been revealed to the ‘people of the Book’ is forever reflected in [Muḥammad’s] own revelations and referred to as an ultimate source of authority.” “Koran and Agada,” 23. Steven M. Wasserstrom argued that Jewish and Christian traditions were seen to attest to the truth of Islam. “Israʿiliyyat was an outside witness brought in to testify to the veracity of the new religion. The older religion is called to the witness box to speak on behalf of the new.” *Between Muslim and Jew*, 174. Another essential scholarly insight in this connection is that of Wansbrough: “By its own express testimony, the Islamic kerygma was an articulation . . . of the Biblical dispensation, and can only thus be assessed.” *Sectarian Milieu*, 45.

¹²⁵ Hirschfeld characterized many scriptural references to the Jews as “abusive titles” and “unflattering epithets.” *New Researches*, 105, 106.

the language of recognition, acceptance, belief and obedience. The conversation apparently referred to at 4.46 provides the exegetes with an opportunity to articulate this response. The second part of the verse says that the Jews should have said, “We have heard and obey.” Ṭabarī explains this to mean “We heard your saying, O Muḥammad, and we obeyed (*tāʿa* IV) your command, and accepted (*qabila*) what you brought to us from Allah.”¹²⁶ Ṭabarī further explains the appropriate response as to believe (*ṣaddaqa*) in Muḥammad and the truth that he brought, and to acknowledge (*qarra*) his prophethood.¹²⁷ In other tampering passages, the right response to the truth is to confess it (*ʿarifa* VIII), as Muqātil reports Ibn Ṣūriyā doing at 5.41.¹²⁸ Elsewhere Muqātil explains that the Jews acknowledge (*qarra* IV) part of the matter of Muḥammad, while hiding the other part.¹²⁹

The language of the Qurʾān allows for the portrayal of appropriate response by indicating that the subjects of the action know (*ʿalima*)¹³⁰ or recognize (*ʿarafa*).¹³¹ When the verb is left open-ended, as is frequently the case, Muqātil tends to specify the object. At 2.146, for example, he explains through an anecdote that the Jews know the true *qibla* from their familiarity with the Torah and Injīl.¹³² The scriptural *amuna* IV is frequently glossed with the verb *ṣaddaqa* in both Ṭabarī and Muqātil. In fact, when Muqātil encounters *amuna* IV without object in the text of scripture, he typically explains it as *ṣaddaqa* in Muḥammad, the *qurʾān*, or *tawhīd*.¹³³ Thus the verbal noun *taṣḍīq* also occurs regularly in the commentaries as a term for the proper response to the prophet of Islam.¹³⁴

Disbelief

The first level of negative response to the prophet of Islam is portrayed by the exegetes as disbelief (*kufr*). In their explanations of 4.46 and 5.12-14, the commentators understand that the people of the book fail to believe in Muḥammad. Muqātil writes that the

¹²⁶ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 436.

¹²⁷ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 439. Also *iqrār* at 2.77, Vol. II, 256. Cf. Muqātil on 2.83: “acknowledge (*qarra*) the sending of Muḥammad.” *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 120.

¹²⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 476.

¹²⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 284, at 3.71 (also at 2.42).

¹³⁰ 2.140, 2.146, 3.71, 3.75, 3.78, 6.114.

¹³¹ Q. 2.89, 2.146; Muq. on 2.76, 2.77, 3.188, 5.83, 6.20.

¹³² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 147.

¹³³ For example, *tawhīd* at 2.8, Muḥammad at 2.13, 14, *qurʾān* at 2.26.

¹³⁴ For example, Ṭabarī at 3.71, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 504.

Jews disbelieve (*kafara*) in Muḥammad and what he brought,¹³⁵ they disbelieve in ʿĪsā as well.¹³⁶ He connects disbelief in Muḥammad with envy on the part of the Jews.¹³⁷ Even Ibn Ṣūriyā, who made a bold confession of Muḥammad’s prophethood in both commentaries, subsequently disbelieved.¹³⁸ At 2.211, Muqātil links the Jews’ disbelief of Muḥammad with their lack of faithfulness to Allah.¹³⁹

The use of forms of *kafara* in the commentaries to characterise the response of the Jews is extensive. As indicated earlier, Muqātil frequently identifies the Jews as the subject of scriptural disbelief.¹⁴⁰ At 2.77, two of Ṭabarī’s traditions find the object of the Jews’ concealment to be their disbelief.¹⁴¹ Ṭabarī’s glossing of *baddala* as *kafara* at 2.211 suggests that ‘disbelief’ in the minds of the exegetes belongs within the circle of the actions of tampering.¹⁴²

Duplicity

The Jews are portrayed as dishonest through a wide variety of epithets and anecdotes in the commentaries. The concealing and confounding verses and their contexts bring to the minds of the exegetes many examples of duplicity and prevarication.¹⁴³ In explanation of 2.76, Muqātil tells of a Jew freely revealing to a Muslim ally that he finds Muḥammad in

¹³⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 377, at 4.46.

¹³⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 461, at 5.12.

¹³⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 461, at 5.13.

¹³⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 477, at 5.41. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 304.

¹³⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 180.

¹⁴⁰ For example, at 4.47. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 377.

¹⁴¹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 256-7 (trads. 1350 & 1351)

¹⁴² *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. IV, 272-3.

¹⁴³ McAuliffe writes, “In the catalogue of exegetical amplification. . . scriptural passages are not always physically hidden. More commonly, silence, a concealing and withholding silence, stands as culprit. Obscuring occurs as an act of omission rather than commission. Jews and Christians deceive their Muslim interrogators by refusing to disclose either their divinely mandated responsibilities or the biblical predictions of Muhammad, by simply falling mute before them.” “The Qur’ānic Context,” 146. Support for this observation comes frequently in Ṭabarī’s commentary, including his early association of *kufṛ* with concealing (at 2.6). “The rabbis among the Jews of Madīna repudiated (*jahada*) the prophethood of Muḥammad and kept it secret (*sarra* IV) from the people, concealing (*katama*) his matter (*amr*), although ‘they recognized it as they recognize their sons.’ The root of ‘*kufṛ*’ among the Arabs is ‘covering (*taghṭiya*) something.’ Thus the night is called a ‘concealer’ (*kāfir*) because its darkness covers (*taghṭiya*) what it envelops. . . . Likewise, the Jewish rabbis covered (*ghaṭā* II) the matter of Muḥammad and hid (*katama*) it from the people, although they knew about his prophethood and had discovered his characteristics (*sifa*) in their books.” Here Ṭabarī also cross-references one of the *katama* verses, 2.159. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 255.

the Torah. But the Jewish leaders warn the rest of the Jews not mention this to the Muslims.¹⁴⁴ At 3.72, Muqātil tells the story of how Jewish leaders find the description of Muḥammad in the Torah in the morning but can't find it at night.¹⁴⁵ Again, Muqātil finds duplicity at 3.188, where the Jews say in the presence of both the prophet of Islam and the Muslims that they recognize and believe in Muḥammad; however, "that was not in their hearts."¹⁴⁶

The language of scripture also encourages the exegetical development of this theme in the frequent occurrence of the word "falsehood" (*kadhib*). At 5.41, Muqātil associates falsehood with Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf and his companions;¹⁴⁷ at the following verse he glosses the same word as *zūr*.¹⁴⁸ At 4.50, Muqātil finds the falsehood to be the alleged Jewish claim, "We are sons of Allah and his beloved ones."¹⁴⁹ Elsewhere he understands it to be the Jewish unwillingness to reveal the prohibition against "bloodshedding and money snatching" in the Torah,¹⁵⁰ or writing something other than the description of Muḥammad.¹⁵¹ Muqātil's anecdotes begin to build up a vocabulary of deception.¹⁵²

It is in the commentary of Ṭabarī, however, that the language of duplicity and dishonesty seems to explode. In addition to *kadhaba*, the exegete uses the verbs *farā* VIII ('to invent lyingly,' at 2.79), *makara* ('to deceive,' at 4.46) and *nafaqa* III (at 2.77). Among the synonyms he gives for 'falsehood' (*kadhib*, 2.42 and frequently) are *ifk* (at 5.41), *bāṭil* (at 3.78), *buhṭ* (at 2.75), *zūr* (at 2.140) and *fīrya* (at 2.79). Beyond these, Ṭabarī uses the terms *ḥayra* ('confusion,' at 5.41) and *khidā*^c ('duplicity,' at 2.77). The Jews of

¹⁴⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 118.

¹⁴⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 284.

¹⁴⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 321.

¹⁴⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 474.

¹⁴⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 478.

¹⁴⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 378.

¹⁵⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 285.

¹⁵¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 286.

¹⁵² An example of an anecdote which applies the vocabulary of deception to an antagonist outside the Jewish circle comes in Muqātil's exegesis of 2.10. 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy "the hypocrite" speaks to Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Alī in such a way as to demonstrate "defiance" to his friends. 'Umar catches his intent and upbraids him, "Woe to you, O Ibn Ubayy! Fear Allah, don't dissemble (*nafaqa* III), be good and don't be wicked. The hypocrite is the worst creation of Allah, the worst of them in badness, the greatest of them in deceit (*ghishsh*)."^c *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 90.

Muḥammad's day, he writes, followed the way of the "lie against Allah" as their ancestors had.¹⁵³

Duplicity is also indicated in the scriptural words of 5.41: "those who say with their mouths, 'we believe,' but their hearts don't believe." In their exegesis of these words, Muqātil and Ṭabarī retail a series of anecdotes about Jewish deviousness and deception. The Jews ask the prophet for a judgment while hoping for a ruling other than what they know to be Allah's command. At the same time they are testing him with evil motives. They want to avoid Muḥammad's question about what is in the Torah. Even their best scholar is portrayed as prepared to prevaricate if not adjured to honesty by a sacred vow. Ibn Ṣuriya finally candidly admits that the Jews do indeed know (*'alima*) that Muḥammad is a true prophet, but that they will not follow through on that knowledge because of envy.¹⁵⁴

The 'rabbinical' test of prophethood employed by the exegetes is a good illustration of a narrative structure designed to demonstrate both the authenticity of the prophet of Islam and the duplicity of his foes. The story about Ibn Ṣuriyā and the three 'qualities' (*khiṣāl*), which Muqātil tells at 5.41,¹⁵⁵ has been described and analysed in chapter 3. Wansbrough translated another story about three *khiṣāl* from Muqātil's exegesis of 18.9.¹⁵⁶ In that story, representatives of the Quraysh in Makka ask the Jews of Yathrib whether they find Muḥammad in their book. The Jews reply, "We find his description (*na'ī*) as you say."¹⁵⁷ The Quraysh are not happy with the answer, but the Jews add nevertheless, "We find that his own people are those most violently opposed to him, and yet this is the time in which he is to appear."¹⁵⁸ This story portrays the Jews as knowing and acknowledging the authenticity of Muḥammad on the basis of their 'book,' and yet deviously supplying the Quraysh with three questions calculated to trick him.

¹⁵³ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 129 (at 5.13).

¹⁵⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 477.

¹⁵⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 477.

¹⁵⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. II, 574-6. *Quranic Studies*, 122.

¹⁵⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. II, 575.

