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Interrogative Rhetoric and Deliberative Discourse in the Medinan Suras[*]

This chapter deals with the rhetorical dimensions of interrogative utterances (*istifhām*) in the Qur'an. The Qur'an includes a rich variety of such utterances, i.e., questions. Scholarly engagement with questions in Arabic texts, especially in the Qur'an, frequently privileges linguistic features and focuses on the grammatical form of the questions. But questions are deployed for rhetorical purposes, especially in religious texts. As Kenneth Craig observes in his study of interrogative rhetoric of the Hebrew Bible, a question "is an opening that seeks to be closed, and its rhetorical play derives from how it disposes its energies: how it invites opening, how it imposes closure".[1] In this article I attempt to shed light on the rhetorical patterning of questions at different stages of the proclamation of the Qur'an, with a particular focus on the latest stage of the genesis of the text and the formation of the community in Medina. I argue that the use of interrogatives in the Qur'an undergoes an evolution wherein the rhetorical patterns of questions are subject to change and questions are increasingly embedded in religious controversy and what resembles a deliberative discourse. I also compare different facets of the evolving interrogative rhetoric of the Qur'an to late antique texts in which questions are similarly deployed for rhetorical purposes.

Questions are probably as old as the *homo loquens*. But the rhetorical strategy of asking questions in order to impart politico-religious knowledge in a disciplined fashion received an important impulse in classical antiquity. We encounter *erōtapokriseis* ("questions and answers"), a later Byzantine coinage, as well as *problēmata* ("problems"), *aporiai* ("difficulties"), and *zētēmata* ("questions"). There is evidence of a widespread didactic practice in grammatical schools that consisted in verifying a

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[1] Kenneth M. Craig, *Asking for Rhetoric: The Hebrew Bible's Protean Interrogative* (Brill: Leiden, 2005), 1–2.

student's acquisition of knowledge through question-answer exercises. The grammarians' practice of asking didactic questions was then enthusiastically adopted by Christian exegetes and theologians who had received their training in the pagan school system.[2] Interrogative rhetoric shaped late antique Jewish literature as well, even before the development of responsal literature.[3] Rhetorical modes of expression were pervasive, and questions embedded in didactic text types continued to thrive in the centuries that followed, all through Late Antiquity and well into Islamic times.

When studying late antique interrogatives, one needs to distinguish between a question-answer genre, on the one hand, and a literary procedure involving questions, on the other. In contrast to the former, the latter may well be used in a text pertaining to a different genre.[4] The degree to which both

[2] For the Christian context, see especially the pioneering article series on question-answer literature by Gustave Bardy, "La littérature patristique des 'Quaestiones et Responsiones' sur l'Écriture Sainte", *Revue Biblique* 41 (1932) (I); 41 (1932) (II); 41 (1932) (III); 42 (1933) (IV); 42 (1933) (V); 42 (1933) (VI). Overview articles include Yannis Papadogiannakis, "Erotapokriseis", in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall et al. (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), accessed September 30, 2017, at http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah12080/full; Yannis Papadoyannakis [= Papadogiannakis], "Instruction by Question and Answer: The Case of Late Antique and Byzantine Erotapokriseis", in *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity: Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 91–105; and Heinrich Dörrie, "Erotapokriseis", in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum: Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt*, vol. 6, ed. Theodor Klauser (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1966), 342–370. Two important more recent contributions to the study of questions in Late Antiquity are the collective volumes by Annelie Volgers and Claudio Zamagni, eds, *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), and Marie-Pierre Bussières, ed., *La littérature des questions et réponses dans l'Antiquité profane et chrétienne: De l'enseignement à l'exégèse* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

[3] For the Jewish context, see especially Jacob Lauterbach, "She'elot u-Teshubot", in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1905), and Peter J. Haas, *Responsa: Literary History of a Rabbinic Genre* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

[4] See Claudio Zamagni, "Une introduction méthodologique à la littérature patristique des questions et réponses: Le cas d'Eusèbe de Césarée", in *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context*, ed. Annelie Volgers and Claudio Zamagni (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 10, and in English idem, "Is the Question-and-Answer Literary Genre in Early Christian Literature a Homogeneous Group?", in *La littérature des questions et*

manifested themselves primarily or predominantly in writing and in oral discourse, respectively, remains to be assessed, but the literary procedure was by no means only a feature of written texts. (We might gain this impression from the written crystallizations of late antique discourse that have come down to us and with which we need to work today.) In any case, only the *literary procedure* of asking questions is relevant to an analysis of the Qur'anic uses of interrogatives. Questions are systematically deployed in Qur'anic suras – a phenomenon that is to be expected if one assumes that the text reflects an interactive process of communication between a messenger and his community. The Qur'an then presents itself "as a continuous dialogue in which questions were raised and answers were given".[5] But despite the importance of questions and answers, no sura is structured predominantly or exclusively by questions and answers. It should be noted, however, that a question-answer *genre* emerged at a very early stage of the Islamic exegetical engagement with the Qur'an. This responsal genre is constituted by the so-called *masā'il* ("questions").[6] Later Islamic scholastic dialectical and didactical literature also draws on question-answer formats. We may also note the importance of the question-answer genre in polemics and apologetics.[7]

Questions as a feature of the Arabic language are discussed in more or less detail in modern European works about Arabic grammar,[8] which in turn build on a rich tradition of medieval

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réponses dans l'Antiquité profane et chrétienne: De l'enseignement à l'exégèse, ed. Marie-Pierre Bussières (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 242.

[5] Angelika Neuwirth, "Oral Scriptures in Contact: The Qur'anic Story of the Golden Calf and its Position between Narrative, Cult and Inter-Communal Debate", in Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies London, 2014), 309.

[6] The *Masā'il Nāfiʿ ibn al-Azraq*, for example, cover two hundred difficult words in the Qur'an. These are explained with reference to Arabic poetry by ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAbbās. Philological *masā'il* were quickly followed by legal *masā'il*. On *masā'il* literature, see Hans Daiber, "Masā'il wa-Adjwiba", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition*, vol. 4, ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 636–639.

[7] A prominent example is John of Damascus's *Disputation between a Saracen and a Christian*. On this text, see Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 97–130.

[8] For example, Hermann Reckendorf, *Die syntaktischen Verhältnisse des Arabischen*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1895), 73–82; idem, *Arabische Syntax* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1921), 31–42; William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 1898), 306–317.

scholarship.[9] Based on the expected answer, interrogative structures can be divided into polar interrogatives (yes/no questions) and non-polar or constituent interrogatives (wh-questions). Both structures are introduced by different question particles and pronouns: *a-* and *hal* are used in polar interrogatives; *mā/mādhā* ("what"), *man* ("who"), *ayyu* ("which"), *ayyāna*/*matā* ("when"), *ayna* ("where"), *annā* ("whence"), *li-mā* ("why"), *kam* ("how many"), and *kayfa* ("how") are used in non-polar interrogatives. All these interrogatives are a basic component of Qur'anic language as well. Scholars have examined semantic, morphological, and syntactical characteristics of individual question markers.[10] But despite the long-standing engagement with questions in Arabic and Qur'anic grammar, they remain an understudied topic in more recent Qur'an scholarship,[11] above all outside of grammatical works. Rhetorical strategies involving Qur'anic questions have received scarcely any attention.[12] Hence, we know little about the functions served by Qur'anic questions, how they involve

[9] An example is Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Hishām, *Mughnī al-labīb ʿan kutub al-aʿārīb*, ed. Māzin Mubārak and Muḥammad ʿAlī Ḥamad Allāh (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1964 [1384]). Ibn Hishām analyses question particles in the long first part of his work, which is devoted to *mufradāt*, lexical items with grammatical functions.

[10] See notably Gotthelf Bergsträsser, *Verneinungs- und Fragepartikeln und Verwandtes im Ḳur'ān: Ein Beitrag zur historischen Grammatik des Arabischen* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1914), 84–105, which focuses on negative questions. For a more recent albeit short overview of interrogatives in the Qur'an, see Alan Jones, *Arabic through the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2006), 105–108. Interrogative pronouns and particles are briefly translated and discussed in Arne A. Ambros (in collaboration with Stephan Procházka), *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004), 322–332 (passim).

[11] An exception to the lack of modern scholarly interest in Qur'anic questions is ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm Ibrāhīm Muḥammad al-Maṭʿanī, *Al-Tafsīr al-balāghī li-l-istifhām fī l-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1999 [1420]). The work treats question markers in alphabetical order. The first volume focuses particularly on the question marker *hamza*. On this topic, see also ʿAbd al-Raʿūf al-Labadī, *Hamzat al-istifhām fī l-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Amman: al-Maktaba al-Waṭaniyya, 1992). Rhetorical questions are analysed from a linguistic perspective in Muhammad A. Badarneh, "The Rhetorical Question as a Discursive and Stylistic Device in the Quran" (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2003).

[12] An exception is the brief discussion of "inquiry" in Rosalind Ward Gwynne, "Patterns of Address", in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, 2nd ed., ed. Andrew Rippin and Jawid Mojaddedi (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 82–95, at 92.

addressees by signalling semantic opening and closure, which information they carry in which contexts, or, alternatively, how they signal a failure to assimilate knowledge.

