

From Ethico-Religious Exhortation to Legal Paraenesis: Functions of Qur'anic *Wa'z*

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Abstract

This essay examines qur'anic "exhortation" and "legal paraenesis" in light of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and late antique biblical traditions. It analyzes the verb *wa'aḏa* and related forms in narrative and legal/legislative sections of suras that can be assigned to different chronological stages of the Qur'an's textual genesis. Qur'anic exhortations initially occur in narratives about messengers sent to unbelieving peoples. The word *maw'īza* then becomes part of the self-referential vocabulary of the Qur'an and is used to characterize the contents of Moses' Tablets. This linguistic development anticipates a process of legal and regulatory actualization, specification, and exposition: in the Medinan period, legal discourse is framed with the verb *wa'aḏa*. The emerging Medinan legal paraenesis puts emphasis on social applicability, but it is neither parochial nor does it break with Meccan ethics. Instead, it connects the communication and implementation of laws, rulings, and commands to human volition in a specific social context.

Keywords

Qur'anic law – exhortation – paraenesis – legal instruction – preaching – Medinan suras – Meccan suras

Introduction

In the mid-1970s, legal scholars started exploring the relevance of literature and literary criticism for legal study, a project that culminated in the Law and Literature movement.¹ The claim that legal texts should be approached as literary discourses and studied together with them is not a trivial one. When applied to Islamic legal culture, it has implications for our understanding of how law in the Qur'an is articulated and conceptualized. By paying attention to "legal communication," this essay engages with the "poethics" of qur'anic law-making.² It addresses the imbrication of law and literary composition, specifically oration, and hortatory and paraenetic discourse, through an analysis of the qur'anic concept of *wa'z*, "exhortation" or "paraenesis." The nominal form *wa'z* itself does not occur, but the verb *wa'aza* and related forms do occur in narrative and legal/legislative sections of the Qur'an.³ They can be assigned to different chronological stages of the Qur'an's textual genesis.

One who engages with hortatory and paraenetic discourse in the Qur'an must confront a history of ambivalent attitudes toward this kind of speech. There is hardly any Arabic literary genre that was more cherished and at the same time more reviled than popular preaching, *wa'z*.⁴ In early Islamic times, the popular preacher (*wā'iz*, sometimes *mudhakkir*), whose role overlapped with that of

1 On the "Law and Literature Movement," see Ian Ward, "From Literature to Ethics: The Strategies and Ambitions of Law and Literature," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 14:3 (1994): 389–400.

2 Richard H. Weisberg, *Poethics and Other Strategies of Law and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). Quotation *ibid.*, 46. For Weisberg "poethics" is a pedagogical project. He calls for "a revival of jurisprudence through literary sources and techniques." Ward, "From Literature to Ethics," presents critical reflections on Weisberg's ideas.

3 The verb *wa'aza* and related forms occur in Meccan suras: Q al-A'raf 7:145 and 164; Yūnus 10:57; Hūd 11:46 and 120; al-Naḥl 16:90 and 125; al-Shu'arā' 26:136 (twice); Luqmān 31:13; Saba' 34:46; and in Medinan suras: al-Baqara 2:66, 231, 232, and 275; Āl 'Imrān 3:138; al-Nisā' 4:34, 58, 63, and 66; al-Mā'ida 5:46; al-Nūr 24:17 and 34; al-Mujādala 58:3; as well as al-Ṭalāq 65:2.

4 On Arabic oration, see Tahera Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration: Art and Function* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), and *idem*, "Khuṭba: The Evolution of Early Arabic Oration," in *Classical Arabic Humanities in Their Own Terms: Festschrift for Wolfhart Heinrichs on His 65th Birthday Presented by His Students and Colleagues*, ed. Beatrice Gruendler with the assistance of Michael Cooperson (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 176–273. On popular preaching, see Johannes Pedersen, "The Islamic Preacher: Wā'iz, Mudhakkir, Qāṣṣ," in *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume. Part I*, ed. Samuel Löwinger et al. (Budapest: Globus, 1948), 226–51; and *idem*, "The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher," *Die Welt des Islams* 2 (1953): 215–31. More recent studies include Lyall R. Armstrong, *The Quṣṣās of Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); and Jonathan P. Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).

the storyteller (*qāṣṣ*),⁵ was “at the center of the process by which the nascent religion defined itself,”⁶ notably with respect to the articulation and diffusion of Islamic ethics and law. But despite or, more likely, because of this crucial role, *waʿz* later came under attack from two sides: mystics, on the one hand,⁷ and traditionists and jurists, on the other.⁸ Both groups vigorously opposed this mode of preaching. And yet, the connection between *waʿz* and legal instruction was never dissolved. When ‘Alā’ al-Dīn b. al-‘Aṭṭār al-Dimashqī (d. 724/1324) reflects on the *mawʿiza* (“exhortation,” “paraenesis”), which he considers to be a function of the *khuṭba* (“oration”), he demands that “the *mawʿiza*, each and every time, must satisfy people’s needs with regard to legal rulings they ignore.”⁹ Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār thus demands that the listeners’ legal needs be fulfilled: they are to be instructed in what they do not know about Islamic law.

The general lack of scholarly interest in qur’anic *waʿz* may be a consequence of an unconscious bias resulting from the ferocious criticism directed against the practices connected to *waʿz*. Even more important, qur’anic self-referentiality, i.e., “the overriding concern of the Prophet’s recitation with itself,” has in general received comparatively little scholarly attention.¹⁰ The role of

5 Berkey, *Popular Preaching*, 14, argues that it is difficult to establish a meaningful hierarchy of the different offices and functions of preaching. The designations *wāʿiz* and *qāṣṣ*, he contends, have “flexible, functional, contingent, and overlapping meanings.” They stand not for “categorical types” but for “activities or even different aspects of the same activity.”

6 Berkey, *Popular Preaching*, 22.

7 For the criticism by the Sufis, see Pedersen, “Criticism,” 221, and Berkey, *Popular Preaching*, 27.

8 Jurists, for example, criticized preachers for disseminating weak hadiths and for displaying what was perceived as a startling lack of certainty in doctrine. See Pedersen, “Islamic Preacher,” 244–45, and idem, “Criticism,” especially 222. Two of the most illustrious critics were Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), the latter a celebrated preacher who formulated his own vision of legitimate popular preaching. See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa-l-mudhakkirīn* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983 [1403]).

9 Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār, *Kitāb Adab al-khaṭīb* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1996), 125: *wa-yanbaghī an takūn al-mawʿiza fī kull waqt wa-zamān ‘alā ḥasab ḥājat al-nās ilayhā mim mā yajhalūnahu min al-aḥkām al-sharʿiyya*.

10 Exceptions include Stefan Wild, ed., *Self-Referentiality in the Qurʾān* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006) (quoting Wild’s introduction, *ibid.*, 3), and Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même: vocabulaire et argumentation du discours coranique autoréférentiel* (Leiden: Boston, 2014). For specific examples of qur’anic self-referentiality, e.g., *kitāb*, see Daniel Madigan, *The Qurʾān’s Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). On scriptural orality, see William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même*, 3–6, includes a detailed overview of publications touching on the topic of qur’anic self-referentiality.

self-referentiality in the Qur'an distinguishes it from Jewish and Christian scripture: the Qur'an is "both itself and *about* itself," as Daniel Madigan has stated.¹¹ The verb *wa'aza* and its different forms are often part of the qur'anic discourse about itself, functioning as "self-predications."¹² Muslim philologists and theologians were clearly aware of *wa'z* as a qur'anic self-referential category. Abū Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī (849/1445–911/1505), in a chapter in his "Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'an" (*al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-qur'ān*) lists *maw'iza* as the eighth term in a sequence of fifty-five names and attributes of the Qur'an.¹³

To this day, qur'anic *wa'z* has not been studied in any detail,¹⁴ although Joseph Lowry has demonstrated the importance of literary context for an attentive reading of the Qur'an's legal passages. This often means integrating legal/legislative discourse with literary discourse, especially narrative.¹⁵ Following Lowry, I define "legal" as that which imposes an obligation on listeners "to engage in specific, repeatable physical (i.e., not purely mental) conduct."¹⁶ In this essay, I argue that law in the Qur'an is generated, communicated, and appropriated in the framework of hortatory and paraenetic discourse. The essay sheds light on the changing functions of qur'anic *wa'z* by tracing a development from ethico-religious exhortation to legal and regulatory actualization, specification, and exposition.

Some qualifications are in order. I use the terms "ethico-religious exhortation" and "legal paraenesis" and describe how the former transforms into the latter to indicate a qualitative change, not one of category. Some scholars have

11 Madigan, *Qur'an's Self-Image*, 62. Also quoted by Wild (ed.), *Self-Referentiality*, 5.

12 For a classification of different types of self-referentiality, see Wild (ed.), *Self-Referentiality*, 7–11. He mentions the term *maw'iza*, *ibid.*, 10.

13 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-qur'ān*, ed. Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyya (n.p.: Wizārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1426 AH), 337. In al-Suyūṭī's chapter on the names of the Qur'an, *maw'iza* follows *kitāb* (*mubīn*), *qur'ān* (*karīm*), *kalām*, *nūr*, *hudan wa-raḥma*, *furqān*, and *shifā'a*.

14 Pedersen, "Islamic Preacher," 227, and Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même*, 159–60, provide brief discussions of some occurrences of *wa'z* in the Qur'an.

15 See especially Joseph E. Lowry, "Reading the Qur'an as a Law Book," *Yale Law School Legal Scholarship Repository: Occasional Papers* 13 (2015), accessed December 12, 2020, http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/ylsop_papers/13; *idem*, "Reading the Qur'an as a Law Book: Legislation, Language, and Allusion in Islam's Scripture," in *Arabic Belles Lettres*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry and Shawkat M. Toorawa (Atlanta: Lockwood, 2019), 3–18; and *idem*, "When Less is More: Law and Commandment in *Sūrat al-An'ām*," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9:2 (2007): 22–42.

