

# INTERPRETING SCRIPTURES IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

OVERLAPPING INQUIRIES

EDITED BY MORDECHAI Z. COHEN  
AND ADELE BERLIN

*Psalterium, Hebræum, Græcū,  
Arabīcū & Chaldæū, cū tribus  
latinis interpretatōibus & glossis.*

תהלים עברי יוואני ערבי עם  
התוס' ושלש ה' תוס'ים  
בר'טין עם פר'וטין

*ᾠδὴ δαυὶδ ἐκ τῶν ᾠδῶν  
ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ  
ἐκ τῶν ᾠδῶν δαυὶδ ἐκ τῶν ᾠδῶν*

مزامير داود  
عزاني وقسدياني  
ترجمت لطين ونفسبرهم

ספר דתהלים יהוא יונאי  
ערבי וכסדי' עם תוס'  
סותרוסא מן לטין ובחיהיון

## INTERPRETING SCRIPTURES IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

This comparative study traces Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptural interpretation from antiquity to modernity, with special emphasis on the pivotal medieval period. It focuses on three areas: responses in the different faith traditions to tensions created by the need to transplant scriptures into new cultural and linguistic contexts; changing conceptions of the literal sense and its importance vis-à-vis non-literal senses, such as the figurative, spiritual, and mid-rashic; and ways in which classical rhetoric and poetics informed – or were resisted in – interpretation. Concentrating on points of intersection, the authors bring to light previously hidden aspects of methods and approaches in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This volume opens new avenues for interdisciplinary analysis and will benefit scholars and students of biblical studies, religious studies, medieval studies, Islamic studies, Jewish studies, comparative religions, and theory of interpretation.

MORDECHAI Z. COHEN is Professor of Bible and Associate Dean of the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University. His publications include *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor: From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimhi* and *Opening the Gates of Interpretation: Maimonides' Biblical Hermeneutics in Light of His Geonic-Andalusian Heritage and Muslim Milieu*.

ADELE BERLIN is Robert H. Smith Professor of Hebrew Bible Emerita in the Department of English and the Jewish Studies Program at the University of Maryland. She is the author of seven books, including *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, and commentaries on Zephaniah, Esther, and Lamentations.



# INTERPRETING SCRIPTURES IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

*Overlapping Inquiries*

EDITED BY  
MORDECHAI Z. COHEN AND ADELE BERLIN

with the assistance of  
MEIR M. BAR-ASHER, RITA COPELAND,  
AND JON WHITMAN



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107065680](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107065680)

© Cambridge University Press 2016

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2016

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Interpreting scriptures in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam : overlapping inquiries / edited by Mordechai Z. Cohen and Adele Berlin ; with the assistance of Meir M. Bar-Asher, Rita Copeland, and Jon Whitman.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-06568-0 (Hardback)

1. Sacred books--History and criticism. 2. Judaism. 3. Christianity. 4. Islam. I. Cohen, Mordechai Z., editor.

BL71.159 2015

208'.2--dc23 2015032421

ISBN 978-1-107-06568-0 Hardback

Additional resources for this publication at [www.yu.edu/revell/interpreting-scriptures](http://www.yu.edu/revell/interpreting-scriptures)

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

# Contents

|                                                                                                                                      |          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>List of figures</i>                                                                                                               | page vii |
| <i>Notes on contributors</i>                                                                                                         | ix       |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i>                                                                                                               | xiii     |
| <i>List of abbreviations</i>                                                                                                         | xv       |
| <br><i>Introduction: Intersecting encounters with scriptures in three faiths</i>                                                     | <br>I    |
| <i>Mordechai Z. Cohen</i>                                                                                                            |          |
| <br>PART I SCRIPTURAL TEXTS IN CHANGING CONTEXTS                                                                                     | <br>23   |
| 1 The emergence of biblical interpretation in antiquity                                                                              | 25       |
| <i>James L. Kugel</i>                                                                                                                |          |
| 2 Disclosing the mystery: the hermeneutics of typology in Syriac exegesis                                                            | 46       |
| <i>Sidney H. Griffith</i>                                                                                                            |          |
| 3 “We have made it an Arabic Qur’an”: the permissibility of translating scripture in Islam in contrast with Judaism and Christianity | 65       |
| <i>Meir M. Bar-Asher</i>                                                                                                             |          |
| 4 The unmoved mover begins to move: literary and artistic renderings of the Christian Bible                                          | 84       |
| <i>Piero Boitani</i>                                                                                                                 |          |
| 5 Deconstructing the dual Torah: a Jewish response to the Muslim model of scripture                                                  | 113      |
| <i>Meira Polliack</i>                                                                                                                |          |

|          |                                                                                                                                            |     |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| PART II  | CONCEPTIONS OF THE LITERAL SENSE                                                                                                           | 131 |
| 6        | The literal sense of Christian scripture: redefinition and revolution<br><i>Jon Whitman</i>                                                | 133 |
| 7        | Figuring the letter: making sense of <i>sensus litteralis</i> in late-medieval Christian exegesis<br><i>Alastair J. Minnis</i>             | 159 |
| 8        | Conceptions of the literal sense ( <i>ẓāhir</i> , <i>ḥaqīqa</i> ) in Muslim interpretive thought<br><i>Robert M. Gleave</i>                | 183 |
| 9        | Emergence of the rule of <i>peshat</i> in medieval Jewish Bible exegesis<br><i>Mordechai Z. Cohen</i>                                      | 204 |
| PART III | RHETORIC AND THE POETICS OF READING                                                                                                        | 225 |
| 10       | Poetry and commentary in the medieval school of Rheims: reading Virgil, reading David<br><i>A. B. Kraebel</i>                              | 227 |
| 11       | On the figurative ( <i>majāz</i> ) in Muslim interpretation and legal hermeneutics<br><i>Wolfhart P. Heinrichs</i>                         | 249 |
| 12       | Words of eloquence: rhetoric and poetics in Jewish <i>Bible</i> exegesis in its Muslim and Christian contexts<br><i>Mordechai Z. Cohen</i> | 266 |
| 13       | Classical rhetoric and medieval scriptural interpretation in the Latin West<br><i>Rita Copeland</i>                                        | 285 |
| 14       | Robert Lowth's biblical poetics and romantic theory<br><i>Stephen Prickett</i>                                                             | 309 |
| 15       | From scripture to literature: modern ways of reading the Bible<br><i>Adele Berlin</i>                                                      | 326 |
|          | <i>Bibliography</i>                                                                                                                        | 336 |
|          | <i>General index</i>                                                                                                                       | 371 |
|          | <i>Scriptural index</i>                                                                                                                    | 379 |

## *Figures*

|      |                                                                                                                                                                              |                |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| 4.1  | Tapiz de la Creación (Creation Tapestry), Girona Cathedral, c. 1100.                                                                                                         | <i>page</i> 89 |
| 4.2  | Tapiz de la Creación, restored by el Centro de Restauración de Bienes Muebles, 2012.                                                                                         | 90             |
| 4.3  | Monreale Cathedral, nave, south wall, Creation mosaics, late 12 <sup>th</sup> century, detail of Light and Angels.                                                           | 93             |
| 4.4  | Monreale Cathedral, nave, south wall, Creation mosaics, late 12 <sup>th</sup> century, the Beginning.                                                                        | 94             |
| 4.5  | San Clemente, Rome, apse of upper church, mosaic, c. 1130.                                                                                                                   | 96             |
| 4.6  | San Clemente, Rome, apse of upper church, mosaic, detail of the Hand of God.                                                                                                 | 97             |
| 4.7  | San Marco, Venice, narthex, mosaic, 1215–35, dome with Genesis scenes.                                                                                                       | 98             |
| 4.8  | Chartres Cathedral, north transept, portal sculpture, 1194–1230, first day of Creation.                                                                                      | 100            |
| 4.9  | Chartres Cathedral, north transept, rose window, stained glass, 1230–35, Christ creates the cosmos.                                                                          | 101            |
| 4.10 | Giovanni di Paolo, Creation of the World and Expulsion from Paradise, tempera and gold on wood, 1445, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Robert Lehman Collection, 1975). | 106            |
| 4.11 | Perugino, God the Creator, fresco, 1507–08, ceiling of the Stanza dell’Incendio di Borgo, Vatican.                                                                           | 107            |
| 4.12 | Raphael, The Prime Mover, fresco, 1509–11, ceiling of the Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican.                                                                                   | 108            |
| 4.13 | Michelangelo, Separation of Light and Darkness, fresco, 1512, ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Vatican.                                                                        | 109            |
| 4.14 | Michelangelo, Separation of Water and Dry Land, fresco, 1512, ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Vatican.                                                                        | 110            |
| 4.15 | Michelangelo, Creation of Sun, Moon, and Planets, fresco, 1512, ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Vatican.                                                                      | 111            |



**Plate in Chapter 10**

Rheims, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 133, f. 4v, gloss on  
Psalms 2:13–3:4.

236

The figures appearing in this volume in black and white can be viewed  
in full color at [www.yu.edu/revel/interpreting-scriptures](http://www.yu.edu/revel/interpreting-scriptures)

Figure 4.1 also appears in full color on the back jacket cover.

## *Notes on contributors*

Meir M. Bar-Asher is Max Schloessinger Professor of Islamic Studies and the Chair of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His research interests include the Qur'an and its exegesis, Muslim sectarianism, and the interaction between Judaism and Islam. Among his published works are *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī-Shiism* (1999) and *The Nuṣayrī-'Alawī religion: an enquiry into its theology and liturgy* (2002, with Aryeh Kofsky).

Adele Berlin is Robert H. Smith Professor of Hebrew Bible Emerita in the Department of English and the Jewish Studies Program at University of Maryland. Her research interests include literary study of the Bible, inner-biblical and ancient Jewish interpretation, and modern interpretive strategies. Among her publications are *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (1983), *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (1985), and *The JPS Bible Commentary: Esther* (2001).

Piero Boitani is Professor of Comparative Literature and Head of the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the University of Rome, "La Sapienza." His research interests include the Bible and its rewritings in European literature and art; Dante, Boccaccio, and Chaucer; and thirteenth- and fourteenth-century English narrative. Among his published works are *The Bible and Its Rewritings* (1999), *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion* (1986, edited with Jill Mann), and *English medieval narrative in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries* (1982).

Mordechai Z. Cohen is Professor of Bible and Associate Dean of the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, Yeshiva University. His research interests include medieval Jewish Bible interpretation in Christian and Muslim cultural contexts; connections with Arabic

poetics and Hebrew poetry; medieval Jewish legal hermeneutics and Muslim jurisprudence; and modern literary approaches to the Bible. Among his published works are *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor: From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimhi* (2003) and *Opening the Gates of Interpretation: Maimonides' Biblical Hermeneutics in Light of His Geonic-Andalusian Heritage and Muslim Milieu* (2011).

Rita Copeland is Sheli Z. and Burton X. Rosenberg Professor of Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania, and a member of the departments of Classical Studies and English. Her research interests include medieval literary history, rhetoric, and hermeneutics as applied to Bible and literary culture, Latin receptions of Greek and Arabic learning, and scriptural interpretation among heretical groups (Wycliffites / Lollards). Among her publications are *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (1991), *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (2010, edited with Peter T. Struck), and *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300–1475* (2009, with Ineke Sluiter).

Robert M. Gleave is Professor of Islamic and Arabic Studies at the University of Exeter. His research interests include Islamic Law and legal theory (*usūl al-fiqh*); Muslim theories of interpretation; Shi'ite legal, political, and hermeneutical theory; medieval Arabic literature and literary theory. Among his published books are *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbari School of Shii Thought* (2007) and *Islam and Literalism: Literal Meaning and Interpretation in Islamic Legal Theory* (2012).

Sidney H. Griffith is Ordinary Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages at The Catholic University of America. His research interests include Syriac Christian Bible interpretation, early Arabic Bible translations, and their influences on the Qur'an and its interpretation. Among his publications are *Faith Adoring the Mystery Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian* (1997), *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (2008), and *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (2013).

†Wolfhart P. Heinrichs was James Richard Jewett Professor of Arabic at Harvard University. His research interests were medieval Arabic literary theory, Islamic legal hermeneutics, the notion of *majāz* ("figurative speech") in Arabic poetics and qur'anic hermeneutics, and Neo-

Aramaic. Among his books are *Arabische Dichtung und griechische Poetik: Hāzim al-Qartāḡannīs Grundlegung d. Poetik mit Hilfe aristotel Begriffe* (1969), *The Hand of the Northwind: Opinions on Metaphor and the Early Meaning of Isti'āra in Arabic Poetics* (1977), and *Studies in Neo-Aramaic* (1990).

A. B. Kraebel is Assistant Professor of English at Trinity University. His research focuses on medieval interpretation of the Bible and classical Latin literature, as well as book history and manuscript studies. He has published an edition of *The Sermons of William of Newburgh* (2010), and he is currently preparing a monograph, tentatively entitled *The Appeal of the Academic: Biblical Commentary and Translation in Late Medieval England*.

James L. Kugel is Professor of Bible at Bar-Ilan University and Director of the Institute for the History of the Jewish Bible at Bar-Ilan University. His research interests include the “interpreted” Bible, as reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbinic literature, New Testament, and Qur’an; liturgical uses of Scripture; biblical poetry and the notion of parallelism as interpreted from ancient to modern times. Among his publications are *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (1981); *The Bible as It Was* (1997), and *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (2007).

Alastair J. Minnis is Douglas Tracy Smith Professor of English at Yale University. His research interests include medieval literary theory and notions of authorship; medieval study of the Bible and classical literature; conceptions of Scripture’s multiple senses; scholasticism and its vernacular intersections. Among his published writings are *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition C. 1100-C. 1500* (2010; edited with Rosalynn Voaden); *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (2009); and *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (1984).

Meira Polliack is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Tel-Aviv University. Her research interests include medieval Bible exegesis and translation, Karaism, Judaeo-Arabic Literature, and Judaeo-Arabic sources in the Cairo Genizah; reception history and interpretation of the Bible as a central feature of the cultural history of the Jews of the medieval Islamic world. She has written *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation: A Linguistic and Exegetical Study of Karaite Translations of the Pentateuch from the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*

C.E. (1997) and edited *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources* (2003).

Stephen Prickett is Regius Professor Emeritus of English Language and Literature, University of Glasgow, and Honorary Professor of the University of Kent at Canterbury. His research interests include literature, theology, and history of biblical interpretation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and romantic appropriations of scripture. Among his publications are *Words and the Word: Language, Poetics, and Biblical Interpretation* (1986); *Origins of Narrative: The Romantic Appropriation of the Bible* (1996); and *Modernity and the Reinvention of Tradition: Backing into the Future* (2009).

Jon Whitman is Associate Professor in the Department of English of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where for many years he also served as Director of The Center for Literary Studies. His research interests include interpretive and literary allegory; diverse conceptions of the “literal” sense; changing approaches to relations between Scripture and literature; the development of medieval romance; imaginative structures of history and time; and critical theory from antiquity to the modern period. He is the author of *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (1987) and the editor of *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period* (2000) and *Romance and History: Imagining Time from the Medieval to the Early Modern Period* (2015).

## *Acknowledgments*

This volume is the result of the collaborative research of a fourteen-member team of scholars – each represented within its pages – in a project entitled “Encountering Scripture in Overlapping Cultures: Early Jewish, Christian and Muslim Strategies of Reading and Their Contemporary Implications.” First conceived in 2007, the project was designed initially by Mordechai Cohen and Jon Whitman, soon joined by Adele Berlin and Meir Bar-Asher. Eventually, the full team crystallized and convened as a research group directed by Mordechai Cohen and Meir Bar-Asher at the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies (IIAS) in Jerusalem from September 2010 until February 2011. We wish to acknowledge the IIAS, its then director Eliezer Rabinovici, associate director Lea Prawer, and the entire IIAS staff for supporting the research group, providing the uniquely suited setting for its collaborative inter-disciplinary scholarly activity. Special thanks to Netta Hazan, our dedicated research assistant, who ably and cheerfully facilitated the work of our group members during their stay in Jerusalem.

The editors wish to acknowledge each of the authors who contributed the chapters that make up this volume. In addition to their own studies, as members of the research group they offered valuable new perspectives on the work of their colleagues. These additional perspectives are represented in the general introduction and prefaces to each chapter appearing in the volume.

A special follow-up conference hosted by the IIAS in Jerusalem in July 2012, attended by a large part of the group, enabled us to integrate the chapters of this volume into a cohesive study that demonstrates the importance of investigating the interpretation of scriptures in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam comparatively. We are particularly grateful to Rita Copeland for the central role she played in planning and shaping the sessions of the conference, which contributed to its success.

In the course of editing this volume, we benefited from the generous guidance of Meir Bar-Asher, Rita Copeland, and Jon Whitman, who are listed as assisting editors. Professor Whitman's scholarly vision is reflected in key formulations of the introduction, and he made important suggestions about the arrangement of the volume and the logical flow of its chapters. Professor Bar-Asher offered his expertise in reviewing all of the material dealing with Arabic and Muslim interpretation. Professor Copeland advised on subjects relating to the Latin Christian tradition as well as rhetoric and poetics.

We note with sadness the passing of Wolfhart Heinrichs in January 2014. Despite his final illness, he made every effort to submit his chapter for the volume, which we hope will be a fitting memorial to this great scholar of Islam. We are most grateful to Robert Gleave, who drew upon his expert knowledge of Muslim legal hermeneutics to supply the primary references for Professor Heinrichs' chapter.

The editors acknowledge the dedicated work of Shifra Schapiro who proofread the entire manuscript, offering valuable suggestions to enhance its accuracy, readability, and stylistic consistency. Shifra also worked assiduously to insure the completeness, usefulness, and consistency of the bibliography and references, and assisted in preparing the indices.

Permissions to publish the sixteen figures (illustrations) in this volume were acquired thanks to the generous support provided by Michal Linial, current director of the IIAS. The website featuring them in full color together with further background on the collaborative research project from which this book emerged was designed by Malka Lebovic-Alweis, with graphics provided by visual marketing consultant Judah S. Harris. See <http://yu.edu/revel/cohen-berlin-interpreting-scriptures/>

We also express our gratitude to Laura Morris of Cambridge University Press who invited us to publish this volume, and to Alexandra Poreda, Helen Francis, and Isabella Vitti, who guided us through the publication process.

**Mordechai Cohen and Adele Berlin**

*Jerusalem, August 2014*

## *Abbreviations*

|             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1–2 Chr     | = 1–2 Chronicles                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1–2 Cor     | = 1–2 Corinthians                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 1–2 Kgs     | = 1–2 Kings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 1–2 Sam     | = 1–2 Samuel                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <i>Aen.</i> | = <i>Aeneid</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Ar.         | = Arabic                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| b.          | = Babylonian Talmud                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| c.          | = circa                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| CSEL        | = <i>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum</i> . Ed. Iosephi Zycha, et. al. Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1866–                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Dan         | = Daniel                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Deut        | = Deuteronomy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <i>DSD</i>  | = <i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <i>EI</i>   | = <i>Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition</i> . Ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. Leiden: Brill, 1960.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Exod        | = Exodus                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Gal         | = Galatians                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Gen         | = Genesis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>HBOT</i> | = <i>Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation</i> . Volume I/1: Antiquity. Ed. Magne Sæbø, Menahem Haran and Chris Brekelmans. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996. Vol. I/2, <i>The Middle Ages</i> . Ed. Magne Sæbø, Menahem Haran, and Chris Brekelmans. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2000. Vol. II: <i>From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment</i> . Ed. Magne Sæbø, Michael A. Fishbane, and Jean-Louis Ska. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2008. |
| Heb.        | = Hebrew                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Hos         | = Hosea                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Isa         | = Isaiah                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |



|      |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| j.   | = Jerusalem Talmud                                                                                                                                                                         |
| JAOS | = <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>                                                                                                                                          |
| Jer  | = Jeremiah                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| JQR  | = <i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>                                                                                                                                                           |
| Jub. | = <i>Jubilees</i>                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Judg | = Judges                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Lev  | = Leviticus                                                                                                                                                                                |
| m.   | = Mishnah                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Matt | = Matthew                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| MT   | = Masoretic Text                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Num  | = Numbers                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| PEPP | = Greene, Roland, and Stephen Cushman, eds. <i>The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics</i> . 4th ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.                                 |
| PL   | = <i>Patrologia Latina (Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Latina)</i> . 221 vols. Ed. Jaques Paul Migne. Paris: Migne, 1844–1864. (References are given by volume and numbered columns.) |
| Prov | = Proverbs                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Ps   | = Psalms                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Q.   | = Qur'an                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Rom  | = Romans                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Song | = Song of Songs                                                                                                                                                                            |
| s.v. | = <i>sub verbo</i>                                                                                                                                                                         |
| t.   | = Tosefta                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| TDOT | = <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, rev. edn. Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1974.                                                   |
| TDNT | = <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Ed. Gerhard Kittel, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1964.                                                                               |
| Zech | = Zechariah                                                                                                                                                                                |

*Introduction*  
*Intersecting encounters with scriptures in three faiths*  
*Mordechai Z. Cohen*

This volume stands at the junction of the study of sacred scriptures – the Jewish Bible, the Christian Bible, and the Qur'an. The interpretation of these scriptures, which are foundational in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is increasingly being situated in the flux of literary and cultural movements at large. This book illustrates how such interpretation developed in distinct but intersecting cultures.

In discussing these developments, the study treats interpretation as more than commentary on specific passages and books. Informed by the emphasis in contemporary theory on reading as a dynamic transaction between interpreter and text, it explores the conditions of mind and spirit by which interpreters encounter and engage the writings sacred to them. Recent scholarship has suggested ways in which approaches to scriptural signification fluctuate amid developments in other spheres of learning, such as theology, philosophy, science, politics, law, and literature. Drawing upon such scholarship, this volume investigates Jewish, Christian, and Muslim reading strategies in order to describe the distinctive ways in which each interpretive community shapes its identity.

The encounters with scriptures presented in this volume extend even beyond an investigation of those modulating approaches to scriptural texts. For in each of the three faiths, such texts are not merely objects of interpretation; the scriptures themselves help to shape the idioms and conceptions of the very communities that engage them. In this sense, the process of encountering scriptures is a two-directional movement in which readers and texts are in a constant interplay with each other.

The argument advanced in this study is that awareness of parallel trajectories is crucial to understanding the unique turns made within Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interpretation of scripture, over and above revealing commonalities and, at times, mutual influence among them. Apart from this introduction, the study consists of fifteen chapters that together form a comparative investigation of diverse strategies of reading

sacred texts, from antiquity to modernity, in their respective cultural and intellectual contexts. By concentrating on points of overlap and intersection, the study brings to light aspects of methods and approaches in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that remain hidden until set in relation to one another. It shows how the distinct turns taken by one tradition come into sharper relief when seen in the light of those taken in others.

This volume is the outgrowth of an intense semester-long study and dialog among an international group of fourteen scholars from September 2010 to February 2011 at the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem. During those months, the group explored not only the interpretation of scripture itself, but also related fields such as literary theory and legal hermeneutics. Developing out of our collaborative project, this volume provides an in-depth investigation of the nexus of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim encounters with scripture.

These three interpretive traditions are usually studied in isolation from one another, and important advances in understanding each tradition have been made in modern scholarship – some by authors of the current volume. In recent years, a number of valuable studies have opened a new vista by juxtaposing investigations of scriptural interpretation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.<sup>1</sup> Building upon all of these advances, this volume emphasizes the overlap among the inquiries that emerge from encounters with scriptures in the three faith traditions, and explores how issues addressed in one tradition manifest themselves similarly or differently in others. Through its array of fifteen interrelated chapters, *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries* aims to answer the question: How does the comparative study of these encounters with scriptures prove mutually illuminating?

<sup>1</sup> Among the important recently published studies in this field are (1) *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering based on a conference in Toronto in 1997. While not specifically designed as a comparative study, since its twenty-nine chapters are grouped by faith rather than thematically, that volume's juxtaposition of the three interpretive traditions invites the reader to draw comparative conclusions. See Fishbane, "Reverence." (2) *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context*, edited by Natalie B. Dohrmann and David Stern, based on a year-long seminar at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in 2001/2. Its twelve chronologically arranged chapters juxtapose studies of Jewish, Christian and Muslim interpretation; most focus on antiquity, with some on the medieval period and one on the Renaissance. (3) The monumental reference work *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, edited by Magne Sæbø, Menahem Haran and Chris Breckelmans. Its three volumes represent the collaborative work of dozens of scholars, and offer a comprehensive survey of Jewish and Christian (but not Muslim) interpretation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament from antiquity to the modern period.

To answer this question, the chapters of this volume are arranged in three rubrics that highlight overlapping and intersecting lines of inquiry.

- I *Scriptural Texts in Changing Contexts*: the ways in which the scriptural texts foundational in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were transformed – from the very beginnings of their interpretation in antiquity – to adapt to changing cultural and religious contexts;
- II *Conceptions of the Literal Sense*: changing conceptions of the literal sense of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scripture and its importance vis-à-vis non-literal senses (figurative, spiritual, midrashic, etc.);
- III *Rhetoric and the Poetics of Reading*: the ways in which classical and later models of rhetoric and poetics informed – or were resisted in – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interpretation.

This volume does not aim to survey comprehensively the history of scriptural interpretation in the three faiths. Designed to be suggestive rather than exhaustive, it presents a sharply focused juxtaposition of selected studies across linguistic, confessional, geographic and chronological boundaries, from antiquity to modernity, with the bulk of essays dealing with the medieval period – in which formative interpretive theories emerged. In identifying and addressing the three issues listed above, this volume contributes to the study of the stream of interpretation in each faith community and also opens new interdisciplinary approaches to the history of scriptural interpretation.

While only some chapters in this volume explicitly engage with all three faith traditions, each of its three parts juxtaposes comparable investigations that highlight areas of overlap and intersection among them. Accordingly, the overview that follows serves two functions. First, it offers a brief summary of each chapter. Second, and more important, it provides the framework to illuminate the areas of overlap and intersection that emerge from the juxtaposition of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim approaches to scripture. This introductory overview is a guide that suggests how these studies contribute to an integrated comparative vision of scriptural interpretation.

## **Part I Scriptural texts in changing contexts**

While the volume is not arranged in a strictly chronological fashion, this first part begins with early interpretive encounters with scripture, and then moves to related developments in the medieval and modern periods. The common theme of this part is how the three faith traditions responded to

the challenges posed by the need to transplant and resituate sacred scriptures from their original contexts into new ones that were distinct and distant, historically, culturally, religiously, and/or linguistically. Over the centuries, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam met these challenges in a variety of ways, at times by transforming the scriptural texts to yield new meanings and realms of signification, and at others by resisting such reshaping of scripture.

The roots of scriptural interpretation can be found in the Bible itself, or, more correctly, what would come to be the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup> Within many biblical books are later insertions, clarifications, and interpretations of earlier material; and later books at times re-write or re-interpret parts of earlier books. As time passed, the text of the sacred writings became less malleable, but their interpretation continued unabated, although in a different form. It was to be found not in changes made to the texts themselves, but in a body of new interpretive works. [Chapter 1](#), by James Kugel, examines this continuum of interpretation as attested in writings from the third century BCE to the first century CE – including the Apocrypha, the New Testament, the Hellenistic Jewish writings, and the Dead Sea Scrolls – during which time the very notion of the Hebrew Bible as “scripture” was developing. Among these works are re-writings or retellings of parts of the biblical story, commentaries on specific lemmas of the sacred text, and discursive works that contain elements of interpretation. Kugel reveals to us the world of ancient biblical interpretation, its operative assumptions, and the strategies it used to resolve exegetical and theological difficulties the sacred text presents. This is the interpretive world that Christianity and rabbinic Judaism inherited and initially shared, even as their paths diverged throughout late antiquity.

Kugel traces how themes from the earliest forms of Bible interpretation are developed in the writings of the church fathers and by the rabbis in the Talmud. Notwithstanding obvious theological differences between them, Kugel shows how the two interpretive communities engaged the text in analogous ways. The most fundamental assumption of this early interpretation was that the biblical text is cryptic, with its true meaning lying beneath the surface. A closely related assumption is that everything in sacred scripture is relevant and offers guidance to the present situation – “written down for our instruction,” as Paul says (1 Cor 10:11). To extract the hidden meaning of the Bible and the “instruction” it conveys, a variety of techniques were developed. Within Judaism, techniques known

<sup>2</sup> See Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*; Stemmerger, “Inner-biblical Interpretation.”

collectively as midrash were applied to mine the text of the Bible for clues regarding behavior, beliefs, and – most importantly – the all-encompassing and detailed religious law (*halakhah*) that characterizes rabbinic Judaism, as eventually codified in the Mishnah and Talmud. These rabbinic teachings were not regarded as innovations; rather, they were collectively cast as the “Oral Law,” described as an accompaniment to the “Written Law” given originally at Sinai, and having equal, if not greater, authority.