I argue in this article that it is possible to trace changes in the Qur'an's interrogative rhetoric. My argument presupposes a diachronic approach to the Qur'anic text. Traditional Islamic scholarship distinguished Meccan suras (i.e., those revealed in Mecca) from Medinan ones (i.e., those revealed in Medina). Building on this contrast and on the work of Gustav Weil, in his *Geschichte des Qorâns* (1860) Theodor Nöldeke further subdivided the Meccan suras into three periods forming a continuum between two poles: one pole is constituted by short and rhythmic suras, the other by long narrative ones.[13] Nöldeke's model has been substantially refined and partially modified in recent years by a number of scholars, most notably Angelika Neuwirth and Nicolai Sinai.[14] Most importantly for the present context, Sinai has shown that the Medinan Qur'an constitutes a stylistically and doctrinally well-defined sub-corpus of proclamations.[15] This result aligns with the observation that questions are deployed in considerably different ways in Meccan and Medinan suras.

In what follows, I shall first examine the characteristics of exemplary questions and sets of questions in suras dating to different stages of the Qur'an's textual genesis and discuss their respective rhetorical patterns. I shall then proceed to examine the relation of questions to the structure of the Medinan suras and ask how questions play into what I call "deliberative discourse". In a final section,

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[13] See Theodor Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorâns*, vol. 1: *Über den Ursprung des Qorāns* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909).

[14] See Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010); Nicolai Sinai, "The Qur'an 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); and Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 111–137.

[15] See Nicolai Sinai, "The Unknown Known: Some Groundwork for Interpreting the Medinan Qur'an", *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 66 (2015–2016). He identifies "a repertoire of themes that are both inherently linked and concentrated in a relatively limited number of surahs, all of which exhibit a high mean verse length and formulaic density" (Sinai, "The Unknown Known", 72). This, as Sinai argues, "warrants isolating the suras in question as a distinct subcorpus of the Qur'an, which is conveniently picked out by the traditional label 'Medinan'".

the Qur'anic practice of posing questions will be tentatively considered in its late antique rhetorical context.

The Rhetorical Patterns of Meccan and Medinan Questions

A closer look at questions in Meccan and Medinan suras reveals significant differences. These differences result not so much from morphological or syntactical peculiarities but have rather to do with the rhetorical patterns that determine the nature, number, and disposition of these interrogative structures.

Among the earliest types of Qur'anic interrogative structures are didactic questions. A number of these questions contain the phrase *mā adrāka mā*, "What will explain to you what is …?" They open suras or individual building blocks,[16] but they can also have a closing function.[17] These didactic questions about unknown new terms imitate information-seeking questions: they revolve around the puzzling facets of the impending *eschaton* or other enigmatic concepts and terms (e.g., *sijjīn*, Q 83:8). However, the questions do not truly receive an answer, but instead assert the epistemic authority of the messenger.[18] Sūrat al-Ḥāqqa (Q 69) is an example of a question dealing with the *eschaton*:

[1] The Inevitable (*al-ḥāqqa*) –

[2] What is the Inevitable? (*mā l-ḥāqqa*)

[3] What will explain to you what the Inevitable is? (*wa-mā adrāka ma l-ḥāqqa*)[19]

[16] On the interrogatory openings of the early Meccan suras, see Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 2nd ed. (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 100. On the *mā adrāka mā* construction, see Devin J. Stewart, "The Mysterious Letters and Other Formal Features of the Qur'ān in Light of Greek and Babylonian Oracular Texts", in *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 328–329.

[17] *Mā adrāka mā* at the beginning of suras: Q 86:2, Q 97:2, 101:3; opening sura sections: Q 74:27, 82:17–18, 83:8.19, 90:12, 104:5; with closing function: Q 82:17–18, 101:10 (cf. 77:14, which occurs towards the end of a section).

[18] I thank Joe Lowry for this observation.

[19] Qur'an translations here and in what follows are based on Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, 2 vols (London: Allen and Unwin; New York: Macmillan, 1955) and Alan Jones, *The Qur'ān* ([Cambridge]: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007). I have freely combined and modified these translations.

Vv. 1–3 of Sūrat al-Qāriʿa (Q 101) have the same rhetorical pattern, but the verses describe the *eschaton* as *al-qāriʿa* ("the Knocking").

Mā adrāka mā constructions are not the only interrogatives found in early Meccan suras. The openings of two other suras paraphrase questions posed by listeners. Sūrat al-Maʿārij (Q 70) opens with the verse, "A questioner asked about a punishment about to happen" (*saʾala sāʾilun bi-ʿadhābin wāqiʿ*). Sūrat al-Nabaʾ (Q 78) has a similar reported question at the beginning: "About what are they questioning one another? / About the great tiding" (*ʿamma yatasāʾalūn / ʿani l-nabaʾi l-ʿaẓīm*). The topic of both reported interrogations is the impending eschatological judgement.

Hence, *mā adrāka mā* questions and other introductory questions in early Meccan suras, while structurally providing an opening, are only apparently posed to provide semantic closure. In fact, they highlight a knowledge disparity: the Messenger knows something that the audience does not know. The questions allow the listeners emotionally to grasp the disastrous facets of Judgement Day while some semantic ambiguity remains.

Besides their opening function, another important characteristic especially of early and middle Meccan questions is what I propose to call "iterative patterning": Meccan questions tend to be part of repeated patterns. An analysis of the interrogative structure of Sūrat al-Mursalāt (Q 77) sheds light on this form of interrogative patterning in a comparatively early Qurʾanic sura.

Q 77 al-Mursalāt		
11 verses		
	Q ↓	[12] Until what day shall they be delayed?
	A ↓	[13] To the Day of Decision.
	Q	[14] What will explain to you what the Day of Decision is?
1 verse = refrain		
	Q *a-lam*	[16] Did We not destroy the ancients, [17] then cause the later ones to follow them?
1 verse + 1 verse refrain		
	Q *a-lam*	[20] Did We not create you from a nasty fluid [21] that We placed in a safe abode [22] until a known term, [23] upon which We determined, determined well indeed?
1 verse = refrain		

	Q *a-lam*	[25] Did We not make the earth a housing [26] for the living and the dead, [27] and set in it soaring mountains and quench your thirst with sweetest water?
1 verse = refrain		
22 verses		
	Q	[50] In what statement will they believe after this?

With the exception of the concluding question – the deliberately isolated position of which creates a powerful resonance – questions in the sura are knit together into larger patterns or sequences. The first one of these is a question-answer-question pattern (vv. 12–14) ending in a *mā adrāka mā* question in v. 14. This question about the *yawm al-faṣl* may be taken to be left open or to be allusively answered by the sura's exclamatory refrain "Woe on that day to those who deny it!" (v. 15; cf. vv. 19, 24, 28, 34, 37). The second pattern consists in a series of three consecutive *a-lam* questions that are posed from a divine perspective (vv. 16, 20, 25).[20] The iterative pattern is very balanced in so far as the passages between the question words are of approximately the same length (measured in verses). The three *a-lam* questions can be understood to section off or – depending on the length one assigns to each question[21] – even to constitute building blocks in and of themselves in the polemical main part of the sura. They share this important structural function with the refrain: while the question words open short subsections revolving around different ideas, the refrain closes these subsections.

Such iterations of questions characterise a number of early and middle Meccan suras. Within these groups of texts, there is no sura in which questioning is as prominent and pervasive as in Sūrat al-Raḥmān (Q 55):

Q 55 al-Raḥmān		
12 verses		

[20] For another sequence of *a-lam* questions, see Q 105:1–2 (*a-lam tara kayfa fa'ala rabbuka bi-aṣḥābi l-fīl / a-lam yaj'al kaydahum fī taḍlīl*). A single *a-lam* question from a divine viewpoint can be found in Q 94:1–4 (*a-lam nashraḥ laka ṣadrak*).

[21] Note that vv. 17, 21–23, and 27 can be construed as continuing the preceding questions or as declarative sentences. The second alternative would yield a slightly different understanding of the sura's interrogative patterning than that set out in my table. In any case, neither option obviates the clear structuring function of the questions, which results mainly from the invariant opening with *a-lam*.

