Dhālika'l-Kitāb:

Rhetoric, Cosmology, and Musicality in Qur'anic Composition

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Abstract

The structural logic of Qur'anic composition remains elusive despite the substantial accumulation of insights and conjectures in both Muslim and Western scholarship. Advancing the disputed thesis of ring composition proposed by Michel Cuypers and Raymond Farrin, this dissertation addresses the problem of sura structure by decisively establishing the formulaic modus operandi of Qur'anic ring composition. It argues that this concentric arrangement stands as a symbol for the vertical cosmos, descending from the levels associated with God to those of spiritual and corporeal domains. This correspondence is discernible in the intricate cluster of themes and descriptors linked to each cosmic level as delineated in Sufi cosmological models, which clarifies the complexity and precision of parallelisms between higher and lower concentric registers. In line with Qur'anic rhetoric and recitation, which constitute the fundamental domains of Muslim experience, these levels further intersect with distinct forms of rhetorical speech—namely ceremonial, legal, and political—and exhibit stages of inherent musical progression from tonal tension toward equilibrium and resolution. Consequently, this formulaic concentric structure, in which form, content, and affect converge, serves as a self-referential matrix for analytical-cum-affective Qur'anic experience.

A significant factor obscuring structural clarity is the lack of affective engagement and methodology alongside analytical focus. In the Muslim experience, the divinity of the Qur'anic voice manifests through its rhetorical, spiritual, and aesthetic affect, regarded as miraculous and inimitable—an experience formulated into the doctrine of *iʿjāz* (lit. incapacitation). Yet, while this experience has been articulated with marked anecdotal magnitude in medieval to modern Muslim discourse theory, Qur'anic exegesis, Sufi metaphysics, and collective piety, structural modalities of affect within Qur'anic composition have yet to be thoroughly examined. Holistic

approaches to sura structure in the writings of several 20th century Qur'anic exegetes, including Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) and Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (d. 1997), highlight large-scale thematic organization and sporadically offer anecdotal insights into structural affect. For instance, Quṭb suggests that suras and their structures contain a distinctive embedded musical atmosphere and rhythm. This early structural attempt indicates a propensity to be integrated into the comprehensive framework presented in this dissertation.

In Western research, a sustained experiential engagement has often been eclipsed by a predominant historical-critical orientation toward literary structure, leading to a persistent impression of structural disarray and editorial interpolations. This impression catalyzes a search for textual and redactional coherence in Qur'anic text, particularly in multipartite Medinan suras often regarded as secondary products, as suggested by Angelika Neuwirth and Nicolai Sinai. Synchronic studies that undertake meticulous exploration of structural markers, including by Mathias Zahniser and Neil Robinson, contribute to the thesis of structural coherence, encouraging further exploration. A departure toward purely synchronic analysis is seen in the contentious thesis of ring composition, which promises growth into a general theory by incorporating aspects of the Muslim experience. Notably, some brief yet key inherent musical insights by Kristina Nelson, and the foundational work by Michael Sells that examines the aural-cum-semantic architecture of short Meccan suras emerge as exceptional analyses that lean towards an experiential tonal hearing of sura structure, demonstrating a close interplay between sound and meaning. This tonal ground is developed in the present dissertation into a comprehensive tonal approach.

Sufi, especially Akbarian, theory establishes structural correspondence between the cosmos and the Qur'an, characterizing each in terms of the other. The general theory developed

from that insight argues for the vertical cosmological symbolism of Qur'anic ring composition, examined at the nexus of Sufi cosmological models—with particular attention to cosmic worlds (sing. *ʿālam*)—and sura structure. Each cosmic world, functioning as a formulaic structural register, exhibits a distinct web of archetypal themes, types of rhetorical speech, and inherent musical character. This configuration reveals the nuanced and precise nature of correspondences between concentric structures at multiple levels of composition. A variety of central Qur'anic terms, self-descriptions, and prophetic traditions lend support to this characterization.

Each chapter of this dissertation is dedicated to an aspect of Qur'anic composition and Muslim experience: rhetorical, cosmic-mystical, and aesthetic, with each part of the sequence structured to integrate and deepen the preceding ones. Chapter One argues for the inherent oratorical character of Qur'anic discourse, featuring a sequential organization of three types of rhetorical speech: formal, legal, and political. The chapter demonstrates this framework in a variety of short Meccan suras. The features and objectives of these forms outlined in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* serve as a partial frame of reference, which distinctly intersect with Qur'anic rhetorical genres designated in Muslim rhetorical analysis. However, the definitive matrix that shapes the specific Qur'anic character of these forms lies in their self-referential vertical arrangement. In broad terms, formal or ceremonial speech introduces God and positions of authority on the higher level; legal speech oversees and mediates the binding relationship between the loci of authority and subjects on the middle level; and political speech engages with God's subjects on the lower level.

Expanding on this framework, Chapter Two offers a thorough analysis of the correspondence between cosmic worlds and Qur'anic ring composition—each elucidating the other—in a considerable portion of the lengthy and polythematic Sūrat al-Baqara (Q 2). Aligned

with rhetorical analysis, the vertical cosmic schema positions the world of *jabarūt* and divinity on the higher level, *malakūt*, the spiritual plane, serving as a point of intersection and encounter on the middle level, and *mulk*, the material plane, on the lower level. While Sufi cosmology often refers to these three worlds as general categories, the discussion specifies nine worlds, framing the entire vertical scope.

Chapter Three then addresses in detail the affective movement of the rhetorical and cosmic structures in Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (Q 1), which progresses from tonal-cum-semantic indeterminacy to relative tension and resolution, to complete resolution in various manners within each verse and throughout the sura. This formulaic and progressive composition demonstrates an integral convergence between structure, content, sound, and affect at multiple levels of composition, shedding light on the Muslim experience of the Qur'an.

Preliminary research suggests that this compositionality is also found in various traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad, as well as in a wide variety of works by many renowned Sufi scholars, including Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111), Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240), and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), among others, offering a novel experiential hermeneutic lens with significant metaphysical, philosophical, theological, literary, and historical implications for Muslim and Western Islamic studies at large.

Résumé

La logique structurelle de la composition Coranique reste insaisissable malgré l'accumulation substantielle de perspectives et de conjectures dans la recherche musulmane et occidentale. En avançant la thèse contestée de la composition en anneau proposée par Michel Cuypers et Raymond Farrin, cette dissertation aborde le problème de la structure des sourates en établissant de manière décisive le modus operandi formulé de la composition en anneau Coranique. Elle soutient que cette disposition concentrique représente un symbole pour le cosmos vertical, descendant des niveaux associés à Dieu à ceux des domaines spirituels et corporels. Cette correspondance est discernable dans le regroupement complexe de thèmes et de descripteurs liés à chaque niveau cosmique, tels que décrits dans les modèles cosmologiques soufis, ce qui clarifie la complexité et la précision des parallélismes entre les registres concentriques supérieurs et inférieurs. Conformément à la rhétorique et à la récitation Coraniques, qui constituent les domaines fondamentaux de l'expérience musulmane, ces niveaux s'entrecroisent avec des formes distinctes de discours rhétoriques — à savoir cérémoniels, juridiques et politiques — et montrent des étapes de progression musicale inhérente allant de la tension tonale vers l'équilibre et la résolution. Par conséquent, cette structure concentrique formulée, dans laquelle forme, contenu et affect convergent, sert de matrice autoréférentielle pour l'expérience Coranique analytique-cum-affective.

Un facteur important obscurcissant la clarté structurelle est le manque d'engagement affectif et de méthodologie aux côtés de la focalisation analytique. Dans l'expérience musulmane, la divinité de la voix Coranique se manifeste à travers son effet rhétorique, spirituel et esthétique, considéré comme miraculeux et inimitable — une expérience formulée dans la doctrine de l'iʿjāz (litt. incapacitation). Pourtant, bien que cette expérience ait été articulée avec

une ampleur anecdotique marquée dans la théorie du discours musulman médiéval à moderne, l'exégèse Coranique, la métaphysique soufie et la piété collective, les modalités structurelles de l'affect dans la composition Coranique n'ont pas encore été examinées en profondeur. Les approches holistiques de la structure des sourates dans les écrits de plusieurs exégètes Coraniques du 20e siècle, dont Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) et Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (d. 1997), soulignent l'organisation thématique à grande échelle et offrent sporadiquement des aperçus anecdotiques sur l'affect structurel. Par exemple, Quṭb suggère que les sourates et leurs structures contiennent une atmosphère musicale distinctive et intégrée. Cette première tentative structurelle indique une propension à être intégrée dans le cadre global présenté dans cette dissertation.

Dans la recherche occidentale, un engagement expérientiel soutenu a souvent été éclipsé par une orientation historique-critique prédominante vers la structure littéraire, conduisant à une impression persistante de désordre structurel et d'interpolations éditoriales. Cette impression catalyse une recherche de cohérence textuelle et rédactionnelle dans le texte Coranique, en particulier dans les sourates médinoises multipartites souvent considérées comme des produits secondaires, comme le suggèrent Angelika Neuwirth et Nicolai Sinai. Les études synchroniques qui entreprennent une exploration méticuleuse des marqueurs structurels, notamment par Mathias Zahniser et Neil Robinson, contribuent à la thèse de la cohérence structurelle, encourageant une exploration plus approfondie. Un départ vers une analyse purement synchronique est observé dans la thèse contestée de la composition en anneau, qui promet de se développer en une théorie générale en intégrant des aspects de l'expérience musulmane. Notamment, certaines perspectives musicales inhérentes et succinctes de Kristina Nelson, ainsi que les travaux fondateurs de Michael Sells qui examinent l'architecture aural-cum-sémantique des courtes sourates mecquoises, émergent comme des analyses exceptionnelles qui penchent

vers une audition tonale expérientielle de la structure des sourates, démontrant une interaction étroite entre le son et le sens. Cette base tonale est développée dans la présente dissertation en une approche tonale complète.

La théorie soufie, en particulier akbarienne, établit une correspondance structurelle entre le cosmos et le Coran, caractérisant chacun en termes de l'autre. La théorie générale développée à partir de cet aperçu argumente en faveur du symbolisme cosmologique vertical de la composition en anneau Coranique, examiné au carrefour des modèles cosmologiques soufis — en accordant une attention particulière aux mondes cosmiques (sing. ʿālam) — et à la structure des sourates. Chaque monde cosmique, fonctionnant comme un registre structurel formulé, exhibe un réseau distinct de thèmes archétypaux, de types de discours rhétoriques et de caractère musical inhérent. Cette configuration révèle la nature nuancée et précise des correspondances entre les structures concentriques à plusieurs niveaux de composition. Une variété de termes centraux Coraniques, d'autodescriptions et de traditions prophétiques soutiennent cette caractérisation.

Chaque chapitre est dédié à un aspect de la composition Coranique et de l'expérience musulmane : rhétorique, cosmique-mystique et esthétique, avec la séquence structurée pour intégrer et approfondir les précédentes. Le chapitre un argue du caractère oratoire inhérent du discours Coranique, mettant en avant une organisation séquentielle de trois types de discours rhétoriques : formel, juridique et politique. Le chapitre démontre ce cadre dans une variété de courtes sourates mecquoises. Les caractéristiques et les objectifs de ces formes décrites dans la Rhétorique d'Aristote servent de cadre de référence partiel, qui intersecte distinctement avec les genres rhétoriques Coraniques désignés dans l'analyse rhétorique musulmane. Cependant, la matrice définitive qui façonne le caractère Coranique spécifique de ces formes réside dans leur

agencement vertical autoréférentiel. En termes généraux, le discours formel ou cérémoniel introduit Dieu et les positions d'autorité sur le niveau supérieur ; le discours juridique supervise et médiatise la relation contraignante entre les loci d'autorité et les sujets sur le niveau intermédiaire ; et le discours politique engage les sujets de Dieu sur le niveau inférieur.

En développant ce cadre, le chapitre deux offre une analyse approfondie de la correspondance entre les mondes cosmiques et la composition en anneau Coranique — chacun élucidant l'autre — dans une portion considérable de la sourate longue et poly-thématique Al-Baqara (Q 2). Aligné avec l'analyse rhétorique, le schéma cosmique vertical positionne le monde du jabarūt et de la divinité sur le niveau supérieur, le malakūt, le plan spirituel, servant de point d'intersection et de rencontre sur le niveau intermédiaire, et le mulk, le plan matériel, sur le niveau inférieur. Alors que la cosmologie soufie se réfère souvent à ces trois mondes comme des catégories générales, la discussion spécifie neuf mondes, cadrant toute l'étendue verticale.

Le troisième chapitre aborde en détail le mouvement affectif des structures rhétoriques et cosmiques de la sourate al-Fātiḥa (Q 1), qui évolue de l'indétermination tonale-sémantique à la tension et à la résolution relatives, culminant dans une résolution complète de différentes manières dans chaque verset et tout au long de la sourate. Cette composition formelle et progressive démontre une convergence intégrale entre la structure, le contenu, le son et l'affect à plusieurs niveaux de composition, mettant en lumière l'expérience musulmane du Coran.

Des recherches préliminaires suggèrent que cette compositionnalité se retrouve également de manière marquée dans diverses traditions du Prophète Muḥammad, ainsi que dans une grande variété d'œuvres de nombreux savants soufis renommés, dont Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111), Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240) et Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), entre autres, offrant une nouvelle perspective herméneutique expérientielle avec des implications

métaphysiques, philosophiques, théologiques, littéraires et historiques significatives pour les

études islamiques musulmanes et occidentales en général.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Boundaries:

Navigating Between the Analysis and Experience of Qur'anic Composition

ihdina'ṣ-ṣirāṭa'l-mustaqīm[1]

– Q 1:6

The Qur'an defines itself as a "clear," "self-evident" book (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*), with the Qur'anic use of the term book (*kitāb*) encompassing notions of heavenly archetype and earthly manifestation of the revealed scripture and its composition.[2] However, the structural logic of Qur'anic composition remains elusive, preventing the achievement of a general theory, despite the substantial accumulation of insights and conjectures in both Muslim and Western scholarship. A line of observation that has not been explored and integrated into synchronic analysis is the structural correspondence established between the cosmos and the Qur'an in Sufi metaphysics. For instance, the renowned Andalusian mystic, Muḥyi'd-dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240), refers to the cosmos (*al-ʿālam*) as the Great Qur'an (*al-qurʾān al-kabīr*), consisting of letters, words, verses, and chapters ("*ḥurūf wa kalimāt wa suwar wa āyāt*").[3] Among the present approaches, the thesis of ring composition proposed by Michel Cuypers and Raymond Farrin stands out for its novel

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1. "Guide us to the straight path" (Q 1:6). This thesis uses Abdel Haleem's 2005 translation for all Qur'anic citations unless another translation is specified.

2. See Q 12:1; 26:2; 27:1. For the term *kitāb* (book) denoting composition, see Q 39:23. Further instances of the term *mubīn* describe the Qur'an as a "clear recitation" (*qurʾān al-mubīn*) (e.g., Q 27:1), revealed in a "clear Arabic tongue" (*lisān ʿarabiyyun mubīn*) (Q 16:103), and delivered as a "clear communication" (*balāgh al-mubīn*) (e.g., Q 16:35; 29:18). For a comprehensive treatment of the term, see Sinai, "Kitāb," 591-601.

3. Ḥakīm, "Al-Qurʾān al-Kabīr," 908.

synchronic analysis.[4] This approach promises to develop into a general theory of Qur'anic composition, grounded in the argument presented in this dissertation that Qur'anic ring composition serves as a multi-layered symbol for the vertical cosmos, synthesizing the two geometric conceptions.

The question of the prevalence and precision of ring composition in the study of Qur'anic suras remains a point of contention. Nicolai Sinai critiques what he perceives as a circular and reductionist approach by Cuypers and Farrin, arguing that their demarcation of ring composition frequently appears arbitrary and preferentially inclined, imposing a concentric structure upon the composition while overlooking significant structural connections.[5] I suggest that Cuypers' and Farrin's analyses lack precision and, at times, accuracy, as the formal significance of concentric structure has not been identified. Addressing this issue involves recognizing the cosmological representation of Qur'anic ring composition, descending from the levels associated with God to those of spiritual and corporeal domains, clarifying nuanced parallelisms between higher and lower levels. This correspondence is discernible in the intricate cluster of formal, thematic, and affective descriptors linked to each cosmic level, as delineated in Sufi cosmological models, and

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4. Ring composition is a formal device that involves a series of symmetric pairs arranged around a central point, such as in the form of ABCD/X/D'C'B'A'. See, Michel Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015); Raymond Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 2014). For a comprehensive introduction to ring composition, see Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

5. See Sinai, "Going Round in Circles," 110-14.

reflected in sura structure. This cosmological conception clarifies the complexity and precision of Qur'anic ring composition, allowing demarcation at multiple nested levels.[6]

A significant factor obscuring structural clarity is the lack of prolonged experiential engagement and affective methodology alongside analytical focus. This dissertation argues that the rhetorical, mystical, and aesthetic affect of Qur'anic voice constitutes integral aspects of Qur'anic ring composition, enabling a systematic analytic-cum-affective approach. In the Muslim experience, these aspects serve as primary loci of manifestation for the perceived divine origin of Qur'anic speech and composition. Medieval Muslim discourse theory is responsible for formulating this subtle experience into the doctrine of *iʿjāz* (lit. incapacitation), which holds that the Qur'an is inimitable in form and content.[7]

While this line of affective engagement has been articulated with marked anecdotal magnitude in medieval to modern discourse theory, Qur'anic exegesis, Sufi theory, and Muslim piety, structural modalities of affect within Qur'anic composition have yet to be thoroughly examined. Owing primarily to the prevailing historical-critical orientation toward synchronic analysis inherited from biblical studies, the study of affective experience in Western research of the Qur'an has often been neglected. Voicing this lacuna, Angelika Neuwirth states in her 2019 work *The Qur'an and the Late Antiquity*:

> At present, historical Western research is only breathing with one lung, so to speak. The second lung, the Arabicity and poeticity of the Qur'an, has not yet been utilized. Engagement with the aesthetic dimension of the Qur'an still remains the exclusive domain of inner-Islamic exegesis. It has hardly been treated in Western research and, consequently, is only discussed marginally in this volume (see chapters 12 and 13). But the aesthetic knowledge that awaits discovery, and which could ultimately permit the

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6. While the present thesis focuses on a number of short Meccan suras and a significant portion of the lengthy al-Baqara (Q 2), ongoing research conjecturally extends this correspondence to the composition of the entire Qur'anic corpus.

7. See Boullata, "The Rhetorical Interpretation," 143-8.

Qur'an to be set into relief as an "Arabic scripture" in an Arabic literary context, is necessary for any future comprehensive interpretation of the Qur'an (Neuwirth 2019, 37).

Sufi theory, in particular Akbarian thought, establishes a comprehensive structural correspondence between the cosmos and the Qur'an, characterizing each in terms of the other. As mentioned earlier, Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to the cosmos as the Great Qur'an (*al-qurʾān al-kabīr*), as well as by using other Qur'anic designations, such as the Great Book (*al-kitāb al-kabīr*) and the Great Corpus (*al-muṣḥaf al-kabīr*).[8] This correspondence further links mystical affect with Qur'anic composition: God recites (*talā*) the Great Corpus (*al-muṣḥaf al-kabīr*) to humans through the recitation of (mystical) states (*tilāwa al-ḥāl*).[9]

This correlation persists in modern Sufi writings. For instance, a late-Ottoman/early Republican scholar, Said Nursi (d. 1960), describes the Qur'an as an "eternal translation of the Great Book of the Universe" (*kitab-ı kebir-i kâinat*), an "everlasting translator of the various tongues that recite the verses of creation (*âyât-ı tekviniye*)," an "exegete (*müfessir*) of the Book of the Worlds of the Seen (*şehadet*) and Unseen (*gayb*)" and a "sacred map of the cosmic worlds (*avâlim-i uhreviye*)," among other parallel descriptions.[10]

The general theory developed from this line of insights establishes the modus operandi of Qur'anic ring composition, explored at the nexus of various Sufi cosmological models—with particular attention to cosmic worlds (sing. ʿ*ālam*)—and sura structure. These models describe cosmic levels (*marātib*) alongside various intersecting categories. Some of the common references include skies (*samāwāt*), celestial spheres (*aflāk*), worlds (ʿ*awālim*), their inhabitants,

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8. Ḥakīm, "Al-Qurʾān al-Kabīr," 908; Ḥakīm, "Kitāb," 951; Ḥakīm, "Al-Muṣḥaf al-Kabīr," 683.

9. Ḥakīm, "Al-Muṣḥaf al-Kabīr," 683.

10. See Nursi, *The Words*, 388-9.

the manifestation of God, His Names, Attributes, and Acts on those loci, constituents of human self (primarily spirit [*rūḥ*], heart [*qalb*], and soul [*nafs*]), and stages of the mystical path, among numerous others.[11]

Each cosmic level, functioning as a formulaic structural register, exhibits a distinct web of archetypal themes and rhetorical and aesthetic affect. Aligned with the Qur'an's inherent orality and recitation, which constitute its original mode of communication, cosmic levels intersect with distinct forms of rhetorical speech: namely, ceremonial, legal, and political. Aristotle's treatment of these forms, along with their pointed correspondence to certain commonly identified rhetorical contexts in Muslim rhetorical analysis, serve as frameworks for identifying these forms and further crystallizing the demarcation of sura structure.[12] Additionally, explored through tonal music theories, the affective voice of these cosmic and rhetorical structures is conveyed through their inherent musical character. At multiple levels, the concentric arrangement progresses from tonal tension toward equilibrium and resolution in varying manners. This contracting and expanding musical space-time forms an animated analytical and affective matrix, throwing light on the rhetorical, mystical, and aesthetic experience of Qur'anic composition.

The dissertation dedicates a chapter to each facet of Qur'anic composition and Muslim experience, each chapter building upon the previous one. Chapter One establishes the oratorical character of Qur'anic composition in a significant number of short Meccan suras. It demonstrates that the sura structure comprises a formulaic sequential arrangement of three types of rhetorical

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11. For a comprehensive repository of designations of cosmic levels, see Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 4-15.

12. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 13-15; Steward, "Speech Genres and Interpretation of the Qur'an," 3.

speech: ceremonial, legal, and political. The idiosyncratic Qur'anic character of these forms lies in their self-referential vertical arrangement. In broad terms, on the higher register, ceremonial speech praises and criticizes positions of authority, with a view to their wisdom, integrity, and competence. On the middle register, legal speech addresses the binding relationship between positions of authority and subjects with a focus on justice and injustice through accusation or defense. On the lower register, political speech engages with subjects under authority through encouragement and dissuasion, appealing to their prosperity and security.

Chapter Two focuses on the question of structural connection between the cosmos and the Qur'an. It explores various Qur'anic self-designations and focus-words that point out this link as well as their concentric arrangement. It provides a comprehensive discussion of the vertical cosmos and its levels in Sufi cosmology, outlining a hierarchy of cosmic worlds in mutual elucidation with Qur'anic structure. In conjunction with rhetorical structures, the correspondence between the cosmic worlds and Qur'anic structure is examined through a comparative exploration of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (Q 1), considered the encapsulation of Qur'anic revelation in Sufi theory, and the first sixty-one verses of Sūrat al-Baqara (Q 2), which is the subsequent, longest, and a polythematic sura that demonstrates significant textual character. The analysis of demonstrates a precise structural link between the vertical cosmos and sura structure. The concentric pattern is found at multiple levels of composition with a nested concentric pattern present both in short passages and the larger ring they form in Sūrat al-Baqara. This systematic organization reveals a significant inter- and intratextuality between the suras and between sura sub-structures. Aligned with ceremonial, legal, and political registers, the vertical cosmic schema outlined in this analysis positions the world of *jabarūt* and divinity on the higher level, *malakūt*, the spiritual plane, serving as a point of intersection and encounter on the middle level, and *mulk*,

the material plane, on the lower level. While Sufi cosmology often refers to these three worlds as general categories, the discussion specifies nine worlds, framing the entire vertical scope.

Chapter Three then addresses the inherent musical character of each cosmic level and rhetorical structure at multiple levels of composition, including verse-internal progression and the progression of verses. This analysis provides key insight into the affective experience of Qur'anic voice. The inherent musical method adopted in this chapter is developed based on theories of musical tonality, operating through twin notions of tension and resolution. In Western theory, these two dynamics are often explained based on metaphors of physical motion, and particularly gravity.[13] Linking gravity with the physical concept of space-time based on Einstein's theory of general relativity, the chapter establishes connection between musicality and the cosmos, arguing for the distinctive gravitational affect of each cosmic level. Building on the analysis in the previous chapters, the chapter examines Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (Q 1) in minute detail, with particular attention to the affective movement of cosmic and rhetorical structures.

Consequently, rhetorical, cosmological, and inherent musical structures both elucidate distinct aspects of Qur'anic composition and reinforce each other through cross-categorical insights, collectively affirming the ring composition that frames them. I would argue the formal, contentual, and affective convergence of these three facets, catalyzes a holistic, or more precisely, a synthesized experience, which characterizes the Muslim experience of the Qur'an.[14]

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13. See Dogantan-Dack, "Tonality," 211.

14. As it will be examined in Chapter Two, in addition to its common rendering as "recitation," the noun *qurʾān* is often interpreted in Sufi theory to refer to the Qur'an's collecting or gathering all realities within itself. This sense of the word *qurʾān* is closely associated with the key Sufi term *jamʿ*, denoting synthesis and union, as opposed to *farq*, denoting separation. See Ḥakīm, "Qurʾān," 903-7; Ḥakīm, "Kitāb," 949-54. Various instances of the use of the term *qurʾān* and its immediate semantic context attest to this interpretation: "We shall make sure of its

Aspects of the Muslim experience have barely been examined within the context of Qur'anic composition in both Muslim and Western scholarship. In the following sections, I explore the Muslim and Western experiences and approaches to the Qur'an, tracing aspects of a holistic experience of Qur'anic composition in four interrelated domains: Qur'anic rhetoric, sound-recitation, cosmology, and structure.

Muslim Experience of the Qur'an

Qur'anic ring composition and its synthesized character serve as a comprehensive point of reference for exploring the Muslim and Western engagement with the Qur'an, and the prevailing proclivities, significance, and limitations of existing approaches in each tradition. One can trace and identify consistent articulations of the Qur'an's synthesized experience within Muslim discourse theory, collective piety, Qur'anic exegesis, and Sufi metaphysics. In Western research, a prolonged experiential engagement with the Qur'an has often been eclipsed by a predominant historical-critical focus on the Qur'an's composition and its inner-chronological development. The scholarly concern with the Qur'an's relationship to its late antique milieu and the process of its canonization interfere with the orientation of literary-critical analysis toward a purely synchronic experience. As the most pivotal outcome, this diachronic focus is always intertwined with the persistent impression of structural disarray and editorial interpolations

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safe collection and recitation (*jamʿahū wa qurʾānahu*). When We have recited it, repeat the recitation and We shall make it clear" (Q 75:17-9).

within Qur'anic suras.[15] This dynamic, in turn, leads to highly conjectural formulations of Islamic and Qur'anic origins.[16]

Due to the impasse created by these conjectures, a search for textual and redactional coherence in Qur'anic text gradually inclines toward treating the sura as a textual unit. Thanks to Angelika Neuwirth's extensive 1980 work *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* on short Meccan suras arguing for a tripartite arrangement around a thematic middle, synchronic analysis has gained momentum.[17] Detailed explorations of structural markers in several lengthy and multipartite Medinan suras, including by Mathias Zahniser and Neil Robinson, further contribute to the notion of sura as a unit.[18] Yet Medinan suras often continue to be regarded as secondary compositions of disparate Qur'anic material, as suggested by Angelika Neuwirth and Nicolai Sinai.[19] A departure toward purely synchronic analysis is seen in the novel thesis of ring composition proposed by Michel Cuypers and Raymond Farrin, which attracted significant criticism, yet promises growth into a general theory at the nexus of the aspects of the Muslim experience, an endeavor undertaken by this dissertation.

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15. For insights into how historical assumptions about the Qur'an's canonization interact with literary analysis, especially concerning the organization of the lengthy and multi-thematic Medinan suras, see Neuwirth, "Form and Structure of the Qurʾān."

16. See Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and the Late Antiquity*, 20-1.

17. For Neuwirth's view of the early and later Meccan and Medinan suras' composition, see Neuwirth, "Sūra(s)."

18. For instance, see Zahniser, "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Sūras: al-Baqara and al-Nisāʻ," 26-56; Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 196-221.

19. See Neuwirth, "Sūra(s);" Sinai, "Toward a Redactional History of the Medinan Qur'an," 366-402. Neuwirth suggests that "Most of the so-called "long sūras" (ṭiwāl al-suwar, e.g. Q 2-10) cease to be neatly structured compositions, but appear to be the result of a process of collection that we can not yet reconstruct."

Apart from these textual endeavors, works that center the orality of Qur'anic composition and its affective experience are scant and limited to short suras and fragments. Notably, some brief yet key inherent musical insights by Kristina Nelson,[20] and the foundational work by Michael Sells,[21] which examines the aural-cum-semantic architecture of several short Meccan suras emerge as exceptional analyses that lean towards an experiential tonal hearing of sura structure, demonstrating a close interplay between sound and meaning. This tonal ground is developed in the present dissertation into a comprehensive tonal approach.

Rhetoric

The Muslim experience of the Qur'an finds its emblematic expression through the elusive notion of *i'jāz* established within Medieval Muslim discourse theory. The doctrine of *i'jāz* (lit. incapacitation) holds the primal theological authority in the Islamic faith, holding that the Qur'an is inimitable in form and content.[22] The inimitability of content involves the argument that Qur'anic references to past and future events inaccessible to the Prophet Muḥammad affirm the divine origin of the Qur'an.[23] Primarily, however, it refers to a peculiar affective experience resulting from an inextricable interplay between form and meaning of Qur'anic speech.[24] This

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20. Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, 5-13.

21. For some of Sells' key analyses, see Sells, "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sūrat Al-Qadr," 239-259; Sells, "A Literary Approach to the Hymnic Sūras of the Qur'ān," 3-25; Sells, "Sound and Meaning in Sūrat al- al-Qāriʿa," 403-430.

22. See Grunebaum, "Iʿdjāz."

23. See Boullata, "The Rhetorical Interpretation," 143-4.

24. There is a close correlation between the perceived aesthetic affect of Qur'anic voice and the formulations of inimitability. For a psychological approach toʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's (d. 471/1078) theory of *naẓm*, identifying affective experience as the central criterion of artistic calibre and literary criticism, see Khalafallah, "ʿAbdalqâhir's Theory in His "Secrets of Eloquence," 166–7. Also see Boullata, "The Rhetorical Interpretation," 145-7.

convergence is a precise indicator of the experience of Qur'anic inimitability, conceptualized here as the Qur'an's synthesized character.

In the writings of various Muslim rhetoricians, such as Abū Sulaimān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998), Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), and particularly, ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078), this synthesized quality serves as the primary source of rhetorical and aesthetic affect. It therefore lies at the core of the notions of eloquence (*balāgha*) and articulatory-cum-semantic purity (*faṣāḥa*), which constitute the conceptual foundations of Qur'anic inimitability in medieval theory.[25] While a wide range of figures of speech have been considered integral parts of Qur'anic eloquence,[26] rhetoricians aspire to pinpoint this quality within the precise grammatical construction (*naẓm*) of Qur'anic expression, at the nexus of the polarity between the arrangement (*naẓm*) of words (*alfāẓ*) and meanings (*ma ʿānī*).[27] This dichotomy has become the fundamental point of contention regarding the norms of superior expression, and whether the inimitability primarily resides in the auditory stylistics of wording, including its semantic outcome, or the cognitive and grammatical arrangement of meanings.[28]

This tension is crucial, and in a particular manner superficial, in revealing the substance of Muslim experience. For instance, ʿAbd al-Jabbār views speech (*kalām*) primarily as an

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25. For al-Jurjānī's perspective on the essence of eloquence (*balāgha*) and linguistic purity (*faṣāḥa*) vis-à-vis grammatical construction (*naẓm*) and rhetorical affect, see Cürcani, *Delâilü'l-İ'câz*, 54-6.