¹⁵⁸ Wansbrough's translation, *Quranic Studies*, 122.

Denial

Deception moves into active denial of the truth in the commentaries with the frequent occurrence of the verbs *kadhaba* II and *jahada*.¹⁵⁹ At 2.79 and 4.44, Muqātil finds the Jewish leaders denying (*takdhīb*) Muḥammad.¹⁶⁰ The expression *takdhīb* carries the sense of a deliberate “giving the lie” to Muḥammad, and appears to function as the opposite to the action of *taṣdīq*, or “declaring his truth.” Muqātil also describes the Jews as deniers (*mukadhdhibūna*) of the Torah at 2.159.¹⁶¹ One Jewish leader even denies that Allah ever revealed anything to anyone!¹⁶²

Muqātil sets *juḥud* and *takdhīb* in parallel at 5.14, in his explanation of what the Christians “used to do” in their various Christological confessions.¹⁶³ But the exegete also uses the verb *jahada* about the Jews at 2.146, where the object of rejection is the truth about the *qibla* revealed in the *kitāb Allāh*.¹⁶⁴ The verbal nouns of the two verbs appear to be used even more frequently in Ṭabarī’s commentary. The object of Jewish *juḥūd* and *takdhīb* at 5.41 is the prophethood of Muḥammad.¹⁶⁵ At 4.46 he adds to this “what he brought from his Lord.”¹⁶⁶ And at 2.75, he finds that since the children of Israel in the past denied Allah’s spoken word, the Jews of Madīna are likely to deny the description of the prophet of Islam in their books.¹⁶⁷ Their crime is the “repudiation (*juḥūd*) of it after they’d know it to be true.”¹⁶⁸

Ṭabarī refers to the intention (*ta‘ammud*) of the people of the book to disbelieve in Muḥammad, implying a conscious decision to deny the claims of his truth.¹⁶⁹ The exegete also supplies a third noun of denial, *inkār*, at 2.27.¹⁷⁰

¹⁵⁹ *jahada* means “to deny, disacknowledge,” and also can take on the sense of being niggardly and avaricious, and “possessing little good.” Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 2, 381.

¹⁶⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 118-119, 376.

¹⁶¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 153.

¹⁶² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 574.

¹⁶³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 462-3.

¹⁶⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 148.

¹⁶⁵ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 306.

¹⁶⁶ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 439.

¹⁶⁷ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 247-8.

¹⁶⁸ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 411 (at 2.27).

¹⁶⁹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 506 (at 3.71).

¹⁷⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 411.

Disrespect

The theme of Jewish disrespect for Muḥammad is highlighted in the commentaries at 4.46, where the exegetes attempt to explain the mysterious term *rā'ina*. Tabarī cites a tradition attributed to Qatāda saying that the Jews used to mock (*haza'a X*) the prophet of Islam with the use of that term.¹⁷¹ Tabarī and his chosen traditions explain with a remarkable range of vocabulary that the Jews used to insult (*sabba*) Muḥammad and hurt (*adhiya* IV) him with abomination (*qabīh*),¹⁷² abuse (*shatm*),¹⁷³ derision (*istihzā'*)¹⁷⁴ and disdain (*istikhfāf*).¹⁷⁵

The language of disrespect first appears in the Qur'ān at 2.14: "When they meet those who believe, they say, "We believe"; but when they go privily to their Satans, they say, "We are with you. We were only mocking (*haza'a X*)."

Muqātil identifies the subject as the unbelieving Jews, and the object of mocking as "Muḥammad and his companions."¹⁷⁶ The Qur'ān gives exegetes the possibility to develop this interpretation at 6.10: "Messengers indeed were mocked at before thee; but those that scoffed at them were encompassed by that they mocked at."

Already in the distant past, writes Muqātil, the Jews mocked while substituting a saying for the word which God had commanded them.¹⁷⁷ Their descendents acted the same way toward Muḥammad when they laughed (*dahika*) at Allah's similitude of "the spider and the fly."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷¹ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435 (trad. 9703). Similarly 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīz*, Vol. I, 159. Cf. Watt: "a piece of Jewish mockery of Muḥammad." "The Early Development," 52.

¹⁷² *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 433.

¹⁷³ Muqātil uses this term to describe *rā'inā* at 2.104. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 129. See also al-Farrā', Vol. I, 69.

¹⁷⁴ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 434.

¹⁷⁵ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435. "By their simultaneous use of Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, with its natural pitfalls of pun and assonance; it should have been easy enough for his Jewish opponents to expose his inspired reinforcement of the Truth, which had been revealed 'before,' to mockery and ambiguity." Julian Obermann, "Koran and Agada," 45.

¹⁷⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 91.

¹⁷⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 110.

¹⁷⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 94-95, at 2.26.

Envy

The language of envy is very important for connecting the narrative framework of Jewish response with the theme of tampering in the commentaries. As was noted above, this narrative current appears very early in Muqātil's commentary at 2.16, evidently triggered by the phrase, "they who have bought error at the price of guidance." Muqātil writes that the Jews found the description of Muḥammad in the Torah before he appeared, and believed in him. But when Allah sent him from among the Arabs, "they disbelieved in him out of envy."¹⁷⁹ Muqātil also finds envy to be a motivation of the Jews in his exegesis of 5.13, where he explains that though the Jews knew that Muḥammad was a true prophet from the testimony to him "with them" in the Torah, they disbelieved in him after Allah sent him out of envy that he was from the descendents of Ismā'īl.¹⁸⁰ Both Muqātil and Ṭabarī recount the comment of Ibn Šūriyā to Muḥammad at 5.41, that "the Jews do indeed know that you are a true prophet, but they envy you."¹⁸¹ Ṭabarī identifies envy as the motivation for Jewish hostility toward Allah and Muḥammad at 2.75,¹⁸² and for Jewish concealment of information about Muḥammad in their scripture at 2.159.¹⁸³

Envy is a theme in the Qur'ān at 2.90, 2.105, 2.109, and 4.54.¹⁸⁴ Muqātil glosses the "grudging" (*baghyan*) of 2.90 as "envying (*ḥasadan*) Muḥammad since he was from the Arabs."¹⁸⁵ At the verse just prior, Muqātil recounts the famous story of the Jews praying that Muḥammad be sent as a messenger to help them fight against the idolatrous Arabs. "Then when Allah, powerful and exalted, sent Muḥammad . . . from outside of the children

¹⁷⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 91.

¹⁸⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 461.

¹⁸¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 476. Cf. *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 304 (trad. 11921), 308.

¹⁸² *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 249.

¹⁸³ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 250 (trad. 2373).

¹⁸⁴ On 'envy' as *Leitwort* in the Qur'ān see Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 16, 17.

¹⁸⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 122.

of Israel, they disbelieved in him [even though] they recognized (*ʿarafa*) him.”¹⁸⁶ Also at 3.73, 4.54 and 57.29, the people of the book do not want Allah to shower his bounty on people outside of their circle. Again, Muqātil finds at 3.73 that the reason for the envy toward Muḥammad is “because the prophethood will be among outsiders.”¹⁸⁷ One other reference to this theme worth noting is Muqātil’s comments just prior to the scriptural phrase, 2.97, “Whosoever is an enemy to Gabriel” (2.97). The exegete claims that the Jews consider Gabriel their enemy because after giving the prophethood exclusively to them, he has now given it to another.¹⁸⁸

Ṭabarī transmits a variety of traditions about the Jewish expectation of Muḥammad in pre-Islamic times at 2.89 and 2.90. Several of them make explicit that envy of the Quraysh and the Arabs was the motivation for the Jewish rejection of Muḥammad when he appeared.¹⁸⁹ Some of the traditions also reveal how the state of the earlier scriptures was envisioned. The Jews used to pray for Muḥammad’s help, saying “O Allah, send this prophet whom we find written down (*maktūban*) with us.”¹⁹⁰ They used to find Muḥammad written down with them in the Torah.¹⁹¹ They threatened their Arab enemies, “if the prophet whom Moses and Jesus gave good news of—*aḥmad*—came, he would overcome you.”¹⁹² Ṭabarī adds his own judgment that the crime of the Jews in this story is

¹⁸⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 122. Wansbrough discusses the treatment of 2.89 and 2.109 in the *Sīra*, and the indication there of Jewish envy, in *The Sectarian Milieu*, 16, 18. This sub-theme that the Jewish tampering action took place only after Muḥammad ‘was sent’ appears to continue throughout both commentaries. Still at *Sūra* 98, Muqātil seems to say that there was no problem with the earlier scriptures prior to the appearance of the prophet of Islam. On the scriptural words, “And they scattered not, those that were given the book, excepting after the clear sign came to them” (98.2), Muqātil writes: “Those who disbelieve never ceased agreeing on the truth (*taṣḍīq*) of Muḥammad until he was sent, because they had his description (*naʿt*) in their books. When God designated him from the offspring of someone other than Isaac, they disagreed about him.” *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. IV, 780. On this particular point Ṭabarī pursues the same line in his interpretation of the verse: “He is saying that when God sent him, they split into groups in their opinions about him.” Translations from Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi and Andrew Rippin, eds. and trans., *Classical Islam: A sourcebook of religious literature* (London: Routledge, 2003), 106, 116.

¹⁸⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 284.

¹⁸⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 125. Georges Vajda further discusses the theme of Jewish jealousy in *Sīra* and *hadīth* in “Juifs et Musulmans selon le Ḥadīth,” 85-87.

¹⁸⁹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 335 (trads. 1526, 1525); 336 (trad. 1533). Ṭabarī agrees at 2.90 that the motive of the Jews in this story in denying what they knew was envy. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 345.

¹⁹⁰ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 335 (trad. 1526).

¹⁹¹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 335 (trads. 1525, 1527).

¹⁹² *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 336 (trad. 1533).

their denial (*inkār*) that Muḥammad was the one whose characteristics (*sifa*) they found in their book.¹⁹³ These stories picture an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews at the time of the appearance of the prophet of Islam. Their narrative logic would be lost if the reader was to assume the corruption of the Torah.

Greed

As seen above, the scriptural phrase “selling for a little price” seemed to trigger many descriptions of the greed of the Jewish leaders in the commentaries. Muqātil offers an explanation which repeats a number of times in his commentary: “an insignificant offer from what the lowly people of the Jews give them every year from their crops and their fruit. . . . If they had followed Muḥammad. . . that food would certainly have been withheld from them as a consequence.”¹⁹⁴ At 2.79, Muqātil identifies greed as the motive of the Jewish leaders for refusing to follow Muḥammad, and correspondingly for erasing his description from the Torah. The same phrase appears in explanations of the motives for concealing a scriptural text.¹⁹⁵

The scriptural warrant for this exegesis seems to come only at 9.34: “Many of the rabbis (*aḥbār*) and monks (*ruhbān*) devour the wealth of mankind wantonly and debar from the way of Allah. To those who hoard up gold and silver and spent it not in the way of Allah, give tidings of a painful doom.” At 5.42 there is also a reference to people who “consume the unlawful” (*akkālūna li al-suḥt*)—which Muqātil glosses as a bribe (*riḥwa*).¹⁹⁶ One of the tampering verses, however, contains a verb of greed, *bakhala* (at 4.37). There Muqātil finds that the leaders of the Jews are being “niggardly” by commanding the rest of the Jews to conceal the matter of Muḥammad, “out of fear.” Most of Ṭabarī’s traditions interpret this to be stinginess with the truth about Muḥammad,¹⁹⁷ but a tradition attributed to Ibn Zayd finds it to mean Jewish avarice (*bukhl*) “with what Allah gave them of income.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 345.