13	Q ***fa-bi-ayyi ʿālāʾi rabbikumā tukadhdhibān***	[13] Which then of your Lord's bounties do you [dual] deny?
2 verses		
	Q ***fa-bi-ayyi ʿālāʾi rabbikumā tukadhdhibān***	[16] Which then of your Lord's bounties do you [dual] deny?
1 verse		
	Q ***fa-bi-ayyi ʿālāʾi rabbikumā tukadhdhibān***	[18] Which then of your Lord's bounties do you [dual] deny?
2 verses		
	Q ***fa-bi-ayyi ʿālāʾi rabbikumā tukadhdhibān***	[21] Which then of your Lord's bounties do you [dual] deny?
…		
	Q ***fa-bi-ayyi ʿālāʾi rabbikumā tukadhdhibān***	[75] Which then of your Lord's bounties do you [dual] deny?
1 verse		
	Q ***fa-bi-ayyi ʿālāʾi rabbikumā tukadhdhibān***	[77] Which then of your Lord's bounties do you [dual] deny?
1 verse		

An entire sentence is repeated in Sūrat al-Raḥmān, not only a question word: "Which then of your Lord's bounties do you [dual] deny?" This repeated question simultaneously serves as the sura's refrain. The pattern emerges clearly after the opening section (vv. 1–12, first question in v. 13) and is maintained until the end of the sura: every two or three verses, the same question is interjected. Again, this creates a strong rhythmic effect. This hymnic sura, Angelika Neuwirth has suggested, "exemplifies a central *theologoumenon*: the symmetry of the divine order of creation, not only on the semantic level, but equally in grammatical and phonetic terms".[22] The symmetry of creation is thrown into particular structural relief by means of the grammatical form of the dual.[23] This is stressed by the fact that the dual ending occurs in rhyme position. At the same time, the recurring interrogative refrain creates a regular rhythmic pattern that may also be seen as pointing to the balance and evenness of creation.

An iterative question pattern is also embedded in the refrain of Sūrat al-Qamar (Q 54), a middle Meccan sura. The question (Q) "Is there one who heeds the warning?" (*fa-hal min muddakir*), often preceded by the declaratory statement (D) "We made the recitation easy to remember" (*wa-la-qad*

[22] Angelika Neuwirth, "Qur'anic Readings of the Psalms", 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), 754.

[23] See Neuwirth, "Qur'anic Readings", 754–755.

yassarnā l-qur'āna li-l-dhikri) and the exclamatory statement (E) "And how great were My punishment and My warnings!" (*fa-kayfa kāna ʿadhābī wa-nudhur*) are used in an alternating pattern:

Q 54 al-Qamar		
8 verses		
6 verses		
	Q *fa-hal min muddakir*	[15] … Is there one who heeds the warning?
	E *fa-kayfa kāna ʿadhābī wa-nudhur*	[16] And how great were My punishment and My warnings!
	D *wa-la-qad yassarnā l-qur'āna li-l-dhikri* **Q *fa-hal min muddakir***	[17] We made the recitation easy to remember. Is there one who heeds the warning?
	E *fa-kayfa kāna ʿadhābī wa-nudhur*	[18] … And how great were My punishment and My warnings!
2 verses		
	E *fa-kayfa kāna ʿadhābī wa-nudhur*	[21] And how great were My punishment and My warnings!
	D *wa-la-qad yassarnā l-qur'āna li-l-dhikri* **Q *fa-hal min muddakir***	[22] We made the recitation easy to remember. Is there one who heeds the warning?
7 verses		
	E *fa-kayfa kāna ʿadhābī wa-nudhur*	[30] And how great were My punishment and My warnings!
1 verse		
	D *wa-la-qad yassarnā l-qur'āna li-l-dhikri* **Q *fa-hal min muddakir***	[32] We made the recitation easy to remember. Is there one who heeds the warning?
6 verses		
	Imperative variant on *fa-kayfa kāna ʿadhābī wa-nudhur*	[39] Taste My punishment and My warnings!
	D *wa-la-qad yassarnā l-qur'āna li-l-dhikri* **Q *fa-hal min muddakir***	[40] We made the recitation easy to remember. Is there one who heeds the warning?
10 verses		
	Q *fa-hal min muddakir*	[51] … Is there one who heeds the warning?
4 verses		

The integration of a recurring question into the refrain is not a coincidence in this case either. Structurally, the refrain question provides closure inasmuch as it frames the major building blocks of the main part of the sura. This main part consists of the stories of Noah's people (vv. 9–17), the people of ʿĀd (vv. 18–22), the people of Thamūd (vv. 23–32), Lot's people (vv. 33–40), and Pharaoh's people (vv. 41–42). All narratives but the last one close with the declaration "We made the recitation easy to remember" and the question "Is there one who heeds the warning?" The exclamatory statement "And how great were My punishment and My warnings!" is deployed with a slightly greater degree of flexibility between the sura's building blocks. It can appear towards the beginning (v. 18) or towards the end (vv. 16, 21, 30; cf. v. 39) of a narrative. While the question and exclamatory statement structurally close off sections against one another, semantically they provide an opening. They do not convey information but call into question the addressees' understanding of the severity of divine punishment (exclamatory statement) and the addressees' susceptibility to being warned (question). The interrogative particle *hal* followed by *min* in the question conveys doubt more forcefully than, for example, its potential alternative, the particle *a-*.[24] The linguistic makeup of the question here plays into the rhetorical strategy: both cast doubt on the listeners.

The examples just discussed show that iterative question patterns have important structural functions. They can either create coherence throughout a sura (e.g., Q 55) or help introduce and reinforce section breaks (e.g., Q 77, Q 54). The kinds of questions that we typically encounter in such repeated patterns are not information-seeking questions. We can cautiously classify them as rhetorical questions, although the binary opposition between these two classes of questions may prove to be of limited use, as in Biblical narrative.[25] In order to appreciate that this distinction does not entirely hold in the Qur'an either, we only need to consider the didactic questions previously discussed, which are only on the surface information-seeking questions but in reality aim for an emotional answer as well. Be this as it may, questions in repeated patterns like "Which then of your Lord's bounties do you [dual]

[24] Reckendorf, *Die syntaktischen Verhältnisse*, 74.

[25] Information-seeking questions and rhetorical questions are deployed in Arabic sermons. See Tahera Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration: Art and Function* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 111–112, who distinguishes "real" and "rhetorical" questions: "The real questions prompted the audience to answer verbally, while the rhetorical ones provoked a non-verbal intellectual and emotional response." On the distinction between information-seeking questions and rhetorical questions in Biblical narrative, see Craig, *Asking for Rhetoric*, 3–4.

deny?" or "Is there one who heeds the warning?" are assertive and expressive. These hymnic, or darkly sarcastic, interrogatives elicit an emotional answer from the audience inasmuch as they "cajole, convince, berate, affirm, denounce", etc.[26]

Besides didactic questions and iterative patterning, characterised by repetitions and strong rhythmic effects, from the middle Meccan suras onwards questions also become part of dialogical sequences. Direct speech is a prominent feature in the Qur'an and dialogue is a constituent element of Qur'anic narrative.[27] Mustansir Mir speaks of a "technique of narration-through-dialogue".[28] Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ (Q 26) is still characterised by iterative patterning of the sort that we saw above – e.g., the oft-repeated question "Will you not be God-fearing?" (*a-lā tattaqūn*, vv. 106, 124, 142, 161). Messengers address this question to the disbelieving peoples to whom they are sent. The decisive point is that these questions sometimes open dialogues between messengers and their audience. Questions are also embedded in such dialogical structures. The question-and-answer exchange between Moses and Pharaoh (Q 26:23–31) is a good case in point:[29]

> [23] Pharaoh said, **"And what is the Lord of all Beings?"** (*wa-mā rabbu l-ʿālamīn*)
>
> [24] He said, "The Lord of the heavens and the earth, and what is between them, if you have faith."
>
> [25] He said to those around him, **"Do you not hear?"** (*a-lā tastamiʿūn*)
>
> [26] He said, "Your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers."
>
> [27] He said, "Your messenger who was sent to you is possessed!"
>
> [28] He said, "The Lord of the east and west, and what is between them, if you have understanding."
>
> [29] He said, "If you take a god other than me, I shall certainly imprison you."
>
> [30] He said, **"Even if I were to bring you something clear?"** (*a-wa-law jiʾtuka bi-shayʾin mubīn*)
>
> [31] He said, "So bring it, if you speak true."

[26] Craig, *Asking for Rhetoric*, 3–4.

[27] See Mustansir Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an", *Religion & Literature* 24, no. 1 (1992), and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh, *Al-Ḥiwār fī l-Qurʾān: qawāʿiduhu, asālībuhu, muʿṭayātuhu* (n. p.: al-Dār al-Islāmiyya, 1979).

[28] Mir, "Dialogue", 17, 18.

[29] For an exemplary analysis of the dialogue in Q 26:16–37, see Mir, "Dialogue", 12–16.

The dialogue opens with Pharaoh's question about God. Note that Pharaoh refers to God using the interrogative pronoun *mā*, and not *man*. This is due to the fact that the inquiry concerns the nature and quality of God, a possible use of *mā*, but in this case one with degrading connotations.[30] The dismissive question provides an opening for Moses to set out his monotheistic message. He does so in vv. 24, 26, and 28 in different cosmic, historical, and earthly terms. Both parties display what Mir has called "studied disregard" for each other's statements.[31] Pharaoh himself uses a question in v. 25 to draw his audience in, ridiculing Moses.