16 Joseph E. Lowry, "Law, Structure, and Meaning in *Sūrat al-Baqarah*," *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association* 2 (2017): 111–48, at 118.

used the terms “exhortation” and “paraenesis” interchangeably,¹⁷ while others have highlighted nuances in specificity. “Exhortation” or “hortatory” discourse can accordingly refer to texts “whose appeals are less clearly defined” and “paraenesis” to texts “with specific injunctions,”¹⁸ such as commands, orders, charges, directives, and instructions. John Gammie, for example, defines paraenesis as “a form of address which not only commends, but actually enumerates precepts and maxims which pertain to moral aspiration and the regulation of human conduct.”¹⁹ By highlighting the qualitative difference between “exhortation” and “paraenesis,” I do not wish to create a dichotomy between ethics and law. According to A. Kevin Reinhart, Islamic ethics and law are inseparable, since “Islamic law is the central domain of Islamic ethical thought.”²⁰ When I speak of “ethico-religious exhortation” and “legal paraenesis,” it is my intention to trace lines of continuity between one and the other, not to set them apart. I also hope to shed light on connections between legal/legislative and non-legal (narrative etc.) qur’anic discourse that have previously been overlooked. It is true that the Qur’an can be understood as a record of Muḥammad’s preaching, as Walid Saleh has insisted.²¹ As such, it is to be expected that the hortatory and the paraenetic are expansive categories with blurred borders. Exhortation and paraenesis serve as macro forms into which different literary forms are inserted. While both are intended for ethical instruction, legal/legislative material as defined above is by and large inserted almost exclusively into Medinan suras, albeit alongside other literary forms.

The chronological model at the basis of this essay is Gustav Weil/Theodor Nöldeke’s classification of early, middle, late Meccan, and Medinan suras,

17 See, for example, Leo G. Perdue, “The Social Character of Paraenesis and Paraenetic Literature,” *Semeia* 50 (1990): 5–39, at 5, 8, and *passim*. Cf. Stephen Westerholm, “Four Maccabees: A Paraenetic Address?,” in *idem*, *Law and Ethics in Early Judaism and the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 85–111, at 103, 104, and *passim*.

18 Westerholm, “Four Maccabees,” 100, n. 36, building on Troels Engberg-Pedersen.

19 John G. Gammie, “Paraenetic Literature: Toward the Morphology of a Secondary Genre,” *Semeia* 50 (1990): 41–77, at 51.

20 A. Kevin Reinhart, “Islamic Law as Islamic Ethics,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 11:2 (1983): 186–203, at 187. Reinhart comes to this conclusion on the basis of an examination of the *fiqh*-process, in the course of which “initial moral insights are systematically and self-consciously transformed into enforceable guidelines and attractive ideals for all of human life” (*ibid.*, 199).

21 See Walid A. Saleh, “The Preacher of the Meccan Qur’an: Deuteronomistic History and Confessionalism in Muḥammad’s Early Preaching,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 20:2 (2018): 74–111, at 75 and *passim*. Saleh focuses on the preacher rather than the modalities of preaching and limits himself to the Meccan suras.

which is based on Islamic traditional classifications of Meccan and Medinan suras. The Weil/Nöldeke chronology has been developed and refined in recent years.²² It can help us understand the evolution of the Qur'an's self-referential terminology over the Meccan and Medinan periods and shed light on organic ties between Meccan and Medinan themes and discourses.

I contend that *wa'z* reflects the process whereby a qur'anic concept of law-making crystallizes. This concept is strongly grounded in an oral mode of moral and ethical instruction that resonates with late antique Jewish and Christian hortatory and paraenetic discourse. In what follows, I will examine the first introduction of hortatory discourse in qur'anic narratives, where it plays a pivotal role in the speeches of messengers and the sage Luqmān (Part 1). From that point in time, exhortation develops into a self-reflexive meta-category that is based on an etiology relating to the moment when Moses received the Tablets (Part 2). Framing legal/legislative passages, *wa'z* leaves a strong paraenetic imprint on the organization of the legal sections of the Medinan suras (Part 3). By selectively integrating into my analyses of qur'anic verses and passages biblical and post-biblical traditions, on the one hand, and Arabic poetry and Islamic theological and commentarial texts, on the other, I wish to shed light on the Qur'an's organic links with a variety of traditions. These different perspectives on the Qur'an are often seen as incompatible. It is therefore also my aim to demonstrate that this must not be the case and that an analysis sensitive to different intellectual and literary traditions can, on the contrary, significantly refine our understanding of fundamental philological and theological principles and ideas found in the Qur'an.

22 See Theodor Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909). In this essay, I follow the chronological ordering proposed by Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), and idem, *Der Koran*, vols. 1 and 2/1 (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen 2011 and 2017). On the history of qur'anic chronology, see Emmanuelle Stefanidis, "The Qur'an Made Linear: A Study of the *Geschichte des Qorāns*' Chronological Reordering," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10:2 (2008): 1–22. For a critical approach to inner-qur'anic chronology, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Le Problème de la chronologie du Coran," *Arabica* 58:6 (2011): 477–502. Nöldeke's chronology is refined and modified in Nicolai Sinai, "The Qur'ān as Process," in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 407–39, and idem, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 111–37.

Waʿz as Ethico-Religious and Moral Exhortation

Waʿz was a feature of ancient Arabic poetry. For example, the poet ʿAbīd b. al-Abrāṣ (fl. first half of the sixth c.) and Labīd b. Rabiʿa (d. 40/660–61), a *mukhaḍram* poet, i.e. one who lived to witness the emergence of Islam, ascribed exhortations to fate (*dahr*).²³ In both cases, the references to *waʿz* are embedded in poems strongly marked by reflections on the annihilation of tribal groups. ʿAbīd’s “Suspended Ode” (*muʿallaqa*) opens with a lament for the Asad tribe:

- 1 Desolate, without its people, is Malḥūb; likewise al-Quṭabiyyāt; likewise al-Dhanūb;
- 2 Likewise Rākis; likewise Thuʿaylibāt; likewise Dhāt Firqayn; likewise al-Qalīb;
- 3 Likewise ʿArda; likewise Qafā Ḥibirr – there is not one of them in those places.
- 4 They have [taken in] wild things instead of their people; things have changed their state.
- 5 It is a land that has been inherited by death; everyone who dwelt in it has been despoiled –
- 6 Either slain or dead in some other way – and gray hair is a [mark of] shame for those who [survived and now] have gray hair.²⁴

Rather than expressing the customary “fond nostalgia” of the *nasīb*, the poem offers a description of desolation that is full of despair.²⁵ The poet goes on to describe his copious tears (vv. 7–10) and to reflect on his own graying hair (v. 11). The verb *waʿaḏa* occurs in the ensuing section, which is characterized by “stoical pessimism” and in which the poetic persona muses about the inevitability of change and decay:²⁶

- 19 Man cannot exhort the one who is not exhorted by fate (*lā yaʿīzu l-nāsu man lam yaʿīzi l-dahru*); trying to instill wisdom is of no avail.

23 The verses discussed here have been identified by Pedersen, “Islamic Preacher,” 228. I am grateful to Nicolai Sinai for drawing my attention to ʿAbīd’s poem.

24 For the poem, see Alan Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry: Select Poems* (Reading: Ithaca, 2011), 309–35 (translation modified).

25 Ibid., 312.

26 Ibid., 319.

Paradoxically, the rejection of man's ability to exhort and to be exhorted, by man or by fate, is followed in v. 21 closely by an exhortation articulated by the poetic persona: "Give help in any land in which you happen to be" (*sā'id bi-arḍin idhā kunta bihā*).

As for Labīd b. Rabī'a, he refers to *wa'z* towards the beginning of his poem:²⁷

- 1 Ask man what he aims for! Is it to fulfil a solemn promise? Or is it error and vanity?
- 2 The snares are strewn in his path (*bi-sabīlihī*) and he perishes even if the snares miss him.
- 3 If a man has labored for a night, he thinks that he is done, but man must labor as long as he lives.
- 4 Say to him, if he wants to plan out his affairs, "Has fate not yet exhorted you (*a-lammā ya'izuka l-dahru*)? May your mother be bereft of her son!"

The rest of the poem is a sustained contemplation of death and desolation. Everything vanishes: 'Adnān and Ma'add (v. 7), al-Nu'mān (i.e., Ibn al-Mundhir, the last Lakhmid king of al-Ḥīra) with all his riches (v. 12–26 and 30–39), and a tribe with a flock seen at al-Ufāqa (vv. 27–29) have vanished. Nothing of this tribe is left "except what someone who asks is told" (v. 46). Their "limbs" are strewn about at al-Rass (v. 48). The Ghassanids have been abased with their leader (v. 49) and, finally, the unnamed "generous courageous one" has perished after decades of kingship (vv. 49–50).

In the two poems, man is not responsive to the exhortations of fate, which manifest themselves in desolation and death. The reference to al-Rass in Labīd's poem is particularly noteworthy given that the Qur'an lists the "people of al-Rass" together with other peoples annihilated by God in Q al-Furqān 25:38. Since Labīd was a *mukhaḍram* poet, it is difficult to judge if the Qur'an alludes to a poetic trope by mentioning the people of al-Rass, or if the poem explicates the Qur'an. Additionally, there is the problem of the authenticity of ancient Arabic poetry to consider. Notwithstanding these questions, the two poems bear witness to a poetic tradition in which the nexus of hortatory discourse and annihilation was productive, or was, at the very least, perceived to have been productive.

27 For the poem, see Anton Huber and Carl Brockelmann, *Die Gedichte des Labīd, aus dem Nachlasse des Dr. A. Huber, herausgegeben von Carl Brockelmann* (Leiden: Brill, 1891), 27–33 (Arabic pagination). The translation is mine.

The very same nexus is significant in the Qur'an too, as suggested by the punishment context in which the verb *wa'aza* occurs for the first time. In the middle Meccan period, exhortations play an important role in the context of "punishment narratives."²⁸ The messenger Hūd is sent to an unbelieving people, the 'Ād, in Q al-Shu'arā' 26. He exhorts them, but they do not heed his words, and are therefore annihilated by God:

- 123 The 'Ād accused the messengers of lying.
- 124 When their brother Hūd said to them, "Will you not fear God?
- 125 I am a faithful messenger for you.
- 126 Fear God and obey me.
- 127 I ask for no reward for this. My reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds.
- 128 Do you build on every mountain a sign to be frivolous?
- 129 And do you acquire structures so that you may dwell there forever?
- 130 And when you grip with violence, do you grip as oppressors?
- 131 Fear God and obey me.
- 132 Fear Him who has provided for you the things you know,
- 133 Who has provided for you livestock and sons,
- 134 And gardens and springs.
- 135 I fear for you the punishment of an awesome day."
- 136 *They said, "It is all the same to us whether you exhort or whether you don't (qālū sawā'un 'alaynā a-wa'azta am lam takun minā l-wā'izīn).*
- 137 This is merely the creation of the ancients.
- 138 We shall not be punished."
- 139 And they accused him of lying, so We destroyed them. In that there is a sign, but most of them do not believe.
- 140 Your Lord is the mighty and the compassionate.²⁹

28 On the qur'anic punishment narratives, see David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers: A Qur'anic Study* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999); Saleh, "Preacher," 85–90; Devin Stewart, "Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions in the Qur'an," in *Qur'anic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 17–51, at 29–40. The term "punishment narrative" or "legend" (German "Legenden von Strafgerichten" and "Straflegenden") was first used by Aloys Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammod: Nach bisher grösstentheils unbenutzten Quellen*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Nicolai'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1861), 459–504 (passim).

