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Understanding the Qurʾan in Text and Context

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Nature of the Problem

In a state-of-the-art introduction to a recent volume of essays on Quranic studies, Alford T. Welch divides the field as it has developed in Western scholarship into three areas: "(1) exegesis, or the study of the text itself, (2) the history of its interpretation (Tafsir), and (3) the roles of the Qurʾan in Muslim life and thought (in ritual, theology, etc.)".[1] Studies within the first two areas have been characterized by more or less rigorous methods of textual and historical research, although, as Welch points out, "critical opinion on the basic issues is more divided now than ever before".[2] Most scholars working on problems in the third area have also culled their data from classical religious texts; they have usually seen their task as one of describing the normative rules and conditions that apply to the liturgical performance and use of Qurʾan recitation. The role of the Qurʾan in Muslim life has also been described by social scientists working in local fieldwork situations.[3] The unfortunate polemical atmosphere between proponents of textual and contextual studies has discouraged productive integration of both kinds of investigations in Quranic studies.[4]

Under these circumstances, questions arise about the prevailing assumptions of Quranic studies. First, is it valid to emphasize the historical distance between speaker and addressee with respect to discovering meaning in literary texts? Welch echoes the assumption of many textual scholars when he finds

greater value in the historical proximity of commentary to the imputed original text. Speaking about Muslim commentaries on the Qur'an, he observes that the classical commentaries are "by far the most valuable for Qur'anic exegesis, that is, for helping to understand the ideas of the Qur'an itself and what they meant to its first hearers".[5] Yet, "the modern commentaries . . . are valuable not so much for their exegesis of the Qur'an as for what they tell us about the ideas and concerns of the authors and modern Muslims in general".[6] The dual claim that the earlier and more orthodox commentaries tell us what the Qur'an means in and of itself, and that the later (including heterodox) commentaries tell us what Muslims think the Qur'an means is highly questionable on both counts. In this model of understanding, an original meaning exists or once existed, and this can be lost in space/time distance from the source of meaning. Among addressees of the text, the textual scholar (usually Western) comes off better equipped than the believing Muslim "to understand the ideas of the Qur'an itself."

Welch's discussion of the topic "validity in interpretation" seems to reflect the work of E. D. Hirsch, who also argues for absolute meaning. Recognizing that various Muslim sectarian groups interpret the Qur'an differently, Welch maintains that "such interpretations have no claim to universal truth, but are of value to critical scholarship only for purposes of studying the beliefs and teachings of the sectarian groups, not for analysis of the Qur'an itself." Yet Welch allows that there can be more than one valid interpretation, and he postulates that each interpretation "of a given passage or theme will be accepted as valid as long as each is consistent with the grammar, word usage, and in general also with the literal meaning of the passage or term in question."[7] To adapt a phrase from earlier polemics about biblical scholarship, Welch and many Quranic scholars have looked down into the well of *Quran forschung* and seen the face of Wilhelm Dilthey staring back. For them, universal validity of interpretation rests on the premise of intersubjectivity between author and reader – "bracketing out," as Husserl had argued, a part of conscious experience and the mental acts that render its meaning, for contemplation over time among readers. The argument goes that if a human author intended a text to mean something in particular, then other human beings ought to have access to that meaning even though they may also see a significance in relation to their own historical/cultural circumstances. Neither Hirsch nor Welch has any notion of how this works beyond the doctrine of intersubjectivity, which can be checked, according to Welch, by rules of grammar, word usage, and the ability to recognize literal meanings that are constant among human beings in all times and places.

The literal meaning of any form of speech is problematic, and even more so that of monotheistic sacred speech, as Erich Auerbach has shown. In *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,* Auerbach contrasts passages of Homeric verse with biblical narrative, concluding that the aim of the latter "is not to bewitch the senses, and if nevertheless they produce lively sensory

effects, it is only because the moral, religious and psychological phenomena which are their sole concern are made concrete in the sensible matter of life."[8] Sacred speech, as I shall argue later in this paper, presents generic symbolic figures – God, angels, prophets, believers, unbelievers – and the situations it narrates must be interpreted to mean something for someone in the particular contexts in which it is interpreted. Symbolic meanings are not universals that can be pumped into texts where they exist independently of interpreters viewing text and meaning from specific historical/cultural realities.

Contrary to Welch, I contend that the hermeneutic circle discussed by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*, and more recently by Gadamer, Hoy, and Ricoeur, provide better models of the hermeneutic process of interpretations.[9] In short, getting at meanings must focus on the interpretation of meaning, which means the interpreter and his or her historical/cultural horizon of understanding. With Welch, I do not think we can avoid studying the grammar, lexicography, and historical features of the texts we wish to explain and interpret. The interpreter, however, cannot possess the world or mind of the author; he or she must necessarily preconceive (*Vorverstehen*) according to the information he assembles about it and understand it in terms of his own horizon of understanding.

Welch puts his finger on a second problem when he observes that "outsiders tend to see the Qurʾan only as scripture. . . . For most devout Muslims the Qurʾan is first and foremost the eternal speech of God. And in its historical mode its primary significance for the vast majority of Muslims through the centuries has been its oral form, as the recited Qurʾan, memorized in part and recited in prayers."[10] Although virtually all scholarly writing about the Qurʾan mentions its special orality in Muslim culture, the attempt to establish a hermeneutic for understanding the meaning of an orally performed text has not yet been made. Nor is there, in my view, a simple dichotomy of literary versus oral modes of the text. The Qurʾan, by virtue of memorization, is present in much of the public and private lives of Muslims, and it is also cited and alluded to in everyday discourse, as well as in more formal public oratory and poetic utterances.[11] In these contexts we must presume the Qurʾan also bears a meaning to speakers and audiences. Moreover, the contextual nature of the speaker/addressee situation, as speech-act theorists have argued, contains rules that govern the communication of meaningful discourse.

What I wish to argue, then, is that the Quranic text in both its literary and oral forms constitutes a speech-act situation which involves a speaker and addressee(s), and that what we must attempt to discover are the rules that govern the various cultural contexts in which such communication takes place. In most speech-act situations, the speaker (writer of literary speech or utterer of oral speech) and addressees are defined by historical circumstances that can be described and analyzed by literary, historical, or sociolinguistic methods. The case of sacred speech, however, poses certain problems that speech-act theorists have not considered. At the base of the symbolic world views of Muslims is a cosmology that sees Allah (God) as the speaker and humankind

as the addressee. Thus, the oral/literary text of the Qur'an constitutes a *lingua sacra* that implies a symbolic, cosmological context of meaning. I hold that under-standing cosmology and the world views it generates in different historical and cultural contexts is essential to understanding Quranic modes of communication.