The late Meccan suras prominently display another form of interrogative dialogical patterning, although it should be noted that many of the previous interrogative patterns continue to be used, especially questions in narrative dialogues. What is new is a question-answer pattern bracketed by *qul* statements, as for example in Sūrat al-Raʿd, Q 13:16:

> Say: **"Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth?"** (*qul man rabbu l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi*)
> Say: "God."
> Say: **"Then have you taken others beside Him to be your protectors, others who do not have it in them to benefit or harm themselves?"** (*qul a-fa-ttakhadhtum min dūnihi awliyāʾa lā yamlikūna li-anfusihim nafʿan wa-lā ḍarran*)
> Say: **"Are the blind and the seeing equal** (*qul hal yastawī l-aʿmā wa-l-baṣīru*), **or are the shadows and the light equal?** (*am hal tastawī l-ẓulumātu wa-l-nūru*)
> **Or have they ascribed to God associates who created as He created, so that creation is all alike forthem?"** (*am jaʿalū li-llāhi shurakāʾa khalaqū ka-khalqihi fa-tashābaha l-khalqu ʿalayhim*)
> Say: "God is the creator of everything, and He is the one, the omnipotent."

Question-and-answer sequences introduced by *qul* directives can function as exemplary schematised dialogues. The entire passage is somewhat reminiscent of the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh in Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ, itself marked by a series of questions and answers. However, in the case of

[30] For this use of *mā* instead of *man*, see Wright, *Grammar*, vol. 2, 313, who quotes Q 26:23. Mir, "Dialogue", 14, suggests that the question word is used sarcastically.

[31] Mir, "Dialogue", 12.

Sūrat al-Raʿd, both questions and answers are introduced by the command "Say: …" (*qul*). The *qul* pattern elevates the interrogative exchange to a level of greater abstraction, rendering it prototypical. Except for the first question, which receives a clear answer, the following questions are very different from the questions in the narrative dialogue we encountered in Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ. They are opaque and highly evasive; their concatenation leads to a polemical build-up of interrogative structures, which is closed by a statement about God.[32]

A different *qul* pattern can be observed in another late Meccan sura that is also marked by an extremely high ratio of questions, Sūrat al-Anʿām (Q 6):

> [12] Say: **"To whom belongs what is in the heavens and on earth?"** (*qul li-man mā fī l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi*)"
> Say: "It is God's. He has prescribed for Himself mercy. He will for sure gather you to the Day of Resurrection, about which there is no doubt. Those who have lost their souls do not believe.
> [13] And to Him belongs whatsoever inhabits the night and the day. He is the hearing and the knowing."
> [14] Say: **"Shall I take as protector someone other than God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, He who feeds and is not fed?"** (*qul a-ghayra llāhi attakhidhu waliyyan fāṭiri l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi wa-huwa yuṭʿimu wa-lā yuṭʿamu*)
> Say: "I have been commanded to be the first to surrender (*aslama*): 'Do not be of those who associate (gods with God).'"
> [15] Say: "I fear, if I should rebel against my Lord, the punishment of a great day."
> …
> [19] Say: **"What thing is greatest in testimony?"** (*qul ayyu shay'in akbaru shahādatan*)
> Say: "God is a witness between me and you, and this recitation (*hādha l-qur'ānu*) has been revealed to me that I may warn you thereby, and whomsoever it may reach. **Do you indeed bear witness that there are other gods with God?"** (*a-innakum la-tashhadūna anna maʿa llāhi ālihatan ukhrā*)

[32] A dialogue turning into a catalogue of polemical questions is a late Meccan literary phenomenon that is briefly discussed in Hannelies Koloska, "Towards an Abrahamic Religion: Developments in Later Meccan Suras. Part I: Strategies of Argumentation and Interpretation", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 22, no. 2 (2020): 37–38.

Say: "I do not bear witness."

Say: "He is only one God, and I am quit of what you associate with Him."

While structurally similar, both *qul*-patterns quoted above display significant differences. The answers to this second pattern of questions are much more straightforward than to the first set of questions, although the level of abstraction is similar. The pattern in Sūrat al-Anʿām resembles a catechism, inasmuch as monotheist creedal statements function as answers to the questions raised.[33]

In the longer Medinan suras, we encounter far fewer of the interrogative iterative, dialogical, and other patterns just surveyed. It is certainly true that different modes of posing questions can be detected across the entire Qur'an. Nonetheless, Medinan questions have a marked tendency to occur in solitary position rather than in sequences of several questions. Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (Q 3) offers an example:

[64] Say: "People of the Scripture! Come now to a word common between us and you – that we serve none but God, and that we associate nothing with Him, and that one of us does not take another as lords apart from God."

If they turn their backs, say: "Bear witness that we surrender."

[65] O People of the Scripture, **why do you argue with us about Abraham?** (*li-ma tuḥājjūna fī ibrāhīma*)

The Torah and the Gospel were only sent down after him.

Do you not understand? (*a-fa-lā taʿqilūn*)

[66] *You* are the ones who argue about that of which you have knowledge;

so **why do you argue about that of which you have no knowledge?** (*fa-li-ma tuḥājjūna fī-mā laysa lakum bihi ʿilmun*)

God knows, and you do not.

The questions in this passage are embedded in an address to the People of the Scripture. The question regarding Abraham (v. 65) serves to broach a new topic and is followed immediately by a

[33] On the similarity of the question-answer format in some *qul* statements to catechetical teachings, see the comments in Koloska, "Towards an Abrahamic Religion", 37.

comment to the effect that the Torah and the Gospel were sent down after Abraham. The second question, coming at the end of the same verse, invites the listeners further to ponder the matter raised. The ensuing question (v. 66) then elevates the problem to a new, more general level: the issue at stake is now the audience's disputing that which is beyond their knowledge.

A little further on, the sura continues in a similarly interrogative mode:

> [160] **If God helps you, none can overcome you; but if He forsakes you, who then can help you after Him?** (*fa-man dha lladhī yanṣurukum min baʿdihi*)
> In God then let the believers put all their trust.
> [161] It is not for a prophet to be fraudulent; the one who defrauds shall bring his fraud with him on the Day of Resurrection.
> Then every soul shall be paid in full what it has earned, and they shall not be wronged.
> [162] **Is he who follows God's good pleasure like he who incurs God's anger, whose abode is hell?** (*a-fa-mani ttabaʿa riḍwāna llāhi ka-man bāʾa bi-sakhaṭin mina llāhi wa-maʾwāhu jahannamu*)
> An evil homecoming!
> [163] They are in ranks with God; and God sees what they do.

The question in v. 160 does not receive an answer; instead, the listener is expected to provide the answer himself (to wit, that no one but God can help). The conclusion to be drawn, clearly marked by a *fa-*, is then reiterated: "In God then let the believers put all their trust" (*wa-ʿalā llāhi fa-l-yatawakkali l-muʾminūn*). From the issues of fraudulent prophets and retribution on the Day of Resurrection (v. 161), the focus quickly shifts to the more general matter of the two categories into which people will be divided on that day. This latter aspect is again broached by means of a question that does not receive a full answer. The text does, however, provide comments supporting the inference that the audience is evidently expected to make, consisting in an interjection regarding the "evil homecoming" of those consigned to hell, and a second comment conveying additional information, namely, a more nuanced picture of the judged being assigned "ranks" (*darajāt*) before God.

To conclude the present section, Meccan questions have clear structuring functions: they can function as structural openers and closers both in suras and in individual sura parts, or they can create coherence. They also rhythmically structure suras by forming iterative patterns. Some questions resemble didactic information-seeking questions and invite responses without truly providing

semantic closure. Rather, they highlight disparities of knowledge. Other questions have a strong rhetorical thrust in that their expressiveness is used to move the listeners. Questions in dialogues and schematized dialogues with *qul*, which predominate at the later Meccan stage, are used to convey doctrinal messages and characterize those who speak (within narratives and as addressees of the proclamation). Medinan questions, by contrast, tend to occur in singular position. They are, however, by no means disconnected from their literary context. They function, rather, as invitations to reflect, and they are to be pondered individually. Answers are half given and half withheld. Such questions live on in the listener; they still resound when the next statement is articulated – a statement that may be related to the preceding question by providing an answer to it, or a partial answer, or no answer at all. Topics become *topoi*, as Vernon Robbins has put it: places of dwelling, of "thinking, reasoning and answering".[34]

Medinan Questions, Sura Structure, and Deliberative Discourse

Given the observations above on the nature of Qur'anic questions and their rhetorical patterns, we need to ask what impact interrogative structures exert on the structural and thematic composition of the Medinan suras and vice versa. The answer to this question is less straightforward than in the case of the Meccan suras. One of the most striking characteristics of the Medinan suras is their seemingly additive character and the apparent absence of any tightly knit compositional scheme, whether a tripartite structure like many of the Meccan suras or some other structure.[35] The fact that the Medinan suras' overall structure is so little understood has frequently given rise to the question whether they were composed as cohesive literary units or whether they should be considered to be later compilations.

In order to ascertain what function questions perform in the longer Medinan suras, we must begin by first locating where questions occur. Does their appearance correlate with thematic sections? We can identify the long suras' thematic sections with the help of earlier studies of individual Medinan

[34] Vernon K. Robbins, "Questions and Answers in *Gospel of Thomas*", in *La littérature des questions et réponses dans l'Antiquité profane et chrétienne: De l'enseignement à l'exégèse*, ed. Marie-Pierre Bussières (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 9 (discussing the early Christian non-canonical Gospel of Thomas).