29 Qur'an translations here and in the following are based on Alan Jones, *The Qur'an* ([Cambridge]: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007), albeit with my modifications.

In Q al-Shu‘arā’ 26, it is not fate that exhorts, but a messenger who does so with words. Instead of the arbitrary workings of fate that cause desolation, annihilation is a punishment earned by man – here, the ‘Ād – and meted out by God. Not unlike the implied listeners of the poems, however, the listeners in the community forming around the Prophet were expected to ponder the bygone people and to draw lessons from the “exhortation,” so that their resistance and unresponsiveness to admonition would break down.

Hūd’s sermon in Q al-Shu‘arā’ 26 is similar to hortatory addresses by other messengers in punishment narratives, where the verb *wa‘āza* or related forms do not occur. Devin Stewart has called the addresses in which messengers in punishment narratives exhort their peoples by reminding them of the punishment of previous peoples, “sermons within a sermon.”³⁰ These sermons represent microcosms of Muḥammad’s own preaching and its reception. Shu‘ayb’s exhortation to the people of Midian in the late Meccan Q Hūd 11 (vv. 84–86, 88–90, 92–93) as well as the exhortation by the unnamed believer from Pharaoh’s kin who supports Moses in his confrontation with Pharaoh in Q 40 Ghāfir (vv. 28–35 and 38–45) contain a number of elements similar to those in Hūd’s exhortation, though in different order and with different emphasis: a (self-)authorization of the messenger and the message, admonitions to fear God and His punishment – which were to become a standard feature of Islamic sermons of pious counsel³¹ –, and a rejection of a distinct behavioral pattern (see Table 1).

Another “sermon within a sermon,” in Q Ibrāhīm 14 (vv. 6ff.), contains different elements: it is not addressed by Moses to an unbelieving people, but uttered as an encouragement to his own people. Besides “sermons within sermons,” other speeches by messengers in qur’anic punishment narratives are hortatory in character. Q Hūd 11, which contains Shu‘ayb’s “sermon within a

30 Devin Stewart, “Qur’anic Punishment Stories and the Sermon within a Sermon: A Typological Investigation,” in *Prefiguration and Fulfilment in the Qur’an and its Biblical Milieu*, ed. Islam Dayeh and Angelika Neuwirth (Abingdon: Routledge, forthcoming). The article is based on a paper Stewart gave at the conference “Typology – Strategies of Reenactment and Fulfillment in the Milieu of the Qur’an and its Exegesis” (Freie Universität Berlin, SFB 980, 16 July 2015). Stewart characterizes the three “sermons within a sermon” that he discusses (Q Hūd 11:84–95, Ibrāhīm 14:6–15, and Ghāfir 40:28–35) as follows: “All three texts are addresses to a large audience, all three are hortatory in nature, and all three invoke examples from salvation history in order to impress a moral point on the audience.”

31 Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration*, 26, describes the *waṣīyya bi-l-taqwā* as a “standard” feature in Islamic sermons of pious counsel. The *waṣīyya bi-l-taqwā* is also frequently used at the opening of early Islamic religious epistles. See Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 6–7. This points to the considerable vitality of exhortations to fear God in early Islamic times.

TABLE 1 Comparison of elements in the exhortations of Hūd (Q al-Shu‘arā’ 26), Shu‘ayb (Q Hūd 11), and the unnamed believer supporting Moses (Q Ghāfir 40).

Element	Q al-Shu‘arā’ 26 (with w-‘z)	Q Hūd 11 (without w-‘z)	Q Ghāfir 40 (without w-‘z)
(Self-) authorization of the messenger or the message	“I am a faithful messenger for you” (v. 125)	“I have you considered if I have a clear proof from my Lord” (v. 88)	“If he is lying, his lies will be reckoned against him; if he is telling the truth, some of what he promises you will befall you. God does not guide anyone who is a lying profligate.” (v. 28)
Admonitions to fear God and his punishment	“fear God and obey me” (vv. 126, 131) “I fear for you the punishment of an awesome day” (v. 135)	“I fear for you the punishment of an all-encompassing day” (v. 84) “you shall know to whom will come a punishment that shall shame him” (v. 93)	“I fear for you something similar to the day of the factions” (v. 30) “I fear for you the day when they are calling one another” (v. 32) “the profligates will be the companions of the fire” (v. 43)
Rejection of a distinct behavioral pattern	Vanity and hubris: “Do you build on every eminence a sign to be frivolous? / And do you acquire structures so that you may dwell there forever?” (vv. 128–129)	Greed: “Do not give short measure or short weight.” (v. 84) “My people, give full measure and full weight in justice.” (v. 85)	Idolatry: “Those who engage in disputes concerning God’s sign, without any authority that has come to them – [their action] is greatly odious to God and to those who believe.” (v. 35) “You call me to disbelieve in God and to associate with Him that of which I have no knowledge, whilst I call you to the Mighty, the Forgiver.” (v. 42)

sermon” is a case in point. The sura has a hortatory arc: Noah exhorts his people (vv. 28–31), as do Hūd (vv. 50–52, 54–57) and Šālīḥ (vv. 61, 63–64). Although the verb *wa’aḏa* does not appear in these cases to designate the speeches of the messengers, we do encounter *n-dh-r* (*innī lakum nadhīrun mubīn*, v. 25) and *dh-k-r* (*a-fa-lā tadhakkārūn*, v. 30) – both terms are frequently used in the Meccan suras to designate exhortations by messengers (and by Muḥammad). In Q Hūd 11 God uses *wa’aḏa* for His own words when He warns Noah not to try and save his disbelieving son (*innī a’iḏuka*, v. 46).

It is noteworthy that all these hortatory speeches are embedded in punishment narratives. The same is true of the short and allusive passage about the Sabbath breakers in Q al-A’rāf 7:163–166, the second and only other passage besides Q al-Shu’arā’ 26:136 in which the verb *wa’aḏa* is explicitly mentioned in the context of a punishment legend (v. 164).³² The people who ignore an exhortation (the content of which is not reported) and transgress the Sabbath are punished by God. However, instead of being annihilated, they are transformed into baboons.

Besides exhortations to communities in the context of punishment narratives, the verb *wa’aḏa* is employed in reference to Luqmān’s exhortation of his son in the late Meccan sura Q Luqmān 31:

- 12 We gave Luqmān wisdom, saying, “Give thanks to God.” The one who gives thanks does so only for his own good. The one who is ungrateful – God is all-sufficient and laudable.
- 13 *And when Luqmān said to his son, exhorting him (wa-huwa ya’iḏuhū),* “O my son, do not associate any partner with God. Associating partners with God is a grievous wrong.”
[...]
- 16 “O my son, if it is the weight of a grain of mustard and if it is on a rock or in the heavens or on earth, God will bring it forth. God is kind and well-informed.
- 17 O my son, perform prayer, enjoin what is reputable and forbid what is disreputable, and endure patiently what befalls you. That is a good way to show determination in affairs.

³² In Q al-Baqara 2:65–66, the term *maw’iḏa* is also used in the context of the story of the Sabbath breakers. But it does not refer to a warning addressed to the people within the story. Instead, it refers to the story itself as an exhortation, demonstrating a later use of *wa’ḏ* as a meta-category. For this development, see Part 2 of this essay.

- 18 Do not turn your cheek from men contemptuously, and do not walk in the land in exultation. God does not love anyone who is conceited and boastful.
- 19 Be modest in your walk and keep your voice low. The most disagreeable voice is that of the ass.”

Luqmān’s exhortation is presented as a testament, a literary form which continued to play a role in early Islamic dogmatic literature. For example, a testament (*waṣīyya*) was ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa, among others.³³ Looking backwards in time, it is also a literary form in which Jewish and Christian ethical instruction and legal paraenesis often occurred (Greek *diathēkē*, Hebr. *tsawa’a*).³⁴ Luqmān has the same authority as the dying sages who impart their “last word,” an authority not possessed by those to whom the exhortation is addressed.³⁵ The dying David’s exhortation to his son Solomon (1 Kgs 2:1–12) opens as follows:³⁶

1 When David’s time to die drew near, he charged (*waytsaw*) his son Solomon, saying: 2 “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, 3 and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in His ways and keeping His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.”³⁷

In a long speech, the ageing Tobit admonishes his son Tobias not to sin and to do good deeds (Tob 4:3–19):³⁸

33 For early Islamic texts that begin with the word *waṣīyya*, see the index provided in Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, vol. 4 (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 1997), 981. Testaments are also briefly mentioned in Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration*, 265.

34 The nominal form for “testament” or “will” does not appear in the Hebrew Bible. Forms of the verb *tsawah* are used in, e.g., 1 Kgs 2:1. For the nominal form *tsawa’ah*, as a designation for a verbal will, see for example bB. Bat. 147a (in the context of a transfer of property rights on the death bed). The Greek word *diathēkē* appears in the New Testament, e.g., Heb 9:16–17. The Syriac Peshitta of the New Testament uses the Greek loanword. For an overview of exhortations by dying sages, see Leo G. Perdue, “The Death of the Sage and Moral Exhortation: From Ancient Near Eastern Instructions to Graeco-Roman Paraenesis,” *Semeia* 50 (1990): 81–109.

35 On the role of authority in this injunction-giving situation, see Westerholm, “Four Maccabees,” 99.

36 See Perdue, “Death,” 89–91.

37 Here and in the following translations of biblical texts are quoted from the NRSV.

38 See Perdue, “Death,” 101, n. 27.

5 “Revere the Lord all your days, my son, and refuse to sin or to transgress His commandments. Live uprightly all the days of your life, and do not walk in the ways of wrongdoing 6 for those who act in accordance with truth will prosper in all their activities.”

Table 2 shows that living in God’s way, and only in God’s way, and abiding by His law are part of the fabric of ethico-religious exhortation in the Bible and in the Meccan suras.

There are additional parallels between Luqmān and Tobit. Luqmān, as has been observed, models “ideal parenthood.”³⁹ The two qur’anic verses which I

TABLE 2 Comparison of Luqmān’s exhortation (Q Luqmān 31:12–19) with those of David (1 Kgs 2:1–12) and Tobit (Tob 4:3–19).