In the remainder of this essay I will discuss three aspects of a new approach to Quranic studies. First, I will discuss speech-act theory in relation to the oral and literary dimensions of the speaker/addressee situations that define the Qur'an as speech act. Second, I will discuss the symbolism of Quranic cosmology as a special context of speech acts of the *lingua sacra* type. Third, I will review oral-formulaic and semantic-constituent methods of analysis which have been successfully applied to non-Quranic texts.

Speech-act Theory and the Qur'an

The basic claims of speech-act theory are summarized by Pratt as follows:

> To make an utterance is to perform an act. A person who performs a speech act does at least two and possibly three things. First, he performs a *locutionary act*, the act of producing a recognizable utterance in the given language. Second, he performs an *illocutionary act* of a certain type. "Promising," "warning," "greeting," "reminding," "informing," or "commanding" are all kinds of illocutionary acts. . . .
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> Finally a speaker who performs an illocutionary act may also be performing a *perlocutionary act*; that is, by saying what he says, he may be achieving certain intended results in his hearer in addition to those achieved by the illocutionary act. By warning, a person may frighten him, by arguing one may convince, and so on.[12]

At the levels of illocution and perlocution, meaning depends heavily on the context in which the utterance is made. Context is defined by the relationship between speaker and audience or addressee, and such relationships operate under marked or unmarked rules – rules which vary according to context.

As developed by ordinary language philosophers such as J. L. Austin, John R. Searle, and Paul H. Grice, speech-act theory has focused on the "rules which users of [a] language assume to be in force in their verbal dealings with each other; they form part of the knowledge which speakers of a language share and on which they rely in order to use the language correctly and effectively, both in producing and understanding utterances."[13] Searle discusses five classes of illocutionary acts: representives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.[14] It is striking to note that each of these classes and many of their subdivisions are apparent functions of Quranic speech.

Pratt has taken the implications of speech-act theory as it applies to ordinary language one step further by applying the same speaker/addressee rules of

language use to literary discourse. This requires her first to counter the claims of structural poetics among Russian formalists and the Prague school, which have argued that literature "can be distinguished from other utterances on the basis of intrinsic grammatical or textual properties."[15] Pratt calls this the poetic language fallacy, which she believes may have developed with the rise of scientific language in the seventeenth century and later in romanticism, on principles of language use that go back ultimately to Aristotle's *Poetics.* Pratt does not want to challenge "what formalist and structuralist poeticians have said about literary texts" per se, but rather their "belief that literature is linguistically autonomous, that is, possessed of intrinsic linguistic properties which distinguish it from all other kinds of discourse."[16]

As evidence that at least some of the assumptions of poeticians about natural language are insupportable, Pratt reviews the work of sociolinguist William Labov on oral narrative of personal experience in various social communities in America. Labov defines narrative as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of causes to the sequence which (it is inferred) actually occurred. . . ."[17] What Labov found was that "a fully developed narrative is made up of the following sections: 1. abstract 2. orientation 3. complicating action 4. evaluation 5. result or resolution 6. coda."[18] In other words, regardless of content, a structural similarity among oral narratives seems to obtain, demonstrating an aesthetic organization of a felicitous narrative, much as we expect to find in literary narratives. This much will seem self-evident to many.

What Pratt deduces from an examination of Labov's studies of natural narratives is that aesthetic organization does not arise from literary qualities, but rather from the contextual situation of the speaker (narrator) and the interlocutor(s) or addressee(s). In order to evaluate the "tellability" of a natural narrative – why it is being told – a grammatical analysis is not enough. The narrator's intentional omission of a key structural element in his story, for example, might arise from his unwillingness to divulge certain facts to a particular audience. Thus, there are structural properties in storytelling that do not necessarily surface in the "text" of the narrative itself. These latent properties or conditions, essential to what the narrative signifies to teller and hearer alike, are contextual in nature. Pratt argues that both textual (literary) and oral discourse depend for significance on contextual considerations involving the speaker and addressees.[19] Pratt's initial arguments regarding the structural and contextual properties of oral discourse are essential to her central claim that the literary-speech situation is also contextual in nature. Certain standard locutions, organization of the material, and other factors suggest the similarities between oral and literary narrative.

Without further reviewing this and other aspects of Pratt's interesting and stimulating book, I want to return to my contention that the Qurʾan in both its literary and oral manifestations within Muslim culture has identifiable contextual circumstances within which Muslims render and interpret meaning.

The Qur'an does not "mean" something outside of sociocultural contexts but rather, as Erich Auerbach has demonstrated in the case of Western classical literature, it is always possessed of *Deutungsbedürftigkeity – a* text in need of interpretation.[20]

Wansbrough has discussed the literary genre properties of the early interpretive literature of Muslim exegesis. What he calls "source criticism" distinguishes between *tafsīr, maghāzī, asbāb al-nuzūl, fiqh* and other exegetical genres, locating the contextual features of each within the cultural milieus of scriptural use that each served. Among the sociocultural contexts of early Islamic scriptural use are interfaith polemics, popular explanations, establishing prophetic exempla, legal reasoning, and so on. Speech-act theory in Quranic studies has, as one of its main tasks, the problem of discovering the contextual rules of meaningful discourse, explicit and implicit, within each genre. As in the case of oral speech, the literary record of exegetical modes implies a speaker/addressee context which contains elements of significance external to the text per se.

In the case of the Qur'an, however, the textual features of both scripture and exegesis are highly symbolic. Quranic symbolism, then, poses important problems in understanding Muslim world views.

Quranic Symbolism and Symbolic Knowledge

It is commonplace to note the central role of the Qur'an in Muslim culture. Marshall Hodgson went a step further by seeing this role in terms of symbolism. "A symbolic expression of the institutions of Muslim faith can be expected to remain at the heart of the symbolic life of Muslim peoples as with other peoples. In a measure, this expectation is realized. The great *religious* symbol, the great concrete image in Islam . . . is the Qur'an. Wherever other faiths call for some symbolic presence, or even a symbolic gesture, Islam presents the Qur'ān or some fragment of it. . . . The words of the Qur'ān are, certainly, above all evocative and only incidentally informative, in the ordinary Muslim experience: they function sooner as symbols than as simple concepts."[21]

Hodgson's insightful (though methodologically unpursued) remarks about the symbolic and oral presence of the Qur'an suggest that we must go beyond the text itself in order to measure its meaning and significance within Muslim culture. Students of religion have long noted the importance of symbols to the religious apprehension and construction of reality and to ritual performances. Several writings by anthropologist Clifford Geertz explore how symbols function within particular sociocultural systems. Symbols, he argues, serve to make world view and ethos fit. World view denotes "the collection of notions a people has of how reality is at base put together"; ethos refers to "their general style of life, the way they do things and like to see things done. . . ."