[35] For an overview of different structural dividers and their diverging interpretation in the framework of compositional analyses, see Marianna Klar, "Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Combining Synchronicity with Diachronicity in Sūrat al-Baqara. Part One", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19, no. 1 (2017).

suras by Neal Robinson, Mathias Zahniser, and Nicolai Sinai.[36] Against this background, one notices a correlation between the occurrence of questions and certain thematic sections but not others:

Q 2 al-Baqara (structure based on Robinson and Sinai[37])		
vv. 1–39	Prologue	7 questions; q:v = 0.179
vv. 40–123	Criticism of the Children of Israel	20 questions; q:v = 0.238
vv. 124–152	Abrahamic legacy	8 questions; q:v = 0.275
vv. 153–242	Legislation for the new nation	7 questions; q:v = 0.077
vv. 243–283	Militancy / pronouncements on charity and money-lending	13 questions; q:v = 0.317
vv. 284–286	Epilogue	0 questions; q:v = 0

Q 3 Āl ʿImrān (structure based on Robinson)		
vv. 1–32	Preliminary matter	4 questions; q:v = 0.125
vv. 33–63	Status of previous prophets: (a) Jesus and his entourage	4 questions; q:v = 0.129
vv. 64–99	Status of previous prophets: (b) The religion of Abraham	11 questions; q:v = 0.305
vv. 100–179	The Muslim experience of death and defeat	11 questions; q:v = 0.137
vv. 180–200	Ending	1 question; q:v = 0.047

Q 4 al-Nisāʾ (structure based on Zahniser)		
vv. 1–43	I Women Block	4 questions; q:v = 0.093
vv. 44–70	II Exhortation	7 questions; q:v = 0.259
vv. 71–104	III Battle	11 questions; q:v = 0.323
vv. 105–126	IV Exhortation	4 questions; q:v = 0.181
vv. 127–176	V Women Cluster	5 questions; q:v = 0.1

Q 5 al-Māʾida (structure based on Robinson; blocks 2–9 combined into one section)		
vv. 1–10	1. Regulations and exhortations for the believers (closure: warning of hell)	1 question; q:v = 0.090
vv. 11–86	2. Reminder of earlier covenants	13 questions; q:v = 0.173

[36] See Robinson, *Discovering*, 201–223; Robinson, "*Sūrat Āl ʿImrān* and Those with the Greatest Claim to Abraham", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2004); Robinson, "Hands Outstretched: Towards a Re-Reading of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2001); Sinai, *The Qur'an*, 97–104; A. H. Mathias Zahniser, "Sūra as Guidance and Exhortation: The Composition of *Sūrat al-Nisā'*", in *Humanism, Culture, and Language in the Near East: Studies in Honor of Georg Krotkoff*, ed. Asma Afsaruddin and A. H. Mathias Zahniser (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 71–85.

[37] For a discussion of different thematic and structural patterns that scholars have identified in Sūrat al-Baqara, see Klar, "Text-Critical Approaches", 4–13.

	3–8. Narratives (Moses, Adam); punishment of antisocial crimes; the Messenger judges in accordance with revelation, believers to avoid alliances with the *ahl al-kitāb*; the Messenger must convey the message entrusted to him 9. Reminder of earlier covenants (closure: warning of hell)	
vv. 87–108	10. Regulations and exhortations for the believers	1 question; q:v = 0.045
vv. 109–119	The messengers are called to account: Jesus's mission	3 questions; q:v = 0.272
vv. 120	Closing verse	0 questions; q:v = 0

Figure 1: Schematised presentation of the contents of the long suras Q 2, 3, 4, and 5, including the number of questions corresponding to each thematic section and the value of q:v (number of questions divided by number of verses). Sections for which q:v is smaller or equal to 0.1 are not highlighted; sections for which q:v is smaller or equal to 0.2 are highlighted in light grey; sections for which q:v is greater than 0.2 are highlighted in dark grey.

As space does not allow me to discuss all of the long Medinan suras here, I shall focus on Sūrat al-Baqara (Q 2) by way of an example. The prologue of the sura (vv. 1–39) is not as rich in questions as other sections of the text, yet some questions do occur in the context of a discussion of what Robinson has described as the "dynamics of belief and unbelief", presentations of contrasting reactions to God's parables, and, more generally, signs controversies.[38] The three sections in which most of the sura's questions appear are the section criticising the Israelites (vv. 40–123), the section on the Abrahamic legacy (vv. 124–152), and the section on militancy (vv. 243–283).[39] The first two follow each other, while the third is separated by a legislative part containing very few questions.

As for the first of those parts of the sura that exhibit a high ratio of questions, vv. 40–123, it opens by summoning the Israelites to fulfil their covenant with God and reminds them of the favour granted to them at the time of Moses. Questions are particularly prominent in a subsection levelling concrete accusations against the Israelites, which are interwoven with warnings to the Prophet and the believers

[38] Robinson, *Discovering*, 203–206 (quotation p. 203).

[39] Sinai, *The Qur'an*, 107–108, n. 56, points out that the title "liberation of the Kaʿba", given to the section by Robinson, is misleading (as subsequently recognised by Robinson himself), in so far as the section contains no explicit reference either to the Kaʿba or to its liberation. Instead, the section contains only general injunctions to fight in the way of God.

(vv. 75–123; questions occur in vv. 75, 76, 77, 80, 85 etc.). As Robinson comments, the precise context of these accusations is not always clear, but they offer a picture of "intense sectarian rivalry between Jews, Christians and Muslims".[40]

The sura's Abraham section relates how God tested Abraham, how He established the "House" (i.e., the Kaʿba) as a place of worship, and how He entrusted it to Abraham and Ishmael. The narrative closes with Abraham enjoining his sons to remain faithful to his religion and with further comments on Abraham's religion, before the text moves on to a discussion of the prayer direction prescribed for the Qur'anic community. It is in this last subsection on the *qibla* that we find most of this part's questions (vv. 142–152; questions occur in vv. 138, 139, 140 etc.). This is, once again, a passage whose character is marked by dispute and controversy, in so far as it defends the imposition of a new prayer direction and warns the Prophet against praying in the same direction as the People of the Scripture.

As already indicated, very few questions occur in the ensuing legal or legislative section of the sura, which takes the form of a long address to the believers (vv. 153–242). Within ninety verses, we find a total of only seven questions, most of which occur towards the end of the legislative part, in a digression on belief and hypocrisy (vv. 204–214; questions occur in vv. 210, 211, 214, 215). Note, however, that an alternative interrogative structure is used in the legal (legislative) material, which have been called "responsum requests". The sections introduced by these requests discuss topics that are the subject of questions reported from the Qur'an's addressees.[41] The formula "they ask you about" (*yasʾalūnaka ʿan*) occurs seven times (vv. 189, 215, 217, 219 [twice], 220, 222).

The third part of the sura that displays a high ratio of questions concerns militancy.[42] Here, questions are confined to the first half – namely, the subsections containing reminiscences of an

[40] Robinson, *Discovering*, 208.

[41] On this category, see Joseph E. Lowry, *Law and the Literary Dynamics of the Qur'an: Studies in Qur'anic Legislation* (forthcoming), chapter 2.

[42] Nicolai Sinai considers the militancy section as an integral part of what he calls the sura's "legal corpus", spanning vv. 153–283. See Sinai, *The Qur'an*, 98 and 107–108, n. 56. While the argument that the section's additional pronouncements on charity and money lending tie in neatly with the legal exhortations preceding the section in vv. 153–242 is compelling, the first part of the militancy section certainly differs from the hortatory and legally-oriented discourse preceding and following it. Moreover, the notion of fighting in God's way in the Medinan Qur'an is frequently connected to ideas conglomerating around the concept of bartering this-worldly possessions for recompense in the hereafter. (See especially Q 4:74 and 9:111.) One could therefore also regard the

unspecified group who "left their dwellings in thousands" and enjoining the believers to fight (vv. 243–245; questions occur in vv. 243, 245), the narrative about the Israelites who reluctantly fought under Saul (vv. 246 – 251; questions occur in vv. 246, 247, 249), and finally the subsection on God's omniscience, illustrated by brief narratives in which this omniscience is disputed (vv. 252–260; questions occur in vv. 255, 258, 259, 260). The latter half of this sura part, treating charitable giving and usury, contains no further questions except for v. 266. The epilogue, too, lacks any questions.

If we examine the distribution of questions across the other long suras' topically and thematically defined component sections (all the while bearing in mind the latter's obvious heterogeneity), we observe tendencies similar to Sūrat al-Baqara. Questions appear with exceptional frequency where issues of communal identity are negotiated or in the context of a polemical engagement with the People of Scripture, with "hypocrites", and those accused of merely pretending to believe. By contrast, questions rarely occur in legal or legislative passages. This is, for example, very much the case for Sūrat al-Nisāʾ (Q 4).