¹⁹⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 118-119.

¹⁹⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 101, at 2.41; Vol. I, 156, at 2.174; Vol. I, 320-321, at 3.187.

¹⁹⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 478.

¹⁹⁷ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 350-354.

¹⁹⁸ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 352.

Ṭabarī offers a range of vocabulary in his explanations of what he understands the Jewish leaders hoped to gain in exchange for their tampering actions: miserable (*khasīs*) goods from this world (at 2.79), bribes (*rishwa*, at 2.75), ill-gotten property (*suht*, at 5.41), an “object of desire” (*tamaʿ*, at 2.174), illegal earnings (*yaksibūna min al-ḥarām*, at 2.79), and “the ephemeral things of this world” (*ḥutām al-dunyā*, at 3.78).

Enmity

At the end of his exegesis of 2.75, Ṭabarī draws a straight line from the Jews’ targetting of animosity (*naṣaba* III, *ʿadāwa*) toward God and Moses in the ancient past to the hostility and enmity which the Jews of Madīna show toward Allah and Muḥammad.¹⁹⁹ Enmity becomes an important theme in the exegetes’ characterization of the Jews. In Ṭabarī’s exegesis of two of the tampering verses, the Jews are described as the “enemies of Allah.”²⁰⁰

The language of scripture allows for the development of this theme at 4.45: “Allah knows best your enemies.” Muqātil immediately identifies these as the Jews.²⁰¹ There is also the explicit statement in 5.82: “You will also find the most vehement of mankind in hostility (*ʿadāwa*) to those who believe the Jews and the associators.” Ṭabarī signals the enmity theme very early in his exegesis of Sūrat al-Baqara, in association with the words, “And some men there are who say, ‘We believe in Allah and the Last Day’; but they are not believers” (2.8). He writes that when Allah established Muḥammad in Madīna, “the learned among the Jews displayed malice (*daghāʿin*) towards the messenger of Allah, and manifested an enmity (*ʿadāwa*) and hatred (*shanʿān*) towards him out of jealousy (*ḥasad*) and injustice (*baghī*)—that is, except for a small group of them whom Allah guided to Islam

¹⁹⁹ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 249. See also Adang, “Medieval Muslim Polemics,” 148.

²⁰⁰ *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 536 (at 3.78); Vol. VIII, 352 (at 4.37).

²⁰¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 376.

and who became Muslims.”²⁰²

Rejection

Hostile attitudes are seen to manifest themselves in acts of repudiation in the exegesis of 4.46. There the Jews say, “We hear and disobey (‘*aṣā*).” They should have said, “We hear and obey (*tā‘a*).” Both exegetes understand this verse to refer to the Jewish response to the authority of the prophet of Islam, and from such scriptural hints they develop an extensive vocabulary of rejection. They envision a variety of positions, from a choice not to obey to active defiance of Muḥammad and the Muslims.

It was noted above that the expression “sell for little price” frequently brings to Muqātil’s mind the interpretation that if the Jewish leaders had followed (*tabi‘a*) Muḥammad, they would not have received their annual tithe from the Jewish populace. Both exegetes understand God’s covenant with the children of Israel to have included the stipulation to follow and obey (both *tabi‘a* and *tā‘a*) Islam’s prophet. In addition to verses like 7.157, where the successful will “follow” (*tabi‘a* VIII) the *ummi* prophet, the exegetes had in their minds the frequent Qur’ānic imperative to “obey (*tā‘a*) Allah and the messenger” (3.32).²⁰³ Indeed, according to 4.64, “We sent no messenger save that he should be obeyed by Allah’s leave.”

In spite of Allah’s command, the Jewish response to Muḥammad’s authority is characterized by the exegetes through forms of the verb ‘*aṣā* (to disobey, resist, rebel).²⁰⁴ The scriptural expression “throw behind backs” also brings to the minds of the exegetes the Jewish rejection of authority. Ṭabarī uses the verbs “to refuse” (*abā*, at 2.159), “to counteract” (*baṭala* II, at 4.46), “to renounce” (*taraka*, at 2.159 and frequently), “to

²⁰² *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 270. The tone of Muslim scripture at many points seems to suggest that the enmity is mutual. Hirschfeld found, in reference to 2.5-15, that “The very first public speeches Mohammad made in Medina breathed so much hatred and hostility that the Jews had everything to fear.” “Historical and Legendary Controversies,” 109. Georges Vajda wrote that the *ḥadīth* carried the scriptural suggestions forward: “Developing and aggravating the grievances uttered in the Qur’ān, Muslim tradition willingly underlines above all the enmity of the Jews.” “Ahl al-Kitāb,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, H.A.R. Gibb *et al*, eds., (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), Vol. I, 256. See also Vadja, “Juifs et Musulmans selon le Ḥadīth,” 85f.

²⁰³ The imperative *aḥi‘ū* with Allah and the messenger as object occurs some 12 times in the Qur’ān. At 24.56 the command also occurs with “the messenger” as lone object.

²⁰⁴ For example in Ṭabarī, ‘*aṣā* at 4.46, ‘*isyān* at 7.162, and *ma‘ṣiya* at 2.146.

reject” (*rafaḍa*, at 2.146), “to oppose” (*‘aruda* III, at 2.101) and “to abandon” (*zāla*, at 5.41), to portray Jewish resistance. The Jews intentionally (*‘amada* V) disobey (*ma‘ṣiya*) Allah,²⁰⁵ and in the same way the religious leaders of both Jews and Christians renounce (*tark*) compliance (*ittibā‘*) with Allah’s messenger.²⁰⁶

Treachery

A dominant note in the exegetes’ explanation of 5.13 is the theme of Jewish treachery. This is due in part to the occurrence of the term *khā’ina* in the verse, as well as the proximity of 5.11 and its associations with a story of treachery. Ṭabarī glosses *khā’ina* with the terms *ghadar* (‘treason’) and *khiyāna* (‘faithlessness’), and applies them all to “the people of the Jews Banū Naḍīr, who planned the murder of the apostle of Allah . . . and his companions, when the apostle of Allah . . . came to them, asking them for help concerning the blood money of the *‘āmaryyīn*.”²⁰⁷ Ṭabarī explicitly connects this action with the words of 5.11, “O you who believe, remember the favour of Allah to you when certain men formed the design to stretch out their hands against you.”²⁰⁸ A tradition attributed to Qatāda deepens the gloss of *khā’ina* with *kadhib* (‘falsehood’) and *fujūr* (‘immorality’).²⁰⁹

The commentaries also associate a story of Jewish treachery with 4.51: “Have you not seen those to whom was given a portion of the book? They believe in sorcery and *al-ṭāghūt* and say to those who disbelieve, ‘these are better guided than those who believed in the way.’” At this verse, both Muqātil and ‘Abd al-Razzāq recount the story of the conspiracy of the Madīnan Jews with the Makkan Quraysh to fight Muḥammad after the battle of Uḥud.²¹⁰ Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf is the main villain in both commentaries, and Muqātil accompanies him with 30 other Jews.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 189 (at 2.146).

²⁰⁶ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. III, 249 (at 2.159).

²⁰⁷ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 133.

²⁰⁸ Muqātil offers this narrative in his exegesis of 5.11. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 458-460. Schöller, “*Sīra and Tafsīr*,” 24, finds this to be one element of the “orthodox” account of the prophet’s conflict with the Jews.

²⁰⁹ ‘Abd al-Razzāq offers the same gloss at 5.13. *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīz*, Vol. I, 183.

²¹⁰ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 378-379. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīz*, Vol. I, 160.

²¹¹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 378.

Obstinacy

Finally, the exegetes characterize the Jews of Madīna as possessing a kind of obstinacy or incorrigibility which sets them beyond the pale. There is abomination (*qabiha*) among the Jews, writes Ṭabarī at 4.46.²¹² The Jews resist the truth even though they have had all the opportunities to know the truth and to respond to it appropriately. Ṭabarī's favourite vocabulary for stubborn resistance is the verb *ʿanada* III and the matching adverb *ʿinād*. At 2.90, the exegete explains that the Jews deserve Allah's anger because "they disbelieved in Muḥammad when he was sent, rejected (*juhūd*) his prophethood, and denied (*inkār*) that he was the one whose characteristics they had found in their book, obstinately opposing (*ʿinādan*) him, grudging him, jealous of him and the Arabs."²¹³

Marco Schöller writes, after studying the narrative pattern of Jewish response to the prophet of Islam in the commentary of al-Kalbī, "the Jews doubted, were won over by obstinacy and did not convert to Islam."²¹⁴ Jane Dammen McAuliffe writes that this diagnosis runs strong in the Muslim tradition:

Although the sources do mention legal or financial motives for scriptural distortion, overwhelmingly they ascribe it to theological obstinacy. Jews and Christians wilfully refused to recognize and/or acknowledge the clear descriptions of Muhammad and his advent which were, to translate a Qur'ānic locution literally, 'between their hands (*bayna aydihim*).'²¹⁵

After giving the Jews this chance, writes Muqātil in his exegesis of 5.13, Allah hardened their hearts against faith in Muḥammad.²¹⁶ Again, there are suggestions of hardness of heart in scripture—in 5.13 as well as in 2.88 and 2.74: "Then, even after that,

²¹² *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 435. Wansbrough writes of Jewish perfidy, *Sectarian Milieu*, 16: "alleged prognosis of Muhammad in Jewish scripture, Jewish perversity in rejecting fulfilment of their own messianic expectations. . . ."

²¹³ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. II, 345. Similar wordings also appear in Vol. II, 450 (*ʿinādan*, at 2.91) and Vol. II, 404 (*ʿanada* III, at 2.101).

²¹⁴ "Sira and Tafsīr," 26. Schöller cites a tradition which al-Kalbī gives at 3.12, that the Jews, after acknowledging Muḥammad's prophethood after the battle of Badr, doubted the same after the battle of Uḥud. The Jews subsequently broke their treaty with Muḥammad and Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf went to Makka to incite the leaders there to fight the prophet of Islam.

²¹⁵ "The Qur'ānic Context," 148.

²¹⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 461. The expression "Allah has set a seal on their hearts" at 2.7 also prompts from Ṭabarī a statement of the incorrigibility of the disbelieving Jewish rabbis. *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 266.

your hearts were hardened and became as rocks, or worse than rocks, for hardness.”²¹⁷ In both 2.88 and 5.13, scripture pairs hardness of heart with a curse. Indeed, the exegetes regularly apply the frequent scriptural occurrences of cursing and severe punishment to the Jews.²¹⁸ Ṭabarī interprets the curse at 4.46 to mean that Allah has humiliated the Jews, driven them away, and removed good sense from them.²¹⁹ At 5.13 he writes that Allah has removed good and success from the Jews, and faith from their hearts.²²⁰

The function of this incredible profusion of vocabulary of resistance in the larger narrative framework is to characterize the Jews as a devious and obstinate people. The question must be posed at this point as to whether this characterization predisposes the Jews to be more likely to falsify the scriptures in their possession, or merely to conceal the truths in their scriptures and prevaricate.