> It is the office of symbols [Geertz continues] then, to link these in such a way that they mutually confirm one another. Such symbols render the world view believable and the ethos justifiable, and they do it by invoking each other in support of the other. The world view is believable because the ethos, which grows out of it, is felt to be authoritative; the ethos is justifiable because the world view, upon which it rests, is held to be true. . . .
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> Religious patterns . . . thus have a double aspect: they are frames of perception, symbolic screens through which experience is interpreted; and they are guides for action, blueprints for conduct.[22]

Quranic symbols, in this view, negotiate between the mental constructions of reality Geertz calls "world view" and the social contexts of ethos. Thus, for example, the Qur'an posits (or presumes) the existence of the Muslim *umma* in the sacred time of the Prophetic mission, and it also prescribes for the *umma* as it ought to be in historical time. Muslim exegesis historicizes and exhorts its symbolic paradigms.

The exegetical literature that clothes the Quranic symbols in fuller, more articulate meanings can be approached as part of the symbol system displayed in Muslim literature. The degree of semantic clarity from one *āya* (verse) of scripture to the next varies, for both lexical and theological reasons, that is, only Allah knows the entire meaning of the Qur'an. Coherent literary interpretation emerges in different exegetical genres. Among the established literary genres, the *asbāb alnuzūl* (occasions of revelation) locate Quranic passages within the context of the life of the Prophet, Muhammad, thus creating the literary dimensions of that context. *Tafsīr and ta'wīl* (commentary) utilize the context of scripture by proposing grammatical, lexical, and other kinds of meanings following the canonical order of *sūras* and *āyas*. Collections of *aḥādīth* (imputed Prophetic sayings, actions or silent approval) facilitate the applicability of Quranic enunciations to concrete situations in life by creating larger fields of contextual meaning and authority extracted from the life of the Prophet (Sunna). *Fiqh* and *sharī'a* (sacred law) locate meaning in the liturgical and social transactions between God and humankind, and among humans, conceived and applied in forensic contexts. Kalām (dialectical theology) discursively explores abstract themes of Muslim belief that radiate out of (or into) the textual surface of scripture at *loci probantes*. Thus, there are several literary genres of interpretation (and some of these, such as *ḥadīth*, are also orally transmitted) in which the Quranic cosmology becomes a richer, more productive and culturally pervasive system of symbols than the text of scripture per se.

By focusing our attention on the symbolic aspects of exegetical activity, a radically different program of research is required. As Sperber and Ricoeur have argued, exegesis does not explain or interpret a primary field or system of symbols; rather, it extends the process of symbolism within (Islamic) culture. Thus, exegesis itself enunciates a symbolic knowledge that, for the outside

interpreter, still requires explanation.[23] For example, the meaning of Sūra Eight is "explained" by al-Wāqidī (d. 823) and Ibn Hishām (d. 834) from Ibn Isḥāq (d. 768) as having been revealed to the Prophet during the events of the famous battle at Badr between the Prophet's Medinan forces and the Meccan troops of Quraysh. The early Muslim exegetes have displayed a seminarrative explanation which is itself a reflex on the divine/human dimensions of encounter implicit within Quranic cosmology.[24] By turning to exegetical literature for help in understanding the Qur'an, we have not yet transformed its symbolic language into any language of explanation other than its own internal one. This has implications for the extent to which exegetical texts infused with sacred symbolism can serve the purpose of historical reconstruction. They may explain scripture otherwise, however, if they are seen as speech-act contexts in which scriptural symbolism is enunciated.

I have discussed elsewhere the view of symbolism argued by Dan Sperber.[25] Sperber wants to distinguish between three kinds of knowledge: semantic (lexical meaning, i.e., by definition), encyclopedic (empirical knowledge of the way things are in the world), and symbolic knowledge. Human beings grasp meanings and hold knowledge of all three types. "A satan is an unseen being" is, like "a bachelor is an unmarried man," an analytic statement and, thus, an example of semantic knowledge. What we know about satans is, in this case, a matter of semantics. "Mecca is in Arabia" and "satans do not exist" are assertions about the way things are in the world of empirical experience, and they are true or false on empirical grounds, regardless of convictions to the contrary. Such statements are examples of what Sperber refers to as encyclopedic knowledge, and they are synthetic. Symbolic knowledge is implicit in metaphors and other acts of imagination. Statements of symbolic knowledge may also be synthetic, but unlike encyclopedic knowledge, symbolic knowledge is not true or false on empirical grounds. "Poets are led astray by satans" and "pork is a forbidden food" are known to be true by convictions held within certain societies, not by verifiable causal states of affairs in the world. Whereas empirical anomalies (pouring rain on a cloudless day) are irrational and prod the mind to seek a rational explanation, symbolic knowledge that contravenes empirical knowledge (prophets parting the Red Sea) can be conducive of intellectual repose and conviction in specific cultural contexts. The cognitive process by which human beings integrate symbolic, empirical, and semantic knowledge in order to express cultural values and convictions requires much more study and is key, I think, to Geertz's notion of symbols functioning to make world view and ethos fit. The discussion of religious symbols may be distinguished for the purpose of analysis according to their roles in cosmology, world view, and ethos. The cognitive processes of symbolism – a full analysis of which would go beyond the limited scope of this essay – can be stated as follows.

I take cosmology to mean a symbolic vision of a supramundane ordering of and relation to mundane reality – a cosmos in the classic sense of the term.

World view refers to the implications this has for sociocultural forms, relations, and institutions. Cosmology is usually narrated in sacred texts and by extension in their exegetical oral and literary genres. World view is evidenced in the sociohistorical circumstances of a culture, and it uses cosmological symbolism (to a greater or lesser degree) to make sense of those circumstances. Both the textual historian and the ethnographer confront aspects of world view, which one anthropologist (Eickelman) defines as "shared cultural assumptions concerning the nature of the social world."[26] Both cosmology and world view are expressed by cultural symbols, although, whereas (monotheistic) cosmology concerns the sacred times of creation, the sending of prophets, the performance of miracles, the eschaton and the like, world view denotes the more immediate perceptions and conceptions that members of a society have of their ethnicity, social roles, moral obligations, the nature of evil, political and economic order, and so on.