Passages containing sustained anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemics are one of the thematic commonalities distinguishing the Medinan suras from the Meccan stratum of the Qur'an.[43] Questions occur exactly in such sections, but also in pedagogic and apologetic sections more broadly. They are embedded in discourse marked by a "deliberative rhetoric". Sometimes called "legislative rhetoric", this type of rhetoric helps to predict potential outcomes of behaviour in the future, as Aristotle puts it in his *Rhetoric*.[44] According to the latter, the orator advises about "good or bad things" (*agatha ē kaka*).[45]

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discussion of charity and money lending as an organic outgrowth of the militancy verses and as closely connected to them, and consequently interpret vv. 243–283 as a unit in its own right that is deliberately set apart from the preceding legal corpus through a narrative opening. I have therefore opted to follow Robinson in considering the militancy verse group including its additional pronouncements on charity and money lending as an independent section. I do, however, agree with Sinai that there are strong continuities between both legal bodies.

[43] Sinai, "The Unknown Known", 67–68.

[44] See Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, ed. and trans. John Henry Freese (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), I, 4–8 (pp. 38–89).

[45] Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I, 4, 1 (ed. and trans. Freese, 38–39). Aristotle then proceeds to define in minute detail existing kinds of good things, discusses what constitutes the happiness for which man aims, and finally deals with what is good and expedient, or even a greater good and more expedient, because the orator can draw his arguments from these things.

Exhortation and dissuasion are grounded in opposites (*enantia*), to which the orator appeals in order to convince.[46]

The Medinan thematic sections in which questions tend to appear in greater numbers employ strategies of persuasion and dissuasion for the purpose of Qur'anic self-validation. They serve a clear end, namely, to direct the community and the polity toward a certain spiritual stance or course of action. As we shall see in the third section of this article, embedding questions in deliberative rhetoric is a strategy that is at work in late antique oration. Persuasion and dissuasion are simultaneously at play in the Medinan suras: the principal addressees of the Qur'anic messenger in Medina were primarily the believers themselves and the "hypocrites", who differed in their degree of commitment to the Qur'an's injunctions. This is the case even if questions are ostensibly directed at the People of Scripture. It is plausible to assume that any hope of also reaching Christians and especially Jews was greater towards the beginning of the Medinan period, before later political escalations. It is clear that Sūrat al-Baqara, which served as an example above, still envisages Medinan Jews as part of its audience and appeals to them.[47]

If we return to the issue of the distribution of questions and the structure of the Medinan suras, the question arises whether interrogative utterances can tell us something about compositional principles. It is possible that Medinan questions in particular have hitherto suffered from relative scholarly neglect because in the framework of the structural and thematic analysis of a Medinan sura, it may seem counter-intuitive to examine a rhetorical device that does not – as it did in the Meccan suras – occur in patterns. A further contributing factor may have been the fact that questions serve to generate a productive doubt in the listeners instead of providing concrete semantic content.

The Medinan suras could have been built entirely from declarative statements. But they are not. To confront an audience with a question allows for what Jacob has called a "retour du sujet sur sa pratique".[48] The listeners – primarily believers, hypocrites, but to some degree also Christians and Jews, depending on the context – are constantly challenged to mull over the knowledge that has been

[46] Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I, 6, 1 (ed. and trans. Freese, 58–59): "It is evident, then, what things, likely to happen or already existing, the orator should aim at, when exhorting, and what when dissuading; for they are opposites."

[47] For a similar assessment, see also Neuwirth, "Oral Scriptures in Contact", 312 and 320–322. She comes to this conclusion based on an analysis of the story of the Israelites and the Golden Calf included in the sura.

[48] Jacob, "Questions", 37.

imparted and to measure themselves and others against it, thereby deepening and consolidating it. This does not mean that they are supposed to engage in an open-ended exercise of contemplation. The self-scrutiny that is initiated is purpose-driven and the message self-validating and unambiguous. But the individual still plays a role in assimilating this message through sustained reflection. Frequently, an assertion is followed up by questions that need to be pondered, or the other way around: a question is followed by a statement. Questions are raised not in order to be answered immediately but incrementally. This incremental mode of processing is decisive. Consider vv. 43–45 of Sūrat al-Baqara, which occur within an address to the Israelites:

> [43] Perform the prayer and pay the alms, and bow with those who bow!
> [44] **Do you order others to be pious and forget yourselves while you recite the Scripture?** (*a-ta'murūna l-nāsa bi-l-birri wa-tansawna anfusakum wa-antum tatlūna l-kitāba*)
> **Do you not understand?** (*a-fa-lā taʿqilūn*)
> [45] Seek help in patience and prayer, for a great task it is, save for the humble.

Whether by means of short reminiscences or longer exhortations, the believers are repeatedly reminded throughout the sura to be pious, to pray, to give alms, and to be God-fearing (vv. 2–4, 25, 82–85, 110, 153, 177, 238). The questions in v. 44 are meant to make the listeners scrutinise their own thoughts and behaviour. V. 177 especially seems to provide a follow-up to v. 44, which illustrates that the process of pondering initiated by that earlier verse has still not been completed. V. 177 explores what piety is not, and inversely, what piety is:

> [177] It is not piety that you turn your faces in the direction of the east and west.
> True piety is this: to believe in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets (*laysa l-birra an tuwallū wujūhakum qibala l-mashriqi wa-l-maghribi wa-lākinna l-birra man āmana bi-llāhi wa-l-yawmi l-ākhiri wa-l-malā'ikati wa-l-kitābi wa-l-nabiyyīna*), to give of one's substance, however cherished, to kinsmen, and orphans, the poor, the traveller, the beggars, and to ransom the slave, to perform the prayer, to pay alms.
> And those who fulfil their covenant, and patiently endure misfortune, hardship and peril, those are the ones who are sincere, those are the God-fearing.

The address to the Israelites, in which the question about piety in v. 44 occurs, opens with a reference to God's "covenant" or "contract" with humans (*ʿahd*, v. 40), and this "contract" is mentioned again in v. 177. Moreover, the same word for "piety" (*birr*) is used in the question and twice in v. 177. While the question in v. 44 raises the possibility that scriptural recitation (*wa-antum tatlūna l-kitāba*) can be futile if it is not rooted in true piety, v. 177 dwells on the nature of this true piety, namely "to believe in God, the Last Judgement, the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets".

Medinan questions allow the listeners to process the knowledge imparted to them not only by revisiting God's word but also their own emotional states, practices, and behavioural patterns. Could the underlying process of incremental knowledge transmission also motivate other characteristics of the Medinan suras, for example, their increased reliance on various redactional techniques? One may think here of the numerous Medinan additions to Meccan suras presented by Tilman Nagel (and others)[49] or the processes of literary growth and editorial expansion that Nicolai Sinai has discovered in some Medinan legislative sections.[50] To be sure, I do not wish to imply that certain modes of literary growth *result* from a particular use of questions, only that both phenomena might be rooted in the same presumed readiness of the listener to process knowledge by reconsidering it. Of course, such a hypothesis warrants extensive analysis, which cannot be provided here.

The community of believers plays a decisive role with regard to the questions posed in the Medinan suras. Very early on in the process of the Qur'an's emergence, the Qur'anic proclamations enter into a dialectic relationship with a community whose questions and concerns are audible in the text. The Medinan deployment of questions increases the potency of this presence. What Medinan questions achieve is to relay to the community a certain kind of authoritative knowledge that can never be simply transmitted; it is a moral mode of knowing that must be generated in the minds and hearts

[49] See Tilman Nagel, *Medinensische Einschübe in mekkanischen Suren* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995). See also Sinai, *The Qur'an*, 92–97, who focuses on "secondary embedding" and discusses criteria for identifying later "insertions".

[50] See Nicolai Sinai, "Processes of Literary Growth and Editorial Expansion in Two Medinan Surahs", in *Islam and its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an*, ed. Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 69–119.

of the believers.[51] It is created through sustained reflection and deliberations. The pondering, deliberating believer is a precondition for the divine word being appropriated and implemented. One wonders, therefore, whether this heightened awareness of the necessity of the believer's pondering, of his weighing of moral options in view of very different future outcomes, does not endow him or her with a new kind of agency.

Asking Questions as a Late Antique Rhetorical Practice

The importance of the historical and cultural context for assessing rhetorical strategies in Late Antiquity cannot be overemphasised. Accordingly, this final section will address the late antique background against which the practice of asking questions in the Qur'an – and particularly in the Medinan suras – can profitably be studied.

I have initially distinguished the late antique literary genre of question-answer literature from the rhetorical strategy of asking questions, which was "operative across a wide range of literary forms".[52] However, an increased use of the strategy and the emergence of the genre were certainly intertwined; the genesis of an independent genre seems to have been symptomatic of the major importance that the didactic practice of asking questions had acquired in late antique theology.

Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339) is commonly considered the first Christian author to have adopted the question-answer genre,[53] influenced by the Jewish philosopher Philo's *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus*, in which the latter applied the methods of Homeric scholarship to scripture.[54] Eusebius's widely read *Questions and Responses on the Gospels* represented an innovation in the fourth century. Among Jews, too, questions and answers played an important role. They are scattered across

[51] This interior dimension also characterises legal paraenesis in the Medinan suras. On this topic, see Nora K. Schmid, "From Ethico-Religious Exhortation to Legal Paraenesis: Functions of Qur'anic *Waʿẓ*", *Islamic Law and Society* (forthcoming).

[52] Papadoyannakis, "Instruction", 93.

[53] See Zamagni, "Une Introduction", 7–8. The adoption of the question-answer genre by Eusebius of Caesarea is discussed by Bardy, "La littérature patristique" (I), 228–236, and mentioned by Dörrie, "Erotapokriseis", 348.

[54] On zetematic discourse in Philo's writings in general, see already Bardy, "La littérature patristique" (I), 212–217; on zetematic discourse in Philo's *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus* in particular, see Maren R. Niehoff, "Questions and Answers in Philo and *Genesis Rabbah*", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 39 (2008).

the two Talmuds and found in learned correspondences between Babylonia and Persia.[55] However, only in the post-Talmudic period did this practice crystallise into a proper genre of *she'elot u-teshubot*. Although responsal literature from the Saboraic and Amoraic periods has not been preserved, it is probable that, just as among Christians, the fourth century saw the emergence of some kind of independent literary form, because a developed responsal literature definitely existed at the middle of the eighth century (the Geonic period).[56] Besides Christians and Jews, Manichaeans, too, employed *erōtapokriseis*.[57]

Perhaps most interesting with regard to the Qur'anic use of questions is the observation that question-answer literature really started to thrive with the emergence of the so-called Antiochene school of Christian exegesis.[58] Antiochene exegetes were by and large struggling to come to grips with the literal meaning of scripture, although a dichotomic distinction between Alexandrian allegorisers and Antiochian literalists would be overly simplistic.[59] With the Antiochenes, evidence for the prevalence of a rhetoric of the question crystallises around a school whose impact on Qur'anic hermeneutics I have attempted to trace elsewhere.[60]

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[55] Lauterbach, "She'elot u-teshubot", 241–242.

[56] Lauterbach, "She'elot u-teshubot", 242. See Haas, *Responsa*, on the "written replies to legal, moral, or exegetical questions put to a Rabbinic authority" (Haas, *Responsa*, 11). Haas warns against the facile conception of a continuous development (without substantial changes) of responsal literature from a somewhat cruder expression in Biblical times to the literature of the Geonic period. The conception he critiques is heavily influenced by the Hegelian view of history that was shared by nineteenth-century scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (see for details Haas, *Responsa*, 14–17). He emphasises the changes responsal literature underwent over time.

[57] Papadogiannakis, "Erotapokriseis", 1.

[58] Jacob, "Questions", 13.

[59] Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 156–176.

[60] See Nora K. Schmid, "Lot's Wife: Late Antique Paradigms of Sense and the Qur'ān", in *Qur'ānic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016), particularly 60–62, on the Antiochene literal understanding of the fate of this Biblical figure. See also pp. 62–72 on the evolution of the Qur'anic engagement with Lot's wife, an engagement that points to a greater proximity to the Antiochene understanding of scripture.

Antiochene question-answer literature had a wide-reaching impact. Bas ter Haar Romeny has drawn attention to a succession of collections presenting questions and answers in the East Syrian tradition.[61] An important figure linking the East Syrian development back to Greek discourses is Eusebius of Emesa, one of the earliest representatives of the Antiochene School and an author of *zētēmata* on the Old Testament. He exerted a profound influence on Diodore of Tarsus, and through him also on Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom. Given that Eusebius of Caesarea was Eusebius of Emesa's teacher, it comes as no surprise that the first question-answer text in Syriac was a translation of the *Book of the Solution of the Contradictions of the Gospel* by Eusebius of Caesarea, fragments of which have survived.[62]

A cursory glance at the question-answer collections generated in these milieus reveals the completely different nature of the questions in the Medinan suras. Christian question-answer collections mostly follow scripture and present problems in the text,[63] whereas Medinan questions do not elucidate scriptural passages. To some degree, a common denominator exists in so far as questions in the Medinan Qur'an, like those found in Christian *erōtapokriseis* literature, present "important social and religious issues of the day".[64]

The Antiochene nexus emerges much more convincingly if one looks beyond question-answer collections and instead takes into consideration the rise of questioning and asking as a rhetorical strategy across genres. I wish to underscore, however, that I am not suggesting including just any text in which an occasional question occurs. In concentrating on the "rhetorical strategy" of posing

[61] Under the influence of the Antiochene School, the authors of Syriac question-and-answer collections ultimately adopted the genre of the Homeric questions-and-answers in great numbers, for example, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Elisha' bar Quzbaye, John of Bet Rabban, and Michael Badoqa. On the East Syrian authors of question-answer collections, see Bas ter Haar Romeny, "Question-and-Answer Collections in Syriac Literature", in *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context*, ed. Annelie Volgers and Claudio Zamagni (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 154–160.

[62] On the importance of Eusebius of Emesa for the introduction of question-answer collections into the East Syrian tradition, see for greater detail ter Haar Romeny, "Question-and-Answer Collections", 148–154. See also the short section on Eusebius of Emesa in Bardy, "La littérature patristique" (II), 342–343.

[63] Dörrie, "Erotapokriseis", 347–348, observes that such questions only indicate the transition from one verse to the next in a commentary.

[64] Papadogiannakis, "Erotapokriseis", 1.

questions, my focus remains on a *disciplined* use of questions in texts for the production and transmission of ethico-religious and politico-religious knowledge.

Questions are important rhetorical devices in a number of texts issuing from the Antiochene milieu. A major example are the sermons, homilies, and catecheses by the above-mentioned Antiochene preacher and later bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom (d. 407). True, in Chrysostom's preaching, questions frequently dwell on scriptural problems. However, other types of questions that exhibit much more resonance with Qur'anic questions can be found, too. Consider the following pattern similar to the iterative interrogative sections of the Meccan suras, in Chrysostom's Homily 2 on 1 Corinthians. The questions refer to God:

> (9) Has He not made a world (*oukhi ktisin eirgasato*), to teach His loving-kindness and His power? … Has He not also sent prophets (*oukhi kai prophētas epempsen*)? Has he not both called and honoured us (*oukhi kai ekalese kai etimēsen*)? Has He not done wonders (*oukhi ethaumatourgēsen*)? Has He not given a law both written and natural (*ou nomon edōke kai grapton kai physikon*)? Has He not sent His Son (*ou ton huion apesteilen*)? Has He not commissioned apostles (*ouk apostolous epemspen*)? Has He not wrought signs (*ou sēmeia eirgasato*)? Has He not threatened hell (*ou geennan ēpeilēsen*)? Has He not promised the kingdom (*ou basileian epēngeilato*)? Does He not every day make His sun rise (*ou kath hekastēn hēmeran anatellei ton hēlion autou*)?[65]

The repeated beginning with *oukhi*, *ouk,* or *ou* brings to mind the rhetorical structures in Sūrat al-Mursalāt (Q 77), quoted above, with its repetition of sentence-initial *a-lam*.

Other formal similarities with Meccan and particularly Medinan questions can be detected. Chrysostom frequently asks his listeners whether they "see" or "perceive". In Homily 2 on Ephesians, for example, we find the question: "Do you see that we have from our nature seeds that tend to virtue; whereas those of vice are contrary to nature?" (*hōras hoti pros tēn aretēn ekhomen apo tēs physeōs*

[65] For the original text, see Jacques Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus*: *Series Graeca*, 161 vols (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–1866), vol. 61, 20; for a translation, see John Chrysostom, *The Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians. Translated, with Notes and Indices* (Oxford: John-Henry Parker, 1854), 17–18 (slightly modified).

spermata ta de tēs kakias para physin estin).[66] Here, the opening "Do you see that …?" (*hōras hoti*) introduces a question concerning man's capacity to reflect, addressed directly to the listener. Such questions are raised in a similar way in the Qur'an, although in the negative: "Have you not seen?" (*a-lam tara*).

While the *a-lam tara* pattern appears already in a few early and middle Meccan suras,[67] it increases significantly in the late Meccan period,[68] and even more in Medina.[69] It is particularly interesting to note that third-person questions of the form "has he / have they not seen", which predominate in the middle and late Meccan periods,[70] vanish in the Medinan suras. With few exceptions, only questions addressed to the listeners in the second person remain.[71] By way of an additional thought, all of these questions are posed in the second person *singular*, which may be taken to point to an increased individuation among the listeners.

Medinan questions opening with *a-lam tara* alert the listeners to abstract moral, ethical, and dogmatic positions. For example, v. 23 of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (Q 3) raises the question: "Have you not seen those who have been given a portion of the Scripture being summoned to the Scripture of God, that it may provide a decision between them?" (*a-lam tara ilā lladhīna ūtū naṣīban mina l-kitābi yud'awna ilā kitābi llāhi li-yaḥkuma baynahum*). Vv. 44 and 51 of Sūrat al-Nisā' (Q 4) start in a similar way: "Have you not seen those to whom a portion of the Scripture has been given?" (*a-lam tara ilā lladhīna ūtū naṣīban mina l-kitābi*). Between those two questions, it is asked: "Have you not seen those who hold themselves to be righteous?" (*a-lam tara ilā lladhīna yuzakkūna anfusahum*, v. 49).