5.2.5 Personification of responses

Muqāṭil’s technique of personifying paradigmatic Jewish responses in his exegesis of 2.1-162 was noted in section 5.1 above. That pattern continues throughout his commentary, including in his exegesis of other tampering verses. A good example of the way he contrasts the two types of Jews in his narrative is in his exegesis of 3.75. On the sentence, “Of the people of the book is he who, if you trust him with a hundredweight, will restore it to you,” Muqāṭil writes that this refers to “‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions.” Whereas, he identifies “Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf and his companions” as the ones who, “if you trust him with one pound, will not restore it thee, unless you stand over him” (3.75).²²¹

Muqāṭil finds Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf to be the major actor in six of the tampering verses examined above.²²² Ka‘b also appears frequently in the commentary in the close contexts of

²¹⁷ The motif of ‘hardening of the heart’ in the Qur’ān and its relationship to comparable imagery in the Bible is explored in Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 72-73.

²¹⁸ “One of the most frequent invectives against the Jews is that ‘Allah has cursed them.’” Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, 106. Of the tampering verses examined above, seven contain a curse or punishment.

²¹⁹ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. VIII, 439.

²²⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 128.

²²¹ *Tafsīr Muqāṭil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 285.

²²² At 2:146, 2:159, 2:174, 3:78, 4:37 and 5:41 (x4).

the tampering explanations.²²³ At 4.51, Muqātil identifies Ka‘b as the mysterious “*al-tāghūt*.”²²⁴ There the exegete provides an extensive account of Ka‘b’s visit to Makka after the battle of Uḥud, together with Ḥuyayy ibn Akḥṭab and thirty other Jews. Ka‘b makes a deal with Abū Sufyān to fight Muḥammad.²²⁵ Abū Sufyān then asks Ka‘b for some advice about Muḥammad, since “you are men from the people of the book, reading the book.” After asking a set of questions, Ka‘b pronounces, “By Allah, you are better guided than what is upon Muḥammad.”²²⁶

Treachery is also in view in Muqātil’s story of Ka‘b’s involvement in the plot of the Banū Naḍīr to kill Muḥammad at 5.11.²²⁷ But in this narrative structure, treachery receives its just deserts (“Allah’s curse” at 4.52). Muqātil tells the story of the assassination of Ka‘b at the hands of Muḥammad ibn Maslama at 4.52²²⁸ and 59.2.²²⁹ He offers this story to explain the meaning of the words, “whomever Allah curses will not find a helper” (4.52). The story of the assassination of Ka‘b, reported with poetry and great detail in the *Sīra*,²³⁰ thus becomes a parable of earthly recompense for those who oppose the rule of the prophet of Islam.²³¹

On the other hand, the example of appropriate Jewish response is given in Muqātil’s commentary in the person of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām. At 5.13, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions are the exceptional “few” among the Jews who will not act treacherously toward Muḥammad. When Muḥammad adjures Ibn Šūriyā to honesty at 5.41, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām is the one who stands with the prophet of Islam. At 2.130, however, he takes a more active role of actually spreading the faith. There Muqātil tells the story of how ‘Abd

²²³ For example, at 3:72, 3:75, 4:47, 5:42 (x2) and 5:44 (x3).

²²⁴ ‘Abd al-Razzāq specifies *tāghūt* at 4.51 as Ka‘b and Ḥuyayy ibn Akḥṭab. *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīz*, Vol. I, 160.

²²⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 378.

²²⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 379.

²²⁷ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 460.

²²⁸ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 379.

²²⁹ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. IV, 275-6.

²³⁰ Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 564-9. Cf. Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, Vol. II, 31-34.

²³¹ Uri Rubin, “The Assassination of Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf,” *Oriens* 32 (1990), 65-71. According to the *Sīra*, “Our attack upon Allah’s enemy cast terror among the Jews, and there was no Jew in Madīna who did not fear for his life.” Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 569. Cf. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 368.

Allāh ibn Salām invited his nephews Salama and Muhājir to Islam and told them, “Do you not know that Allah, powerful and exalted, said to Moses, ‘I am sending a prophet from the descendents of Ismā‘īl,’ saying to him, ‘*aḥmad* will divert (*hāda* II) his community away from the fire,’ and that whoever denies (*kadhāba* II) *aḥmad* the prophet is cursed, and whoever does not follow his religion is cursed?”²³² Salama submitted to the call, but Muhājir refused (*abā*) and detested (*raghiba ‘an*) Islam. Muqātil specifies this as the *sabab al-nuzūl* of the phrase, “Whoever shrinks from (*raghiba ‘an*) the religion of Abraham” (2.130).²³³

Compared to Muqātil, Ṭabarī’s citing of specific names as the perpetrators of the tampering actions is rare. Two of the traditions he transmits at 5.11 find Ka‘b to be involved in the plot to kill the prophet of Islam.²³⁴ But when Ṭabarī discusses the perpetrators of that treachery at 5.13, he only indicates the Jews of Banū Naḍīr.²³⁵ Certainly a striking feature of the many versions of the stoning verse story which Ṭabarī recounts at 5.41 is the absence of both Ka‘b and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām. Indeed, the exegete gives some space to the question of whether Ibn Ṣūriyā “the one-eyed” was actually involved in the story, as specified in a tradition attributed to Abū Hurayra.²³⁶

The function of this narrative element in the overall framework is to portray paradigmatic responses to the prophet of Islam in a personal and lively way. Ka‘b represents the Jewish leaders who are well aware of the testimony to Muḥammad in their scriptures and yet transgress that knowledge in every possible way. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām is the symbol of piety and integrity which responds appropriately to the truth, believes and

²³² *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 139-140.

²³³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol. I, 140. The alleged divine intimation to Moses of a prophet to come resembles the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:18, a major proof-text of medieval polemic. Wasserstrom describes the process of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām’s portrayal in Muslim tradition as “mythicizing,” and suggests that the story of his encounter with Muḥammad was “designed to support the Muslim assertion of a Jewish prophesying and recognizing the coming of Muhammad.” *Between Muslim and Jew*, 177.

²³⁴ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 104 (trads. 11562, 11563).

²³⁵ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 133. Rubin notes that Ṭabarī does not mention the name of Ka‘b in his exegesis of Sūra 59, and attributes this to considerations of chronology. “It seems, that having a sharp ‘historical’ sense, al-Ṭabarī was aware of the ‘fact’ that Ka‘b had been killed already after Badr.” “Assassination,” 70.

²³⁶ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. X, 308.

follows.

5.2.6 Conclusions

The foregoing detailed examination of tampering passages in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī confirm the impression of the operation of a narrative framework over the exegesis of the individual tampering verses. That framework was signalled in Muqātil's exegesis of 2.1-162, where he also indicated a series of narrative themes. In the explanations of the tampering verses in both commentaries, narrative themes are further filled in with details, and new themes are introduced. It may simply be noted that in the commentary of Ṭabarī, the narrative framework is also signalled both early and extensively.²³⁷

The themes of the matter of Muḥammad, the covenant in the Torah, and the link of correspondence between Muḥammad and the earlier scriptures all serve to portray the Jews as culpable for not responding appropriately to the information in their possession. The paradigmatic responses personified by Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf and 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām similarly focus attention on the acceptance or rejection of the prophet of Islam and the scriptural witness to him. All of these elements relate to the authority of Muḥammad. All of these elements depend for their narrative dynamic on the concept of an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews of Madīna.

Among the vocabulary of Jewish resistance, the bulk of the characterization paints a picture of a people who make culpable choices on the basis of adequate information. In terms of Norman Calder's image of a Chinese painting,²³⁸ the exegetes fill in details of Jewish unfaithfulness to an intact Torah to support the Qur'ān's vague, suspended accusation of tampering. Some of the verbs and adjectives employed by the exegetes could indeed go well with an accusation of textual falsification. Hostile and treacherous people, for example, are capable of any evil. Greed is associated with an accusation of falsification at

²³⁷ A cursory reading of the first volumes of the commentary reveals passage after passage of characterization of the Jews, using the same wordpool of verbs and adverbs. Already at 2.4, Ṭabarī writes that Sūrat al-Baqara, from its beginning, "alludes to a condemnation by Allah of the unbelievers among the people of the book, those who claimed to confirm (*muṣaddiq*) what the messengers of Allah who were before Muḥammad had brought, but who gave Muḥammad the lie (*kadhaba* II), denied (*jaḥada*) what he brought, and maintained, despite their denial, that they were the rightly guided." *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. I, 248.

²³⁸ "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 115.

2.79. But even these characterizations are used by the exegetes to explain verses where alteration of text is not in view. And the multiple facets of deception, disrespect, envy and rejection are best highlighted by a story of inappropriate response to the truth. This leads to the conclusion that the narrative structure discovered in the commentaries favours the understanding of a variety of other actions of tampering over the accusation of textual falsification.

To continue Calder's image, exegetes are never free to paint in the details arbitrarily, but rather "the filling has to be measured against independent structures."²³⁹ Two internal structures which guide the exegetes are the Qur'ān's own material on the earlier scriptures, and the constraints of the *tafsīr* genre. An external structure which the foregoing investigation has revealed is the narrative framework of inappropriate Jewish response to the prophet of Islam and to the truth of the Torah. The claim that this narrative framework influences the exegesis of the tampering verses will now be explored, again using an insight from Norman Calder.

5.3 The influence of the narrative framework on exegesis

The narrative elements described in the preceding section reveal the outlines of a narrative structure which looms over the process of interpretation in the commentaries. That narrative structure concerns claims of authority for the prophet of Islam and the responses to him of the people of the book, primarily the Jews of Madīna. This narrative structure in turn exerts an influence on the way in which the exegetes interpret the tampering verses. An external structure brings meaning and coherence to the explanations of the disparate details of the tampering verses. An understanding of this influence is therefore essential to the full perception of the development of the tampering motif in the commentaries.

An illustration of the influence of narrative structures on the development of exegetical themes was provided by Calder in his article, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr." Calder demonstrated the authority of what he termed the "discipline" of narrative to determine

²³⁹ "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 115.

exegetical decisions over theological dogma and even prophetic *ḥadīth*.²⁴⁰ He pointed out the importance of narrative for Ṭabarī in particular, and gave examples from the *Jāmi' al-Bayān* of how the appeal of story tended to win out over theological considerations—at least those which were already circulating at the time of Ṭabarī. The subject of Calder's exploration was exegetical treatments of Qur'ānic verses about Abraham. The “popular narrative” was that Abraham had lied, and this seemed to bear more weight for Ṭabarī than the doctrine of prophetic sinlessness.²⁴¹ The exegete was also familiar with many traditions which favoured Ishmael as the intended victim of Abraham's sacrifice. But Ṭabarī himself preferred to recognise Isaac as the victim—because this was the “established narrative” about Isaac and Jerusalem.²⁴²

In Ṭabarī's mind, wrote Calder, popular narrative emerged historically prior to theological dogma, and therefore exerted greater authority for the exegete.²⁴³ In the two exegetical situations cited by Calder, Ṭabarī knew—and transmitted—a range of opinion which was diverse to the point of contradiction. Over against 17 statements which favoured identification of the sacrifice victim as Isaac, Ṭabarī offered 24 statements from “authorities of similar weight and standing” in favour of Ishmael.²⁴⁴ He had to defend his position against three major rational objections which had arisen to the identification of Isaac.²⁴⁵ With time, of course, Muslim theological dogma favoured the identification of Ishmael, and found vigorous exegetical expression in the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr.²⁴⁶ But even so, Ṭabarī let narrative rule his exegetical decision.