26. For figures of speech often highlighted in rhetorical analysis, see Rummānī, "Al-Nukat fī Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān," 53-78.

27. For the concept of *naẓm* as central to the literary significance of figures of speech, see Cürcani, *Delâilü'l-İ'câz*, 56, 96-101.

28. The dichotomy of words (*alfāẓ*) and meanings (*ma ʿānī*), along with the critique of grounding the Qur'an's inimitability in its wording, emerges as a fundamental and recurrent theme in al-Jurjānī's discussion of *naẓm*. See Cürcani, *Delâilü'l-İ'câz*, 96-101, 331-44.

acoustical phenomenon involving the ordering (*naẓm*) of sound units. Thus he locates the

Qur'an's inimitability in its aural purity (*faṣāḥa*) arising from its distinctive wording, giving the

meaning its unique articulacy.[29] In contrast, al-Jurjānī conceives of speech as an immaterial and

cognitive occurrence, identifying the grammatical arrangement (*naẓm*) as the seedbed of

eloquence and articulacy, upon which auditory stylistic features are considered inherently

contingent.[30]

Often regarded as the apex of medieval analysis, al-Jurjānī's theory of *naẓm* appears to

have been formulated in response to the problem of utterance (*lafẓ*). Al-Jurjānī's attempts to

eliminate any purely acoustical appreciation independent from grammatical linguistic

processes.[31] As such, he defines *naẓm* as "*tawakhkhī maʿānī al-naḥw*" ("minding the meanings

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29. Boullata, "The Rhetorical Interpretation," 145.

30. Boullata, 146; Cürcani, *Delâilü'l-İ'câz*, 56, 96-101. For the contrast in the approaches between ʿAbd al-Jabbār and al-Jurjani, see, Larkin, "The Inimitability of the Qur'an."

31. Al-Jurjānī's approach to *naẓm* appears to be shaped by this objective. He asserts that "Arrangement of letters is their consecutive occurrence in pronunciation, where their arrangement is not required by a [particular] meaning, nor is their arranger following in it any track in the mind that necessitated his aiming at that which he aimed at in their arrangement. Had the originator of language laid down "*rabaḍa*" in place of "*ḍaraba*" there would have been nothing improper about that. The matter is not like that, however, with the placement of words, for in placing them, you follow the tracks of the meanings, and you arrange (*turattib*) them in accordance with the way the meanings are arranged in your mind. Therefore, it is a [kind of] ordering in which the situation of one part of it in relation to the rest is taken into consideration; it is not that kind of ordering that means joining one thing to another in a random manner" (Cited in Larkin 1988, 39).

of syntactic relations"),[32] emphasizing the aesthetic implications of manipulating grammatical construction.[33]

In addressing the problem of *lafẓ*, al-Jurjānī eliminates any external stylistic imposition upon meaning by insightfully asserting that such stylistic devices should ideally arise from the meanings themselves.[34] This complete subsuming of sound under meaning presupposes an inherently cognitive poetic linkage between sound and meaning. Consequently, the effortless and pellucid compound between meaning, form, and style, and effectively between sound and meaning, represents the pinnacle of the grammarian's aesthetic appreciation. While this unity is intrinsic to the linguistic process, its intensity raises it to a level of perceived inimitability. The grammarian's meticulous efforts are all aimed at anchoring this holistic experience in a solid

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32. van Gelder and Heinrichs, "Naẓm," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*.

33. The manipulation of grammatical construction includes but not limited to the use of definite and indefinite form of a noun (*maʿrifa wa-nakra*), foregrounding and backgrounding (*taqdīm wa-taʾkhīr*), syndetic and asyndetic coordination (*waṣl wa-faṣl*), and ellipsis (*ḥadhf*), forming a grammatical foundation for poeticity. See van Gelder and Heinrichs, "Naẓm."Al-Jurjānī illustrates the rhetorical and aesthetic affect resulting from such grammatical maneuvers with refined and acute aesthetic taste. A classic example would be his analysis of the verse fragment *wa fajjarnā l-ʾarḍa ʿuyūnan* (We caused the earth to burst forth with flowing springs) (Q 54:12). In this sentence, the verb *fajjara* (to cause to burst forth) is semantically linked to *ʿuyūn* (springs) but syntactically refers to *ʾarḍ* (earth), as if, al-Jurjānī suggests, it were the earth that gushes forth in the form of springs. This unique grammatical-semantic manipulation creates a vivid and affectively demonstrative imagery, offering key insight into the rhetorician's fascination with the poeticity of Qurʾanic expression. See, Cürcani, *Delâilü'l-İʿcâz*, 99.

34. Al Jurjānī maintains that "It is not the speaker who leads the idea to wordplay and rhyme; on the contrary, the idea leads him to these two stylistic devices and makes him hit upon them; so much so that, if he had wanted to substitute an expression without assonance, the sense would have fought against it, and he would have been forcing something strange upon it, and the speaker would have been just as much subject to censure as one who put together tasteless puns and repulsive rhymes. You will find no method that is more felicitous and better from beginning to end, and no course that better leads to a good form of expression and more reliably commands applause, than to leave the ideas free to follow their own disposition and let them find the words themselves" (Cited in Kermani 2015, 211).

grammatical foundation. The sustained underlying tension between utterance and meaning in medieval to modern discourse theory serves to highlight the centrality of this synthesis.

Yet it appears that the exclusion of sound by al-Jurjānī is not entirely justified. The stylistic disposition of meanings, if accepted in total terms, is explained only in relation to poetic devices, such as rhyme and assonance, without considering the entire acoustical fabric. This lacuna is compensated by regarding the arrangement of sounds as incidental and devoid of compositional function. It is this acoustical aspect of the synthesized experience that is yet to be fully explored. As I will address in the context of recitation, adopting a tonal approach to Qur'anic composition, which encompasses both acoustical and semantic aspects of discourse, appears promising for addressing this fundamental problem.

Another significant aspect of medieval theory beyond grammatical preoccupation is the emphasis given to the rhetorical contexts of Qur'anic verses as well as larger-scale sura structures (sing. *maqām*). Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) reports that one line of scholarly interpretation for the cryptic hadīth "the Qur'an was revealed in seven *aḥruf*," often translated as "seven letters" or "seven ways," is that it comprises seven rhetorical genres: command (*ʾamr*), prohibition (*nahy*), exhortation (*targhīb*), dissuasion (*tarhīb*), debate (*jadal*), narrative (*qaṣaṣ*), and parable (*mathal*).[35] There are various other rhetorical contexts, such as praise (*madḥ*) and blame (*dhamm*), frequently highlighted in the rhetorical interpretation of the Qur'an.[36]

The rhetorical analysis in Chapter One establishes that many of these genres pointedly intersect with ceremonial, legal, and political speech that formulaically structure the Qur'anic sura. Despite keen recognition of these rhetorical genres, their organization within the sura

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35. Cited in Steward, "Speech Genres and Interpretation of the Qur'an," 3.

36. For instance, see Zemahşerî, El-Keşşâf, 1: 81.

structure, their objectives, and the kinds of evidence put forward in each, have remained as broader areas of Qur'anic eloquence awaiting systematic exploration. Exploring these compositional and rhetorical aspects, Chapter One aims to revitalize discussions on rhetorical genres in medieval to modern discussions, which frame the grammatical analysis of Qur'anic expressions.

Sound

The convergence of sound and meaning characterizes the experience of Qur'anic recitation. Navid Kermani (2015) has documented the Qur'an's self-understanding as an oral-aural communication addressing the ear, and the centrality of Qur'anic recitation and aesthetic experience within Muslim collective memory, scholarship, and piety. In the present discussion, sound is emphasized as an integral aspect of the oral-aural, inherent musical, and pitched melodic experience of Qur'anic composition, which have thus far received scant scholarly attention.

In Muslim collective memory, the Qur'an originates in a predominantly oral milieu renowned for its pre-eminent eloquence and articulacy in poetry, oration, and verbal art in general.[37] The miraculous impact of Qur'anic recitation captivates this perceptive audience, serving as an integral, if not the primary, factor that instigated the conversion of the early Muslim community.[38] Many early Muslims, such as the second caliph ʿUmar, are remembered for their immediate conversion upon hearing the sublimity of sacred recitation.[39] Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfiʿī

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37. For the Muslim collective memory of the early reception of the Qur'an, see Kermani, *God is Beautiful*, 1-66; Nursi, *The Words*, 390-1.

38. See Kermani, 24-33; Kutub, *Kur'ân'da Edebî Tasvîr*, 23-9.

39. Kermani, 17.

(d. 1937), an Egyptian poet and writer on the Qur'an's inimitability, portrays another moment of early conversion: "Every single part of his mind was touched by the pure sound of the language's music, and portion by portion, note by note, he embraced its harmony, the perfection of its pattern, its formal completion. It was not so much as if something was recited to him but rather as if something had burned itself into him."[40]

The significance of the "the pure sound of the language's music" can be generalized further. In the context of today's global Muslim population, the majority of whom are non-Arabic speakers, it would not be an overstatement to assert that the sound of Qur'anic composition, including its inherent and pitched musicality, undertakes a more primary and immediate experiential role than its semantic content in the Muslim piety. Conventionally, Muslim children start learning Qur'anic recitation at an early age, in mosques, Islamic schools, and madrasas, among other institutions.[41] While it is challenging to estimate, one can safely say that currently, millions of non-Arabic speaking individuals have committed the entire Qur'an to memory during their childhood, almost exclusively as sound.[42] An incomparably greater number of non-Arab children learn to recite the Qur'an and perform it in liturgical contexts.

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40. Cited in Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation*, 15.

41. For early Muslim education of the Qur'an, see Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, 104-6.

42. For instance, according to the Directorate of Religious Affairs, the current number of certified memorizers in Turkey (with approx. 84 million population) as of 2019 is estimated to be one hundred and sixty thousand (160,000). See, "Hafız Sayımız Yeterli Değil," *T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, September 27, 2019, https://diyanet.gov.tr/tr-TR/Kurumsal/Detay/25983/hafiz-sayimiz-yeterli-degil. In addition, anecdotal information provided by a Tanzanian resident suggests the existence of local groups that memorize the Qur'an entirely by ear. While this observation highlights the extent of acoustical experience in certain Muslim communities, its prevalence requires further research.

The distinctive quality of Qur'anic sound is preserved through a rigorous system of rules known as *tajwīd* (lit. to make better), which regulate the correct articulation and timbre of Qur'anic letters and their rhythmic duration.[43] *Tajwīd* therefore plays an integral role in conveying the embedded aural quality of Qur'anic composition. Aḥmad al-Ruzayqī, an esteemed Egyptian reciter, emphasizes that "the Qur'an has its own *mūsīqā*, and you cannot clothe the Qur'an in any other *mūsīqā*."[44] Even though non-Arabic reciters and listeners in general must be acquainted with a minimal Qur'anic vocabulary, their overall experience, particularly that of children, comes close to an entirely aural experience of strictly regulated Qur'anic sound. The melodic rendering of this sound permeates every aspect of daily life, resonating in mosques and homes, on radios, televisions, and the internet, as well as during various formal occasions, shaping the sacred soundscape of Muslim culture.[45]

The reception of Qur'anic meaning in conjunction with sound furnishes broader insight into the holistic experience of Qur'anic composition that resides at the core of medieval Muslim theory. Kristina Nelson, an ethnomusicologist who offered an extensive study of Qur'anic recitation and its Egyptian context, observes that the perceived intensity of the convergence between sound and meaning—which she identifies as an "almost onomatopoeic use of language"—defines the Muslim experience of Qur'anic inimitability:

> Ultimately, scholars and listeners recognize that the ideal beauty and inimitability of the Qur'an lie not in the content and order of the message, on the one hand, and in the elegance of the language, on the other, but in the use of the very sound of the language to convey specific meaning. This amounts to an almost onomatopoeic use of language, so

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43. For a concise treatment of *tajwīd*, see Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, 14-31.

44. Nelson, 178.

45. For the experience of the Qur'an in daily Muslim piety, see Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, 96-109; Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 9-24.

that not only the image of the metaphor but also the sound of the words which express that image are perceived to converge with the meaning (Nelson 1985, 13).

This perceptive remark concludes a brief discussion on the inherent musical structuring of several short Meccan suras and sura fragments, highlighting a tonal progression from tension toward resolution.[46] This intrinsic tonal hearing aligns with the contemporary recitation practice, where the musical movement culminating in resolution at verse endings is arguably the most prominent tonal feature.[47] Nelson therefore seems to implicitly suggest that the inherent musicality of Qurʾanic composition serves as an integral dynamic of sound-meaning interplay.

This characterization is vital for it encompasses the overall inherent musical flow of Qurʾanic speech in addition to placing emphasis on its euphonious articulacy (*faṣāḥa*) at a phonetic level in medieval theory. Nelson treats the tonal movement progressing from tension toward resolution as given, highlighting how it is shaped through the manipulation of syntactic, rhythmic, and formal parallelisms. For instance, she suggests that the resolution in Sūrat al-ʿAṣr (Q 103) is delayed by altering the length of verse three:

1	wa l-ʿaṣr
2	inna l-insāna la fī khusr
3	illa l-laḏīna āmanū wa ʿamilu ṣ-ṣāliḥāti wa tawāsaw bi l-ḥaqqi wa tawāsaw bi ṣ-ṣabr

1	By the declining day,
2	man is [deep] in loss,
3	except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to steadfastness.

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46. Nelson offers two short examples, the opening verses of Sūrat al-Shams (Q 91) and Sūrat al-ʿAṣr (Q 103), with a brief note on tonal progression. See Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qurʾan*, 12.

47. For the tonal and recitational significance of melodic cadence, see Nelson, 12, 125-132.

Nelson provides only a general idea of tonal progression. A tonal hearing based on manipulations of parallelisms takes a more sophisticated aural-cum-semantic form in Michael Sells' work based on phonic and rhythmic organization. The aural emphasis in Sells work marks a shift from the inherent musical progression to a sophisticated exploration of the vertical and horizontal resonances of specific "sound figures," which serve as points of conjunction that acquire emotive and semantic "charges."[48] However, this structurally embedded hearing, which Sells conceptualizes as a literary analysis, places less emphasis on the spontaneous flow and tonal progression of the sound fabric.

While both writers adopt elements of musical tonality based in twin dynamics of tension and resolution, this acute tonal hearing of sura structure awaits to be formulated into a systematic inherent tonal approach, as undertaken in Chapter Three. Tonality constitutes a comprehensive synthetic framework for sound as well as meaning through aural, semantic, and thematic tension and resolution, as partly demonstrated by Sells, potentially covering the entire sound fabric. This tonal progression further carries formal significance, as the continuous tonal alternations at multiple levels of composition is intertwined with the emergence of introductory, developmental, and cadential structures. Consequently, inherent musicality appears to reconcile the dichotomy of utterance and meaning in medieval discourse theory by enveloping both aural and semantic affect.

The relationship between inherent and pitched musicality is an area awaiting exploration. Pitched Qur'anic recitation, serving a significant spiritual and aesthetic function in liturgy and

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48. For Sells' intricate integration of semantic, acoustic, emotive, and gendered modalities in his approach to Qur'anic composition, see Sells, "Sells, "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sūrat Al-Qadr," 241-3. For Sells' conceptualization of "sound figures," see Sells, "Sound and Meaning in Sūrat al- al-Qāriʿa," 404.

everyday piety, is performed in a wide variety of melodic modes (*maqām*s) and styles. Recitation introduces an additional, pitched layer of tonality and stylistic rendition, ideally articulating the inherent musical essence of Qur'anic composition.[49] A multi-layered interplay of tonal affect is therefore inherent in the reciter's treatment of Qur'anic structure. As mentioned earlier, Qur'anic progression exhibits various manners of tonal indeterminacy, tension building, partial and complete resolutions in conjunction with formal registers of openings, transitions, and closures. I suggest this inherent progression serves as an inherent musical framework for the reciter, allowing one to align with it or temporarily restrict its natural flow by accentuating or delaying its tensions and resolutions for performative purposes.

Lauren E. Osborne provides an insightful study on the interplay between literary structures of Sūrat al-Furqān (Q 25) and two renditions of the sura by the renowned Kuwaiti reciter Mishārī bin Rāshid al-ʿAfāsī. Osborne examines the "changes in pace, melodic elaboration, shifts in vocal register, and modulation" as recitational markers of interplay with the sura structure, highlighting one performance showing a broad structural correspondence and the other indicating various divergencies (2016, 243-4).[50]

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49. Nelson's discussion shows that the primary objection to associating Qur'anic recitation with music is rooted in the belief that the melodic rendition should emerge from the inherent beauty of the Qur'anic language itself, including its intrinsic musicality and rhythm. This belief underscores the importance of strict adherence to the rules of *tajwīd*, which are thought to convey the divine nature and beauty of Qur'anic language. See, Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, 174-8.

50. Osborne highlights that various literary markers, such as shifting patterns of address, are not reflected in the recitation (2016, 243). For example, despite a general structural correspondence, in one rendition, passages addressing believers and deniers are rendered "in the same tone of voice, register, and pace" (2016, 243). The other rendition features continuous modulations between *maqām*s that does not seem to follow any specific structural or thematic consideration, rather indicating performance conventions (2016, 243-4).

This analysis contributes to exploring the complexity and potential modes of interaction between the pitched recitation and sura structure. As potential avenues of further exploration, I suggest that variations in styles across different regions and the preferences of individual reciters also appear as significant components of this interaction. For instance, Saʿūd al-Shuraim, the long-serving prayer leader of the Grand Mosque Masjid al-Ḥarām in Mecca, often seems to closely observe the changes in thematic and structural divisions.[51] Moreover, recitation is conventionally an improvisational practice. A reciter may render the same sura in various melodic modes, styles, and moods on different occasions—even in considerable variation between, for instance, night (*ʿishāʾ*) and early morning (*fajr*) prayers. In addition, given that the convergence of sound and meaning defines the synthesized experience of the perceived Qur'anic inimitability, the most important factor to convey this substance is the reciter's appreciation of, and the ability to melodically interact with, the inherent tonal-cum-formal structuring of Qur'anic composition. Chapter Three will contribute to precisely outlining these structures and their inherent musical character, thus establishing a foundation to assess the reciter's choices further.

Cosmology

Sufi theory situates Qur'anic composition within a universal framework, where boundaries between differing aspects of composition dissolve. Chapter Two discusses in detail that Sufi metaphysics establishes a direct structural link between the Qur'an, the cosmos, and the human self, each reflecting the same universal constitution, mirroring the others: Notions of

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51. Al-Shuraim's style does not sound melodically ornamental and often seems to align with conventional recitational practice, despite his customary observance of sura structure. Thus, the relationship between performance practices and Qur'anic structure appears as a critical aspect that requires further exploration.

qurʾān and *kitāb* are used interchangeably between each of these categories. Each gathers and synthesizes (*jamʿ*) all the realities (*al-ḥaqāʾiq*) in the form of letters, words, verses, and chapters ("*ḥurūf wa kalimāt wa suwar wa āyāt*").[52] Particularly in the formulations of Ibn al-ʿArabī, the experience of each category is virtually viewed as the experience of the others.[53] This characterization emerges as the uttermost explanation for the perceived synthesized nature of Qur'anic composition in medieval to modern discourse theory, Qur'anic exegesis, and collective piety.[54]

Structure

Despite the prevailing atomistic, verse-by-verse analysis in Muslim Qur'an exegesis, a particular strand in medieval to modern analysis incorporates an increasingly textual and structural approach to Qur'anic composition. This development, of course, occurs in the context of the established doctrine of linguistic inimitability (*iʿjāz*). Mustansir Mir observes that in

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52. See Ḥakīm, "Qurʾān," 906; Ḥakīm, "Al-Qurʾān al-Kabīr," 908; Ḥakīm, "Kitāb," 951.

53. One central term that binds these categories in the Qur'an is *āya* (sign). As an exemplary Qur'anic passage, Q 45:1-6 introduces the *kitāb* (book) and then highlights various loci where God's *āyāt* (signs) manifest. These loci include the heavens and the earth, the human self, creatures on earth, and natural phenomena such as the day-night cycle, wind, and rain, thereby linking the cosmos and the human self through the concept of *āya* (sign). The passage then integrates all these signs of God (*āyātu'l-lāh*) as God's recitation (*talā*) and speech (*ḥadīth*), synthesizing these diverse signs within the framework of Qur'anic discourse. For the Qur'anic use of the term, see Sinai, "Āyah," 118-28.

54. How Ibn al-ʿArabī conceptualizes divine speech and the process of its reception provides an extra-linguistic insight into the shared constitution between the Qur'an, the cosmos, and the human self. For instance, Ibn al-Arabi maintains that God's speech and its comprehension by the recipient is one and the same (Ibn al-ʿArabī 2008,14), eliminating the distinction between sound and meaning. If the comprehension lags behind, it is identified as a sign of not being God's speech. Similarly, Ibn al-Arabi asserts that the Qur'an descends anew with each instance of its recitation. If it descends onto the heart rather than just recited with the tongue, its meaning can be comprehended even without knowledge of Arabic (Ibn al-ʿArabī 2008,14)—again, conceiving of sound and meaning as one.

medieval exegesis, this proclivity marks a transition from a linguistic to a linear conception of *naẓm*, based in the consecutive linkages between Qur'anic verses, and occasionally, larger sections and suras.[55] In 20th century Qur'anic exegesis, linear analysis develops towards a larger-scale structural approach to Qur'anic suras.[56] Against the backdrop of Qur'anic ring composition, which had not yet been identified during their times, the emphasis placed on aspects of structural unity in both periods, notably by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), appears to accentuate an underlying synthesized experience.

Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392), recognized for his manual of Qur'anic sciences, discusses the lack of scholarly consensus on whether the Qur'an comprises disparate material revealed under varying circumstances or whether it embodies a special rationale in its composition.[57] While the prevailing Muslim view holds that the Qur'anic corpus is arranged by the Prophet Muḥammad under divine guidance,[58] the debate appears to have motivated structural proclivities.

From the very beginning, the interest in the peculiar relationship between form and content characterizes this structural tendency. Some medieval exegetes, such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d. 728/1327) and Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī (d. 885/1480), expand the prevailing atomistic focus by exploring the linkages between consecutive

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55. Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an*, 17-9.

56. See Mir, "The Sūra as a Unity," 211-224.

57. Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an*, 17.

58. For a brief assessment of Muslim views on the structure of Qur'anic corpus, see Madigan, *The Qur'ân's Self-Image*, 45-52.

structural units, often interpreted from the perspective of a newly emerging science called ʿilm al-munāsaba (the science of interrelationships between Qurʾanic compositional units).[59]

Rāzī is often recognized as the first exegete to incorporate a systematic linear analysis of the Qurʾanic verses. While the significance of this exploration in highlighting the coherence of Qurʾanic composition may seem narrow due to the limited scale of linear connections, the semantic and thematic intervals between both consecutive verses and, by extension, passages can be quite wide and dynamic. Rāzī regards the arrangement (naẓm) of these dynamic connections as the seedbed of the Qurʾan's laṭāʾif, denoting subtleties that require discerning attention.[60] This appraisal indicates that the exegete is drawn by an elusive experience of deeper organization, prompting the exploration of intricate links within a dynamically progressing discourse. Rāzī proverbially amplifies the extent of such synthesized experience, asserting that "the Qurʾan is like a single sura, and even a single verse."[61]

It does not seem plausible to interpret this emerging structural tendency as merely a reductive effort to find coherence within Qurʾanic structure. Cosmological analysis will show that each verse marks a distinct level with unique thematic and stylistic characteristics, with verse groups—often less than ten verses—forming a concentric whole. While these circles are part of larger circles, they still reflect the formulaic order of the vertical cosmos. Rāzī's perception of subtle relationships (laṭāʾif) appears as an intuitive discernment of an extensive structuring principle yet to be identified. Hence, although often overlooked as structurally

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59. For a concise discussion of the notion of munāsaba, see Reda, "Holistic Approaches to the Qurʾan," 498-99.

60. Mir, *Coherence in the Qurʾan*, 17.

61. Cited in Tuncer, *Tenasup İlmi Açısından Kurʾan Surelerindeki Eşsiz Ahenk*, 31.

limited, the emerging holistic inclination at the verse level is quite significant, and the extent to which it captures the essence of transitions between verses remains to be explored.

The notion of *naẓm* expands from a linear to a large-scale structural approach in 20th century Qur'anic exegesis. Several exegetes, including Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) in Egypt, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981) in Iran, and Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī (d. 1930) and Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (d. 1997) in Pakistan, adopt what Mir describes as an "analytic-synthetic" approach:[62] meaning, the exegetes dissect the sura, including long and polythematic Medinan suras, into its thematic structures, then seek to discern the binding central theme—*miḥwar* (lit. axis), as termed by Quṭb, and *ʿamūd* (lit. pillar) in the case of Farāhī.[63] Iṣlāḥī further presents an ambitious exploration of the composition of the Qur'anic corpus, grounded in a parallel methodological orientation.[64]

Mir construes the emergence of this original Muslim development established across exegetes from distant lands as a response to the prevailing intellectual demands of modernity, accompanied by discontent with the hermeneutic limitations of the traditional, decontextualized atomistic approach.[65] It is probable that Western criticism of structural discontinuity also have played a significant role in contributing to this multi-faceted propensity. This propensity manifests a quest for a holistic and, by extension, self-referential hermeneutic framework

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62. Mir, "The Sūra as a Unity," 217.

63. Mir, "The Sūra as a Unity," 213-17. For a brief evaluation of modern Muslim holistic approaches to the Qur'an, see Reda, "Holistic Approaches to the Qur'an," 500-501.

64. See Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an*, 43-63.

65. Mir, "The Sūra as a Unity," 218.

independent of extra-Qur'anic sources integral to traditional exegesis, such as the genre of *asbāb al-nuzūl* ("occasions of revelation").

The analytical approach to sura structure does not simply proceed with a prior orientation toward holistic arrangement isolated from aesthetic experience. In fact, the significance of structural affect seems to be amplified in the writings of some exegetes as a result of continuous structural engagement. For instance, Quṭb highlights the sura's affective atmosphere and intrinsic musicality as intertwined with its thematic arrangement:

> Hence, whoever lives in the shades of the Qur'an notices that each of its suras has a distinctive personality, a personality that has a soul with which one's heart lives as though with a living soul possessing distinctive features and traits. It [each sura] has a main topic or several main topics tightly bound to a special theme; it has a special atmosphere enveloping all its topics and helping it to deal with them from specific angles to achieve harmony among them accordingly; it has a special musical rhythm which, if it changes in the course [of the sura], changes for a specific consideration related to the topic. This is a general characteristic of all the suras of the Qur'an (Cited in Boullata 2000, 362).

This remark points out a deep-seated affective experience. Quṭb maintains the medieval emphasis on linguistic purity (*faṣāḥa*), as well as the links (*tasalsul maʿnawī*) between individual verses and sections to indicate a distinctive harmony (*tanāsub*).[66] Among the significant aspects he advances are the flow of embedded rhythm (*ʿīqā dākhilī*) and musicality (*mūsīqā dākhilī*), which harmonizes with the sura's themes and atmosphere (*jaww*).[67] The holistic significance of intrinsic musicality particularly comes to the fore when Quṭb claims that its hearing is of a spiritual nature, comprehended with a hidden sense (*ḥāssa khafī*), bestowed from God (*ladunnī*).[68]

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66. Kutub, *Kur'ân'da Edebî Tasvîr*, 114-15.

67. Kutub, *Kur'ân'da Edebî Tasvîr*, 130, 135, 139.

68. Kutub, 135.

Even in the absence of perceiving the formulaic pattern of Qur'anic ring composition, the exegetes perform laborious exploration of sura structure, taking an insightful step towards a general theory. This early ambitious attempt is integrated into the comprehensive framework presented in this dissertation. As is the case with medieval exegetes, it remains a task to explore how thematic demarcations and commentary in general interact with ring composition. In addition, while affective engagement remains an integral element, the formulaic pattern of Qur'anic ring composition transforms analytical activity to experience, facilitating an identifiable convergence between structure and affect. Recognizing the uninterrupted sequence of concentric patterns allows conditioning and anticipation of how the structure will progress. This conditioning prepares the listener for a new variation, thus providing insight into each archetypal concentric register.

Western Experience and Analysis

Western literary research in the last four decades has contributed to structural exploration with growing methodical complexity. A definitive step towards a general theory culminates with the notion of ring composition proposed by Cuypers and Farrin, potentially integrating the outcomes of previous structural scrutiny. These explorations largely remain formal and thematic, concentrating on dissecting Qur'anic structure, with limited attention given to aspects of experience.

Early Western Qur'an research, such as by Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921) and Richard Bell (d. 1952), commonly regards Qur'anic composition as disjointed, containing secondary redactional composition of disparate Qur'anic material.[69] These two aspects—structural

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69. Goldziher asserts that "Judgments of the Qur'an's literary value may vary, but there is one thing even prejudice cannot deny. The people entrusted… with the redaction of the unordered parts of the book occasionally went about their work in a very clumsy fashion." (1981,

discontinuity and view on the process of the Qur'an's compilation—are closely connected, influencing each other. When the sura is treated as a unity, as in Theodor Nöldeke's (d. 1930) work, this does not entail affirming it as an original composition. Neuwirth notes that "Although Nöldeke's work still built on the reality of the sūras (admitting, of course, subsequent modifications), the hypothesis of an artistically valuable composition—be it of the qurʾānic corpus or of the single sūras—has since been negated, and existing literary forms have been considered to be the result of a haphazard compilation."[70]

The distinctive dynamism of rigorously formulaic ring composition, which frames quasi-autonomous and self-referential structures into a unified whole, should conceivably have been mistaken for its exact opposite: disorganization. The aural experience, as argued with reference to the experience of non-Arabic speaking global Muslim population, would plausibly mitigate this impression. The absence of such experiential engagement is, to some degree, explainable by prevailing historical-critical orientation and the predominance of a biblical backdrop extending into Qur'anic studies. These factors are coupled with a continuous disregard for the doctrine of iʿjāz, thus overlooking aesthetic engagement. This trajectory begins to shift toward treating Qur'anic suras as unities in post-1980s scholarship, following Angelika Neuwirth's work.

Neuwirth's 1980 literary analysis of the micro-structure of Meccan suras represents an ambitious attempt to address widespread disagreements over the basic historical and literary questions related to Qur'anic composition largely influenced by Bell's work. Neuwirth focuses

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28). Similarly, rejecting D. H. Müller's suggestion of strophic form as characteristic of Qur'anic composition, Bell maintains that "…Muller's contention brings out a real characteristic of Qur'anic style, namely that it is disjointed. Only seldom do we find in it evidence of sustained unified composition at any great length" (Bell 1977, 73).

70. Neuwirth, "Form and Structure of the Qurʾān."

on formal markers of sura structure, including rhyme patterns, verse structures, and proportions between verse clusters, offering meticulous examination aligned with Qurʾanic inner-chronology. Neuwirth dissects the sura into its building blocks, identifying genres such as oath clusters, eschatological accounts, flashbacks, signs (*āyāt*), biblical narratives, polemics, and circumstances confronted by the emerging community.[71] Consequently, Neuwirth suggests a common tripartite scheme in early and middle Meccan suras structured around a thematic middle.[72] As for the long Medinan suras, Neuwirth has continued to portray them as collections of disjointed passages, regarding their further exploration a desideratum—which has remained an unresolved problem (2007, 98). While Neuwirth's conclusions have garnered skepticism from various scholars, such as Andrew Rippin and Alford T. Welch,[73] they have established a rigorous foundation that continued to flourish in the post-1980s structural analysis, expanding towards the exploration of lengthy Medinan suras.