Parallel	Luqmān (Q Luqmān 31:12–19)	David (1 Kgs 2:1–12)	Tobit (Tob 4:3–19)
Monotheism	“do not associate any partner with God” (v. 13)		“revere the Lord all your days” (v. 5)
Strength and endurance	“endure patiently what befalls you” (v. 17)	“be strong, be courageous” (v. 1)	
Walking in God’s way	“do not walk (<i>lā tamshi</i>) in the land in exultation” (v. 18) “be modest in your walk (<i>fī mashyika</i>)” (v. 19)	“keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in His ways (<i>lalekheth bidhrakhayw</i>)” (v. 3)	“do not walk in the ways of wrongdoing (<i>mē poreuthēs tais hodois tēs adikias</i>)” (v. 5)
Law-abidance (general and specific)	“enjoin what is reputable and forbid what is disreputable” (v. 17)	“keeping His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses” (v. 3)	“refuse to sin or to transgress His commandments” (v. 5) etc.

39 A. H. Mathias Zahniser, “Luqmān,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 242–43, at 242.

have omitted in the quotation from Q Luqmān 31, vv. 14 and 15, still need to be discussed. They represent a divine interjection, embedded within Luqmān's speech:

- 14 We have charged (*wa-waṣṣaynā*) man concerning his parents – his mother bore him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning was only in two years – saying, “Show thanks to Me and to your parents. Unto Me shall all return.”
- 15 But if the two of them strive with you to make you associate with Me that about which you have no knowledge, *do not obey them*. Keep them kindly company in this world, but follow the way of those who turn to Me. Then your return will be to Me, and I shall tell you what you used to do. [emphasis mine-NKS.]

Note that God's commands are introduced with the verb *waṣṣā*. In Q Yāsīn 36:50, the verbal noun *tawṣīya* refers to the formulation of a testament. Similarly, the Hebrew verb *tsawah* is used in reference to both divine and human commands.

The two qur'anic verses with God's commands are inserted in Luqmān's speech to invert the beginning of Tobit's speech to Tobias. Both Q Luqmān 31:14–15 and Tob 4:3–4, also a reminiscence on parenthood and motherhood, reflect on man's obligations to his parents. However, Tobit demands unlimited obedience to parents at the beginning of his long exhortation:

- 3 Then he called his son Tobias, and when he came to him he said, “My son, when I die, give me a proper burial. Honor your mother and do not abandon her all the days of her life. *Do whatever pleases her, and do not grieve her in anything*. 4 Remember her, my son, because she faced many dangers for you while you were in her womb. And when she dies, bury her beside me in the same grave. [emphasis mine-NKS.]

In the Qur'an, these injunctions are uttered by the divine voice, thus conferring on them a higher degree of authority. While Tobit exhorts his son to “do whatever pleases” his mother, without limitation, God introduces an important caveat in Luqmān's speech: if one's parents are associators, “do not obey them” (Q Luqmān 31:15). I am not arguing that there is a direct link between the qur'anic Luqmān and Tobit; both sapiential figurations might stem from a common pool of ideas. It has also been suggested that the *Book of Tobit* is connected to the *Aḥiqar Story*.⁴⁰ The wise Aḥiqar adopts his nephew Nadan

⁴⁰ See Marko Marinčič, “The Grand Vizier, the Prophet, and the Satirist: Transformations of the Oriental *Aḥiqar Romance* in Ancient Prose Fiction,” in *The Ancient Novel and Beyond*,

and raises him to be his successor as a counsellor at the court of the Assyrian king, but the ungrateful Nadan betrays him.⁴¹ Tobit and Tobias are, by contrast, exemplary in character, as suggested by their names (Hebr. *ṭob*, “good”).⁴² In fragments of the *Aḥiqar Story* in Syriac, Aḥiqar exhorts Nadan with a string of moral-ethical teachings.⁴³ But Aḥiqar acknowledges, “I knew not that Nadan listened not to my words, but scattered them.”⁴⁴ It is plausible that the parallels between Luqmān and Tobit’s exhortations are the result of a wide diffusion of sapiential themes, a possibility to which the *Aḥiqar Story* bears witness.⁴⁵

Examples of the testament format could be multiplied: In Rabbinic Judaism and in Greco-Roman culture, paraenesis of the dying was an established literary genre.⁴⁶ The apocryphal *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, a particularly important text as far as this kind of instruction is concerned, includes the dying commands of the twelve sons of Jacob.⁴⁷ The *Testaments* encapsulates the work of a second-century Jewish author, but the text was transmitted and reworked by Christians in late second/early third-century Syria.⁴⁸ Jacob’s testament to his sons is alluded to in the Medinan sura Q al-Baqara 2:133:

ed. Stelios Panayotakis et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 53–70, at 53–60. For an edition of the different versions of the Aḥiqar story in Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, and other languages, see F. C. Conybeare, J. Rendel Harris, and Agnes Smith Lewis, eds., *The Story of Aḥiqar from the Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Turkish, Greek and Slavonic Versions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913).

41 On Nadab’s (=Nadan’s) betrayal, see also Tob 14:10.

42 See Marinčič, “Grand Vizier,” 56.

43 See Conybeare et al. (eds.), *Story of Aḥiqar*, 99–101, 103–9.

44 Ibid., 109.

45 The qur’anic Pharaoh orders Hāmān to build a structure called *ṣarḥ* (Q al-Qaṣaṣ 28:38, Ghāfir 40:36–37). See Adam Silverstein, “Hāmān’s Transition from Jāhiliyya to Islam,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 285–308, at 301–303. Silverstein points out parallels to the Aḥiqar story: The Egyptian Pharaoh challenges the Assyrian Esarhaddon to send him a man capable of building a tower between the heavens and the earth. Since Aḥiqar is believed to be dead, Nadan is nominated. But Aḥiqar, who is in fact alive, is sent. He succeeds in building the tower. In some renderings of the story, Silverstein contends, the figures of Nadan and Hāmān merged, which would explain the qur’anic reference to Hāmān.

46 For the former, see Perdue, “Death,” 92–93, and for the latter, *ibid.*, 93–97.

47 Robert Henry Charles, ed., *The Greek Versions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Edited from Nine Mss together with the Variants of the Armenian and Slavonic Versions and Some Hebrew Fragments* ([London]: Oxford University Press; Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1960) [reprint of the first edition 1908]. Trans. *idem*, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917). See the analysis in Perdue, “Death,” 91–92.

48 Studies of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* include Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, *Gesetz und Paränese: Katechismusartige Weisungsreihen in der frühjüdischen Literatur* (Tübingen:

- 133 Or were you witnesses when death came to Jacob, when he said to his sons, "What will you serve after me?" They said, "We shall serve your God and the God of your forefathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, one God. We shall be devoted exclusively to Him!"

The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* displays certain parallels to qur'anic legal paraenesis, as will be shown below.

With the late Meccan suras, we have arrived at a stage of the textual genesis of the Qur'an when the verb *wa'aza* and its related forms are transposed from the messengers and from the quintessential sage in the narratives onto the qur'anic messenger, the Prophet. Late Meccan suras connect "exhortation" explicitly with Prophetic speech. This happens in the framework of exhortations addressed to the messenger in which he is in turn charged with exhorting his listeners. It is noteworthy that *wa'z* in this context occurs within a *qul*-instruction in a late Meccan sura, Q Saba' 34.⁴⁹ A *qul*-instruction is a formal rhetorical category that brackets "prototypical" messenger discourse in exchanges with believers and universalizes it.⁵⁰

- 46 Say, "*I exhort you only to one thing (innamā a'izukum bi-wāḥidatin):* that you rise for God in twos or singly and then reflect. Your companion is not possessed by any demon. He is simply a warner for you in the face of a severe punishment."
- 47 Say, "I have not asked you for a reward; this is for you. My reward is only from God. He is witness to everything."
- 48 Say, "My Lord casts forth the truth, Knower of the unseen things."
- 49 Say, "The truth has come. Falsehood neither originates nor restores."
- 50 Say, "If I stray, I stray only to my own disadvantage; and if I am guided aright, it is because of that with which my Lord inspires me. He is hearing and nearby."
- [emphasis mine-NKS]

Mohr Siebeck, 1987), and Johannes Thomas, "The Paraenesis of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Between Torah and Jewish Wisdom," in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context*, ed. James Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 157–90.

49 In Q al-Nahl 16:125, also, it is probable that it is the Prophet who exhorts, although this is a matter of interpretation.

50 On *qul* in the Qur'an and embedded speakers, see Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM, 2003), 9 and 234. According to Wild (ed.), *Self-Referentiality*, 16, *qul* marks "induced speech, reported speech, ordered speech, revealed speech, mantic speech."

The qur'anic messenger is instructed to "exhort" the believers to reflect in order to avert divine punishment in the hereafter. It is noteworthy that the *qul*-instruction comprises some of the elements that I have identified above as integral components of messenger exhortations within qur'anic narratives: a self-authorization ("nothing possesses your comrade," v. 46; "my reward rests only with God," v. 47), fear of God and His punishment ("he is simply a warner for you before a severe punishment," v. 46), and a rejection of unethical behavior ("if I stray, I stray only to my own disadvantage; and if I am guided aright, it is because of that with which my Lord inspires me," v. 50). It is noteworthy that the ethical instruction uses imagery of straying and guidance (*ḍalla* – *ihtadā*). There are two ways that the listener can follow, a way of error and one of righteousness. These two ways metaphorically stand for two opposite ethical decisions. I will return to the image of the "ways" below.

A similar argument can be made for Q al-Naḥl 16:125. Towards the end of the sura, the qur'anic messenger is called to exhort the listeners. Here too, the summons to exhortation is entwined with imagery of two diverging ways.

- 125 Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and with fair exhortation (*ud'u ilā sabīli rabbika bi-l-ḥikmati wa-l-maw'izati l-ḥasanati*), and dispute with them in the best manner. Your Lord knows those who stray from his way (*bi-man ḍalla 'an sabīlihi*), and He knows those who are guided aright (*bi-l-muhtadīn*).

Even into the Medinan period the qur'anic messenger is called to exhort his listeners. In Q al-Nisā' 4:63, God instructs his Prophet "to exhort them [the hypocrites] and to speak to them a devastating word about themselves" (*wa-iḥṣum wa-qul lahum fī anfusihim qawlan balighā*).

The exhortations embedded in Meccan suras and qualified as *wa'z* are moral and ethical in character and devoid of legal specificities. However, they should not be perceived as "merely" ethical and "not yet" legal. The examples just discussed are general in nature, since they are features of narratives and formal categories employed for their typological, paradigmatic potential. The "punishment stories" offer speeches by prototypical messengers; the Luqmān story offers the testament of a quintessential sage; *qul*-instructions offer generic sets of questions and answers in a confrontation between a messenger and his audience; exhortations addressed to the Prophet, in which he is called to exhort his listeners, circumscribe Prophetic hortatory discourse. All these figurations of exhortation have a universalizing tendency. Precisely because of their focus on the prototypical, the quintessential, and the generic, the stories prepare the ground for acceptable and unacceptable behavior in the listeners.