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[66] Migne, *Patrologiae*, vol. 62, 20. For a translation, see Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 13: *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 57 (slightly modified).

[67] Early Meccan: Q 89:6 and 105:1; middle Meccan: Q 19:83, 25:45, 26:225.

[68] Late Meccan: Q 14:19.24.28, 31:29.31, 35:27, 39:21, 40:61.

[69] Medinan: Q 2:243.246.258, 3:23, 4:44.49.51.60.77, 22:18.63.65, 24:41.43, 58:7.8.14, 59:11.

[70] Middle Meccan: *a-wa-lam yara*: Q 21:30, 36:77; *a-*(*wa-*)*lam yaraw*: Q 17:99, 26:7, 27:86, 29:19.67, 36:31.71, 67:19; *a-fa-lā yarawna*: Q 20:89, 21:44; late Meccan: *a-*(*wa-*)*lam yaraw*: Q 13:41, 16:48.79, 30:37, 32:27, 41:15, 42:33; *a-fa-lam yaraw*: Q 34:9.

[71] The exceptions are: Q 6:6, 7:148 (*a-lam yaraw*), and 9:126 (*a-wa-lā yarawna*).

Beyond the structural and syntactical level, other parallels in the rhetoric of interrogation can be observed: here, the matter of deliberative rhetoric or discourse arises again. Chrysostom's questions, just like many questions in the subsections of the Medinan Qur'an dealing with theological debates, contrast moral dispositions, types of persons, and categories of behaviour. This is illustrated by the following quotation from Homily 1 on 1 Corinthians:

> For tell me, what was there ever more exalted than Abraham? And yet it was he that said, *I am but dust and ashes* …. For he is indeed exalted who is truly humble …. And this is plain from hence: if one man esteem clay to be clay, and despise it, and another admire the clay as gold, and account it a great thing; which, I ask, is the man of exalted mind (*tis ara estin ho hypsēlos*)? Is it not he who refuses to admire the clay (*oukhi ho ton pēlon mē thaumazōn*)? And which, abject and mean (*tis de ho tapeinos kai eutelēs*)? Is it not he who admires it, and sets much store by it (*oukhi ho thaumatsōn auton kai mega tithemenos*)?[72]

One of the questions in Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (Q 3) that has already been quoted in the first section above similarly presents opposing models of behaviour: "Is he who follows God's good pleasure like he who incurs God's anger and whose abode is hell?" (*a-fa-mani ttabaʿa riḍwāna llāhi ka-man bāʾa bi-sakhaṭin mina llāhi wa-maʾwāhu jahannamu*, v. 162).

In general, a number of Medinan questions call the believer to ponder instances of moral or amoral behaviour, such as v. 114 of Sūrat al-Baqara: "Who commits a greater wrong than he who hinders God's name from being remembered in his temples, and who makes haste to ruin them?" (*wa-man aẓlamu mimman manaʿa masājida llāhi an yudhkara fiha smuhū wa-saʿā fī kharābihā*).

Questions in Chrysostom's preaching have been identified as an integral part of a deliberative rhetoric.[73] We have seen that according to Aristotle's rhetoric, the orator advises about "good or bad

[72] Migne, *Patrologiae*, vol. 61, 15–16; translation: Chrysostom, *The Homilies*, 10.

[73] See Philip R. Caples, "An Analysis of the Rhetorical Elements in Selected Homilies of John of Antioch (Chrysostom) in the Pauline Corpus" (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 45–47. Caples considers deliberative rhetoric "the dominant species of rhetoric in fourteen homilies of John Chrysostom's Pauline corpus" (Caples, "Analysis", 45). On the rhetorical devices and techniques employed in Chrysostom's

things", that he persuades and dissuades with the help of opposites. Based on this conception of deliberative rhetoric, Chrysostom employs exhortation and dissuasion in order to appeal to his audience to change their behaviour.[74] Chrysostom does not constitute an exception in this regard. Deliberative discourse in sermons and homilies is so widespread that it has prompted Geoffrey Dunn to suggest that "for much of Christian history the homily was considered a deliberative exercise".[75]

The impact of Chrysostom's questions is very similar to that of Medinan questions: they open up a reflective space for the listeners. They do not convey knowledge by appealing to the listeners' urge to acquire information; rather, they instil the capacity to decide between two opposites, to distinguish what is morally right from wrong, belief from disbelief. However, deliberation is not pursued for its own sake – reflection becomes the precondition for reaching a concrete outcome: the behaviour and spiritual state of a believer. The quest for knowledge was a vast project, obviously far more complex than the mere dispensation of information by a teacher figure; individuation and personalisation of thought were part of it, too. It takes moral perceptiveness to know.

Conclusion

A question is not a question is not a question. Significant differences exist between the interrogative rhetoric in Qur'anic suras that can be dated to the Meccan period and the Medinan period, respectively. Early Meccan questions, whether didactical or iterative, have important structural functions. They often do not prepare the ground for semantic closure but create expressive openings by displaying knowledge disparities between the Messenger and his listeners. In the middle and late Meccan periods, questions can also be embedded in dialogues, or abstracted dialogues framed by *qul*, both those that flip into catalogues of superimposed polemical questions and those that project creedal statements as responses. The important point is that in all these cases, questions are not solitary but create structural, rhythmic, and semantic networks in the oral fabric of the proclamations. In Medinan suras, by contrast,

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sermons, see also Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), 106–112 (on questions see p. 111).

[74] Cf. Caples, "Analysis", 45.

[75] Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Rhetoric in the Patristic Sermons of Late Antiquity", in *Preaching in the Patristic Era: Sermons, Preachers, Audiences*, ed. Anthony Dupont, Shari Boodts, Gert Partoens, and Johan Leemans (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 103–134, here 108. Dunn focuses on sermons from the Latin West.

questions often occur in solitary position and receive neither straightforward responses nor are they especially expressive. These questions open a space for critical self-reflection among the listeners, who are induced to answer them incrementally. In the long suras, Sūrat al-Baqara being a prominent example, they are often embedded in polemical and apologetic sections characterised by a deliberative discourse in which moral opposites are addressed and negotiated. A similar kind of deliberative discourse is operative in late antique sermons issuing from the Antiochene milieu, in which question-and-answer literature flourished. We encounter comparable questions especially in the sermons of John Chrysostom.

Peter Brown has spoken of Late Antiquity as an "Age of Questioning" that was marked by the flowering of a novel intellectualism devoted to religious topics and a hunger to understand things divine. He refers to Aline Rousselle, who characterises this new attitude to religion as "l'explication du croire",[76] or "a growing sense of the need to unravel and explain the content of religions and their attendant practices".[77] In keeping with this general atmosphere, questions are virtually ubiquitous in late antique literary and theological articulations. They are present even where one might at first deem them to be absent: scholars attempting to define the *erōtapokriseis* genre struggle to determine its boundaries and to set it apart from other genres, discovering more and more texts containing what has been called "implicit" or "hidden" questions.[78] Talmudic midrashim represent an interesting example.[79]

Taking into consideration such hidden questions has the dual consequence of causing the literary genre to implode and the rhetorical practice to explode into an existential condition that is perceptible in virtually all late antique texts. Nonetheless, some of these texts employ questions

[76] Rousselle, quoted in Peter Brown, *Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Poor in Early Christianity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 30.

[77] Brown, *Treasure in Heaven*, 30.

[78] Bardy, "La littérature patristique", 227, in the context of a discussion of Origen, considers imagining questions and answering those imagined questions to be a widespread method in Late Antiquity.

[79] See Jacob Neusner, *The Reader's Guide to the Talmud* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 161–201, who discusses the dialectical mode of argument in the Babylonian Talmud, "a give and take in which parties to the argument counter one another's arguments in a progression of exchanges" (Neusner, *Reader's Guide*, 161). Questions play a significant role in this "moving argument" (Neusner, *Reader's Guide*, 163).

particularly clearly, explicitly, and unremittingly. The Qur'an belongs to this "age of questioning": it deploys questions as a prominent feature of its "discursive matrix".[80]

Being inevitably limited in scope, the present chapter is meant to raise questions rather than provide definitive answers. For example, widening the focus and studying interrogative speech in Qur'anic suras in relation to declarative, imperative, and exclamative utterances would be one possible avenue for further research. How do the different types of speech relate to each other and how does this constellation change in the course of the Qur'an's genesis? The concatenation of questions with Qur'anic speech introduced by the command *qul* ("Say: ...") also promises to be a fruitful topic for further research, particularly in light of catechetical texts. Finally, it would be interesting to learn more about the use of questions in relation to certain themes, such as the duality of ignorance and knowledge. These and other questions about questions must remain open for now.

[80] Papadoyannakis, "Instruction", 100.

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