Subsequent scholarship expands toward analyzing lengthy and multi-thematic Medinan suras. Notably, the works of Mathias Zahniser and Neal Robinson offer thorough analyses of formal and thematic markers, contributing to the treatment of suras as cohesive units.[74] In search of the beginnings and endings of extensive multipartite sections, these investigations focus on repetitions, parallelisms, formulas of address, shifts in speaker and addressee, rhyme patterns,

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71. Neuwirth, "Form and Structure of the Qurʾān."

72. Neuwirth, "Form and Structure of the Qurʾān;" Neuwirth, "Sūra(s)."

73. See Welch, review of *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 764-67; Rippin, review of *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 149–50.

74. See Zahniser, "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Sūras: al-Baqara and al-Nisāʿ," 26-56; Robinson, *Discovering the Qurʾan*, 196-221.

formal genres such as narrative, signs, and eschatological sections, and various other structural cues available to scholars.

Furthering Neuwirth's conjecture that lengthy Medinan suras constitute secondary compositions, Nicolai Sinai provides an exploration of several Medinan suras by integrating synchronic and redactional perspectives.[75] Sinai underlines that there is no inherent tension between redactional activity and significant structural coherence recognized in these long suras.[76] However, it is crucial to differentiate between redactional activity, which may bear varying degrees of coherence, and the deliberate integral unity within Qur'anic structure. The analysis of ring composition in a sizeable portion of Sūrat al-Baqara (Q 2) presented in Chapter Two calls into question the hypothesis of secondary composition, indicating systematic structural objectives. Having said that, the study of literary markers carries a distinct significance, as these markers often overlap with concentric structures, providing further clarity.

As an exceptional alternative to these textual endeavors, drawing on the works of Milman Parry and Albert Bates Lord, Andrew Bannister argues for the applicability of Oral Literary Theory to the Qur'an.[77] Bannister aims to elucidate the pervasive formulaic diction within the Qur'anic corpus, comprising a significant degree of repetition and variation. He suggests that such formulaic diction highlights the composition of Qur'anic speech within the context of oral performance, relying on a repository of formulaic phrases accumulated in its oral-poetic milieu.[78]

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75. See, Sinai, "Toward a Redactional History of the Medinan Qur'an," 365-402; Sinai, "Towards a Compositional Grammar of the Medinan Suras," 15-56.

76. Sinai, "Toward a Redactional History of the Medinan Qur'an," 366.

77. See Bannister, 29-33

78. Bannister, 29-30.

Bannister provides compelling quantified data that attests to the extensive use of formulaic phrases throughout the Qur'anic corpus.[79] However, he offers no explanation for the sura structure, other than pointing out specific shifts in the formulaic density of several suras that might supposedly indicate redactional activity.[80] This gap calls into question the validity of the Qur'an's oral-formulaic mode of composition. The position taken in this dissertation argues that the Qur'an has systematic and extensively attested compositional objectives. In the making of a religion, these objectives are intertwined with modes of rhetorical delivery, a cosmological conception of concentric organization, and distinct affective expressivity, which point to a somewhat specific conception of Qur'anic composition. Chapter Two demonstrates that this concentric pattern serves as the fundamental unit of repetition, comprising archetypally distinct and richly variational thematic registers. Therefore, it does not appear as a plausible surmise to explain the Qur'an's formulaic diction outside of its self-referential compositional context in the first place.

Finally, among all these approaches, the pioneering thesis of ring composition proposed by Cuypers and Farrin provides a stable synchronic foundation that could accommodate various, if not all, perspectives of compositional analysis in both Muslim and Western scholarship. In this form of chiasmus, pairs of mirroring structures surround a highlighted center creating a concentric layout, such as in the form of ABCD/X/D'C'B'A'. As mentioned earlier by highlighting Sinai's criticism, the prevalence and precision of concentric principle throughout Qur'anic structure remains a point of contention.[81] I suggest the ambiguity arises because

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79. See Bannister, 138-155.

80. Bannister, 180.

81. See Sinai, "Going Round in Circles," 106-122.

Cuypers' and Farrin's analyses often provide an approximate and occasionally unreliable outline of the concentric arrangement.

Cuypers outlines a set of criteria pointing out the contrast between the extremities and the center of a concentric structure.[82] This contrasting quality introduces a significant experiential aspect with a sense of alternating progression, which alerts and conditions the listener to pay attention to these shifts. However, aside from this intrinsic structural dynamic, the study of ring composition by Cuypers and Farrin remains as a purely formal endeavor, disengaged from affective engagement.

Cuypers' analysis, drawing on Roland Meynet's work on biblical rhetoric, argues that ring composition and other symmetric modes of composition are distinctive features of Semitic rhetoric.[83] Cuypers strictly juxtaposes Semitic with Western rhetoric, with the latter indicating a linear as opposed to symmetrical progression.[84] However, it is crucial to note that while Cuypers contrasts Semitic and Western rhetoric, he does not address the Qur'anic rhetoric in terms of the art of persuasion. This omission leads him to overlook the fluidity between rhetorical genres as discussed in Aristotelian tradition and Muslim rhetorical analysis, which will be explored in Chapter One. The incorporation of oratorical forms into ring composition sheds further light on its peculiar formal significance. The sequencing of ceremonial, legal, and political speech highlights that the ring comprises a highly dynamic and affectively charged delivery. The tonal progression embedded within rhetorical discourse (as well as within the sequencing of cosmic levels) adds further affective autonomy and synthesis.

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82. See Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur'an*, 109-126.

83. Cuypers, 6-9.

84. Cuypers, viii.

Each chapter in the following sections integrates these aspects, addressing the rhetorical, cosmological, and tonal dimensions of Qur'anic ring composition, demonstrating a comprehensive analytic-cum-affective approach. These aspects signify independent domains of Muslim experience that have remained anecdotal in Muslim scholarship. This attempt to ground the Muslim experience works toward establishing a general theory of Qur'anic composition by furthering the thesis of ring composition.

Chapter One

Rhetoric

wa mā ʿala'r-rasūli illa'l-balāghu'l-mubīn[85]

– Q 29:18

This chapter posits that the Qur'anic sura exhibits an oratorical character, featuring a sequential organization of three types of rhetorical speech: ceremonial, legal, and political. The features and objectives of these forms, as outlined in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, serve here as a partial frame of reference to demarcate the sura's rhetorical structure.[86] These rhetorical forms also pointedly intersect with rhetorical genres (sing. *maqām*) designated in Muslim rhetorical analysis. However, the definitive matrix that shapes the specific Qur'anic character of these forms, and their consecutive ordering, resides in their self-referential vertical arrangement. Within this rhetorical microcosm, on the higher register, ceremonial speech praises and criticizes positions of authority, with a view to wisdom, integrity, and competence. On the middle register, legal speech oversees and mediates the binding relationship between subjects and positions of authority with a focus on justice and injustice through accusation or defense. On the lower register, political speech engages with subjects under authority through encouragement and dissuasion, appealing to their prosperity and security. The succession of these independent forms into a unified discourse results in a highly dynamic and expressive oratorical style, idiosyncratic

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85. "If you say this is a lie, [be warned that] other communities before you said the same. The messenger's only duty is to give clear warning." (Q 29:18). Yusuf Ali's (2015) translation highlights the connotation of public delivery: "…the apostle is only to preach publicly (and clearly)" (Q 29:18). See note 1.

86. Aristotle's treatise on the art of rhetoric serves as a foundation for subsequent Western rhetorical theory. For a comprehensive exploration, see Alan G. Gross and Arthur E. Walzer, *Rereading Aristotle's Rhetoric* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

of Qur'anic expression. This chapter aims to demonstrate this framework and stylistic character, examining the three rhetorical modes, their basic affective character, and their sequential composition. It addresses several short and thematically diverse Qur'anic suras frequently recited within liturgical context: *al-Fātiḥa* (Q 1; the Opening)*, al-Qadr* (Q 97; The Night of Glory)*, al-Bayyina* (Q 98; Clear Evidence)*, al-Zalzala* (Q 99; The Earthquake)*, al-Māʿūn* (Q 107; Small Kindness), and *al-Kawthar* (Q 108; The Abundance).

Aristotle's *Rhetoric*

As Chapter Two will elaborate, the rhetorical character of Qur'anic discourse is primarily defined by the cosmological conception of its self-referential ring structure, presenting itself as a rhetorical microcosm. However, this cosmological framework enables the subsuming and synthesizing of various categories of rhetorical analysis drawn from both Western and Muslim rhetorical traditions, either directly or by reinterpreting them within the context of the Qur'an. This integration encourages comprehensive cross-traditional approaches to the Qur'an's rhetorical hermeneutics. The present chapter initiates this undertaking by focusing on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which presents an extensive treatment of the nature and objectives of rhetorical delivery, including types of rhetorical speech, means of persuasion, argumentation, emotions, style, and arrangement.[87] While the scope of the *Rhetoric* is broadly pertinent, this chapter confines itself to examining the types of rhetorical speech and their peculiar Qur'anic character and composition. This examination also involves identifying intersecting rhetorical genres identified in Muslim rhetorical analysis.

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87. See Aristotle, R. C. Jebb, and John Edwin Sandys, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle: A Translation* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: The University Press, 1909), xxiii- xxviii.

Aristotle defines rhetoric as "the faculty of discerning in every case the available means of persuasion" (1355b), outlining three types of rhetorical speech: ceremonial, legal, and political, each with specific defining elements (1358b). To offer a brief overview, ceremonial or epideictic rhetoric relates to various ceremonial contexts, events, and public gatherings, often delivered with a focus on the present time. It features praise and blame, and virtue and vice, respectively, with an emphasis on honor and shame (1358b; 366b; 1368a). As such, the moral approbation or criticism, along with achievements or failures of the subject in question, falls under the scope of epideictic rhetoric. Aristotle recommends that amplification, rather than argumentation, is best suited to epideictic delivery (1418a). This general scope of epideictic rhetoric intersects with the commonly addressed genres of praise (*madḥ*) and blame (*dhamm*) in Muslim rhetorical interpretation.

Within the context of the court, legal or forensic speech concerns taking legal action through accusation or defense, with a focus on justice and injustice (1358b). The designated time for legal speech is the past, where the conflict originated (1358b). In legal address, the speaker argues over the existence or nonexistence of facts (1418a). In this context, Aristotle recommends the use of rhetorical syllogism (enthymeme), an incomplete syllogistic argumentation where some minor premises are omitted (1368a), which create deductions that may not always be logically valid. The rhetorical genre of command (*ʾamr*), embodying legal authority, instruction, and judgement, is an integral genre within the Qurʾan and is often attested in structural registers of legal rhetoric.

Finally, in the physical setting of assembly, political or deliberative speech offers advice in the form of either encouragement or dissuasion concerning the future (1358b). Aristotle suggests the use of illustrations and examples drawn from the past in determining the future

course of action as effective tools in political speech (1418a). In this context, the speaker provides counsel that appeals to the interests, happiness, and protection of the audience (1358b). Two Qur'anic genres, exhortation (*targhīb*) and dissuasion (*tarhīb*), overlap with these elements in sections featuring political rhetoric.

Aristotle outlines three categories of proof, namely, ethical, logical, and pathetic. While Aristotle does not assign a specific means of persuasion to each type of rhetorical speech, these three categories of proof align with types of speech within Qur'anic composition. Ethical proof involves delivering the speech in a way that establishes the speaker's ethos and credibility (1356a), matching with ceremonial speech. Logical proof appeals to reason by demonstrating real or apparent facts through rhetorical induction and deduction, employing example and rhetorical syllogism, respectively (1356b), aligning with legal address. Pathetic proof, which makes the hearers themselves the mediums of proof by eliciting emotions in them (1356a), is better suited to political speech. Nevertheless, Aristotle notes that each type of speech may be found in a secondary position in the context of the others (1358b).

The Qur'an's Rhetorical Microcosm

I suggest the fundamental features of each type of speech and proof manifest within the Qur'anic composition in ways particular to the tripartite vertical arrangement that synthesizes these forms, featuring God as the transcendent authoritative speaker. While it is a complex task to encapsulate the scope of each form of rhetorical address within Qur'anic composition, Chapter Two demonstrates in the context of multipartite Sūrat al-Baqara (Q 2) that the defining features of each form remain stable within thematically diverse and intricate structures.

Ceremonial speech in the openings typically issues authoritative announcements with an enigmatic element. These announcements often feature God and representations of divine

authority, as well as worldly positions of authority, accompanied by approbation or criticism regarding conditions of authority. These conditions encompass various virtuous qualities, serving as proof of the wisdom, credibility, and competence of the authority figure, which often manifests through reputation. The peculiar affective tone of ceremonial addresses combines a sense of sublimity and reverence with a heightened and amplified style of address, expressing a transcendent but all-active authority.

In the middle register, legal speech articulates the binding relationship between God and His subjects, serving as a point of intersection, mediation, and encounter. The function of legal authority is entwined with a sense of impressive and majestic authority and the expected submission and loyalty. As such, these sections often feature legal injunctions and themes of worship, accountability, and judgement. The execution of justice, often marking moments of truth and finality, emerge as a prominent theme featuring conflict, and the resulting accusation and defense. Legal rhetoric often appeals to reason by highlighting such moments of finality, the binding nature of the relationship between God and His subjects, and the guidance provided in establishing this relationship. Moving beyond the immediate Aristotelian framework, the themes of justice and conflict appear to be implicitly intertwined with various demanding elements of binding relationships, such as love, appreciation, and gratitude. As such, when disrupted by conflict, these themes become a matter of accusation and defense, demanding justice.

In the lower register, political rhetoric addresses the prosperity and security of God's subjects through encouragement and dissuasion. These sections appeal to emotions, making the audience's affective experience the proof of persuasion. Themes focusing on decisive future outcomes, including worldly and heavenly favors, along with implicit and open threats, are

frequently foregrounded. The concluding articulation of the experience of these outcomes is intertwined with an affective tone of certainty and decisiveness.

Q 1 Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (The Opening)

1   In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy!

2   Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds,

3   the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,

4   Master of the Day of Judgement.

5   It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help.

6   Guide us to the straight path:

7a   the path of those You have blessed,

7b   those who incur no anger

7c   and who have not gone astray.

Rhetorical Structure

> V. 1-3 Ceremonial   Praise of God
>
> V. 4-6 Legal   Pledge of loyalty to the King
>
> V. 7   Political   Plea for prosperity and protection

As the first and most recited sura of the Qur'an, the Opening delivers a preludial and synoptic prayer. The continuous use of present time throughout the sura, which brings past-oriented legal speech and future-oriented political speech into the present moment, creates an aura of presence in pre-time before the event of the Qur'an. The opening section offers a ceremonial speech, introducing and praising God, establishing His transcendent character in a celebratory tone. Verse one announces God as the ultimate authority, recognized for His

overarching love and compassion. Verse two praises Him as the wise and omnipotent lord and educator (*rabb*) over all creation, and verse three reaffirms and celebrates His loving nature.

While remaining within the context of praise, the middle section transitions to a legal address, highlighting contexts of encounter and mediation. Appealing to reason, it emphasizes the legally binding relationship between God, as the King, and humankind, the subjects. Verse four alludes to the ultimate moment of accountability and justice before God, establishing Him as *al-Mālik, or al-Malik* (the Master or the King) of the Day of Judgement. In a dramatic conclusion to the praise, verse five formalizes a pledge of loyalty and submission to the one King, duly acknowledging Him as the sole legitimate authority and source of power.

Following this pledge, verse six constitutes a collective plea for advice and directives from the recognized legal authority, employing the metaphor of the "straight path." This metaphor highlights the mediated relationship between God and humankind, alluding to the distance and connection between the higher and lower registers. Expanding the plea, the conclusion delivers a political speech that features humankind as the subjects under the King's authority. Appealing to emotions, this section revolves around themes of utility and common interest. The extended verse seven articulates a demand for prosperity and security, both exhorting and dissuading the implied audience.

Q 97 Sūrat al-Qadr (The Night of Glory)

1   We sent it down on the Night of Glory.

2   What will explain to you what that Night of Glory is?

3   The Night of Glory is better than a thousand months;

4   on that night the angels and the Spirit descend again and again with their Lord's permission on every task;

5   [there is] peace that night until the break of dawn.

Rhetorical Structure

V. 1-3 Ceremonial   Praise for revelation and the Night of Glory

V. 4   Legal   Execution of ordained tasks and organizing revelation's descent

V. 5   Political   Promotion of peace in the Night of Glory

In Muslim exegetical literature, the Night of Glory (*laylatu'l-qadr*) often marks the time

of the year when the Qur'an is believed to have descended in its entirety to the lower heaven, to

be later revealed to humanity in installments through the medium of the angel Gabriel.[88] The

other primary aspect of this night is the implementation of divine decrees (*'amr*) within the

cosmic order by the angels and the Spirit.[89] Combining the two aspects, it seems the sura binds

this cosmic regulation with the descent and reception of the revelation.

The Night of Glory can be characterized as a potent celebratory address on the descent of

divine revelation.[90] The style of delivery is assertive and triumphant. The opening verses aim to

strike the audience with an enigmatic subject, The Night of Glory, reiterating and amplifying the

phrase in each verse of this section with an enthusiastic affective tone. Verse one issues a self-

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88. See Râzî, *Mefâtîhu'l-Gayb*, 23: 280.

89. See, Râzî, 23: 281.

90. The semantic context of the word *qadr* is multifaceted, and its various aspects are reflected in the sura. Derived from the verb *qa-da-ra*, meaning "to measure" and "to have power over," the noun *qadr* conveys quantitative senses of measurement and determination, including the act of assigning a specific measure to something. This aligns with the state of possessing power and ability over that which is determined. Additionally, it encompasses the qualitative aspect of one's measure of worth and honor, as well as its appreciation. (e.g. Q 39:67). See, Lane, "قدر," 2494-96. For the concepts of *qadr* and *laylatu'l-qadr*, see Sinai, "Qadr," 83, 271 (n. 1), 356, 409; Sinai "Laylat al-qadr," 83, 356, 409. For a thorough analysis of the sura, with particular attention to its intricate acoustical structure, see Sells, "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sûrat Al-Qadr," 239-59. For a historical and literary-critical commentary, see Neuwirth, *The Qur'an*, 49-56.

commending proclamation in the emphatic first person plural *innā,* which praises this enigmatic night and what is cryptically referred to as '*hu*' (it), that which is sent down in it. Traditional exegesis understands this object pronoun '*hu*' to refer primarily to the Qur'anic revelation.[91] The use of the past tense (*anzalnā*) in this present-oriented context serves to magnify the revelation as complete and already achieved. Moreover, the omission of the speaker's name and that which is sent down demonstrates a reputation and honor that is ubiquitous,[92] serving as evidence of the speaker's ethical perfection and integrity.

By directing the divine attention upon the audience in the second person singular, the imposing rhetorical question in verse two—'What will explain to you what that Night of Glory is?'—creates tension with the audience. In the following verse, an overflowing and amplified answer is presented, which articulates the measure of this night's worth: "better than a thousand months," which partly relieves the tension of the question and continues to captivate the audience with its magnitude.

With a dramatic shift to a legal address, verse four appeals to reason by demonstrating the clarification for the enigmatic Night of Glory. Offering an expansive dramatic scene of majestic activity, this verse evinces a mediating quality between God and His subjects as the angels and the Spirit descend during the Night of Glory to implement commands (*min kulli ʾamr*) authorized (*idhn*) by their Lord.[93] Given the mediating character of this register and the sura's context of revelation, the descent of angels appears to relate to modulating and synchronizing the cosmic

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91. See Râzî, *Mefâtîhu'l-Gayb,* 23: 280; Sells, "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sūrat Al-Qadr," 244.

92. Similarly, classical commentators often interpret this omission as an exaltation and a sign of reputation, see Râzî, 23: 280.

93. For the concept of *ʾamr, see,* Sinai, "Amr," 78-85.

setting for the purpose of enabling or coordinating the descent of revelation and its reception. This harmonization seems to be the subject of the ordained decrees, pointing out an organic link between revelation and the cosmos.

Regardless of the specific objective of this angelic activity, verse four articulates a triumphant closing scene with a political discourse appealing to the subjects' emotions with a view to their interest and happiness. This verse offers a blissful imagery, highlighting the security and contentment bestowed during the Night of Glory, eliciting joy, and encouraging spiritual contact with the higher realms.

Q 98 Sūrat al-Bayyina (Clear Evidence)

1   Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolaters were not about to change their ways until they were sent clear evidence,

2   a messenger from God, reading out pages [blessed with] purity,

3   containing true scriptures.

4   [Yet] those who were given the Scripture became divided only after they were sent [such] clear evidence

5   though all they are ordered to do is worship God alone, sincerely devoting their religion to Him as people of true faith, keep up the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, for that is the true religion.

6   Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolaters will have the Fire of Hell, there to remain. They are the worst of creation.

7   Those who believe and do good deeds are the best of creation.

8   Their reward with their Lord is everlasting Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will stay forever. God is well pleased with them and they with Him. All this is for those who stand in awe of their Lord.

Rhetorical Structure

V. 1-3 Ceremonial   Praise for the authoritative evidence *(bayyina)*

V. 4-7 Legal   Judgment of those who accept and deny the evidence

V. 8   Political   Promise of heavenly rewards and mutual pleasure

The sura Clear Evidence introduces the advent of a decisive proof (*bayyina*) embodied by a new prophet and revelation, juxtaposed against the fixity and deep-rooted beliefs and conflicts of the addressed disbelievers. There is a noticeable affective orientation towards harmony and social cohesion, accompanied by a caring caution that precludes any domineering attitude during the elimination of sectarian conflict and the transformation of firmly embedded beliefs. Revolving around various aspects of fixity and totality, the sura clearly distinguishes between those who believe in this decisive proof and those who do not, concluding with the believers being promised complete contentment.

Verse one opens with an authoritative statement, criticizing a long-standing and adamant sectarian discord between polytheists, Christians, and Jews that reached an impasse. The verse implies the obstinate will to authority and the need for wise guidance. In contrast, this extended sentence concludes with a surprising climax: "until they were sent clear evidence" (*ḥattā ta'tiyahumu'l-bayyina*). Here, the Qur'anic voice promptly adopts a celebratory and praising tone for the arrival of transcendent evidence (*bayyina*), serving as the means to provide unity and social harmony.

Verses two and three commend and bring this authoritative evidence to the forefront: God presents and identifies this evidence as a trustworthy messenger ordained by divine authority, who recites authentic and dependable revelation. In these verses, the speaker is God, who introduces the Prophet Muḥammad solely as a messenger in the indefinite form, without mentioning his name. This aspects contribute to the presentation of the Prophet in a moment of humility, clearing him from personal impulse to transform a people. The focus is on foregrounding his representative authority, ethical perfection, and spiritual insight and wisdom for educational competence directed at social and doctrinal harmony.

The subsequent legal section addresses the conflict among those who were previously given scripture regarding the evidence, issuing ultimate judgement concerning believers and disbelievers. With the advent of the evidence, verse four marks a moment of truth and judgement, with the evidence functioning as a criterion of justice. The showcasing of the unprecedented conflict emerging after the evidence appeals to reason by emphasizing the absence of any comparable previous example. This argument serves as proof for the veracity of the evidence. In contrast, verse five lays out the binding legal constituents of a reliable religion: namely, worshipping God alone, fulfilling prescribed prayer, and paying alms. The verse foregrounds the plausibility of these commands implying numerous past examples. Thereby the verse implies that the discord regarding the evidence's veracity is not justified and is self-inflicted. It is important to note that, resonating with the theme of social harmony that permeates the sura, the style of delivery in these verses highlights justice while ensuring not to overstep boundaries and provoke conflict.[94]

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94. Given the binding character of legal register, the exclusion of polytheists in verse four hints at a closer bond between the recipients of previous scriptures and the newly arrived messenger, highlighting underlying affection.

Ultimately, within the judicial setting of verses six and seven, the decisive evidence leads to the conclusive verdict: God convicts those who reject the evidence to hellfire and vindicates those who accept it and act accordingly. Within the initially established context of peace building, verse seven determines the specified disbelievers as the gravest threat to harmony and order: they are "the worst of creation" (*sharr al-bariyya*). In contrast, akin to demonstrating each scale of justice, the believers are regarded as the ideal subjects standing for goodness and peace: "the best of creation" (*khayr al-bariyya*).

Following the judgment, a political address acknowledges the believers, appealing to their emotions. The extended final verse serves to encourage them, as well as the implied audience, with the promise of heavenly rewards before their Lord and the ultimate establishment of mutual pleasure between God and those who hold Him in reverence, presenting a definite ending aligned with the decisive evidence (*bayyina*).

Q 99 Sūrat al-Zalzala (The Earthquake)

1   When the earth is shaken violently in its [last] quaking,

2   when the earth throws out its burdens,

3   when man cries, 'What is happening to it?';

4   on that Day, it will tell all

5   because your Lord will inspire it [to do so].

6   On that Day, people will come forward in separate groups to be shown their deeds:

7   whoever has done an atom's-weight of good will see it,

8   but whoever has done an atom's-weight of evil will see that.

Rhetorical Structure

V. 1-3 Ceremonial   Demonstration of the final earthquake and the resurrection

V. 4-6 Legal   The earth's testimony

V. 7-8 Political   Exhortation and dissuasion concerning deeds

This sura addresses the earthquake of the Last Day, with a meticulous analytical focus on the recording and storage of factual data concerning the deeds of humanity by the personified earth. These accounts are subsequently retrieved and communicated in the context of eschatological transformation for judgement and recompense. In turn, the sura encourages self-accounting and reflection on one's deeds, in order to purge the burdens of wrongdoing and transform the self before they are conclusively revealed.

The sura opens with an unsettling demonstrative address, in which the earth, personified in feminine form, performs the final act, quaking and discharging her burdens. This moment is often interpreted in traditional exegesis as referring to the resurrection and the casting out of the dead from their graves.[95] Michael Sells suggests that the imagery of earthquake draws a parallel with the birth pangs and delivery of the mother.[96] Angelika Neuwirth similarly characterizes the earthquake as "cosmic pains that induce the 'coming (back) to earth' of the resurrected dead, who now rise out of the graves."[97]

I further propose that this moment marks a catharsis, with the personified earth conclusively purging and revealing the data it has stored. It is through this revelation that the audience is educated on self-accounting. The ethical proof lies in the earth's receptive, preserving, and revealing nature, which meticulously records, restores, and reinstates the data

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95. Râzî, *Mefâtîhu'l-Gayb*, 23: 333-34.

96. Sells, "A Literary Approach to the Hymnic Sūras of the Qur'an," 19. Similar metaphors of delivery are also found in classical exegesis, see Râzî, 23: 334. For Sells' concise analysis of the sura's acoustically modulated structure, see Sells, 18-20.

97. Neuwirth, *The Qur'an*, 49-56.

which has occurred upon it. The subsequent legal section highlights that this data is transformed into verbal form through divine inspiration (*waḥy*), foregrounding its role in converting and communicating cosmic data.

The transition to legal rhetoric, marked by the temporal phrase *yawma ʾidhin* ("on that day"), signals the moment of accountability and justice. In verses four and five, the earth, assuming the role of an official witness, is inspired by God to testify before the divine court and relay a comprehensive account of the data she has meticulously recorded (*tuḥaddithu akhbārahā*). The revelation of this data serves as the evidence itself, rationalizing the precision of justice without the need for further proof or judgement. Verse six demonstrates the return of people from the earth in divided groups to come and witness their deeds. This scene vividly illustrates the procedural execution of legal authority, heightening anticipation as individuals await the inevitable reckoning of self-accountability.

The truth is factually revealed in the lower register. Equally appealing to emotions of prosperity and suffering, conclusive deliberative rhetoric exhorts and dissuades the subjects, inviting them to self-interrogation. The emphasis that each person will exclusively experience the outcomes of one's deeds places the subjects themselves as the instrument of proof and persuasion.

Q 108 Sūrat al-Māʿūn (Small Kindness)

1   [Prophet], have you considered the person who denies the Judgement?

2   It is he who pushes aside the orphan

3   and does not urge others to feed the needy.

4   So woe to those who pray

5   but are heedless of their prayer;

6   those who are all show

7   and forbid common kindnesses.

Rhetorical Structure

V. 1-3 Ceremonial   Criticism of the oppressor

V. 4-5 Legal   Denouncement of the heedless

V. 6-7 Political   Dissuasion from affected pietism

The sura follows a humanitarian trajectory with an emphasis on the misuse of authority. It opens with a formal speech blaming and discrediting an unwise and oppressive figure of authority devoid of collective concern. This figure is depicted as incompetent in educating and integrating those marginalized, as well as supervising those disadvantaged, casting severe doubt on their ability to lead effectively and ethically. The omission of the character's name underscores notoriety, implying the prevalence of such exemplar in social setting. In turn, this section educates the listener from a position of proximity, addressing them in the second person singular, fostering a sense of cooperation and solidarity. It emphasizes social justice regarding those excluded and oppressed, illustrating the misuse of power facilitated by the rejection of ultimate authority.

The legal speech in middle register accuses those heedless of their prayers, with God interfering with the hypocritical display of worship and annulling it. Aligned with the emphasis on the misuse of authority, this denouncing invalidates these figures' appropriation of religious authority through pietistic public display.

In the lower register, deliberative rhetoric clarifies this motive as an attempt to acquire political benefit and security, dissuading affected pietism and exhorting sincerity and transparency. Bolstered by the annulment of worship in the legal register, this exposure

encourages free thinking in observing authority figures' integrity and transparency with particular attention to the clash between their social and political dealings—as highlighted in the formal register—and perceived piety. Verse seven further draws attention to the harm brought to the common good through these figures' preventing even the slightest assistance and gestures of kindness to those disadvantaged.

Q 108 Sūrat al-Kawthar (Abundance)

1   We have truly given abundance to you [Prophet]—

2   so pray to your Lord and make your sacrifice to Him alone—

3   it is the one who hates you who has been cut off. (Q: 108)

Rhetorical Structure

V. 1   Ceremonial   Affirmation of the Prophet

V. 2   Legal   Injunction of worship and sacrifice

V. 3   Political   Dissuasion from enmity

Often interpreted as a divine offering of consolation,[98] the sura follows an existential trajectory based on the interplay between being and nothingness, juxtaposing "abundance" (*kawthar*) with having been "cut off" (*abtar*), with the theme of sacrifice, or self-sacrifice, at the center. Verse one delivers an authoritative announcement, showcasing the amplified "abundance" expressive of a sense of being, affirming the Prophet and upholding his status and credibility in a protective tone. The mediating legal address issues injunctions of worship and self-sacrifice, consoling the Prophet as it commands him to self-negate in worship and refrain from self-defense, thus highlighting the transformative spiritual dynamic between nothingness and being.

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98. See Neuwirth, *The Qur'an*, 58.

In the lower register, future-oriented political rhetoric appeals to emotions by dissuading the audience from harboring enmity towards the Prophet, warning about the deprivation this hostility would cause. The contrast between "abundance" and having been "cut off" (*abtar*) intensifies this dissuasion. Given that being "cut off" is caused by enmity towards the Prophet, this contrast implies and encourages that benefiting from the blessing of "abundance" depends on love and attachment to him through self-negation and following his example in being devoted to self-sacrifice.