Later suras specify what exactly it is that constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior in a specific social setting: that of the Medinan polity. But the universal layer on which this specification is elaborated is of the greatest importance: it prevents Medinan legal paraenesis from becoming parochial.

Wa'z Linking Qur'anic Legal Paraenesis to Moses' Tablets and Salvation History

In the late Meccan period, the Qur'an begins to use the word *maw'iza* as a self-predication. The self-referential potential of the word is corroborated by the fact that it tends to co-occur with other self-referential categories, for example "wisdom" (*hikma*),⁵¹ "truth" (*haqq*),⁵² "reminder" (*dhikrā*),⁵³ "healing" (*shifā*),⁵⁴ "guidance" (*hudan*),⁵⁵ and "mercy" (*rahma*).⁵⁶ The term *maw'iza* continues to be used as a self-predication in Medinan suras, where it occurs along with "warning example" (*nakāl*),⁵⁷ "clarification" (*bayān*),⁵⁸ and again "guidance" (*hudan*).⁵⁹

Q al-A'rāf 7, a late Meccan sura, marks the emergence of *wa'z* as a meta-category that connects ethical exhortation and legal and doctrinal exposition and specification. In that sura, a link between ethical exhortation and a salvation-historically significant instance of law-making in the Hebrew Bible – the giving of the Ten Commandments – is established via the concept of *maw'iza*. It must be emphasized that the qur'anic depiction of Moses is very much aligned with the punishment stories: occurrences of the motif of the punishment of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army in the qur'anic Moses narratives by far outnumber references to the plagues or to the Exodus, the pivotal elements in the biblical story.⁶⁰

51 Q al-Naḥl 16:125. Cf. the Medinan verses Q al-Baqara 2:231 and al-Nisā' 4:58 (co-occurrence of *ya'izukum* and *hikma*, *ḥakamtum*, *taḥkumū*).

52 Q Hūd 11:20.

53 Ibid. Cf. Q al-Naḥl 16:90 (co-occurrence of *ya'izukum* and *tadhakkarūn*) and the Medinan verse al-Baqara 2:231 (co-occurrence of *ya'izukum* and *idhkurū*).

54 Q Yūnus 10:57.

55 Ibid. Cf. Q al-Naḥl 16:125 (co-occurrence of *maw'iza* and *muhtadīn*).

56 Q Yūnus 10:57.

57 Q al-Baqara 2:66.

58 Q Āl 'Imrān 3:138. Cf. Q al-Nūr 24:34 (co-occurrence of *maw'iza* and *mubayyināt*).

59 Q Āl 'Imrān 3:138. Cf. Q al-Mā'ida 5:46, where *maw'iza* and *hudan* co-occur in reference to the Gospel. See in detail Part 2 of this essay.

60 Nora K. Schmid, "Moses in Egypt," in *Biblical Traditions in the Qur'an*, ed. Nicolai Sinai, Marianna Klar, Gabriel S. Reynolds, and Holger Zellentin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

While the biblical story is driven by Moses' request to let the Israelites depart, in the Qur'an Pharaoh's disbelief plays the decisive role. Q al-A'rāf 7 embeds the Moses material in a sequence of punishment legends, starting with Noah and his people (vv. 59–64), and continuing with Hūd and the 'Ād (vv. 65–72), Ṣāliḥ and the Thamūd (vv. 73–79), Lot and his people (vv. 80–84), and Shu'ayb and the Midianites (vv. 85–93). The lengthy Moses narrative (vv. 103–162), which includes the giving of the Tablets (vv. 144–154), represents the climax of this sequence and is followed by only one short account involving a settlement by the sea that was punished for breaking the Sabbath (vv. 163–166). The continuity with the above-mentioned punishment narratives in which *waḥ* plays a role is clear.

The opening of the qur'anic Tablet episode is noteworthy:

- 144 He [God] said, "O Moses, I have chosen you above all men *with My messages and by My speaking* (*bi-risālātī wa-bi-kalāmī*). Take what I have given you and be thankful."
- 145 *And We wrote down for him on the Tablets an exhortation drawn from everything and an exposition for everything* (*wa-katabnā lahū fī l-alwāḥi min kulli shay'in maw'izatan wa-tafṣīlan li-kulli shay'in*): "Hold on to it firmly, and order your people to take the fairest of it. I shall show you the abode of the godless."
- 146 I shall turn away from My signs those who are unjustly haughty in the land. When they see each sign, they do not believe in it; when they see the way of righteousness, they do not choose it as a way; when they see the way of error, they choose it as a way (*wa-in yaraw sabīla l-rushdi lā yattakhidhūhu sabīlan wa-in yaraw sabīla l-ghayyi yattakhidhūhu sabīlan*). That is because they denied the truth of Our signs and were heedless of them."
- [all emphases mine-NKS]

Verses 144–146 supply the *waḥ* category with a salvation historical and scriptural etiology by linking it to Moses' Tablets: the exhortation is recorded in writing on the Tablets. That the term *maw'iza* occurs for the first time in the context of this significant moment of law-making suggests that legal instruction is an integral part of, and derives from, ethical exhortation. It is noteworthy that the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue), which are famously connected to the giving of the Tablets in the Bible, are not mentioned in the qur'anic account. Instead of a circumscribed set of commandments, what is written on the Tablets seems more encompassing, more general, since it is drawn "from everything" (*min kulli shay'in*). Yet the legal significance of the episode is undeniable: a meta-commentary in v. 157 transposes its implications onto Muḥammad, or rather onto the textual figure of the Prophet, by insisting

that he “will order them to do what is recognized as right and forbid them to do what is disapproved of. He will make the good things lawful for them and make the bad things unlawful for them.”

Notwithstanding the qur’anic reference to writing, God’s mention of His “messages” (*risālāt*) and His “speaking” (*kalām*) in v. 144, in combination with the reference to an “exhortation,” may also be taken to refer to an oral mode of communication. In Exodus 34, the Ten Commandments were inscribed on the two pieces of stone. The idea that the law given to Moses is somehow connected to an oral ethico-religious hortatory discourse is not emphasized, despite the long speeches delivered by God to Moses in this and preceding chapters of Exodus, some of which are characterized by a “style in which a tribal elder might give moral instruction.”⁶¹ The act of writing, which is emphasized, is described differently: whereas in Exod 34:1 God announces that He will be the one who writes, in Exod 34:27 He instructs Moses to do so.

- 1 The Lord said to Moses, “Cut two Tablets of stone like the former ones, and *I will write on the Tablets* the words that were on the former Tablets, which you broke.” [...]
[...]
- 27 The Lord said to Moses: Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.
- 28 He was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And *he wrote on the Tablets* the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. [all emphases mine-NKS]

Irrespective of the scenario and the context, these verses put emphasis on writing. The Ten Commandments themselves are listed in a previous chapter of Exodus, in Exod 20:2–17. However, this is not the only place where they are enumerated in the Hebrew Bible; Deut 5:6–21 embeds them in an oration by Moses, shortly before his death. Gerhard von Rad has described Deuteronomy as “law preached.”⁶² It represents the beginning of an intensifying paraenetic reception history of the Decalogue, which lasted well into Late Antiquity.⁶³

61 Walter Houston, “Exodus,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 67–91, at 82.

62 Gerhard von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 16. On the paraenetic dimensions of Deuteronomy, see Christoph Bultman, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 135–57, at 135.

63 The engagement with the Decalogue in Pseudo-Phocylides 3–8 is an example for the paraenetic reception and transmission of the Decalogue. See Niebuhr, *Gesetz und Paränese*,

The convergence of divine law and exhortation in the Qur'an is therefore all the more noteworthy. Q al-A'rāf 7:146 connects the announcement of "two ways" – a "way of righteousness" (*sabīl al-rushd*) and a "way of error" (*sabīl al-ghayy*) – to the giving of the exhortation and thus indirectly to the Commandments. The image of two ways, which represents an ethical duality, is found in a number of Jewish and Christian ethico-religious exhortations and legal paraenese. The beginning of the "Testament of Asher," which is part of the abovementioned *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, is illustrative:⁶⁴

1 The copy of the Testament of Asher, the things he spoke to his sons in the hundred and 2 twenty-fifth year of his life. For while he was still in health, he said to them: Listen, children of Asher, to your father, and I will declare to you all that is upright in the sight of the Lord. 3 Two ways (*dʿyo hodous*) has God given to the sons of men, and two inclinations (*dʿyo diaboulia*), and two kinds of action (*dʿyo praxeis*), and 4 two modes (of action) (*dʿyo tropous*), and two issues (*dʿyo telea*). Therefore all things are by twos (*dia touto panta dʿyo*), one over against the other. 5 For there are two ways of good and evil (*hodoi gar eisin dʿyo kalou kai kakou*), and with these are the two inclinations in our breasts (*ta dʿyo diaboulia en sternois hemōn*) discriminating them.⁶⁵

The Mosaic event is connected to two diverging ways in Q al-A'rāf 7:146, an image known from hortatory/paraenetic discourse. But this is not the only signal of the role played by this particular oral discourse in shaping the qur'anic perspectives on the law that Moses receives. The Qur'an's engagement with the contents of the Decalogue points to a hortatory appropriation. The most extensive qur'anic engagement with the Ten Commandments occurs in the passages Q al-Isrā' 17:22–39 (middle Meccan), Q al-An'ām 6:151–53 (late Meccan), and Q al-Baqara 2:83–85 (Medinan). But we can catch glimpses of them elsewhere (e.g., Q al-Nisā' 4:25, 36, and 93, al-Mā'ida 5:38 etc.).⁶⁶ The Commandments

15–20. The idea that the law given to Moses is connected to an oral discourse is also central to the concept of the oral Torah in Judaism.

64 For the two ways, see also IQS; Didache 1–6.

65 Charles, ed., *Greek Versions*, 171–72 (trans. idem, *Testaments*, 87; modified).

66 See also Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Quran* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961), 305–10, for several qur'anic verses that engage with the Decalogue. Studies of the qur'anic Decalogue include Sebastian Günther, "O People of the Scripture! Come to a Word Common to You and Us (Q. 3:64): The Ten Commandments and the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9:1 (2007): 28–58, and Angelika Neuwirth, "The Discovery of Evil in the Qur'an: Contemplating Qur'anic Versions of the Decalogue in the Context

mentioned in the Qur'an are never explicitly linked to Moses' Tablets. However, vv. 154ff. in Q al-An'ām 6 state that Moses was given "the Scripture" (*al-kitāb*), which was sent down to him. This Scripture is in turn characterized as containing "an exposition for everything" (*tafṣīlan li-kulli shay'in*, v. 154) – the exact words used to describe the Tablets in v. 145 of Q al-A'rāf 7. This parallel points to a blurring of the conceptual boundaries between the Books of Moses and the Tablets. Additionally, Q al-Baqara 2:83, which introduces another group of verses engaging with the Ten Commandments, refers to the conclusion of a covenant with the Israelites (*wa-idh akhadhnā mithāqa banī isrā'īla*). Thus, the Commandments and the giving of the Tablets are indirectly connected.