The need to find the Hebrew Bible applicable to the new Christian community gave birth to programmatic, comprehensive “christological” modes of reading, which Sidney Griffith discusses in [Chapter 2](#). The ability of Christianity to embrace the Hebrew Bible, seemingly about an ancient people no longer relevant to its own salvation narrative, depended on reinterpreting it allegorically and typologically. The “letter” or “literal sense” of what came to be the Old Testament, relating the laws and histories of the Jews, was transformed or “fulfilled” by its “spiritual sense” – the new faith and history of the Church. Griffith focuses on the distinctive typological interpretive approach devised in the early Syriac (Eastern Christian) tradition, which seeks to decipher the “mysterious symbols” (*râzê*) in the Old Testament. Using the Gospels as a hermeneutical lens, the Syrian Fathers thus reinterpret its details as a foreshadowing of Christian salvation history. Ephraem the Syrian (c. 306–73) imagines Christ raising in his two hands the Old and New Testaments, with his body as the hinge between them, a perspective that is applied by Jacob of Serûg (c. 451–521) in his detailed reading of the binding of Isaac as a prefiguration of the crucifixion of Christ.

Judaism and Christianity thus both manifested a dual model of scripture: Written/Oral Law, Old/New Testament. These two dual models were each part of dynamic interpretive movements to “resituate” the ancient texts of the Hebrew Bible within new religious contexts – rabbinic Judaism and the Christian faith – centuries after the biblical books had been written. The interpretive process that led to these dual models was well underway, as shown in [Chapter 1](#), long before the canon of the Hebrew Bible was finalized at the beginning of the Common Era. Indeed, biblical books do not announce themselves as divine scripture. The notion that the Hebrew Bible in its entirety is divinely inspired, even the word of God Himself, seems to have taken root firmly only around the beginning of the Common Era, and goes hand in hand with the canonization of the Hebrew Bible.

The gradual development whereby scripture came to be perceived as the word of God is absent in the case of the Qur’an, which was introduced

from the outset as divine revelation. The biblical narrative would be subject to a radical transformation in the Qur'an, where it is cited selectively, reworked, and resituated within a Muslim framework. A literary product of cultural and religious forces in seventh-century Arabia, the Qur'an incorporates recollections of the patriarchs and prophets into a new conception of "prophetology" that culminates in Muhammad. It advances "a new paradigm for the reading . . . of . . . scriptural narratives in an Arabic-speaking milieu, offering a new construal of a familiar salvation history."<sup>3</sup>

Composed in a cultural-intellectual context that included well-formed Jewish and Christian notions of scriptural authority, the Qur'an appropriates this conception to stake its claim as an authoritative text advancing a new faith.<sup>4</sup> Muslim scripture is thus uniquely "self-referential," announcing itself clearly and forcefully as sacred scripture, that is, the word of God.<sup>5</sup> Qur'anic interpretation, unlike the interpretation of the Bible, is normally seen as following its canonization, not as preceding it. Moreover, in contrast to ancient interpreters, who assumed that the Bible was cryptic and its meaning not always apparent, a plethora of qur'anic statements attest that it is written in clear, plain (*mubīn*) language, for example, "These are the *ayāt* (verses) of the Book, and a clear (*mubīn*) Qur'an" (Q. 15:1). In this vein, Q. 3:7, taken by Muslims as a hermeneutical directive, indicates that the Qur'an's "unambiguous" (i.e., clear) verses (*muhkamāt*) are its essence, since they express God's will directly, whereas the "ambiguous" (*mutashābihāt*) verses are subject to interpretation (*ta'wīl*<sup>6</sup>) – and favored by "those in whose hearts is dissention."<sup>7</sup> Judaism and Christianity most typically welcomed the potential for expansive, new interpretations; but in Islam clarity and directness were more often sought to determine God's will as expressed in scripture.

While allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an would certainly emerge in Islam,<sup>8</sup> it is not a defining feature of Muslim scriptural interpretation. We must keep in mind that Christianity and rabbinic Judaism inherited an

<sup>3</sup> See Griffith, *Bible in Arabic*, 54–96 (citation from p. 54). See also Neuwirth et al., *Qur'an in Context*; Reynolds, *Qur'an and Biblical Subtext*.

<sup>4</sup> See Madigan, *Self Image*; Sinai, "Qur'anic Self-Referentiality," 103–4.

<sup>5</sup> See Wild, *Self-Referentiality*.

<sup>6</sup> The term *ta'wīl*, which, at its base, means simply *interpretation*, was at times used to connote *reinterpretation* or, more specifically, *figurative, or otherwise non-literal interpretation*. See Poonawala, "*Ta'wīl*."

<sup>7</sup> See Wild, "Sura 3:7."

<sup>8</sup> This is especially true of Shi'ite and Sufi interpretation. See Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*; idem, "Outlines"; Goldziher, *Schools*, 116–66.

ancient text from an earlier context. The Christian community could not embrace the Hebrew Bible without positing that its true meaning is something “other” than that what it seems to say, calling for its christological reinterpretation.<sup>9</sup> Within rabbinic Judaism, likewise, by the beginning of the Common Era the Hebrew Bible could no longer serve as a self-standing theological and religious guide, and was mediated through a midrashic re-writing that brought the ancient text in line with contemporary norms of Judaism.<sup>10</sup> But the formation of the Qur’an was roughly coterminous with the birth of Islam, and was directly relevant to the message of the new religion constructed around it.<sup>11</sup> Islam, at the outset, thus did not have the same need to “resituate” its scripture.<sup>12</sup>

Yet as the centuries passed, Islam likewise introduced the Qur’an into new contexts, and pressures mounted to adapt it accordingly. Chapter 3, by Meir Bar-Asher, explores a manifestation of this challenge by comparing Muslim views on the permissibility of translating the Qur’an with Christian and Jewish views regarding Bible translation. While calls to translate the Qur’an into other tongues became acute in modern times, this issue is an old one in Islam, where the prevailing view has long been that the original Arabic formulation of the Qur’an is essential to its status as a sacred text. To be sure, concerns over the accuracy of scriptural translation were expressed in all three faith communities. But a unique argument was made within Islam. Whereas Christianity (and Judaism, albeit to a lesser extent) was comfortable engaging with the Bible in translation, Muslim thinkers asserted that the Qur’an’s sanctity was inextricably tied to its very language, which was said to be miraculously sublime and inimitable, as expressed in the Muslim doctrine of *i’jāz al-qur’ān* (“inimitability of the Qur’an”). This dimension of the Qur’an cannot be adequately represented in translation – even one that expresses its content accurately. Bar-Asher follows the Muslim discussion into the modern period, when new cultural pressures led some religious scholars to

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, there were Christians – most notably the followers of Marcion in the second century – who understood the Hebrew Bible literally, and therefore rejected it entirely as incompatible with Christianity. It was in opposition to this sort of understanding that Marcion’s opponents (in what became “Orthodox” Christianity) maintained that the Jews, together with Marcion, did not discern the Hebrew Bible’s true “spiritual” meaning. See Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 203–12.

<sup>10</sup> See Kugel, *Bible as it Was*.

<sup>11</sup> To be sure, modern scholarship challenges the traditional narrative of the Qur’an’s revelation and its dating, offering a range of alternative views regarding its formation as a literary text. Nonetheless, the Qur’an is generally regarded as a product of the religious culture during the period, broadly speaking, in which Islam emerged. See Neuwirth et al., *Qur’ān in Context*, 2–24.

<sup>12</sup> Although the Qur’an does “resituate” biblical motifs within a Muslim framework, as discussed above (at Note 3).



officially endorse its translation into other languages – with the caveat that these do not truly reproduce the power of the original text, but merely approximate its message.

The concerns about scriptural translation raised sharply in Islam shed light on some of those addressed over the centuries in Judaism and Christianity. Ambivalence over the Bible's translation into Greek in antiquity is reflected in the Talmud. Yet, in practice, Judaism accepted the necessity of Bible translation, for example, into Aramaic, Greek, and later Arabic. Though the Catholic Church long opposed vernacular translations, the version it advocated was Jerome's Vulgate – itself a translation. More importantly, the very process of biblical translation is essential to the Christian mission to convey the gospel (“good news”) to all of humanity – in their disparate languages.<sup>13</sup> While Islam, likewise, aims to spread the word of God expressed in the Qur'an universally, it generally insists that this must be done in the original Arabic. Even when resituated into other cultural and linguistic contexts, it must remain a pure “Arabic Qur'an” (Q. 12:3).

Chapter 4, by Piero Boitani, returns to the realm of Christian interpretation – through literary and artistic representation. This study is predicated on the Christian endorsement of the transformation of scripture, not only through allegorical and typological reading but also through translation. Notwithstanding the controversies they sparked at times, endeavors to translate Christian scripture reflect an underlying desire by its interpreters to mine the Bible for additional meanings that are revealed when it is transplanted into new contexts and conveyed through new media. If Islam, at least in the view of many commentators, was wary of ambiguity, Christianity more typically celebrates the “multivalence” that enriches the potential meanings of scripture. To be sure, critical voices were raised against the dangers of this interpretive openness. Abuses of scriptural authority prompted the reproach – most common during the Reformation, but voiced already in the medieval period – that in the hands of some religious leaders “scripture is like a nose of wax that . . . can be fashioned this way and that way” as the interpreter chooses.<sup>14</sup> This was one of the concerns that led late-medieval Christian interpreters to privilege the literal sense, a matter discussed in Chapter 7. Yet the critique highlights the fact that Christian interpretation, by its nature, depends on the Christian Bible's susceptibility to new readings and even transfiguration.

<sup>13</sup> Compare the account in Acts 2:1–4, 7–11, of the Galileans “speaking in other tongues” to declare the wonders of God.

<sup>14</sup> See Porter, “Nose of Wax.”

Boitani investigates how shifting Christian interpretations of Genesis are conveyed in imaginative literary and artistic renderings of the biblical creation narrative from late antiquity to the Renaissance in Western Europe. The subjects of the literary and artistic renderings of scripture are too vast to be covered here.<sup>15</sup> But this chapter provides a useful example of Christian openness to the transformations of the Bible through poetry, painting and sculpture, which, one might argue, lead to interpretive alterations more drastic than translation does. Boitani focuses on the various ways in which the phrase “the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the deep” (Gen 1:2) has been represented poetically and visually within Christianity. Aristotle’s definition of God as “the unmoved mover” was embraced by the early church fathers, and is reflected, for example, in the *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius (480–524). Consequently, Boitani shows, God is represented as motionless in artistic renditions of this verse and in the creation story in late antiquity and the early medieval period. Eventually a new conception of divine motion directing creation began to emerge in Christianity, as attested dramatically in the *Divine Comedy* of Dante (1265–1321), and reflected in paintings by Giovanni di Paolo (1395–1482) and Michelangelo (1475–1564) that portray God as being “supremely mobile.”

Chapter 5, by Meira Polliack, traces how Jewish thinkers in the Islamicate world reframed their conception of the Hebrew Bible in light of the Muslim model of scripture. It focuses on the development of Karaism, a branch of Judaism that rejected the authority of the “Oral Law” and advocated a model of a singular scripture – the “Written Law.” As the Karaites saw it, the rabbis of late antiquity distorted the message of God stated clearly in the Bible. Yet the irony, noted by Polliack, is that the newly constructed “purist” Karaite model of Hebrew scripture seems to have been prompted by Muslim claims regarding the Qur’an.

The chapter takes as its starting point the intensive movement among Jews in Muslim lands to render the Bible in Arabic. Within the Rabbanite world, the translation by Saadia Gaon (882–942) became so dominant that it precluded further Arabic translations. Saadia incorporated midrashic traditions into his Arabic version of the Bible. But among the Karaites, who rejected Saadia’s dominion, a number of authors – especially in the tenth-century Jerusalem school – composed Arabic Bible translations, often accompanied by commentaries (also in Arabic) that interpreted the Bible independently of midrashic tradition.

<sup>15</sup> On these subjects, see Prickett, *Bible and the Arts*, and further references there.

Polliack argues that the vibrant engagement of Karaite authors with Arabic language and culture prompted them to re-think their conception of sacred scripture. Scholars have long pointed to Muslim influence to explain the rise of Karaism. Whereas the “dual Torah” concept would have been natural within a Christian milieu (that embraced the sanctity of two “Testaments”),<sup>16</sup> it is not surprising that it would be called into question in a Muslim one. Polliack argues more specifically that the Karaites sought to create a Jewish version of the Muslim foundational narrative of scriptural transmission that guarantees its authenticity. Being a young religion with a recently revealed scripture, Islam confidently asserted that the Qur’an in its known form is a faithful replica of the original scripture penned by the Prophet, whereas the Hebrew Bible had been altered by the Jews through the millennia of its transmission.<sup>17</sup> This accusation of *tahrīf* (“distortion”), according to Polliack, prompted the Karaites to formulate a new robust Jewish narrative of scriptural transmission. Drawing upon the Muslim notion of *tawātūr* (“recurrence”), that is, the agreement of multiple sources that confirm the authenticity of a tradition, the Karaites could point to the virtual unanimity of the text attested in all copies of the Hebrew Bible as evidence for its faithful transmission. But the “Oral Law” features numerous debates that call its reliability into question. The Karaites therefore jettisoned the “dual Torah” doctrine in favor of a singular scriptural model. The Karaite Hebrew Bible thus donned Arabic garb not only linguistically but also conceptually, as it integrated key features of the Muslim notion of sacred scripture.

## Part II Conceptions of the literal sense

In the medieval period, the dominance of Christian allegorical and typological interpretation began to give way to, or at least to share the stage with, newly emerging conceptions of the “literal sense” of scripture. Within Islam, where the “clarity” of scripture was prized, literal interpretation was privileged from the outset. And yet, there emerged within Muslim interpretation a parallel investigation into the nature of the literal sense, not to justify its primacy, but rather to define its parameters precisely. Within medieval Jewish Bible interpretation, likewise, the literal

<sup>16</sup> See Yuval, “Orality of Jewish Oral Law.”

<sup>17</sup> Again, the early Shi’ites are exceptional in this respect, as some of their scholars argued that the text of the Qur’an was deliberately altered to expunge references to Shi’ite doctrines. See Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 90–1, 101–3; Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, 24–30.

sense of scripture becomes increasingly privileged not only among the Karaites, but even among the Rabbanites who accepted the authority of the midrashic interpretive tradition. Not unlike their Christian counterparts, the Rabbanites devised a variety of strategies to reconcile their seemingly new focus on Hebrew scripture's literal sense with the midrashic interpretive infrastructure of rabbinic Judaism.

The terminology used in the three faiths to speak about "the literal sense" of scripture naturally differed, depending on the languages of the interpreters, whether Hebrew/Aramaic (*peshat*), Latin (*sensus literalis*), or Arabic (*ẓāhir*, *ḥaqīqa*). These terms had long been taken simply to denote "what the text of scripture really says." But recent scholarship is revealing the complexity of these notions of the "literal sense," which incorporate innovative reading strategies that were constructed within newly emerging intellectual currents.

In [Chapter 6](#), Jon Whitman shows how Christian conceptions of the literal sense underwent radical change from antiquity to the modern period. Ancient and early medieval thinkers tended to align the "letter" of Christian scripture with the mere "surface" of the text. But by the thirteenth century the "literal" sense came to be associated with a realm beneath or beyond the textual surface: the intention of the author. This shift gradually aligned the "letter" with the "spirit" of the text – the meaning intended by its divine author. Previously relegated to the circumference, the "literal" sense in its newly expansive capacity increasingly occupied the center of scriptural meaning in late medieval and early modern Christian commentary. This transfiguration of the literal sense eventually passed far beyond the realm of scriptural interpretation, and by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the notion of spiritualizing the "letter" deeply informed the emerging theory of the "symbol" and the modern aesthetics of literature at large.

The turning point addressed briefly by Whitman is the focus of [Chapter 7](#), in which Alastair Minnis aims to account for the newly heightened interest in the literal sense among authors such as Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141), Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), and Nicholas of Lyre (d. 1349). Minnis begins by assessing two opposing twentieth-century perspectives on this development. Beryl Smalley valorized it as a pioneering endeavor to interpret the Bible historically and philologically, a departure from the exclusive focus on the Bible's "spiritual senses" that characterized older Christian interpretation. Henri de Lubac, on the other hand, criticized those (like Smalley) who emphasized the revolutionary nature of the medieval conceptions of the literal sense, and instead highlighted the

continuous Christian privileging of the spiritual sense. Minnis offers a more nuanced view, explaining the increasing prestige of the literal sense within the context of other intellectual developments in medieval Latin learning. The new wave of Aristotelian learning of the time, for example, prompted interpreters to regard the literal sense as logically compelling and “immediate,” by contrast with the “mediated” – and subjective – spiritual (sometimes called “mystical”) senses. Medieval Christian interpreters hardly let go of the spiritual sense. To accommodate it within the new order that privileged the literal sense, some of them devised the idea of the “double literal sense,” which encompassed readings previously classified as “spiritual” or “mystical.”

Chapter 8, by Robert Gleave, draws upon modern semantic theory to define the Arabic terms *ẓāhir* (the “obvious,” “apparent” sense) and *ḥaqīqa* (“true,” or “proper” language), as opposed to *majāz* (figurative or otherwise non-literal language) and *ta’wīl* (non-literal interpretation [see Note 6]). Given the centrality of law (*sharī’a*, *fiqh*) in Islam, it is not surprising that the most penetrating investigations of this matter emerge in Muslim jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), which developed a legal hermeneutics to ascertain the “will of God” (*murād Allāh*) expressed in the Qur’an. It was posited that a qur’anic verse must be taken in its literal sense (*ẓāhir*) unless there is an indication – contextual or logical – to the contrary, in which case *ta’wīl* is applied to determine the intention of the speaker, that is, Allah. The *ẓāhir* is regarded as the meaning that the text possesses “in and of itself,” even if it differs from the speaker’s intention, as inferred through a further reasoning process. A similar distinction is made in Muslim jurisprudence between a law that is stated explicitly in the text (*naṣṣ*), and that which might be inferred from it (*qiyās*). The former is privileged because it is known with certainty to be expressed by the text, whereas the latter is dependent on interpretive reasoning that necessarily involves guesswork.

Yet a key question that remained was precisely how to define – and arrive at – the *ẓāhir* / *ḥaqīqa*. Gleave applies this question to analyze the writings of the early jurist al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820), as well as the influential later authors al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/980), Ibn al-Qaṣṣār (d. 398/1008), al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013).<sup>18</sup> Among these authors, three conceptions of literality can be discerned: (1) the sense “apparent” to a typical Arabic speaker (though this may vary depending on his or her proficiency in the language); (2) the sense determined by the Arabic science of grammar, which emerged in

<sup>18</sup> Dates relating to Islam are given according to the Hijri Calendar (AH)/Gregorian Calendar.

the ninth century; (3) the sense attested in the ancient linguistic usage of the Arabs, who were thought to have perfect knowledge of the language. Ultimately, the standard definition would emerge that the literal sense is the original “coinage” of the language, that is, the meaning of a word assigned at the presumed moment at which the language was created. At that point, the aforementioned three conceptions were used as criteria to determine what that original coinage might have been.

Chapter 9, by Mordechai Cohen, traces the emergence of a Jewish conception of *peshat* as opposed to midrashic interpretation by exploring how key medieval Rabbanite exegetes invoked the talmudic maxim that “a biblical verse does not leave the realm (lit. “hands”) of its *peshat*.” Challenging the conventional static definition of *peshat* (“what the biblical text really means”), Cohen traces its dynamic development against the backdrop of contemporaneous Muslim and Christian conceptions of the literal sense.

Within the Islamic orbit, the *peshat* maxim was cast in Arabic terms. Embracing a Mu‘tazilite outlook, Saadia posited that a verse must be taken according to its *zāhir* unless it contradicts reason, another verse, or a tradition of the rabbis, in which case *ta’wīl* must be applied. The *peshat* maxim was interpreted in this spirit by his successor Samuel ben Hofni Gaon (d. 1013). For these geonic authors in the Muslim East, *peshat* / *zāhir* is a default position that may be adjusted. On the other hand, in al-Andalus (=Muslim Spain) the great Hebrew linguist Ibn Janah (early eleventh century) invoked the maxim to argue that the *peshat* – which he defined as the grammatically indicated meaning – is inviolate, even if it contradicts rabbinic halakhic traditions. To justify this move, he argued that scripture conveys two distinct layers of meaning (*peshat* and halakhic interpretation) that need not be harmonized.

A similar dualistic conception emerged in the northern French *peshat* school of Rashi (1040–1105) and his students, prominent among them his grandson Rashbam (c. 1080–1160). Some scholars cite this parallel as evidence that Andalusian influence was responsible for the emergence of *peshat* exegesis in northern France. Cohen, however, argues that Rashi’s hermeneutical innovations are best understood in light of developments in Latin learning and Bible interpretation in the neighboring cathedral schools – as brought to light in Chapters 7 and 10 of this volume.

Stepping beyond the dual hermeneutic, the Andalusian émigré Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164) construed the *peshat* maxim to mean that scripture has but a single correct meaning, that is, *peshuto shel miqra*, with midrashic “interpretation” serving merely homiletic and inspirational

purposes. Advancing this singular model even further, the Andalusian talmudist-philosopher Moses Maimonides (1138–1204) reshapes the halakhic system by asserting that *peshat*, which he equates with the Muslim notion of *nass* (an explicit text), is the exclusive source of laws of biblical authority, whereas midrashic interpretation, equated with *qiyās* (legal inference), yields laws of rabbinic authority alone. His construal of the *peshat* maxim thus overturns the traditional Jewish hermeneutical hierarchy whereby midrash was the ultimate source of *halakhah*. Maimonides grants that status to *peshat*.

### Part III Rhetoric and the poetics of reading

Alongside their investigations into the “literal sense,” the three religions developed interests in the rhetorical and poetic dimensions of their scriptures. In Western Christendom, interpreters drew upon the repository of classical learning preserved in monasteries and cathedral schools. Rhetoric and grammar (which included poetics) were the “language arts” bequeathed by ancient Rome to the medieval Christian world that formed the mainstay of basic Latin education.<sup>19</sup> While the ancient Greek and Latin disciplines of rhetoric and poetics were not unknown in the Jewish and Muslim traditions, they were regarded as foreign and exerted considerably less influence there. Yet analogous endeavors to define the rhetorical and poetic features of sacred scripture – the Bible and the Qur’an – were conducted based on indigenous forms of Jewish and Muslim learning.

The study of rhetoric and poetics involves investigations of language used non-literally, imprecisely, or in other exceptional ways for the sake of elegance and persuasion. Whether described in terms of the figures and tropes defined in the classical and Christian traditions, *balāgha* and *majāz* in Arabic, or *mashal* and *melīṣah* in Hebrew, these techniques disrupt the normal signification of language, and their application to scripture thus points to divergences from the literal sense. Yet this differs from the allegorical, typological, and midrashic strategies of reading discussed earlier. Here the driving force is not the assumption that scripture conveys recondite meanings as a divine text, but rather that it can be analyzed

<sup>19</sup> See Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*. Within the classical tradition inherited in the Latin West, grammar, rhetoric and dialectic made up the three “liberal arts” later termed the “trivium.” Among these, grammar included *enarratio poetarum* (interpreting the poets), under which poetics was subsumed. See Lausberg et al., *Literary Rhetoric*, 9–15; Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 24–9.



according to the conventions of human poetry and oratory, an assumption that introduces new complexities explored in this part.

The compatibility of the Christian Bible with the norms of classical (pagan) poetry and oratory, for example, could not be taken for granted. Augustine (354–430), a master rhetorician before he converted to Christianity, struggled with the crudeness of the Bible’s style by classical standards. To resolve this dilemma, he argued that poetic elegance as such is merely superficial, whereas the Bible’s sublimity is a function of its humility and the mysteries it contained. Yet at the same time he sought to demonstrate that it contains poetic and rhetorical flourishes no less remarkable than those of the great pagan poets. Cassiodorus (c. 485–c. 585) likewise went to great lengths in his Psalms commentary to enumerate biblical examples of the classical figures and tropes, a tradition followed by the Venerable Bede (c. 673–735) in his influential work *De Schematibus et Tropis*.<sup>20</sup>

Chapter 10, by A. B. Kraebel, explores a distinctive and influential method of reading the Psalms as poetry in the cathedral school of Rheims. Whereas Cassiodorus and Bede catalogued the classically defined poetic techniques in the Psalms, this chapter traces a more integral use of the grammatical commentary tradition on pagan poetry to analyze the Bible. Evidently initiated by Remigius of Auxerre (d. 908), who brought the interpretive priorities of the liberal arts to bear on the Psalter, this approach was developed fully by late-eleventh-century Rémois masters, especially Bruno le Chartreux (1030–1101) and those influenced by him, such as John of Rheims (d. 1125) and Roscellinus of Compiègne (c. 1050–1122). These writers were indebted to both Remigius and to their own reading of classical poetry, especially the works of Virgil, in creating a poetic hermeneutic for the reading of the Psalms. Bruno in particular emphasized his endeavor to discover the intention of David as the author of the Psalms, much as the tradition of Virgil commentary (especially that of Servius) aimed to discover the great poet’s intention through grammatical analysis. However, since David was a prophet, his intention – unlike that of a mere human poet – included within it a mystical christological sense.

Classical learning played a less central role in Muslim lands than it did in the Latin West. To be sure, the ninth-century translations of Aristotle’s *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* into Arabic among his works on logic known as the *Organon* sparked a vibrant commentary tradition that formed the basis of an important “logical” tradition of Arabic learning.<sup>21</sup> Within Muslim

<sup>20</sup> See Kugel, *Idea*, 159–67; Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 267–71.

<sup>21</sup> See Black, *Logic and Rhetoric*.



learning, however, there was a strong tendency toward compartmentalization, and the Arabic discipline of poetics and literary rhetoric (*balāgha*) appears to have resisted the integration of Greek models, preferring instead to draw upon indigenous Arabic poetry.<sup>22</sup> While the field of qur'anic hermeneutics developed separately even from the Arabic poetic-rhetorical tradition, there was some cross-pollination that yielded investigations into the Qur'an's literary style and rhetorical features, which were sometimes cited as evidence for its "inimitability."<sup>23</sup> This typically entailed adducing qur'anic verses that manifest *majāz*, that is, language that diverges from its usual meaning, grammatical formation, or syntactic arrangement.<sup>24</sup>

While the investigations of qur'anic *majāz* and its rhetorical qualities at times resemble Christian endeavors to catalogue the Bible's figures and tropes, there are important differences between the two that stem from distinctive Muslim concerns, as Wolfhart Heinrichs discusses in [Chapter 11](#). This chapter explores how the notion of *majāz* was defined within the field of qur'anic hermeneutics in general and in Muslim jurisprudence in particular – and the extent of its overlap with the classical figures and tropes. Heinrichs traces the various usages of the term *majāz*, and the implications of its eventual pairing with the opposing term *ḥaqīqa*, that is, literal language. In theory, if not always in practice, *ḥaqīqa* was privileged as "true" and regarded as fundamental, whereas *majāz* was seen as a deviation. Moreover, the latter was associated with poetry, which was disdained by theologians and jurists as deceitful speech, as epitomized in the Arabic adage that "the best of poetry is its most false." Being a central feature of poetry, the possibility that *majāz* played a role in the Qur'an, viewed by Muslims as the message of Allah, was considered problematic in some quarters. Heinrichs explores various strategies for resolving this dilemma, including the radical denial of the very existence of *majāz* in the Qur'an.

The incorporation of poetic and rhetorical concepts into Jewish Bible interpretation is the subject of [Chapter 12](#), by Mordechai Cohen. Jewish authors in al-Andalus absorbed both the Arabic poetic model and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* as part of a larger package of Greco-Arabic learning. In this spirit, the Hebrew poet Moses Ibn Ezra (c. 1055–1138)<sup>25</sup> defines the rhetorical and poetical elements of the Hebrew Bible – which

<sup>22</sup> See Heinrichs, *Arabische Dichtung*; idem, "Literary Theory," 19–69.

<sup>23</sup> See von Grunebaum, *Tenth-Century Document*. See also Larkin, "Inimitability"; Zubir, *Balaghah*.

<sup>24</sup> See Heinrichs, "Contacts"; Wansbrough, "*Majāz al-qur'an*."

<sup>25</sup> He is not to be confused with Abraham Ibn Ezra (mentioned in reference to [Chapter 9](#)). There is no evidence that the two were related, though they seem to have known of one another.

he classifies under the rubric of *majāz* – as a “false” imaginative garb incidental to its inner philosophical “truth” (*ḥaqīqa*). This dichotomy became essential to later exegetes of the Andalusian school, who identified *peshat* with the latter and therefore marginalized elements of scripture deployed for literary purposes.