Conclusion

The analysis of these short suras establishes that the Qur'anic sura is characterized by a peculiar formulaic sequence of ceremonial, legal, and political speech. The vertical relationship between rhetorical registers defines the Qur'anic character of these rhetorical forms, with positions of authority on the higher level, legal power mediating the relationship between the authority and subjects on the middle level, and subjects under authority on the lower level. This rhetorical microcosm forms a self-referential whole that virtually dictates the conditions of its rhetorical hermeneutic. The subsequent chapter will expand this framework within the context of the extensive Medinan sura al-Baqara (Q 2), demonstrating that each type of rhetorical speech corresponds with layers of the vertical cosmos. This correspondence reflects a cosmological conception of rhetorical delivery, extending the Qur'anic scope of each rhetorical genre.

The analysis relied solely on translation, which eclipses the aural-cum-semantic affect of Qur'anic voice. Yet, it is apparent that this idiosyncratic formulaic synthesis of rhetorical forms endows Qur'anic speech with formal stability and expressive verbal dynamism, demonstrating systematic convergence between rhetorical structure and content. These features provide significant insight into the notion of *naẓm* residing at the core of the Muslim discourse theory

and the holistic experience of Qur'anic composition in the Muslim tradition. The aspect of inherent musicality addressed in Chapter Three elucidates this experience based on the tonal character of each structure, demonstrating their affective movement.

Having said that, while the analysis of sura structure reveals a vivid oral, oratorical character, this character does not outright position the Qur'anic sura as an oral composition intended for public performance. Chapter Two will demonstrate that this formulaic pattern remains stable, if not more obvious, in extensive Medinan material that appear textual in character. These large-scale building blocks reveal the same formulaic structure in a nested fashion within the framework of ring composition. This rigorously systematic concentric pattern provides fluidity between aspects of Qur'anic self-understanding as recitation (*qurʾān*) and book (*kitāb*), effectively dissolving the boundaries between the two. As the following chapter elucidates, this peculiar, nested fluidity, which is rooted in the cosmological symbolism of Qur'anic composition, enables the conceptualization of the Qur'an's genre as *sui generis*.

The use of rhetorical forms recognized in Western tradition, alongside corresponding rhetorical genres addressed in Muslim scholarship, establishes an initial foundation for a comprehensive study of Qur'anic rhetoric at the level of sura. An extensive exploration of Qur'anic *topoi* particular to each type of rhetorical speech would further define their scope and potential sub-categories.

This foundation serves to integrate Muslim linguistic and aesthetic orientation, which has primarily been atomistic, into a holistic understanding of eloquence at the sura level. This approach frames the analysis of figures of speech, and more importantly, *naẓm* at the grammatical level, which promises to clarify the nuances of rhetorical affect. Muslim exegetical

tradition is replete with the analysis of such rhetorical *laṭāʾif* (subtleties) that furnishes aesthetic

and psychological insight, serving as a rich repository to draw upon.

Chapter Two

Cosmology

I swear by the positions of the stars—a mighty oath, if you only knew—
that this is truly a noble Qur'an, in a protected Record that only the
purified can touch, sent down from the Lord of all being.

– Q 56:75-80

I am leaving among you, that which if you hold fast to them, you shall not
be misguided after me. One of them is greater than the other: The Book of
Allah is a rope extended from the sky to the earth, and my family—the
people of my house—and they shall not split until they meet at the *ḥawḍ*,
so look at how you deal with them after me.[99]

– Prophet Muḥammad

The essence of our relationship with the Qur'an lies in being able to turn towards
it with our heart, consciousness, will, cognition, and perception, and to experience
it with every dimension of our being. Through such an orientation and experience,
we sense that Allah (may His glory be exalted) is speaking to us, and we suddenly
blossom like seeds that have reached water and light. In every word and sentence
of the verse we recite, we attain different depths; while simultaneously observing
the atlas of our soul, we reach the horizon of witnessing the map of the heavens.

– Fethullah Gülen, *Sohbet-i Cânan*

In the Great Mosque of the Universe, the Qur'an recites the Universe, so
let's listen to it.

– Said Nursi, *The Words*

Sufi theory establishes a structural correspondence between the Qur'an and the cosmos,

characterizing each in terms of the other. For example, the illustrious Andalusian mystic, Ibn al-

ʿArabī (d. 1240), designates the cosmos as the Great Qur'an (*al-qurʾān al-kabīr*), composed of

letters, words, verses, and chapters ("*ḥurūf, wa kalimāt, wa suwar, wa āyāt*").[100] In the context of

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99. *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3788. For *ḥawḍ*, the basin where the Prophet Muḥammad was
reported to meet his community in the hereafter, see Wensinck, "Ḥawḍ."

100. Ḥakīm, "Al-Qurʾān al-Kabīr," 908.

these correspondences, this chapter introduces a cosmological perspective to the study of Qur'anic composition, expanding the rhetorical analysis. It proposes that Qur'anic ring composition stands as a symbol of the vertical cosmos, descending from levels associated with divinity to those of spiritual and corporeal domains. This correspondence is observable in the intricate cluster of formal, thematic, and affective descriptors linked to each cosmic level and concentric structure. A correlative analysis of these two domains facilitates the demarcation of vertical cosmic levels with particular attention to their concentricity and the parallelisms between higher and lower domains. This, in turn, provides clarity to the concentric structural boundaries. As established in Chapter One, these demarcations consistently converge with rhetorical structures, offering further precision.

The discussion demonstrates that ring composition enables a systematic and amply variational intertextuality across both contextually homogenous and disparate Qur'anic sections. As the analysis will elaborate, a critical reference emerges in Q 39:23 that describes the Qur'anic composition as "*kitāban mutashābihan mathāniya*" ("a Scripture that is consistent and draws comparisons"). I interpret this phrase as "a two-fold composition whose many parts correspond to one another," suggesting it affirms this concentric characterization. The analysis presented here focuses on two suras with substantial structural and thematic variance: Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (Q 1), the first and most recited sura—considered in Sufi metaphysics as the encapsulation of the Qur'anic corpus;[101] and the initial sixty-one verses of Sūrat al-Baqara (Q 2), a significant portion of the subsequent, poly-thematic, and longest sura. The analysis illustrates how the correspondences between cosmological, concentric, and rhetorical structures, as they expand and

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101. See Ḥakīm, "'Umm al-Kitāb," 122; Nursi, *The Words*, 417.

reinforce each other, define Qur'anic ring composition and the pervasive intertextuality it enables.

Sufi cosmological models employ various astronomical, metaphysical, and mystical frameworks to map the cosmos and delineate its various levels. These categories include skies (*samāwāt*), celestial spheres (*aflāk*), cosmic worlds (*ʿawālim*), zodiacal constellations, planetary archetypes, God's Attributes and Names manifest in these levels, types of cosmic inhabitants, spiritual and physical faculties of the human self, and stages of the mystical path, among others.[102] These divisions overlap with nuanced variations due to varying number of vertical divisions.

To establish a working cosmological schema, the present analysis prioritizes the tripartite division of cosmic worlds (*ʿālam* pl. *ʿawālim*)—*jabarūt*, *malakūt*, and *mulk*— frequently addressed across various traditions, linking these worlds with various other cosmic categories.[103] Aligning with the rhetorical analysis, the concentric schema presented here positions *jabarūt* and divinity on the higher level, *malakūt*, the spiritual plane, serving as a point of mediation and encounter on the middle level, and *mulk*, the material plane, on the lower level.

In collecting various descriptions and thematic markers of cosmic levels and other related categories, I primarily draw from Ibn al-ʿArabī, and other prominent Akbarian figures, including Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274) and Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 1350). I occasionally incorporate cosmologies of other Sufi scholars, including Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111), ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166), and Aḥmad al-Fārūqī al-Sirhindī (d. 1624), among others. I specifically make

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102. See Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 4-38; Titus Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn al ʿArabī* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2001).

103. See Terrier, "Sufi Hierarchies of the Worlds or Levels of Existence," 277-298.

use of two sources: first, the work of Ahmed Avni Konuk (d. 1868), a late-Ottoman Mawlawī

Sufi, who presents a comprehensive exposition of the levels of being (*marātib al-wujūd*) in the

introduction of his commentary on Ibn al-Arabī's (d. 1240) *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (The Bezels of

Wisdom). This introduction is significant as it offers a rich collection of terminology and

descriptions designating cosmic levels in both Akbarian and broader Sufi metaphysics.

Additionally, I consult Suʿād al-Ḥakīm's 1981 work, *Muʿjam al-Ṣūfī*, a detailed glossary of

numerous Sufi terms in the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī.

The Qur'an and the Cosmos

Sufi metaphysics, across diverse traditions, characterizes the cosmos and the Qur'an as

structurally interconnected, which provides a novel impetus to examine the Qur'anic

composition within the context of this interrelationship. Specifically, the connection established

between the Qur'anic notion of the seven heavens (*samāwāt*), the Pedestal (*kursī*), and the

Throne (*ʿarsh*), including vertical cosmic levels in general, and the composition of the Qur'an

sets a comprehensive framework for a close examination of correspondences within Sufi

cosmological models and Qur'anic structure. It is worth noting that scholarly attention in Sufi

theory and Qur'an exegesis devoted to the structure of cosmic levels far surpasses a comparable

preoccupation with delineating Qur'anic structure. Instead, a rather broad connection is alluded

to between stars and clusters of stars with Qur'anic verses based on the Qur'anic term *nujūm*

(stars), which is likewise interpreted in early Qur'an exegesis to refer to segments of Qur'anic

revelation.[104] This general correlation is significant for it consolidates the emphasis placed on the

structural correspondence with the heavens, which the argument here proposes to employ as a

framework for compositional analysis.

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104. See Ibn ʿAbbās, *Tanwīr al-Miqbās*, 646.

A primary Qur'anic basis for this correlation lies in God's creation through Speech: "when He wills something to be, His way is to say, "Be"- and it is!" (Q 36:81). Building upon the command "Be!" (*Kun*), Ibn al-ʿArabī describes all that exists as God's words (*kalimāt*), manifesting His Names.[105] Through the creation of the cosmos, the Divine Names that seek external manifestation in distress achieve relief, manifesting themselves through the Breath of the Merciful (*al-nafas al- raḥmān*)."[106] Here, the Breath, hence, the Speech, defines the principle of creativity characterized by Mercy – due to the actualization of the propensity of God's Names to manifest. This interpretation allows one to characterize the ontology and structure of the cosmos and the Qur'an through each other, defining both as God's Speech.

Another categorical foundation that links the cosmos and the Qur'an involves a specific understanding of the terms *qurʾān* and *kitāb*, which denote their comprehensive nature. In addition to its meaning "to recite" or "to proclaim," the root *qaraʾa* also signifies "to collect" or "to draw together."[107] Another related root proposed for the verbal noun *qurʾān* is the verb *qarana* (without glottal stop), which means "to conjoin" or "to connect."[108] Similarly, besides its meaning "to write," the noun *kitāb*, derived from the verb *kataba*, means "to draw together" or "to conjoin."[109] With pervasive usage in Sufi thought, *qurʾān* and *kitāb* adopt the sense of

105. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 178.

106. Ibn al-ʿArabī, 181.

107. Lane, "قرأ," 2502-2504.

108. Lane, "قرن," 2987-2988.

109. Lane, "كتب," 2589-2591

collecting and synthesizing (*jamʿ*), articulating the idea that the Qur'an, the cosmos, and the human self collect all realities (*ḥaqīqa* pl. *ḥaqāʾiq*) of God's Names and reflect each other.[110]

As has been mentioned, Ibn al-ʿArabī characterizes the cosmos as the Great Qur'an (*al-qurʾān al-kabīr*), comprising letters, words, verses, and chapters ("*ḥurūf, wa kalimāt, wa suwar, wa āyāt*").[111] All that is found in Divine Knowledge acquires external existence through the Breath and the agency of Speech, where these Qur'anic compositional units represent the realities of creation.[112] Additionally, Ibn al-ʿArabī employs the terms the Great Book (*al-kitāb al-kabīr*) and the Great Corpus (*al-muṣḥaf al-kabīr*) for the cosmos: God recites (*talā*) this Great Corpus to humans through the recitation of (mystical) states (*tilāwa al-ḥāl*).[113]

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110. See Ḥakīm, "Qurʾān," 905; Ḥakīm, "Kitāb," 950; Ḥakīm, "Allāh," 80-81; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 50.

111. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the compositional form of the Qur'an is also identical with that of human form, which he considers as a microscale Qur'an (*al-qurʾān al-ṣaghīr*) (Ḥakīm 1981, 908). Ibn al-ʿArabī identifies the Qur'an and the archetypal, perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*)—which is principally represented by the Prophet Muḥammad—as twins (2017, 11:184). He asserts that that the Qur'an and the Prophet Muḥammad exhibit the exact same form, as if the Qur'an indicates his physical image (*ṣūra jasadiyya*)—encouraging those who have not seen the Prophet to observe (*yanẓur*) him in the Qur'an (Ḥakīm 1981, 906). Additionally, in terms of the correspondence between the cosmos and humanity, Sufi theory describes the macrocosm as the Great Human (*insān al-kabīr*), and the human being as the microcosm (*ʿālam al-ṣaghīr*), each actively participating in the other (Ḥakīm 1981, 168). As archetypal representatives of this relationship, it associates Islamic prophets to a specific heaven (*samāʾ*) and cosmic function (See Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn alʿArabī*, 31). For instance, Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to the fourth heaven—often associated with the Prophet Idrīs (Enoch)—as the heart of the cosmos, the sphere (*falak*) of the Sun, and the level of the spiritual pole (*quṭb*), among other descriptions. See, Ḥakīm, "Idrīs," 461.

112. See Ḥakīm, "Al-Qurʾān al-Kabīr," 908; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 178-181.

113. Ḥakīm, "Al-Muṣḥaf al-Kabīr," 683.

Correspondingly, Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 1350) describes sacred scriptures (*kutub ilāhiyya*) as comprising the throne (*ʿarsh*), the pedestal (*kursī*), the heavens, elements, and compounds, maintaining that each of these levels (*martaba*) is a book (*kitāb*) that encompasses the realities of the levels below.[114] Likewise, Ibn al-ʿArabī emphasizes that the Qurʾan's units of composition, from letters to chapters to its entirety, descend from various cosmic levels (sing. *martaba*), mansions (*manzil*), stations (*maqām*), and worlds (*ʿālam*).[115] In his view, the rationale behind the Qurʾan's gradual descent is to reveal these mansions and levels.[116]

A thorough analysis of how cosmic elements manifest in Qurʾanic composition has not been conducted. However, it is common in Sufi literature and Muslim Qurʾan exegesis to draw a broad parallel between stars and Qurʾanic verses. Attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 687), a companion of the Prophet and a prominent early Qurʾan commentator, the term *nujūm* (stars) in Q 56:75 signifies "the revelation of the Qurʾan in installments."[117] This verse links the positions of the stars (*mawāqiʿ al-nujūm*) with the noble Qurʾan (*qurʾān al-karīm*) and the hidden celestial Book as its source (*kitāb al-maknūn*): "I swear by the positions of the stars—a mighty oath, if you only

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114. Al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being*, 168-169.

115. See Ibn alʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 11:177-192

116. Ibn alʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 11:186. Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts that the Qurʾan's comprehensive nature, encompassing all realities, is linked to its original station (*manzil*) of *iʿtidāl* (balance and equilibrium) (2017, 11:182). He suggests that this balanced inclusion of all realities within the Qurʾan entails it being a divine favor and mercy (*raḥma*) for all the worlds, as divine *raḥma* is also all-encompassing (2017, 11:182). Ibn al-ʿArabī further argues that the Qurʾan's mansion of *iʿtidāl* enables it to encompass all other scriptures and revelations (2017, 11:184). Again, due to this *iʿtidāl*, Qurʾanic revelation transcends the knowledge of the Arabic language, with its sound and meaning as one (2017, 11:183). This formulation of *iʿtidāl* (balance) aligns with the synthesized character of the Qurʾanic voice as proposed in this dissertation.

117. Ibn ʿAbbās, *Tanwīr al-Miqbās*, 646.

knew—that this is truly a noble Qur'an, in a protected Record, that only the purified can touch, sent down from the Lord of all being" (Q 56:75-80). Ibn al-ʿArabī interprets the oath on the positions of the stars to refer to the moments of revelation—when the Prophet unites with the Holy Spirit (al-rūh al-qudus)—as well as the positions of the revealed portions within Qur'anic corpus.[118]

Building upon this framework, I propose that the enigmatic term *sūra* (chapter) alludes to the zodiacal constellations (*burj*, pl. *burūj*) that comprise the stars.[119] The etymology of the term *sūra* includes a sense of highness in station or rank—as signs of glory and nobility. It also signifies towering structures or an individual degree of a structure, "a row of stones or bricks of a wall."[120] Derived from the same root, *sūr* similarly signifies "the wall of a city;" *sawwara*, to wall a city, and *tasawwara*, to climb a wall.[121]

This semantic environment of highness in rank, nobility, and of physical structure correspond to that another Qur'anic term: *burj* (constellation). The verb *barija* signifies to become "manifest, or conspicuous, high, or elated," and *tabarruja* means a woman to display her beauty and ornaments (e.g., Q 33:33, 24:60).[122] This semantic framework is also reflected in the

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118. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Tefsir-i Kebir*, 1256-57.

119. For a concise treatment of the concept, see Sinai, "Surah," 420-21. Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts that the concept of *sura* refers to mansions (*manzil*) (2017, 11:188). In other writings, he associates these mansions with spheres (*falak*) and constellations (*burj*) (2015, 9:166). The sequence of these mansions becomes apparent as the sun moves through each constellation (2015, 9:167). I suggest this framework supports a correlation between suras and the zodiacal constellations, with their order aligning with that of the zodiac.

120. Lane, "سور," 1465.

121. Lane, "سور," 1464.

122. Lane, "برج," 180.

context of constellations: "We have set constellations (*burūj*) up in the sky and made it beautiful (*zayyannāhā*) for all to see" (Q 15:16). The etymology of the noun *burj* denotes "an angle of a fortress, or of a city, and sometimes a fortress itself: so called from its conspicuousness and construction and height;" *burūj* are the chambers "of the wall of a city or fortress."[123] Hence, the parallelism between *sūr*, the wall of a city, and *burj* is evident—for instance, as in the verse, "Death will overtake you no matter where you may be, even inside high towers (*burūj mushayyada*)" (Q 4:78).

The correlation of stars with Qur'anic verses and constellations with suras, along with the concentric arrangement of vertical cosmic levels within the sura structure, broadly frames the structural relationship posited by Sufi scholars between the cosmos and the Qur'an, intertwining its circular and vertical aspects. The association of constellations with suras calls for an astrological approach to examine the thematic and stylistic characteristics of Qur'anic suras vis-à-vis the signs of the zodiac.[124] The present analysis prioritizes establishing Qur'anic ring composition as a structural matrix for further compositional and cosmological research. In doing so, the current exploration confines its focus to vertical cosmic levels and their concentric character as reflected in Qur'anic ring composition.

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123. Lane, "برج," 180.

124. The relationship between the zodiacal and planetary archetypes and the vertical levels of the cosmos, and how their interaction is reflected in the Qur'anic composition, are beyond the scope of this chapter. However, building on these insights, I suggest the conjecture that each sura in the Qur'an appears to exhibit an organically integrated cluster of themes that correspond with the astrological characteristics of a specific zodiacal sign. As such, each sura can be considered to represent an angle of a vertical and circular vision of the cosmos—as the etymology of the term *burj* denoting both verticality and angularity. Preliminary research suggests that suras are arranged in the Qur'anic corpus as ten sets after twelve zodiacal constellations—except for the tenth set ending midpoint on the sixth sign—, offering a conical view of the cosmos descending through each sky. Here, each sura stands as a unit as part of the nested vertical setting, indicating the vertical cosmos in the framework of the position of its set.

Ring Composition

The Qur'anic basis of ring composition must be problematized. A key Qur'anic self-description in Q 39:23 that features the term *kitāb*, which I construe in this context as "composition," seems to point out this concentric form: "God has sent down the best discourse (*aḥsan al-ḥadīth*), a two-fold composition whose many paired parts correspond to one another (*kitāban mutashābihan mathāniya*)."[125] In the suggested translation, the first adjective *mutashābihan* means "consimilar, or conformable, in its several parts," interpreted as correspondence, offering a broadly pervading sense of coherence and a variational quality.[126] The following adjective *mathāniya*, bringing further precision, characterizes this compositionality and correspondences between its parts as two-fold, comprising many folded structures.

This description appears parallel with formulations of ring composition. The consonantal root *th-n-y* signifies "to double, bend, or fold," turning "one part of it upon another."[127] Thus, as the plural of *mathnā* (مثنى), "two at a time and two at a time," which denotes pairings, or of *mathnāh* (مثناة), "doubled" or "folded," I interpret the cryptic term *mathāniya* as a two-fold structure comprising many paired parts. Here, the use of the term *ḥadīth* (discourse, speech) instead of, for instance, *qurʾān* (in the sense of recitation), also seems fitting in a reciprocal

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125. Q 39:23 states "God has sent down the most beautiful of all teachings: a Scripture that is consistent and draws comparisons; that causes the skins of those in awe of their Lord to shiver. Then their skins and their hearts soften at the mention of God: such is God's guidance. He guides with it whoever He will; no one can guide those God leaves to stray."

126. Lane, "شبه," 1500. Another Qur'anic concept that designates its style, *taṣrīf*, denoting variation, appears to parallel this quality (e.g., Q 6:105, 20:113). See Lane, "صرف," 1681.

127. Lane, "ثنى," 356.

compositional context of pairings and correspondences, characterizing Divine Speech as closer to a dialogical frame of reference.

Similarly, in the context of the cosmos, some Akbarian Sufis position higher and lower levels such that they mirror each other, residing in opposite directions. For instance, al-Qayṣarī and al-Farghānī place *mulk*, the corporeal plane, in direct opposition (*muqābalah*) to the Divine Presence.[128] As the forthcoming analysis will confirm, this placement indicates a concentric arrangement.

The Worlds

Sufi cosmology offers schemes that share a common vertical structure, descending from levels that mark divinity to those of spiritual and material realms. While these schemes feature variations due to a changing number of vertical divisions and occasionally involve distinctly opposite placements of certain levels, the general structure follows the descending order from *jabarūt* (the World of Invincibility) to *malakūt* (Kingship) to *mulk* (Dominion).[129] Qur'anic ring composition and rhetorical structures clarify the arrangement of these levels by both elucidating their sequential and concentric structure. In the following sub-section, I outline nine cosmic worlds with occasional additions and clarifications based on Qur'anic composition, presenting a synthesis of various cosmic divisions and descriptors.

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128. Al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being*, 135; Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences," 119.

129. See Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 67. For instance, the renowned founder figure of Qādiriyya Sufi order, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166), and the prominent Akbarian Sufi ʿAbd al-Razzaq al-Qāshānī ʿ(d. 1345), among others, characterize the cosmos through this descending sequence of *jabarūt*, *malakūt*, and *mulk*. See Terrier, "Sufi Hierarchies of the Worlds or Levels of Existence," 283-85.

At the general level, Sufi cosmology identifies two primary realms specified in the Qur'an: *ghayb*, often rendered as the unknown, or the unseen and *shahādah*, as the visible world (e.g., Q 59:22). The term *ghayb* is commonly associated with *jabarūt* and *malakūt*, while *shahādah* often designates *mulk*, the material and corporeal realm.[130] Another frequent Qur'anic dichotomy includes the worlds of *ʾamr* (command) and *khalq* (creation), regularly linked with *malakūt* and *mulk*.[131] An additional extra-Qur'anic division used in Sufi theory, is *lāhūt* and *nāsūt*, denoting divinity and human nature.[132] These terms broadly refer to higher and lower realms, resonating with the unknown and the visible worlds.

More complex schemes presented by various Akbarian scholars rely on the notion of presence (*ḥaḍrā*), outlining what is often termed as Divine Presences (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilahiyyāt al-khams*). These schemes incorporate a combination of descriptors for each presence, including Divine Attributes, cosmic worlds, their inhabitants, and the human essence. In this configuration, there are often five levels, and thus various other levels are subsumed under the others. For instance, in descending order, al-Qūnawī's scheme consists of (1) the Divine Presence, also named the Presence of Knowledge, (2) the Presence of the Spirits, (3) the Central Presence, the level of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), the point of intersection between the higher and the lower realms, (4) the Presence of Image-Exemplars, the Imaginal World, and (5) the Presence of

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130. Al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being*, 135.

131. Terrier, "Sufi Hierarchies of the Worlds or Levels of Existence," 278-79.

132. Terrier, 279-80.

the Visible, the Corporeal World.[133] The schemes of al-Qāshānī, al-Farghānī, and al-Qayṣarī also match this general layout while featuring nuanced differences.[134]

Additionally, an explicit framework for cosmic worlds can be found in Ibn al-ʿArabī's division of the cosmos into nine celestial spheres (*aflāk*), and the corresponding seven heavens (*samāwāt*), the Pedestal (*kursī*), and the Throne (*ʿarsh*).[135] He further categorizes these nine spheres into the three cosmic worlds: *jabarūt*, *malakūt*, and *mulk*, noting that each of these worlds consists of three parts.[136] This description is vital for it serves as a guiding principle for compositional analysis, overlapping with concentric structure.

These schemes indicate a descent from divinity to spiritual to material levels. However, a key point of contention is the placement of *jabarūt* and *malakūt*. A common view associates *jabarūt* with divinity, positioning it above *malakūt*, the realm of spirits.[137] While not correlating *jabarūt* with divinity, al-Qayṣarī too places it above, regarding *malakūt* as its manifestation.[138] In contrast, Ibn al-ʿArabī and some other scholars, including al-Ghazzālī, regard *jabarūt* as the middle, transitional world in between *malakūt* and *mulk*.[139] While the nuances of this marked

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133. Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences," 112, 115.

134. Chittick, 122-23.

135. Ibn alʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 1:144-46.

136. Ibn alʿArabī, 1:144-46.

137. Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 67.

138. Al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being*, 135.

139. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 16:236-37; Nakamura, "Imām Ghazālī's Cosmology Reconsidered," 38.

difference of opinion are beyond the scope of this discussion,[140] in the vertical context of

Qur'anic ring structure, the analysis distinctly positions *malakūt* (kingdom) as the middle

register. This interpretation is primarily based on prevailing themes associated with kingship and

angels within this register, both stemming from the same root, *m-l-k*.

The Nine Cosmic Worlds

Besides the overarching levels briefly mentioned above, the particular cosmic levels

identified in Sufi thought are vast. Here, incorporating some other worlds into that framework, I

identify nine worlds based on Qur'anic structure, confirmed by ring composition, and present

their basic features by synthesizing various descriptors. To start, many Sufi scholars identify

lāhūt as the first and highest world, signifying Divine Nature (*ulūhiyya*) and the ineffable

singularity of Divine Self (*dhāt al-aḥadiyya*).[141] Among its numerous designations, *lāhūt* is also

called the Unknown of Unknowns (*ghayb al- ghuyūb*) and the Reality of Realities (*ḥaqīqatu l-*

ḥaqāʾiq).[142] Ibn al-ʿArabī identifies the level of divinity as the highest, correlating it with the

name *Allāh*, which encompasses all levels and Divine Names.[143] In Akbarian tradition, this level

is exclusively associated with Being (*wujūd*), with the other levels being its loci of

manifestation.[144] Termed as the level of No Individuation (*lā taʿayyun*), this world is regarded as

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140. One explanation for this apparent difference of opinion could be the use of differing reference points of directionality. For the differentiation between elevation (*ʿuluw*) with regards to position (*makān*) and degree (*makāna*), See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 83-84.

141. Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 5, 67.

142. Konuk, 6.

143. See Ḥakīm, "Allāh," 78-9. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 16: 202-4.

144. Konuk, 4.

transcendent above any restriction, including absoluteness and universality, and any form of existents, including mental and external.[145]

The second world is **jabarūt**, the World of Invincibility. It is the presence of God's compelling power and knowledge.[146] *Jabarūt* represents the First Individuation (*al-taʿayyun al-awwal*) and is associated with the Absolute Unseen (*al-ghayb al-muṭlaq*), the Supreme Spirit (*al-rūh al-aʿẓām*) and the First Intellect (*al-aql al-awwal*).[147] This level is the level of unity (*waḥdah*), for at this level, God's Knowledge of His Essence, Names, Attributes, and the entire creation is absolute and undivided, i.e., in summated unity (*ijmāl*).[148] I further propose relying on Qur'anic composition that this level correlates with the divine name *Rabb*, meaning Educator, with connotations of control, compulsion, and nourishment, for edifying purposes.

The third world I suggest based on Qur'anic structure is **raḥamūt**, the World of Divine Mercy and the Universal Soul (*al-nafs al-kulliyya*).[149] In contrast to the unity and summation of knowledge at the First Intellect, this Second Individuation marks the differentiation (*tafṣīl*) of God's names and the emergence of the archetypes of every universal and particular form in the Universal Soul—referred to as the immutable entities (*al-aʿyān al-thābita*).[150] Correspondingly, the First Intellect is often associated with the Pen (*qalam*) and the Universal Soul with the

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145. Konuk, 4, 67; al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being*, 25.

146. Konuk, 11, 67; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 16: 235-37.

147. Konuk, 11-13, 67.

148. Konuk, 11-13.

149. See al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being*, 133; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 16:212-4.

150. Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 13-15.

Preserved Tablet (*lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*).[151] In Akbarian metaphysics, both the emergence of the forms at this level in a latent state and the external existence they later acquire in spiritual and material worlds occur through the Breath of the Merciful (*al-nafas al-rahmān*), the essential principle of differentiation and creation.[152] Thus, in addition to the presence of Divine Knowledge, this level is associated with Divine Speech. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, similar to the formation of speech sounds through the airstream, all the (following) worlds are God's words (*kalimāt*) and manifest through the attribute of Speech.[153]

I would suggest that these three worlds fit in the first tripartite portion of Ibn al-ʿArabī's nine-fold scheme, representing divine levels.[154] The following addresses the spiritual and material worlds, each consisting of three parts. The fourth world is ***malakūt***, the World of Kingship.[155] Al-Qayṣarī suggests that this is the manifestation of *jabarūt*.[156] *Malakūt* marks the level of angels (*malāika*) and spirits (*arwāh*), where the Archetypal forms (*al-aʿyān al-thābita*) manifest as simple intellectual substances (*jawāhir*), free of shape, matter, space, and time.[157] This world is associated with God's name *Malik* (The King), or *Mālik* (The Master), and with

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151. See Ḥakīm, "Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ," 995-99.

152. See Ḥakīm, "Nafas al-Raḥmān," 1063-67.

153. Ḥakīm, "Nafas al-Raḥmān," 1604.

154. Another confirming indicator is that, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, a level can be identified with either the name *Allāh*, *Rabb*, or *Raḥmān*, which is the case with the above divisions. See Ḥakīm, "Maqām Raḥmānī - Maqām Rabbānī," 935.

155. Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 67.

156. Al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being*, 135.

157. Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 24-25.

command, dominion, and power,[158] typically considered as the inner dimension of *mulk*, the physical realm. Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to *malakūt* synonymously with the World of the Command (ʾ*amr*), where God's name *Bātin* (The Inward) is manifest.[159] Ibn al-ʿArabī puts this world in analogy with the heart, the chest in the human body,[160] the sky, the angels, the prophets, the revelation, the Hereafter, and the Day of Judgement, positioning them between the higher and lower worlds as bridges (*barzakh*).[161] As such, love, rather in its powerful ascetic forms, as the attachment between God and human self is commonly associated with this level.[162] Here, the heart (*qalb*) is the bond between the spirit (*rūḥ*) and the soul (*nafs*), receiving its light from the spirit and transforming the soul out of lower desires toward the ascetic love of the spirit.[163] This characterization applies to the next two parts of *malakūt*, differing in their specific nuances.