Irrespective of a conceptual link between the Decalogue and the Tablet episode in the Qur'an, some Commandments are integrated into the legal (and narrative) fabric of a number of suras and they point to the same hortatory framework as the Tablet episode. Holger Zellentin has observed that "the Qur'an's Decalogue is everywhere in its legal code, yet nowhere fully cited."⁶⁷ The biblical Ten Commandments are never "cited" in their entirety. Instead, qur'anic allusions to individual commandments are signs of a continued interpretative "work." The interpretative openness of the divine laws given to Moses may also be reflected in Q al-A'rāf 7:145: what God wrote on the tablets was not only an exhortation but also an "exposition for everything" (*tafṣīlan li-kulli shay'in*).

Thus, oral instruction and paraenesis seem to have shaped the qur'anic engagement with the historically charged moment when Moses received God's law. To better understand this process, it is helpful to examine Christian attitudes to the laws given to Moses and the degree to which orality, generally, and oral instruction and paraenesis, in particular, shaped these attitudes. The nexus between the Commandments, law-making, and oral instruction is particularly prominent in early Christianity. Jesus, according to the Gospels, is both observant of the law given to Moses and its outspoken critic. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7) – not by coincidence a hortatory discourse – is crucial for understanding his ambivalence to Mosaic law. Matt 5:17 reads:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil (*ouk ēlthon katalysai alla plērosai*; Peshitta: *lō etīt d-eshde elā d-emalē*).

of Pagan-Arab Late Antiquity," in idem, *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014), 253–74 (includes a discussion of additional scholarly publications *ibid.*, 258–59).

67 Holger M. Zellentin, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 69.

Jesus fulfils the old law (conceptualized as a “filling,” *plērosis*).⁶⁸ He engages with the Decalogue in his Sermon on the Mount, rejecting the ceremonial Commandments (e.g., the Sabbath, the representations of the divine) and reaffirming the moral ones by tracing them back to the idea of charity and love of one’s neighbor, thus anchoring them in Christian ethics.⁶⁹

The Qur’an manifests an awareness of the Christian idea of a paraenetic fulfilment of previous laws. A verse in what is arguably the latest qur’anic sura, Q al-Mā’ida 5, points to such an awareness in the Medinan community. The verse is embedded in a discussion of how judgment is to be imparted. The passage describes a process of consecutive confirmation (*taṣdīq*) of scriptural law from one religious community to the next. The term *maw’iza* occurs in v. 46, where it is associated with Jesus’ confirmation of the law:

46 We caused Jesus, the son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps, confirming that which had been revealed before it in the Torah (*muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi mina l-tawrāti*), and we bestowed on him the Gospel in which is guidance and light (*wa-āṭaynāhu l-injīla fīhi hudan wa-nūrun* – confirming that which had been revealed before it in the Torah (*wa-muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi mina l-tawrāti*) – a guidance and *exhortation* to those who fear God (*wa-hudan wa-maw’izatan li-l-muttaqīn*). [emphasis mine-NKS]

V. 46 is ambiguous due to its complicated syntax. Does the *maw’iza* refer to the Gospel or to Jesus? A number of exegetes, among them al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī, assume that the accusative *maw’izatan* is in adjunction (‘*aṭf*’) to the preceding *muṣaddiqan* (and the latter to *fīhi hudan wa-nūrun*) and that all of these words refer to the Gospel.⁷⁰ It is less often noted that the second *muṣaddiqan* might not refer to the Gospel but to Jesus, as in the first occurrence of

68 On the notion of fulfilling the law in Matthew, see Stephen Westerholm, “Law in the New Testament,” in idem, *Law and Ethics in Early Judaism and the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 113–28, at 115.

69 Philippe Delhaye, *Le Décalogue et sa place dans la morale chrétienne* (Brussels: La Pensée Catholique, 1963), 23–39.

70 Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl wa-‘uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta’wīl*, ed. Khalīl Ma’mūn Shīḥā (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifa, 2009 [1430]), ad Q al-Mā’ida 5:46, and al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta’wīl al-ma’rūf bi-tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Mar’ashlī, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), ad Q al-Mā’ida 5:46.

muṣaddiqan in the verse.⁷¹ In that case, *maw'izatan* would also have a different referent.

Despite this grammatical difficulty, however, it is likely that *maw'izatan* refers to the Gospel. If so, it is noticeable that the Torah and the Gospel are described in vv. 44 and 46 in identical terms: *fiḥā/fiḥi hudan wa-nūrun*. They differ only in that the Gospel, additionally, is described as a *maw'iza*,⁷² a characteristic that it shares with the Qur'an, according to the Qur'an's self-conception, as described above.

According to the New Testament, Jesus and his followers believed that earlier Scriptures were written for their instruction.⁷³ In his Epistles, Paul insists that the older scriptures were written to teach his contemporaries and Christian coreligionists, thus affirming that they had not lost their validity (Rom 15:4, cf. 1 Cor 10:11). The nexus between confirmation and instruction is consistent with Q al-Mā'ida 5:46. Sensing the educative aspect expressed by the wording, the exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān adds the gloss "against ignorance" (*min al-jahl*) to *maw'izatan*.⁷⁴ Some exegetes interpreted the chain of confirmation in vv. 44, 46, and 48, which is brought to a close with the Qur'an, in terms not only of "confirmation" but also of "abrogation" (*naskh*).⁷⁵ Confirmation and abrogation point precisely to the interplay between rejection and affirmation of laws that can be observed in hortatory discourses with legal components such as the Sermon on the Mount as well as in later Medinan suras.

Wa'z as Divine Legal Paraenesis

In the Medinan period, qur'anic *wa'z* frequently occurs in contexts of legal and doctrinal elaboration and exposition. The verb *wa'aza* starts to frame paraenetic passages that are legislative in character or that have a regulatory thrust. In such contexts, *wa'z* takes precedence over other self-referential terms that were used to predicate exhortations in Meccan suras. Words like *dhakkara* ("to admonish"), *andhara* ("to warn"), *bashshara* ("to announce" or "give good tidings"), and *faṣṣala* ("to set forth in detail") are used less frequently as self-referential

71 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Beirut: al-Risāla, 2006 [1427]), ad Q al-Mā'ida 5:46.

72 I thank Marianna Klar for this observation.

73 See Westerholm, "Law in the New Testament," 113.

74 Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 5 vols., ed. 'Abdallāh Maḥmūd Shihāta (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Tārikh al-'Arabī, 2002 [1423]), ad Q al-Mā'ida 5:46.

75 See, for example, al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, ad Q al-Mā'ida 5:46: *fā-innahu ra'ā l-tawrāt ḥaqqan wa-ra'ā wujūb al-'amal biḥā ilā an ya'tī nāsikh*.

markers of Medinan legal paraenesis, if they are used at all.⁷⁶ Co-occurrences of the term *āya* (“sign,” “verse”) and the verb *bayyana* (“to make things clear”) in Medinan legal paraenesis, by contrast, warrant further study. Variants of the formulation “thus God makes His signs [the signs] clear to you [the people]” (*ka-dhālika yubayyinu llāhu lakum āyātihi* [*āyātihi li-l-nāsi/al-āyāti*]) are tied exclusively to verses with legal and ethical content. In fact, the entire phrase appears only in Medinan suras.⁷⁷ This exception notwithstanding, *wa’z* appears to be the category that is most consistently used and that displays the greatest continuity with Meccan self-referential terminology.

Legal discourse framed as *wa’z* in the Medinan period is an outgrowth and articulation of qur’anic ethics. Legal specification and exposition represent an important mode of engagement with ethics at this stage of textual genesis and community formation. However, the movement is not from absence to presence, from rudimentary to elaborate. The shift has an impact on specificity and social applicability. At the same time, Medinan legislation is not parochial. It remains part of a project to formulate a coherent theological world view.

Subjects that are framed as *wa’z*, or legal paraenesis, include conjugal relations (divorce, repudiation, rebelliousness of wives), usury, trusts and ownership, warfare, and slander – i.e., social legislation. The verb *wa’aẓa* occurs both in Medinan long suras (Q al-Baqara 2 and al-Nisā’ 4) and in short or homiletic suras (Q al-Nūr 24, al-Ṭalāq 65, and al-Mujādala 58). Three different categories of legal paraenesis can be distinguished, depending on the implied speaker: man (1), indeterminate: the Prophet or God (2a), and God (2b).

The first category (1) is represented in only one instance, in Q al-Nisā’ 4:34. Male believers are to exhort female believers to be obedient:

76 Form I *dhakara* and related forms occur more frequently than form II *dhakkara* and related forms in the Medinan suras. The listeners are enjoined to remember/contemplate God’s name and His grace in legislative and regulatory contexts, e.g., in Q al-Baqara 2:231 and 239; al-Mā’ida 5:4 and 91; al-Ḥajj 22:28, 34, and 36; al-Jumu’a 62:9 etc. Form V *tadhakkara* “to remember, be mindful” appears rarely in legal discourse, e.g., in Q al-Nūr 24:1 and 27. The connection between words derived from *n-dh-r* and legal discourse is superficial: for example, the reference to *nadhīr* in Q al-Aḥzāb 33:45 is unrelated to the legal material in vv. 49ff. *Bashshara* appears thirty-seven times in thirty-five Medinan verses, but only Q al-Tawba 9:34 and al-Ḥajj 22:34 and 37 have legal and ethical implications. *Faṣṣala* occurs five times in Medinan suras, but only Q al-Tawba 9:11 is regulatory.

77 See Q al-Baqara 2:187, 219, 221, 242, and 266; Āl ‘Imrān 3:103 and 118; al-Mā’ida 5:89; al-Nūr 24:58, 59, and 61; as well as al-Ḥadīd 57:17 (*bayyannā lakumu l-āyāti*). Cf. Q al-Tawba 9:11. If legislative material, rulings, or ethical injunctions are not embedded in the verses themselves, they occur in the immediate context.