The formal disciplines of poetics and rhetoric seem to have been unknown to Rashi and his students in northern France. Yet they developed an intuitive poetic sense that played a key role in their conception of *peshat* by enabling them to negotiate between the authority of midrashic interpretation and their own textual analytic sensibilities. This chapter explores the ways that this balance resembles Christian efforts, in the neighboring cathedral schools of northern France, to describe the complex literary workings of the Bible and the interaction between its literal and spiritual senses.

Chapters 10–12 deal with what might be regarded as shared, or at least analogous, concerns with the figures and tropes (whether cast in their Latin, Arabic, or Hebrew forms) as manifested in sacred scripture. Chapters 13–15 turn to a related concern that would seem to be uniquely Christian, though, as we will see, it actually relates, in revealing ways, to Jewish and Muslim interpretation, and has an afterlife in contemporary critical Bible scholarship. These chapters touch upon the deep-seated anxiety over the seeming incompatibility of the Bible with prevailing literary-aesthetic norms in a competing secular literary canon rooted in the tradition of the Classics. Most famously expressed by Augustine, this dilemma was a perennial issue for later Christian interpreters well into the modern period.<sup>26</sup> The strategies devised to address this challenge not only influenced the encounter with scripture; they at times shaped the very perception of literary expression at large.

Discussions of the figures and tropes represent only one domain of classical rhetoric (which it shared with grammar), whereas the most distinctive element of this discipline was an exploration of the process of argumentation itself. The application of this more fundamental concept of rhetoric to scripture by a select group of Christian interpreters – and a singular Jewish one – from late antiquity to the Renaissance is addressed by Rita Copeland in Chapter 13. This application involved a transformation of

<sup>26</sup> See Note 20. Von Grunebaum, *Tenth-Century Document*, xv, notes that whereas “the Bible could not escape being judged against the Greco-Roman literary tradition,” the Qur’an “stood out in Arabic literature as an unprecedented phenomenon for the critical valuation of which no tried standard existed.”

classical rhetoric itself, which was originally formulated as a blueprint for oratory and now had to be refitted for hermeneutical purposes.

Augustine and Cassiodorus, who were steeped in classical rhetoric and initially found the Bible foreign, looked to the categories of rhetoric as a familiar map by which to navigate its complexities. Apart from defining the features of biblical eloquence (as already mentioned), they drew upon the discipline of rhetoric to discover its mode of argumentation. This process was inverted in the medieval period, by authors such as Notker of St. Gall (950–1022), Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129), and Thomas of Chobham (c. 1160–1235). These Christian authors were more at home with the Bible than with classical rhetoric, and they sought to employ the Bible as a guide to penetrate the less familiar discipline of classical rhetoric. They used the Bible to illustrate rhetorical techniques, and indeed saw it as a standard by which to assess the continuing relevance of the classical sciences. Rupert of Deutz, for example, argued that the rhetoric of the Bible is superior to all secular rhetoric, and Thomas of Chobham cited the Bible as the most perfect example of persuasive speech – using it as an example for Christian preaching.

The multiple ways in which classical rhetoric informed the Christian interpretive tradition are illuminated by comparison with a unique Jewish application by the classically-trained fifteenth-century Italian Jewish humanist Judah Messer Leon. Whereas Christian authors viewed the Bible through a rhetorical lens as the result of a passive saturation in the Latin liberal arts curriculum, Messer Leon did so as part of an autodidactic program in scholastic philosophy and the Latin liberal arts tradition. In Copeland's view, this accounts for his more total mapping of the structure and doctrinal topics of rhetoric onto scripture. Like Augustine and Cassiodorus, he argues that the Bible can be fully understood only through rhetorical analysis, and, in turn, that the Bible is the most perfect illustration of rhetoric, as the later medieval Christian authors argued.

[Chapter 14](#), by Stephen Prickett, discusses the endeavor by the English literary scholar and Hebraist Robert Lowth (1710–87) to discover the principles of poetry in the Hebrew Bible. But rather than imposing the classical poetic model onto the Bible, as medieval Christian authors had done, he sought to uncover the indigenous ancient Hebrew rules for poetic expression. As this chapter reveals, Lowth's investigations relate integrally to other issues addressed earlier in this volume. Reflecting post-Reformation Bible scholarship, Lowth focuses on the literal sense of scripture – defined as the intent of the ancient biblical authors. To discover their “primeval” mindset, he turned to ancient Near Eastern cognate

sources, including Arabic literature. Lowth cites the Muslim claim regarding the miraculous sublimity of the Qur'an, and it is conceivable that he knew of the associated Muslim opposition to its translation discussed in [Chapter 3](#). It is thus noteworthy that Lowth provides a Christian answer to the challenge Islam raised regarding the translatability of the word of God: How does one preserve the sublimity of scripture in a different linguistic medium? Recognizing that the metrical systems of classical poetry do not fit the Hebrew Bible, Lowth (who, unlike medieval Christian scholars, read it in Hebrew) argued that the defining principle of ancient Hebrew poetry was "parallelism," in which two (and sometimes three) short versets are juxtaposed to create the effect of symmetry. This conception of ancient Hebrew verse allowed, in turn, for a new appreciation that the sublimity of biblical poetry is translatable, since it is not dependent on the meter or rhythm of the original Hebrew – as Lowth demonstrated in his poetic translation of Isaiah.

Earlier Christian translators had assumed that the poetic dimension of the Hebrew Bible is untranslatable, since it was thought to be dependent on the meter and rhythm of the original wording. This failure to fully replicate "the letter" of scripture would have been acceptable to interpreters who regarded "the spirit" as its essential meaning. Lowth, on the other hand, made it his goal to capture the "literal sense" and thus aimed to reproduce the original Hebrew text – including its poetic dimension – in his English translation. Yet the product of his labors amounted to something else entirely. The "letter" of Hebrew scripture is transformed and re-situated in his English translation: although he sought to perceive and appreciate the sacred text as its ancient readers would have done, Lowth, in fact, recreated it – in a sublime poetic form – in the idiom of eighteenth-century English.

The transformation brought about by Lowth's translation went beyond the Bible. As Prickett demonstrates, Lowth's close encounter with the poetics of Hebrew scripture engendered a metamorphosis in his very conception of poetry. Lowth originally subscribed to neoclassical theory that was widely accepted in eighteenth-century England. The Hebrew Bible hardly seemed sublime according to the highly stylized neoclassical literary taste, and its primitive roughness offended neoclassical sensibilities. Through his discovery of the structure of biblical poetry, Lowth came to appreciate a different literary valuation, measuring the sublimity of biblical literature by the power of its spiritual and emotive force. The immediate source of Lowth's conception of sublimity was probably Longinus's *On the Sublime*, which became accessible in Europe through Boileau's 1674 French

translation. But it is conceivable that Lowth was also influenced by the notion of *i'jāz al-qur'ān*, which he seems to have understood in similar terms. However, while the sublimity of the Qur'an is regarded by Muslims as being inimitable, Lowth set out to replicate biblical poetry in English translation. And indeed, Prickett demonstrates that this new concept of the sublime had a formative influence on others as well, as the Romantic conception of poetry as a "spontaneous overflow of emotion" can be traced to his account of the poetic nature of ancient Hebrew prophecy. In this respect, then, Lowth brought the Hebrew Bible into the stream of English literary theory and expression.

Chapter 15, by Adele Berlin, inverts the process just described by showing how modern conceptions of literature and poetics have been used to illuminate the Bible in the twentieth century. This chapter enters the realm of modern secular academic scholarship of the Bible, which differs fundamentally from the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim encounters with scripture treated heretofore in this volume. Yet this chapter identifies striking points of contact and even continuities with pre-modern scholarship. As Berlin notes, modern scholarship offers yet another "transformation" of the Bible, from "sacred scripture" to "literature." While this has important new implications, the idea that scripture can be viewed as "literature," as opposed to the *sui generis* word of God, was a dynamic – if at times controversial – force in pre-modern interpretation, as earlier chapters have shown. And the move to view scripture as essentially secular literature came about only gradually within the modern period.

This chapter outlines how classical literature continued to influence the evaluation of the Bible, and how the discovery of ancient Near Eastern texts brought a new dimension to the comparison of the Bible with other literatures. Ultimately, the Bible was seen as standing on its own merits, without the need for apologetics for its inferior style or for triumphalism for its superior attributes. With the rise of literary theory in its multiple forms in the twentieth century, new analytic tools appeared and were productively applied to biblical interpretation, and continue to influence biblical studies.

This chapter integrates issues raised in the three rubrics represented in the three parts of this volume. The aim of modern historical-critical Bible scholarship to discover the original intentions of the biblical authors can be compared with earlier endeavors to expound the Bible's literal sense, as discussed in Part II. A central objective of modern scholarship is to define the literary conventions and systems of poetics underlying the Bible – an undertaking that can be likened to pre-modern efforts to define the biblical

system of poetics, as discussed in [Part III](#). Yet, as Berlin observes, every such modern analysis is ultimately dependent on particular theoretical premises, and therefore, as in the case of pre-modern biblical interpretation, it reveals as much about the interpretive context as it does about the Bible. We may say, then, that academic literary analysis relates to the themes of [Part I](#), as it “resituates” the Bible in a contemporary context by reframing its study within current literary theory. This is a modern way of reading “Scriptural Texts in Changing Contexts,” an endeavor that can be traced to the earliest forms of Bible interpretation.



PART I

*Scriptural texts in changing contexts*





## CHAPTER I

# *The emergence of biblical interpretation in antiquity*

*James L. Kugel*

Even before the last parts of the Hebrew Bible were written, people were busy interpreting its earlier parts, particularly the Torah (Pentateuch). Their interpretations have been preserved in a variety of ancient sources (outside of the Bible itself), principally in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and Hellenistic Jewish writings. These interpretations take different forms: some are retellings of biblical narratives; others are commentaries proper; still others consist only of brief, offhand remarks that reveal how a particular text was interpreted in ancient times. These interpretive writings all date from about the third century BCE to the first century CE. Then come the earliest Christian interpretive works as well as the classical works of rabbinic Judaism; both of these lead in turn to the medieval period, upon which many of the essays in the present volume are centered. Yet the story of ancient biblical interpretation does not begin in the third century BCE, nor is it easily separated from the whole early history of those texts that eventually came to make up the Jewish Bible. The evidence suggests a more complicated picture of the emergence of such interpretive writings and, indeed, a somewhat unusual notion of what *interpretation* truly meant in ancient times.

### **I The making of the Hebrew Bible**

Modern biblical scholars agree that most books of our Bible are the product of different hands in different periods. Earlier versions were supplemented by later editors, who sometimes altered entirely the content and significance of the original text's words. To cite one well-known example: the last third of the book of Isaiah (chapters 40–66) is indisputably *not* the work of the eighth-century prophet named Isaiah; it came, rather, from an anonymous writer (or writers) who lived a century and a half after Isaiah, during the time of the Babylonian exile and the return to

Judah that followed it.<sup>1</sup> But even the thirty-nine chapters that precede this anonymous prophet's words are not all one piece. For example, the oracles against foreign nations (chapters 13–23) are now generally thought to have come from different hands during or following the period of Assyrian ascendancy in the ancient Near East. Likewise, the “Isaiah Apocalypse” (chapters 24–27) is widely recognized to be an independent unit, which may have been composed during the Babylonian exile or after the return to Zion. The focus of chapters 28–33 belongs, in the opinion of many scholars, back in the eighth century, but then the text turns to the condemnation of Edom (chapters 34–35), which many people believe again belongs to the time of the Babylonian exile or immediately following it.

The example of Isaiah is hardly unique. The books of nearly all the other prophets of the Hebrew Bible, as well as the Torah itself and the various subunits of the historical books that follow it, have been argued to be the product of different hands in different periods. The question that naturally arises is: What is the conception of scripture underlying such changes? How sacred could sacred scripture have been if people in those early days felt free to rearrange it and add to it, inserting their own ideas or opinions and often distorting or changing entirely the original sense of the text?

To formulate the question in this way is virtually to answer it. If, for example, the prophets themselves (or even some later figure) prefaced their words with “Thus says the LORD” or the like, there can be little doubt that those words were considered to be sacred, a direct communication from God to his earthly messengers. But if someone else, decades or centuries later, apparently had no qualms about rearranging the prophet's words, inserting sentences or whole paragraphs or, in some cases, whole chapters of his own or someone else's devising – then apparently that person's conception of scripture was not disturbed by the introduction of such changes. Indeed, the mingling of his own words without distinction with the words previously attributed directly to God could not have troubled such an editor or interpolator, or else he would have refrained from doing so or at least taken pains to draw a distinction between the prophet's original words and his own, later additions. It is to be stressed that such insertions and rearrangements were not isolated, exceptional occurrences; modern scholars have identified them again and again. So the conclusion must be that, at this early stage, sacred scripture did not consist of immutable texts at all; whatever sanctity was attributed to them did not

<sup>1</sup> See Childs, *Old Testament as Scripture*, 316–25; Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*.

save them from undergoing major revision and supplementation. Of course, this is not our conception of scripture today; at some point the text of scripture became frozen, petrified, and nowadays we think of this immutable state as altogether right and proper. When, and under what circumstances, did the *conception of scripture* change?

## 2 Evidence from Qumran

An attempt to answer this question leads to the Dead Sea Scrolls, the collection of writings discovered at or near Qumran (a site in the Judean desert near the shores of the Dead Sea) starting in the late 1940s. The small religious community that resided there in ancient times does not appear to have had anything like our notion of biblical fixity: they do not seem to have a defined biblical canon, nor do their writings attest to the existence of a fixed and immutable text for various biblical books.

Certainly for the Qumran covenanters, as for other Jews of the Second Temple period, the Torah was *the* central text and the focus of Jewish piety. But numerous other texts were apparently also treated as sacred and authoritative in the Second Temple period; what these books were, and what their texts actually consisted of, varied considerably among different groups.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in addition to most of the books included in today's Bibles, a number of other works now classified as Old Testament Pseudepigrapha appear to have shared a place in the Qumranites' sacred library. There is no reason to suppose, for example, that the book of *Jubilees* was any less sacred in the eyes of the Qumran community than the books of Genesis or Exodus. Parts of some fifteen different manuscript copies of *Jubilees* have been identified among the Qumran scrolls, the same number of manuscripts as Genesis; *Jubilees* is apparently cited as an authoritative book in the *Damascus Document* (CD col. 16:3–4).<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the Qumran manuscripts never refer to a specific body or precise number of sacred texts; it seems to most scholars a mistake to project our idea of a biblical canon onto the Qumran covenanters. Rather, there existed an inchoate and flexible group of texts beyond the Torah, including a number of compositions now excluded from the canon of the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>2</sup> See Stone, *Jewish Writings* and Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*.

<sup>3</sup> Note also the apparent reference to *Jubilees* as an authoritative text in 4Q228 *Text with a Citation of Jubilees*, "For this it is written in the *Divisions* [. . .]," where the last word appears to cite to the first words of the ancient title of *Jubilees*, "The book of the divisions of times . . ." as well as 4Q *Pseudo-Jubilees*.

Not only was the inventory of writings not yet fixed; the texts themselves were still in flux. As the Qumran manuscripts demonstrate, ancient texts continued to be modified in ways great and small,<sup>4</sup> and different versions of the various books that were later included in the biblical canon(s) apparently circulated freely in the first and second centuries BCE. Sometimes the differences between these versions are slight, but at other times they are considerable. One well known example of the latter (but it is hardly the only one) is the book of Jeremiah, which was preserved in two quite distinct forms, two “editions.” One edition – corresponding to the book of Jeremiah as it appears in the Old Greek/Septuagint translation of the Bible – is shorter than the traditional (masoretic) text by some ten chapters, and the order of its chapters is different from the masoretic order. This form of the book is preserved in two Qumran fragments, 4Q71 (4QJer<sup>b</sup>) and 4Q72a (4QJer<sup>d</sup>). But fragments of a proto-masoretic form of Jeremiah were also found at Qumran, in the texts denoted 4Q70 (4QJer<sup>a</sup>), 4Q72 (4QJer<sup>c</sup>), and 4Q72b (4QJer<sup>e</sup>). This longer version apparently (though perhaps not irrefutably)<sup>5</sup> bears witness to a process of supplementation and reordering carried out on a massive scale. What is surprising, however, is that these two competing forms of the book seem to have coexisted side-by-side for a time, rubbing shoulders in the library of a single community, or at least of a single school or movement in the sectarian mix of the late Second Temple period.

### 3 The Reworked Pentateuch

The apparent coexistence of two editions of Jeremiah may constitute an extreme example of the absence of textual rigidity in the closing centuries before the Common Era. But even the Torah, whose relative fixity in Second Temple times is generally conceded, was not immune to little changes. This emerges from another set of texts from Qumran, the so-called Reworked Pentateuch.<sup>6</sup> Scholars are divided as to how to classify these texts: are they simply another version of the Pentateuch proper, or are they a slightly modified, sparsely annotated

<sup>4</sup> See von Weissenberg et al., *Changes in Scripture*.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Rofé has argued that the shorter version represents a condensation of the original, longer version: “The Arrangement of the Book of Jeremiah,” 390–98; “The name YHWH SEBA’OT,” 307–15. Whichever contention is correct is immaterial for my overall point.

<sup>6</sup> 4Q158, 4Q364, 4Q365, 4Q366, and 4Q367; see Tov and White, “Reworked Pentateuch,” 268–71.

*reworking* – one that no Qumranite would equate with the “official” or “formal” version of the Pentateuch?<sup>7</sup>

In support of the former view is the similarity of these “Reworked Pentateuch” texts to the version of the Torah preserved by the Samaritans, which dates back to the closing centuries BCE.<sup>8</sup> The Samaritan Pentateuch differs from other versions in numerous ways. One of its most striking features is its conscious effort to harmonize different parts of the Torah – sometimes smoothing out rather trivial matters, such as the spelling of names, but at other times harmonizing on a larger scale.<sup>9</sup> An example of the latter is the Samaritan Pentateuch’s insertion of material from Deut 5:26 (some Bibles: 5:29) and Deut 18:18–22 into its version of Exod 20:19–22, so that the resultant Exodus text includes God’s promise to Moses that he will have a prophetic successor – a promise that is found in the masoretic and Septuagint texts only in the book of Deuteronomy. (The Samaritan text’s insertion seemed only appropriate since, according to the Deuteronomy texts, God’s promise to Moses was originally made at the time of the great revelation at Mount Sinai, which is first recounted in Exodus 20.)

Do such changes remove the Samaritan Pentateuch from the category of “biblical text” to some other category? It would hardly seem so. After all, there can be little doubt that the Samaritan Pentateuch was and is considered by the Samaritans as the correct, canonical text of the Torah. Even if they were aware of other text traditions, this would hardly affect the canonical status of their own Pentateuch in the Samaritans’ eyes. Theirs must have been simply, at least for them, the correct Torah. But then, where does one draw the line between the Samaritan Pentateuch and its close cousin, the Qumran Reworked Pentateuch? The latter is similar to the Samaritan Pentateuch, inserting passages from one part of the Torah into another in order to create a more consistent whole. But the Reworked Pentateuch also adds new material here and there (whether of its own devising or imported from some other Second Temple period text is difficult to say).

To mention the most striking example: All other versions of Chapter 15 of the book of Exodus recount that Moses and the Israelites sang a song of

<sup>7</sup> On this question see Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, esp. 39–59. See also Segal, “4Q Reworked Pentateuch”; Petersen, “Rewritten Bible as a Borderline Phenomenon”; Zahn, “The Problem of Characterizing.”

<sup>8</sup> See Sanderson, *An Exodus Scroll*; Schattner-Rieser, “Der samaritanische Pentateuch”; Crawford, “Pentateuch in Pre-Samaritan Texts.” See also Bernstein, “What Has Happened.” On the Samaritan Pentateuch, see Pummer, “Samaritans and their Pentateuch”; Kartveit, *Origin of the Samaritans*, 279–312.

<sup>9</sup> See Weiss, “Synonymous Variants.”

thanksgiving after their successful crossing of the Red Sea: it begins, “I will sing to the Lord, for He has gloriously triumphed; horse and rider He has cast into the sea.” Following this lengthy hymn, the narrative then adds that Miriam, Aaron’s sister, led the women in song (Exod 15:20–21). Only the first line of her song is cited, and it sounds altogether parallel to the opening words of the song of Moses: “Sing to the Lord for He has gloriously triumphed, horse and rider He has cast into the sea.” Not so in the Reworked Pentateuch. There (4Q365 frags. 6a col ii and 6c), Miriam clearly sings a song of her own:

You despised . . .  
 For the majesty of . . .  
 Great are You, a deliverer  
 Gone is the enemy’s hope, forgotten . . .  
 They perished in the mighty waters, the enemies . . .  
 Extol the One who raises up: You gave [re]demption  
 [The One who a]cts gloriously

This part of the Qumran text is fragmentary, but clearly Miriam has been given a set of lyrics quite different from that of Moses and unknown from any other source.

As noted, such bits of evidence have caused scholars to ponder the very rubric “Reworked Pentateuch.” Were these texts a very minor reworking of the accepted Pentateuch text, or were they actually someone else’s Pentateuch? The latter may seem more likely, especially in view of the connections of the Reworked Pentateuch to the Samaritan one.<sup>10</sup> But the very hesitation about whether to consider this work a slightly altered biblical *text* or a lightly annotated biblical *commentary* points up something basic about the relationship between textual alteration and textual interpretation.

#### 4 A narrowing funnel?

A growing stability of the biblical text is unmistakable over the course of the centuries preceding the start of the Common Era. One might conceive of this process as a kind of narrowing funnel of possible changes. At the funnel’s top, way back in First Temple and exilic times, sacred texts were held to be altogether changeable: an editor or interpolator could feel free to rearrange and add new material at will – twenty-seven new chapters stuck on at the end of the book of Isaiah (chapters 40–66), plus numerous other

<sup>10</sup> See Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 56; idem, “Rewritten Bible”; Tov, “Rewritten Bible Compositions.”

insertions and rearrangements; ten new chapters in the book of Jeremiah; and so on. With time, however, the funnel narrowed. An editor or copyist might still add in a word or phrase here and there, perhaps even a whole new song for Miriam, but the heavy lifting of earlier days was apparently no longer acceptable. Soon, the narrow end of the funnel came to be closed off entirely, so that even small changes were ruled out. The text of biblical books came to be altogether immutable, petrified.

But this narrowing funnel is actually an illusion. Long before the revision of a text's actual words became impossible, another form of revision had emerged, and that was ancient biblical interpretation. "The text may say X," ancient interpreters endlessly assert, "but what it really means is Y."<sup>11</sup> This assertion underlies the whole phenomenon of the so-called Rewritten Bible<sup>12</sup> – texts like the book of *Jubilees* or the *Genesis Apocryphon* from Qumran, which retell and explain biblical narratives in their own words – as well as commentaries proper, such as are found in the writings of Philo of Alexandria, or 4Q252 and other *peshet* texts from Qumran. And this same approach continued to be endorsed and elaborated by still later Jewish and Christian interpreters, in rabbinic Midrash and in the exegetical writings of the church fathers. Their message, even if communicated only indirectly, is: "The full meaning of the text is not what the words say, but what I say the words *mean*." These two forms of malleability – actually revising the words of the text, and rewriting or commenting on the text in such a way as to change its apparent meaning – are not usually viewed as part of a single continuum, but seen from a distance, their basic affinity is unmistakable. The very hesitation about categorizing the "Reworked Pentateuch" texts from Qumran points up the fundamental continuity from text revision to text interpretation.<sup>13</sup>

This ability of ancient biblical interpretation to transform the apparent meaning of the words of a biblical text has been amply illustrated elsewhere, but let one or two examples serve here as a *pars pro toto*. A well-known law in the Hebrew Bible is "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"

<sup>11</sup> This was one of the four assumptions shared by ancient biblical interpreters, as discussed later.

<sup>12</sup> This term was introduced by Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*, 67–126. See also Alexander, "Retelling the Old Testament"; Tov, "Rewritten Bible Compositions"; Brooke, "Rewritten Law, Prophets, and Psalms"; Segal, "Between Bible and Rewritten Bible"; Bernstein, "Rewritten Bible: A Generic Category"; Falk, *Parabiblical Texts*; Laato and van Ruiten, eds., *Rewritten Bible Reconsidered*.

<sup>13</sup> See Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, esp. 39–59. A similar continuum may be observed in the Aramaic Targumim, which run from the normally rather literal translation of Onqelos to the more free-wheeling translations of the *Peshitta*, *Targum Neofiti*, and so on, and most strikingly, *Pseudo-Jonathan*. See Shinan, *Embroidered Targum*.



(Exod 21:24, Lev 24:20). But ancient biblical interpretation actually turned this law on its head: the true meaning of the words is *not-an-eye for an eye* – but rather, monetary compensation. As the Babylonian Talmud later explained:

Does not scripture say “an eye for an eye”? Then why not take this literally to mean the [offender’s] eye [is to recompense the victim’s]? Let this not even enter your mind! . . . R. Simeon b. Yohai said: . . . What can you say in the case of a blind man who put out the eye of someone, or of a maimed person [without arms] who caused someone else’s hand to be cut off? (b. *Bava Qamma* 83b-84a)

While this is a relatively late attestation of *not-an-eye for an eye*, the idea that the appropriate recompense for taking someone’s eye is monetary compensation appears far earlier. In Jewish circles, it is attested in the first century CE in the writings of Josephus, who notes that for bodily injury (as opposed to death), “the law permits the victim to establish damages for the incident.”<sup>14</sup>

An equally striking case is the law of Lev 18:21, “You shall not give any of your offspring to be passed to Molech, and you shall not profane the name of your God; I am the Lord.” The god Molech was apparently worshiped in ancient Canaan by having children “passed through fire”; burning children to death in this way is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible (Deut 12:31, 2 Kgs 16:3, Jer 7:31, 19:5 and elsewhere) and is condemned in the strongest terms. But perhaps because, in later times, this practice had ceased, giving one’s offspring “to Molech” acquired a new, polemical interpretation. It now meant giving one’s child to a gentile in intermarriage:

And do not give of your seed for sexual relations with a daughter of the nations to pass over to idolatry and do not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. (*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, Lev 18:21)

And do not cast of your seed to impregnate a foreign woman. (*Peshitta* Lev 18:21)

It was taught in the school of R. Ishmael: [Lev. 18:21] refers to an Israelite who has relations with a non-Jewish woman and so engenders a son [who will be given over] to idol-worship. (b. *Megillah* 25a)

Once again, this interpretive line goes back much earlier than the rabbinic period; it is cited for the first time in the book of *Jubilees* in the early second century BCE. That book recounts the story of the rape of Dinah

<sup>14</sup> See Kugel, *Traditions*, 656–7.

(Genesis 34), but having summarized those events in a few sentences, it goes on to draw a legal lesson nowhere present in the biblical story:

If there is a man in Israel who wishes to give his daughter or his sister to any foreigner, he is to die . . . *because he has given one of his descendants to Molech* and has sinned by defiling them. (*Jub.* 30:7–10)

Of course, the biblical narrative of Dinah says nothing about forbidding a “man in Israel who wishes to give his daughter or his sister to any foreigner” – how could it? The story of Dinah is set in “Israel’s” first generation: the only alternative to Jacob giving his daughter to a “foreigner” would have been to give her to one of her own brothers! But by the time of *Jubilees*’ composition, exogamy was a vital issue in Judea, and so the story of Dinah was reinterpreted to contain a lesson nowhere in evidence in the biblical version: intermarriage is forbidden.

## 5 A different conception of scripture

Such changes in the text’s *meaning* may look quite different from actual alterations in the words of the text; but were they really? It is well to remember that physical books in the ancient world were quite expensive and, hence, rather scarce. Ordinary people learned scriptural texts by memorizing them, and there is strong evidence that, along with the text itself, they learned by heart the accepted interpretation of the text as well.<sup>15</sup> Under such circumstances, distinguishing text from interpretation was often not easily accomplished and altogether irrelevant in any case. So the difference between, on the one hand, actually rubbing out the word “eye” in “an eye for an eye” and physically replacing it with the words “monetary compensation” and, on the other hand, making the same switch mentally must have been slight indeed. The same was true for Lev 18:21, “You shall not give any of your offspring to be passed to Molech,” as well as for the larger lesson emerging from Genesis 34. What the Bible *meant* was what authoritative interpreters had been saying it meant for centuries; the meaning of its actual words was altogether secondary and, to the extent that that meaning clashed with the accepted interpretation, fundamentally irrelevant.