In relation to Geertz's distinction between world view and ethos, then, I locate cosmology in the sacred text of scripture; it comprises a system of symbols that is somewhat fixed within the sacred text of oral and literary transmission, though more fluid in exegetical genres. World view comprises the normative perception of reality which is constructed (e.g., by Muslims under historical circumstances) out of that store of symbolic knowledge in relation to semantic and empirical knowledge available within a given historical context. Ethos concerns the actual forms peoples' lives take – the resulting attitudes and ways of doing things that characterize their personal and social existence. The symbols of Quranic cosmology are, in effect, translated as world views which act to effect a cultural ethos. Thus, the symbolism of cosmology under the determination of a fixed textual transmission is relatively stable structurally from one time and place of Muslim culture to the next. The symbolic structures of God and man, believer and unbeliever, obedience and disobedience, and so on, can be seen to remain fairly fixed. World view is the cultural vision of reality through the lenses of Quranic symbolism, enlarged by the intertextual surfaces of exegetical literature, and necessarily different by virtue of the historical, ethnic, linguistic, geographic, and other cultural and natural factors that render one time and place different from others.

Toshihiko Izutsu and Michel Allard and his colleagues have studied Quranic cosmology from slightly different points of view. Izutsu conducted a semantic analysis of the key terms of what he called the Quranic Weltanschauung, measuring the semantic and conceptual fields of Quranic speech by comparison with pre-Islamic and Middle Arabic meanings for some of the same terms. Thus, the Quranic symbols (Allah, *tanzīl* "sending down," angels, faith, etc.) are explored as concepts with relational meanings established in juxtaposition to other concepts within the Quranic textual system. Izutsu proceeds with some questionable assumptions about the historical periods he draws into his comparisons, but his study calls attention to the need and value of synchronic analysis of the Quranic symbol system.[27] Allard and his colleagues also propose

a synchronic analysis by looking at the "syntax" of Quranic cosmology. This they do by suggesting a structuralist method of determining the syntagmatic surface sequences of activities and their consequences among the symbolic beings that inhabit the Quranic cosmos.[28]

Drawing from the analyses of Izutsu and Allard we may summarize by noting that two realms of activity animate the Quranic cosmology – the mundane (seen or present) and the supramundane (unseen). God rules over the entire doubly dimensioned cosmos, although both the supramundane and mundane realms are inhabited by his creatures who interact within and between both realms. In the supramundane world, satans, angels, and other unseen beings – some obedient and others not – respond to God according to the moral status of their being. On earth, humankind (and the unseen Jinn) are also discriminated among according to those who accept God and his messengers and those who do not. Prophets, aided by some angels and hindered by others (and satans), convey the divine word to humankind, which in Quranic semantics is divided into communities or nations (*umam*).

Quranic cosmology is a dynamic, structured, complex. Binary oppositions such as divine/human, heaven/earth, acceptance/rejection, and believer/unbeliever provide the contrasts within the texture of Islamic cosmology, which we may suspect acts to symbolize (and thus interpret for those who grasp and apply these symbols) tensions felt within the concrete world of everyday life. Even at the surface of the Quranic text (*parole*, speech) the message is made clearer by a restricted number of acting subjects, functions, and qualities. Semantic richness evolves through intertextual exegesis. Allard's study shows that, below the textual surface, at the level of *langue*, the message is presented in encoded acts of communication (sending *āyas*, leading astray) and response (acceptance, rejection) among beings who inhabit the two realms that the Quranic cosmology comprises. The syntagmatic sequences of Quranic speech become forceful in their repetition. Repetition, however, is not just a function of the literary mode. The strong oral presence of the Qur'an in Muslim culture is a vital contextual problem for understanding the communication of repeated symbolic activities.

Several papers read at the Arizona State University symposium on "Islam and the History of Religions" urged the importance of oral as well as textual studies. To summarize: The "nonlisted" liturgical sequences of the Qur'an fall functionally into a nonliterary division of thirty equal parts (sixty halves and 240 quarters of halves) to which scholars have paid little heed, but by which Muslims mark out recitation in the ritual performances of the local community; and we must evaluate the relation of the liturgical function to the literary or "listed" sequence (i.e., Qur'an as collection of *sūras*, and in the literary mode subject to literary exegesis).[29]

One of the observations made during the symposium and remarked on by several of the participants was that, *prima facie*, the traditional collection of the Qur'an preserves a fairly uniform distribution of juridical, theological, and

paraenetic materials throughout the text so that liturgical reading (reciting) from beginning to end, or simply continuously, presents auditors with uniform ranges of semantic notions and frames of reference that are generally characteristic of Quranic symbolism. It is part of the litany of Quranic studies to point out (sometimes in dismay) that the liturgical sequence of reciting the Qurʾan (the ʿUthmānic "collection"), though exegetically tied to events in the life of the Prophet, do not appear within the text in the putative diachrony in which the biographical materials locate them. The textual order of *sūras* and *āyas* is vastly different from the order of "occasions" within the Prophet's biography during which they were "sent down." One result is that the "message" of the Qurʾan is not contingent on communication of whole historical narratives and paraenetic blocks of material. Textual analysts, given the anomaly of a canonical text composed of seemingly fractured literary components, have been tempted to determine "meaning" by trying to rearrange *āyas* and *sūras* in order to place like types of material alongside each other, and to reconstruct narratives. The present order of the recited text, however, suggests that, despite the literary-critical anomalies within the text as we have it, the Qurʾan as recited and memorized is an intelligible speech act within Muslim culture. That is, I am proposing that we assume there is some sort of effective communicative rationale behind the present collection of the text.

A later account within the Islamic exegetical tradition (al-Suyūṭī, d. 1505) tells us that Muhammad and the Angel Gabriel collated the *sūras* and *āyas* to date each year of the Prophet's mission, repeating the process (i.e., it was quite deliberate) just before the end.[30] Although the framework is obviously an extension of Quranic cosmology, the intention rests on oral, not literary, communication between the mundane and supramundane messengers of God. Muslim exegesis and contemporary textual scholarship (with the important exceptions of Burton and Wansbrough) agree that the consonantal text was fixed by order of the caliph, ʿUthmān (ca. 650). Orthodox Islam nonetheless accepts seven (ten or fourteen) slightly variant readings (recitations) of the vowels which, strictly speaking, do not form an ingredient of the consonantal text fixed by the ʿUthmānic collection. Thus, until the seven or more variant readings were also canonized in the fourth/tenth century, oral transmission was free within the limits provided by the existence of only a consonantal text. Moreover, the actual degree to which the consonantal text might also have varied during the first two centuries is by no means solved to the satisfaction of every scholar.