- 34 Men are in charge of women because God has given preference to some of them over others and because of the possessions which they spend. Righteous women are obedient, guarding the unseen because God has guarded [them]. Those women whose marital infidelity you fear, *exhort them* (*fa-‘izūhunna*), leave them alone in the marital bed, and beat them. If they obey you, do not seek a way against them. God is exalted and great. [emphasis mine-NKS]

Although the exhortation concerns the innerworldly sphere, conjugal relations, a clear asymmetry in authority between the two genders is posited, as “men are in charge of women” (*al-rijālu qawwāmūna ‘alā l-nisā’i*).

The two other categories extend this asymmetrical relationship in authority outside the human domain by implying that the paraenetic source is either the Prophet or God (2a), or by directly and explicitly identifying the source as God (2b). Both categories pre-suppose the self-referential uses of *wa’z* discussed in Part 2 of this essay, where we have seen that the Qur’an refers to itself using the term *maw’iza* (alongside other terms such as *hudan*). Since the Qur’an is itself *wa’z*, logically there must be an agent who articulates it. In the case of category 2a, the answer to this question is circumvented: the believers are exhorted to observe certain laws and the exhortation is formulated as a passive construction. Such is the case in Q al-Ṭalāq 65:2, which occurs in the context of a larger section on divorce:

- 2 Then, when they have reached their term, either retain them in a way recognized as lawful or part from them in a way recognized as lawful. Call as witnesses two just men, and elicit the testimony before God. Those who believe in God and the Last Day *are exhorted to this* (*yū’azu bihī*). And whoever fears God – God will appoint a way out for him. [emphasis mine-NKS]

The same phenomenon can be observed in Q al-Mujādala 58:3, again in the context of conjugal relations. Here the believers are exhorted to observe a certain penalty in the case of a rash repudiation of wives:

- 3 Those who compare their wives to their mothers’ backs and then go back on what they have said: they need to free a slave before they can touch each other. That is *what you are exhorted to do* (*tū’azūna bihī*). God is informed of what you do. [emphasis mine-NKS]

Both verses, Q al-Ṭalāq 65:2 and Q al-Mujādala 58:3, “occur twice” in the Qur’an (cf. Q al-Baqara 2:231 and al-Aḥzāb 33:4).⁷⁸ Do the passive forms point to a chronological sequence? Q al-Ṭalāq 65:2 and Q al-Mujādala 58:3 may be later than the other occurrences of the same statements. The passive forms would then reflect the paraenetic reinforcement of ideas already expressed. It should be noted, however, that Q al-Baqara 2:231 uses an active form of *wa‘aẓa*, while Q al-Aḥzāb 33:4 does not.

Finally, *wa‘ẓ* is identified as divine in origin in a number of Medinan verses (2b), in which God is the agent of legal paraenesis.⁷⁹ Divine legal paraenesis occurs for example in the “doublet” verse in Q al-Baqara 2 just mentioned. God exhorts the believers twice in the context of divorce regulations:

- 231 When you have divorced women and they have reached their term, retain them in a way recognized as lawful or set them free in a way recognized as lawful. Do not retain them harmfully so that you transgress. Whoever does that wrongs himself. Do not take God’s signs in mockery, but remember God’s blessing to you and the Scripture and the Wisdom that He has sent down to you, *by which He exhorts you* (*ya‘īẓukum bihī*). Fear God and know that God knows everything.
- 232 When you have divorced women and they have reached their term, do not make difficulties about them marrying their [new] husbands if they have agreed together on the basis of what is recognized as lawful. *To that are exhorted* (*dhālika yū‘aẓu bihī*) those of you who believe in God and the Last Day. That is purer and more chaste for you. God knows while you do not know.
[emphases mine-NKS]

In v. 232, a passive construction occurs once again. This suggests that category 2a has the same paraenetic source as 2b, namely God, although this is not made explicit.

Another instance of divine *wa‘ẓ* in category 2b is Q al-Baqara 2:275, where the person who desists from usury is identified as a person “to whom comes an exhortation (*maw‘īẓatun*) from his Lord.” Q al-Nisā’ 4:58 concludes a divine command to trustworthiness and fairness with the words “excellent is

⁷⁸ I thank Joseph Lowry for this observation.

⁷⁹ This development is anticipated in two Meccan suras. In Q Hūd 11:46, God exhorts outside of a legal context (the exhortation is addressed to Noah). In Q al-Naḥl 16:90, God’s exhortation is addressed to the believers and concerns justice (*‘adl*).

the exhortation which God gives you (*inna llāha nī'immā ya'izukum bihī*).⁸⁰ Q al-Nisā' 4:66 reflects on the possible refusal of the listeners to wage war for God, concluding that "had they done what they were exhorted to do (*mā yū'azūna bihī*), it would have been better and more strengthening for them." That the exhortation is divine in origin can in this case be inferred from the following verse, in which God is clearly the speaker: He promises a reward for performance. In Q al-Nūr 24:17, the legal context is a long passage on slander: v. 6 criticizes "those who slander their wives and have no witnesses but themselves," introducing opaque references to an event in which a woman was slandered but her accusers were not able to produce four witnesses (v. 13), while others gossiped instead of condemning them (v. 15). In this context, "God exhorts you (*ya'izukumu llāhu*) never to repeat the like of that, if you are believers" (v. 17), i.e., to engage in slander. Finally, v. 34 of the same sura, which precedes the "Light Verse," characterizes what God is sending down as an exhortation (*wa-maw'izatan li-l-muttaqīn*). This statement follows detailed marriage regulations in vv. 32 and 34.

In the Medinan suras, the focus on social legislation framed as *wa'z* is noteworthy. Late antique legal paraenesis had a strong focus on social legislation, especially as it pertains to sexual ethics.⁸¹

Why is the verb *wa'za* instrumental in framing legal passages in the Medinan suras? Why not *kataba* followed by the preposition *'alā*, for example? "Prescribing" is the operative legal terminology in the legal sections in Q al-Baqara 2:178–242, but otherwise it appears only sporadically. A certain measure of speculation is necessary. *Wa'z*, one might argue, is characterized by a connection to man's interior: leading a lawful life requires conscious legal-ethical decision-making and this in turn requires human volition. The redefinition of legal issues and their re-conceptualization as a matter of interior disposition has been observed in other qur'anic contexts.⁸² "Piety in the Qur'an," Reinhart argues, "is not just doing the right act, or observing the right taboos, but the inner disposition and attitude that transcends that act."⁸³ He

80 But see Hani Hayajneh, "The Usage of Ancient South Arabian and Other Arabian Languages as an Etymological Source for Qur'anic Vocabulary," in *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context 2*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 117–46, at 130–33. Based on South Arabian usage, Hayajneh argues that *amāna* in the Qur'an refers to an "administrative dignity or right given by (or sanctioned by) God," rather than to a "trust" or "deposit," as generally assumed.

81 See, for example, Niebuhr, *Gesetz und Paränese*, 26, 30, 45, 47, 63, 159, and passim.

82 See notably A. Kevin Reinhart, "What We Know about Ma'rūf," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 1 (2017): 51–82, at 57. He discusses the redefinition of legal issues as a matter of inner disposition in the context of his analysis of the word *birr*.

83 Ibid., 58.

suggests that a moral knowledge outside of the revelation, located in man, is part of the qur'anic concept of ethics.⁸⁴ This is true of legal paraenesis as well: having heard the exhortation, the listeners have the option to go either the right way or the wrong one, to turn to darkness or to light – another powerful binary, besides the two ways that stand for good and evil, which appears in the Medinan suras. The listeners must choose one option and then conform. Legal paraenesis appeals to an inner disposition.

The interior dimension of legal paraenesis articulated with the verb *wa'aza* and related forms emerges clearly in a comparison with uses of the verb “prescribe,” *kataba 'alā* (seldom: *kataba li-*). Only in a few cases does *kataba 'alā* (*kataba li-*), which occurs almost exclusively in Medinan suras, appear in legal and legislative passages and references.⁸⁵ Wherever the verb occurs, it signifies a legal process sanctioned by legal writ or a disciplined practice, a practice imposed from without rather than adopted from within.

The verb *kataba* with a normative meaning often refers to rulings and laws written down in previous scriptures, thus conveying a sense of codified scriptural law/legal writ. The verb must not have been understood in a literal sense, as pre-scribing. But a significant number of its occurrences in legal contexts do indeed suggest that the rulings it frames are based on existing scripture and disciplined practices. In Q al-A'rāf 7:145, *kataba li-* refers to an action performed by God upon Moses' Tablets (*wa-katabnā lahū fī l-abwāhi*), as discussed in Part 2. The Medinan verse Q al-Mā'ida 5:32, “We have prescribed for the Israelites that whoever kills a soul, other than in retaliation for a soul or for corruption in the land, will be as if he had killed all the people,” echoes an idea articulated in the Babylonian Talmud, where it is ascribed to the Hebrew Bible (“he who destroys one soul of a human being, the Scripture considers him as if he should destroy a whole world,” bSanhedrin 37a). Q al-Mā'ida 5:45 and Q al-Baqara 2:178 treat the *lex talionis* as it is laid down in Lev 24:19–21, using *katabnā 'alayhim* and the passive *kutiba 'alaykumu*, respectively. The

84 See *ibid.*, 64.

85 For *kataba 'alā* (and derived forms) in legal contexts, see Q al-Baqara 2:178, 180, 183 (twice), 216, and 246 (twice); Āl 'Imrān 3:154; al-Nisā' 4:66 and 77; al-Mā'ida 5:32 and 45; as well as al-Ḥadīd 57:27. Q al-Nisā' 4:103 has the substantive form *kitāb 'alā*. Puzzling are two occurrences of *kataba 'alā* in Q al-An'ām 6:12 and 54. In both cases, God “prescribed for Himself mercy” (*kataba [rabbukum] 'alā nafsīhi l-rahmata*). For *kataba li-* with the possible meaning “prescribe,” see Q al-Baqara 2:187 (*wa-btaghū mā kataba llāhu lakum*) and al-Nisā' 4:127 (*mā kutiba lahunna*). Although in these two instances *kataba li-* occurs in legal contexts, it may be argued that the reference is to what God has “intended” or “foreseen” rather than “prescribed” for man. It must be emphasized that *kataba li-* is not always used in the same way as *kataba 'alā*. For example, I am not considering occurrences in which *kataba li-* indicates an entitlement to something, e.g., Q al-Nisā' 4:127; al-Tawba 9:51.

opaque verse Q al-Ḥadīd 57:27, which deals with monasticism, states that *rahbāniyya* has not been prescribed for Jesus' followers (*mā katabnāhā 'alayhim*). According to Holger Zellentin, *rahbāniyya* here does not signify "monasticism" or "celibacy," but instead refers to community overseers, perhaps bishops, who are elsewhere criticized for being treated as "lords besides God" and for embezzling communal funds (Q al-Tawba 9:31 and 34).⁸⁶ The use of *kataba 'alā* in Q al-Ḥadīd 57:27 is consistent with the occurrences in the verses discussed above. The verb may not emphasize the lack of a scriptural basis for the rigidly disciplined practices that characterize the monastic life. But even if it does not, it can be understood, *pace* Zellentin, as the rejection of a scriptural basis for appointing overseers. In either case, what is emphasized is the lack of a scriptural basis for specific practices, not a lack of human volition.