The Akbarian Sufis usually speak of *mithāl*, the World of Image-Exemplars after *malakūt*. However, I suggest relying on several other discussions of Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qūnawī, and the ring structure of al-Fātiḥa and al-Baqara, to situate another world, or another part of *malakūt*, between *malakūt* and *mithāl*. This world is the center (of the circle in terms of ring composition) and the point of intersection of all the worlds, marking the precise locus of the King and the Perfect Human as God's vicegerent (*al-insān al-kāmil*). Al-Qūnawī designates this

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158. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 16: 214-16.

159. Ibn al-ʿArabī, 16: 215.

160. The association of chest with *malakūt* appears to imply some correspondence with the physical form, where the head represents the higher realms, the abdomen the lower realms, and the chest functioning as the intermediary.

161. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Tefsir-i Kebir*, 1:44, 45 69, 95. Al-Ghazzālī also characterizes *malakūt* through similar designations, see Nakamura, "Imām Ghazālī's Cosmology Reconsidered," 32-3.

162. See, Ḥakīm, "Qalb," 918.

163. Ibn al-ʿArabī, 1:44-45.

intermediary as the Central Presence and the level of the Perfect Human.[164] Ibn al-ʿArabī also defines the Perfect Human as the bridge (*barzakh*) between the higher and the lower worlds, the locus of manifestation for all of God's names, and the spirit of the cosmos.[165]

While *malakūt* is defined through binding elements between divinity and lower worlds, this Central Presence, or this second part of *malakūt*, represents the comprehensive manifestation of God, and the heart, as the spiritual faculty and the intellect per se, within which the Divine Spirit manifests. Ibn al-ʿArabī maintains that the heart is created in the image of God, and as such, it marks the level referred to in the renowned *ḥadith qudsī* where God states "Neither My Earth nor My Heavens could contain Me, whilst the heart of My believing servant does contain Me."[166]

Following this level, **mithāl**, the World of Image-Exemplars is where the spirits, intellectual substances, meanings, and the archetypal forms (*al-aʿyān al-thābita*) acquire compound forms.[167] The forms perceived in the corporeal worlds are considered the shadows of these forms.[168] The composite forms in the World of Image-Exemplars remain indivisible. To exemplify this, Konuk mentions the indivisibility of the images reflected in the mirror.[169] Moreover, this world is also associated with the faculty of imagination,[170] whose essential

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164. Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences," 112.

165. See, Ḥakīm, "Insān al-Kāmil," 162-63.

166. See, Ḥakīm, "Qalb," 918.

167. Al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being*, 149.

168. Al-Qayṣarī, 151.

169. Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 33.

170. Konuk, 33.

function is to depict formless meanings.[171] Critically, there is an element of confusion between the manifestation of the archetypal forms and the forms created through imagination (*wahm*).[172] Therefore, the Sufi is expected to go beyond his delimited imagination (*khayāl muqayyad*) in order to observe the forms as they are in the World of Image-Exemplars.[173]

Konuk notes that *mithāl* is often subsumed under *malakūt*.[174] In addition, al-Qayṣarī views both worlds as the worlds of relative unknown, as opposed to Divinity, which is the Absolute Unknown.[175] Accordingly, these two worlds, including another world between the two as I suggest, appear to form the second tripartite section of Ibn al-ʿArabī's scheme.

Moving from the spiritual to the physical plane, the next world is **mulk**, the World of Dominion.[176] Ibn al-ʿArabī places it under the authority of *malakūt*, the Kingdom.[177] This world is linked with the corporal realm, the earth (*arḍ*), the lower self (*nafs*), sensuality, and mortality.[178] Ibn al-ʿArabī also associates it with Divine Name Ẓāhir (The Apparent), referring to it synonymously with the World of Creation (*khalq*), as opposed to that of Command (*ʾamr*) associated with *malakūt*.[179] Unlike the indivisible forms in *mithāl*, on this plane, the forms

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171. Ḥakīm, "Khayāl," 449.

172. Al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being*, 153.

173. Al-Qayṣarī, 153.

174. Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 67.

175. Al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being*, 135.

176. Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 67.

177. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 16: 215.

178. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Tefsir-i Kebir*, 1: 95, 319, 1163, 1172.

179. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 16: 215.

achieve complete outer existence and become separable, thus becoming subject to the formation and disintegration of matter.[180] Accordingly, the spirits reach perfection by assuming complete physical externality.[181]

Sometimes by subsuming under *mulk*, the Akbarian Sufis add the level of the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) as the final level that comprehends all the others.[182] However, as mentioned before, al-Qūnawī and Ibn al-ʿArabī place the Perfect Human in the middle of the Cosmic scheme as the all-encompassing center of, and the isthmus between, the higher and lower worlds.[183] It is plausible to suggest that while the former might represent the Cosmic essence of the Perfect Human, the latter refers to its existence on the physical plane. Moreover, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī's scheme, one more level is needed to complete the three parts *mulk*. I suggest that the ring structure of al-Fātiḥa and al-Baqara clarifies these two final levels, which I term the Underworld (*al-ʿālam al-suflī*), and the World of Nonexistence (*ʿadam*). In the following section, I will break down the ring composition of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa and al-Baqara, identifying the corresponding cosmic levels along with their thematic, affective, and rhetorical characteristics. To demonstrate the pervasive intertextuality across compositional levels, I will present a comparative analysis of the two suras at each level.

Cosmology of Ring Composition in Sūrat al-Fātiḥa and al-Baqara

Extended analysis reveals that the Qur'anic sura is characterized by a concentric arrangement, comprising self-similar rings across multiple scales of composition, formed by

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180. Konuk, 36.

181. Konuk, 25.

182. Konuk, 67; Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences," 113, 115.

183. Chittick, 112; Ḥakīm, "Insān al-Kāmil," 162-63.

verses, passages, and clusters of passages, which appears to exhibit the basic formulaic compositional pattern of Qur'anic suras. In Sūrat al-Baqara (Q 2), I will primarily focus on the ring structure formed by nine short passages in the initial sixty-one verses, referring to the nested ring structure within each passage more broadly as higher, middle, and lower registers, combining cosmic and rhetorical markers, without addressing each verse.

In demonstrating the cosmic levels, I briefly provide some key cosmic markers and how they translate to Qur'anic context, subsequently analyzing the suras. In explaining each verse in a section, I integrate as much thematic and affective markers possible into brief explanations, identifying the structural correspondence with cosmic levels. The chart below outlines the worlds and their structural correspondence in the ring composition of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (Q 1) and al-Baqara (Q 2).[184]

The Worlds	Al- Fātiḥa	Al-Baqara
lāhūt	In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy (1:1)	Verse 1-8
jabarūt	Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds (1:2)	8-20
raḥamūt	The Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy (1:3)	21-25
malakūt	Master of the Day of Judgement (1:4)	26-29
The Center	It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help (1:5)	30-33
mithāl	Guide us to the straight path (1:6)	34-39
mulk	The path of those You have blessed (1:7a)	40-48
ʿālam al-suflī	those who incur no anger (1:7b)	49-57
ʿadam	and who have not gone astray (1:7c)	58-61

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184. This outline brings precision to Cuypers' and Farrin's general demarcation of al-Fātiḥa's ring composition. See, Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur'an*, 47, 66, 110; Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation*, 6-7.

As demonstrated in Chapter One, the rhetorical structures of al-Fātiḥa (Q 1) comprises a ceremonial praise of the Divine Self in the higher register (vv. 1-3), a legal section featuring themes of reciprocal and binding character, i.e., the Day of Judgement, a moment of pledge to King, and plea for guidance, in the middle (vv. 4-6), and the elaboration of the plea for prosperity and security in the lower register (vv. 7).

The first sixty-one verses of al-Baqara (Q 2) follows the same pattern of ceremonial, legal, and political rhetorical structures, with each category further comprising three nested sub-sections that I highlight in my analysis. Within the higher register of ceremonial rhetoric, section one (vv. 1-8) introduces and praises the Book and the God-conscious, and respectively condemns those who disbelieve. Section two (vv. 8-20) introduces and criticizes the hypocrites, presenting an edifying lesson. Section three (vv. 21-5) praises God by highlighting His favors and the Qur'anic revelation. Within the middle register featuring legal rhetoric, section four (vv. 26-9) foregrounds the covenant between God and humanity. Section five (vv. 30-3) features the appointment of Adam as God's vicegerent on earth. Section six (vv. 34-9) addresses Adam and Eve's error (*zalla*) and the subsequent fall to the earth. The final three sections of political rhetoric articulate sustained encouragements and dissuasions. Section seven (vv. 40-8) centers on themes of prosperity and favors blessed upon the Children of Israel. Section eight (vv. 49-57) focuses on reminding them of various forms of security provided, such as deliverance and pardoning, following calamities inflicted upon them and after their own transgressions. Section nine (vv. 58-61), issuing a strong dissuasion, recounts several other aspects of their wrongdoings and the related punishments. These structures, and the sub-rhetorical structures of each section, intersect with cosmic levels, analyzed in the following discussion.

Lāhūt

 Lāhūt, the highest world associated with Divine Nature, represents the transcendental and

all-embracing level that collects the realities of the subsequent worlds.[185] In *lāhūt* sections, these

characteristics manifest with God as the primary actor, centering on themes of His

transcendence, authority, perfection, and wisdom, with an orientation toward faith, compliance,

and discipline. These sections often contain all-embracing proclamations with an enigmatic

element, delivering a concise, practical, and instructive address. The recognition of hierarchy and

the status of the actors imparts an administrative and procedural tone. In terms of its goals,

authoritative divine guidance provided to achieve ultimacy and perfection, and of happiness and

bliss, is an intrinsic relationship between God and humanity that characterizes this level. As this

ultimacy elucidates, this world combines the themes of the subsequent worlds in authoritative

tone, encompassing God's knowledge, power, love, majesty, guidance, compassion, and anger.

 Verse one, "In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy" (Q 1:1),

delivers a formal announcement to an open-ended audience, introducing God as the sole

transcendent authority, recognized for His grace and compassion. The proclaimer is unspecified,

whether it is God Himself or a subject proclaiming "in the name of God." If considered as the

proclamation of an agent, the verse indicates themes of hierarchy, status, and representation,

manifesting through the relationship between God, the proclaimer(s), and the addressees. As

such, God remains transcendent and enigmatic, with His address manifesting through the

proclaimer.[186] Additionally, the emphasis on God's love and mercy—in the verse that opens the

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 185. Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 67; Ḥakīm, "Allāh," 78-9; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 16: 202-6.

 186. In metaphysical terms, the most enigmatic element in this verse is probably the idea of representing Divinity, which brings God's transcendence and immanence into focus.

first and most recited chapter of the Qur'anic corpus—strongly resonates with *lāhūt*, marking the ultimate point of human happiness.[187]

The opening of al-Baqara indicates a more intricate combination of themes associated with *lāhūt*. This section introduces the divine scripture and identifies two definite classes, those who are God-conscious and disbelievers, addressing their success and failure based on their recognition of divine authority. In so doing, it establishes the authoritative and representative status of those God-conscious, highlighting their virtues and responsibilities, and congratulating their accomplishments.

On the higher plane, the sura opens with an announcement of enigmatic disjointed letters (Q 2:1), introducing the Qur'anic scripture as flawless and ultimate (*lā rayba fīhi*) (Q 2:2). The unknown proclaimer presents this perfect scripture as a guidance for those God-conscious (*muttaqūn*)—the term conveying a sense of veneration of authority as well as proclivity for discipline (Q 2:2). The speaker enumerates specific tenets that collectively define those who are God-conscious. These tenets include the belief in the unknown (*ghayb*), affirming God as the transcendent authority, the institutionalization of the prayer, and the supervision of the needy, determining the conditions of their representative authority (Q 2:3).

Establishing the legal framework, the middle plane presents those God-conscious as believers of the revelation sent down to the Prophet Muḥammad and those before him, establishing the prophethood as the all-embracing executive head, the revelation as its constitutional basis, and certain conviction of the hereafter as its objective (Q 2:3). The use of the

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187. In that connection, on a level characterized by authority, the verse delivers a euphoric and expressive effect by emphasizing divine grace. This emphasis imparts a cathartic quality to the verse, helping one overcome the sense of distance imposed by the fear of divine authority.

second person singular for the Prophet, apart from those who are God-conscious in general, emphasizes His eminent status. Centering on prophecy and revelation, this level highlights the mediation between God and the recipients of revelation.

On the lower plane, the definition of those God-conscious is concluded with congratulations on their ultimate prosperity and accomplishment (Q 2:3-5). In a tone of addendum, God then denounces those who disbelieve, depicting them as alienated and veiled from perceiving (God, the unidentified, enigmatic reality of *lāhūt*) in great suffering (Q 2:6-7).

Jabarūt

Sufi theory associates *jabarūt*, the World of Invincibility, with God's overwhelming power and knowledge, often denoting the presence of the absolute unknown and the First Intellect.[188] These sections convey an extreme sense of power and transformation, along with penetrative knowledge directed toward an educating purpose, often shedding light on overwhelming, unavoidable, or mysterious themes. Relying on the Qur'anic register of *jabarūt*, I correlate this level with the name *Rabb* that denotes education and transformation.

In al-Fātiḥa, verse two, "Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds" (Q 1:2), glorifies God as the sole Educator and Master (*Rabb*) over the subsequent worlds or the entire creation, expressing overwhelming potency, control, and knowledge. In contrast to the emphasis on God's authoritative and loving nature in verses one and three, this verse foregrounds an awe-inspiring sense of domination and knowledge reflected in the constant transformations of His creation. It is worth noting that the praise announced in this ceremonial register exhibits wisdom and insight,

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188. Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 11-13, 66-67.

and by extension, educative, as it acknowledges the praiseworthy nature of both transformative processes and their outcome.[189]

The themes of intense power, domination, and knowledge associated with *jabarūt* manifest prominently in the relevant section of Sūrat al-Baqara (v. 8-20). This section addresses the hidden state and motivations of the hypocrites, dealing with grave themes of power such as oppression and corruption, and themes of knowledge and awareness, including deception, foolishness, and various forms of self-contradiction. This section imparts a lesson on the motives, manifestations, and contradictions of hypocrisy, along with an emphasis of God's power and knowledge over them.

The higher register initiates with God's condemnation of the hypocrites (Q 2:8). God emphasizes that their deceit and hidden duplicity do not escape divine attention, underscoring their lack of insight that their trickery is self-deceptive (Q 2:9). Next verse seems to imply that God intensifies the innermost desires of hypocrites, leading to excessive engagement in deceit and lying, thus compelling them into sense of self-humiliation and public disgrace (Q 2:10).[190]

The mediating register centers on the hypocrites' disregard for insightful directives against their oppressive use of power, and their social and intellectual arrogance against common

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189. In terms of affect, the knowledge of the impenetrable source of complete control can induce disorientation, leading to a loss of control and focus, for it can be self-negating. As such, it can elicit intoxicated and ecstatic responses proportional to the absence of intimidation, as the praise in the verse seems to articulate.

190. While beyond the scope of this discussion, this interpretation sets out from the consideration that this verse marks a sub-*rahamūt* level and therefore deals with grace and ignominy respectively. The general character of *rahamūt* will be addressed in the following passage (vv. 21-25). Here, God increasing the hypocrites' disease in the verse appears to be an inverted expression of *rahamūt* related function of granting abundant favors and blessings. Additionally, as *malakūt* corresponds with the heart, the following sub-*malakūt* section (vv. 11-15) outlines the manifestations of the disease of the hypocrites' hearts.

people, accompanied by deceptive gestures of assurance and subsequent mocking (Q 2:11-5). As such, this section appears to educate the audience to perceive subtle, if not concealed, expressions of hypocrisy that escape precise legal treatment, but potentially perilous to social unity built around the mediating administrative function of prophecy and revelation, as addressed in the middle register of *lāhūt* section.

God's knowledge of the human self's most hidden and subtlest tendencies can take the form of an overwhelming state. However, the intense character of *jabarūt* manifests most evidently through an extreme dissuasion articulated in the lower domain of utility and security (Q 2:17-20), featuring a similitude depicting the hypocrites' subconscious. This passage presents a vivid imagery of the hypocrites kindling a fire in sheer darkness. Yet, the moment it lights around them, God takes the light away (Q 2:17). Deaf, dumb, and blind, they find themselves caught under a rainstorm filled with darkness and lightning (Q 2:18-9). They are only able to move when the lightning flashes (Q 2:20). God leaving them in this terrorizing state, this section highlights the space given to hypocrites, along with their lack of power and insight, and the respective domination and knowledge of God over them.

Raḥamūt

Raḥamūt is the World of Divine Mercy. In the Akbarian tradition, the forms which exist in their latent state acquire external existence through the Breath of the Merciful, which correlates the principle of creation with Divine Mercy and Speech.[191] Unlike the unity of knowledge at the First Intellect, the Breath of the Merciful marks the emergence and differentiation (*tafṣīl*) of forms (*ṣuwar*).[192] Correspondingly, these sections highlight various of

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191. Ḥakīm, "Nafas al-Raḥmān," 1063-67; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 16:212-4.

192. Ḥakīm, "Nafas al-Raḥmān," 1064.

God's favors and blessings, the harmony and beauty of creation, as well as contain elements related to speech and expression, specifically, Divine Speech.

Verse three in al-Fātiḥa, "The Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy" evidently accentuates God's loving nature. The *raḥamūt* section in al-Baqara opens with the ceremonial rhetoric that foregrounds God's authoritative affection, inviting people to worship their creator in the welcoming spirit of meeting Him (implied by the allusion to those created before) (Q 2:21). This section portrays the multiplicity of God's creation with a decorative and peaceful depiction of the earth as a resting place with the sky its canopy, where God sends down rain and produces abundant fruits and provisions (Q 2:22).

The legal section imposes an obligation on those who doubt the descent of revelation, that is, Divine Speech, to reply in kind with a chapter (Q 2:23). This legal action initiates a civil contest with a resolute claim, featuring an inverted provocative imagery where disbelievers serve as the provision (lit. fuel) for hellfire (Q 2:24). This legal context, as the nexus of beauty, appreciation, and speech as thematic aspects of *raḥamūt*, appears to intertwine with public performance and aesthetics of verbal delivery, and thus rhetoric, and doubt and persuasion, placing the audience in the position of the jury.[193] The political register closes by giving glad tidings to the believers, encouraging them with scenes of grace and bliss from the paradise, showcasing provisions, fruits, pure spouses, and eternity (Q 2:25).

Malakūt

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193. This characterization supports the traditional Muslim interpretation of these verses as primarily issuing an aesthetic challenge. See Kermani, God is Beautiful, 190-202.

The World of Kingship is associated with God's command and power, the heart, the sky, the Hereafter, Judgement Day, the angels, and the prophets.[194] These elements draw their meaning and function from the Divine, constituting a point of mediation and encounter between the Divine and corporeal plane. This portion of *malakūt* often centers on themes around the binding and unifying relationship between the Sovereign and the subjects, as well as among the subjects themselves, delivering a magisterial, commanding, and affectionate address.

On the legal register of al-Fātiḥa, verse four (Q 1:4), "Master of the Day of Judgement" establishes God as the Sovereign (*mālik*), the sole possessor of command in the endmost moment of encounter and responsibility for all subjects. Expanding this framework of sovereignty, the *malakūt* section of al-Baqara begins by remarkably directing the audience's attention to the heavens. It first turns the gaze to the air through the mention of a gnat, then subtly shifts to what lies above it (*mā fawqahā*), possibly alluding to celestial objects of similar apparent size (Q 2:26). This ceremonial section of the multi-part verse emphasizes the Sovereign's grandeur and all-dominating command over everything, from the minutest elements to the heavenly bodies. This emphasis further extends to the mastery in creation, thereby dignifying even the seemingly insignificant aspects of existence. This aspect establishes the criterion of supremacy based on recognizing God's mastery alone, rather than biased judgements based on apparent qualities, which, as the following legal section clarifies, stem from the defiance (*fisq*) against the Sovereign. Together, these aspects demonstrate the might and mastery of the sovereign, accompanied by His bold and uncompromising commitment (in contrast to shyness [*lā yastaḥyī*]) to the equality and justice of His subjects before Him. The subsequent part of this verse praises

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194. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Tefsir-i Kebir*, 1:44, 45 69, 95; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 16:215-16.

the faithful for their discerning appreciation of God's overarching mastery and condemns the undiscerning and defiant who speak ill of it.

The legal section concludes this multi-part verse and showcases the Sovereign's legal autonomy and power, explicitly defining the source of conflict regarding erroneous notions of supremacy as disobedience (*fisq*) against the Sovereign (Q 2:26). As such, the apparent differences among the objects of creation vis-à-vis notions of sovereignty emerge as the subject of trial. The Sovereign tests the subjects, guiding the discerning to the realization of God's mastery and their subjecthood, and misleading the defiant through their erroneous criteria of supremacy.

The following verse, positioned at the center, features the theme of covenant between God and His subjects, and the open-ended duty of severing the bonds He orders to be joined (Q 2:27). This verse clearly articulates *malakūt*'s binding and mediating function, which includes associations with the heart and love as bridges between the higher and lower realms.[195] It alludes to the connection between these realms and emphasizes the responsibility of fostering unity and love among the subjects themselves. In retrospect, this vertical-cum-horizontal aspect of unity and love underpins the Sovereign's address of the apparent differences among the objects of creation in the higher register: God is positioned as the Master, with all creation as interconnected equals in their connection to their Master alone. In contrast, the rebels are defined as those who are defeated by their own actions, breaking their covenants, acting divisively, and spreading corruption in the land.

The political rhetoric on the lower register reminds of God's favors and love, issuing a demanding encouragement, with the emphasis on God's ultimate control over one's life, and the

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195. See note 161.

subjects' eventual return by force (Q 2:28). The overall focus on the skies in this section is also connected to the Hereafter. This demanding tone takes the form of a sovereignly love in the closure with a more generous encouragement to reciprocate with an obedient love for Him. God declares that the creation of everything on the earth is intended for His subjects, redirecting attention to Himself, and emphasizing His fashioning of the heavens as the locus of His rule, presenting a demonstrative imagery of the mastery of His love (Q 2:29).

The Center

This level marks the center of the ring structure, marking the precise locus of the King, and the Perfect Human (*insān al-kāmil*) as his vicegerent. As has been discussed, Ibn al-ʿArabī holds that the Perfect Human is the isthmus (*barzakh*) between the higher and the lower worlds, as the image of God, His vicegerent, and the master of all beings, collecting all of God's Names.[196] The heart is identified in similar terms as the King, and the intellect drawing its thought from God.[197] It is described as an eight-faced circular mirror reflecting all levels around it, representing the image of God. As such, it is a comprehensive locus that contains the manifestation of the Divine Self.[198] These descriptions entirely suit the Center section in the suras in question. Additionally, this world still fits into the tripartite *malakūt* portion of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ninefold scheme and broadly reflects the markers of *malakūt*.

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196. Ḥakīm, "Insān al-Kāmil" 162-63; Ḥakīm, "Al-Ṣūra," 702-8.

197. It is worth noting that, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, the heart is the locus of knowledge, the intellect that draws its thought from God, which is not identical with the First Intellect, representing Divine Knowledge. See Ḥakīm, "Qalb," 918.

198. See Ḥakīm, "Qalb," 918-19. For a similar characterization by the prominent figure of Naqshbandiyya order Aḥmad al-Fārūqī al-Sirhindī (d. 1624) that highlights the centrality of the heart (*qalb*) as an isthmus between the spirit (*rūḥ*) and soul (*nafs*), see İmam-ı Rabbânî, *Mebde' ve Meʿad*, 77-87.

The verse "It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help" (Q 1:5) follows the verse that establishes God as the Master (*mālik*) or the King (*malik*). It offers a scene of pledge of loyalty to the King, recognizing Him as the sole legitimate and generous authority. The pledge demonstrates a dramatic moment, spotlighting the King. God is addressed in the second person singular, expressing a direct encounter different from transcendence.

The Center section of al-Baqara features the theme of kingship, highlighting God as the King, angels as His officials, and Adam as the vicegerent to be appointed. It foregrounds themes of comprehensive centrality, primarily God teaching Adam "all the names" (Q 2:31). As such, this section closely links kingship with knowledge encompassing the heavens and the earth, a combination that occurs only in this central register within the entire ring.

The higher register opens with a climactic scene, where God, the King, informs the angels, reminiscent of His officials, that He sets a vicegerent on the earth (Q 2:30). Angels question this appointment by stressing certain abuse of authority to occur, presenting themselves as more devout and competent for this office (Q 2:30).[199] The verse concludes with God providing a concise, authoritative response, affirming His transcendent wisdom (Q 2:30).

The legal section appeals to reason by testing the angels' claim to this office, thereby eliminating the conflict. Subsequently, it establishes the legitimacy and justice of Adam's vicegerency based on his comprehensive knowledge. God teaches Adam "all the names" and presents him to the angels, challenging them to identify these names (Q 2:31).[200] According to

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199. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the angels' emphasis on their praise and worship implies an implicit claim of superiority and claim for this position (2008, 1:58-9).

200. Ibn al-ʿArabī interprets the presentation of entities (ʿaraḍahum) to angels, where God asks for their names, as a symbolic representation of the human self and the meanings acquired through various sense perceptions and components of the human body (2008, 1:58).

Ibn al-ʿArabī, "all the names" refers to the knowledge of the whole (*kull*) that encompasses all realities, enabling Adam to bridge the higher and lower realms, uniting the image of God and the cosmos within himself.[201] These markers of the Perfect Human, demonstrated by the all-inclusive centrality of this level, can also be construed as the heart within which the spirit manifests.[202]

The presentation of Adam to the angels offers a majestic scene of ultimacy, prompting angels to glorify God and acknowledge their subordinate status in knowledge (Q 2:32). On the lower register, the subsequent injunction for Adam to reveal these names illustrates the political authority of Adam as the vicegerent (Q 2:33). The climactic revelation of names conveys an imagery of amazement, appealing to emotions. In this moment of the angels' perplexity, the King issues a demonstrative dissuasion, reminding the angels of God's assertion of His knowledge, mirroring the higher plane (Q 2:33). This mirroring with the addition of God's knowledge of what is hidden in the heavens and the earth is aligned with God's knowledge of the hidden motivation behind the angels' objection, revealing their claim of superiority to Adam.

Mithāl

This register marks the beginning of mirroring structures within the ring composition. The World of Image-Exemplars has two distinct and potentially antithetical aspects. One the one hand, it denotes the level of imagination (*khayāl*) where archetypes, spirits, and meanings manifest through their symbolic formal representation.[203] Thus, this plane marks the knowledge

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201. See Ḥakīm, "Al-Ṣūra;" Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Tefsir-i Kebir*, 58.

202. The verse "When I have shaped him and breathed from My Spirit into him, bow down before him" (Q 38:72) supports the association of this level with the manifestation of the spirit.

203. See Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 33; Ḥakīm, "Khayāl."

of symbols. Al-Qayṣarī notes that on this plane, the wayfarer observes things as they are because their form corresponds to the forms of intellectual meanings in the Guarded Tablet.[204] On the other hand, the exercise of imagination (*wahm*) arbitrarily impairs the reflection of forms as they are: al-Qayṣarī emphasizes that one's fantasies (*mutakhayyala*), desires (*shahwa*), and worldly pleasures (*ladhdha dunyawiyya*) corrupt the original forms, replacing them with the reflection of fantasies.[205] Thus, pointing out the task of the wayfarer, al-Qayṣarī underlines, "The extent to which the soul is luminous, it is able to disengage itself from the sensory realm and remove the darkness that causes the lack of witnessing."[206]

In line with this duality and conflict, the corresponding Qur'anic sections consistently contain symbolic, elusive, and tempting elements intertwined with the actors' perplexity, desire, and forgetfulness. In close relation, these passages often feature Satan or the devils as significant actors. In turn, this level placed in the legal register offers guidance out of perplexity, low desires, and the resulting tribulation toward certainty and spiritual pleasures.

The verse "Guide us to the straight path" (Q 1:6) is a concise prayer demanding guidance. The specific object of guidance is the symbolic straight path, the exact nature of which is not defined. It rather alludes to a form of journeying and way out of numerous uncertain directions that cause confusion, prompting one to ask for guidance. The nature of this path is clarified in the coming verse as fulfillment of pleasures, security from danger, and getting lost (Q 1:7). Within the ring composition, this level, marking the beginning of the journey, mirrors verse four, "Master of the Day of Judgement," which is the end of the path and the meeting point.

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204. Al-Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being*, 153.

205. Al-Qayṣarī, 153-55.

206. Al-Qayṣarī, 155.

On the higher plane, this section establishes the divine representation of Adam through God's order to angels to prostrate before him, recognizing his authority (Q 2:34). Prostration here is a perplexing symbolic act that demands interpretation, given it is typically directed toward God. The next verse, addressing the settlement of Adam and his wife in the garden, appears edifying in character, for it features the confusing and alluring directive made regarding not approaching a tree, which serves as the subject of divine teaching (Q 2:35). This tree serves as a mysterious symbol, and approaching it is described as *ẓulm* (Q 2:35), denoting misuse of power and misjudgment.

The legal register centers on Satan causing Adam and his wife to slip (*azallahumā*), showcasing another cryptic concept. This error, the nature of which is not evident, is presumably related to approaching the tree, causing their banishment by the King. The verse implies the banishment of other unidentified actors as well, adding further elusive aspects. These actors are positioned as enemies in the quest for land and provision, with the connection between the forbidden tree, causing this enmity, and the desire for land and provision remaining ambiguous. The interpretation of the symbols of garden, fruit, eating, approaching, among others, appear necessary to decipher this sections' import.

On the lower plane, Adam receives guidance expressed through the ambiguous reception of some words from God, leading to Adam's repentance, the reason for which remains unclear (Q 2:37). Aligned with political rhetoric, this act implies encouragement to turn toward God. The following verses issue further encouragement and dissuasion. After sending down all of the unidentified addressees as a punishment, God explicitly states that He will offer guidance that will lead those who follow them out of insecurity and despair (Q 2:38). God emphasizes the necessity of following the cryptic *āyāt* of this guidance, denoting signs, allusions, or intimations,

imagery reminiscent of roadway signage of the straight path, with those who disbelieve and consider them misleading unable to escape hellfire and annihilation (Q 2:39).

Within the concentric frame, this level mirrors *malakūt*, which represents the kingdom of the Sovereign, heavens, the hereafter, the Day of Judgement, and the ending of worldly life. In contrast, *mithāl* marks the moment of separation from the kingdom, and the beginning of life on the corporeal plane.

Mulk

The World of Dominion is the corporeal realm and is correlated with the earth and lower self (*nafs*), among other material markers.[207] I suggest that this first layer of *mulk* encompasses aspects that are deeply connected to the material pleasures of worldly life. The concentric position of this level mirrors *rahamūt*, reflecting themes of favors, benefits, kindness, and affection, encapsulated in the following sections with the prominent Qur'anic term *niʿma*.

The emphasis on favors on this plane is apparent in the verse "The path of those You have blessed (*anʿamta alayhim*)" (Q 1:7). The corresponding section of al-Baqara similarly revolves around various aspects of worldly favors, specifically material gains and trade, while emphasizing the pitfalls associated with worldly attachments. Here, the notion of contract features in the reciprocal context of worldly life, primarily trade. As a register of political rhetoric, the entire section can be interpreted as an exhortation regulating the material plane and an encouragement to turn towards God through acclaiming his blessings. Mirroring the *rahamūt* theme of Divine Speech, the arrival of new scripture is also delicately inserted into this section, subtly coloring the overall exhortation.