John Wansbrough has noted the "high frequency and the uniform distribution in the Qurʾān of formulae and 'formulaic systems.'"[31] Thus, both with respect to semantics and to the formal components of Quranic speech, the present collection of the Qurʾan may be underpinned by a distinct rationale. Literary criticism and traditional exegesis, though useful and productive in textual studies, have not brought us much closer to understanding or even appreciating the Qurʾan as a speech act framed within the present order of

sūras and *āyas.* What, then, might we learn from other methods appropriate to the study of texts employed in oral and ritual contexts?

Oral-formulaic and Semantic-constituent Analyses

Oral-formulaic analysis offers insights into kinds of materials which are not foreign to students of religion interested in *lingua sacra* meant to be recited (e.g., Vedas, Mishna, Qur'an). As worked out by Milman Parry and Albert Lord with Homeric Greek and Yugoslavian folk poetry,[32] oral-formulaic analysis challenges textualist assumptions about the literal transmission of epic poems for generations by bards with prodigious memories. The older textualist view had centered on scholarship in search of "original" or *Urtexte* by analyzing surviving variants, repetitions of phrases, and patterns throughout the text and attributing these to scribal error or massoretic redaction, that is, to the process of transmitting, editing, and fixing the text.

Oral-formulaic analysis makes an inventory and classification of repeated phrases and formulas throughout a text, and, contrary to most textual studies, argues that variant renditions now in literary form were probably at one time composed "orally" by individual performers. Oral composition relies on stock phrases and themes that are well known, within a cultural context, to poet and audience alike. The poet, in this view, seeks to entertain his audience by creatively composing a poem out of stylistic and formulaic expressions. Similarity from one presentation of the poem to the next is insured by the stabilizing factors of meter, stock phrases, and themes – all culturally determined and approved. Variety from one performance to the next may be a sign of creative individuality on the part of the poet. The poet's purpose is, above all, to entertain and enthrall his audience – what speech-act theorists would regard as illocutionary and perlocutionary levels of discourse.

The performative aspect of recited texts is an important but neglected problem in Quranic studies. Commenting on J. L. Austin's analysis of performance-centered acts, Richard Bauman argues that the manner of orally presenting a text communicates meaning to an audience above and beyond the referential aspect of the language employed.[33] Performances are "keyed" by such culturally determined modes as rhyme, and also by special phrases, words, pronunciations, and ranges of metanarrational devices.[34] Bauman also speaks of the "patterning of performance," by which he means "situated behavior," that is, performance behavior that is "rendered meaningful with reference to relevant *contexts*."[35] Institutions appoint culturally defined spaces in which performances are to occur, as well as special times, such as calendrical feast days and rites of passage (to which we may add the appointed times and places of worship). Because performance involves communication and, thus, a relationship between performer and audience, and because a process of interpretation is involved between them, Bauman concludes that we must consider speech-act performances as a "nexus of tradition, practice and emergence

in verbal art."[36] This approach does not look for "residuals" of the past in its analysis of performed texts, but rather it wants to understand the process of emerging values, meaning, signification, and experience in the performance itself. Since no one will deny that the Qur'an is a "scripture" meant to be recited, it seems rather clear that not only what is recited, but how it is recited, is a question that must be linked to other questions about Quranic symbolism and its communication.

Oral-formulaic studies of pre-Islamic poetry have been published by James Monroe and Michael Zwettler.[37] The significance of their research for Quranic studies lies in the consideration each scholar has given to the application of oral-formulaic theory as worked by Parry, Lord, and others for Greek, Slavic, and English poetry to the phenomena of pre- and early Islamic poetry (Arabic). Zwettler's work includes a lengthy and useful review of the early work of Parry and Lord, as well as of revisions suggested by scholars such as Benson, Curschmann, and Chaytor.[38] Most interesting is Nagler's argument for a generative rather than an oral-formulaic model of oral composition.[39] A problem that has vexed oral-formulaic theorists is the process of rendering recited poetry into written, textual form. Parry and Lord leave the impression that the formulaic nature of poetry has implications for the process of oral composition only. Zwettler and others argue that "oral performance of poetical works was a very complex operation, even when the performer did not simultaneously compose the poem he presented."[40] The implication is that once a poem has been textualized (copied in literary form and thus achieved a fixed state), the formulaic and performative qualities of its continued enunciation within a culture still seem to render it a special type of speech act. This affirms my earlier point that the rules governing the speaker/addressee communication are contextual. Thus, quite apart from the question of whether this approach will help us to resolve questions about the composition of the Qur'an in nascent Islam, oral-formulaic theory may be applied to the problem of understanding the ongoing process of performing textualized, formulaic oral speech acts. First, however, the theory does have important applicability to the text of the Qur'an itself.

Oral-formulaic theory rests on several definitions that clarify its purpose and scope with respect to the text. A formula is a "repeated group of words the length of which corresponds to one of the divisions of the poetic structure."[41] The adaptation of a theory which trades mainly in poetry of rhyme and meter to the semipoetic language of the Qur'an needs to be carefully considered. Patterns of assonance and end rhyme occur without rigid rules of rhyme and meter. A formulaic system is a "group of phrases having the same syntactical pattern, the same metrical structure, and at least one lexical item in common."[42] Again, adaptation to the situation in the Qur'an will have to be made. A striking feature of Arabic lies in the morphological patterns of words. Similarly structured consonantal forms of words (e.g., the *mafʿūl* form: *maʿlūm, majhūl, mafhūm*, etc.) create certain possibilities for formulaic expressions that give

Arabic poetry and oratory a character quite distinct from that of most of the other languages submitted to formulaic analysis. Other definitions, such as of formulaic phrases and runs or clusters, also bear upon the analysis. Culley defines "theme" as having to do with content rather than formal characteristics of lines and parts.[43] Themes contain scenes and descriptions. The case of the Qur'an is distinctive with respect to scenes and descriptions, because many of the themes to which the Qur'an alludes are given their fuller frames of reference in the literary exegetical "contexts," as mentioned above with respect to *Sūra* Eight and the Battle at Badr. The *sūra* itself seems to contain thematic markers that call to mind symbolic meanings that are beyond the text of the Qur'an, but that nonetheless belong to its cosmology.