<sup>15</sup> Evidence for this is the very existence of “exegetical motifs” (as discussed later in this chapter), that is, explanations of individual verses that reappear in a variety of different contexts – in “Rewritten Bible” texts such as *Jubilees*; in commentaries such as those of Philo of Alexandria or, later on, rabbinic literature and the writings of the church fathers; in ancient liturgical compositions, homilies, and so on. See Kugel, *In Potiphar’s House*.

It was suggested earlier that the very malleability of the sacred texts in ancient Israel bespoke a *conception of scripture* strikingly different from ours today: however sacred the texts were held to be, their sanctity apparently did not keep them from being rearranged, supplemented, and at times altogether altered in character. Nor did this way of conceiving of scripture suddenly disappear in the second or first centuries BCE, or even in the following centuries. Quite the opposite: scriptural malleability simply changed its locus from the actual words of the text to their accepted meaning, which often diverged radically from the literal sense of those words. The words said one thing, all ancient interpreters agreed, but what they truly *meant* was often something else entirely, and it was that meaning that they transmitted to generations of later readers.

## 6 The four assumptions

This conception of scripture, and what it implied about the practical work of explaining scripture's meaning, was surprisingly widespread among the Bible's most ancient interpreters. On the surface, the various ancient interpreters known to us seem to have little in common. What could the elegant, allegorical commentaries of Philo of Alexandria seem to share with the terse, pithy sayings of Ben Sira? And what could connect either of these to the explicative retellings of the narratives of Genesis in the *Book of Jubilees* or the *Genesis Apocryphon*? Not only are their literary forms different, but their authors belonged to entirely different segments of society. (Indeed, Philo lived in Alexandria, Egypt, some distance from ancient Judea, and he spoke and studied scripture in a different language, Greek). Yet if one takes a step backward and surveys ancient biblical interpreters from a distance, it is clear that the overall malleability of scripture's meaning described earlier came to be crystallized into a common set of beliefs about *how*, in practice, scripture was to be read and interpreted. Four basic assumptions about scripture seem to have been held in common by virtually all ancient interpreters:

- (1) *Scripture is composed of writings that are fundamentally cryptic.* This assumption held that Israel's sacred texts often expressed their true meaning indirectly, through hints, allusions, and references not immediately apparent to the ordinary reader – hence the overall necessity for trained interpreters, whose task it was to make plain the hidden meaning of the text to listeners or readers.

- (2) *Scripture is a guide to the present and future of readers today.* Although most of scripture refers to the distant past (a past that was distant even in the time of the ancient interpreters), its words were held to be addressed to the interpreter's own contemporaries. Thus, the speeches of Israel's prophets in the eighth or sixth century BCE were interpreted as if they were referring to events in the Roman-occupied Palestine of the interpreters' own day; laws that were given to Moses were explicated in such a way as to refer to situations and a way of life that existed in the interpreters' own time; the stories of heroes from the ancient past events were understood to contain lessons for proper conduct, the heroes themselves having been converted into moral exemplars through creative exegesis; and so forth.
- (3) *Scripture is perfectly consistent and free of error or internal contradiction.* Although different sacred books, and even different parts of the same book, sometimes seemed to contradict each other, such contradictions were held to be illusory. Indeed, any apparent error of fact, or (eventually) any deviation for the interpreter's own ideology or school, came be explained by clever exegesis that made the problem disappear. This approach ultimately led to the doctrine of "omniscience," whereby nothing in scripture is said in vain or for rhetorical flourish: every detail is important, everything is intended to impart some teaching, and therefore even the existence of repetitions and doublets was denied.<sup>16</sup>
- (4) *Every word of scripture may be said to have come directly from God or at least to have been inspired or granted by Him.* Certainly, sentences that began, "And the Lord said to Moses," or "Thus said the Lord . . ." were two of scripture's most common ways of designating divine speech. But what of the parts that are not so designated? Eventually, interpreters came to hold that every part of scripture had been divinely dictated or otherwise granted by God – the stories of Genesis or the court history of David no less than the laws given to Moses or the prophecies of Isaiah or Jeremiah. Even the psalms, whose words seemed to be directed *to* God, were nonetheless often held to have come *from* God, indeed, to be a form of prophecy.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Kugel, *Idea*, 103–9.

<sup>17</sup> See Kugel, "David the Prophet."

Ancient interpreters rarely spoke of these assumptions as such; indeed, for most interpreters, they probably were *unconscious* assumptions (as assumptions usually are). Nevertheless, they underlie virtually everything that was written about scripture during this crucial period, and thus had a great deal to do with the “spin” that accompanied the Bible from antiquity through the middle ages, the Renaissance, and – to a great extent – even into our own day.

## 7 How interpretation worked

It may be helpful to observe these various assumptions at work in a specific text, the biblical account of Abraham’s near-sacrifice of his beloved son Isaac:

And it came to pass, after these things, that God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” and he answered, “Here I am.” He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. Then sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will show you.” So Abraham got up early in the morning and saddled his donkey. He took two of his servants with him, along with his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering and then set out for the place that God had told him about. On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. Abraham told his servants, “You stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go up there, so that we can worship and then come back to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac; then he took the fire and the knife, and the two of them walked together. But Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father?” and he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them walked together. (Gen 22:1–8)

Ancient interpreters were troubled by a number of elements in this story. Did not the very fact of divine omniscience make this “test” of Abraham unnecessary? Surely God knew how it would turn out before it took place, so why put Abraham through this awful trial? Equally disturbing was Abraham’s apparent conduct vis-à-vis his son. He never tells Isaac what God has told him to do; in fact, when Isaac asks his father the obvious question – “I see fire and the wood for the sacrifice, but where is the sacrificial animal?” – Abraham gives him an evasive answer: “God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” This actually turns out to be true; God does provide a ram at the last minute – but Abraham had no way of knowing this at the time.

Interpreters did their best to find a solution to these problems. It is important to stress that interpreters generally were not out to arrive at a modern-style critical or objective reading of scripture's words. In keeping with Assumption 2, they began with the belief that scripture had some important lesson to teach *them*, and in the case of this story, it had to be a positive lesson about all concerned – not only Abraham and Isaac, but about God as well. If that lesson was not immediately apparent, then it had to be searched for through a careful weighing of every word, since, in keeping with Assumption 1, the meaning of any biblical text could be hidden: it might say A when it really meant B.

With regard to the first question mentioned earlier – why should God need to test anyone if He is omniscient? – interpreters set their eye on an apparently insignificant detail, the opening sentence of the passage: “And it came to pass, after these things . . .” Such phrases are often used in the Bible to mark a transition: “The previous story is over and now we are going on to something new.” But the word “things” in Hebrew (*devarim*) also means “words.” So the transitional phrase here could equally well be understood as asserting that some words had been spoken, and that “it came to pass, after these *words*, that God tested Abraham.” Since Genesis did not say which words had been spoken, interpreters felt free to try to figure out (or, truthfully, to invent) the missing conversation.

At some point, an ancient interpreter – no one knows who or when – thought of another part of scripture quite unrelated to Abraham, the book of Job. That book reports that Satan once challenged God to test His servant Job (1:6–12, 2:1–6). Since the story of Abraham and Isaac is also described as a divine test, this interpreter theorized that the “words” mentioned at the opening of this story might have been, as in the book of Job, words connected to the hypothetical challenge spoken by Satan to God: “Put Abraham to the test and see whether He is indeed obedient enough even to sacrifice his own son.” If one reads the opening sentence with this in mind, then the problem of why God should have tested Abraham disappears. Of course God knew that Abraham would pass the test – but if He nevertheless went on to test Abraham, it was because some words had been spoken leading God to take up a challenge and prove *to Satan* Abraham's worthiness. This solution was adopted by the anonymous author of the book of *Jubilees*. Here is how his retelling of the story begins:

There were *words* in heaven regarding Abraham, that he was faithful in everything that He told him, [and that] the Lord loved him, and in every difficulty he was faithful. Then the angel Mastema [that is, Satan] came and said before the Lord, “Behold Abraham loves his son Isaac and he delights

in him above all else. Tell him to offer him as a sacrifice on the altar. Then You will see if he carries out this command, and You will know if he is faithful in everything through which You test him." Now the Lord knew that Abraham was faithful in every difficulty which He had told him . . . (*Jub.* 17:15–16)

Here, the "words" referred to in Gen 22:1 are words of praise uttered by the other angels. "And it came to pass, after these *words*" were uttered, that Satan felt moved to challenge God concerning His faithful servant. God takes up the challenge, but the author of *Jubilees* assures his readers that there was really no need for God to test Abraham, since "the Lord knew that Abraham was faithful in every difficulty which He had told him" and would certainly pass this test as well.

As noted, this revised version of the biblical story contains a lesson for today (Assumption 2): Abraham was faithful to God, even when put to a very difficult test; you should be too, and you will be rewarded as Abraham was. It also illustrates Assumption 3, the idea that the Bible is not only internally consistent, but that it agrees with the interpreter's own beliefs and practices – in this case, the belief that an all-knowing God would have no need to put Abraham to the test. (Actually, the idea of divine omniscience is never stated outright in the Hebrew Bible. It would seem that this notion did not come into existence until later on.) Finally, it is thanks to Assumption 1, that the Bible speaks cryptically, that this interpretation was possible: When the Bible said "after these things," although this looked at first glance like a common transitional phrase, what it really meant was "after these words," and it thereby intended readers to think of the book of Job and the divine test with which that book begins.

As for Abraham hiding his intentions from Isaac – once again it all depends how one reads the text. Ancient interpreters noticed that the passage contains a slight repetition:

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac; then he took the fire and the knife, *and the two of them walked together*. But Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father?" and he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." *And the two of them walked together*. (Gen 22:6–8)

Repetition is not necessarily a bad thing, but ancient interpreters generally felt (in keeping with Assumption 3) that the Bible would not repeat without purpose. Between the two occurrences of "and the two of them walked together" is the brief exchange in which Abraham apparently hides

his true intentions from Isaac. But Abraham's words were, at least potentially, ambiguous. Since biblical Hebrew was originally written without punctuation to indicate the beginnings of sentences, Abraham's answer to Isaac could actually be read as two sentences: "God Himself will provide. The lamb for the burnt offering [is] my son." (Note that Hebrew has no verb "to be" in the present tense; thus, this last sentence would be the same whether or not the word "is" is supplied in translation.) Read in this way, Abraham's answer to Isaac was not an evasion but the brutal truth: "You are the sacrifice, Isaac." If, following that, the text adds, "And the two of them walked together," this would not be a needless repetition at all: Abraham told his son that he was to be the sacrifice and Isaac agreed; then the two of them "walked together" in the sense that they were now of one mind to carry out God's fearsome command. Thus, in keeping with Assumptions 1 and 3, the apparent repetition was no repetition at all, and Abraham's apparent evasion was actually an announcement to Isaac of the plain truth. The conduct of both Abraham and Isaac was now above reproach: Abraham did not seek to deceive his son, and Isaac, far from being a mere victim, actively sought to do God's will no less than his father did. Indeed, their conduct might thus serve as an example to be imitated by later readers (Assumption 2): even when God's decrees seem to be difficult, the righteous must follow them – and sometimes they turn out merely to be a test.

Did interpreters truly believe their interpretations? Did they not know they were distorting the text's real meaning? This is always a difficult question. It seems likely that, at least at first, ancient interpreters were sometimes well aware that they were departing from the straightforward meaning of the text. But with time, that awareness began to dim. Biblical interpretation soon became an institution in ancient Israel; one generation's interpretations were passed on to the next, and eventually they acquired the authority that time and tradition always grant. Midrash, as this body of interpretation came to be called, simply became what the text had always been intended to communicate. Along with the interpretations themselves, the interpreters' very *modus operandi* acquired its own authority: this was how the Bible was to be interpreted. Moreover, since the midrashic method of searching the text carefully for hidden implications seemed to solve so many problems in the Bible that otherwise had no solution, this indicated that the interpreters were going about things correctly. As time went on, new interpretations were created on the model of older ones, until soon every chapter of the Bible came accompanied by a host of clever explanations that accounted for any perceived difficulty in its words.



## 8 Exegetical motifs

One further point about the “how” of ancient biblical interpretation: it always worked via a scrupulous examination of the precise wording of the biblical text. Even when the issues addressed were broader – divine omniscience, Abraham’s character, Isaac’s apparent passivity – these were always approached through the interpretation of a specific verse; indeed, sometimes through a single word in the verse. “Do you want to know what ‘after these things’ means in the story of Abraham and Isaac? It means *after these words*.” “Do you know why *the two of them walked together* is repeated? The second time is a hint that Abraham had just told Isaac he was to be sacrificed, and he agreed.” It was always from such precise points of wording that larger issues were approached.

Ancient biblical interpretation was thus, no matter how broad its intentions, formally an interpretation of single verses. And this is what enabled specific interpretations to travel so widely. Teachers in school as well as preachers in synagogue or church would, in the course of explaining a biblical text, inevitably pass on an insight into this or that verse: “Here is what it is really talking about!” Thereafter, all the listeners would know that such was the meaning of that particular verse, and they would think of it every time the verse was read in public; indeed, they would pass on the explanation to others. Since the biblical text was known far and wide and often cited, a clever answer to a long-standing conundrum would circulate quickly throughout the population.

Nowadays, such verse-centered interpretations are known as *exegetical motifs* – “motifs” because, like musical motifs, they were capable of being inserted into different compositions, reworked or adapted, and combined with other motifs to make a smooth-running narrative. After a while, retellers sometimes did not even bother to allude to the particular biblical verse in question, but simply incorporated the underlying idea into their retelling. Thus, for example, the idea that Abraham had explained to Isaac that “the lamb for the burnt offering [is you,] my son,” and that Isaac, far from fleeing, had willingly embraced his martyrdom, shows up in a variety of retellings, some of them terse, but others lovingly expanding on the basic idea:

Going at the same pace—no less with regard to their thinking than with their bodies . . . they came to the designated place. (Philo, *De Abrahamo* 172)

Remember . . . the father [=Abraham], by whose hand Isaac would have submitted to being slain for the sake of religion. (4 *Maccabees* 13:12)

When the altar had been prepared he had laid the cleft wood upon it and all was ready, [Abraham] said to his son: "My child, myriad were the prayers in which I beseeched God for your birth . . . But since it was by God's will that I became your father and it now pleases Him that I give you over to Him, bear this consecration valiantly . . ." The son of such a father could not but be brave-hearted, and Isaac received these words with joy. He exclaimed that he deserved never to have been born at all if he were to reject the decision of God and of his father . . . (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Book I, chapter 13)

## 9 From antiquity to the middle ages

Following the period of ancient biblical interpretation came the rise of early Christianity and of rabbinic Judaism, and both of these ultimately created their own styles of biblical commentary. It is impossible in the present framework to do full justice to the development of either, but a few broad observations are nonetheless in order.

The first is that the four basic assumptions of ancient biblical commentary remained the common starting point of all interpreters in this next stage as well. Indeed, interpreters in both these camps simply continued to transmit and only slightly elaborate the traditions inherited from their predecessors. An apt example is a passage from the First Letter of John in the New Testament:

By this it may be seen who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil . . . For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning [that is, the book of Genesis]; that we should love one another not be like Cain, who was of the Evil One and murdered his brother. (1 John 3:10–12)

This passage refers to the interpretive tradition that claimed that Cain was actually the offspring of Satan and Eve. This motif was apparently designed to explain Eve's words in Gen 4:1, "I have gotten a man with the Lord" (the last word being understood as a shorthand reference for "with an angel of the Lord," in this case, the wicked angel Satan).<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Cain's diabolical ancestry also served to explain how he could kill his own brother: a son of Satan could hardly be expected to do less!

With time, however, Christians developed their own distinctive style of biblical interpretation. One important mode of reading is known today as *typology*, whereby the Hebrew Bible was read through the lens of the events of

<sup>18</sup> Kugel, *Traditions*, 146–8.

the Gospels and Christian teachings.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the story of the binding of Isaac was taken by some early Christians as a foreshadowing of the crucifixion:

If God is for us, then who is against us? He who *did not withhold His own son* but gave him up for us all, will He not also give us all things along with him? (Rom 8:31–32)

The italicized words are a reference to the Genesis account, where God says of Abraham, “You did not withhold your son, your only one, from Me” (Gen 22:16). Similarly:

[Jesus was the fulfillment of] that which was foreshadowed in Isaac, who was offered upon the altar. (*Letter of Barnabas* 7:3)

Another important mode of reading adopted by early Christian exegetes was *allegory*, reading the various persons and places mentioned in biblical narratives as if they represented abstract, usually spiritual, qualities. Even before Christianity, this mode of reading was a favorite of Hellenistic Judaism (which borrowed it from Greek allegorizing of writings of Homer and Hesiod). Thus, Philo of Alexandria (c. 30 BCE.–c. 55 CE) introduces his account of Abraham’s migration from the city of Ur to Haran by saying:

The departure from home as depicted by the literal text of scripture was made by a certain wise man [Abraham]; but according to the rules of allegory [it is made] by the soul [of anyone] fond of virtue who is searching for the true God. (*De Abrahamo*, 68)

In other words, without denying the literal sense of the biblical text – there really was a “certain wise man” named Abraham and he really did undertake the journey described in Genesis – Philo asserts that the narrative has a deeper meaning, in which Abraham represents any soul in search of God.

Philo’s allegorizing was passed on directly to the early Christians in his city, in particular to Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215 CE) and later figures. Together, typology and allegorizing ultimately became part of the polysemous web of Christian readings known in the medieval West as the fourfold meaning of scripture.<sup>20</sup> Thanks to this approach, the Old Testament became an infinitely complex text full of concealed meanings, not only foreshadowing (via typology) the events of the New Testament, but likewise serving (thanks largely to allegorizing) as a source for the Church’s doctrines and teachings, as well as offering a guide to individual

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 2. See also Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality*; Preus, *Shadow to Promise*.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 7 and De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*. On the relationship between typology and allegory, see Chapter 2, Section 4.

salvation and embodying the vision, made explicit elsewhere, of the glorious triumph that was to mark the end of days.

## 10 Rabbinic interpretation

Rabbinic interpretation includes a vast corpus of writings, stretching from the second to the sixth centuries CE. In a sense, it is still more of a straight-line continuation of its predecessor, ancient biblical interpretation, than early Christian exegesis: the same methods, and many of the same exegetical motifs found in earlier writings, reappear in rabbinic texts. To return again to an earlier example, the motif that Satan had challenged God to put Abraham to the test, seen in the book of *Jubilees*, is found in a much later rabbinic work, the Babylonian Talmud:

“And it came to pass after these things [words]” (Gen 22:1): After which words? Said Rabbi Yoḥanan in the name of Rabbi Yose ben Zimra: After the words spoken by Satan. For the text earlier relates, “and the boy grew up and was weaned, and Abraham made a great banquet on the day that Isaac was weaned” (Gen 21:8). At that time Satan said to God, “Master of the Universe! You have blessed this old man at the age of one hundred years with offspring. Yet amidst all [the bounty of] this banquet that he prepared, was there not one pigeon or fowl for him to sacrifice before You?” He replied: “All that he did he did only for the sake of his son. Still, were I to say to him, ‘Sacrifice your own son before Me,’ he would sacrifice him at once.” Hence it says thereafter, “And it came to pass after these things [words] that God tested Abraham.” (b. *Sanhedrin* 89b)

This passage embodies the same basic motif recorded six or seven centuries earlier in *Jubilees*: God certainly knew how His testing of Abraham would turn out, but He went ahead anyway in order to prove Satan wrong. Altogether typical of rabbinic exegesis, however, is the added wrinkle in the Talmud’s account, namely, the connection of Satan’s challenge with an earlier incident in Genesis, in which Abraham made a great feast on the occasion of Isaac’s weaning (Gen 21:8). Although this incident is recounted in Genesis without any hint of criticism for Abraham’s conduct, it comes in the chapter just preceding Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac, so rabbinic exegetes sought some causal connection between the two. Satan here fixes on the fact that Abraham failed to offer any sacrifice to God as the opening salvo in his questioning of Abraham’s piety.

One other distinguishing trait of rabbinic exegesis deserves mention. Prior to its advent, there was apparently no fully developed idea of a biblical canon in Judaism. True, no one doubted that the Torah was at the heart of

Judaism's sacred library, and the writings of ancient prophets and sages were also treasured. But the *idea* of the canon as a single sacred corpus was not truly in evidence until the start of the rabbinic period. It was then that rabbinic exegetes began to actively connect verses from the Psalms or Jeremiah or the Song of Songs with a verse from the Torah – not so much in an effort to explain a difficulty in the Pentateuch text as proof that the entire canon is a seamless, self-explanatory whole. Thus, for example:

“And Moses took Joseph’s bones with him [for he had caused the Israelites to take an oath that ‘When God takes you to mind, you will take my bones up from here with you’]” (Exod 13:19): This verse is to make known Moses’ wisdom and piety, since all of Israel was occupied with the booty [that they had gotten from the Egyptians], and Moses alone was occupied with the commandment of Joseph’s bones. About him scripture says, “The wise of heart will take commandments, but the foolish of speech will come to grief” (Prov 10:8). (*Mekhilta, Be-Shallah*, introduction)

A real exegetical problem underlies this midrashic comment. If Exod 13:19 says that the Israelites as a whole were bound by oath to remove Joseph’s bones from Egypt, why does this very same verse also say that Moses performed this task alone? The answer given is not very flattering to the other Israelites: they were busy inspecting all the gold and silver and other goods that the Egyptians had lent them just before the exodus (Exod 12:36) and simply neglected their duty to take up Joseph’s bones. It was thus Moses alone who remembered this obligation, which is why the text says “And *Moses* took Joseph’s bones . . .”

But it is the last sentence in this passage that is of particular interest. The citation from Proverbs really adds nothing to our understanding of Exod 13:19; its sole purpose is to connect this verse in Exodus to a verse far distant from it in the Bible. The basis for this connection is the word “take.” Normally, a person is said to *keep* a commandment or to *do* it, so the wording “the wise of heart will *take* commandments” is somewhat anomalous. Since Moses is said to *take* Joseph’s bones, the verse in Proverbs could be interpreted as a specific reference to Moses’ good deed rather than a general statement about any person who is “wise of heart” (which is, in truth, what it is!). With this as his point of departure, the midrashist has prepared the ground well for an elaboration of this connection. He says that the Exodus verse is intended “to make known Moses’ wisdom and piety,” whereas in truth, *wisdom* had nothing to do with it. It was a pious act on Moses’ part, but no particular wisdom was involved. But since the verse in Proverbs speaks of the “wise of heart,” it was necessary to assert that Moses’ act was not one of piety alone, but also

wisdom.<sup>21</sup> Nor, strictly speaking, was the removal of Joseph's bones a "commandment" in and of itself, as the midrashist asserts: "Moses alone was occupied with the *commandment* of Joseph's bones" – so as to make it fit better the verse from Proverbs, "The wise of heart will take *commandments*."

This tendency of rabbinic midrash to seek out connections between a verse from the Pentateuch and an apparently unrelated verse from elsewhere – what might be called its "celebration of the canon" – came into broader expression as time advanced. Ultimately, it led to the creation of a new genre of sermon, the *Petihta*, along with the "halakhic proem" characteristic of the *Tanhumma-Yelammedenu* literature, which extended the rabbinic "canon" beyond scripture proper to include simple *halakhot* from the Mishnah and elsewhere.<sup>22</sup>

Other developments within the medieval period went on to alter profoundly the whole character of biblical interpretation within the various strands of Judaism and Christianity, as may be seen in the following chapters in this volume. Greek philosophical thought, transmitted directly or mediated through the Arabic philosophical tradition; the sharpening of Christian teachings, expressed in the early creeds as well as in the definition of various heresies; a renewed interest among Jews in Hebrew grammar and philology (stirred by earlier developments in Islam); the rise of Karaism – all these and more influenced profoundly the continued development of biblical interpretation. But for all such changes, it is important not to lose sight of the great lines of continuity. The basic assumptions and methods of ancient biblical interpretation – along with a great many individual interpretive motifs – survived unchallenged well into the middle ages and beyond. Indeed, in a broad perspective, the earliest period of biblical interpretation can be seen as its most influential one; it continued to shape later exegesis for centuries and centuries, indeed, its importance can even be felt in our own time.

<sup>21</sup> Other traditions suggested that Joseph's bones had been hidden away and required special skill to be discovered, but this apparently played no role in the midrashic motif at hand. See Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 125–55.

<sup>22</sup> See Atzmon, "Same Fate"; Bregman, *Tanhumma-Yelammedenu Literature*; Heinemann, "Proem in Aggadic Midrashim"; Sarason, "Petiḥtot in *Leviticus Rabba*"; Shinan, "Petihta."

## CHAPTER 2

### *Disclosing the mystery* *The hermeneutics of typology in Syriac exegesis*

*Sidney H. Griffith*

The belief that the Hebrew Bible relates a deep message beneath its surface was typical of ancient interpretation, as detailed in [Chapter 1](#). But it played a crucial role in early Christianity, which interpreted the Old Testament “spiritually” as a forerunner of the Gospel. The New Testament itself claims such an interpretive continuity with the Old Testament narrative. As Paul remarks:

It is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman . . . the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory (*allēgoroumena*): these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar . . . she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother . . . So, brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. (Gal 4:22–31)

Hagar represents the Sinaitic Law adhered to by the Jews in the physical city of Jerusalem, under Roman dominion. Christians, by contrast, are the children of Abraham “through promise”; liberated from the Law in its literal sense, they adhere to a new covenant and inhabit a spiritual, heavenly Jerusalem. Although Paul uses the Greek term for allegory here, later church fathers describe his reading strategy specifically as typological, that is, that events of one historical narrative represent events in a later time.<sup>1</sup> The transfer of meaning in typology is temporal (from one time-frame to another), whereas in allegory things and actions represent ideas. In actuality, both allegory and typology were characteristic of Western Christian interpretation, from late antiquity well into the middle ages and even beyond. The current chapter explores the distinctive typological approach

<sup>1</sup> See Whitman, “Textual to Temporal,” 162–165.

developed in early Syriac (Eastern Christian) tradition, and considers its relation to the allegorical mode of reading in other interpretive schools.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

Syriac-speaking Christians of late antiquity composed two types of biblical commentaries. Their formal commentaries focus on difficult words, phrases, and narrative events in the biblical text. More wide-ranging biblical exegesis is found in Syriac liturgical compositions, teaching songs (*madrāshê*; sing. *madrāshâ*) and metrical homilies (*mêmrê*; sing. *mêmrâ*). These “applied commentaries” were deployed for liturgical, homiletic, theological, or even polemical purposes. It was here that the classical Syriac writers, such as Ephraem the Syrian (c. 306–73), Narsai (c. 399–503), and Jacob of Serûg (c. 451–521), engaged in extensive exegeses of biblical passages, especially those proclaimed in the liturgy. And it is in these compositions that we may best discern the hermeneutical and methodological processes of scriptural reading typical of Syriac patristic discourse in its classical period. This study highlights the typological hermeneutic commonly employed in their reading of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, focusing on Jacob of Serûg’s *mêmrâ*, “On Abraham and his Types.” This homily offers a detailed christological reading of the Binding of Isaac, a narrative discussed from the perspective of rabbinic Jewish interpretation in [Chapter 1](#).

In addition to Syriac religious discourse composed in artistic prose, popular exegesis in Syriac appears most often in the classical period in verse compositions. The important genres, all originally intended for a congregational setting, are the stanzaic *madrāshê*, set to music; the *mêmrê*, verse narratives meant to be recited; and the *sughyāthâ*, dialogue or dispute poems. The *madrāshâ*, a “teaching song,” is both didactic and performative.<sup>2</sup> It is a poetically metered recitative sung to the accompaniment of the lyre (*kennārâ*).<sup>3</sup> This genre has deep roots in the Syriac literary tradition and was a favorite for Ephraem the Syrian,<sup>4</sup> who composed hundreds of

<sup>2</sup> Palmer, “Merchant of Nisibis.”

<sup>3</sup> See McVey, “Earliest *Madrāshê*”; Palmer, “Lyre without a Voice”; Beck, ed., *Hymnen contra Haereses*, LIII:6, 203. The closest analogue to the *madrāshê* in form and function in cognate literatures are the Hebrew *piyyūṭim*, synagogue songs that came into prominence in Palestine in the seventh and eighth centuries. See Schirmann, “Hebrew Liturgical Poetry.” Already among the *Hodayot* discovered at Qumran researchers have noticed poetic features that reappear in the Syriac *madrāshê*; see Kim, “Authorizing Interpretation.”

<sup>4</sup> For a bibliography of the works of Ephraem, see den Biesen, *Annotated Bibliography*. See also Griffith, “St. Ephraem, Bar Daysān.”



them on doctrinal and liturgical themes. In Ephraem's careful hands the *madrāshê* became an important means of exegesis and catechesis.