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207. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Tefsir-i Kebir*, 1: 95, 319, 1163, 1172.

This section opens on a higher plane with a ceremonial address to the Children of Israel, inviting them to acclaim the memory of God's favors (*niʿma*) bestowed upon them, exhorting them to fulfill the requirements of their covenant with God. The address appears to carry an implicit message not to fear the loss of worldly gains, establishing God as the sole locus of fear (Q 2:40). The subsequent verse invites belief in the Qur'anic message and an appreciation of God's signs, appealing to their experience in appraising the value of a product, encouraging independent judgement (Q 2:41-2).

The legal register appears to exhort mediating positions of authority and decision making, in the overall mood of a language aligning with ethics of commerce. These points lay emphasis on trustworthiness in speaking the truth and refraining from misleading insight (Q 2:42); prioritizing worship, supervising the needy, and practicing humility over protecting one's position (Q 2:43); and compliance with divine guidance, just as they guide their followers with their commands (Q 2:44).

On the lower section, God encourages seeking help from Him through prayer, patience, and humbleness (Q 2:45), congratulating those praying as if they meet their Lord (Q 2:46). Reiterating the blessings given to the Children of Israel, the next verse delivers a powerful exhortation by reminding of God's blessing and how He favored them over others, which dissuades them from compromising their status. In a similar language articulating the reciprocal nature of trade, the final verse further dissuades by portraying the Day of Judgement as a day when material privilege, including assuming culpability for someone else's crime in return for a favor, offering compensation, or seeking intercession, will not be available (Q 2:47-8).

ʿĀlam al-Suflī

I suggest titling this section the Underworld because it implies a spatial dimension below the earth. The themes found in these sections are rooted in the notion of survival. These themes often relate to aggression, oppression, destruction, and ultimately death. They are also connected to inheritance, lineage, and origins, and mirroring these, appetite, and sexuality. The imagery at this level is often violent and intimidating. This level mirrors *jabarūt*, which elucidates its powerful and impulsive character, with themes challenging the survival of human corporeality.

The second fragment of verse seven, "those who incur no anger" (Q 1:7), highlights themes of divine anger and the search for security. This level is therefore evocative of extreme and aggressive themes and actions. The corresponding section of al-Baqara expands this framework by featuring acts of violence, oppression, murder, association of partners with God, and death, among others.

On the higher plane, the section opens with highlighting emancipation provided by God, with Him saving the Children of Israel from the oppression of Pharaoh's people, who were afflicting them with a terrible torment, slaughtering their sons and sparing their women, God describing it as a tremendous trial (Q 2:49). The next verse contains astonishing imagery where God parts the sea, saving the Children of Israel, and drowning the people of Pharaoh (Q 2:50). Both verses present moments of life and death, wherein God provides security.

The mediating legal register begins with the grave wrongdoing of the Israelites taking the calf as a deity in the absence of Moses, and God grants them pardon (Q 2:51-2). The next verse addresses God giving the book (*kitāb*) and the cryptic criterion (*furqān*) to Moses as guidance (Q

2:53). The term *furqān* is often interpreted as the means to distinguish right from wrong, which aligns with this legal context.[208]

The lower level opens with a poignant scene of intense disappointment, where Moses encourages his people toward a collective repentance to their Originator by "killing themselves" ("*faqtulū anfusakum*"), emphasizing the virtue in this act before God, portraying Him as the compassionate acceptor of repentance (Q 2:54).[209] The subsequent verse addresses the Israelites' daring impulse to witness God openly as a condition for believing in Moses. Then, a thunderbolt strikes them, and after their death, God revives them (Q 2:55-6). God then reminds them of His extraordinary signs of compassion and provisions sent to them, while emphasizing their insistent and pitiful self-destruction (Q 2:57).

Whether interpreted literally or allusively, these occasions illustrate the violent character of this level focused on survival. They emphasize God's tremendous power, and the manifestations of extreme and intense human desires. As the concentric counterpart of this level, the *jabarūt* section features corresponding themes of extreme power, most conspicuously in the depiction of the hypocrites' struggle in sheer darkness, surrounded by rain and thunderbolts.

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208. In this sub-*malakūt* register, which marks the convergence of the higher and lower realms, *furqān*, the criterion, appears to allude to the difference between transcendence and immanence, i.e. the transcendental divine and its manifestations in the intellectual and compound forms of the lower domains. The gravity and delicacy of this elusive matter are emphasized by the fact that God grants pardon for this offense before the guidance is provided.

209. I suggest this verse marks a sub-*mulk* level and can be better understood as an emotively charged exhortation for collective repentance against material engagement that amounts to worship, rather than legal obligation, thus retaining its political rhetorical character. The despaired tone in the Prophet's address and the emphasis on God's forgiving and compassionate nature consolidates this interpretation.

It is important to note that some Akbarian Sufis introduce the level of the Perfect Human after *mulk*,[210] possibly due to the transformative and potentially destructive power inherent in ruling over the physical realm as the vicegerent, which is highlighted by the angels' questioning in the Qur'an (Q 2:30). Additionally, the notion of the Perfect Human may be related with the concept of spiritual death, annihilation (*fanāʾ*), and the subsequent permanent revival (*baqāʾ*), which are considered the ultimate objectives in Sufi wayfaring. Consequently, the terrestrial representation of the Perfect Human can be associated with this and the following level.[211]

ʿ*Adam*

This level mirrors *lāhūt,* and similarly, Ibn al-ʿArabī sets Being against Nothingness (*ʿadam*), describing the former as sheer light, reality, goodness, and the latter as sheer darkness, falsehood, ignorance, and impossibility.[212] It corresponds to the verse ending "and who have not gone astray" (Q 1:7), resonating with this framework. Therefore, I suggest titling this level as Nothingness, as it seemingly diverges from the levels of being.

ʿ*Adam* passages often contain themes of deviation and distortion, for at this level the dissolution of boundaries and the resultant sense of nothingness make divergence appear possible. Therefore, there is a more categorical element of confusion at this level than the confusion regarding symbols within the elusive *mithāl*. In this context, the sense of nothingness typically relates to existential aspects of human frailty, including poverty, weakness, vulnerability, loneliness, melancholy, temperamentality, nihilism, isolation, rejection, and

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210. See Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 67.

211. See Ḥakīm, "Baqāʾ," 201-4.

212. Ḥakīm, "ʿAdam," 783-84.

suffering in other forms, which, in turn, may lead to destruction or self-destruction. As such, this level can also evoke pity, compassion, and love, with an orientation toward self-sacrifice.

On the other hand, deviation can also be linked with that which is extraordinary and eccentric—thus mirroring the transcendence of *lāhūt*. In that connection, deficiency and deviation interplay with creativity and innovation, which may acquire positive or negative meaning depending on the context. Similar in the context of mystical transcendence, the dissolution of boundaries may also express union, oneness, and all-inclusiveness. As has been mentioned, achieving such nothingness, and thus Being, is one of the furthest goals on the Sufi path.

As the last component of the plea for guidance to the straight path in verse six, the final part of verse seven "and who have not gone astray" (Q 1:7) foregrounds getting lost, and therefore, divergence from the path. Getting lost and being without a path can be understood as the ultimate human frailty, exposing the human being to all dangers. In terms of spiritual allusion, it can also mark the step toward transcendence and independence of being, perhaps offering another innovative definition of the straight path. The paradoxical nature of this level also appears as a source for spiritual allusions.

The higher level of the corresponding section of al-Baqara begins with God granting the Israelites a city of abundant provisions, reminiscent of Adam's placement in the garden. God orders them to enter this city by prostrating, thereby humbly acknowledging their "nothingness" and God's supremacy and transcendence, and by saying "Relieve us," with God promising forgiveness (Q 2:58). However, upon their refusal to enact their humbleness, and their subtle and devious alteration (*baddala*) of what He commanded them to utter, God sends down a torment

(*rijz*) (Q 2:59). This alternation showcases the theme of deviance through an innovative act, which is negative in this context.

The following verse similarly emphasizes the abundance of God's provision, but this time illustrating a favorable instance of creativity through divine favor. Here, Moses prays for water, and God instructs him to strike a rock with his staff, resulting in twelve springs gushing forth, with each group recognizing their designated spring for drinking (Q 2:60). Here, an extraordinary deficiency of water leads to a prayer to God, which appears as a deviance from the ordinary operation of causality. Subsequently, the springs gush forth seemingly out of nothing through a creative and innovative act with the staff. Furthermore, mirroring *lāhūt*, there is all-inclusiveness evoked by the twelve springs and everybody knowing their place.

In the legal register, the Israelites subtly accuse God, the King, and express temperamental discontent about their deprivation of food, asking for variety (Q 2:61). Moses rebukes them by asking whether they want to exchange (*atastabdilūn*) better for worse (Q 2:61), the verb *baddala* emerging for the second time, expresses deviation. In the sub-register of *mithāl*, reminiscent of Adam and his wife's fall, he then orders them to go down (*ihbiṭū*) to the city to find what they ask for (Q 2:61).

The lower section concludes the ring structure, highlighting the ultimate sense of nothingness and deprivation. The political rhetoric dissuades by emphasizing their humiliation (*dhilla*) and misery (*maskana*), and them incurring God's wrath due to killing their prophets and their disobedience and transgression (Q 2:61). Considering the cosmic level of this section, this transgression is linked with the theme of acknowledging one's nothingness before God. As such, this verse appears to illustrate how acts of deviance are initiated by a sense of deprivation and lead to a sense of nothingness.

Concluding Remarks

The systematic synthesis of cosmic levels in a nested fashion emphasizes the extensive self-referential character of Qur'anic composition. As alluded to within each short passage of al-Baqara, the concentric pattern is embedded at multiple levels of composition. As the next chapter will discuss, the same pattern is also present at the level of individual verses.[213] This self-referentiality encompasses an exceptionally fluid intra- and intertextuality between cosmic levels across Qur'anic suras, as demonstrated between al-Fātiḥa (Q 1) and al-Baqara (Q 2), and across levels of composition.[214]

This intertextuality serves an integral hermeneutic function, expanding the scope of what is regarded as the primary and most reliable tool in Muslim Qur'an exegesis: the interpretation of the Qur'an based on the Qur'an itself, relying on other material found within it (*tafsīr al-qurʾān*

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213. The same concentric pattern, in conjunction with rhetorical structures, is found at the level of individual verses. Yet, delineating each level or synthesized levels within a verse is a complex task, necessitating thorough affective engagement, as Chapter Three will address based on their inherent musicality. We can take as an example the verse "who believe in the unseen, keep up the prayer, and give out of what We have provided for them" (Q 2:3). I suggest this verse combines the sub-*jabarūt* and sub-*rahamūt* levels within the *lāhūt* section (Q 2:1-7). The ceremonial register "who believe in the unseen" exalts transcendental authority; the legal register "keep up the prayer" showcases the mediating theme of worship; and the political register "and give out of what We have provided for them" highlights favors and benefits on the material plane. Thus, in al-Baqara, this verse synthesizes five levels: its own descent as a verse, its presence in the synthesized sub-*jabarūt* and sub-*rahamūt* levels, its place in the *lāhūt* section of the first portion of the sura, and its position within the entire sura.

214. The Qur'an's self-referentiality is highlighted in Western research. Qur'anic composition amplifies this self-referentiality to a complete degree. See, Stefan Wild, *Self-Referentiality in the Qurʾān* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

bi'l-qurʾān).[215] Therefore, comparative analysis of cosmic levels throughout the Qur'anic corpus enables a thorough exploration of the archetypal character of each individual level.[216]

Given the rigorously systematic ring structure aligned with the vertical cosmos, it appears evident that Qur'anic composition carries a very specific cosmological rationale, demonstrating an indivisible whole. The nested concentric pattern indicates an extraordinary convergence between structure and theme, providing a novel approach to notions of Qur'anic inimitability (*iʿjāz al-qurʾān*), and clarifying the synthetic experience of Qur'anic composition in the Muslim piety and scholarship. This systematic interplay sheds some light on intuitive remarks such as Rāzī's who suggests that "the Qur'an is like a single sura, and even a single verse."[217] Chapter Three further highlights its affective aspect by focusing on the interplay of sound and meaning.

Ongoing research suggests that al-Baqara, as well as other Qur'anic suras, exhibit the same cosmological symbolism, often comprising short passages of around nine verses that descend by dividing the vertical cosmos into varying numbers of sections—typically less than nine—occasionally synthesizing specific adjacent levels. Yet, despite the variance of numbers of major building blocks, the sura structure preserves its tripartite cosmic-cum-rhetorical

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215. See Reda, *The al-Baqara Crescendo*, 20.

216. The cosmic levels of suras within the corpus are not outlined here. But as mentioned earlier, I offer as conjecture that the suras reflect a descent based on the twelve signs of the zodiac at each level. Once this framework is established, a comparative analysis of the cosmic levels would allow us to situate each within the broader context of the others. This contextualization would facilitate an intricate understanding of the levels and their specific thematic and affective content.

217. Cited in Tuncer, *Tenasup İlmi Açısından Kur'an Surelerindeki Eşsiz Ahenk*, 31.

framework.[218] The study of suras across the Qur'anic corpus remains a significant task for providing further clarity and guiding future directions.

The structural coherence of extensive Medinan suras has remained a persistent problem in scholarship on the Qur'an. This initial exploration provides a strong case for reconsidering these suras as units. Currently, various studies addressing Sūrat al-Baqara come to different conclusions than the present study regarding the portion covered. For instance, vv. 1-39 are often demarcated as the introduction, with opinions regarding the second section falling within the range of vv. 39-152 according to many Muslim and Western scholars, including Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, Neal Robinson, Mathias Zahniser, and Nevin Reda.[219] Offering an analysis of the sura's ring composition, Raymond Farrin's demarcation also does not capture the first concentric set.[220] While certain thematic demarcations can be considered to cut across this peculiar cosmic form, the analysis offered in this chapter suggests that this concentric pattern demands, if not dictates, a holistic approach to its internal interrelationships. Having said that, these studies, and the study of structural markers in Western Qur'an research in general, provide a growing sophisticated repository of formal, thematic, linguistic, and rhetorical dividers.[221] It is crucial to examine and

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218. Cosmic levels further provide a rich conceptual repository for rhetorical contextualization. For instance, a *lāhūt*-related verse, passage, or larger section can be understood as the context of Godship (*al-maqām al-ulūhiyya*). Or, based on the theme of guidance that typically marks levels of mithāl, these sections can be identified as the context of guidance (*al-maqām al-hidāya*). More specific and multiple designations can be tailored for individual passages.

219. See Klar, "Lexical Layers vs Structural Paradigms in the Opening of Sūrat al-Baqara," 57.

220. See Farrin, "Surat al-Baqara," 19-20.

221. See Marianna, Klar, ed. *Structural Dividers in the Qur'an*. Abingdon (Oxon: Routledge, 2021).

incorporate these markers to enhance the understanding of interrelationships between cosmic-cum-rhetorical registers.

A cosmological conception of Qur'anic composition, combining analytical and experiential engagement, is imperative for future research. As discussed earlier, Q 56:75-80 contain one of the most direct instances of establishing the Qur'an's relationship to the cosmos. These verses link the position of stars with Qur'anic revelation, situating it in a hidden, celestial book that only the purified can access, sent down from the Lord of all worlds. References to the celestial archetype of Qur'anic scripture is frequently foregrounded at the openings of suras, particularly through the disjointed letters. These references often intertwine with notions of *kitāb* (book), *tanzīl* (sending down), and *āyāt* (signs) (e.g., Q 12:1-2; 13:1; 41:1-3).[222] The structural correspondence between verses (*āyāt*) and cosmic levels sheds light on the compositional function of the concept of *āya* (sign). This characterization elucidates the fluidity the term shows in binding God's signs manifest in the cosmos—including the heavens, the earth, and human self—and in units of Qur'anic composition.[223]

Furthermore, various prophetic traditions affirm the connection between Qur'anic revelation and the cosmos. A tradition attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad describes the Qur'an as a rope (*ḥabl*) extended from the sky to the earth,[224] resonating with the argument of this chapter. In another direct reference, the Prophet states that "I have been given these last two verses of Sūrat al-Baqara from a treasure beneath the Throne (*kanzin taḥta'l-ʿarsh*). No prophet

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222. See Sinai, "ʾ-l-r, ʾ-l-m, ʾ-l-m-r, ʾ-l-m-ṣ," 57-59.

223. See note 64.

224. *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3788

has been given the likes of them before me."[225] My analysis confirms this description of *taḥta'l-ʿarsh* ("beneath the Throne"), given that the two final verses occupy the level of *ʿadam*, which mirrors *lāhūt*, the highest world that can be associated with the Throne (*ʿarsh*).[226] Another tradition expresses that "The one who was devoted to the Qur'an will be told: 'Recite and ascend as you used to recite when you were in the world. Your rank will be at the last *āya* you recite.'"[227] Further exploration of the hadith corpus is necessary to clarify cosmological conceptions of the Qur'an among the early community.

The discussion in this chapter throws some light on the frequent characterization of the cosmos as the Great Qur'an (*al-qurʾān al-kabīr*) and the Great Book (*al-kitāb al-kabīr*) in Sufi theory. A more detailed study of various other cosmic markers is necessary to expand and systematize this framework. Some of the common markers in Sufi writings include God's Names and Attributes, grammatical categories (primarily self, attribute, and act), mystical states (*ḥāl*) and stations (*maqām*), constituents of human self (*rūḥ* [spirit], *qalb* [heart], and *nafs* [soul], among others), ranks of the human soul (such as *nafs al-ammāra* [the commanding soul], *lawwāma*, [self-reproaching soul], and *muṭmaʾinna*, [the contented soul]), and stages of the mystical path (including *sharīʿa* [religious law], *ṭarīqa* [the path], *maʿrifa* [mystical, experiential knowledge], and *haqīqa* [the mystical truth]), within which many Qur'anic and extra-Qur'anic concepts are situated. The study of these celestial dividers would uncover a more comprehensive

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225. *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 23251 in "Hadith on Qur'an."

226. In Ibn alʿArabī's nine-part cosmic scheme, which guided the analysis presented in this chapter, I suggest the cosmic worlds intersect with the seven heavens, the Pedestal, and the Throne. However, this chapter did not place the heavens at the center, as further research is required to explore the relationship between the heavens and worlds. Yet, given the Throne marks the highest spheres, its association with *lāhūt* is plausible.

227. *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2914.

appreciation of Qur'anic composition, paving the way for conceptualizing it as the structural matrix of spiritual wayfaring (*sayr al-sulūk*).

The correspondence between the Qur'an and the cosmos in Sufi theory extends to the human self. Some common categories among these faculties are the spirit (*rūh*), heart (*qalb*), and soul (*nafs*), which, as the analysis highlighted, correspond with the three major categories of *jabarūt*—the divine plane, *malakūt*—the spiritual plane, and *mulk*—the material plane. More detailed analysis of spiritual faculties identified in various Sufi traditions, such as the notion of *laṭāʾif* (lit. subtleties) prioritized in Naqshbandiyya Sufi order, would further clarify the association of these faculties with cosmic worlds.[228] Laying the groundwork for experiential engagement, the following chapter addresses the affective dynamics of the Qur'anic voice, with particular attention to the inherent musicality of sound, meaning, and structure.

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228. The concept of *chakra* (lit. wheel), predominantly employed in spiritual traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, is similarly pertinent to the analysis of these spiritual faculties.

Chapter Three

Musicality

> Verily, among the people who recite the Qur'an with the best voice are those who, when you hear them, you consider them in awe of Allah.[229]

> Allah does not listen to anything as He listens to a Prophet reciting the Qur'an in a melodic voice.[230]

> – Prophet Muḥammad

The study of rhetorical and cosmological dividers contributes to demarcating the structural boundaries of an oratorical and concentric composition. This chapter argues for the intrinsic musicality, or tonality, of Qur'anic voice, with a focus on the affective character of these structures and of Qur'anic composition at large. The attention given to tonality sheds light on the convergence of sound, affect, and meaning, providing insight into the rhetorical, aesthetic, and mystical experience of Qur'anic voice. As core twin dynamics of musical tonality, the analysis of affect focuses on the progression of aural and semantic elements of tension and resolution. In the non-pitched structural context of the Qur'an, these elements encompass formal, rhythmic, and inherent melodic tension and resolution, intertwined with thematic and semantic aspects. This analysis suggests that the Qur'anic voice progresses from aural-cum-semantic indeterminacy to relative tension and resolution, to complete resolution in varying manners and at multiple levels of composition. This characterization strongly aligns with the Qur'an's self-description of its own affective impact, contemporary pitched recitational practice, and the affective character of rhetorical and cosmological structures. Building on the rhetorical and cosmological analyses presented in Chapters One and Two, this chapter extensively examines the inherent musicality

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229. *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 1339.

230. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim*, no. 792a.

and the interplay of sound, meaning, structure, and affect in Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (Q 1), the first and most recited chapter of the Qur'an.

Tonality and Form

A vast array of world music operates through tonality of fixed scale systems, which comprise distinct pitch levels organized within a tonal hierarchy.[231] In Western music, tonality is conventionally described as "… an organized system of tones (e.g., the tones of a major or minor scale) in which one tone (the tonic) becomes the central point to which the remaining tones are related. In tonality, the tonic (tonal center) is the tone of complete relaxation, the target toward which other tones lead."[232] The root tone being the center for complete resolution applies to scales in general. For instance, *maqām*s in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian music, among others, such as *rast*, *ḥijāz*, *ṣabā* etc., which are used extensively for Qur'an recitation, have their tonal centers called *qarār*.[233]

The specific position of tones within a scale is often associated with varying degrees of instability and tension, and others stability and resolution.[234] Experienced listeners and musicians acknowledge that each scale degree, or the pitch position in a scale, possesses a unique character and elicits a set of distinctive feelings. These affective identities are recognized as a cognitive phenomenon within the context of tonal relationships in a scale, rather than a perceptible experience of isolated pitches.[235] A study in the field of Western music theory examines

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231. See Peretz, "The Nature of Music from a Biological Perspective," 6-7.

232. Benward and Saker, *Music in Theory and Practice*, 39.

233. Al-Faruqi, "The Cantillation of the Qur'an," 9, 12, 13.

234. Peretz, "The Nature of Music from a Biological Perspective," 7.

235. Huron, *Sweet Anticipation*, 144.

musicians' descriptions of the feelings associated with each degree in a major scale. Some common responses describe each degree as follows:[236]

1st degree, tonic	Stable, foundational, home, contentment, extremely satisfying, resolved
2nd degree, supertonic	Hanging, dangling, transitory, moderate expectancy of more to come, part of a flow
3rd degree, mediant	Bright, love, warmth, beauty, point of many possible departures, yet also strongly restful, peaceful and calm
4th degree, subdominant	Awkward, tentative, strong sense of being unfinished, "Now what?" no clear expectation of future, hanging feeling, would be happy to fall by half step
5th degree, dominant	Strong, muscular, balance, possibility, pleasant, sense of looking down from a tall building and being pleasant comfortable, but knowing you'll eventually take the elevator back to the street level
6th degree, submediant	Balance, open, lightness, airy and open, temporary suspendedness, neutral, evokes mild curiosity in regard to direction
7th degree, leading tone	Unstable, pointing, restless, sense of inevitability, highly unstable, uncomfortable, squirmy, itching

In this context, the 1st, 3rd, and 5th degrees, along with the 8th degree as the higher octave of the 1st degree (not reiterated in the table), function as stable and harmonious loci of resolution in varying kinds and levels. In contrast, the 2nd, 4th, and especially the 7th degrees express more instability and tension, gravitating toward resolution in their neighboring degrees. The 6th degree, positioned between the harmonically stable 5th and the highly volatile 7th,

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236. Huron, 145.

serves as an equilibrium point, manifesting a distinctive harmony in a neutral fashion, as inferred from the descriptions of the participants. The overall tonal contour of this characterization can be broadly applied to scales in general. For instance, the major scale explored above almost entirely overlaps with the *maqām* rast, one of the most commonly used *maqām*s for Qur'anic recitation.

How tonal relationships produce a sense of tension and resolution is a central question often associated with the concept of gravity. One of the most prominent modern music theorists and composers, Paul Hindemith, defines tonality as "a natural force, like gravity," asserting that "it is gravitation itself that draws the tones towards their roots and towards the bass line..."[237] Drawing an analogy between architectural structures and music, Hindemith asserts that "It is the force of gravity, and no will of ours, that makes us adjust ourselves horizontally and vertically."[238] In his view, chords comprising three musical notes, most notably the tonic triad (a chord encompassing the 1st, 3rd, and 5th degrees of a scale), represent centers of gravitational force that enable the construction of a musical structure with harmonic (vertical) and melodic (linear) constituents.[239]

This characterization implies that each degree in a scale possesses a distinctive gravitational identity, or space-time, so to speak. This inference is supported by Hindemith's use of the solar system as a metaphor for tonality,[240] resonating with ancient formulations of the

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237. Hindemith, *The Craft of Musical Composition*, 152.

238. Hindemith, 22.

239. Hindemith, 22, 75, 109.

240. Hindemith, 57.

"music of the spheres," where each planet is assigned a tone in a scale.[241] The notion of musical gravity has also been well-established in contemporary music theory. Concepts such as gravity, attraction, and force are typically used to describe aspects of tonal motion. One scholar maintains that "the common consensus in recent theory is that we experience and understand tonal movement by metaphorically transferring our embodied experience of physical forces such as gravity into the domain of music."[242] Some scholars who explore these "musical forces," including musical gravity, magnetism, and inertia, suggest that these forces can be measured.[243]

Equally important is the close relationship between tonal and formal arrangement. The formation of musical form, comprising beginnings, middles, and endings, is linked to the motional tendencies of a tonal gravitational network. One scholar argues that "the form of a theme or a whole work depends entirely upon the particular manner of defining states of tension and reconciliation."[244] The most noticeable conventional musical rhetoric involves the periodic return to the tonic at the endings, as the music moves toward the ultimate goal of resolution and stability, commonly referred to as the "triumph of the tonic."[245] In contrast, beginnings have the task of overcoming tonal and formal indeterminacy, setting music from ambiguity toward certainty.[246] They are expected to transition the listener into the composition's temporal frame,

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241. See, Proust, Dominique. "The Harmony of the Spheres from Pythagoras to Voyager." *Proceedings of the International Astronomical Union* 5, no. S260 (n.d.): 358–67. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743921311002535.

242. Dogantan-Dack, "Tonality," 211.

243. See Larson, *Musical Forces*, 1-2.

244. Bennett, "Music and Emotion," 407.

245. Kramer, "Beginnings and Endings in Western Art Music," 3.

246. See Rowell, "The Creation of Audible Time," 199-200.

providing a sense of progression, and establish a tonal framework, which is usually performed through forcefully asserting the tonic or gradually moving toward it.[247] After establishing the tonic, the middles express musical continuity and transition through variations, contrasts, climaxes, and adding new musical events until the music finds ultimate rest at the ending. In this way, "Musical compositions and musical processes move generally from ambiguity to certainty."[248] The artist can then play against conventional tonal and formal tendencies, manipulating the anticipated flow of musical charge with varying gestures of tension and resolution.

Qur'anic Recitation

The conventional formal framework in music aligns with the practice of Qur'anic recitation. The movement toward resolution at the endings of verses, verse-clusters, and larger structures is crucial, if not the most evident and artistic feature of contemporary recitation practice. Although reciters employ various *maqām*s and melodic styles, this tonal movement remains unmistakable. Ibsen al-Faruqi characterizes melodic recitation as a tonal process of tension-building that results in a cadential resolution.[249] She associates upward melodic motion with beginnings and periodic returns to the tonic tone via a descending motion with endings, serving as loci of musical punctuation.[250] This general observation remains accurate for more recent trends in recitation. Popular Arab reciters, such as Saʿūd al-Shuraim, the long-serving prayer leader of the Grand Mosque Masjid al-Ḥarām in Mecca, and the prominent Kuwaiti

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247. Kramer, 4; Rowell, 199-200.

248. Rowell, 206.

249. Al-Faruqi, "The Cantillation of the Qur'an," 7.

250. Al-Faruqi, 9.

reciter Mishārī bin Rāshid al-ʿAfāsī, among many others, often conclude verse endings, and endings in general, with a resolution and a return to the tonic. Notably, in the artistically elaborate Egyptian *mujawwad* style, intense, and ideally cathartic, resolution of long-held tensions with sophisticated melodic ornamentation at verse endings is a self-evident feature— often followed in live settings by ecstatic responses of appreciation.[251]

One can hardly overstate the aesthetic significance of the cadence. Nelson notes that "The real test of the reciter's (and musician's) melodic skill is the melodic cadential formula, the *qaflah* or the *waqf*."[252] This cadential resolution serves as an "anchor point" for the reciter.[253] Illustrious Egyptian reciter Muṣṭafā Ismāʿīl (d. 1978), as quoted by Nelson, emphasizes "Everything introduces what is next, but it is not exactly planned ahead of time... [the reciter] must know ahead how he will cadence."[254] As discussed earlier, this final resolution therefore functions as the tonal point of reference of Qur'anic recitation.

The melodic movement toward resolution in various styles of recitation is by no means accidental. Before a detailed analysis will be presented shortly, it is worth highlighting that Qur'anic verses are typically marked by rhyme, serving as natural loci of resolution. It is

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251. Listen, for instance, a rendition of Sūrat Maryam (Q 19) with particular attention to cadential endings, particularly the specified running time, by the renowned reciter ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ ʿAbd al-Ṣamad; Quran recitations, "Abdul Basit Surahs Maryam and Takweer," YouTube, Feb 14, 2012, video, 12:50-13:45, https://youtu.be/9vJIKiNQzN4?si=rGo-OT0kjoTPqSbR. Additionally, listen to a renowned rendition of Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā (Q 93), موقع الشيخ عبد الباسط عبد الصمد, "Beautiful Recitation Of Quran | Heart Soothing By Abdulbasit Abdussamad," April 27, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5I7thLd47C0&t=236s.

252. Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, 127. For the tonal and recitational significance of melodic cadence, see Nelson, 12, 125-132.

253. Nelson, 127.

254. Nelson, 127.

intriguing that an overwhelming majority of rhymes in the Qur'an feature *nūn*, followed by *mīm* and *alif*. These letters are ideal for resolution when used at the end and initiated by preparatory elongation (*madd*) in the final syllable, as is frequently the case. The relaxing muscle movement in them allows for smoother and fuller settlement, such as in words like *al-raḥīm*, *ʿālamīn*, *ad-dīn*, *nastaʿīn*, *mustaqīm*, *ḍāllīn* (Q 1). If the closure is rhythmically emphatic, not initiated by a elongation in the last syllable, and ending with a muscularly tense letter, it is a factor of a more abrupt and tenser resolution, potentially generating a destabilizing and severe atmosphere: such as *wāqiʿ*, *dāfiʿ*, *maʿārij* (Q 70:1-3); or *muddaththir*, *fa-andhir*, *fa-kabbir* (Q 74:1-3); or *kuwwirat*, *inkadarat*, *suyyirat* (Q 81:1-3).