With Calder's analysis in view, and on the basis of the evidence of this dissertation that the obstinacy of the Jews was a reigning narrative theme in the mind of the exegetes, the influence of narrative on the exegesis of the tampering verses can be envisioned. The Islamic doctrine of the corruption of the earlier scriptures had not emerged by the time of

²⁴⁰ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 117-118, 108.

²⁴¹ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 107-108.

²⁴² “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 121-122.

²⁴³ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 108.

²⁴⁴ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 121.

²⁴⁵ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 122.

²⁴⁶ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 123-124.

Muqātil or even Ṭabarī, but it was possibly in the process of development. The need in the narrative is to make a case for the truth of the claims of the prophet of Islam, and to show the Jews as brazenly refusing to acknowledge this truth.

In discussing the former scriptures, the exegetes would want to show that the attestation of the prophetic status of Muḥammad can be found in the former scriptures. They will also want to amplify the Qurʾānic claim that the recitations which the messenger is presently making confirm what the people of the book have with them. Here the prophet's own claim in the commentaries that he is reviving the commandments of Allah is in line. In treating the obstinacy of the Jews, the exegetes would want to show that the Jews were fully culpable because everything they needed in order to know the truth of Muḥammad's claims was right in front of them.

This is indeed largely what happens in the commentaries. The dominant actions of tampering which the exegetes narrate are actions which depend for their narrative dynamic on the presence of an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews of Muḥammad's Madīna.

5.4 The narrative dynamic of the *Sira*

As a test case for the claim of the influence of narrative on the exegetical development of the tampering verses, a survey of the treatment of the earlier scriptures in the *Sira* is proposed. The similarity of the *Sira* to Muqātil's *Tafsīr*, as well as to the narrative exegesis contained in Ṭabarī's commentary, has been established. The presence or absence of the accusation of textual falsification in this early narrative work, and the narrative logic of its presence or absence, will shed light on the narrative dynamic in the commentaries.

The thrust of the extended account of the prophet of Islam in the *Sira* is that Muḥammad is essentially linked with the line of earlier prophets;²⁴⁷ indeed, the *Sira* openly asserts that the coming of Muḥammad is predicted in the earlier scriptures.²⁴⁸

There are a number of stories about anticipation of the coming of Muḥammad among

²⁴⁷ W. Raven, "Sira," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, C.E. Bosworth *et al*, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), Vol. IX, 661-2.

²⁴⁸ Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 21-23, 217-218.

various groups of people. According to Ibn Ishāq, the expectation among the people of the book comes from having read descriptions of Muḥammad in the previous scriptures.²⁴⁹ For example, Jewish rabbis and Christian monks had spoken about the prophet of Islam as the time of his appearance drew near. They told “his description (*sifa*) and the description of his time which they found in their scriptures and what their prophets had enjoined upon them.”²⁵⁰ Regarding the Jews, the *Sira* presents a trio of stories which portray Jews predicting the coming of a prophet.²⁵¹ The Arabs are inclined to listen, because, “We were polytheists worshipping idols, while they were people of the scriptures with knowledge which we do not possess.”²⁵² Ibn Ishāq writes that God told Muḥammad that he had made a covenant with the earlier prophets that a messenger would come confirming what they knew.²⁵³ When Christians from Abyssinia came to meet Muḥammad in Mecca, they heard him recite the Qurʾān and promptly believed in him. “They recognized (*ʿarafa*) in him the things which had been said of him (*waṣafa*) in their scriptures of his matter (*amr*).”²⁵⁴ Indeed, the *Sira* contains one of the earliest Muslim quotations of a text from the Gospel.²⁵⁵ Ibn Ishāq quotes a version of the passage John 15:23-16:1, then adds that the Syriac

²⁴⁹ Arent Jan Wensinck observed this expectation not only in Ibn Ishāq, but in other early writers such as Ibn Saʿd and al-Wāqidi (d. 207/823). *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina*, Second edition, Wolfgang H. Behn, trans. and ed. (Berlin: Adiyok, 1982), 39-43.

²⁵⁰ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. I, 132.

²⁵¹ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. I, 137-139. Wasserstrom refers to “larger cycles of tales” in where non-Muslims prophesy Muḥammad, exemplified in the *Sira*. *Between Muslim and Jew*, 176.

²⁵² *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. I, 137. In two of the stories, the Arabs were predisposed to accept Islam by the prophecies of the Jews. However, the Jews deny Muḥammad when he appears, in one case out of “wickedness (*baghy*) and envy (*ḥasad*).” (*Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. 1, 138). In the third story, the Banū Qurayza are warned about the coming of a prophet who “will be sent to shed blood and to take captive the women and children of those who oppose him.” *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. 1, 139.

²⁵³ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. I, 153, quoting Sūra 3.81.

²⁵⁴ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. I, 263, connecting it with Sūra 28.53-55. In the famous story of Bahīrā, which is found in the *Sira* at Vol. 1, 116-119, the Syrian monk recognizes the prophet of Islam from his description in a book that was in his cell. Ibn Ishāq does not specify the Gospel, but rather variously describes this source as “his books” and “the Christian books.” When other ‘people of the book’ also recognize Muḥammad and want to ‘get at him,’ Bahīrā warns them off, reminding them of “his mention (*dhikr*) and his description (*sifa*) which they would find in the *kitāb*.” *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. 1, 118. A. Abel describes Ibn Saʿd’s version of this story in which “the monk knew Muhammad because he had found the announcement of his coming in the unadulterated (*tabdīl*) Christian books, which he possessed.” “Bahīrā,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, H.A.R. Gibb et al, eds. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), Vol. I, 922. However, there is no hint of such a distinction in Ibn Ishāq.

²⁵⁵ Wansbrough called it the “earliest attestation in Muslim literature” of the technique of citing proof-texts from the earlier scriptures. *Quranic Studies*, 63.

“*munḥamannā*” (which he says is equivalent to the Greek “*al-baraqīṭis*”) “is Muḥammad.”²⁵⁶ Use of this passage from the Gospel shows a concern for an essential connection between Jesus and Muḥammad which can be found written in the *Injīl* itself.²⁵⁷

When Muḥammad begins his preaching in Mecca, the leaders of the Quraysh send two representatives to Madīna to ask the Jewish rabbis about him, explaining, “for they are the first people of the scriptures and have knowledge which we do not possess about the prophets.”²⁵⁸ Later in Madīna, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām accepts Islam.²⁵⁹ He is introduced as the rabbi of Banū Qaynuqā’ and their “most learned man.” ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām designs a ruse with Muḥammad in order to demonstrate his high standing among the Jews of Madīna as well as the deceitfulness and treachery of the Jews. When the Jews affirm the good reputation of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām, he challenges them to accept the prophet of Islam. “By Allah you certainly know that he is the apostle of Allah. You find him written with you in the Torah by his name and his characteristics. I testify that he is the apostle of God, I believe in him, I hold him to be true, and I acknowledge him.”²⁶⁰ This story assumes

²⁵⁶ *Sirat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 152-153. Guillaume makes the case that Ibn Ishāq’s citation is from the Palestinian Syriac Lectionary. “The Version of the Gospels Used in Medina circa 700 A.D.,” *Al-Andalus* 15 (1950), 289-296. Sidney H. Griffith notes that Ibn Ishāq took the freedom to alter the text of John in accordance with Islamic sensibilities. “The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century,” *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985), 138. Interestingly, Ibn Ishāq does not connect the Syriac *munḥhemana* of John 15:26 with the *aḥmad* of Sūra 61.6, a common practice of Muslim polemical writers. Cf. Watt, “The Early Development,” 58; and A. Guthrie and E.F.F. Bishop, “The Paraclete, Almunhamanna and Aḥmad,” *The Muslim World* 41 (1951), 252f.

²⁵⁷ In Ibn Ishāq’s account of Salmān the Farsi, Salman travels to a location in Syria to meet an ascetic healer. In this strange story, the healer turns out to be Jesus, who promptly sends Salman to the Arabian prophet. *Sirat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 145-146.

²⁵⁸ *Sirat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 195. Wansbrough points out that the version of this story in Muqātil’s *Tafsīr*, at 18.9, includes the prediction of Muḥammad in Jewish scripture (*Tafsīr*, II, 574-576). The Quraysh say, “Tell us whether you find any mention of him in your scriptures.” The Jews reply, “We do find him described [*naʿt*] as you say.” *Quranic Studies*, 122 (*Tafsīr*, II, 575).

²⁵⁹ *Sirat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 360-361.

²⁶⁰ *Sirat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 361. Ibn Hisham’s version of the *Sīra* does not suggest a Torah prophecy of Muḥammad’s coming as it does a Gospel text. However, Yūnus ibn Bukayr’s record of Ibn Ishāq’s lectures contains just such a suggestion. Yūnus transmits a tradition that Umm al-Dardā’ asked Kaʿb al-Ḥibr (Ḥibr means something like ‘Jewish scholar’) what reference he found to the prophet of Islam in the Torah. Kaʿb al-Ḥibr answered, “We find Muhammad the apostle of Allah. His name is al-Mutawwakil. He is not harsh or rough; nor does he walk proudly in the streets. He is given the keys that by him Allah may make blind eyes see, and deaf ears hear, and set straight crooked tongues so that they bear witness that there is no god but Allah alone without associate. He will help and defend the oppressed.” Guillaume provides this translation then characterizes it as a “garbled version” of Isaiah 42:2-7. “New Light on the Life of Muhammad,” *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Monograph No. 1 (Manchester University Press, n.d.), 32.

a Torah in the possession of the Jews of Madīna in which the description of Muḥammad may be found. It also initiates Ibn Ishāq's personification of the appropriate Jewish response to Muḥammad in the person of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām.²⁶¹

An extended passage about Muḥammad and the Jews of Madīna gives a narrative framework for Sūrat al-Baqara as well as for many other passages in sūras 3-5. In this section a large number of verses of tampering are touched on. How does the *Sīra*'s confidence in the earlier scriptures and the theme of a correspondence between those scriptures and the coming of Muḥammad relate to the *Sīra*'s treatment of the Qurʾānic verses of tampering?

On 2.75 Ibn Ishāq relates basically the same story which Muqātil and Ṭabarī offer in their exegesis of the verse.²⁶² The Jewish leaders heard the commands and prohibitions from God and understood them. But when they returned with Moses to the people, a group of these leaders "changed the commandments they had been given" by contradicting Moses and claiming that God had commanded something different. Ibn Ishāq here glosses "the word of God" as "the Torah." However, the narrative he offers does not concern a text and its falsification, but rather only an audition of the voice of God and a verbal alteration of the content in reporting it to the people.