Beyond the *madrāshâ*, the most widespread vehicle of popular biblical interpretation in Syriac in patristic times was the expository and hortatory discourse recited in liturgical and congregational settings, called simply a speech, *mêmrâ*. The ecclesiastical setting, the verse structure, and the manner of delivery as a cadenced sermon or homily distinguish the *mêmrâ* as a specific kind of speech, which typically went on for hundreds of lines. The *mêmrê* were employed in scriptural exegesis within a tradition of biblical interpretation, a tradition that inevitably came to its classical and clearest expression first in the works of Ephraem the Syrian.<sup>5</sup> Later Syriac authors of exegetical *mêmrê*, like Narsai, the founder of the "School of Nisibis,"<sup>6</sup> and Jacob of Serûg, wrote within the "tradition (*mashlmānuthâ*) of Mār Ephraem, the Teacher (*malphānâ*)."<sup>7</sup>

### I Ephraem the Syrian on the *râzê*

According to Ephraem, Nature and Scripture together are the twin sources of revelation. He likens Nature and the two Testaments to three lyres, to the accompaniment of which the Word of God sings; the lyre of Nature testifies that it is Christ Himself who sings to the lyre of Moses and the lyre of the Gospel. Ephraem says:

The Word of the Most High came down  
and clothed himself in  
a weak body with two hands.  
He took up and balanced two lyres;  
one in his right hand and one in his left.  
A third he put in front of him,  
to be a witness for the other two.  
For it was the middle lyre corroborating  
that their Lord was singing to their accompaniment.<sup>8</sup>

As Ephraem describes here, scripture is the rule of faith that even Nature confirms.

For Ephraem, furthermore, the Old and New Testaments that together make up the Christian Bible have Christ as their focal point and are linked through what he refers to frequently as the *râzê* (sing. *râzâ*). The closest English term to render *râzâ* might be "symbol." But it also connotes what

<sup>5</sup> See Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery*; idem, "Ephraem the Exegete."

<sup>6</sup> See Becker, *Fear of God*.

<sup>7</sup> See Griffith, "Images of Ephraem."

<sup>8</sup> Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Virginitate*, XXIX:1; McVey, ed., *Hymns*, 390.

later Christian interpreters call a “type” (as in typological interpretation) – a person, thing, or event in the Old Testament that prefigures a corresponding one in the New Testament. Yet the Syriac term *râzâ* also means “mystery,” that is, a secret with a cryptic message, reflecting its roots in ancient Persian and Old Aramaic, where it means “secret” (it appears in Daniel [e.g., Dan 2:18] in this sense).<sup>9</sup> In any case, Ephraem and other Syriac writers typically use this term and its synonyms in reference to typological interpretation: the *râzâ* proleptically discloses to the knowledgeable Christian reader what is yet hidden in earlier scripture (the Old Testament), but which is fully revealed in its perceived relevance to the Gospel’s account of the incarnate Christ’s fulfillment of the economy of salvation. For Ephraem, all *râzê* point to the incarnate Christ, “Lord of the *râzê*, who fulfills all *râzê* in his crucifixion.”<sup>10</sup> They may point forward from Nature and Scripture to Christ, who in turn reveals their true meaning, or they may point back to Christ from the Church’s life and liturgy, whose sacramental words and actions are also called *râzê*.<sup>11</sup>

The *râzê* seem to have a life of their own in Ephraem’s conception. As he writes:

In the Torah Moses trod  
the Way of the *râzê* before that People  
who used to wander every which way.  
But our Lord, in his Testaments,  
definitively established the path of Truth  
for the Peoples who came to the Way of Life.  
All the *râzê* thus travelled  
on that Way, which Moses trod  
and were brought to fulfillment in the Way of the Son.<sup>12</sup>

The *râzê* travelled the path trod by Moses in the Old Testament on their way to fulfillment in Christ in the New Testament.

As he insists on the unity of the two Testaments, so Ephraem insists on the integrity of the Gospel, proclaimed in the canonical four. Like the body of the alphabet,

which is complete in its members,

<sup>9</sup> See Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, vol. II, cols. 3871–5. See also Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, 520; idem, *A Syriac Lexicon*, 1424.

<sup>10</sup> Beck, ed., *Paschalhymnen, De Azymis*, III:1.

<sup>11</sup> See in particular Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, 23–71; Beck, “Symbolum-Mysterium”; idem, “Zur Terminologie”; Murray, “Theory of Symbolism.” For a recent summary of Ephraem’s “theological epistemology,” see Mourachian, “Human Freedom,” esp. chap. 4, part 1.

<sup>12</sup> Beck, ed., *Hymnen contra Haereses*, XXV:3.

neither subtracting a letter,  
 nor adding an extra one,  
 so is the truth, which is written  
 in the Holy Gospel,  
 in the letters of the alphabet,  
 the perfect measure which does not accept  
 less or more.<sup>13</sup>

It would seem that he makes a point of insisting on the integrity of the canonical four Gospels against his adversaries, whom he identifies elsewhere as the followers of Marcion, Bar Dayṣān, and Mani,<sup>14</sup> who, he says, “cut off and take away [parts] and paste them up to make books [of their own] . . . They make strangers of phrases, whose intention is one and the same.”<sup>15</sup>

According to Ephraem, the Prophets and the Apostles provided in their sayings “the milestones and the inns” on the “Way of Life,” and they all mark the way to Christ, who alone reveals his Father.<sup>16</sup> The lines of writing in the scriptures thus form a bridge over the ontological chasm that separates creatures from their Creator, bringing the human mind, by way of its encounter with the incarnate Son of God, to the knowledge of God himself.<sup>17</sup> Just as in the Son, God clothed himself in flesh, so in the scriptures God clothed Himself in human words. As Ephraem put it, “He clothed Himself in our language, so that He might clothe us in his way of life.”<sup>18</sup> And in this language, as we find it in the scriptures, the *râzê* convey the mysteries God means to reveal. The key to interpret these mysteries is the incarnate Son; Christ is the lens through whom to read and understand the integral scriptures, the one Bible in both of its Testaments.

Ephraem also finds *râzê* in nature. These symbols of the divine are paths by which the invisible God reveals Himself to persons of right faith, who thereby come to recognize the Word of God as who He is, truly incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. He thus says of nature,

In every place, if you look, his *râzâ* is there,  
 and wherever you read, you will find his types (*tupsawhy*).  
 For in him all creatures were created

<sup>13</sup> Beck, ed., *Hymnen contra Haereses*, XXII:1.

<sup>14</sup> On Ephraem's adversaries, see Griffith, “Setting Right”; idem, “The Marks.”

<sup>15</sup> Adapted from Beck, ed., *Hymnen contra Haereses*, II:15,19.

<sup>16</sup> See Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Fide*, LXV:1. See also idem, *Hymnen contra Haereses*, XXV:1, XXVII:3. Ephraem develops the image of the way extensively at a number of places in his works. See Beck, “Das Bild vom Weg.”

<sup>17</sup> On Ephraem's bridge imagery in this context, see Beck, “Zwei ephrämische Bilder.”

<sup>18</sup> Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Fide*, XXXI:2; Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 60.

and he traced his *râzê* on his property.  
 When he was creating the world,  
 he looked to adorn it with icons of himself (*yugnawhy*);  
 the springs of his *râzê* were opened up to run down  
 and pour forth his *râzê* into its component parts.<sup>19</sup>

In another *madrâshâ*, Ephraem speaks similarly of the allusions to God's Son and Messiah to be found in the scriptures. He says,

See, the Law (*nāmôšâ*) carries  
 all his likenesses (*demwâtheh*).  
 See, the Prophets, like deacons,  
 carry  
 icons of him (*yugnawhy*), the Messiah  
 who reigns over all.  
 Nature and the scriptures  
 together carry  
 the *râzê* of his humanity,  
 and of his divinity.<sup>20</sup>

Exegesis for Ephraem consists in explicating the right reading of the *râzê* God has strewn in both scripture and nature, most often showing how to read them typologically, always with reference to the incarnate Son revealed in the Gospel, thereby disclosing the truth enshrined in the mystery.

Ephraem often portrays the God who displays the *râzê* in Nature and Scripture as an artist.<sup>21</sup> In two stanzas of one of his *madrâshê* "On Virginity" he provides a good summary of the functioning of the *râzê* in his own exegetical thought. Ephraem addresses Christ, "the painter of his own *râzê*,"<sup>22</sup> virtually envisioning Christ himself as the model exegete. Ephraem says,

You have gathered up the scattered *râzê*  
 from the Torah that are nigh unto your beauty.  
 You have published the models (*tapenkê*),  
 which are in your Gospel,  
 along with the prodigies and signs of Nature.  
 You have mixed them together as the paints for  
 your portrait; you have looked at yourself,  
 and painted your own portrait.  
 Here is the painter, who in himself has painted

<sup>19</sup> Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Virginitate*, XX:12; McVey, ed., *Hymns*, 348–9.

<sup>20</sup> Beck, ed., *Paschalhymnen, De Azymis*, IV:22–4.

<sup>21</sup> See Griffith, "Image of the Image Maker."

<sup>22</sup> Beck, ed., *Paschalhymnen, de Crucifixione*, II:5.

His Father's portrait;  
 two portrayed, the one in the other.  
 The prophets, the kings, and the priests,  
 who were creatures, all of them painted  
 your portrait, but they themselves bore no resemblance.  
 Created beings are not capable;  
 you alone are capable of painting the portrait.  
 They indeed drew the lines of your portrait;  
 you at your coming brought it to completion.  
 The lines then disappeared due to the energy of the paints,  
 the most brilliant of all colors.<sup>23</sup>

Ephraem canvassed the scriptures in search of the *râzê*, which in the ensemble, he was convinced, would disclose the whole mystery of the economy of salvation. Having paid fairly close attention to the literal sense of the biblical text in his prose commentaries, clarifying obscure words and phrases, and explaining seeming historical or logical conundrums, Ephraem then customarily read the Bible typologically, in terms of the virtually sacramental *râzê* he saw strewn everywhere in the holy books, pointing the way forward toward revealing the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God in Christ Jesus. In this way, he differed from the Greek-speaking Antiochene exegetes, with whom he is often classed, who used typology much more sparingly, and who eschewed the aggadic proclivities so readily found even in Ephraem's prose commentaries, where he was more moderate in the pursuit of "spiritual" readings than in his *madrâshê* and *mêmrê*.<sup>24</sup>

## 2 Jacob of Serûg's exegetical *mêmrê*

Later Syriac exegetes followed Ephraem's search for the scriptural *râzê* that adumbrated Christ's fulfillment of the economy of salvation. None did so more closely than Jacob of Serûg, who at the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries reflected on the mysteries he found encoded in the scriptures in hundreds of highly imaginative exegetical *mêmrê*.<sup>25</sup> These were theologically exciting times. In the year Jacob was born, the Council of Chalcedon approved a christological formula that became one of the most church-dividing decisions ever to be taken by an ecclesiastical assembly in late antiquity. By the time of his death, the Roman imperial government in

<sup>23</sup> Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Virginitate*, XXVIII:2–3; McVey, ed., *Hymns*, 386.

<sup>24</sup> See Van Rompay, "Antiochene Biblical Interpretation." <sup>25</sup> Brock, "Ya'qub of Serugh."

Constantinople was prepared to enforce the adoption of the Christology of Chalcedon empire-wide, requiring all bishops to accept its orthodoxy.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, in Edessa, where Jacob had been a student, rival theologies based on texts newly translated from Greek divided Syriac-speaking theologians, some following the theology of Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), others devotees of Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428). Differing political sympathies seem also to have been in play at the time: some Edessans were called “Persians,” presumably because of their political preference for the rule of Persia, or simply because they came originally from those parts of the Syriac-speaking milieu under Persian government; others remained reconciled to Roman suzerainty. Eventually, theological and political discord led to the closure of the “School of the Persians” in 489 and its scholars fled to Nisibis in Persian territory. There, under the sponsorship of Bishop Bar Sawmâ of Nisibis (c. 420–c. 490, bp. 457), devotees of Theodore of Mopsuestia, led by Mâr Narsai, founded the institution that would become the famed School of Nisibis.<sup>27</sup>

Jacob of Serûg seems to have spent some thirty years as a scholarly cleric in Ḥawrâ, writing the hundreds of *mêmrê* and the letters that have made him one of the best known and most prolific of the early Syriac writers. (So far, less than half of the over 700 *mêmrê* ascribed to him have been published; most are on biblical and liturgical themes.<sup>28</sup>) His style, his themes and his religious discourse, albeit in a simpler register, easily evoke the memory of the works of Ephraem the Syrian. Jacob himself celebrated Ephraem’s memory in his well-known *mêmrâ*, “On Mâr Ephraem, the Teacher.”<sup>29</sup>

Like Ephraem and other early Syriac writers, Jacob speaks of the “literal” or “plain” sense or meaning (*sukâlâ*) of scripture in several terms: “significative” (*sukâlâyâ*), “actual” (*su’rânâyâ*), “bodily” (*pagrânâyâ*), or “carnal” (*besrânâyâ*). But he also speaks of the “spiritual sense” (*sukâlâ ruhânâyâ*) through reference to the *râzê* that the text of scripture is thought to convey. For Jacob, as for Ephraem before him, the *râzê* each bespeak a truth about Christ. It appears that Jacob, given his participation in the christological disputes of his day, was even more assiduous in discerning the *râzê* in the Old Testament than was Ephraem. In this

<sup>26</sup> See now Menze, *Justinian*. <sup>27</sup> See Becker, *Fear of God*.

<sup>28</sup> See Alwan, “Bibliographie.” The largest published collection of the *mêmrê* is Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*. Gorgias Press (Piscataway, NJ) plans to publish editions and English translations of all of Jacob’s available homilies.

<sup>29</sup> See Amar, *Metrical Holy*.

connection, Jacob uses other related terms as well, including “types” (*ṭupsē*), “figures” (*eskîmê*), “metaphors” (or “borrowed terms”; *ashilāthâl sh’lāthâ*), “parabolic expressions” (*pelāthâ*), “images” (*ṣurāthâ* or *ṣalmê*), “likenesses” (*demwāthâ*), or “shadows” (*ṭelānyāthâ*).<sup>30</sup> His keen interest in this matter is reflected in the separate *mêmṛâ* Jacob penned, “On the *râzê*, the types, and the images of the Messiah,” in which he listed 121 occurrences of typological references to Christ and of his economy of salvation in the Old Testament.<sup>31</sup> In what was undoubtedly a polemical ploy, he addressed the *mêmṛâ* to an unnamed Jew, perhaps intended to be a stand-in for his Nestorian christological adversaries. At the end of this composition, which so boldly links the Old and New Testaments, Jacob remarks,

Moses is true and all his sayings are true;  
true too are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.<sup>32</sup>

Jacob expands on this theme in his *mêmṛâ*, “On the Veil on Moses’ Face,” saying:

Jesus is a radiant light in the Scriptures, and so  
a veil is thrown over Him so that He might be Hidden  
from the sight of spectators.  
That veil of Moses openly cries out to the entire world  
that the words in the Scriptures are likewise veiled:  
Moses is the model (*dmūthâ*) of all that is uttered in prophecy,  
providing a type (*ṭupsâ*) for the veiled character of the Old Testament.<sup>33</sup>

For Jacob, the Evangelists were the ones who unveiled the veiled words of the prophets. He made this explicit in his *mêmṛâ*, “On the Transfiguration of Our Lord,” where, according to the Gospel narrative, Peter, James, and John accompanied Jesus up the mountain, where Moses and Elijah also appeared (see Matt 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36). In his *mêmṛâ*, Jacob says of the Lord,

<sup>30</sup> See Boulos Sony, “Méthode exégétique.”

<sup>31</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, III:305–21. A modern scholar counts almost 150 instances of what he calls “sets of typological networks” just in a selection of Jacob’s “Festal Homilies.” See Kollamparampil, *Salvation in Christ*, 306–20.

<sup>32</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, III:321.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted with slight changes from Brock, *Homily on the Veil*, 18–19. See also Jacob’s extended reflections on this theme in the same *mêmṛâ*, 14–5, including the statement: “The Father kept the son in concealment, without anyone being aware; but He wished to reveal this matter to the world in symbolic terms (*rāzānā’īth*).” Some lines further Jacob says of a biblical prophet’s word, of whom Moses is the type, that “his word requires ‘sons of the *rāzâ*’ to be [rightly] understood.” The “sons of the *rāzâ*” are those who know how to read the scriptures hermeneutically aright.

The keys of Moses He wished to confer upon John  
in order to allow him “in the beginning” (*brīshīth*)<sup>34</sup> to write spiritually  
(*rūḥānā’īth*),

so that instead of the son of Amram, there entered the son of Zebedee,  
that he too may become “the master scribe” of the *rāzē* of the divinity.  
That authority which was with Elijah, He had given to Simon  
in order to loose and to bind divinely as the “head of the household”  
(Matt 16:13–20)

He joined those of the household of Simon to the household of Moses  
so as to make the New equal with the Old in proclaiming Him.<sup>35</sup>

Jacob of Serūg’s hermeneutical typology is extensively at work in his exploration of the biblical narrative called “Abraham’s Trial,” in Genesis 22.<sup>36</sup> Jacob spoke of it in two places, extensively in a *mēmra* dedicated to “Abraham and his types,” which we shall study later, and briefly in the *mēmra*, “On the *rāzē*, the types and the images of the Messiah.” In the latter composition, Jacob speaks about Isaac as a prefiguration of Christ as follows.

The oblation of Isaac and of the ram that came down from the tree;  
there the Son and his death are depicted through a *rāzā* .  
And if it features only one ram for the sake of the *rāzā*,  
it depicts the virgin who in her virginity gave birth to just one.  
For as they say Golgatha was the mountain of Isaac,  
in that place of the crucifixion, his father bound him.  
Where Zion fastened the wood [of the cross] to crucify the Son,  
there grew the tree that bore the *rāzā*.  
Secretly, he gave the signal that he would sacrifice Isaac on Golgatha,  
so that the *rāzā* would be deployed on the mountain of the crucifixion.  
For three days Isaac was busy in the company of his father,  
in order to raise up the image (*šalmā*) of the death of the Son, and then  
be roused.  
On the third [day], he overcame killing and escaped from it;  
that was for the Son, who on the third [day] rose from the grave.  
Isaac bore the wood for his own sacrifice to that mountain,  
that was for the Son, who bore his own cross when he went out.<sup>37</sup>

Ephraem, too, saw in these events the foreshadowing of Christ’s crucifixion.  
Interestingly, he devoted only a paragraph in his commentary on Genesis 22  
to this typology that Jacob of Serūg would develop in great detail. Ephraem

<sup>34</sup> Note the implied connection of John 1:1, “Εν ἀρχῇ,” with Gen 1:1, *bereshit*.

<sup>35</sup> Kollamparampil, ed., *Homily*, 30–1. Translation slightly altered.

<sup>36</sup> See Brock, “Genesis 22”; idem, “Syriac Poetry,” 2. <sup>37</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, III:311–12.



was more interested in the aggadic problem of why Abraham concealed his plans from Sarah and the women of his household.<sup>38</sup> Only at the end of his comment did he speak elliptically of the typological significance of the sacrifice:

Abraham saw the ram in the tree. He put it up on the altar in place of his son. Isaac's question about the lamb testifies to the fact that there had not been a ram there before. And the wood that was on Isaac's shoulder certifies that no tree had been there. The mountain belched up the tree and the tree the ram. The day of that one who was hung on the wood [of the cross] like the ram was, and tasted death in behalf of the whole world, was depicted in the ram that was hung up in the tree and was there for the sacrifice in place of Abraham's son.<sup>39</sup>

Ephraem did, however, highlight the typology of the sacrifice of Isaac in one of his *madrāshê* "On the Crucifixion":

Come and see the living lamb,  
 who chose his own shepherds.  
 And he also chose his own slaughterers;  
 he gave Abram the knife to hold,  
 to kill his *râzâ*, the sheep.  
 He [Abraham] killed his *râzâ* and he saved his *râzâ*;  
 he saved the lamb [Isaac] and he killed the ram.  
 By means of his *râzâ* he saved his *râzâ*,  
 to become the sum of the *râzê*.  
 Blessed be the one who has come and summed up all the *râzê*.<sup>40</sup>

This translation, though rough, has the virtue both of clearly showing Ephraem's typological reading of the sacrifice of Isaac and of putting the operative hermeneutical term *râzâ* in high relief. In Jacob of Serûg's *mêmrâ* on Genesis 22 (see the following text) the term is similarly prominent, and it even acquires a virtual life of its own as the exegetical marker that flags the typological reading of numerous details in the scriptural narrative. In his more far-ranging discovery of typologies, however, Jacob goes significantly beyond both Ephraem's and his own contemporary Narsai's deployment of typological constructions put upon sundry details in Old Testament narratives.<sup>41</sup> One wonders if Jacob's championing of the "one-nature" Christology in the controversies of his time did not condition him to find a more abundant presence of Christ's *râzê* in the Old

<sup>38</sup> Other Christian writers, including Syriac ones, followed Ephraem's interest in Sarah; see Brock, "Sarah and the Aqedah"; idem, "Where was Sarah?"

<sup>39</sup> Tonneau, *Ephraem in Genesis et in Exodum Commentarii*, 84.

<sup>40</sup> Beck, ed., *Paschalhymnen, de Crucifixione*, II:7. <sup>41</sup> See Frishman, "Type and Reality."

Testament than the followers of Theodore of Mopsuestia and the Antiochene school more generally would be prepared to recognize.

### 3 “On Abraham and his Types”

With its 439 verses, Jacob of Serūg’s *Mēmṛā* 109, “On Abraham and his Types,” is one of his longer exegetical homilies.<sup>42</sup> Though it presents Jacob’s interpretive methodology at close quarters, it has received little scholarly attention.<sup>43</sup> The liturgical occasion for the composition of this homily was the proclamation of the Gospel passage appointed for Easter week (John 8:28–59), in which the verse appears, “Abraham longed to see my day; he saw it and rejoiced” (John 8:56). Jacob addresses his words to the Son of God, whose help he implores in the composition of the *mēmṛā*. He says,

O Son of God, my mind longs for your great *rāzā*;  
grant that I might open it up for the audience who will rejoice in it.  
The suffering of your death calls me [to tell] its story;  
give me your hand to travel quickly in telling of you.  
My wretched tongue is eager to recount your history;  
just as Abraham was longing to see your day. (John 8:56)  
If the just one saw you in the lamb,<sup>44</sup> and rejoiced in you,  
I the unworthy one will see you in the homily (*mēmṛā*). Console me.  
Abraham rejoiced in the lamb, in which your *rāzē* were depicted.  
Make me to rejoice in the homily in which your beauty is shown.  
The great *rāzā* shone forth in the ram that was from the tree,  
and it both loosed the bonds of the boy Isaac and rejoiced his father.  
For the old man longed to see the Son’s day;  
how salvation would come about at the hands of our Lord.  
When his mind was kindled with this thought,  
the *rāzā* blazed up and displayed its beauty in allusions.<sup>45</sup>

At the very end of the *mēmṛā*, Jacob harks back to the leitmotif of the whole composition in the concluding verse: “Abraham sacrificed the lamb

<sup>42</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:61–103.

<sup>43</sup> An exception is McCarron, “Epiphany of Mystical Symbols.” An edition and English translation by Sebastian P. Brock is scheduled to appear in the Gorgias Press series of translations of Jacob of Serūg’s *mēmṛē*. What appears to be an abbreviated recension of the work in the unpublished “*Mēmṛā* of Mār Jacob on Abraham and Isaac,” provides a glimpse into the transmission of Syriac homilies. The shorter text may have been abbreviated for liturgical efficiency, or the longer *Mēmṛā* 109 may have been put together (either by Jacob himself or by editors after his death) from pre-existing, shorter compositions – which might explain seeming disjunctions at several points in the text. See Mingana, *Collection*, 1010, referring to MS Mingana 546, ff. 72v–75v.

<sup>44</sup> That is to say, Abraham (the just one) saw Jesus in Isaac (the lamb).

<sup>45</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:61–2.

of the *râzé*, and set his son free; and he rejoiced in the day of the ‘Only-One,’ whose suffering is blessed.”<sup>46</sup> The active role of the hermeneutic marker *râzâ* is evident in this homily, in which it appears some fifty-two times. Often it is the subject of active verbs in the discourse, suggesting that for Jacob it has a virtual life of its own, almost as if it has the role of a narrator in the extended *haggadah* of Abraham and Isaac. The *râzé* in the account of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac gesture toward, point to, indicate (*r-m-z*), and even stand in for, particular moments in Christ’s subsequent Passion, death, and resurrection. Alongside the term *râzâ* Jacob liberally employs related Syriac terms that connote “type,” “image,” “likeness,” and “parabolic expression,” all parsed to show how the narrative elements of Isaac’s sacrifice exhibit a verbal icon of Christ’s crucifixion. This relation is so palpable for Jacob that he can say, echoing John 8:58, “Abraham rejoiced in the day of the Son that he saw in his own son.”<sup>47</sup>

Jacob of Serûg refers to the narrative in Genesis 22 as the master *râzâ* (*râzâ rabbâ*).<sup>48</sup> At one point in the narrative, in answer to Isaac’s question to his father about the whereabouts of the lamb for the sacrifice, Abraham replies “The Lord will see to the lamb for His sacrifice,” (Gen 22:8), and Jacob highlights his perception of the typologically prophetic character of the verse: “The master *râzâ* is spoken here in a small phrase, and the manifest truth is declared in the narrative.”<sup>49</sup> Throughout Jacob’s *mêmrâ*, the *râzâ* is passively said to be spoken, inscribed, depicted, displayed, carried, and brought along its “way” (*’ûrhâ*). Jacob even uses this hermeneutical term to designate Abraham’s whole enterprise, as when he says that the patriarch “did not reveal to Sarah where he was going when he was setting out, nor did he disclose the *râzâ* to the youths he took with him.”<sup>50</sup> But at times the *râzâ* is also described proactively, being said to act as if on its own initiative. For example, Jacob says that when Abraham’s mind was kindled with the longing to see the day of the Son, “the *râzâ* blazed up and displayed its beauty in allusions (*rmîzâthâ*).”<sup>51</sup> Of Isaac, Jacob says that “the *râzâ* drew the lad on towards the killing.”<sup>52</sup> The homilist thus thinks of the *râzé* themselves as acting virtually *in persona Christi* in the words, phrases, and imagery of Genesis 22, and in the action that the text almost cinematically brings to mind. The patriarchal narrative, as Jacob reads it, mysteriously (*râzânâ’îth*) and in an anticipatory mode bespeaks the

<sup>46</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:103.

<sup>47</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:101.

<sup>48</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:61, 62, 86.

<sup>49</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:86.

<sup>50</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:70.

<sup>51</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:62.

<sup>52</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:70.

unfolding of the events of Christ's Passion, the Gospel account of which he sees as the template retroactively patterning the major moments in the drama of Abraham's binding of Isaac.

Jacob of Serūg's *mêmrâ* follows the text of Genesis 22 fairly closely, as he announces: "Let the history of Isaac come to the fore on its own; and when it is recounted, the *râzâ* will come to be spoken."<sup>53</sup> As Jacob launches into his exegetical homily he directly addresses the *râzâ*, "Come, O *râzâ*, look for me there, at the end of the *mêmrâ*," which will tell the story that "like a lictor, goes in front of you; you are like a king in a procession; you come at the end."<sup>54</sup> So Jacob says, "Let then the *râzâ* of the Son stand by the narrative, and let the story of Abraham's son proceed in an orderly fashion."<sup>55</sup> The *râzâ*, of course, is none other than the emblem of Christ himself.

Jacob comments on Genesis 22 verse by verse, composing his *mêmrâ* line by line in versified twelve-syllable couplets. He both quotes from and paraphrases the biblical text, interweaving exegetical comments and imagining the scene as it unfolds. He builds the drama skillfully, setting the scene in deft strokes; he highlights the dialogue between father and son, along the way revealing their inner, anxiety ridden dialogues with themselves. All the while he makes sure that his listeners, who know the story by heart, will hear the right interpretations. The numerous occurrences of the term *râzâ* and its synonyms resound like a constant drum-beat throughout the *mêmrâ*; amid the sharply depicted details of the heart-wrenching narrative there is no way the congregation could miss the homily's message.

Jacob explains why God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son: "He asked for Isaac, not because He was in need of sacrifices, but to betoken (*r-m-z*) the great killing of His own Son."<sup>56</sup> God put Abraham to the test not because He did not already know his heart, but "for the sake of the *râzâ*."<sup>57</sup> Abraham did not hesitate nor did he question God about earlier promises: "The *râzâ* smoldered within his mind and was blazing up in it; he was unable to withhold Isaac from the knife."<sup>58</sup> Jacob envisions God admonishing Abraham to emulate Him, willingly and without grief to offer up his only son. And like Ephraem in his commentary on Genesis, Jacob ponders why Abraham kept the matter a secret from Sarah. He says that between Abraham and his Lord, "they forged the *râzâ* and no one noticed"; and

<sup>53</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:62.