One thing that Culley found was that "psalms with high formulaic content came from a limited number of types of psalms."[44] The "types" he found were individual complaints, individual thanksgivings, and hymns.[45] Thus, at least in the psalms, there would seem to be a distinct correlation between percentage of formulaic content and thematic content. Groups of psalms that exhibit common semantic notions can be identified and distinguished also on the basis of formal characteristics of composition. This may have implications for the effect certain formulaic phrases would tend to have on hearers and reciters. Wansbrough has listed some of the more common initial, medial, and final formulaic phrases that mark off passages in the Qur'an.[46] Exhaustive lists and a record of loci would require a monumental effort. Wansbrough's suggestion that such an effort could best be done with the use of a computer has obvious merit.

In a chapter on classical ʿ*arabīya*, Zwettler discusses the Qur'an in relation to Arabic poetry.[47] Islamicists have long debated the "basic question of the interrelationship of the language of early Arabic poetry, the Qur'an, and the Bedouins; the problem of the *iʿrāb* (desinential inflection); the nature and origin of the classical ʿ*arabīya* of later centuries; etc."[48] The traditional scholarly view has been that the Qur'an represented the language of Quraysh, reputedly the most felicitous of all the Bedouin dialects. Yet Zwettler agrees with Parry (on Homeric poetry) that oral poetry preserves traditional phrases, formulas, and styles of diction that may no longer be used in current dialects that are spoken by the poet and his audience.[49] The notion of *lingua sacra* also suggests a special diction and style peculiar to scriptures and other sacred texts, but not representative of the language spoken in everyday discourse.[50] Zwettler argues that the Qur'an shared much more with the language of oral poetry than it did with any spoken dialect, and that this would account for the Qur'an's frequent denial that Muhammad was a poet as well as for the later reliance of Muslim philologists on early poetry and the Qur'an as resources for the standardization of the Arabic language.[51] If this solution is accepted, then the writing down of the Qur'an was the earliest attempt to graphically reproduce the language of oral poetry in Islam as a genre. Zwettler continues:

Because of the religious and social requirements of the Islamic community, and above all because of the liturgical principle of public oral recitation and prayer, the capacity for using this idiom could no longer be reserved solely to poets, *rāwīs*, *kāhins*, and their like, but had to become the common acquisition of all who heard, understood and accepted God's "Arabic Qurʾān" as delivered through his chosen Arab Messenger. This included, at first, all the members of Muhammad's super-tribal Arab Muslim community and, later, the entire community of Muslims, Arab and non-Arab alike (only some of whom at any time would be endowed with notable poetic ability). . . .

It was the Qurʾān, with its uncompromisingly innovative and effective use of this (oral-poetic) medium for non-poetic purposes and its forthright claim to being "an *Arabic* recitation," in "an articulate *Arabic* tongue,"that perhaps for the first time gave recognition and significance to the poetic "language" as a quantity abstractable from the poetry and accessible to non-poets as well.[52]

If oral-formulaic analysis might be useful in getting at the formal and dictional aspects of Quranic recitation, we are still left with questions about theme and how it is communicated.

An approach that is a propos of the study of Quranic themes comes from scholars working with another genre of *lingua sacra*, namely, prayer texts.[53] I will review here the work of my colleague, Sam D. Gill, on Navajo prayer texts. Gill's research is similar to the work of Thomas Sebeok on Cheremis material. Gill's approach follows a structural method determined by the nature of the materials with which he works; it is not, however, a semiotic system entombed within the texts, but rather one that opens out onto the contexts in which the texts take on meaning in Navajo culture. The Navajo case is similar in many ways to that of the Qurʾan. Gill points out that, "since the prayer utterance can be shown to be a meaningful speech act which includes the text and its several contexts, the event of the prayer utterance can be thought of as a 'prayer act,' that is, as an act of prayer which is a meaningful act of communication in a definable situation."[54] What Gill wants to revise is the prevailing emphasis on "the interpretation of the various elements in Navajo ritual and myth [which in the usual formulation of the task has] been to isolate . . . constituent elements from their context and to organize them in like categories in concordances, that is sandpaintings with sandpaintings, songs with songs, prayersticks with prayersticks."[55] Gill argues that there are several "levels" of meaning that involve different contexts to which prayers relate. Meaning is generated in a network of symbols that connect in different contexts.

Sacred Words, the apt title of Gill's study, is divided into two parts for analytical purposes. First, the surface structure of the available collections of prayer texts is analyzed apart from the various contexts of their meanings. Then, having established patterns of surface "constituents," the author analyzes the use of the patterns in their ritual, mythological, and motivating

situational contexts. The first task, then, consists in isolating constituent segments of the text without regard for "the context in which such a prayer text might be uttered or the various nuances of meaning of these words in the context of Navajo culture. . . ."[56] The actual number of different kinds of constituents turns out to be finite and manageable (Gill seems to manage this better than Sebeok) because prayer texts, like biblical and Quranic texts, are examples of *lingua sacra* whose "semantic spectrum is selective, its syntax stereotyped and rhetorical, its style paraenetic. . . ."[57] Gill discovered some twenty types of constituents in Navajo prayer texts, and to each type he gave an alphanumeric designation. The constituents of Navajo texts include such categories as place designation, name mention, pleas for assistance, and so on. In other words, the constituents of a text are generic units joined together at seams in the text that must be identified and disconnected for analytical purpses. This is akin, perhaps, to what semiotic structuralists call the *lexie*.[58]

Having devised a method of plotting the syntagmatic features of the surface of the text, Gill ends up with patterns of alphanumeric codes. The paradigmatic features lie in the grouping of similar syntagmatic patterns of constituents that may be discovered to have similar thematic content. These are identified as blessing-way prayers, life-way prayers, enemy-way prayers, and so on. Thus, all prayers that fall within a certain syntagmatic pattern may be expected to function paradigmatically with respect to Navajo symbolism. If a symbol or group of symbols have been identified thus, however, their significance is contingent on utterance of the formulas in specific ritual contexts performed for specific motivational purposes in association with specific mythological (i.e., cosmological symbolic) knowledge.

Thus, a prayer formula depends on much else for meaning than the formula, pattern, or even semantic content per se. Moreover, meanings may vary for the same formula depending on the different contexts of myth, ritual, and purpose for reciting the prayer. The anthropologist who works with "little" traditions or with, say, Hindu-Muslim societies has a great number of contexts and symbolic fields to consider, but if Gill's method can be adapted to Quranic studies, it may be possible to schematize Quranic symbolism in a variety of cultural situations.