In lengthier verses, the sense of resolution emerges before the end-rhyme, with the resolving momentum signaled at varying intensities.[255] These cadential resolutions sometimes become overly evident with a sense of definite settlement. For instance, *wa kānallāhu ʿalīman ḥakimā* (48:4), *wa kafā billāhi wakīlā* (48;28), *inallāha samīʿun ʿalīm* (49:1); or as less distinct, *wa law kariha'l-mujrimūn* (8:8), *wa yuthabbit aqdāmakum* (47:7). A clear example can be found in the cadential concluding sentences of Q 27:59-66. Most of these cadences are initiated by a recurring climactic exclamation "Is it another god beside God?" that further highlights the cadential ending. The continuous resolution at verse endings, both in inherent and pitched musicality, creates a musical conditioning and anticipation in the listener, generating a sense of musical progression. As the analysis below will demonstrate, once a sense of resolution is identified, one can hear the verses, verse-clusters, or more compound structures as progressions with a series of tensions and resolutions.

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255. For the literary significance of the cadential statement, which Neuwirth refers to as "the clausula phrase," see Neuwirth, "Form and Structure of the Qurʾān."

It should, however, be emphasized that despite the broad congruity between inherent musicality and its pitched rendition, their relationship remains an area largely unexplored in Muslim recitation practice. Consequently, I suggest that reciters' perceptiveness in discerning and melodically rendering the tonal dispositions of the Qur'anic voice varies considerably in both depth and scope. While I will provide samples of recitation alongside the analysis of suras in this chapter, these recitations primarily serve to demonstrate the articulation of Qur'anic material and highlight general parallels between inherent and pitched musicality.

Substantiating Qur'anic Tonality

The idea of motion from tension to resolution aligns with the Qur'an's self-description of its composition and affective experience in Q 39:23—a verse partially discussed in reference to ring composition in Chapter Two: "God has sent down the best discourse (*aḥsan al-hadīth*), a two-fold composition whose many paired parts correspond to one another (*kitāban mutashābihan mathāniya*), that causes the skins of those in awe of their Lord to shiver. Then their skins and their hearts soften at the mention of God: such is God's guidance. He guides with it whoever He will; no one can guide those God leaves to stray." Upon highlighting the concentric, or folded, nature of Qur'anic composition, the sequence of this compositionality is depicted as a progression from psycho-spiritual tension toward resolution. Here, the initial experience of awe and the sensation of shivering, and the subsequent softening of skin and heart, can be considered aligned with musical tension and resolution. Notably, the affective imagery of experiencing the best or most beautiful speech (*aḥsan al-hadīth*) suggests a cathartic sense of relief—an intense purge catalyzed by the awe of God. This affective experience takes on significant psycho-spiritual centrality, as it is defined as God's guidance (*dhālika huda'l-lāh*, lit. "that is God's guidance").

The Qur'anic Composition as Aural-cum-Semantic Space-time

How can one examine tonality in a non-pitched context? I propose that a tonal approach to Qur'anic composition involves perceiving elements of aural and semantic tension and resolution against the backdrop of the conventional formal-tonal framework, indicating a process toward certainty and resolution. This framework is substantiated by the Qur'an's self-description of its affective impact as an experience of tension followed by resolution, and by the recitation practice, which demonstrates a melodic movement toward resolution.

As discussed earlier, the sense of tonality is grounded in metaphors of physical motion, particularly through gravity and the descending resolution toward its source. As highlighted by Hindemith, for instance, "it is gravitation itself that draws the tones towards their roots and towards the bass line…"[256] I suggest expanding the context of gravity to include the notion of space-time, whose spatial and temporal features are defined by a combination of formal, rhythmic, and melodic elements, intertwined with corresponding thematic and semantic character.

In Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity, gravity is correlated with the concept of space-time. It results from the curvature of space-time and the formation of gravitational fields caused by the mass and energy of a celestial body.[257] In our solar system, the sun, with its substantial mass and energy, serves as the central celestial body responsible for the curvature of space-time that govern the orbital motion of planets. Each planet within the solar system, including their moons, further cause local curvatures within the overall gravitational field.

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256. Hindemith, *The Craft of Musical Composition*, 151.

257. See Greene, *The Elegant Universe*, 67-71.

Correspondingly, I conceptualize Qur'anic ring composition as a metaphorical aural-cum-semantic space-time. The center of the ring is responsible for the overall curvature of space-time, with further localized curvatures manifesting at each orbit. The space-time of composition is warped at each cosmic level in varying degrees of contraction and expansion, thereby exhibiting tonal variation and progression. As my analysis will show, each structural register in al-Fātiḥa (Q 1) has its unique space-time and tonal character.[258]

When the composition is set in motion through recitation, there is a concurrent unrolling of alternations between curvatures, shifting between degrees of tonal tension and resolution. Each curvature is further framed within the overall progression of formal tension, moving from indeterminacy toward resolution, imparting on Qur'anic composition its complex affective character. Aligned with the conventional formal-cum-tonal framework, I designate beginnings as loci of formal tension arising from structural indeterminacy, where the comparative formal context and a clear sense of direction have not yet established. In contrast, endings mark the loci of formal resolution, indicating formal completion. In between lies the complex convergence of tension and resolution, forming a transitional as well as central register. In this middle register, there is a relative formal resolution with a tentatively established sense of progression and directionality, allowing justified anticipation. This dynamic synthesis of each space-time and formal register characterizes the affective experience of cosmic levels, which is not apparent in the static geometric image of ring composition.

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258. In Sufi cosmology, each of these spheres is represented by a specific planet; see, Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, 23, 31, 41. The present analysis does not focus on identifying these celestial bodies. That being said, the distinctive thematic features of each cosmic level provide a strong indication of the planet or planet combinations associated with each level based on their descriptions in astrological traditions.

Each space-time is defined by a complex intertwinement of sub-formal, rhythmic, and melodic elements of tonality. These features shape the tonal character of each formal register that interacts with the corresponding space-time, expressing various manners of tension-building and resolution. The mass-energy density of each space-time, arising from the intricate interplay of its spatial and temporal features, highlights the degree of gravitational impact. Consequently, variations in the mass-energy density at each level elucidate the tonal progression.

I characterize the contraction and extension of space by the sub-formal element of verse length. I consider the contraction and expansion of temporality through the density and accentuation of syntactic and rhythmic divisions and verse-internal parallelisms. I examine melodic tension and resolution based on muscle contraction and relaxation, and the density of open and closed syllables, which further characterize rhythmic and syntactic units. The intricate synthesis of these spatial and temporal features, which express the distinct character of space-time, necessitates thorough analysis at each level.

In addition to these aural aspects of tonality, the space-time of Qur'anic voice is inextricably shaped by what I designate as semantic-thematic tonality, shedding light on the convergence of sound, meaning, and affect within Qur'anic structure. As the analysis will show, the alternation of aural tension and resolution is accompanied by corresponding semantic and thematic content, with an overall progression from indeterminacy toward clarity. Moreover, the aural-cum-semantic progression indicates a logico-rhetorical sequence, with statements, claims, and premises gradually leading to a conclusion. The opening statements often assert themselves with a cryptic element, demanding elaboration and evoking anticipation. These elements are developed through transitional tensions and partial resolutions, culminating in complete semantic

resolution. Ultimately, the metaphorical characterization of Qurʾanic structure as a space-time synthesizes the gravitational movement of sounds and meanings, treating them as one.

As extensively discussed in Chapters One and Two, Qurʾanic composition exhibits a tripartite structure examined through types of rhetorical speech (ceremonial, legal, and political) and the corresponding three major cosmic worlds (*jabarūt*, *malakūt*, and *mulk*). The analysis of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (Q 1) focuses on the affective character of these registers in sound and meaning at both the verse as well as verse-internal levels. I suggest that this convergence of sound, structure, meaning, and affect communicates the synthesized character of Qurʾanic expression, deemed inimitable in the Muslim experience.

Q 1 Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (The Opening)

1   bismi'l-lāhi'r-raḥmāni'r-raḥīm

2   al-ḥamdu li'l-lāhi rabbi'l-ʿālamīn

3   ar-raḥmāni'r-raḥīm

4   māliki yawmi d-dīn

5   ʾiyyāka naʿbudu wa ʾiyyāka nastaʿīn

6   ihdina'ṣ-ṣirāṭa'l-mustaqīm

7a   ṣirāṭa'l-laḏīna anʿamta alayhim

7b   ghayri'l-maghḍūbi ʿalayhim

7c   wa la'ḍ-ḍāllīn

1   In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy!

2   Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds,

3   the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,

4   Master of the Day of Judgement.

5 It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help.

6 Guide us to the straight path:

7a the path of those You have blessed,

7b those who incur no anger

7c and who have not gone astray.[259]

The rhetorical and cosmological structures of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa have been examined in Chapter One and Two. As outlined in the table below, the sura comprises two sections of progression, further divided based on their formal and tonal features. The subsequent analysis provides an extensive aural-cum-semantic examination of each verse, their space-time, and tonal character, with particular attention to the interplay of sound, meaning, affect, and structure.[260]

1 bismi'l-lāhi'r-raḥmāni'r-raḥīm	Indeterminate	Opening: Indeterminate, Tension	Progression One, vv. 1-5
2 al-ḥamdu li'l-lāhi rabbi'l-ʿālamīn	Transitional tension		
3 ar-raḥmāni'r-raḥīm	Relative resolution		
4 māliki yawmi d-dīn	Relative opening converging with transitional tension	Transition & Center: Relative Resolution	
5 ʾiyyāka naʿbudu wa ʾiyyāka nastaʿīn	Relative complete resolution		

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259. For the recitation of al-Fātiḥa (Q 1) by ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ ʿAbd al-Ṣamad, listen to Quranic recitations, "Al-Fatiha: 01," YouTube, Jan 13, 2014, audio, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1n2fY2Ctds.

260. The analysis divides the verse-internal rhythm into beats. I define a beat to exhibit CVC and VC patterns in closed syllables and CV in open syllables, including those found in elided units. To designate the durations of these syllables, I use numbers for convenience instead of musical notation. Additionally, I employ "c" as a symbol for closed and "o" for open syllables.

6 ihdina'ṣ-ṣirāṭa'l-mustaqīm	Relative indeterminate opening		
7 ṣirāṭa'l-laḏīna anʿamta alayhim	Relative resolution		Progression Two, vv. 6-7
7a ghayri'l-maghḍūbi ʿalayhim	Transitional tension	Complete Resolution	
7b wa la'ḍ-ḍāllīn	Complete resolution		

Lāhūt

Opening: Indeterminate			
V. 1	bis-mil-lā	hir-raḥ-mā	nir-ra-ḥīm
Rhythm	2 2 2	2 2 2	2 1 2
Syllables	c c o	c c o	c o c
Form	Opening	Transition, center	Closure
Tonality	Tension	Relative resolution (convergence)	Resolution

Verse one is enveloped by indeterminacy, as the comparative formal, tonal, and semantic context has yet to emerge—aligning with the transcendence of *lāhūt*. While remaining indeterminate, its tonal character will be revealed through comparison in the following verses. The verse features three proportionate beat groups except for the diverging penultimate syllable, demonstrating a tightly structured progression. This flow exhibits a cascading melodic resolution connected through elisions and word-internal alternations: the open and elongated syllables at the first two words' endings provide tonal release, contrasting with the two preceding closed

syllables that create tension. The complete resolution in the final word's ending features an elongated motion smoothly resolving through muscular relaxation. The divergence of the penultimate syllable *ra* of *ra-ḥīm* and the reversal of open and closed syllables in this final word punctually restrict this flow toward complete resolution. This interruption prevents the formation of a fully symmetric pattern that would otherwise weaken the effect of resolution. In contrast, the muscle tension of the letter *ḥ* in the final syllable, softened due to its rhythmic position and the following melodic resolution, imparts a sense of weight, whose complete settlement emphasizes the resolution.

The verse delivers a ceremonial announcement, promulgating the authority of the transcendental, gracious, and compassionate God. These qualities align with the cascading aural descent, depicting a "condescending" address, conveying both authority and affection. In this context, Godship resides in the indeterminate divine register, resonating with an amplified sense of transcendent authority. Lordly grace is situated at the legal equilibrium—the point of balance, expressing regal elegance and charm. Positioned on the sub-level of *mulk* where tension fully resolves, divine compassion depicts a gesture of embrace. As these elements intertwine, the verse expresses a vivid interplay of meaning and affect.

Jabarūt

Transition: Tension				
V. 2	al-ḥam-du	lil-lā-hi	rab-bil	ʿā-la-mīn
Rhythm	2 2 1	2 2 1	2 2	2 1 2
Syllables	c c o	c o o	c c	o o c
Form	Opening	Relative closure	Relative opening, transition, center	Closure

Tonality	Tension	Relative resolution	Relative tension (convergence)	Resolution

Verse two introduces profound aural and thematic contrasts to the preceding verse. It is slightly longer spatially but indicates substantial temporal contraction, suggesting high mass-energy density and therefore gravitational influence that builds up immense tension. The temporal flow is restricted, aligning with the accentuated and asymmetrical rhythmic patterns, demonstrating the awe-inspiring affective character of *jabarūt*. As part of its complexity, the verse also expresses a partial formal and semantic resolution, enabling thought and observation: the comparative context begins to emerge, and the verse provides initial elaboration for God as the Lord of the worlds (*rabb al-ʿālamīn*). Still framed by degrees of indeterminacy, a subtle sense of tonal movement emerges at this register, remaining tentative until the coming resolution in verse three.

The organization of syntactic and syllabic rhythm noticeably differs from the preceding harmonious tripartite structure of verse one. The verse comes to full resolution in four uneven rhythmic steps: the initial contracted 2-2-1 pattern of *al-ḥam-du lil-lā-hi* (Praise belongs to God) followed by climactic expansion of *rab-bil* (Lord) and final resolution of *ʿā-la-mīn* ([of] the words).

The first two words, *al-ḥam-du lil-lā-hi* both inhibit and energize the inherited momentum from verse one, creating powerful pulsation due to change in rhythmic and syllabic structure. The 2-2-2 pattern of verse one is contracted into 2-2-1, with the final syllables, *du* and *hi*, shortened with beating effect. Neither word ending has a smooth durational initiation and muscular resolution. The lack of elision between *lil-lā-hi* and *rab-bil* contributes to this accentuation. In addition, *al* and *ḥam* of *al-ḥam-du* are closed syllables and *du* is an open syllable without elongation that does not allow the charge to expand. The accentuated charge therefore

strongly joins the first two words. Here, the *lā* of *lil-lā-hi*, as the only open and elongated syllable is highlighted, providing a limited relief from a massive and controlled pressure. However, the subsequent short and open syllable *hi* restricts its expansion, continuing to transmit the powerful charge.

This inhibited momentum climactically expands in the second part of the verse, featuring heavily accentuated beats in the syllables *rab-bil*, which merges with the assertive energy of this second verse-internal opening. The word *rab-bil* demonstrates two long beats (2-2) contrasting with the preceding contracted pattern (2-2-1), allowing a powerful release and stretching of space-time. The closed syllables add a powerful marching quality to this rhythm. This distinct emphasis on the word *Rabb* highlights it as the center of the verse. The expanded flow of this powerful charge fully resolves onto ʿ*ā-la-mīn*. This ending word expresses a distinct muscular tension with the ʿ*ā* of ʿ*ā-la-mīn*, voicing a piercing quality of a long and open ʿ*ā*. However, the closing syllable of the verse, *mīn*, with elongation and muscular resolution resonates with the ending of verse one, binding the flow.

While God has been presented as a gracious and compassionate authority in the first verse, here emerges a new, awe-inspiring dimension of His rule as the Lord of the words, introducing a thematic tension. As such, there is magnification and an offering of praise for the Lord (*Rabb*) of the worlds at this register of *jabarūt*. The praise therefore articulates a climax. When heard together in aural and semantic terms, it evokes a state of intoxication—what Sufis term as *istighrāq*—a witness to, or expression of, the single awe-inspiring source of knowledge, education, and compelling transformative power—as aspects of the word *Rabb* and the plane of *jabarūt*.

The position of *al-ḥam-du* (the praise) at the indeterminate ceremonial locus magnifies the sense of exaltation directed to the tremendousness of God manifesting at the level of *jabarūt*. The second word, *lil-lā-hi* (for God), is a locus of relative resolution, where the praise is offered to God in resolving gesture. As explored above, the identical rhythmic pattern of these two words restricts motion with strong pulsations, with *lil-lā-hi* featuring a heightened resolution. I suggest that the expansion of *lā* within the overwhelming resolution of *lil-lā-hi* demonstrates a meeting point for rapturous enthusiasm of praise and divine awe, with charged energy intensely released rather than resolved.

The climactic expansion of charge upon the word *rab-bil* (Lord) is powerfully demonstrative. Here, lordship is spotlighted at the legal center, with the dramatic expansion of energy upon this short unit with two long beats almost hypnotically captivating attention and deeply penetrating and echoing within. The resolution of this charge upon *ʿā-la-mīn* (the worlds) is gesturally expressive, as if the political authority of lordship "resolves onto" and is established upon the worlds. This lordship over the worlds also marks the semantic resolution, concretizing the cause of the praise.

Rahamūt

Relative closure: Relative resolution		
V. 3	ar-raḥ-mā	nir-ra-ḥīm
Rhythm	2 2 2	2 1 2
Syllables	c c o	c o c
Form	Opening	Closure

Tonality	Tension	Resolution

With the first two verses, a sense of tonal movement emerged, yet a resolution is necessary to establish a sense of tonal progression, and this resolution occurs in verse three. Unlike verse one, which articulates lordly grace and compassion within the indeterminate authoritative register, here these qualities highlight God's loving nature, expressing joy, peace, and love. As such, this register serves as the purpose toward which divine lordship in verse two works and resolves into.

Compared to verse two, the sense of space is considerably reduced as much as half, accompanied by temporal expansion. These features point out a lesser gravitational influence, providing a relieving descent and sense of stability after immense turbulence. The verse progresses in two proportionate and harmonious steps that feature smooth resolutions at endings. The contracted 2-2-1 rhythmic opening of verse two slowly relaxes into 2-2-2 pattern, enabling more paced flow.

Within the resolving movement, the word *raḥmān* (the Gracious) is positioned in the ceremonial and indeterminate register of tension, articulating a praise for divine grace and beauty. On the lower, material level, the descending resolution expressed with the word *raḥīm* (the Compassionate) articulates a deeply loving and protective gesture of compassion. The legal register typically participates in both higher and lower domains. Here, it is subsumed within the complete embrace of divine mercy and compassion. The phrase *raḥmāni'r-raḥīm* found in verse one is reiterated, which provides further emphasis and affective depth.

Within the first progression ending on verse five, the sense of resolution in verse three is relative, and the newly forming momentum is inclined to progress further in aural and semantic terms. The first three verses make up a whole, as two alternations establish a relative sense of

tonality and introduction. However, this movement still remains within the framework of formal and tonal ambivalence. Now, it is the turn for a step out of this initial phase with verse four, the level of *malakūt*, where tensions and resolutions begin to merge in a complex way, evoking a sense of transition as well as centrality.

This movement intimates approaching the central curvature in the middle, which starts to manifest itself explicitly as the verse tends downwards toward complete resolution upon verse five at the center. This dominant curvature in space-time was difficult to perceive up to verse three. In this middle register, interacting with relative formal resolution that express equilibrium at the center, the impact of this overall curvature is difficult to overlook.

Malakūt

Relative opening, transition: Relative transitional tension (relative convergence)			
V. 4	mā-li-ki	yaw-mid	dīn
Rhythm	2 1 1	2 2	2
Syllables	o o o	c c	c
Form	Opening	Transition, center	Closure
Tonality	Tension	Relative resolution (convergence)	Resolution

Verse four sharply contrasts with the previous resolution in both aural and thematic terms, heightening the tension again. While the verse length remains the same, significant temporal restraint marks an increase in gravitational impact. In this context of relative opening motion, this restraint translates into a powerful assertion. Compared to the preceding verse, it features a decisive change in rhythmic patterns. The first word *mā-li-ki* (Master) features an unprecedented

2-1-1 pattern, signaling a shift in direction and contracting the 2-2-2 pattern in verse two, resulting in assertive accentuation. The *mā* of *mā-li-ki* similarly indicates a departure in the flow due to an elongated and open syllable at the start, as opposed to the preceding verses. These elements of novelty in direction resonates well with the formal indeterminacy of beginnings.

The following phrase *yaw-mid dīn* (Day of Judgement) progresses with march-like rhythm, escalating tension in verse-internal loci of resolution. The 2-1-2 pattern shared by the previous verses is disrupted. While the final syllable *dīn* has a smooth resolution, the beating of 2-2-2 pattern makes the overall closure tensely assertive. I would argue that the constancy of this accentuation seems to suggest a tripartite verse-internal division. The comparison of the syntactic rhythm of this verse with the preceding one would lend a support to this splitting. Thus, *dīn* as the single closing unit at the end is charged, as if asserting a question mark.

As Qur'anic voice moves out from the initial phase of tonal ambiguity, it enters into the middle register of relative resolution, descending toward the source of central curvature. Following the resolution in verse three, this movement is characterized by a tension-building assertion toward a relatively indeterminate direction. This moment creates a complex convergence of opposite tendencies, a moment of assertive suspension, aligning with the theme of Judgement Day. This thematic tension, assertively foregrounded after God's loving nature, imposes a climactic moment of meeting and accountability, as humanity awaits final judgment in uncertainty on an indubitable day.

This convergence of aural, thematic, and semantic elements in a complex fashion resonates with *malakūt*, the point of intersection and transition between the higher and lower realms. Within this context, the word *mā-li-ki* (Master), positioned within this ceremonial register of divinity, powerfully asserts the sovereignty of God amidst the suspended tension of

the final day. The placement of the pulsating *yaw-mid* (day) at the transitional/central segment appears to highlight the transitional nature of the concept of day. At this sub-*malakūt* legal register, which signifies the meeting point between the higher and lower realms, this placement seems to depict the Day of Judgement as the precise "time" of meeting, indicating an intriguing convergence of sound and meaning. The subsequent resolution upon the spatially short *dīn* expresses an emphatic and suspended resolution by merging with the momentum of the preceding 2-2 pattern. Here, the open syllables of *mā-li-ki* juxtaposed with closed syllables of *yaw-mid dīn* evoke the conspicuity of the Master in the final day.

These elements can be heard to revolve around an indeterminate sense of convergence that defines this register. Ultimately, in this first section of the sura, the listener is prepared in both sound and meaning for a dramatic final resolution, wherein two intertwined concluding moments—the Day of Judgement and the conclusion of the praise—follow each other.

The Center

Center: Relative complete resolution (complete convergence)				
V. 5	ʾiy-yā-ka	naʿ-bu-du	wa-ʾiy-yā-ka	nas-ta-ʿīn
Rhythm	2 2 1	2 1 1	1 2 2 1	2 1 2
Syllables	c o o	c o o	o c o o	c o c
Form	Opening	Relative closure, center	Relative opening	Closure
Tonality	Tension	Relative resolution (convergence)	Relative tension	Resolution

Following the extended praise and the heightened preparation of verse four, complete resolution expresses climactic union right at the center. It should be highlighted that the middle

register marks the point of equilibrium, as well as the center of curvature within the overall space-time. This curvature is difficult to discern from the vertical perspective of the listener for whom the composition gradually unrolls. But it can be observed through the equilibrial function of this verse that provides complete resolution to the preceding progression at the center.

The space-time significantly expands following its preceding contraction. The rhythmic density expands into two extensive and symmetric parts, doubling the length of the preceding verse, facilitating a gradual and well-settled resolution at the center of the sura. This slow-moving, balanced, and accentuated resolution is sublime and majestic, as the verse concluding a lengthy progression at the point of equilibrium.

The extended and geminated opening word *ʾiy-yā-ka* with 2-2-1 pattern inhibits the assertive and contracted momentum of the previous verse's opening *mā-li-ki* with 2-1-1 pattern, signaling resolution. The first word *ʾiy-yā-ka* partially resolves onto *naʿ-bu-du*. The juxtaposition of the expanding *yā* of *ʾiy-yā-ka* with the accentuated *naʿ* of *naʿ-bu-du* and the tightening of the rhythmic pattern from 2-2-1 to 2-1-1 are integral to this resolving alternation. The second part of the verse follows a similar pattern, with the second assertion of *wa-ʾiy-yā-ka* resolving onto the accentuated *nas* of *nas-ta-ʿīn*, achieving further resolution with the elongated rhyme *ʿīn*.

The verse furnishes a dramatic conclusion to the preceding praise by presenting a statement of pledge to the King. The praise leads to and resolves onto this pledge. In verse one, the introduction of God functions as the statement that establishes the context. The subsequent verses elaborate on God's various designations, serving as evidence. Ultimately, this verse delivers the conclusion drawn by the addressees.

The formal position of verse five is complex. It Is positioned at the center of the sura, dividing it into two halves, but it also belongs to the first part, concluding it. I propose the verse-

internal structure embodies these two aspects, demonstrating a resonant convergence at the center of the sura. The first *ʾiy-yā-ka* (it is You) in the ceremonial indeterminate register praises the King's authority in a dramatic tone. The subsequent *naʿ-bu-du* (we worship) within the legal register of sub-*malakūt* spotlights the mediating theme of worship. Since this verse marks the level of *malakūt*, which pertains to kingly command, power, and love in analogy to the human heart, the offering of pledge and worship within this sub-*malakūt* register showcases an ecstatic convergence. The resolving movement upon *naʿ-bu-du* seems to express this moment of completeness, witnessing, and union.

This first part of the verse resonates with the first part of the sura, aligning with the higher realms. The second part of the verse highlights the theme of the King's support, suited to the sura's second part, which corresponds to the lower realms. The reiterated *wa-ʾiy-yā-ka* (it is You) within the legal context of *mithāl* articulates clarity regarding the singular and legitimate source of help, contrasting with the element of confusion integral to *mithāl* sections. The subsequent *nas-ta-ʿīn* (we ask for help) within the sub-register of *mulk* foregrounds political themes of prosperity and security, as the second part of the sura elucidates. The final resolution upon *nas-ta-ʿīn* (we ask for help), which completes the first part of the sura, conveys a sense of completion and relief.

Mithāl

Second Opening: Relative indeterminacy			
V. 6	ih-di-naṣ	ṣi-rā-ṭal	mus-ta-qīm
Rhythm	2 1 2	1 2 2	2 1 2
Syllables	c o c	o o c	c o c

Form	Opening	Transition, center	Closure
Tonality	Tension	Relative resolution (convergence)	Resolution

This verse marks a departure from the union within the central curvature, expressing various aural and semantic elements of ambiguity, seeking clarification. This shift resonates with the theme of the fall in the *mithāl* section (vv. 34-9) of al-Baqara. In this opening of the sura's second progression, space-time once more contracts: the tripartite syntactic rhythm and shorter verse length express assertion and increased pace, contrasting with the quadripartite and extended resolution of the previous verse. Aligning with the ambiguous quality of *mithāl*, the verse builds tension uniquely by featuring an inversion: the 2-1-2 pattern used only at verse endings appears for a single time here at the beginning, introducing a sense of ambiguity and a reversal in direction. This assertion and relative directional ambiguity resonate with the verse's theme, a heartfelt collective request for guidance to the cryptic notion of the straight path.

As another sign of ambivalence, this second opening with relative indeterminacy parallels verse one, featuring a proportionate tripartite organization. However, this verse does not similarly express an undulating descent. The endings of first two words, *naṣ* and *ṭal*, feature elisions with closed syllables that prevent harmonious resolutions. Conversely, the continuous quality of the fricative *s* of *naṣ* and the liquid *l* of *ṭal* imparts an undivided flow to the expression, limiting any pronounced tension. These two contrasting tendencies align with the aura of ambiguity permeating this level and the plea for guidance itself, which combines a sense of certainty of the source of help and unpredictability and doubt arising from the current condition.

The position of *ih-di-naṣ* (guide us) aligns with the amplified tension of this divine and directionally undecided register, directing a collective plea for guidance amid uncertainty to one

transcendental God. The word ṣi-rā-ṭal (path) in the middle locus of convergence and transition

echoes the binding connotation of the concept of path. At the precise midpoint of the verse, the

elongated open syllable rā of ṣi-rā-ṭal (path), which is the only elongation other than that of the

final syllable qīm, gestures an expansion that highlights a moment of unity and encounter—

similar to the union manifesting on the word na ʿ-bu-du in the previous verse. As such, this

syllable provides an experiential insight into the notion of path. Moreover, middles serve as

points of balance and are susceptible to a loss of equilibrium. The subsequent notion of mus-ta-

qīm (straight) eloquently articulates the expectation at the locus of resolution, relief, and stability.

As a whole, the call for guidance in the verse, surrounded by aural and semantic ambiguity,

creates tension that demands a concrete resolution in the following verses.

Mulk

Relative closure: Relative resolution (settlement)				
V. 7a	ṣi-rā-ṭal	la-dhī-na	an-ʿam-ta	ʿa-lay-him
Rhythm	1 2 2	1 2 1	2 2 1	1 2 1
Syllables	o o c	o o o	c c o	o c c
Form	Opening	Relative closure	Relative opening, center	Closure
Tonality	Tension	Relative resolution	Relative tension (convergence)	Resolution

I divide the final verse into three fragments due to their distinct verse-internal

progression, each featuring a separate cosmic level. This verse fragment features a contrasting

syntactic structure and verse length to the preceding verse. The space-time expands again,

providing a harmonious, gradual, and extended resolution. After the middle three verses of the

sura that marks a section of relative resolution, in this section, the Qur'anic voice inclines toward a complete resolution. As the first step of this resolution, this fragment is where the gravitational pull of the eventual settlement emerges, which aligns with the extended verse-internal resolution.

Similar to the unique opening in the previous verse, the 1-2-2 rhythmic pattern at the beginnings is singular in the chapter and signals a new direction, contributing to the reversal tendency of the second progression. The closing pattern 1-2-1 without elongated rhyme is also unprecedented, disrupting the 2-1-2 closure formula, expressing a unique pausing quality. The momentum gently demands further progression and complete resolution in the coming verses, which is apparent in the graduality of resolution and the lack of a complete resolution on end-rhyme.

The verse suggests a stable, slow-moving resolution. The phrase *ṣi-rā-ṭal la-dhī-na* (the path of those) and *an-ʿam-ta ʿa-lay-him* (You have blessed [on them]) form aural and semantic wholes, dividing the verse into two halves. In *ṣi-rā-ṭal la-dhī-na*, all syllables are open except for the eliding *ṭal*, expressing a constant release of tension. Middle syllables are elongated, providing an undulating, gradual rhythmic resolution. A notable element of melodic resolution is that the letters of *ṣi-rā-ṭal* require high muscle contraction and have a thick quality, while the following *la-dhī-na* involves lighter muscle movement on each letter, particularly the final syllable *na*, creating a resolving juxtaposition. The second verse-internal assertion, *an-ʿam-ta* (You have blessed), is the most accentuated word in the verse, imparting it a central and gripping quality. The charge of this emphasis resolves upon the final word, *ʿa-lay-him* (on them), which is also accentuated but to a lesser degree and without elongation in the final rhyme, bringing a distinct pausal settlement.

After the aura of uncertainty and doubt in verse six, this verse fragment offers a partial thematic resolution, showcasing the theme of divine blessings. The plea for guidance continues as the speakers associate the path with those blessed by God, praying for a prosperous journey. The repetition of the concept of the path consolidates semantic resolution. These elements create a partial logical resolution by clarifying the rationale behind the plea for guidance.

The placement of *ṣi-rā-ṭal la-dhī-na* (path of those) at the ceremonial opening extols the straight path and those who follow it in their close association to the divine, defining the enigmatic path through its palpable followers. This tangible representation aligns with the material frame of reference of *mulk*. The accentuated *an-ʿam-ta* (You have blessed) highlights the political authority of the King, from whose realm the path traverses. The clear emphasis on this word evokes an earnest and hopeful gesture that pulsates vis-à-vis the King, marking an encounter typical of middle registers. The position of *ʿa-lay-him* (on them) at the political register showcases the bestowal of blessings, with the swiftly descending resolution evoking an aural gesture of this bestowal. The lack of elongation in the end-rhyme creates a moment of temporary settlement, setting this verse segment apart from the rest of the sura and drawing attention to the articulated heartfelt demand.