<sup>55</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:63.

<sup>57</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:64.

<sup>54</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:62.

<sup>56</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:63.

<sup>58</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:66.

Abraham “did not deign to reveal the Lord’s *râzâ* to his other half,” even though “his beloved Sarah was one who had observed His *râzê* in other places.”<sup>59</sup>

On the journey, Isaac did not question or go along ruefully, since “the *râzâ* came along to lead the boy to the killing.”<sup>60</sup> And when they arrived at the mountain of the sacrifice on the third day, Jacob says of Abraham, “The *râzâ* beckoned to him, ‘Come up to me; I am here. This is the mountain on which the salvation of the world will come about.’”<sup>61</sup> The wood that Isaac carried, the knife of the sacrifice, and all the details of the preparations for the sacrifice of Isaac on the mountain, says Jacob, are features of the narrative that also function as a verbal portrait of the future crucifixion of Christ. He says of the wood that Isaac carried, “The cross of the Son is depicted there by way of a *râzâ*; as in truth it was shown in that wood.”<sup>62</sup> The *râzâ*, according to Jacob, even approached the boy to prompt him to understand the proceedings.<sup>63</sup> As for Abraham himself, Jacob says, “The *râzâ* was traced out before Abraham in his son Isaac; it came to show forth its truth in action in the Son.”<sup>64</sup> And Jacob asks rhetorically, with reference to John 8:56, “If Isaac was not invested in the *râzâ* of the Son, at what time would Abraham have seen the day of the Son? How indeed would he have intently foreseen the crucifixion, if it had not been graven as a *râzâ* in his own son?”<sup>65</sup>

Bringing this long, meditative *mêmrâ* to a close, Jacob of Serûg speaks of Abraham and Isaac’s arrival at the top of the mountain. He says of Abraham, “The master-builder of faith drew near and measured out the foundation, to build there a house for the *râzê* that were to be performed.”<sup>66</sup> Like Ephraem before him, Jacob sees prophetic miracles in the tree that appears of a sudden on the mountain, with the ram entangled in its branches. Jacob says that these foreshadow even the virgin birth of the Son. At the end he says of Abraham, “The *râzê* concealed in the sacrifice of his son were explained for him; he came to understand the ‘parabolic events’ (*pelâthâ*) that happened there . . . The conception, birth, killing and death were shown to him, even the resurrection, all the *râzê* of events yet to come.”<sup>67</sup> The *mêmrâ* ends on a note of praise: “Abraham sacrificed the lamb of the *râzê*, and he set his son free, he rejoiced in the day of the ‘Only [Son]’; blessed be his suffering.”<sup>68</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:69.

<sup>61</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:75.

<sup>63</sup> See Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:82.

<sup>65</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:87.

<sup>67</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:101–2.

<sup>60</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:70.

<sup>62</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:81.

<sup>64</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:87.

<sup>66</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:90.

<sup>68</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:103.

#### 4 Typology and allegory

Scholars often characterize the exegesis of early Syriac writers such as Ephraem and Jacob as Antiochene. This usually means that they are more concerned with the literal sense and historical setting than were their colleagues in the so-called Alexandrian tradition, who were allegedly more inclined toward allegorical interpretation.<sup>69</sup> This may be the case for many of their better known, formal biblical commentaries, especially those associated with members of the Church of the East who expressly followed Theodore of Mopsuestia, the major theoretician of the so-called Antiochian school. But our close reading of the unfolding homily “On Abraham and his Types” and the course of its hermeneutical markers, the *râzê*, reveals the typological character of Jacob’s exegetical thought. It also highlights the continuity with Ephraem’s method of reading the stories of the patriarchs and prophets through the lens of the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth’s apostles and disciples recorded in the New Testament.

Especially revealing in this respect is the term *râzâ*, which is unique to Syriac interpretation, though often paraphrased in Syriac texts themselves by terminology more typical of early Christian interpretation, such as “type,” “image,” and “icon.”<sup>70</sup> While the term functions as a sort of “hermeneutical marker,” it also plays an important esoteric role in Syriac religious discourse more generally. As Edmund Beck noted long ago, in Syriac texts, and particularly in the works of Ephraem the Syrian, the term bespeaks “mystery.”<sup>71</sup> Like a “sacrament” (*sacramentum*) in western Christian thought (*mysterion* in Greek), it discloses to the believer the real presence of “God in Christ,” acting and speaking in salvation history. For Ephraem and Jacob, Christ is “Lord of the *râzê*.” The *râzâ* is thus virtually personified in many places in Jacob’s *mêmrâ*, “On Abraham and his Types.” As the avatar of Christ it seems to indicate Christ himself directing the course of events, even the dialogue and the movements of the *dramatis personae* in the panorama opened up by the biblical narrative.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Guinot, “La frontier.” The Antiochenes are said to prefer typological rather than allegorical interpretation. Though this commonplace has been shown to be inadequate and even misleading, it continues in the scholarly discussion, almost always in reference to early Christian writers in Greek and Latin. Little attention has been paid to the hermeneutics of Syriac interpretation, except to characterize it, broadly speaking, as Antiochene.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, the citation at [Note 19](#). The Greek origin of the Syriac terms for type and icon is evident.

<sup>71</sup> See Beck, “Symbolum-Mysterium”; Bou Mansour, *Théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, II:360–75.

Here typological exegesis has gone beyond itself to inaugurate a distinctive style of religious discourse in Syriac that has been called Symbolic theology.<sup>72</sup>

The symbols, the mysteries, or the “mystic symbols” as one is tempted to call the *râzê* that writers like Ephraem and Jacob of Serûg speak of in their *madrâshê* and *mêmrê*, are the hermeneutic markers they discern, which God, “who reveals (*galei*) the *râzê*” (Dan 2:28), has chosen as a humanly accessible, virtually visible idiom by which to communicate the news of the divine economy of salvation to His chosen people. In this view, the Gospel provides the hermeneutic lens that allows believers to bring the *râzê* in the Old Testament into focus as typological paradigms, even icons that as “types” profile before the fact, or foreshadow the shape of the saving events of Christ’s life, the “anti-types.” As we saw, Ephraem likened this process to the painter’s art, an image that Jacob also employs.

In an extended passage in the *mêmrâ* “On Abraham and his Types,” when according to the biblical narrative Abraham and Isaac have arrived at the mountain of sacrifice after a three-day journey, Jacob says:

When the son’s third day arrived,  
 and the journey of the “only one’s” *râzê* had come to an end,  
 Abraham looked up and saw the mountain to which he was travelling  
 and the Son’s standard (*nîshâ*) gave him the sign, “Up here, Old Man.”  
 When the way to the killing had been trodden, with all its milestones,  
 there was only one inn on it, that of the altar [of sacrifice].  
 The *râzâ* beckoned to him, “Come up to me; I am here;  
 this is the mountain on which the salvation of the world will  
 come about.”  
 “Come up and behold the live killing that is to be put on the altar,  
 the sacrifice that while not dying, is to be slaughtered by the knife” . . .  
 “Come, I will show you the day of the Son by means of signs (*rmîzâthâ*),  
 and I will explain to you about the killing of the ‘only one’.”  
 “Come to me and see the type of the truth (*tûpsâ dsharîrâthâ*);  
 consider me and you will have encountered the genuine reality.”  
 “Here the *pelâthâ* are set out, come, picture (*šûr*) them,  
 and bring down with you the great image (*šalmâ*) for the Son of God” . . .  
 “Direct your ship to this harbor, O mariner of the *râzê*,  
 for here the treasure is deposited, by which you will become rich.”  
 “Come, O painter, and take up godly colors,  
 and with choice pigments bring up the image (*šalmâ*) for the Son.”

<sup>72</sup> Standard descriptions of this discourse are found in Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*; Brock, “Poet as Theologian”; idem, *Luminous Eye*, 53–84.

“This is the place in which the truth is to be accomplished;  
do not pass by another milestone, lest you go astray.”<sup>73</sup>

Jacob here portrays the *râzâ* as speaking to Abraham, seemingly *in persona Christi*.

In addition to the associated hermeneutical terms “type” and “image,” the special term *pelâthâ* is used here, as the *râzâ* (=Christ) tells Abraham to picture/paint (*šûr*) them. One may translate *pelâthâ* “parabolic events” or “parabolic expressions,” since the term designates the events/expressions, even the *dramatis personae*, inscribed in the biblical narratives to which the *râzê* point. Jacob uses the term *pelâthâ* in three other places in the *mêmrâ*. (1) He says that Isaac “would be bound and go up to become a sacrifice, one of the *pelâthâ*.”<sup>74</sup> (2) He says that God the Father said to Abraham about the binding of his son, “Behold, I have invited you to a banquet full of *râzê*; recline and rejoice at the *pelâthâ* that are set out in it.”<sup>75</sup> And at the end of the *mêmrâ*, (3) Jacob says of Abraham, “The *râzê* concealed in the sacrifice of his son were explained for him, and he came to understand the *pelâthâ* that had happened there.”<sup>76</sup> Jacob seems to think of the *pelâthâ* as the paradigmatic or parabolic events set down in the scriptural narratives that in his view providentially and figuratively anticipate later events in Christ’s life.

Until now, we have characterized the interpretive method of Ephraem and Jacob as being typological. But the Syriac term *pelâthâ* has a biblical resonance that may point in another direction. It is used in the Peshitta (Syriac translation) at Galatians 4:24 to render the Greek term for “allegorizing,” which Paul invokes when he takes Abraham’s two sons, one from Hagar, the other from Sarah – the slave and the free woman – as being representative of the Jewish and Christian communities, who follow the old and new covenants, respectively.<sup>77</sup> This raises the question: Does the term *pelâthâ*, as used by Jacob, in the spirit of Ephraem, imply that these Syriac interpreters applied an allegorical mode of reading?

Unlike allegory, typology is usually said to require the integrity of both the literal and the historical dimensions of the biblical text.<sup>78</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia and his followers, including the Syriac-writer Narsai, took a strict constructionist’s view of inter-testamental typologies, discerning them in only carefully defined circumstances. Jacob of Serûg, on the other

<sup>73</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:75.

<sup>74</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:66.

<sup>75</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:68.

<sup>76</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:101.

<sup>77</sup> See the editorial introduction to this chapter. The Greek text actually says, speaking of Sarah and Hagar: αὗται εἰσὶν ἀλληγορούμεναι. The Peshitta renders this phrase, “these [women] are *pelâthâ* of the two covenants.”

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Guinot, “La frontier,” 223.



hand, following in the footsteps of Ephraem, was prepared to see typologies in many more minute details in the biblical narratives than was his contemporary Narsai.<sup>79</sup> We have seen this in Jacob's *mêmra* "On Abraham and his Types," in which the correspondences between the Genesis narrative of Abraham's Trial and Christ's Passion are perceived not only in the main outlines of the Isaac/Jesus narratives, but in the smaller details, which are taken by Jacob to have enabled Abraham virtually to foresee Jesus' whole messianic profile: "The conception, birth, killing and death were shown to him, even the resurrection, all the *râzê* yet to come."<sup>80</sup>

Typology here slides imperceptibly into incipient allegory. For while the broad outline of Isaac's sacrifice and salvation can be seen in Christian exegesis as the type anticipating the antitype of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, the additional connections Jacob sees between the mountain and Golgatha, the lamb and the ram, the wood and the cross, the tree with its entangled ram and the virgin birth, illustrate the process described by Jon Whitman in which "one level of the text or of the world deepens into another." In such a process, "such deeper levels gradually become as literally plain and substantially present as the original ones, so that even the most divergent transfers from literal to allegorical, from material to spiritual, participate in a single continuity . . . it sets even contraries—types and antitypes—in correspondence with one another."<sup>81</sup> The *râzê* that Ephraem and Jacob discern in the biblical narratives are the God-given pointers or markers inscribed in them that disclose the presence of the mystery at work in the very details of the story (*tash'ithâ*). This may well be characterized as typology with a soupçon of allegory, or perhaps even an all-encompassing allegory that functions by way of typology.

<sup>79</sup> Compare Jon Whitman's remark "Once the process of relegating one Scripture to the 'shadows' begins, it is difficult to stop the shadows from spreading" (*Allegory*, 68).

<sup>80</sup> Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae*, IV:102. <sup>81</sup> Whitman, *Allegory*, 67.

*“We have made it an Arabic Qur’an”*  
*The permissibility of translating scripture in Islam in contrast*  
*with Judaism and Christianity<sup>1</sup>*

*Meir M. Bar-Asher*

By late antiquity, the Bible had been subject to extensive reinterpretation in Judaism and Christianity, as discussed in the preceding chapters. The ethical, halakhic and theological sensibilities of rabbinic Judaism were projected midrashically onto the Hebrew Bible – the very text regarded by Christianity as the Old Testament and interpreted through the “hermeneutical lens” of the Gospels. Furthermore, the original Hebrew language of the Bible had become foreign not only to Christians (to whom it was virtually inaccessible), but even to most Jews, who lived in the Diaspora. It was therefore translated by Jews into Greek and Aramaic before the Common Era, and the Christian Bible was rendered in Syriac and Latin, followed by many other languages within the first Christian centuries.

The Qur’an and its place in Islam are different on all of these counts. It announces itself as being written in “clear Arabic” (*lisān ‘arabi mubīn*), an unequivocal divine message conveyed through Muhammad. In the first generations of Islam, a desire to preserve its pristine uniqueness and self-sufficiency at times seems to have generated opposition to the very act of interpreting the Qur’an.<sup>2</sup> While the necessity of interpretation was eventually acknowledged, producing a vibrant *tafsīr* (commentary) tradition, the prospect of translating the Qur’an remained fraught with tension. Since its inception in the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century, the religious epicenter of Islam always remained within Arabic-speaking domains. Though the religion spread widely to non-Arab peoples and the Qur’an was transplanted to new linguistic contexts, its original Arabic format held a uniquely sacred status that, for many thinkers, precluded its translation.

<sup>1</sup> The verse cited in the title is taken from Q. 43:3. Translations of qur’anic verses in this chapter are those of Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, with occasional slight alterations. The formulation of this chapter has benefited from discussions with several colleagues in our Jerusalem group, whom I acknowledge with pleasure: Mordechai Cohen, Rita Copeland, Robert Gleave, Sidney Griffith, and Alastair Minnis.

<sup>2</sup> See [Note 38](#).

This opposition went hand-in-hand with the doctrine of *i'jāz al-qur'an*, that is, the Qur'an's miraculousness or "inimitability," which emerged by the third Muslim century (tenth century CE), and entailed the belief that its linguistic, stylistic, and conceptual excellence cannot be reproduced.<sup>3</sup> In his work *Dalā'il al-i'jāz* ("Indications of the *i'jāz*"), the grammarian and literary theorist 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078) aims to answer the following question:

What is it that first occurred in the Qur'an, namely imposing excellence, dazzling superiority and wondrous composition, to the point that it rendered all creatures powerless (*a'jaza al-khalq qāṭibatan*), and overwhelmed the faculties and abilities of the masters of rhetorical eloquence (*bulaghā'*) and poetic excellence (*fuṣṣahā'*), shackling the minds and thought [...] to the point that it made the valley overflow upon them with inability (*'ajz*) and seized from them the passageways of speech completely?<sup>4</sup>

According to most Muslim authorities, this stylistic excellence is uniquely manifest in the Qur'an in Arabic, and, remarkably, some argue that it has the power to enchant even non-Arabic speakers.<sup>5</sup> Debates within Islam thus ensued regarding the permissibility of translating the Qur'an and, furthermore, whether such translations might be used for ritual purposes. The current chapter explores key features of these debates in the medieval and modern periods, and shows how they shed light, by comparison, on Jewish and Christian encounters with the Bible.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

The standing of the Qur'an in Islam and its place in Muslim consciousness are shaped by two principles stated in the scripture itself: the belief that the Qur'an is the word of God, and that it is written in "clear Arabic speech," in what would later be described as sublime language to which no mortal can aspire. From its beginnings, Islam therefore faced the question: can the Qur'an be translated into other languages? The debate over this question among jurists, theologians, and Qur'an commentators from the early centuries of Islam to the present shines a spotlight on the Muslim perception of its sacred scripture.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Martin, "Inimitability"; Vasalou, "Miraculous Eloquence."

<sup>4</sup> Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-i'jāz*, introduction, 9. Translation from Larkin, "Inimitability," 31, with adjustments.

<sup>5</sup> See Note 37.

<sup>6</sup> For other recent discussions of this subject, see Tibawi, "Is the Qur'an Translatable?"; Amir-Moezzi, "Persian," 60–3. Travis Zadeh's recently published volume, *The Vernacular Qur'an*, came to my attention after submission of the final version of this chapter, too late for me to address in this study.

## I An Arabic Qur'an

The Arabic nature of the Qur'an is expressed in the numerous verses that state the obvious: that the book is written in Arabic. This declaration is augmented by statements that repeatedly emphasize the clarity and purity of this tongue. For example: "this is clear Arabic speech (*lisān 'arabī mubīn*)" (Q. 16:101–103); "an Arabic Qur'an, wherein there is no crookedness" (Q. 39:28). Verses like these reveal that the nature of the Qur'an's language is not merely a technical matter, but rather constitutes the very heart of its characterization as a sacred text. As Alī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), the Andalusian scholar of the Zāhirī school of law,<sup>7</sup> remarks:

God, May He be exalted, said: "an Arabic Qur'an" (Q. 12:3); and He further said: "And We have sent no Messenger save with the tongue of his people, that he might make all clear to them" (Q. 14:4). [God] explained in pure language that He sent Muhammad, peace be upon him, and brought down to him the Qur'an in no language save Arabic. Accordingly, one who reads in any language other than Arabic does not read what God sent by means of His prophet, peace be upon him, and he does not read the Qur'an.<sup>8</sup>

Muslim scholars knew that the Bible had been translated from its original languages into others (including Arabic), but denied that the Qur'an was translatable. *Ta'wīl mushkil al-qur'an* ("The interpretation of the difficult [passages] of the Qur'an") by the literary critic and qur'anic scholar 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) thus says:

No translator is able to render [the Qur'an] into any [other] language, as the Gospel was translated from Syriac into Ethiopic and Greek; and the Torah, Psalms (*al-zabūr*), and other books of God into Arabic. For in terms of figurative language (*majāz*), the non-Arabs are not as rich as the Arabs (*al-'ajama lā tattasi'u fī l-majāz [i]ttisa'a l-'arab*).<sup>9</sup>

Ibn Qutayba illustrates this claim with examples of figurative language (*majāz*) in the Qur'an and demonstrates that they cannot be fully captured

<sup>7</sup> There are four major Sunni schools of Muslim jurisprudence and law (*fiqh*): Ḥanafīs, named after Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767); Mālikīs, named after Mālik b. Anas (d. 795); Shāfi'īs, named after al-Shāfi'ī (d. 820); and Ḥanbalīs, named after Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855). The Zāhirī school, influential in the middle ages, is now virtually extinct.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Ḥazm, *Muḥallā*, IV:159.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Mushkil*, 21; see also Tibawi, "Is the Qur'an Translatable?" 12–13. On the early Jewish and Christian Arabic translations of the Bible that Ibn Qutayba may have known, see Griffith, *Bible in Arabic*, 127–74.

in translation.<sup>10</sup> Even if one could successfully determine and render the primary intention of a figurative expression in the Qur'an, its overtones are inevitably lost in translation.

Whereas Ibn Qutayba points to an empirical consideration to bar the translation of the Qur'an, a more theoretical objection is raised in the "Epistles of the Brethren of Purity" (*Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'*), a philosophically oriented treatise apparently composed in the fourth/tenth century. Epistle 17 distinguishes Arabic from other languages:

The perfect language is the language of the Arabs, and the purest speech is the speech of the Arabs; all else is deficient. The standing of the Arabic language in relation to the other languages is as that of man in comparison to the other creatures.<sup>11</sup>

The corollary relates to the Qur'an:

The domination of the Prophet's religion over all religions, and his language over all languages, is due to the fact that the Qur'an is the most distinguished book (*akramu qur'an*)<sup>12</sup> that God, may He be exalted, brought down, and it is the noblest book (*ashrafu kitāb*) that He established. None of the nations with their various languages are capable of translating it from Arabic into the language of some other nation, as it is totally impossible to be rendered in another language on account of its brevity and its conciseness.<sup>13</sup>

Given the superiority of the Arabic language, the Qur'an cannot be rendered in any other language.

A related argument against translation emerged from the doctrine of *i'jāz al-Qur'an* that attributed a special stylistic "inimitability" to this sacred scripture. The term *i'jāz* is derived from the verb *a'jaza*, meaning *to make someone powerless*. The active participle *mu'jiz* thus applied to the Qur'an would mean that "it makes one powerless, amazed by the intensity of its loftiness." This "miraculously excellent" sublimity of the Qur'an was described in a number of ways by Muslim theorists. Some defined it in terms of its uniquely effective poetic and rhetorical style (*faṣāḥa, balāgha*) and figurative language (*majāz*).<sup>14</sup> Others spoke more broadly of the

<sup>10</sup> On the involved Muslim discussions regarding *majāz* in the Qur'an, see [Chapter 11](#).

<sup>11</sup> *Rasā'il*, III:144.

<sup>12</sup> The word *qur'an* is used here in the general sense of *a book*. It might also be rendered "recitation" (from the root *q-r-'*, i.e., to recite).

<sup>13</sup> *Rasā'il*, III:164–5. Brevity and conciseness are characteristics of poetic elegance commonly ascribed to the Qur'an. See, for example, Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics*, 126.

<sup>14</sup> This approach emerges, for example, in *Dalā'il al-i'jāz* by al-Jurjānī ([Note 4](#)), and in *I'jāz al-qur'an* by the legal scholar and literary theorist Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Tayyib al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013). See von Grunebaum, *Tenth-Century Document*; Vasalou, "Miraculous Eloquence," 33–9.

special, almost enchanted, quality of the arrangement of the Qur'an's language. The term used to describe this arrangement – *naẓm* (lit. string of pearls) – conveys the sense of the stylistic-poetical quality of the words.<sup>15</sup> According to some Muslim authorities, this sort of word-music makes an impression even on the soul of a listener who does not understand Arabic.<sup>16</sup>

The implications of these doctrines for the translation of the Qur'an are brought to light in the statements ascribed to the leading proponents of the Ḥanafī school of law Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī al-Kūfī (d. 182/798) and Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 187/802), both prominent students of Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) himself. They are cited here from the work *Badā'ī' al-ṣanā'ī' fī tarīb al-sharā'ī'* by 'Alā' al-Dīn Abī Bakr ibn Mas'ūd al-Kāsānī (d. 587/1189), also a leading jurist of the Ḥanafī school:

The Qur'an is [the book] that was brought down in the Arabic language. God, May He be exalted, said: "We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an . . ." (12:3). Since the Qur'an is *mu'jiz*, and *i'jāz* in terms of utterance is lost when the *naẓm* of the Arabic is lost, a Persian [Qur'an] is not [deemed to be] the Qur'an, for it lacks the *i'jāz*. Consequently, a person in a state of impurity or a menstruating woman are not forbidden from reading it.<sup>17</sup>

To illustrate the implications of their claim of the inferiority of a translation, these sages of the Ḥanafī school rule that one who reads a translated Qur'an need not be in a state of purity, though normally a Muslim must be in a state of purity when touching or reading the Qur'an.<sup>18</sup> Although a meaning-to-meaning translation of this scripture might be possible, the loss of *i'jāz* in the process makes the resultant book lose the ritual status of the Qur'an. In other words, it is the mysterious and irreproducible *i'jāz* that endows the Qur'an with its ritual status.<sup>19</sup>

The causal connection between the doctrine of *i'jāz al-qur'an* and the untranslatability of the Qur'an is, likewise, noted by the Qur'an commentator Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (1074/5–1143/44):

In the speech of the Arab—especially in the Qur'an, which is miraculously inimitable (*mu'jiz*) in terms of the purity of its expression (or: its poetic

<sup>15</sup> See Larkin, *Theology of Meaning*, 50–3. <sup>16</sup> See Note 37.

<sup>17</sup> Kāsānī, *Badā'ī'*, 1:527. As noted there, Shāfi'ī, likewise, maintains that a translated Qur'an "is not a Qur'an."

<sup>18</sup> This law is based on Q. 56:79, "None but the purified shall touch it." See Kister, "*Lā yamassuhu*."

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Robert Gleave for this formulation.

excellence; *faṣāḥa*) and its wondrous style (*naẓm*), consisting of subtle meanings and intents (*laṭāʾif al-māʾānī wa l-aghbrād*)—there is something that Persian and other languages cannot convey by its rendition.<sup>20</sup>

This characteristic Muslim objection to translating the Qurʾan into other languages might seem surprising given the endeavor to disseminate Islam among non-Arab peoples.<sup>21</sup> Despite the potential benefit that translation of the Qurʾan might bring to such missionary activity, Muslim scholars wished to preserve its Arabic purity and expressed the lofty hope that all Muslims would learn Arabic in order to read the Qurʾan. In fact, the renowned theologian and Ḥanbalī jurist Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) ruled it a religious duty (*farḍ wājib*) for all Muslims to learn Arabic.<sup>22</sup> Whereas the Hebrew of the Bible had always been completely foreign to Christians, and even for Jews it had ceased to be a mother tongue already by late antiquity, the Arabic of the Qurʾan retained continuous vitality in Islam from its inception, since the epicenter of the religion was always in Arabic-speaking lands. Thus the prospect of making some knowledge of Arabic a religious obligation was imaginable, at least theoretically. In this spirit, the modern Syrian jurist Muṣṭafā Aḥmad al-Zarqāʾ argues that Arabic is actually the mother tongue of all Muslims (even non-Arabs), who are said in the Qurʾan (33:6) to be descended from the Prophet's wives, and they naturally spoke Arabic. Hence, he reasons, the endeavor of any Muslim to master Arabic is simply recovering a forgotten mother tongue, rather than learning a new language.<sup>23</sup>

Yet many Muslim thinkers understood that this ideal could not be realized, and therefore grappled with the need to translate the Qurʾan so that it could be studied by all Muslims and perhaps even used in the obligatory prayers. It is to these issues that we now turn.

## 2 Translation of the Qurʾan

Notwithstanding the theoretical opposition voiced over the centuries, in practice the Qurʾan has long been translated into other languages. While

<sup>20</sup> Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, III:506, on Q. 44:43–4; also quoted by Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ*, XVI:99–100, in his commentary on these verses. See also Ḥusayn, “*Naql maʾānī*,” 123. For other sources in this vein, see Amir-Moezzi, “Persian,” 65–7.

<sup>21</sup> The desire to spread Islam widely is already expressed in the Qurʾan. See, for example, Q. 7:158, “Say: O Mankind, I am the Messenger of God to you all.” See also Note 41. On the role of translation as a means for the dissemination of Islam, on the one hand, and, on the other, contending with Christian missionary activity, see Maʾayergī, “Translations.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidāʾ*, 206–7; see also Cook, *Koran*, 26–7. <sup>23</sup> See al-Zarqāʾ, *Fatāwā*, 106–7.

the earliest extant translation of the Qur'an – into Persian – dates to the tenth century, there are testimonies of earlier translations into other languages, such as Syriac and Greek; and the Qur'an was subsequently translated into many other languages.<sup>24</sup> Most translations by Muslims were in one of two formats: interlinear translation, and translations in which the original and translation appear on facing pages. In both cases, the superiority of the original is indicated by calligraphic and typographic means: the original is written (or printed) in a fine and elegant script, while the translation is relegated to a simple script; the original is set forth in large and prominent letters, while small letters are used for the translation. This differentiation conveys that the original Arabic text of the Qur'an must not be overshadowed by the translation.<sup>25</sup>

The disparity between theory and practice did not go unnoticed. Al-Zamakhsharī, who had declared so forcefully that the Qur'an cannot be properly rendered in other languages (Note 20), elsewhere acknowledges that the dissemination of the Qur'an among non-Arab peoples can be accomplished only by means of its translation. He thus remarks: "As we see the situation with our own eyes, in every foreign nation translations serve as proxy [for the original]."<sup>26</sup>

Other Muslim jurists actually sought to establish a theoretical legal basis to permit the translation of the Qur'an by rebutting the weighty objections of earlier authorities. As noted earlier, Ibn Qutayba had argued that the richness of the Qur'an's figurative expressions (*majāzāt*) eludes translation. While a literal translation of the wording (*lafẓ*) of a figurative expression is misleading, simply rendering its meaning (*ma'nā*) into another language is problematic, since it loses the vividness and overtones of the original figurative expression. For example, Ibn Qutayba cites the metaphoric expression *fa-ḍarbanā 'alā ādhānihim* (Q. 18:11) said by God in reference to "the people of the cave," which might be rendered literally (though awkwardly) "We struck upon their ears."<sup>27</sup> For the verb *ḍaraba* ("to strike") Ibn Qutayba offers the synonym *istaghlaqa* ("to close," "to obscure" something), implying that this expression might be

<sup>24</sup> See Cook, *Koran*, 88–93; Amir-Moezzi, "Persian," 60–4; Mingana, "Syriac," 188–235; Argyriou, "Perceptions," 25–69 (my thanks to Sidney Griffith for the last two references); Salāmāh, *Manuscripts*, 63–5.