Those who are familiar with Constance Padwick's interesting study of Muslim prayers will see the relevance of Gill's analysis to the many types of prayers she describes.[59] Her prayer categories include worship of praise, refuge taking, name in worship, calling down of blessing, and so on. These would seem to be likely candidates to contain constituent patterns associated with discernible contexts of myth, ritual, and situations of motivating purposes. As Padwick points out, "The Qurʾān is the psalter as well as the lectionary of Muslim worship, and its style dominates the whole [of enunciatory prayer acts]."[60] The very term for a liturgical division of the Qurʾan (*ḥizb* – one-sixtieth part, or a half of a *juzʾ*) came in time to mean a collect of Quranic verses, which may be selected and organized around a theme, or it may be composed to

devotional utterances attributed to the prophet and to Muslim saints, and interspersed with selected Quranic verses.[61] Thus it may be that the principle argued by Zwettler for why the Qur'an shares oral-poetic qualities with poetry extends also to prayer "collects," which again are determined by principles of collection that may be seen as definable processes in Muslim culture.

My concern is more specifically with the Qur'an per se, however. As "psalter" and "lectionary" of Muslim worship it presents us with a meaningful act of communication in definable situations. The distinct manner within Muslim culture in which the Qur'an – and only the Qur'an – is recited sets it apart from all other devotional and religious enunciations of texts. The science of "making beautiful" (*tajwīd*) the enunciation of God's Word renders the Qur'an's liturgical recitation unmistakably distinctive to the ear. The central place the Qur'an holds in Muslim dogma (Word of God, miraculous by reason of its inimitability, uncreated and eternal), and in cosmology (heavenly tablet, mother of the Book, conveyed by messengers) gives it a focal point in Muslim world views, which in turn characterizes its role in ritual and social contexts.

The relation of semantic-constituent to oral-formulaic analyses would seem to be symbiotic. Gill's description of the constituent method of analysis as it applies to Navajo "enemy-way prayers" shows that a constituent is a thematic block of text that may extend for several lines.[62] Significance attached to an entire constituent pattern may prove to be triggered by initial formulaic phrases and repetitious patterns throughout. Neither the semantic nor the formal elements should be left out of consideration in this kind of investigation.

Final Reflections

This essay began on a polemical note. I questioned the premise found in much of Qur'an scholarship that the meaning of the text is what the author intended to say in the context of the original utterance. I have questioned whether the scholarly exegete of sacred texts should labor at recovering such imputed meanings, for this seems to imply that the significance of the Qur'an for Muslims in later historical and cultural circumstances leads us away from, and not toward, the original meaning. Debate with a respected tradition of textual studies is not my real aim, however, nor could I hope to win many points, given the careful erudition of those who will undoubtedly disagree with my approach to Quranic studies. The problem, as I see it, is that their position requires them to identify the historical author(s) of the Qur'an, and since the Muslim belief in divine authorship is utterly foreign to humanistic models of understanding and interpretation, most have concluded that Muhammad was the author.

This conclusion poses two problems, the first of which is procedural. Many Muslims are greatly offended by non-Muslim revisionism of doctrinal "truths"; any textual exegesis based on the assumption of Muhammad's authorship, no matter how learned and persuasive, is faulted and unworthy of credence

from the pious Muslim point of view. Believers' objections to the humanistic and scientific setting aside of the claims of faith, are hardly new or peculiar to Islam. No scholar can or should be timid in pursuit of the historical evidence he is seeking to uncover and interpret. My point here is a simple one. Quranic studies in the West have often aimed at solving problems Muslims have not recognized as such. It will be important, when it is necessary to pursue such questions, to minimize where at all possible cross-cultural conflict between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars.

A second problem regarding Muhammad's authorship of the Qur'an arises from within the realm of textual and literary criticism of sacred documents. What solid textual and historical grounds do we have for treating Muhammad as the author of the Qur'an? What kinds of evidence are there for the reconstruction of his life, attitudes, use of language, and ideas? Does straightforward evidence exist, to the extent that Qur'an scholars claim it does, for their purpose of explaining what Muhammad intended the Qur'an to mean to his immediate audience? Wansbrough has argued that the Qur'an and the earliest exegetical literature present us with a *Heilsgeschichte.* He argues that the literary formation and development of scripture and exegesis was not stabilized until the eighth century – the beginning of the florescent period to which most of the earliest literature can be traced, and not much earlier. His arguments have not found warm support among Muslim scholars for obvious reasons. Wansbrough's books have drawn greater cries of outrage from Western textual scholars, however. That debate need not be rehearsed here.[63] In my judgment, Wansbrough has shown that the assumption of Muhammad's authorship remains extremely problematic. The Qur'an, Sunna, and exegetical literature display segments of monotheistic narratives of creation, divine sending of prophets, and a soteriology. Getting at history through the symbols of sacred history presents serious, unresolved problems of verification. Scholarship in this area is worthwhile and ought to be pursued, but the field of Quranic studies has other important tasks to be accomplished as well.

Given the difficulties of establishing the "speaker" behind the text, a speech-act approach has some merit in my view, for the problem can be approached in terms of symbolism. The symbolic cosmology of God sending down a communication to a community (*umma*) through a prophet suggests a paradigm for the ritual context of Qur'an recitation. In the Muslim world view, it is God (through his messenger, Gabriel) and not man (Muhammad, reciters of scribal copiers) who is the speaker. The Qur'an presents a distinct form of speech to the ears and eyes of Muslim addressees today, as it did in the sacred time of the Prophetic mission. Thus, the ritual dimension of Qur'an recitation may reflect the Quranic paradigm of its own appearance in sacred history. Passages were sent down and recited by Muhammad on specific occasions in his life and that of the nascent *umma,* which was forming itself around the divine speech acts. This suggests that part of the intent of revelation was to illumine the significance of those occasions *sub specie aeternitatis.* We also learn that

Muhammad's companions subsequently recited *āyas* and *sūras* on their own, and the *Sīra* literature reports occasions on which they did so, modeling their performance on that of the Prophet. The ritual context of Qur'an recitation in historical time also occurs on occasions of special importance to the ongoing Muslim community – the calendrical feast days, rites of passage, or just for the sheer enjoyment of hearing it performed in the proper manner. In addition to the Quranic cosmology, then, study of the symbolism in *Sīra* literature might yield a paradigm for Quranic ritual and performance.