Al-ʿālam al-Suflī

Relative Opening, transition: Relative transitional tension			
V. 7b	ghay-ril	magh-ḍū-bi	ʿa-lay-him
Rhythm	2 2	2 2 1	1 2 1
Syllables	c c	c o o	o c c
Form	Opening	Transition, center	Closure

Tonality	Tension	Relative resolution (convergence)	Resolution

The syntactic rhythm and verse length in this fragment contrast with surrounding verses, leading to an intense contraction in space-time that restricts motion. Within the sura structure, the final resolution began with the gradual descent and temporary settlement of the previous verse fragment. This verse disrupts that settlement with a transitional stage of tension toward further resolution. The shortness of the verse suggests assertion and pace, while the marching rhythmic quality with long beats and the strong muscle contraction expresses an immense, continuous force. The combination of these contrasting elements—assertion and massiveness—within the verse fragment's contracted space-time highlights an intensity holding tremendous power, capable of unleashing devastating destruction. The ending, marked by the lack of an elongated rhyming syllable, brings a severe pause and restriction to this momentum, after which the final conclusion in the next fragment overflows.

The emphatic 2-2 pattern at the beginning is unprecedented and striking, responding to the accentuation in *an-ʿam-ta* (You have blessed) in the previous fragment, transforming it into an extended pulsating rhythm in *ghay-ril magh-ḍū-bi* (not of those who earned wrath). The emphatic rhythm with closed syllables pressurizes the flow until its expansion at the center of the verse upon the *ḍū* of *magh-ḍū-bi* (who earned wrath). This brief yet acute expansion is expressed with the severely contracted and plosive letter *ḍad*, further intensified through the circular air passage of the vowel *wāw*. This expression evokes an extreme release of tension, assuming the form of anger in the context of this verse fragment. Placed at the center, *magh-ḍū-bi* (those who earned wrath) shares the same 2-2-1 rhythmic pattern and central position with *an-ʿam-ta*, emphasizing the contrast. The similar ending with the repetition of *ʿa-lay-him* (on themselves) further binds this contrast together. Finally, the short and open syllable *bi* of *magh-ḍū-bi* suggest

an agile move out of a long and tensely resolving descent, which acutely resolves upon ʿa-lay-him, depicting a descending strike of divine anger. The proposition ʿalā (on [themselves]) and the word-internal resolution of ʿa-lay-him, with the contracted ʿa swiftly resolving upon the evenly joined syllables lay-him, aurally demonstrates this motion.

Contrasting the emphasis on blessings in the previous verse fragment, the intimidating character of the verse is reflected through the theme of divine wrath. This verse fragment is akin to verse four, which both builds tension and evokes anticipation for the final resolution. The escalation of tension after the demand for further resolution in the previous fragment creates a heightened anticipation of a necessary final resolution.

Within the framework of the plea for guidance voiced in verse six, the placement of ghay-ril (not of) on the transcendent register demands security from the path of those who have incurred God's wrath, aligning with the sense of being above or beyond them. On this ceremonial level, the exclusive implication of the word also expresses criticism of an unspecified group that diverge from the straight path. The position of magh-ḍū-bi (those incurred wrath) on the mediating legal register showcases the theme of punishment, blocking the transition between higher and lower realms and denying guidance and passage to the Kingdom, malakūt. Subsequently, on the political register of prosperity and security, the resolution upon ʿa-lay-him (on themselves) emphasizes the concrete, material proximity and implications of divine anger, serving as a powerful deterrent.

ʿAdam

Closure: Complete resolution		
V. 7c	wa-laḍ	ḍāl-līn

Rhythm	1 2	16 2
Syllables	o c	c c
Form	Opening	Closure
Tonality	Tension	Resolution

In this final resolution, space-time expands due to exceptional extensive elongation and virtually removed syntactic and rhythmic tension, creating a sense of openness and release. The 1-2 rhythmic pattern is singular within the sura, connecting to the resolution segment through an elision, which is also unique due to its elongation. The extreme elongation, combined with resolution on the end rhyme—contrasting with the previous two verse fragments that delay such finality—expresses the final resolution in ultimate terms, addressing all aural and semantic issues.

The call for guidance reaches its completion with the plea for not going astray. This complete resolution, however, expresses an intricate complexity. As the register of ʿadam (Nothingness) would suggest, this final motion arrives at a point of dissolution, depletion, and absence—reminiscent of black holes. The elongation with uninterrupted stable movement seems to reflect this dissolution of tonal orientation. This register is paradoxical, and its interpretation is challenging if even possible, as Ibn al-ʿArabī associates ʿadam with impossibility.[261] As such, the attainment of nothingness mirrors the transcendence and ineffability of lāhūt, consolidating this verse's ultimate resolution.

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261. Ḥakīm, "ʿAdam," 783-84.

Similar to the opening *ghay-ril* (not of) in the previous fragment with the sense of being above or beyond those who have incurred God's wrath, the first part *wa-laḍ* (and not) on the transcendent register negates the notion of going astray, thereby magnifying the transcendent divine. The second part, *ḍāl-līn* (those who have gone astray), which extends through legal and political rhetorical registers, showcases disengagement and alienation from the mediating path of the King and His favors and protection on the lower, material realm, thereby negating this disengagement and those who have gone astray. Together, these two negations—the negation in *wa lā* and the negation of *ḍāl-līn*—establish a "negation of negation," affirming transcendence and underscoring the complex interplay between nothingness and being.

Concluding Remarks

The alternating aural-cum-thematic shifts between tension and resolution in each verse of al-Fātiḥa reveals the tonal character of Qur'anic language and composition. This tonal movement through the rhetorical and cosmic registers at the verse and verse-internal level differentiates and communicates the specific and complex affective character of each register within a nested structural hierarchy. This formulaic and progressive quality conveys a dynamic affective voice that synthesizes sound, structure, and meaning.

The examination of the affective dynamics of Qur'anic sound has been delayed in Muslim scholarship despite the ubiquitous emphasis on the intertwinement of sound and meaning. Similarly, apart from several key observations by Nelson and the insightful work of Sells, sound and affect have not been thoroughly explored in Western research due to a prevailing textual and historical preoccupation with Qur'anic composition, which has peripheralized the Muslim aesthetic experience.

The preoccupation with the chronological sequence of Qur'anic suras—from the Meccan to the Medinan periods, including further subdivisions within the Meccan period—without affective engagement runs the risk of overstating stylistic, thematic, and formal differences between suras from different periods, most specifically, the perceived forceful poeticity of the early Meccan suras and the prosaic language of Medinan suras.[262] This overstatement eclipses the underlying tonal, rhetorical, and cosmic progression that is consistently expressive and variational across periods.

Continuing research holds promise that the tonal progression from tension to resolution, in conjunction with rhetorical and cosmic structures, should be considered for the entire corpus, elucidating the systematic tonal and formal commonality and variation throughout. Qur'anic suras across the corpus demonstrate distinct space-times, with differing levels of contraction and expansion, varying in pace and flow, and generating a variety of affective atmospheres. Far from being mechanically formulaic, suras from the same period exhibit significant musical differences. I suggest these features are most evident in their temporal pace with varying flowing quality, and manners and intensity of tension building and resolution. The method developed in this chapter, exemplified at various levels of composition, is applicable for systematically examining these features. Once the ear settles on identifying a sense of motion and progression, suras begin to sound specific.

Conceptualizing Qur'anic composition as an aural-cum-semantic space-time, this chapter elucidates the inherent musical affect of the Qur'anic voice. It uncovers the systematic complexity in the interplay between the gradual alternation of tension and resolution, as well as an overall movement from tension toward resolution. This tonal framework affords a crucial

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262. See Sinai, *The Qur'an*, 112.

appreciation of the convergence of sound, meaning, and structure, which maintains the descending order of rhetorical and cosmic registers at multiple levels of composition, including the micro-scale verse structure. Further analysis of suras at multiple levels across the Qur'anic corpus is imperative to systematize the study of affect, and to establish the experiential hearing of the Qur'anic voice as an essential component of compositional analysis.

This synthesized character of Qur'anic voice sheds significant light on the Muslim experience of Qur'an and formulations of its inimitability (*iʿjāz*) based on notions of eloquence (*balāgha*) and articulacy (*faṣāḥa*) rooted in its syntactic construction (*naẓm*). The emphasis placed on the intertwinement of utterance (*lafẓ*) and meaning (*maʿnā*) in medieval Muslim theory of *naẓm* highlights the extensive rhetorical and grammatical scope of such affective experience. Hence, careful scrutiny of the relationship between musical affect, rhetorical figures, and grammatical structure is significant for furthering the study of Qur'anic rhetoric and aesthetics.

Indeed, the Qur'anic expression demands, if not necessitates, its verbal and pitched delivery. As has been addressed, this recitational proclivity transcends a straightforward division between Meccan and Medinan suras, often considered expressive and prosaic respectively, presenting itself as an intrinsic characteristic. As such, while recitation is inherently tied to oral delivery, it similarly converges the oral and textual divide, which can be correlated with the terms *qurʾān* (recitation) and *kitāb* (book), reflecting both within its rigorously formulaic cosmological symbolism of ring composition.

There is strong correlation between the inherent musical fabric of Qur'anic composition and its contemporary recitation practice. Notions of ideal recitation are already rooted in artfully conveying the embedded aural harmony and tonal disposition of Qur'anic expression. As discussed earlier, the most pervasive and noticeable tonal quality of Qur'anic recitation is the

resolution at verse endings and endings in general, and cadential resolution in more extensive structures. As such, a tonal movement from tension toward resolution is already established in recitation. The analysis presented in this chapter opens new avenues for recitation by encouraging a deeper experiential hearing and rendition of cosmic levels and a more systematic approach to concentric sets. This rendition may involve dynamically adjusting tempo, mode (*maqām*), melodic direction, vocal range, and expressive or theatrical portrayal of meanings, among other elements, to align with the tonal characteristics of each verse, section, or sura. These aspects, already integral to recitation practice, can expand the hermeneutic significance of the aesthetics of delivery.

Furthermore, Q 39:23 identifies a movement from an affective tension to resolution as the experience of God's guidance (*dhālika huda'l-lāh*). Expressed with the striking imagery of the shivering and softening of skin and heart, divine guidance is associated with a spiritual contact with the Qur'anic voice, manifesting a purgative, or cathartic, transformative experience. The psycho-spiritual hermeneutic significance of this transformative communication entails outlining the cognitive-motivational, behavioral, and affective purposes and the audiences of Qur'anic voice at each level, vis-à-vis the psychological responses that align with or counter such purgative impact. In charting the dynamics of this interaction, the rhetorical frameworks— formal, legal, and political—along with the characteristics of each cosmic world, provide a valuable repository of affective material. I suggest such exploration would lay the foundations for a psychological exegesis, scrutinizing the rhetorical, psychological, and spiritual transformative purposes of the Qur'anic voice at both individual and socio-political levels.

The tonal character of each structure further provides insight into the mystical experience of Qur'anic voice at each cosmic level. Various Sufi states (*ḥāl*) at these levels can be related

with varying degrees of contraction and expansion of space-time and the resulting tension and relaxation. I suggest the alternation of tension and relaxation can be linked with a wide variety of dual Sufi concepts, including *jalāl* (awesomeness) and *jamāl* (beauty), *qabḍ* (contraction) and *basṭ* (expansion), *jamʿ* (unification) and *farq* (separation), *fanāʾ* (annihilation) and *baqāʾ* (subsistence), *ghayba* (absence) and *ḥuḍūr* (presence), *sakr* (intoxication) and *saḥw* (sobriety), *maḥw* (erasure) and *ithbāt* (affirmation), *talwīn* (inconsistency) and *tamkīn* (stability), *qurb* (proximity) and *buʿd* (distance), *khawf* (fear) *and rajāʾ* (hope), and various other concepts found in Sufi terminology of mystical experience. The exploration of these states within Qurʾanic composition would further elucidate the affective character of each structure, serve as an affective hermeneutic framework, and contribute to Sufi theory by grounding these states directly in Qur'anic composition.

Conclusion

Confluence:

Towards an Affective-Analytical Approach to Qur'anic Composition

maraja'l-baḥrayni yaltaqiyān
baynahuma barzakhu'l-lā yabghiyān[263]

– Q 55:19-20

Qur'anic ring composition exhibits a systematic and nested hierarchy of cosmic levels, presenting itself as a self-referential whole. It confirms the Sufi experience, which argues for a comprehensive structural correspondence between the Qur'an and the cosmos. Additionally, the cosmic levels progress in conjunction with rhetorical and inherent musical structures, throwing light on the two most fundamental domains of the Muslim experience. As such, cosmological, rhetorical, and inherent musical structures clarify autonomous aspects of Qur'anic composition while reinforcing each other, crystallizing the demarcation of the concentric framework. This systematic structural unity illuminates the convergence of sound, meaning, structure, and affect, revealing the synthesized character of the Qur'anic voice, deemed inimitable in the Muslim experience.

This synthesized character bridges the long-standing gap between the affective experience and analytical examination of Qur'anic composition in both Muslim and Western

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263. Yusuf Ali (2015) translates the verse as "He has let free the two bodies of flowing water, meeting together: Between them is a Barrier which they do not transgress." (Q 55:19-20). According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the two seas (*baḥrayn*) represent the intellectual and sensory realms of existence, which do not directly interact. Instead, these realms converge at the level of imagination (*khayāl*), where meanings manifest into forms and perception becomes more subtle. See Ḥakīm, "Majmaʿa'l-Baḥrayn," 276. Similarly, Ibn al-ʿArabī elsewhere associates these two seas with higher and lower realms, seemingly alluding to the isthmus (*barzakh*) between them as another area of sea. See Ḥakīm, "Baḥr," 186. I suggest these accounts can be linked with the tripartite division of spirit, heart, and soul, with the heart serving as a point of intersection and convergence, despite having its distinct character.

scholarships, manifesting in ways peculiar to each tradition. This bridging yields productive outcomes for both scholarships, fostering cross-traditional communication. It opens new avenues in Muslim studies and encourages Western research into the Qur'an's rhetorical, aesthetic, and spiritual experience vis-à-vis its structure, each elucidating and systematizing the other.

In Sufi theory, the Qur'an's structural correspondence with the cosmos and the human self evinces the comprehensive experiential scope of the perceived synthesized quality of Qur'anic voice. The mystical states that resonate with the wavelengths, so to speak, of Qur'anic structure that embodies sound and meaning as a single entity serve as the medium between these three realms. According to Ibn alʿArabī, the cosmos is the Great Corpus (*al-muṣḥaf al-kabīr*), which God recites through mystical states (*tilāwa al-ḥāl*).[264] The demarcation of cosmic levels within Qur'anic composition and their intrinsic musicality sheds some light on the experience of this mystical affect.

Even when cosmic levels remain unidentified, the holistic experience of the Qur'anic speech, conceptualized through the notion of *naẓm*, defines the Muslim experience. To the Muslim scholar's ear, the eloquence (*balāgha*) and linguistic purity (*faṣāḥa*) embedded in the convergent arrangement (*naẓm*) of utterance (*lafẓ*) and meaning (*maʿnā*) communicates an inimitable rhetorical and aesthetic affect. The case of the present-day Muslim experience remains virtually identical, with the relationship of sound and meaning within Qur'anic voice serving as the core medium of inimitability.[265] Nelson describes this experience as being embedded in an "almost onomatopoeic use of language, so that not only the image of the metaphor but also the sound of the words which express that image are perceived to converge with the meaning"

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264. Ḥakīm, "Al-Muṣḥaf al-Kabīr," 683.

265. Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, 5-13.

(2001, 13). Highlighting the impact of Qur'anic sound alone, practices of Qur'anic memorization and recitation, integral to Muslim piety, transcend linguistic differences for non-Arabic speaking Muslims worldwide.

The Lacuna Between Experience and Analysis

The structural affect of Qur'anic progression has largely remained experiential in Muslim scholarship and has been nearly entirely neglected in Western Qur'an research. I suggest that the evident reason for these complications is the high degree of complexity arising from the rigorously systematic self-referential framework of Qur'anic ring composition itself. This holistic framework operates under a single compositional principle, i.e. the descent of cosmic levels in a nested fashion, which governs the structural spectrum through constant variation. Therefore, when this principle is not recognized, Qur'anic composition may initially appear elusive in terms of organization, preventing prolonged aesthetic engagement and prompting a search for coherence. It resists, with a high degree of stability, to approaches that do not consistently account for the holistic organization at multiple levels of composition. However, the aesthetic experience, particularly at the recitational level, is constantly clarified by the harmony of the systematic movement itself, which increasingly conditions its addressee. This holistic experience appears to prevent an impulse for the search for coherence within the sura structure. This argument accounts for the predominantly experiential engagement in the Muslim context, including the extensive aural engagement of non-Arabic speaking Muslims, and the lack of experience and resulting impression of disjointedness in Western research.

The absence of identifying the systematic ring composition creates varying manners of split between experience and analysis in Muslim and Western scholarship. In the Muslim context, the prolonged aesthetic experience of Qur'anic recitation contrasts with the prevailing

atomistic focus in analysis. This polarity suggests a complex divide between affective experience and analytical engagement due to the lack of a methodical framework that connects the two realms by illustrating how structure works vis-à-vis aesthetic affect.

Medieval literary theory is characterized by an aesthetic orientation to the sentence construction (*naẓm*) of Qur'anic verses. As epitomized by ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's (d. 471/1078) grammatical analysis, the analysis at the level of verse functions as a unifying matrix of affective and analytical engagement. This merger succeeds in elevating the perception of Qur'anic inimitability (*iʿjāz*) to a doctrinal level. However, the linguistic approach to *naẓm* does not examine how grammatical features interact with the specific dynamics of aesthetic affect. This lack of systematic contact leads to conceptualizing Qur'anic inimitability ultimately as a matter of aesthetic taste. For instance, prominent rhetorician Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sakkākī (d. 626/1228) asserts that Qur'an's inimitability (*iʿjāz*), arising from its eloquence (*balāgha*), is ineffable, arguing that its grasp can only be facilitated through cultivating taste by extensive engagement with rhetorical sciences.[266]

In medieval to modern Qur'an exegesis, the scope of *naẓm* begins to expand from a linguistic to a structural approach. While the linguistic notion of Qur'anic inimitability is well-established in exegetical literature, this shift highlights a growing divergence between spontaneous aesthetic experience and deliberative structural focus. This split becomes more pronounced with larger-scale demarcation of structures in 20th century Muslim Qur'anic exegesis. Certain scholars, notably Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), emphasize aspects of structural affect, such as intrinsic musicality (*mūsīqā dākhilī*) and the affective ambiance (*jaww*) of sura

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266. Sekkâkî, *Miftâhu'l-Ulûm*, 498.

structures.[267] However, these affective aspects have not been integrated into structural analysis despite their structural and, by extension, hermeneutic significance.

In Western scholarship, the chronological framework inherited from biblical traditions, along with a notable absence of experiential and aesthetic engagement, has led to the perception of the Qur'an's composition as fragmented. The unifying aural flow and inherent musicality of Qur'anic progression, central to the Qur'anic experience for both Arabic and non-Arabic speaking Muslims, have been eclipsed. The segmentation of continuous tonal alternations has been recognized, as seen in D. Müller's suggestion of the Qur'an's strophic composition, which was initially dismissed until its later development by Angelika Neuwirth's micro-structural analysis. Additionally, a historical-critical focus inclined to attribute the perceived fragmentariness to conjectural formulations of the canonization of the Qur'anic corpus has significantly marginalized, if not nearly entirely dismissed, the aesthetic experience.

Given the lack of a stable foundation for a joint literary and historical analysis, the search for structural coherence—whether perceived as originally intended by the author or interpreted as secondary compositions—has increasingly characterized Western Qur'an research. However, while compositional analysis examines sophisticated formal, thematic, and linguistic markers, the search for coherence remains isolated from affective experience. Consequently, the historical focus on the emergence and development of the Qur'an, its canonization, and its relationship to late antiquity and biblical traditions interferes with a purely synchronic engagement.

Cuypers' pioneering thesis of Semitic rhetoric and Farrin's analysis of ring composition depart from this framework, moving towards a systematic synchronic analysis. However, their focus on thematic parallelism without an affective hearing of the sura's aural and semantic

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267. Kutub, *Kur'ân'da Edebî Tasvîr*, 130, 135, 139.

movement provides an approximate image of ring composition, often leading to vagueness in structural delineations. As the analysis of cosmic levels shows, the notion of parallelism in the absence of recognizing the nuanced pairings—such as between *lāhūt* as the locus of being and *ʿadam* as non-being—offers an imprecise foundation to detect the concentric pattern. This imprecision, as Sinai highlights, runs the risk of a reductionist inclination, imposing concentric structure upon the composition.[268] Consequently, while offering a groundbreaking discovery, the lack of experiential engagement characteristic of Western approaches continues to define the analysis of ring composition, necessitating a merger of affective and analytical approach.

An Affective-cum-Analytical Approach

This dissertation is motivated by the need to clarify Qur'anic ring composition and its rhetorical, spiritual, and aesthetic experience, which constitute the fundamental aspects that define the Muslim perception of the Qur'an's inimitability (*iʿjāz*). It addresses the question of movement: how the Qur'anic structure moves and how it *moves* the reciter and audience. The Qur'an performs this motion through a singular pattern, comprising a joint descending movement of cosmic, rhetorical, and inherent musical structures. This self-referential and systematically nested pattern conditions the listener to discern and experience its variations at multiple levels of composition. This extraordinary convergent motion spotlights what I conceptualize as the synthesized character of Qur'anic voice, eliciting the experience of divine speech. This conceptualization aligns with the pervading Sufi interpretation of the term *qurʾān*

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268. See Sinai, "Going Round in Circles," 110, 119.

and *kitāb*, denoting that which collects and synthesizes, marking the genre of Qur'anic scripture.[269]

The rhetorical organization of the sura structure effectively highlights the unique oratorical coherence of Qur'anic delivery. This organization demonstrates a vertical integration of formal, legal, and political types of speech, presenting a self-referential rhetorical microcosm of divine politics. If we take the rhetorical context of al-Fātiḥa (Q 1) and the examined portion of al-Baqara (Q 2), the formal register presents God as the wise, educating, and loving authority, who is singularly all-active yet also transcendent and ineffable. Concretizing this ineffability, the legal register serves as the locus of mediation and encounter, providing an intersectional medium where God manifests as the King, the head of state, accompanied by His officials, including angels. This register establishes an interface for divine-human interaction. In the lower domain, the vicegerents, epitomized by the Prophets, represent the King, conveying His self-revelation, instructions, and guidance, which govern the subjects' pursuit of prosperity and security. This pursuit is framed by the subjects' recognition of the transcendent God and their compliance with or defiance of His authority as their King. The relationship between divine kingship and the subordinate political sphere of human subjects forms a relational framework that defines the terms of engagement with God. This engagement is set within a temporally transient framework of divine guidance, leading to the subjects' eventual encounter with the King, where the implications of their relationship with the transcendent God and their obedience or defiance to His sovereignty are ultimately decided.

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269. See Ḥakīm, "Qur'an al-Kabīr," 908; Ḥakīm, "Kitāb," 950.

This transformative process provides a comprehensive framework that dictates the conditions of the suras' rhetorical hermeneutic. Each rhetorical register also establishes a hermeneutic framework based on the features and purposes of the type of rhetorical speech within this process. This transformative dialogical framework animates the rich and expressive affective gestures of Qur'anic discourse, including praise, criticism, accusation, defense, encouragement, and dissuasion, among many other psychologically nuanced emotive acts. These gestures guide the subjects' in their engagement with divine guidance.

The exploration of cosmic worlds within Qur'anic ring composition further elucidates the self-referential structural coherence, demonstrating the Qur'an's essential cosmological and mystical-experiential orientation. The analysis of al-Fātiḥa (Q 1) and al-Baqara (Q 2) shows that each concentric register aligns with a cosmic world, indicating a distinct cluster of thematic and affective characteristics, revealing nuanced pairings between higher and lower registers. Here, each register emerges as an integral part of an archetypal concentric set. This archetypal pattern enables extraordinary intertextual variation and fluidity across cosmic levels throughout Qur'anic suras.

The analysis of the inherent musical features of cosmic levels performs the movement of the Qur'anic structure from tension toward resolution. Within this overarching framework of descending motion, each level exhibits complex manners of contraction and expansion of their space-time, expressing tension and resolution. This tonal progression highlights the affective atmosphere and gestures of each cosmic and rhetorical level across various compositional registers. This inherent musicality offers a mystical and aesthetic insight into the structural affect of Qur'anic composition.

The enhanced structural clarity and affective expression define the context of each cosmic level and crystallize their holistic hermeneutic framework. Throughout the listener's spiritual journey vis-à-vis the recitation, structural movement evidently demands that one experiences each level within the contraction and expansion of its space-time. This tonal motion, as clarified in Q 39:23, encompasses the awe-inspiring and cathartic union, followed by subsequent relaxation, conveyed through the sensory and spiritual embodiment of the synthesized character of divine speech, identified as God's guidance. As such, the hermeneutic context of Qur'anic voice becomes definitive only through its holistic experience, transcending literal meaning that is disengaged from structural affect. This experiential hermeneutics is grounded in the cognitive-motivational, affective, and behavioral purposes of Qur'anic revelation at each rhetorical register, with the tonal disposition of cosmic levels crystalizing their experiential depth.

Future Implications

The elucidation of Qur'anic ring composition has decisive implications for future synchronic and historical analysis. The rhetorical, cosmological, and inherent musical aspects of Muslim experience posited in this thesis are applicable across the Qur'anic corpus, necessitating further exploration. A comprehensive analysis of Qur'anic *topoi* specific to each type of rhetorical speech would delineate their range and possible sub-divisions and how these types form a whole. Beyond the exploration of cosmic worlds, a systematic study of the rich repository of designations for cosmic levels in Sufi metaphysics would significantly enhance the scope and precision of cosmological analysis.[270] Additionally, analyzing the various styles of inherent

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270. Common designations include God's names and attributes, grammatical categories (such as self, attribute, act, etc.), skies (*samāwāt*), celestial spheres (*aflāk*), worlds (*ʿawālim*), their inhabitants, the Prophets representing each level, and various specific terms for levels

musical progressions and atmosphere that characterize the aurality of Qur'anic suras across the corpus promises to deepen the hearing of the actual, affective voice of rhetorical and cosmic structures.

For the analysis of the cosmology of Qur'anic corpus, I suggest that each sura resonates with a zodiacal constellation, with each twelve suras forming a coherent set. This correspondence is evident in how the archetypal astrological features of the zodiac signs align with the themes, vocabulary, stylistic features, and inherent musical atmosphere of Qur'anic suras. The ten sets—with the tenth ending halfway—appear to follow the same pattern of descent through cosmic levels, from the divine to the spiritual and material domains. Further analysis of Qur'anic corpus will clarify this descending movement. Therefore, detailed exploration of zodiacal and planetary archetypes in relation to the Qur'anic suras remains a desideratum. This task includes astrological and astronomical exploration of the space-times of Qur'anic structure.

Ring composition enables a synchronic examination of the structure of Qur'anic suras, independent of their historical and chronological contexts. However, when the rhetorical and cosmic organization of the Qur'anic corpus crystalizes, the chronological sequence of revelation can be contextualized as a spiritual and social journey of the early Muslim community through various cosmic levels. This process, from the Meccan to the Medinan periods, broadly reflects an ascending movement towards higher cosmic registers. Such a movement illuminates the transformative process experienced by the early community and the mystical experiences of the Prophet Muḥammad.

(*marātib*), individuations (*taʿayyunāt*), presences (*ḥaḍarāt*), stations (*maqāmat*), the constituents of the human self (such as *rūḥ*, *qalb*, and *nafs*), ranks of the human soul (*nufūs al-sabʿa*), and stages of the mystical path, within which numerous Qur'anic and extra-Qur'anic concepts are situated.

In addition to the Qur'an, ongoing exploration suggests that various prophetic traditions (*aḥādīth*) exhibit a rhetorical and cosmic structure aligned with the framework proposed in this thesis. This framework offers a significant text-critical criterion for examining the structure and content of prophetic traditions, as well as their correspondence with Qur'anic structure. Alongside the Qur'anic movement toward higher cosmic levels, this text-critical foundation would facilitate the organization of traditions into cosmic levels based on their chronology and genre. As such, this approach can contribute to the formation of a cosmologically modulated hadith corpus.

In light of the cosmology of Qur'anic ring composition, it is also significant to reconsider the Qur'an's relationship to its late antique milieu, including pre-Islamic oral and poetic production and circulating biblical traditions. Continuing research suggests that a cosmological conception of arrangement is present in biblical texts. For instance, the first chapter of the Book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible, which addresses the phases of the creation of the universe, the earth, and various forms of life, demonstrates an apparent descent through the cosmic levels. Therefore, an extensive exploration of biblical texts is a significant endeavor that will elucidate the cosmological context of relationship between the Qur'an and biblical texts.

I further suggest that cosmological organization is prominently attested in a wide variety of fundamental Sufi works. Preliminary research identifies this pattern in the writings of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111), ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166), Muḥyi'd-dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240), Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (d. 1273), Aḥmad al-Fārūqī al-Sirhindī (d. 1624), and two modern scholars, Said Nursi (d. 1960) and Muhammed Fethullah Gülen (b. 1941). The works of each of these figures, along with those of various other Sufis, merits systematic structural exploration to substantiate the preliminary remarks proposed here.

Safawi and Weightman's pioneering 2009 work *Rumi's Mystical Design* provides an initial foundation of ring composition and various forms of parallelism in Rūmī's *Mathnāwī*. My ongoing exploration reveals that the *Mathnawī* suggests a rigorous cosmological structure in the sequencing of its books, their sections, and couplets. Similarly, Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (The Ringstones of Wisdom) is another emblematic work that systematically demonstrates a cosmic pattern. It seems to be characterized by an overall tripartite structural descent, with each part comprising nine cosmic worlds, corresponding to the individual sections of the book. Each section also reflects this nested pattern of descent, maintaining the same intricate structure.

In the modern period, the corpus of the late Ottoman-early republican scholar Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur* (Treatise of Light), reflects a systematic cosmological design. It seems that each book in the collection is constructed around a planetary archetype. The epistles within each book frequently exhibit a cosmic descent, while the sequence of epistles in the book progresses thematically in alignment with the zodiacal signs. Additionally, the works and sermons of Fethullah Gülen, particularly his multi-volume Sufi treatise *Kalbin Zümrüt Tepeleri* (Emerald Hills of the Heart), demonstrate a cosmological organization. Each series in Gülen's collection appears to correspond with a planetary archetype. Similar to *Risale-i Nur*, each article within these series reflects a nested descent through cosmic levels, with the articles following a sequence through the zodiacal signs. These and many other Sufi works share a common structural foundation with the Qur'an and among themselves, creating a rich and systematic intertextuality. Consequently, these works serve as structural exegeses of the Qur'an and of each other, based on cosmic levels, thereby consolidating and crystallizing their thematic character and experiential scope.

Qur'anic ring composition and the aspects of Muslim experience addressed in this thesis call for a collaborative effort to reconsider both synchronic and historical analysis of the Qur'an, the hadith corpus, and biblical texts. Additionally, the cosmological basis of Qur'anic composition provides a framework for re-examining the methodologies and conceptual tools of classical Islamic sciences, including Sufi theory, grounding them directly in the Qur'an's rhetorical, cosmological, and aesthetic structure.

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