<sup>25</sup> Cook, *Koran*, 88–94.

<sup>26</sup> Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, II:366; also cited by Ma'ayergi, "Translations"; see also Shaltūt, *Tarjamat al-qur'ān*, 125, 127, 130.

<sup>27</sup> Compare the Qur'an translations of Rodwell ("Then struck we upon their ears with deafness" [*Koran*, 189]) and Blachère ("Nous fimes le silence à leurs oreilles" [*Koran*, 319]).



rendered literally “we blocked their ears,” which is no less enigmatic.<sup>28</sup> So much for a literal translation of the wording (*lafẓ*). Ibn Qutayba understands the meaning (*maʿnā*) of this figurative expression to be “We cast a deep sleep upon them (*anammāhum*).” But to translate the phrase accordingly is problematic, since it limits the connotations of God’s original metaphorical wording, and furthermore there is no guarantee that it is not an erroneous interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

Ironically, Ibn Qutayba’s objections were taken as the starting point for a relativistic stance, that is, that the inability to produce a perfect translation of the Qur’an should not preclude efforts to compose a reasonable one. The Andalusian scholar of the Mālikī school, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388), in his legal work *al-Muwāfaqāt fī uṣūl al-sharīʿa*, argues that the “primary meanings” (*al-maʿānī al-aṣliyya*) of the Qur’an’s figurative expressions must be distinguished from their “accompanying meanings” (*maʿānī khādima / tābiʿa*). He argues that when interpreting the Qur’an – in Arabic – to the masses, who are incapable of understanding its deep meanings, one may convey the primary meaning only, and forego the further connotations and their accompanying meanings. Therefore, it is permissible to translate the Qur’an into another language in accordance with the primary meaning (*al-maʿnā al-aṣlī*).<sup>30</sup>

The reasoning of al-Shāṭibī achieved greater prominence in the twentieth century, when three leaders of al-Azhar university unreservedly supported the translation of the Qur’an: Sheikh Muḥammad Mustafā al-Marāghī (d. 1945),<sup>31</sup> Sheikh Muḥammad al-Khiḍr Ḥusayn (d. 1958),<sup>32</sup> and Sheikh Maḥmūd Shaltūt (d. 1963),<sup>33</sup> all of whose opinions were published in the *Nūr al-islām* journal (later renamed *Majallat al-Azhar*). Al-Marāghī begins his presentation by summarizing the traditional arguments against translation: (1) the *iʿjāz* argument, that is, that the miraculous inimitability of God’s word cannot be reproduced in translation. Closely related is (2) the *naẓm* argument, that is, that the majestic and sublime *naẓm* of the Qur’an that exerts tremendous influence on a person’s soul is absent in translation. Therefore, al-Marāghī explains (according to those who opposed translation) a person who reads or listens to the Qur’an in

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Mushkil*, 22. <sup>29</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Mushkil*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> Shāṭibī, *Muwāfaqāt*, II:51; see also Marāghī, *Baḥth*, 80; Costet-Tardieu, *Reformiste*, 240; Shaltūt, *Tarjamāt al-qurʾān*, 126; Ḥusayn, *Naql maʿānī*, 124.

<sup>31</sup> Served as the sheikh of al-Azhar in 1928–9, and again in 1935–45; see Costet-Tardieu, *Reformiste*; Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary*, 123–4.

<sup>32</sup> Served as the sheikh of al-Azhar in 1951–8; see Najīb, *Aʿlām*, 408.

<sup>33</sup> Served as the sheikh of al-Azhar in 1958–63; see Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary*, 187–8.

translation severs himself from the pure expression of divine knowledge. (3) A different sort of argument stems from the need to paraphrase some of the Qur'an's language rather than translate it word-for-word, which can lead to distortion of its original intent. This is especially true in the case of *majāz*, where a translation must forgo the rich connotations of the original expressions.<sup>34</sup>

To counter the first two arguments, al-Marāghī reasons that the *naẓm*, which lies at the heart of the *i'jāz*, cannot be appreciated fully by a non-Arabic speaker. Admittedly, learning Arabic can facilitate awareness of the marvelous nature of the Qur'an, but its complete understanding depends upon a linguistic sensibility (*al-dhawq al-lughawī*) possible only for a native speaker or for someone whose nature actually becomes Arabic (*aṣṣaḥat salā'iquhu 'arabiyya*).<sup>35</sup> The Arabic *naẓm* thus cannot influence the souls of the masses of non-Arab Muslims; but a translation allows them to benefit from the Qur'an's conceptual sublimity (*ṭalāwat al-ma'ānī*).<sup>36</sup> (Modern conservative Muslim scholars who opposed translation responded by asserting that the influence of the Qur'an's *naẓm* on the listener's soul is divorced from understanding its content. In other words, the poetical, conceptual, and musical sublimity of the Qur'an has an effect upon the listener's soul, even through the barrier of language.<sup>37</sup>)

Relating to the third argument, al-Marāghī acknowledges a translation's inability to capture certain felicities of the original Arabic, especially in the case of figurative language. Some words have a double-entendre or might carry opposing connotations (referred to in Arabic as *aḍḍād*, that is, a word that denotes a thing and its opposite), in which case, the translator must select one meaning and forgo the others. To justify the limiting nature of translation in such cases, al-Marāghī refers to Shāṭibī's observation regarding the close relationship between translation and interpretation (cited earlier in this section). In the early Muslim centuries, the very act of interpreting the Qur'an was largely regarded as superfluous and even seems to have been opposed; but eventually the need for interpretation was accepted universally.<sup>38</sup> Once interpretation is permitted, al-Marāghī argues, translation, which is a type of interpretation, is permitted by implication.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Marāghī, *Baḥth*, 81–2.

<sup>35</sup> Marāghī, *Baḥth*, 85.

<sup>36</sup> Marāghī, *Baḥth*, 90.

<sup>37</sup> See Riḍā, "Tarjamat al-qur'ān," 272.

<sup>38</sup> Some scholars have argued that interpretation (*tafsīr*) of the Qur'an was originally opposed categorically. See Goldziher, *Schools*, 36–64. While this view has been challenged, scholars generally acknowledge that controversies surrounded the early development of *tafsīr al-qur'ān*. See Leemhuis, "Origins," 14–19.

<sup>39</sup> Marāghī, *Baḥth*, 79–80.

This justification, however, implied a certain reservation about the translation project, which would inevitably remain imperfect. In this spirit, Muslim scholars insisted that a Qur'an translation be labelled *tarjamat al-ma'ānī* ("translation of the meanings") or *tarjama tafsīriyya* ("interpretive translation"), to indicate that it captures only the basic meaning of the text – more precisely, one of its possible meanings – and not the full glory and richness of the original Arabic Qur'an.<sup>40</sup> This distinction is reflected, for instance, in 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī's translation, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Beltsville, MD 1989) and in Nouredine ben Mahmoud's translation *Les sens du Saint Qoran* (Beirut 1984).

Drawing upon the theoretical foundation established by his predecessors, the later sheikh of al-Azhar Maḥmūd Shaltūt went so far as to say that translation of the Qur'an is obligatory:

If we consider that translation is a means for the dissemination of the laws [of Islam] and the guidance [of people] for the straight path to which the Qur'an [directs], we will not question even for a moment that [the act of translation] is not only something that is permitted to us, but also an obligation imposed upon us, since God did not send down the Qur'an so that its contents would remain concealed from those who are not Arabs. On the contrary ... the Messenger [of God] ... commanded him to make it clear for all people ... as God says, "We have sent down to you the Remembrance that you may make clear to mankind what was sent down to them, and so they may reflect" (Q. 16:44)... whether in the language [of God's Messenger] or not in his language. According to this verse and many like it, translation of [the Qur'an] is an obligation, and one of the fundamentals of the religion.<sup>41</sup>

Using this reasoning, al-Marāghī and his colleagues even acknowledged that non-Arab peoples may learn the religious precepts and laws of Islam from translations of the Qur'an.<sup>42</sup>

These opinions of al-Marāghī and Shaltūt were not merely theoretical; they were intended to support an official translation project, as indicated in the preface to al-Marāghī's learned essay:

<sup>40</sup> See Shaltūt, *Tarjamat al-qur'ān*, 130; Ḥusayn, "Naql ma'ānī," 131.

<sup>41</sup> Shaltūt, *Tarjamat al-qur'ān*, 127–8. For his polemics against the opponents of translation, see *Tarjamat al-qur'ān*, 131–4.

<sup>42</sup> Marāghī, *Baḥṭh*, 89. Compare the remark of the Shāfi'ī jurist Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277): "Those who are not Arabs will be capable of understanding [the words of Muhammad's] admonition only in translation (*wa-l-'ajam lā ya'qilūna al-indhār illā bi-tarjamatihī*)." See al-Nawawī, *Majmū'*, III:479.

Upon the initiation by the 'Ulamā' of al-Azhar, in cooperation with the Education Ministry, of the project for rendering the meanings of the glorious Qur'an (*tarjamat ma'ānī al-qur'ān al-karīm*)<sup>43</sup> into the most well-known European languages, we saw fit to publish a comprehensive study by Muḥammad al-Marāghī, sheikh of the al-Azhar mosque.<sup>44</sup>

This project was initially blessed, after much indecision, by King Fuad. Once it took shape, however, it gave rise to opposition, led by Sheikh Fakhr al-Dīn al-Zawāhirī (d. 1944),<sup>45</sup> and the project ultimately died in its infancy.<sup>46</sup>

Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), a founder of the modernist movement in Islam and a neo-Ḥanbalī legal thinker, likewise authored a *fatwā* (legal opinion) forcefully opposing attempts to translate the Qur'an.<sup>47</sup> His negative stance was undoubtedly spurred by translations deemed objectionable from a traditionalist Muslim perspective.<sup>48</sup> Muslim scholars like Riḍā were particularly offended by translations of Christian missionaries, which disparaged Islam. For example, the Qur'an in the Yoruba language of Nigeria by Michael Samuel Cole was explicitly penned to "help the cause of Christianity, and dispel the darkness of the ignorance that . . . prevails among the Mohammedans in Yorubaland."<sup>49</sup> Muslim scholars likewise sharply criticized Qur'an translations by Western Orientalists (as they were then called) that rearranged its suras according to their academic literary-historical criteria, for example Richard Bell's *The Qur'an Translated with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh 1937–9) and Régis Blachère's *Le Coran: Traduction selon un essai de reclassement des Sourates* (Paris 1949).<sup>50</sup> Traditionalist Muslim sages also rejected the translations that emerged from the Aḥmadiyya movement (considered heretical), such as *The Holy Qur'an* by Muḥammad 'Alī Lahori.<sup>51</sup> The 1932 modern

<sup>43</sup> On the term *tarjamat al-ma'ānī* ("rendering the meanings"), see Note 40.

<sup>44</sup> Marāghī, *Baḥth*, 77.

<sup>45</sup> He was sheikh of al-Azhar from 1929–35, the interval between the two terms of al-Marāghī. See Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary*, 237.

<sup>46</sup> See Costet-Tardieu, *Reformiste*, 235–46; see also Shaltūt, *Tarjamat al-qur'ān*, 123.

<sup>47</sup> Riḍā, *Tarjamat al-qur'ān*. See also Abou Sheishaa, "Study."

<sup>48</sup> Ḥusayn, "Naql ma'ānī," 130; Loimeier, "Translating," 410–11.

<sup>49</sup> Abou Sheishaa, "Study," §5.3 and note 119. See also Ma'ayergi, "Translations," 172, on which Abou Sheishaa bases his remarks.

<sup>50</sup> For the historical-critical approach underlying these "re-arrangement translations," see Nöldeke, Schwally and Bergsträsser, *Geschichte*, vol. II.

<sup>51</sup> Abou Sheishaa, "Study," § 5.2; Loimeier, "Translating," 411. The Aḥmadiyya is a proselyting messianic reform movement in Islam, founded in India and based on the teachings of Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad (d. 1908), who regarded himself as Messiah (*mahdī*) appointed by God to reform and restore Islam. See Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*.

Turkish translation of the Qur'an was published without the Arabic original alongside it and was used in the mosques of Turkey – a reform that likewise drew harsh criticism from conservative Muslims.<sup>52</sup>

### 3 Qur'an translation in prayer

The contentious issue of the permissibility of translating the Qur'an is closely related to another question: Can a Muslim fulfill his obligatory prayers with Qur'an passages recited in a language other than Arabic? In each of the five daily prayers, the opening sura of the Qur'an (*sūrat al-fātiḥa*), and at least three verses from an additional sura must be recited.<sup>53</sup> This question was especially urgent in the case of non-Arabs who do not understand the Qur'an in its original language or might mispronounce it.

The three opinions on this matter within Muslim law are cited by the aforementioned Ḥanafī jurist Kāsānī:

- (1) Abū Ḥanīfa himself ruled categorically that the obligation to recite the Qur'an in prayer may be fulfilled in any language, whether or not the worshipper is fluent in Arabic.
- (2) The aforementioned Ḥanafī jurists Abū Yūsuf al-Kūfī and Muḥammad al-Shaybānī permitted the recitation of the Qur'an in translation only for a worshipper who cannot pronounce the Arabic original.
- (3) The opinion of Shāfi'ī is that a Muslim cannot fulfill the obligation to recite the Qur'an in translation under any circumstances.<sup>54</sup>

The permissive Ḥanafī stance was rejected by the other Muslim schools of law (see [Note 7](#)), which concur with Shāfi'ī on this matter.<sup>55</sup> The recitation of the Qur'an in translation during prayer is disqualified, for example, by the Mālikī jurisprudent Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 543/1148),<sup>56</sup> by the

<sup>52</sup> See MacCallum, "Turkey," 24–8. This was a reflection of Turkish nationalism. See Cook, *Koran*, 26; Heyd, "Ziya Gökalp."

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Kāsānī, *Badā'ī*, I:526; Samarqandī, *Tuhfat al-fuqahā*, II:130; Shāshī, *Ḥilyat al-ūlamā*, I:183.

<sup>54</sup> Kāsānī, *Badā'ī*, I:527. The translation discussed by Kāsānī is Persian, which was the language of many Muslims in Iraq, the birthplace of the Ḥanafī school. But by analogy this permission was extended to other languages.

<sup>55</sup> For a summation of the legal positions among the four major Sunni schools of law on this matter, see Shaltūt, *Tarjamat al-qur'ān*, 128–30; Ḥusayn, "Naql ma'ānī," 124–6; Jazīrī, *Fiqh*, I: 218–20. For the Shi'ite attitude, see Amir-Moezzi, "Persian," 58–60.

<sup>56</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Aḥkām*, IV:88 (in his commentary to Q. 41:44); cited also by Ḥusayn, "Naql ma'ānī," 124.

famous Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist Ibn Taymiyya,<sup>57</sup> and by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), the great Shāfiʿī jurist and *ḥadīth* scholar (in his *Fath al-Bārī*, the extensive commentary on al-Bukhārī's compilation of *ḥadīth*).<sup>58</sup> As stated unequivocally by Ibn Ḥazm (of the Zāhirī school), one who recites from the Qur'an in any language other than Arabic is deemed to be one who "does not read [the words] that God sent by His Prophet, peace be on him, and does not read the Qur'an at all, but rather [is deemed] one who plays in his prayer; therefore, his prayer is not a prayer (*bal la'iba fī ṣalātihi wa-lā ṣalāta lahu*)."<sup>59</sup>

Notwithstanding its uniqueness in Muslim tradition, the permissive Ḥanafī view yields a rich theoretical discussion. As mentioned at Note 17, Kāsānī relates that Abū Yūsuf and Muḥammad al-Shaybānī argued that a translated Qur'an lacks the *iʿjāz* ("inimitability") property, and thus does not enjoy the sacred status of the original Arabic Qur'an. It is for this reason they do not permit one who is fluent in Arabic to fulfill the obligation to recite the Qur'an in translation. However, they meet Abū Ḥanīfa halfway by permitting one who does not know Arabic to do so. In their opinion, the obligation to recite qur'anic verses in prayer can be separated into two components: one is the linguistic component (*lafẓ*), which can be fulfilled in Arabic alone; the other is the conceptual component – the content (*ma'nā*) of the qur'anic verses – which can be expressed in translation. Since the law must make allowance for a Muslim who does not know Arabic ("because the obligation is in accordance with the ability [of the worshipper]"), it is permissible to fulfill only the second component by reciting the prayers in translation, even though a translated Qur'an is not a Qur'an at all.<sup>60</sup>

The view of Abū Ḥanīfa himself is the most far-reaching, for he argues that the "Arabicity" of the Qur'an is not, in fact, an essential property of its special status as the word of God. Therefore he permits the recitation of the Qur'an in translation even by one who is fluent in Arabic. This is Abū Ḥanīfa's view as summed up by Kāsānī:

Indeed, the obligation in prayer is to recite [from] the Qur'an. This is because it is language (*lafẓ*) that indicates the speech of God (*kalām Allāh*), may He be exalted, which is an attribute (*ṣifā*) existing in Him,<sup>61</sup> as it

<sup>57</sup> His epistle, entitled *al-sabʿūniyya*, is quoted in Ḥusayn, "Naql ma'ānī," 126. See also Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Ṭabaqāt*, I:401 (in biography no. 527: Yahyā b. Sa'īd).

<sup>58</sup> ʿAsqalānī, *Fath*, 15:496–7; Ḥusayn, "Naql ma'ānī," 126.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Ḥazm, *Muḥallā*, IV:159. See also the citation at Note 8. <sup>60</sup> Kāsānī, *Badā'i*, I:527.

<sup>61</sup> This expression would seem to be a reference to the doctrine of the eternal, uncreated Qur'an that exists as an attribute of the Divine essence. See Gardet, "Kalām," 469; Madelung, "Controversy."

contains admonition, exhortation, threat, and intimidation [to do good and avoid evil], and praising and glorification [of God]. But not because it is in Arabic (lit. Arabic language; *lafẓ ‘arabī*), for the meaning (or: content; *ma‘nā*) indicated does not change from one language to another.<sup>62</sup>

Later in his discussion, Kāsānī addresses, for Abū Ḥanīfa, the objection raised by his own followers (Note 17):

As for their saying “inimitability (*iʿjāz*) of the language is not attained in a Persian [Qur’an].” Indeed. However, reciting [a passage] that is stylistically wondrous (*muʿjiz al-naẓm*; i.e., manifesting inimitably striking wording and arrangement) is not, according to him [Abū Ḥanīfa], one of the provisions [of the religious obligation of prayer]. For the commandment is to recite a passage in general, not [necessarily] to recite one that is inimitable.<sup>63</sup>

For Abū Ḥanīfa, then, *iʿjāz* may be a unique trait of the original Arabic Qur’an, but it need not be preserved in the passages recited in prayer.

Justification for Abū Ḥanīfa’s approach, Kāsānī records, can be brought from the Qur’an’s own attestation that it contains revelations from previous scriptures, for example, “Truly, it is in the scriptures of the ancients” (Q. 26:196), and “Surely this is in the ancient scrolls, the scrolls of Abraham and Moses” (Q. 87:19–20). Since those scriptures contain the word of God in another language (Hebrew), one can conclude that Arabic is not an absolute requirement for a verse to be considered the word of God.<sup>64</sup> Kāsānī draws a dramatic conclusion from this reasoning:

If [the worshipper] recited a passage from the Torah, the Gospels, or the Psalms in his prayer . . . it would be permitted according to Abū Ḥanīfa, as we said.<sup>65</sup>

Not surprisingly, the very fact that this implication could be drawn made Abū Ḥanīfa’s singularly permissive view particularly suspect, even within his own school. For example, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Sarakhsī (d. 483/1090), a leading Ḥanafī jurist of his time, recoiled from such a ruling, since “it is known that they [=the Jews and the Christians] falsified and changed (*ḥarrafū wa-baddalū*) [their scriptures], and we fear that [the Muslim] will read [in his prayer] from the falsified parts.”<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Kāsānī, *Badā’i*, I:527–8.      <sup>63</sup> Kāsānī, *Badā’i*, I:531.      <sup>64</sup> Kāsānī, *Badā’i*, I:528.

<sup>65</sup> Kāsānī, *Badā’i*, I:531. He includes the proviso that this passage not be among those that were subject to distortion (*tahrīf*) by the Jews or Christians – because then they are “the speech of man” (*kalām al-nās*), not “the speech of God.” On the claim of *tahrīf*, see Newby, “Forgery.”

<sup>66</sup> Sarakhsī, *Mabsūt*, I:234.



#### 4 Comparison with Jewish and Christian views

The debates among Muslim scholars regarding translation of the Qur'an and its ritual uses can be compared with those in Judaism and Christianity. The earliest known translation of the Bible is the Greek Septuagint, probably composed by Jews in the second century BCE. Drawing upon the legend presented in the ancient *Letter of Aristeas*, which describes the circumstances under which this translation was produced, the Septuagint is celebrated in some rabbinic (and early Christian) sources as being divinely directed.<sup>67</sup> However, strong objections to it are reflected in later rabbinic literature, in variants of the following statement: "Seventy elders wrote the Torah in Greek for King Ptolemy, and that day was as calamitous for Israel as the day on which the [Golden] Calf was made, for the Torah could not be properly translated."<sup>68</sup> Further, the Talmud remarks: "If one translates a verse literally, he is a liar; if he adds to it, he is a blasphemer and reviler."<sup>69</sup> This comment is illuminated by the Muslim discussions about the difficulty of translating the Qur'an's rich language, as it often necessitates a choice between a literal translation that is enigmatic or even misleading, and a free translation that aims for dynamic equivalence ("translation of the meanings"; Note 40), but loses the richness of the original.

The reality that the Hebrew Bible had been translated into other languages was accepted in the rabbinic halakhic system. In fact, the Aramaic translations of the Bible (Targumim; sing. Targum), which modern scholars date to the first centuries of the Common Era, were venerated as an integral part of Jewish tradition. The Targum was even used as an accompaniment to the weekly public Torah reading in the synagogue.<sup>70</sup> The Talmud traces this practice to the time of Ezra (b. *Megillah* 3a), and the great northern French Bible commentator Rashi (1040–1105) goes so far as to assert that the authoritative Targum of Onkelos on the Pentateuch was divinely revealed at Sinai.<sup>71</sup> In the medieval period, influential Arabic translations were penned both within the Rabbanite and Karaite branches of Judaism, a matter discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>67</sup> See Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Septuagint*, 19–69.

<sup>68</sup> *Massekhet Sefer Torah* 1:6. For parallel sources and later elaborations, see Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Septuagint*, 69–83.

<sup>69</sup> B. *Qiddushin* 49a. Compare the similar formulation in t. *Megillah* 3[4]:1.

<sup>70</sup> See m. *Megillah* 4:4, 10.

<sup>71</sup> Rashi, comm. on b. *Qiddushin* 49a; see also Viezel, "Onkelos," 13–14.



With the very existence of Bible translations being a given in the halakhic tradition, their liturgical use is discussed and debated.<sup>72</sup> A full presentation of this matter is beyond the scope of the current study; but we can cite some discussions that bear resemblance to those in the Muslim tradition. A Jewish parallel, in terms of belief and ritual, to *sūrat al-fātiḥa* is the *Shema*‘ passage (“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one . . .”; Deut 6:4–9), which expresses the fundamental beliefs of Judaism and is recited twice daily. A debate is recorded in the Talmud about its recitation in translation:

The *Shema*‘ must be recited as it is written [in Hebrew]. This is the opinion of Rabbi [Judah ha-Nasi]. The Sages, however, say: [that it may be recited] in any language. What is the reasoning of Rabbi [Judah ha-Nasi]? Scripture says: “And [these words . . .] they shall be (*we-hayu*) [in your heart . . . and you shall talk of them when . . . you lie down and when you arise]” (Deut 6:6–7), implying [that these words] must remain “as they are,” [i.e., in Hebrew]. What is the reasoning of the Sages? Scripture says, “Hear (*shema*‘) [O Israel] . . .” (Deut 6:4), implying: in any language that you understand [lit. hear].<sup>73</sup>

When cited in a parallel talmudic source, this following narrative is added to the debate:

Rabbi Levi bar Ḥita went to Caesarea, and heard the voices [of people there who] were reciting the *Shema*‘ in Greek. He sought to prevent them [from doing so]. Rabbi Jose heard [this] and became enraged. He said: Should we say that whoever cannot read Hebrew [lit. “Assyrian” (*ashurit*); i.e., the Hebrew script of the Torah], should not read it at all? Rather, he fulfills [his obligation] in any language that he knows!<sup>74</sup>

Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi deduces his strict ruling from a midrashic reading of Deut 6:6–7, which, in his view, indicates that the Hebrew form of “these words” (i.e., the *Shema*‘) is an essential component of their liturgical recitation. The Sages, by contrast, base their opinion on a midrashic reading of the word “Hear” in the opening formula “Hear O Israel,” which they take to mean that the *Shema*‘ may be recited in any language one understands. In the Caesarea narrative, Rabbi Jose advances a practical argument: how can a Jew who does not speak Hebrew be expected to fulfill his *Shema*‘ obligation?

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, m. *Soṭah* 7:1–2 and sources cited in Note 70; see also Shinan, “Live Translation.”

<sup>73</sup> B. *Berakhot* 13a.

<sup>74</sup> J. *Soṭah* 7:1. My thanks to Shlomo Naeh for drawing my attention to this source.

The *Shulḥan Arukh*, the authoritative Code of Jewish Law penned by Joseph Karo of Safed in the sixteenth century, rules according to the lenient opinion of the Sages and Rabbi Jose.<sup>75</sup> In this, he follows the great Andalusian codifier Maimonides (1138–1204), who rules:

A person may recite the *Shema'* in any language he understands. One who recites it in any other language must be careful to avoid any distortions in that language, and he must be as careful in the pronunciation [of the words] in that language as he is in the Holy Tongue [=Hebrew].<sup>76</sup>

It is noteworthy that Maimonides applies to the recitation of the *Shema'* in translation a talmudic requirement that the text be pronounced with complete accuracy (*dīqduq*). The logic of this ruling is questioned by Rabad (=Rabbi Abraham b. David of Posquières; c. 1120–1197/8), an elder contemporary of Maimonides and his major disputant:

This is not reasonable, since [a translation into] all [other] languages is an interpretation, and who needs to be careful in the [pronunciation of an] interpretation?<sup>77</sup>

It would seem that Maimonides endows a translation of the *Shema'* passage with the same halakhic (legal) status as the original Hebrew text has. Rabad questions this, since a translation is nothing more than an interpretation, the precise wording of which should be inconsequential. This debate can be illuminated by the Muslim discussion regarding translations of the Qur'an. Zamakhsharī observes that "translations serve as proxy [for the original]" (Note 26), which appears to be Maimonides' assumption. On the other hand, Rabad views translation as a form of interpretation, as emphasized by many Muslim legal authorities (Note 39).

Unlike Judaism and Islam, Christianity, by its very nature, favored the translation of the Bible from its original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) in order to spread the "good news" (Gospel) of the word of God to all peoples. Yet there is one major chapter in the history of the Christian Bible that offers some parallels to the Muslim discussions regarding the translation of the Qur'an. Within western Christianity, the Latin Bible translation composed by Jerome (347–420), which came to be known as the Vulgate, assumed a special sacred standing, effectively achieving its own originary authority – yet another instance of Zamakhsharī's observation.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *Orah Hayim* §62.

<sup>76</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Qeri'at Shema'* (Laws of Reciting the *Shema'*) 2:10.

<sup>77</sup> *Hassagot ha-Rabad* (Strictures of Rabad), gloss to *Mishneh Torah* ad loc.

<sup>78</sup> See Bogaert, "Latin Bible."