My perceptions of the problems discussed in this essay are framed in part from a conscious identification with history of religions scholarship, although historians of religions admittedly have contributed very little to our understanding of Islam. Yet the models of understanding religion conserved by Muslims and Islamicists by no means exhaust the possible theories and methods of interpretation. Recent developments in hermeneutics, semiotics, the study of cultural symbolism, and speech-act theory – to name just a few fields that ask how human beings communicate meaning – offer a wide range of new approaches to Quranic studies. Most historians of religions nowadays have learned to watch for progress in these areas and to adapt where possible to the kinds of data presented by the traditions they wish to interpret. In scholarship, as in business, entrepreneurs function to create new activity in the marketplace.

Notes

1. Alford T. Welch, "Introduction – Problems and Perspectives," in *Studies in Qur'ān and Tafsir*, ed. Alford T. Welch, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (thematic issue) 47 (1979): 630.
2. Ibid., p. 620.
3. See Clifford Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System," *Modern Language Notes* 91 (1976): 1473–99; and Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981).
4. An important exception which combines classical textual Islamic studies with substantial fieldwork on Qur'an recitation is Kristina Nelson, "The Art of Reciting the Qur'an" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1980).
5. Welch, p. 629.
6. Ibid., pp. 629–30.
7. Alford T. Welch, "Methodological Considerations in the Study of the Qur'ān" (paper presented to the American Oriental Society, Boston, March 15, 1981). See E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967).
8. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953).
9. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960); David Couzens Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature and History in Contemporary Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); and Paul Ricoeur, "Qu'est-ce qu'un texte? Expliquer et comprendre," in *Hermeneutik und Dialektik* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1970), vol. 2.
10. Welch, "Introduction," p. 622.

11. See Geertz, n. 3 above.

12. Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), pp. 80–81.

13. Ibid., p. 81.

14. Ibid., pp. 80–81.

15. Ibid., p. xi.

16. Ibid, p. xii.

17. William Labov, *Language in the Inner City* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), p. 360, cited in Pratt, p. 44.

18. Pratt, p. 45.

19. Pratt's application of speech-act theory to literary analysis is applied by Marilyn R. Waldman to Islamic historical literature in her *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative: A Case Study in Perso-Islamicate Historiography* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980).

20. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Bern, 1967), pp. 5–27; discussed by John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 100; cf. pp. 148–70.

21. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, "Islam and Image," *History of Religions* 3, no. 2 (1964): 222.

22. Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 87–93.

23. Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, trans. Alice L. Morton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 34: "Exegesis is not an interpretation but rather an extension of the symbol and must itself be interpreted." Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 4 (1975): 35: "Even if these [exegetical] 'additions' belong to the phase of redaction, they are not quite exterior to the text, but belong to what I should like to call its productivity."

24. See Wansbrough's discussion of this, *Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 25–32.

25. Sperber, pp. 91ff. See my "Structural Analysis and the Qur'an: Newer Approaches to the Study of Islamic Texts," in Welch, pp. 665–84 (n. 1 above).

26. Eickelman, p. 175 (n. 3 above).

27. Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964).

28. Michel Allard et al., *Analyse conceptuelle du Coran sur cartes perforées*, 2 vols. (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1963), 2: 27–42.

29. The relevant papers are Frederick M. Denny, "Islamic Ritual: Perspectives and Theories;" William A. Graham, "The Earliest Meaning of 'Qur'an:' An Islamic Contribution to the Understanding of Scripture" and Marilyn R. Waldman, "Primitive Mind/Modern Mind: New Approaches to an Old Problem Applied to Islam," in *Islam and the History of Religions: Perspectives on the Study of a Religious Tradition*, ed. Richard C. Martin, Berkeley Religious Study Series (Berkeley, Calif., 1982).

30. Cited by Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1937), pp. 405.

31. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, p. 48, and see his *Sectarian Milieu*, pp. 59–70 and below.

32. Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. A. Parry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); and Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1965).

33. Richard Bauman, "Verbal Art as Performance," *American Anthropologist* 77 (1975): 290–311.

34. Ibid., pp. 295ff.

35. Ibid., p. 298 (emphasis added).

36. Ibid., p. 306, from Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *New Left Review* 82 (1973): 11.

37. James T. Monroe, "Oral Composition in Pre-Islamic Poetry," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 3 (1972): 1–53; and Michael Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry: Its Character and Implications* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978).

38. Zwettler (pp. 2–50) reviews the state of the field, beginning with the original work of Parry and Lord, and several of the more important subsequent studies by other scholars including Monroe's article cited in the preceding note.

39. Michael Nagler, "Towards a Generative View of Oral Formula," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 98 (1967): 269–311; discussed by Zwettler, pp. 6ff.

40. Zwettler, pp. 23–24.

41. Robert C. Culley, *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967). Parry, Lord, Culley, Zwettler, and others define the key terms differently, demonstrating that each cultural situation and language requires a special application of the theory to that language and culture. I have chosen to follow Culley because his subject, the Psalms, in some ways comes closer to the Qur'an (e.g., both are *lingua sacra*, Semitic, and liturgically performed).

42. Ibid., p. 12.

43. Ibid., p. 17.

44. Ibid., p. 102.

45. ibid., p. 103.

46. Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, pp. 59–70 (n. 24 above).

47. Zwettler, pp. 97–188.

48. Cited by Zwettler (p. 100), from A. Spitaler "Arabisch," in *Linguistica semitica: presente e futuro*, ed. Levi Della Vida (Rome: Instituto di Studi del vicino Oriente, 1961).

49. Zwettler, pp. 97ff.

50. Cf. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, pp. 99–100.

51. Zwettler, pp. 100, 156–65.

52. Zwettler, p. 166 and n. 151.

53. Thomas A. Sebeok, *Structure and Texture* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1974), chap., on "prayers," pp. 42–54; and Sam D. Gill, *Sacred Words: A Study of Navajo Religion and Prayer* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

54. Gill, p. 8 of author's typescript.

55. Ibid., p. 8 (typescript).

56. Gill, p. 11; cf. Sebeok.

57. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, pp. 99–100 (n. 20 above).

58. Jean Calloud, *Structural Analysis of Narrative*, trans. Daniel Patte (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 12–14.

59. Constance E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use* (London, 1961).

60. Ibid., p. xxii.

61. See S. D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), esp. "Prayer in Islam," pp. 73–89.

62. Sam D. Gill, "Understanding Prayer: Anthropological Method, with Special Reference to Navajo Tradition" (paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New York City, November 1979).

63. See discussions by Fazlur Rahman, chap. 4, and Andrew Rippin, chap. 8, in Martin, ed. (n. 26 above).