In relation to 4.44-46 Ibn Ishāq gives a very short narrative about a Jew who "twisted his tongue" when he spoke to the prophet of Islam.²⁶³ He names the notable Jew as Rifāʿa. Rifāʿa said, "give us your attention, Muḥammad, so that we can make you understand." Then he slandered (*taʿana*) and denounced (*ʿaba* II) Islam. The focus of this story is on a verbal act of attacking Islam in the presence of Muḥammad.²⁶⁴ There is no suggestion here of a text and its physical alteration.

²⁶¹ The process of personification continues in *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 397-8, where ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām is presented along with three others as Jews who submitted, believed, and were earnest (*raghiba*) and firm (*rasakha*) in Islam. The disbelieving rabbis say that the converts are the very worst Jews because they have given up their ancestral religion. Ibn Ishāq finds this to be the *sabab al-nuzūl* of 3.113: "Yet they are not all alike; some of the people of the book are a nation upstanding, that recite God's signs in the watches of the night, bowing themselves." *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 398.

²⁶² *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 379.

²⁶³ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 400-401.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 19.

Ibn Ishāq does not link a narrative with 5.13, though he provides details of the “treachery” of the Jews against Muḥammad in relation to 5.11.²⁶⁵ However, he provides a long narrative passage as the occasion of revelation of 5.41.²⁶⁶ The story is substantially the same as the verse of stoning story found in Muqātil, ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ṭabarī. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṣūriyā, introduced as “the most learned man living in the Torah,” affirms that the Torah prescribes stoning for adulterers. He says that the Jews know that Muḥammad is a prophet sent by God, but don’t want to acknowledge the truth because of envy. Here Ibn Ishāq also attaches the story of a rabbi concealing the verse of stoning with his hand.²⁶⁷ The prophet of Islam calls for a Torah to be brought out. When ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām knocks the rabbi’s hand from off the verse,²⁶⁸ Muḥammad says, “Woe to you Jews! What has induced you to abandon the judgement of God which you hold in your hands?” The Jews explain how they agreed to “adjust” (*ṣalaha* IV) the punishment to flogging. The prophet of Islam then proclaims, “I am the first to revive the command (*amr*) of Allah and his book and its practice.”²⁶⁹ All of the parts of Ibn Ishāq’s narrative envision an intact Torah which can be produced and read aloud by Jewish Torah experts. Muḥammad’s proclamation that he revives God’s book appears to come out of a concept that the book is authentic and reliable, if not the book’s custodians.

At several other points in his narratives about the response of the Jews of Madīna to Muḥammad, Ibn Ishāq appears to be working from a concept of an intact and sound Torah. For example, he glosses 2.42, “do not conceal the knowledge which you have about my apostle and what he has brought when you will find it with you in what you know of the books which are in your hands.”²⁷⁰ The three Jewish tribes of Madīna shed each other’s blood, “while the Torah was in their hands by which they knew what was allowed and what

²⁶⁵ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. II, 403.

²⁶⁶ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. II, 404-406.

²⁶⁷ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. II, 406. Bukhārī attaches the same story to 3.93: “Bring the the Torah now and recite it, if you are truthful.” *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. V, 170 (*kitāb tafṣīr al-qur’ān*, bāb 58).

²⁶⁸ The role of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām as the one who gets the reader of the Torah to lift his hand from the stoning verse is discussed by Vajda in “Juifs et Musulmans selon le Ḥadīṭ,” 95.

²⁶⁹ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. II, 406.

²⁷⁰ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. II, 376-377.

was forbidden.”²⁷¹ In relation to 2.89-90, God’s anger against the Jews is at “what they have disregarded of the Torah which they had” by disbelieving in the prophet of Islam.²⁷² The prophet wrote to the Jews of Khaybar that God has revealed the words of 48.29, “and you will find it in your scripture.”²⁷³ Here Ibn Ishāq includes a rather remarkable challenge in Muḥammad’s letter: “Do you find in what he has sent down to you that you should believe in Muḥammad? If you do not find that in your scripture then there is no compulsion upon you.”²⁷⁴ In another story, the prophet of Islam enters a Jewish school and calls the Jews to Allah. In the ensuing exchange they disagree about the identity of Abraham, so Muḥammad says to the Jews, “Then let the Torah judge between us.”²⁷⁵ Ibn Ishāq claims that this was the occasion of revelation of 3.23: “Hast thou not regarded those who were given a portion of the book, being called to the book of Allah, that it might decide between them, and then a party of them turned away, swerving aside?”²⁷⁶ Abū Bakr invites a learned rabbi named Finḥās to Islam because the Jew “knew that Muḥammad was the apostle of God who had brought the truth from Him and that they would find it written in the Torah and the Gospel.”²⁷⁷ Near the end of this *Sīra* section on the Jews, a group of Jews puts the question to Muḥammad straight: “Is it true, Muḥammad, that what you have brought is the truth from God?” The prophet responds, “You know quite well that it is from God; you

²⁷¹ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 382.

²⁷² *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 384.

²⁷³ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 386. Wansbrough describes this as “a challenge to the addressees to acknowledge that Muhammad’s prognosis was contained in Jewish scripture.” *Sectarian Milieu*, 15.

²⁷⁴ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 387. This statement seems to combine a confidence in the scripture of the Jews with a candid uncertainty about its contents.

²⁷⁵ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 394.

²⁷⁶ cf. Hirschfeld, “Historical and legendary controversies,” 105-106. This story appears frequently in works of both *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *tafsīr*. Ṭabarī wrote on 3.23, “The most probable interpretation in my opinion is that Allah here mentions a group of the Jews who lived among those who immigrated with the Messenger of Allah, and were his contemporaries. They were men of knowledge of the Torah. Thus they were called to the Book of Allah, the Torah which they affirmed (*qarra* II) to be from Allah, to judge between them and the Messenger of Allah concerning some matter of disagreement between them. It is possible that this matter concerned Muḥammad and his prophethood. It is also possible that the matter of disagreement concerned Abraham, the intimate friend (*khalīl*) of the All-Merciful, and his religion. It is possible that it was their refusal to accept Islam when they were invited to do so, or that it was the punishment [of the Jewish man and woman who committed adultery]. They used to disagree with the Messenger of Allah about all of these matters. So he called them concerning it to the judgment of the Torah, but they refused (*abā*) to comply with it, and some of them concealed (*katama*) it.” *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Vol. VI, 290-291.

²⁷⁷ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 399.

will find it written in the Torah which you have. . . . You know well that it is from God and that I am the apostle of God. You will find it written in the Torah you have.”²⁷⁸ The claim in all of these examples is that the Torah which is in the possession of the Jews of Madīna during the rule of Muḥammad there will confirm his status as a prophet of God and the divine origin of the recitations which he is giving.

Ibn Ishāq also links narrative with several of the *katama* verses, and the theme of concealing seems to be an important part of his characterization of the Jews. Besides 2.42, mentioned earlier, he treats 2.159, 3.71, 3.187, and 4.37. As *sabab al-nuzūl* for 2.159, he tells a simple story about Arabs asking the Jewish rabbis about something in the Torah. The rabbis respond by concealing it from them and refusing (*abā*) to tell them anything about it.²⁷⁹ Ibn Ishāq’s *asbāb* for the other three *katama* verses similarly appeal to the Jews to be honest about what they find in the Torah.²⁸⁰ The most logical conclusion from these stories is that the Torah which the Jews are encouraged to consult is understood by Ibn Ishāq to be the book which they have in their hands.²⁸¹

A striking fact about the narratives Ibn Ishāq offers about the Ahl al-Kitāb in the *Sira* is the absence of any accusation of the falsification of the previous scriptures. In his section on references to the Jews in Sūrat al-Baqara, he offers no comments on 2.79, 3.78 or 5.13—which as we have seen seemed to trigger for an accusation of falsification in Muqātil and Ṭabarī.²⁸² This raises the question as to why the author of the *Sira* did not use these verses in his narrative. If he had heard the accusation of falsification, why did he not include it in his characterization of the Jews of Madīna? There is little doubt that in this salvation history the Jews emerge as a deceitful, obstinate, indeed treacherous people. Did Ibn Ishāq not consider the accusation of their falsification of the Torah helpful for his portrayal? Was

²⁷⁸ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. II, 410.

²⁷⁹ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. II, 393.

²⁸⁰ *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. II, 394, 400.

²⁸¹ On the *sabab al-nuzūl* in the *Sira* for 2.159, Wansbrough wrote, “The ‘concealment’ (*kitmān*) topos became an important component of the Muslim charge that God’s word had been distorted and abused in the hands of faithless custodians.” *Sectarian Milieu*, 17. However, there is no indication of this in Ibn Ishāq’s treatment of the verse, nor elsewhere in the context of the *Sira*.

²⁸² Rippin points out in “*Asbāb al-Nuzūl*,” 15-16, that al-Wāhidī reports a textual change re. 2.79 in detail. al-Qurṭubī also reports the story in more general terms from al-Kalbī and Ibn Ishāq, “although I have not located a similar report in the *Sira*.” “*Asbāb al-Nuzūl*,” 16, n. 63. This report does not appear in the *Sira*.

he possibly not familiar with the accusation?

In this regard, Wansbrough's comment about the development of the theme of tampering in the *Sīra* is curious. He wrote, "One *topos* emerges as dominant: the Muslim charge of scriptural falsification (*tahrīf*) and its corollary, supersession (*naskh*) by Islam of the Biblical dispensation granted to Israel. . . . The accusation is usually made *in foro externo* in circumstances calculated to reveal Jewish perfidy in failing to preserve the original of their own scriptures, because these had (!) contained prognosis of the Arabian prophet."²⁸³ But where is the evidence in the *Sīra* for this remark? Wansbrough cites Ibn Ishāq's treatment of 2.42 (*kitmān*), 2.59 (*tabdīl*) and 2.75 (*tahrīf*). As has been shown above, 2.75 was connected in the *Sīra* —as in the commentaries—to the story of the Jewish leaders verbally contradicting Moses' report of the commands of God. The gloss of 2.42, mentioned earlier, seems to make the point that the Jews are concealing information about the prophet of Islam which they can readily find in the books which are in their own hands. Ibn Ishāq treats 2.59 in the context of God's dealings with the Children of Israel.²⁸⁴ The Israelites said verbally something other than the '*hitta*' which God commanded them to say. None of these cases could be called a charge of scriptural falsification. There does not appear to be any hint in the *Sīra* section on the Jews of Madīna—the focus of Wansbrough's exploration—that the Jews possessed a corrupted scripture and that the claims that Ibn Ishāq is making could only be confirmed through access to some other "original" scriptures. "Jewish perfidy" is of course a major theme in the *Sīra*, but Ibn Ishāq does not demonstrate this by telling stories about the Jews' failure to preserve their scriptures. Rather, he shows it by offering a narrative about Jewish obstinacy to acknowledge the truth about Muḥammad and what God revealed through him—which is clear from their own scriptures. Wansbrough adds, "The use and abuse of 'scripture' was thus a polemical concept, adduced in support of the Muslim claim that God's salvific design had been achieved only with the revelation granted Muhammad."²⁸⁵ Again, this was not found to be the case in the *Sīra*. On the contrary, Ibn Ishāq makes the claim that

²⁸³ *Sectarian Milieu*, 109.

²⁸⁴ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 377.