Alternatively, *kataba 'alā* is used in Medinan legal verses to articulate one unequivocal command to members of the Prophet's community: fighting and being killed (*qitāl, qatl*) is prescribed for the believers (Q al-Baqara 2:216 and 246 (twice), Āl 'Imrān 3:154, and al-Nisā' 4:66 and 77). In this context, *kataba* signifies the unavoidability of carrying out this divine command, a command that man is wont to reject because it is perceived as a hardship. The use of *kataba 'alā* in Q al-Baqara 2:216 minimizes the role of volition in this instance of legal-ethical decision-making. It pre-empts human aversity: "prescribed for you is fighting, though it is something you hate (*kutiba 'alaykumu l-qitālu wa-huwa kurhun lakum*)." The verb *kataba 'alā* is seldom used in legal contexts to refer to anything but legal rulings based on scripture and disciplined practices or the command to fight. The only exceptions are three passages that discuss inheritance or ritual.⁸⁷ One of the verses, Q al-Nisā' 4:103, concerns prayer. But it is connected to the so-called "Prayer of Fear" (*ṣalāt al-khawf*) in the preceding verse, v. 102. This suggests that the remaining three verses may not actually be exceptions, but also anticipating and pre-empting aversity.

Qur'anic *wa'z*, by contrast, projects law into man's interior by appealing to human volition. Symptomatic of this conceptualization is the emergence of the heart in the Medinan suras as a site for legal-ethical decision making.⁸⁸ The idea that paraenesis targets the heart can be traced to pre-Islamic Arabia and is reflected in poetry. Even if this poetry was reworked and recorded in writing only in Islamic times, it sheds light on a perceived link between the heart and

86 Holger M. Zellentin, "Aḥbār and Ruḥbān: Religious Leaders in the Qur'ān in Dialogue with Christian and Rabbinic Literature," in *Qur'anic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 262–93, at 271–73.

87 Q al-Baqara 2:180 and 183 as well as al-Nisā' 4:103.

88 For a semantic study of the heart in the Qur'an and pre-Islamic poetry, see Tilman Seidensticker, *Altarabisch 'Herz' und sein Wortfeld* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992).

hortatory discourse. The “Suspended Ode” of ‘Abīd b. al-Abrāṣ, discussed at the beginning of this essay, emphasizes this link:

- 19 Man cannot exhort the one who is not exhorted by fate (*lā ya’īzu l-nāsu man lam ya’īzi l-dahru*); trying to instill wisdom is of no avail –
 20 Unless there is the right disposition in the hearts (*illā sajiyyātu/i mā al-qulūbi*) [...].⁸⁹

The “right disposition in the hearts” is a pre-condition for man’s ability to respond to exhortations. A pre-Islamic sermon that has been transmitted in the philological and literary miscellany *Kitāb al-Amālī* by Ismā’īl b. Qāsim Abū ‘Alī, known as al-Qālī (288/901–356/967), also suggests that hortatory and paraenetic discourse have an impact on the heart. The orator al-Ma’mūn al-Ḥārithī opens his sermon with the request, “If you lend me your ears and your hearts, then the exhortation reaches wherever I want among you (*ar’ūnī asmā’ukum wa-aṣghū ilayya qulūbakum yablugh al-wa’z minkum haythu urīdu*).”⁹⁰

Similarly, the heart is mentioned in the Qur’an in two verses that frame ethical or legal content as *wa’z*. The first is the closing section of Q Hūd 11, a prominent position:

- 120 All that we tell you of the tidings of the messengers is that by which
We make firm your heart (mā nuthabbitu bihī fu’ādaka). In these there
 has come to you the truth and *an exhortation* and a reminder for the
 believers (*wa-jā’aka fī hādhihi l-ḥaqqu wa-maw’izātun wa-dhikrā li-l-mu’mīnīn*). [emphasis mine-NKS]

In the same sura, Shu’ayb’s ethico-religious exhortation to the people of Midian, discussed in Part 1, is one of the messenger stories whose purpose is to make the believers’ hearts firm.

In the second case, in Q al-Nisā’ 4, a sura that contains numerous examples of legal paraenesis, God knows “what is in the hearts” of the hypocrites (*mā fī qulūbihim*, v. 63). The messenger is asked to turn away from them and to exhort them. It is the conceptualization of this exhortation that is significant: “exhort them and speak to them a devastating word about themselves” (*wa-iḥṣum wa-qul lahum fī anfusihim qawlan balīghā*). Here, a penetrating exhortation that touches the listeners’ very souls, their personhood, is envisaged.

⁸⁹ Jones, *Arabic Poetry*, 322–323 (translation modified significantly).

⁹⁰ Al-Qālī, *Kitāb al-Amālī*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Jawwād al-Aṣma’ī, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1975–76), 1:323–24. On the pre-Islamic *khuṭba* of pious counsel, see Qutbuddin, “Khuṭba,” 195–96.

One heart trope that is common in Medinan suras—indeed, that appears only in the Medinan period—occurs in repeated warnings against “those in whose heart is sickness” (*alladhīna fī qulūbihim maraḍun*, Q al-Baqara 2:10, al-Mā’ida 5:52, al-Anfāl 8:49, al-Tawba 9:125, al-Ḥajj 22:53, al-Nūr 24:50, al-Aḥzāb 33:12, 32, and 60, Muḥammad 47:20 and 29, al-Muddaththir 74:31 [the last sura is Meccan but the verse is a later, probably Medinan addition]). The trope of the corrupted heart is found in late antique legal paraenesis. Notably, the “Testament of Benjamin” 8:2 refers to “impurity/sickness of the heart” (*ou gar echei miasmon en kardia*).⁹¹ This corruption of the heart is understood as an impediment to a life according to God’s law. The trope of the heart as a site for legal-ethical decision-making also is found in the New Testament. In one exhortation, Jesus engages with the Jewish dietary laws (*kashrut*),⁹² insisting that it is what is in the heart that matters.⁹³ Mark 7:20 reads:

And he [Jesus] said, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. 21 *For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, 22 adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.* 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” [emphasis mine-NKS]

Against this background, it seems plausible to surmise that in the Medinan suras the term *wa’z* highlights the listeners’ active and conscious contribution to implementing and reinforcing the law, its ethical internalization. Legislative content and rulings are not merely “pre-scribed.” When they are framed as legal paraenesis, the listeners are expected to consciously choose to internalize them.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have attempted to identify a connection between narrative passages in Meccan suras and legal/legislative sections in Medinan suras. What began as “ethical exhortation” becomes “legal paraenesis.”

⁹¹ Charles, ed., *Greek Versions*, 225.

⁹² The view that Jesus abrogated these laws has undergone reassessment in modern scholarship. See, for example, David J. Rudolph, “Jesus and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Mark 7:19b,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 74:4 (2002): 291–311, and Holger M. Zellentini, “Jesus and the Tradition of the Elders: Originalism and Traditionalism in Early Judean Legal Theory,” in *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels*, ed. Eduard Iricinschi et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 379–403.

⁹³ See Mark 7:17–23. Cf. Matt 15:10–20.

In the middle and late Meccan suras, messengers such as Hūd or Shu'ayb exhort the peoples to whom they are sent (Q al-Shu'arā' 26 and Q Hūd 11, respectively), the sage Luqmān exhorts his son (Q Luqmān 31), and a *qul*-instruction offers an exemplary exhortation to be articulated by the qur'anic messenger (Q Saba' 34). In all these cases, exhortations are integrated with socio-ethical injunctions. Such exhortations are best understood as paradigmatic, prototypical, and typological renditions of a fundamental ethical awareness that continues to undergird later, notably Medinan suras.

Verses 144–46 of Q al-A'rāf 7 establish a legal etiology for *wa'z*, thus inaugurating its use in legal, legislative, and regulatory contexts. The words written on the Tablets that Moses received contain an “exhortation” (*maw'iza*) drawn “from everything” and an “exposition” (*tafṣīl*) for everything. Instruction, probably oral instruction, is thus emphasized at an important moment in sacred history, the moment when Moses received divine law, the Commandments. The use of the word *maw'iza* in Q al-Mā'ida 5:46, where it refers to the Gospel, points to a qur'anic awareness of a distinctly paraenetic dimension that law-making has assumed in salvation history, especially in Christianity. Since the Qur'an also refers to itself as a *maw'iza*, the shared use of the term arguably reflects a perception of sameness. Notwithstanding the fact that the Hebrew Bible does in fact incorporate paraenesis, especially in the context of the Commandments in Deuteronomy, the Qur'an seems primarily to emphasize a perceived commonality with early Christian paraenesis. It evokes the concept of a consecutive confirmation (*taṣdīq*) that might allude to a fulfilling of the law.

The Medinan legal material framed as and by *wa'z* reformulates and specifies earlier Meccan ethical exhortations to make them immediately relevant in a specific political, social, and historical setting, that of the Medinan polity. Medinan legal paraenesis builds upon Meccan ethical exhortations articulated by messengers sent to disbelieving peoples or uttered by the sage Luqmān. The emphasis on social legislation, especially conjugal relations and divorce, which characterizes the occurrences of *wa'z* in the Medinan suras, brings to mind late antique legal paraeneses, a connection that awaits further research. The verb *wa'aza* expresses an inner dimension of legal-ethical decision-making that is clearly absent from scripture-based prescriptions introduced with *kataba 'alā* (or, in a few cases, *lī-*), which offer no room for human volition or actively pre-empt it. In the Medinan suras, legal paraenesis makes law the object of an interior process reflected in ideas associated with the heart as the site of legal-ethical decision-making.

The manner in which the Qur'an addresses law is as important as the contents of individual legal/legislative passages. This emerges clearly from an

examination of a self-referential category like *waʿz*. The conceptual organization of qurʿanic law is closely linked to the modality of legal communication. We can shed light on its intricacies by tracing the theological and philological continuities between Meccan and Medinan texts, on the one hand, and by studying the organic links between qurʿanic discourses and literary genres preceding and postdating the genesis of Islam’s sacred scripture, on the other hand. Investigating the “poethics” of qurʿanic legislation through an analysis of the Qurʾan side by side with biblical and post-biblical traditions as well as Arabic poetry and Islamic exegetical and theological voices is crucial for understanding the nature of this legislation.

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