²⁸⁵ *Sectarian Milieu*, 109.

Muḥammad and the Qurʾān are part of God's salvific design on the basis of the attestation of Muḥammad in the early scriptures and the relationship of correspondence between the earlier scriptures and the new 'revelation.' Wansbrough seems to support this reading elsewhere when he writes, "By its own express testimony, the Islamic *kerygma* was an articulation . . . of the Biblical dispensation, and can only thus be assessed."²⁸⁶

The *Sīra* treats a remarkable number of the same verses of tampering which were identified through scholarly indication and through the semantic field of tampering. Ibn Ishāq provides a salvation history into which he inserts Qurʾānic verses of interaction and controversy with the people of the book. From the other direction Muqātil, and to a certain extent Ṭabarī, provide interpretation for the vague and contextless verses of the Qurʾān by constructing a looming narrative framework above them.

5.5 Conclusions

In setting out to write salvation history for the Muslim community, Ibn Ishāq was looking to portray continuity with the prophets of the Jewish and Christian communities and to demonstrate attestation from the scriptures of those communities. Continuity and attestation are elements of a narrative framework which works against the concept of a corrupted scripture in the hands of the Jews of Muḥammad's Madīna. The narrative framework of the *Sīra* excludes not only traditions of textual falsification, but also the verses which seem to trigger the accusation in Muqātil's and Ṭabarī's commentaries.

Exegetes of scripture do not have the option to exclude verses. But they interpret the verses according to independent structures—some internal and some external. In explaining the tampering verses, two internal structures which guide the exegete are the material in the Qurʾān on the earlier scriptures and the constraints of the *tafsīr* genre. For Muqātil and Ṭabarī, an important external structure was the narrative framework of Jewish resistance to the authority of the prophet of Islam. The examination of the 25 tampering passages plus many other passages in the commentaries has provided many glimpses of the outlines of

²⁸⁶ *Sectarian Milieu*, 45.

this narrative structure. Calder's insight into the power of narrative in Ṭabarī's exegetical method is supported by an abundance of material in the commentaries. The narrative framework influences the two exegetes to interpret the tampering verses mainly in the direction of actions of tampering which assume an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews.

The influence of the narrative structure accounts for why, though Muqātil and Ṭabarī cite a number of falsification traditions, these traditions remain isolated in the commentaries; and why the treatment of the falsification accusation by Ṭabarī and his forebears has been characterized by scholars as reluctant,²⁸⁷ cautious,²⁸⁸ guarded,²⁸⁹ careful,²⁹⁰ and gentle.²⁹¹ By contrast, with creativity and great abandon the two exegetes narrated a wide variety of stories of tampering by the people of the book. Most of the members of these communities of the earlier scriptures are found to be deceptive and obstinate. Their negative qualities are highlighted in the commentaries by actions of inappropriate response to the prophet of Islam despite the clear information in the books in their possession.

²⁸⁷ Burton, "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 105.

²⁸⁸ Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion," 419.

²⁸⁹ "circonspect." Khoury, *Polemique Byzantine Contre L'Islam*, 210.

²⁹⁰ "vorsichtig." Stieglecker, "Die muhammedanische Pentateuchkritik," 75.

²⁹¹ "behutsam." Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 57.

6. Conclusion

This dissertation set out to demonstrate the development of the theme of “tampering with the earlier scriptures” by exegetes in the formative period of Qur’ānic commentary. This goal has been achieved by a close examination and analysis of passages from the commentaries of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān and al-Ṭabarī. The passages chosen for special focus were exegetical treatments of the verses in the Qur’ān which have traditionally been linked with the Islamic doctrine of the corruption of earlier scriptures. A set of 25 ‘tampering verses’ were found at the intersection of the lists offered in scholarly studies of Muslim polemic and the Qur’ān’s semantic field of tampering. The description and analysis of the exegesis of these verses in the two commentaries culminated in summary statements of how the exegetes understood the Qur’ānic verbs and expressions in the semantic field of tampering.

Examination and analysis of the commentary passages has shown that the exegetes of the formative period did not in the first instance understand the Qur’ānic verses of tampering to mean the textual corruption of the earlier scriptures. Rather, they interpreted the verses to mean a range of actions of tampering done mainly by Jews, mainly contemporary with the prophet of Islam, and mainly related to the Torah. The verses themselves are not at all clear as to actor and action, locus and object of tampering. The exegetes aim to identify the ‘vague and ambiguous’ references of the text of scripture. By the time of Ṭabarī there is a clearly a range of interpretive traditions, and some disagreement, about the meaning of the verses of tampering. The exegetes explain several of the tampering verses by telling stories from the ancient history of the children of Israel. They explain other verses by telling stories about the interaction between the Jews of Madīna and the prophet of Islam. The exegetes transmit traditions about the Jewish alteration of the Torah. These traditions seem to be linked in the commentaries with 2.79, and also attach to exegetical treatment of 3.78 and 5.13. The alteration traditions, however, are overshadowed in the commentaries by more dominant tampering traditions which assume the existence of authentic scriptures in the hands of Jews and Christians.

Muqātil and Ṭabarī understood the verses of tampering to refer to a variety of actions by the people of the book in response to the prophet of Islam. Prominent among these is the concealment of information about Muḥammad in the Torah and the Gospel. Instead of publicizing this information to those of their community who cannot read, the Jewish leaders remain silent about it, or deny it when asked. It may be noted that this approach to tampering is neither the *tahrīf al-ma‘nā* nor the *tahrīf al-naṣṣ* of the classical discussions. The Jews also insult the prophet and his religion by a devious use of words. They neglect the Torah commands and even lay some rulings aside in preference to more lenient punishments. Instead of acknowledging the Torah commands, they deceive Muḥammad and devise tests designed to cast doubt on his prophethood.

In answer to the question of why Muqātil and Ṭabarī should have explained the tampering verses in this way, a number of independent structures were identified and their operation explained. Three internal structures which were seen to guide the exegetes in their interpretations are the wordings of Muslim scripture, the contexts of the tampering passages in the commentaries, and the constraints of the *tafsīr* genre. From outside the exegesis of scripture, a structure which influences the interpretation of the tampering verses in these commentaries is the narrative framework of Jewish response to the prophet of Islam.

The wording of the Qur’ān on the earlier scriptures makes it difficult—with consistency—for the exegetes to speak of those scriptures as if they exist in a corrupted state. The material on the earlier scriptures in the Qur’ān is uniformly positive and respectful. Most of this material appears in sūras 2-7. The earlier scriptures are portrayed there as touchstones of authority and verification. The explicit claim repeated throughout these sūras is that the revelation sent down to the messenger confirms the revelation sent down before it and now ‘with’ the people of the book. In these very same sūras, and often in near contexts, occur verbs and expressions of tampering which create a mood of anxiety about how the people of the book are handling the revelation which God granted to them. A survey of all of these materials showed that favourable descriptions of the earlier scriptures alternate with verbs and expressions from the semantic field of tampering.

Exegesis of verses which contain verbs and expressions from the wider semantic field

of tampering shows a preoccupation with actions of deception such as concealing words of the earlier scriptures which describe the person and arrival of the prophet of Islam. This is partly a function of the Qur'ānic material, both in quantity and canonical sequence. For example, of the 11 tampering verses in the second sūra, six contain verbs of concealing. But beyond the words of scripture, the frequent exegetical portrayal of scenarios of deception has an impact on other contexts in the commentaries. Deception passages are based on an understanding that the tampering is related to an intact text of the earlier scriptures. When the exegetes treat verses containing verbs of alteration, therefore, they have the concealing passages in mind and will consider the question of consistency. As seen above, the language of dishonesty and concealing thus tends also to slip into the exegesis of the *ḥarrāfa* verses.

This phenomenon of seeking consistency with both scriptural wordings and other exegetical contexts is an aspect of the constraints of the *tafsīr* genre. Muslim scholars writing in other genres are not bound to ensure that their use of the Qur'ān matches what the Qur'ān says about the subject in other passages. The polemicist, for example, will use those scriptural materials which appear to best support his argument, and will simply leave other materials aside. Even if the polemicist is aware that the argument he is making does not match the main thrust of scripture, he may be able to exploit the ignorance of the wider context among his readers. The writer of a commentary does not have this option. The scriptural materials which work against a specious argument are necessarily contained in the same book. In the case of the tampering motif, if the exegete wants to write at one point that the Jews concealed the references to Muḥammad in an intact Torah in their hands, and at another point that the Torah in the hands of the Jews was corrupt, he will escape the objections of an alert reader only through great ingenuity.

Muqātil and Ṭabarī, however, not only explained the text of scripture according to internal structures, but also according to external structures. Their exegesis of the tampering verses gave unmistakable indications of larger concerns which go beyond the motif of tampering. Through an examination of literary devices in the commentaries in chapter 5, a case was made for the existence of a narrative framework looming over the exegesis of the individual tampering verses. The particular narrative structure which reveals its dimensions

in the tampering passages is the story of Jewish response to Muslim truth claims concerning the prophethood of Muḥammad and the divine origin of the recitations which he brought. The Jewish response is portrayed as mainly negative. The commentaries' overriding concern to demonstrate the authority of Muḥammad and its unreasonable rejection tends to put the tampering motif into the service of the larger narrative. The question was posed as to whether the narrative structure may be seen to influence the interpretation of the tampering verses.

A case for narrative influence was made with the assistance of scholarly insights into the exegetical method of Muqātil and the importance of narrative for Ṭabarī. The intention to demonstrate the authority of Muḥammad, it was argued, would determine the exegetical approach to the tampering materials in several respects. First of all, the attestation to the messenger and his message would be sought in the earlier scriptures. Secondly, the rulings of the messenger would be seen to be in line with the rulings of the earlier scriptures. Thirdly, the people who possess the earlier scriptures would be made clearly culpable by their disregard of the truth in their hands. Fourthly, those Jews who respond appropriately to the prophet of Islam would be portrayed as dealing honestly with the earlier scriptures as they knew them. This case for narrative influence on the exegesis of the tampering verses was tested on another early work, the *Sira* of Ibn Ishāq. In the *Sira*, the narrative is the central concern, and verses from the Qur'ān are brought in to serve the story. The treatment of the tampering verses in the *Sira* showed a clear concern to demonstrate all four aspects of the above approach. It was observed that not only does the *Sira* lack an accusation of the falsification of the earlier scriptures, but that it does not even make use of the verses which are associated with the accusation in the commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī.

In this way, the narrative structure of Jewish response to Muḥammad was seen to be an essential part of the development of the tampering motif in the commentaries. The exegetes took this external structure seriously when they interpreted the tampering verses. They considered a story of dishonesty about—and rejection of—an existing scriptural attestation to the prophetic status of Muḥammad more helpful in advancing the larger narrative concern than a story about falsification of scripture. They developed the tampering

motif according to this larger narrative concern.

As for the passages in the commentaries which indicate an accusation of textual falsification, the exegetes were familiar with traditions which employed verbs of deletion and addition to specify the tampering action. Muqātil understood at 2.79 and 3.78 a Jewish action of erasing and writing. At the same verses, Ṭabarī attributed strong verbs of deletion and addition to others, while himself using a verb of addition at 3.78. The ‘punctiliar’ or isolated nature of these traditions in the commentaries was noted. In the context of the 25 tampering passages in the two commentaries examined in detail in this study, the accusations of textual falsification seem out of place. Indeed, the near contexts of those two particular passages in the commentaries do not prepare the reader for an accusation of textual falsification.

The exegetical method of Muqātil was clearly seen to be ‘haggadic’ or narrative. For Muqātil the story was always in view. Many of the literary devices which he used in his exegesis have been identified and illustrated in this study. However, Ṭabarī’s exegetical approach was seen to be quite different from Muqātil’s. Ṭabarī demonstrates a lively interest in the linguistic, juridicial and theological implications of Muslim scripture. He pursues questions of Arabic syntax and grammar which Muqātil passed over in silence. In the case of the tampering verses, Ṭabarī provides helpful definitions of key terms where Muqātil seems to assume understanding or at most glosses the terms. Ṭabarī also provides a polyvalent reading of scripture through the citation of many traditions, while Muqātil’s single interpretation of each verse could be called monovalent.

The extent of the importance of narrative and its function in Ṭabarī’s commentary—in comparison to that of Muqātil—was queried above. In Ṭabarī’s interpretation of the tampering verses, narrative exegesis was seen to be his main methodology. The most striking example of this is his extensive exegesis of 5.41. There he recounts story after story of Muḥammad’s ruling on adultery without pausing to discuss the legal questions. For other Muslim scholars, the lack of a “verse of stoning” in the Qurʾān posed a difficult dilemma between *sunna* and scripture. But Ṭabarī makes no mention of this anomaly at 5.41. There is no cross reference to 24.2. In fact, the only scripture referred to is the Torah,

and the stories repeatedly show Muḥammad giving a judgment on adultery in line with that earlier scripture. A major concern of these stories is certainly the authority of the prophet of Islam. But it is not authority in the sense of demonstrating that *sunna* establishes Islamic Law. Rather, the narrative concern is to establish the prophetic authority of Muḥammad by showing his ruling to be coterminous with divine revelation in the past. In this sense, Ṭabarī's passages of narrative exegesis fulfill the same function as those of Muqātil.

In summary, Muqātil and Ṭabarī did not in the first instance understand from the words of the Qur'ān that Jews and Christians had falsified their scriptures. The passages in which they make or transmit accusations of falsification remain isolated and tentative. This raises the question as to how this understanding changed to the point where the doctrine of the corruption of the earlier scriptures became the dominant Muslim position. The answer to this question goes beyond the scope of this study. However, the results of this study suggest directions which may be fruitfully pursued in further research.

One reason for the change in approach may be the needs of polemic. As the new religion emerged in the midst of the strong and established traditions of Judaism and Christianity, there was a need for Islam to set itself apart from the older traditions. Even here, early Muslim polemic shows a concern to prove the claims of the new religion by showing it to be a fulfillment of prophecy in the earlier scriptures. But in the midst of heated exchanges with the conquered populations, in which confident and well-educated Jews and Christians denied Muslim claims on the basis of their respective scriptures, it came to be seen as extremely convenient—no doubt for some irresistible—to accuse the opponent of possessing a corrupted scripture. As the Christian Arab al-Kindi is reported to have said when on the receiving end of this polemic: “I do not know that I have found an argument more difficult to dislodge, more desperate to disarm than this which you advance as to the corruption of the sacred text.”

Thus the claim was made that the Qur'ān had been perfectly preserved from the moment Allah sent it down on Muḥammad, while the people of the book had allowed their books to become corrupt or indeed had intentionally falsified the books themselves.

Another reason for the strengthening of accusations of textual falsification may be

developments in the Islamic concept of authority. The commentaries of Muqātil and Ṭabarī, and other early works such as Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*, are concerned to establish the prophetic authority of Muḥammad by showing its attestation from divine revelation in the past. A new religion which is emerging in the Middle East in the midst of strong and ancient religious traditions will need to measure itself against what exists. The Muslim categories of deity, prophet and book were the categories of Judaism and Christianity. In order to be understood in this milieu, Muḥammad must be portrayed as a prophet in a line of prophets which stretches back through biblical history to Adam. Initially, there was no way for Islam to establish claims of authority other than in terms of the older religious traditions. If Islam wanted to establish authority in these terms, however, it would need to refer to the revelations of the past and would tend to speak of those revelations in a favourable way. An accusation of the wholesale corruption of the earlier scriptures prior to the emergence of Islam would eliminate the possibility of proof of the essential attestation which they provide.

If Islam then goes through a process of establishing authority in the *sunna* of Muḥammad, the approach to the earlier scriptures may change correspondingly. The words and behaviour of the prophet of Islam, as interpreted from the *hadith* collections, become the foundation for Islamic Law. The respect for earlier scriptures may continue, perhaps because of knowledge of their descriptions in the Qur'ān. Indeed, they may continue to be referenced, when convenient, in polemic to argue that Muḥammad's advent was prophesied. However, the role of the earlier scriptures as bases of authority has changed. The Muslim community has accepted the *sunna* as the completely adequate foundation. The props which were earlier deemed essential are no longer needed. They could be knocked out from under the edifice because the edifice now stands firm on another foundation. In this scenario—in which the need for attestation from the earlier scriptures disappears—Muslim scholars are free to boldly advance the accusations of textual falsification among the traditions. Language of confirmation and correspondence between the Qur'ān and the earlier scriptures can also give way to language of abrogation and supersession.

A third possible explanation for the increasing frequency of accusations of textual falsification is the hardening of theological understandings in Islam. It was noted in chapter

5 that Ṭabarī, after considering many conflicting traditions about the identity of the son of Abraham's intended sacrifice, asserted that the son was Isaac. Muqātil before him had identified the son as Isaac without indicating awareness of any other option. Both exegetes were free to consider the reliability of stories from Jews, or reports about the narrative in the Torah, that Isaac was the son involved. With time, however, the Islamic understanding of the identity of the son leaned heavily toward Ishmael. If—when this understanding became established as orthodox—Muslims were to discover that the son in the Torah is unequivocally Isaac, how would they tend to approach the text of the Torah?

This process of reasoning was in fact repeated frequently in the first major statement of the doctrine of the corruption of the earlier scriptures, provided by Ibn Ḥazm. The understanding that Allah must not be described with anthropomorphic language had become established. Therefore, if the reader finds anthropomorphic language for God in the present Torah, its text must necessarily be corrupt, according to Ibn Ḥazm. Similarly, the doctrine of the sinlessness of prophets had become part of orthodox theology. If the Torah was then discovered to contain narratives of important biblical figures committing sins such as lying, adultery and murder, the Torah must have been falsified. Ibn Ḥazm pioneered the method of arguing the corruption of the Bible by judging it according to doctrinaire Muslim theological understandings. Hartwig Hirschfeld characterized this kind of criticism as “dictated by a combination of dogma and *odium theologicum*.”¹

In this way a greater familiarity with the actual contents of the Bible among Muslims, which might have provided opportunities for irenic interaction with Jews and Christians, became a source of harsh polemic against the earlier scriptures and their allegedly careless possessors. Ibn Ḥazm thought it sufficient proof of corruption to quote 48.29 (“That is their likeness in the Torah, and their likeness in the Gospel. . .”) and note that nothing like this was to be found in the existing Torah and Gospel. But the major test of authenticity continued to be the statement in 7.157 that the *ummī* prophet could be found recorded in the Torah and Gospel, and the claim that this referred to Muḥammad. Al-Maqdisī made his case for the alteration of the text of the Torah precisely to encourage Muslims who had

¹ “Mohammedan Criticism of the Bible,” 234.

learned that Muḥammad is not mentioned there.

Some scholars have suggested that the Islamic doctrine of the corruption of the earlier scriptures may have come from similar motifs in operation among other religious communities in the Middle East. This is an attractive proposal, and a reasonable one. Certainly Christian scholars prior to Islam queried discrepancies between the Septuagint and some other Jewish Greek translations. Samaritan scholars contested the text of the Hebrew Bible. Pharisees and Sadducees, Karaites and Ebionites also made accusations. But evidence to support the claim that these controversies in other communities were adopted and adapted by Muslim scholars has thus far not been supplied. Whatever Ibn Ishāq may have known in the second Islamic century about the use of standard polemical *topoi* in other religious communities, he did not in fact make an accusation of the falsification of earlier scriptures in the *Sira*. In the case of Ibn Ḥazm in the fifth Islamic century, the motivation for his blistering polemic against the Bible seems to have come not from what he heard about accusations of falsification among Jews and Christians, but rather from what he heard about the attack on the coherence of the Qurʾān by a Spanish Jew.

Other scholars have pursued indications in Muslim tradition that there was sufficient uncertainty about the text of the Qurʾān amongst Muslims to make outside influence on the doctrine of *tahrīf* unnecessary. One axis of intra-Muslim polemic was Shīʿī accusation that references to ʿAlī and his family had been deleted from Muslim scripture. However, another source of anxiety was the very question of punishment for adultery which the exegetes of this study raised at 5.41. A group of traditions reports ʿUmar as saying that a “verse of stoning” had been sent down upon the prophet of Islam, and that the Muslims had recited it. The mystery of why this punishment did not then make its way into the canonical text, particularly when there was general agreement about its status as *sunna*, preoccupied a generation of legal scholars. Surely John Burton is right when he finds “refreshing irony in witnessing one group of people who have replaced a flogging penalty that is in the Book of God by a stoning penalty, vilifying a second group of people for replacing a stoning penalty that is in the Book of God by a flogging penalty.”²

² “Law and Exegesis,” 282.

An alternative theme which takes into account the dynamic of many religious communities, and one which seems to better suit the findings of this research, is the theme of religious truth claims and human response. A close study of the exegetical treatments of the tampering verses has revealed a narrative structure of Jewish response to Muslim claims about the prophet of Islam. The tampering motif is a function of response to truth claims. The claims concern Muḥammad's status as a true prophet and 'sent one' from Allah, and the divine origin of the recitations which he made. The right response, as portrayed in the commentaries, is to believe in Muḥammad, attest to the truth of his claim to prophethood, acknowledge that what he brought was from Allah, and follow and obey him. The claims are clear, and the response seemingly straightforward. Some of the people of the book respond positively on the basis of the scriptures in their possession. However, most of them disbelieve and deny the Muslim truth claims about Muḥammad. In other words, they are divided over him. At this point the Muslim story is very close to what happens in other religious contexts and, indeed, to what is recorded in major world scriptures.

This suggests a direction for future scholarly exploration. How do communities of differing, even conflicting, faith commitments deal with the rejection of their claims by others? How do they express those truth claims in their source documents? How do they portray the rejection of those claims by others? Are disbelievers shown to be making a free response on the basis of adequate information? Is there a respect for individual freedom to respond positively or negatively? What do source documents or religious traditions put forward as the consequence of rejection? Is consequence limited to a pronouncement of the curse of divinity, or an assurance of reckoning on the Judgment Day? Or does it also include a threat of chastisement in this lifetime? If so, what is the extent of this-worldly punishment for negative response to truth claims: does it envision exile, imprisonment, assassination. . . slaughter? These and other questions point toward open vistas of lively and fruitful scholarly investigation.

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