In the middle ages, the Catholic Church opposed attempts to render the Latin Bible into European vernacular languages. To justify this preference for the Vulgate, the argument was made that Jerome was divinely inspired in his translation – a claim akin to the Jewish characterization of the sanctity of *Targum Onqelos* and the legends about the Septuagint that developed out of the *Letter of Aristeas*. In reality, however, the Church's opposition to vernacular translation seems to have been spurred by the fear that making the Bible accessible to the laity would undermine the interpretive authority of the clergy, a concern exacerbated by medieval heretical movements, such as the Waldensians, Cathars, Lollards, and Hussites. The Lollards adopted the Wycliffite English Bible (translated by c. 1395), which ignited substantial debates in England over the propriety of vernacular translations of the Bible.<sup>79</sup>

The tide was turned by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century with the Reformation undermining Christianity's attachment to Latin. His German Bible translation was followed by a surge of other vernacular translations, bringing the teachings of the ancient prophets of Israel, as well as those of Jesus, Paul, and the Apostles, to the masses in their own languages. Some vernacular translations – which were used both for study and prayer – assumed great popularity and even authority. The 1611 King James Bible is a case in point, becoming one of the most influential works of the English language. Many English speakers have accorded it great sanctity as well as the highest literary prestige. But of course in the modern period – with the Christian Bible having been rendered into so many languages – there can be no pretension that one translation is exclusively authoritative.<sup>80</sup>

Not long after the Protestant revolution, the Catholic Church followed suit and approved translation of the Bible into the vernaculars of Europe. The English Douay-Rheims Bible, for example, was published in 1582 (New Testament) and 1609 (Old Testament). Latin, though, continued to be the exclusive language of the Catholic liturgy. Ultimately, however, the Catholic Church acknowledged the needs of its millions of worshippers for whom Latin was completely foreign, and the Second Vatican Council (1962–5) permitted the use of the vernacular even for reciting the Mass.

While the Ḥanafī school, likewise, allows Muslim believers to commune with God invoking verses of the Qur'an in a foreign language, none of the other Muslim schools of law do so. The question of R. Jose, *mutatis mutandis*, thus becomes relevant: what course of action is open to a Muslim illiterate in Arabic? The authorities of the non-Ḥanafī schools

<sup>79</sup> See Dove, *English Bible*.

<sup>80</sup> See Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 2–4.

offer diverse solutions, but all require mastery of at least some Arabic. If the worshipper knows only a single verse of *sūrat al-fātiḥa* (which contains seven verses), he can make up the other six verses from other parts of the Qur'an. If even this is beyond his capacity, but he knows the formulas for the praise and aggrandizement of God (*al-ḥamdu li-llāh* and *Allāhu akbar*), he may recite them repeatedly for the amount of time needed to recite the *sūrat al-fātiḥa*. If he does not know even these formulas, he can stand silently and thank his Creator.<sup>81</sup> It is conceivable that this dominant stringent position was regarded as reasonable because of a practical consideration: the extreme brevity of the text that a Muslim is required to recite during prayer (*sūrat al-fātiḥa* and three additional verses), unlike the considerably longer Jewish and Christian prayers. The majority of Muslim legal authorities therefore may have seen no compelling reason to compromise regarding the obligation to recite these few words in Arabic.

We must also take into account the fact that considerations that favored translated scripture and liturgy in both Judaism and Christianity were absent in Islam. In Christianity, of course, there can really be no serious discussion of keeping the Bible exclusively in its original languages, since virtually no Christians ever knew it in anything but a translation. While some Jews always retained knowledge of Hebrew, already in the late biblical era it had ceased to be the spoken language of any Jewish population (until its rebirth in the twentieth century). The *halakhah* thus had to confront the reality that the Hebrew Bible is written in a language foreign to virtually all Jews. Islam, by contrast, was never displaced from its birthplace in the Arabian Peninsula, where Arabic always remained a vibrant language of intellectual and cultural expression. Even though Islam embraced non-Arabs – who have long made up the majority of Muslims – the Arabic language could therefore remain dominant within the religion, thereby preserving the special status of "an Arabic Qur'an."

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Ibn Qudāma, *al-Kāfī*, 1:236.

## CHAPTER 4

### *The unmoved mover begins to move* *Literary and artistic renderings of the Christian Bible*

Piero Boitani

In contrast to Islam's effort to preserve the Qur'an in its original Arabic, Christians typically encountered the Bible through translation, as discussed in the [preceding chapter](#). Indeed, Christianity promoted the Bible's translation into many languages, in addition to subjecting it to allegorical and typological interpretation. These transformations reflect the proclivity of Christianity, like Judaism, to celebrate the multivalence of the sacred text. The current chapter explores a further manifestation of this interpretive openness by tracing the portrayal of a biblical theme in literature and art. Focusing on the second verse of Genesis, the chapter outlines how its Greek and Latin renderings produced multiple interpretations that are only partially driven by analysis of the original Hebrew text. They were equally – and, in some cases, mostly – inspired by imaginative conceptualizations of the creation, and of the Creator Himself. Literary works such as Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* can be correlated with striking transformations of the biblical narrative – from text to image – in painting and sculpture, visual media that historically played a central role in conveying Christian scripture.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

The account of Genesis that opens the Bible does not explicitly proclaim any movement of God (*Elohim*) during the Creation. All that is created comes into being by means of God's word, for example, "God said 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen 1:3). No hand is present, no divine being moves anywhere. In the primordial nothingness only the Voice that sets the universe in motion resounds.<sup>1</sup> It is in the account of what the world was like *before* the Creation that movement is attributed

<sup>1</sup> See *TDOT*, s.v., *amār*, *ôr*, and *dābar*, and *TDNT*, s.v., *λέγω*. See also Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 110–12, n. 2 on Gen 1:3.

to God, as described in Gen 1:2, “Now the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered upon the face of the waters.” The last sentence of this verse (Heb. *we-ruah elohim meraḥefet al-penei hamayyim*), rendered *pneuma theou epephereto epáno tou hydátos* in the Septuagint, and *spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas* by Jerome in the Latin Vulgate, is the focus of this study.

## 1 Mobility vs. immobility: biblical and philosophical accounts

The Hebrew word *meraḥefet* describing the movement of the “Spirit of God” in Gen 1:2c prompted many interpretations in the Christian tradition.<sup>2</sup> The biblical Hebrew root *r-h-f* is used elsewhere (see Deut 32:11) to connote a mother bird hovering over her chicks. Basil of Caesarea thus quotes the explanation of a “Syrian” according to whom this word, rendered *epephereto* in Greek, means “it warmed up and impregnated the nature of the waters as a bird broods and breathes vital force into the eggs lying under its warmth; this prepared the nature of the waters for generation (*pros zoogonian*).”<sup>3</sup> Latin exegesis reads the Vulgate’s *ferebatur* as either *incubabat* or *fovebat*, thus privileging the idea of brooding, or *volitabat*, which implies the idea of hovering without excluding brooding, or finally, with a decided inclination toward movement, as *irruerat* – it “ran.”<sup>4</sup>

If the Bible, as read in Greek and Latin milieus, oscillates between an immobile flitting of wings and the running of the Spirit before Creation – that is to say, logically speaking, before the Beginning – the other great Western archetype, Greek myth, does not mention any movement at the origin of things. There is no movement in the multiple generation without a creator with which the cosmos is born in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (ll. 116–38), nor in Ovid’s later version in the *Metamorphoses* (1:5–86). Nor is there any movement in the great mythological and philosophical account of creation-generation in Plato’s *Timaeus* (29e–31b), which would be influential in later ages. Finally, Aristotle postulates the absolute immobility of the Prime Cause in his *Metaphysics*. There he demonstrates that “the Principle and the first of beings” – called *ho theos*, “the god” – “is immobile both absolutely and relatively.” Immobile, the Prime Mover “produces the first,

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Van Wolde, *Stories of the Beginning*; Steiner, *Grammars of Creation*; Conrad, *Creation*; Treschow et al., *Divine Creation*; Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*.

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on the Hexaemeron*, Naldini ed., 58–9; v. Commento, 327.

<sup>4</sup> On the history of exegesis on this verse, see Smoroński, “*Spiritus*”; Tarabocchia Canavero, *Esegesi*; Naldini, “Sull’interpretazione,” 446–9; Gregory, “Le acque sopra.”

eternal, and one movement,” by moving as object of desire and love, that is to say, as an end, as Final Cause.<sup>5</sup>

In the Middle Ages, it is Boethius – who embarks on a philosophical program aiming at harmonizing Plato and Aristotle – who gives poetic form to a Christian metaphysics inspired by the *Timaeus*. Metrum 9 of Book III of the *Consolation of Philosophy* is exemplary in this respect:

O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas  
Terrarum caelique sator qui tempus ab aevo  
Ire iubes *stabilisque manens das cuncta moveri*,  
Quem non externae pepulerunt fingere causae  
Materiae fluitantis opus, verum insita summi  
Forma boni livore carens, tu cuncta superno  
Ducis ab exemplo, *pulchrum pulcherrimus ipse*  
*Mundum* mente gerens similique in imagine formans  
Perfectas iubens perfectum absolvere partes.

O you who in perpetual order govern the universe, Sower of heaven and earth, who bid time ever move, and resting still, grant motion to all else; whom no external causes drove to make your work of flowing matter, but the form within yourself of the highest good, ungrudging; from a supreme model you draw out all things, and being yourself most fair, a fair world in your mind you bear, and forming it in the same likeness, bid it being perfect to complete itself in perfect parts.<sup>6</sup>

Boethius’ inspired formulation does not conceal the Aristotelian ascendancy of the immobility of him that moves everything (*stabilisque manens das cuncta moveri*), nor the Platonic ascendancy of the model (*ab exemplo*), out of which the Creator shapes the world in his image. As for the ideas of goodness (*livore carens*, “free of envy,” ungrudging) and beauty that prompt God to create the universe, they go back to both Plato and Aristotle.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Mover remains firmly unmoved and immobile. Only that original thinker, John Scotus Eriugena, manages, in the ninth century, to catch a glimpse of His movement by placing it within the Supreme Good itself – with a stroke of genius of philosophy and imagination at once, and by means of a series of fascinating oxymora – in order to explain the passage from the One to the many. “*Summae siquidem ac trinae soliusque uerae bonitatis immutabilis motus*,” he writes in the *Periphyseon*, “*et simplex multipliatio et inexhausta a se ipsa in se ipsa ad se ipsam diffusio causa omnium, immo omnia sunt*” (“The unchanging

<sup>5</sup> *Metaphysics* VI:1072a 23–35, 1073a 24–38.

<sup>6</sup> Boethius, *De consolatione Philosophiae* III, m. 9, italics mine. English trans. by S. J. Tester.

movement of the sovereign and veritable triune goodness, its simple multiplication and inexhaustible diffusion from itself in itself and toward itself – this movement is the cause of all things, in fact it is everything”).<sup>7</sup>

Already in the first Book of the *Periphyseon*, Scotus had reconstructed the etymology of *theos* by recurring to the Greek verbs *theo* (I run) and *theoro* (I see). If one derives *theos* from *theoro*, he said, “one interprets it as meaning *He who sees*, because God sees in himself all that exists, whilst he contemplates nothing outside himself, because nothing subsists outside God himself.” But if one derives *theos* from *theo*, one interprets it as meaning *He who runs*, because God runs through all that exists and never stops, but fills everything with his running, in accordance with this verse of scripture: “His word runneth very swiftly” (Ps 147:15). “Nevertheless,” Eriugena added, “God does in no way move.” This is why one predicates of Him that He is at once “immobile movement and mobile rest” (*motus stabilis et status mobilis*). Divine Creation takes place precisely within this interior (*non extra se, sed a se ipso in se ipso ad se ipsum*) movement of the Word:

Stat enim in seipso incommutabiliter, nunquam naturalem suam stabilitatem deserens, mouet autem seipsum per omnia ut sint ea quae a se essentialiter subsistunt. Motu enim ipsius omnia fiunt. Ac per hoc unus idemque intellectus est in duabus interpretationibus eiusdem nominis, quod est Deus. Non enim aliud est Deo currere per omnia quam uidere omnia; sed sicut uidendo, ita et currendo fiunt omnia.<sup>8</sup>

On the one hand God remains at rest in unchanging fashion, without ever abandoning the immutability of his nature, but, on the other hand, God moves through all that exists so that all that exists substantially by itself may exist: because all existing things are produced by this movement. And that is why one finds one identical meaning in the two different names of God. In God, in fact, the act of running through everything does not differ from the act of seeing all that exists, but all that exists is the product of his running and, at one and the same time, of his seeing.

Yet not even Eriugena, when he comments on the work of the six days, dares attribute movement to God, although he keeps open the possibility of translating the original with *spiritus fouebat aquas uel ferebatur super aquas*, that is, the Spirit “brooded” or “moved” upon the waters.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Periphyseon*, III, 632B, 577–80, Jeaneau ed., 22. Translations of the *Periphyseon* in this study are my own (PB).

<sup>8</sup> *Periphyseon*, I, 452A–D, 436–53, Jeaneau ed., 18–19. Compare *Periphyseon*, I, 505A: “At si amat deus quae fecit, profecto uidetur moueri; suo enim amore mouetur.”

<sup>9</sup> *Periphyseon*, III, 690D, 2974–5, Jeaneau ed., 102. It is probably from Eriugena that the *Liber XXIX philosophorum* picks up the formulation: “Immobilis dicitur Deus quia est secundum unam dispositionem semper, et hoc est esse in quiete. Movens semper est, quia vivens in se, tamen sine



## 2 The immobile creator: visual representations

Visual representations of the Creation are not common in early Christian times, but they become more frequent from the eleventh century onward.<sup>10</sup> The ones selected here for discussion illustrate the complexity of visualizing the transition from the immobility of God to the movement of the cosmos. The first is the Creation Tapestry, or “Tapiz de la Creación” as it is called in Catalan, in the Cathedral of Girona, Spain (Figures 4.1, 4.2).<sup>11</sup> At the center of this splendid tapestry of 3.75 by 4.70 meters is placed Christ Pantokrator (“Lord Almighty”; see 2 Cor 6:18),<sup>12</sup> portrayed not in Byzantine but Roman fashion – a young, beardless man, with his right hand raised in blessing and authoritative creation, his left resting on an open book that bears the inscription *Sanctus Deus*. His majesty is underlined by the words that appear to his right and to his left, *Rex* and *Fortis*, the Strong King.

The figure of Christ is inscribed within a circle that contains the verse of Genesis, *Dixitque Deus: Fiat Lux, et Lux Facta est* (“And God said, Let there be light. And there was light”; Gen 1:2). This circle, which represents the circle of the metaphysical universe, is placed within a larger circle, surmounted by a sentence that constitutes a kind of summary of the first and last verses of Genesis 1: *In Principio Creavit Deus Caelum et Terram Mare Et Omnia Quae in Eis Sunt. Et Vidit Deus Cuncta Quae Fecerat Et Erant Valdebona* (“In the beginning God created heaven and earth, the sea, and all the things that are in them. And God saw that all He had made was very good”). This larger circle is further divided into eight sections of different sizes and into two identical halves. The upper half, from the bottom to the top, refers to the physical sky, then to the metaphysical Heaven; the lower half describes the earth. The dove of the Spirit is placed directly below the Pantokrator, within a smaller circle, and is accompanied

alteratione” (Lucentini, *Ventiquattro filosofi*, 90). But the immobile movement of the divine intellect goes back to Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arium*, IV, 17.

<sup>10</sup> In the church of Bishop Sergius at Umm-al-Rasas in Jordan (eighth century), however, there is a mosaic with the representation of the cosmos, the Earth, and the Abyss that may have been part of an illustration of Creation.

<sup>11</sup> This tapestry, believed to have been embroidered c. 1100, underwent a massive cleaning and restoration in 2012 by el Centro de Restauración de Bienes Muebles de Cataluña, and is now exhibited in the Museum of the Cathedral of Girona. For further details about the Tapiz, see Revilla, “Riqueza iconológica.” Italicized Latin words in the following paragraphs reproduce the inscriptions on the Tapiz.

<sup>12</sup> Christ “Pantokrator” – literally, “Ruler of all,” hence “omnipotent” (see Paul, 2 Cor 6:18) – is the typical Byzantine representation of Christ, very much used in the West as well. Here, he is also “Principium” (i.e., Beginning), following John 8:25.



Figure 4.1. Tapiz de la Creación (Creation Tapestry), Girona Cathedral, c. 1100.

by the inscription *Spiritus Dei Ferebatur Super Aquas* (“the Spirit of God moved upon the waters”).

In the two nearest sections, to the right and left hand sides, appear two angels, those of light (*Lux*) and of darkness (*Et Tenebre Erant Sub Faciem Abyssi*; “and darkness was under the face of the abyss”). The two sections that follow in descending order contain: (1) the creation of the firmament (with the inscription *Fecit Deus Firmamentum In Medio Aquarum* [“God made the firmament in the middle of the waters”] placed in a circle surrounded by the primordial waters, the abyss of chaos), and (2) the separation of the waters (with the inscription *Vbi Dividat Deus Aquas Ab Aquis*; “Where God divides waters from the waters”). Here, the internal circle towers over the waters and includes, in the shape of human figures, Sun, Moon, and stars (*Sol Luna Firmamentum*).

The sections of the lower part of the great circle are consecrated to the creation of living beings – directly under Christ Pantokrator, the animals; to the right, Adam before the animals; to the left, the creation of Eve. While the upper portion of the great circle is highly hieratical, the lower

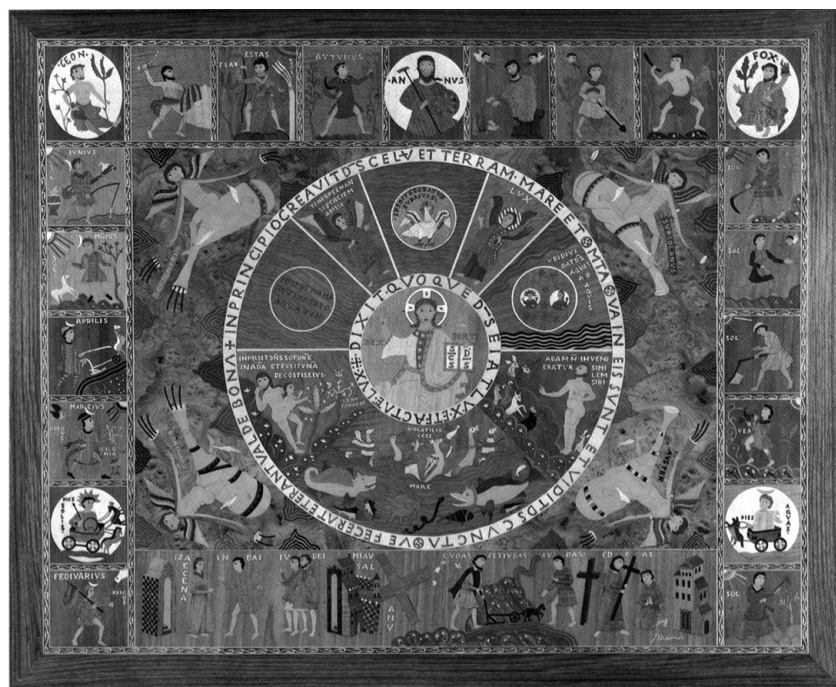


Figure 4.2. Tapiz de la Creación, restored by el Centro de Restauración de Bienes Muebles, 2012.

one vibrates with life and looks after details. Birds, sea monsters, and fish fill the panel of the creation of animals; deer and horses surround Adam; the scene of Eve's creation is full of movement. Water dominates three of the upper sections and the lower, central one – those, that is, of the Spirit, the creation of the firmament, the division, and the creation of animals. The formless sea mass of the first three sections begins to have a shape in the third one and is clearly called *Mare* in the fourth one.

The theological structure of the great circle is fairly clear. Christ, that is, the Logos, inaugurates Creation. It is the divine Word that operates with the *Fiat Lux* ("Let there be light"). The Spirit cooperates, by breathing and brooding over the waters. The angels, who are also created, represent Light and Darkness, the primeval elements of Creation, divided from the very first day. Creation manifests itself afterwards, in the lower portion, as creation of the firmament and of animals and human beings. The Logos

at the center is immobile, but it speaks and, as it finds itself within a circle, it irradiates the greater one while constituting, as it were, its backbone or nervous system. With this neo-Platonic irradiation, the Word “moves” the cosmos, to use an Aristotelian term. One somehow has the impression that the Pantokrator’s raised hand initiates this motion.

The great circle described until now is in turn inscribed within a rectangle, the corners of which are occupied by winged beings that represent the winds, and the geographical zones with which they are associated: *Septentrio*, the northern wind, hence the North; *Cephirus*, the West; *Auster*, the South; and *Subsolanus*, the East. The winds become darker and blow with decreasing intensity in passing from North to South. They appear in the guise of angels, following the depiction of Creation in Ps 104:4, “Who maketh his angels spirits (*ruḥot*); his ministers a flaming fire,” taking Hebrew *ruḥot* according to its most literal sense, that is, “winds.” (“Spiritus” in the Vulgate version of this verse, likewise, means “winds”). This verse is quoted later in the Christian Bible as evidence that the Son is higher than the angels in the order of Creation (Hebrews 1:14). Here too, in the static appearance of representation, a movement surfaces on the level of theological discourse. The creating Word at the center of the Tapiz also is the Spirit, that is to say, breath (Greek *pneuma*; Hebrew *ruah*). The four angelic winds are the Spirit’s translation in the created world, as messengers and servants. The motion that Logos and Spirit set to the cosmos is a rotating one, it articulates the Space already created in the section devoted to the animals (air and sea). Thus, the four elements – earth, water, air, fire – are by now also complete.

Finally, another movement is initiated in the sections that form the frame of the Tapiz de la Creación, which unfortunately has come down to us only partially, with most of the lower portion missing. What is left shows that the four corners of the tapestry featured the four rivers of Eden: Gihon (the name is visible in the upper left corner), Pishon, Tigris, and Euphrates. The identification of the subject in the central panel of the upper band at the top of the tapestry is also clear: this is the Year, surrounded by the four Seasons. The two figures placed immediately next to the upper corners are generally interpreted as Cain (to the left, between Gihon and Summer) and Abel (to the right, between Spring and what ought to be Tigris). The Months follow each other in the vertical panels, from June to February on the left, from July to November on the right. (January and December are missing, with the portion of the Tapiz that has disappeared.)

The last but one panel in the lower part of the frame is occupied, both on the left and on the right, by two, respectively male and female, figures,

who guide chariots drawn by horses. These are the Sun and the Moon, accompanied by the inscriptions *Dies Solis* et *Dies Lunae* – the Days, and probably the two Equinoxes. The delimitation of geographical space continues in the frame (with the rivers of Eden), but that movement which is Time also begins with the Year, the Seasons, Months, and Days. And perhaps history begins, too, from Earthly Paradise to Cain and Abel.

The Tapiz de la Creación provides us with an extraordinary icon of the work of Creation in which the immobile Pantokrator at the center sets the universe in motion by what can be called “translative irradiation.” With the Spirit, the Logos in the first place moves the first circle, which includes Light, Darkness, Waters, Earth, Humankind, Air, Sea, and all their dwellers. Then, divine Breath transforms itself into Wind, Fire, and Space. Finally, Word and Spirit create Time (Pantokrator, Dove, and Year are placed in a direct vertical sequence) and History.

We can follow this movement and pass from Spain to Sicily, and from the very beginning to the end of the twelfth century, to the Cathedral in Monreale, on the heights that overlook Palermo. This Romanesque building, begun perhaps in 1172 during the reign of William II, has arches that are clearly inspired by Arabic fashion. In the ten thousand square meters of mosaics that cover the interior of the church and – guarded by the gigantic Christ Pantokrator of the apse – narrate on the walls of the nave the whole of Genesis and the entire story of Jesus, there are a few panels that are of particular interest in the present context.<sup>13</sup>

In the upper band of the wall to the right of the central nave, the stories of Genesis are depicted in bright gold, blue, white, and red. The panels from the second one onward are a series showing Christ Pantokrator – the very same who dominates the basin of the apse – seated on a globe engaged in the creation of the world. In the first panel of this series (Figure 4.3), He is shown creating light in the form of angels with shining wings (those of the vision in the Book of Revelation). In subsequent panels (not shown here) He divides earth and water; breathes life into plants, reptiles, birds, and animals; shapes Sun and Moon; creates man and woman; and finally rests on the seventh day. The Word (the Logos, i.e., Christ) here is bearded, and the entire organization of the scenes looks Byzantine. In all the panels, it is the hand of the Logos that initiates Creation.

However, the first panel (the one preceding the series just described) is a narrow, vertical rectangle at the top of which Christ Pantokrator, his head crowned by a golden halo, his bust surrounded by a dark azure, white, and

<sup>13</sup> On the Monreale mosaics see Kitzing, *I mosaici*.





Figure 4.3. Monreale Cathedral, nave, south wall, Creation mosaics, late 12th century, detail of Light and Angels.



Figure 4.4. Monreale Cathedral, nave, south wall, Creation mosaics, late 12th century, the Beginning.

gold circle (the cosmos he has on his mind), wearing a mantle of the same colors, stretches his hands down to impose form on the world (Figure 4.4). From the breast of this God who appears as Son there flows a thin stream, a light blue, white, and golden brook, that goes through a somber band of

darkness and finally hits the waves of the sea. Right at the center of the stream, a dove flutters – representing the Spirit. The primordial abyss is sketched by an endless series of gray, black, and white lines in the shape of waves. Just underneath the point where the brook touches and penetrates into the ocean, the grayish lines form the face of an Old Man, hair and beard made of billows, his eyes wide open, his tongue hanging out.

Since Son and Spirit are placed above, Trinitarian logic would have it that the Old Man is the Father. Yet the Pantokrator, the Almighty of the apse and of the other panels who here stands at the top of the picture, is but the incarnated version – the Word – of the Father. Besides, no biblical or Christian God has ever been plunged into the waters instead of floating or moving on them. No, it is not the Father. It is “the face of the abyss” as in the Hebrew *we-ḥosbeḳh al-penei tehom* (“and darkness was upon the face of the abyss”), preceding the sentence in Gen 1:2 that is the subject of this study: *we-ruaḥ elohim meraḥefet al-penei hamayyim*, depicting the Spirit/ wind/breath of God moving/hovering “upon the face of the waters.” Though taken metaphorically to mean “surface,” the word *panim* literally means “face” (*penei* meaning “the face of . . .”). Accordingly, the Byzantine artists to whom we probably owe the mosaics of Monreale sink this visage into the primeval ocean – into Chaos. For the Greek *abyssos* translates the Hebrew word *tehom*, and this in turn contains an allusion to Tiamat, the Babylonian monster of primordial Chaos. Hence, this is the Old Man of Chaos, the Old Man of the Sea.<sup>14</sup>

The God of Monreale is an unmoving creator. Seated, after the first panel, on the cosmos, His raised hand stretches toward the beings He wishes to create, and – to cite Genesis 1 – “they are.” In the case of primordial Creation and in that of man, a luminous stream flows out of His breast or from His eyes to give life to the universe or to the human being. It is still God’s hand that creates the New Cosmos in the apse of the church of San Clemente in Rome (Figures 4.5, 4.6), where, coming out of Heaven, it stretches down toward the Cross that is Tree of Life and of the New Pact.<sup>15</sup> And it is again His hand that sets in motion the universe in the dome of Genesis of the basilica of San Marco in Venice (Figure 4.7).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 104–10.

<sup>15</sup> On San Clemente’s mosaic, dated by scholars to the 1130s, see Riccioni, *Il mosaico*, especially plates XV, XXIX.

<sup>16</sup> The mosaic of this dome is believed to have been constructed c.1215–35. On the San Marco mosaics, see Forlati, *Mosaici di S. Marco*; Demus, *Mosaic Decoration*; Da Villa Urbani, *La basilica di San Marco*; D’Agostino and Panciera, *Il mistero*.





Figure 4.5. San Clemente, Rome, apse of upper church, mosaic, c. 1130.

The dome of San Marco features a circular structure surrounded by pendentives where four flaming, six-winged cherubim appear, accompanied by the inscription “Here burn the Cherubim at the heat of Christ’s flame and always shine with the splendor of the eternal Sun. The mystical Cherubim, in showing their six wings, praise the Lord by singing with serene voice.” At the center of the dome lies a rosette full of golden stars on a blue background, at its top a smaller, golden circle, with a bigger, blue-green circle surrounded by four smaller circles, two red ones and two of blue-green hue. This is the Point on which the entire cosmos depends; the Point that becomes the four elements. There follow three circular, concentric bands, divided into twenty-six panels, of which five are placed in the inner circle, eight in the middle one, and thirteen in the outer circle. The five scenes of the inner band show: (1) the Spirit in the guise of a dove fluttering on the waters; (2) light divided from darkness; (3) creation of the firmament; (4) dry land divided from the waters; (5) creation of plants. In the following band, the panel directly under the Spirit shows the Creation of Sun and Moon; then, proceeding to the right, that of birds and fish (two scenes), of animals, of man. There follows the Benediction of the seventh day, then the soul (represented as a small, winged girl) is breathed into Adam, and God leads him into the Garden. The outer band begins

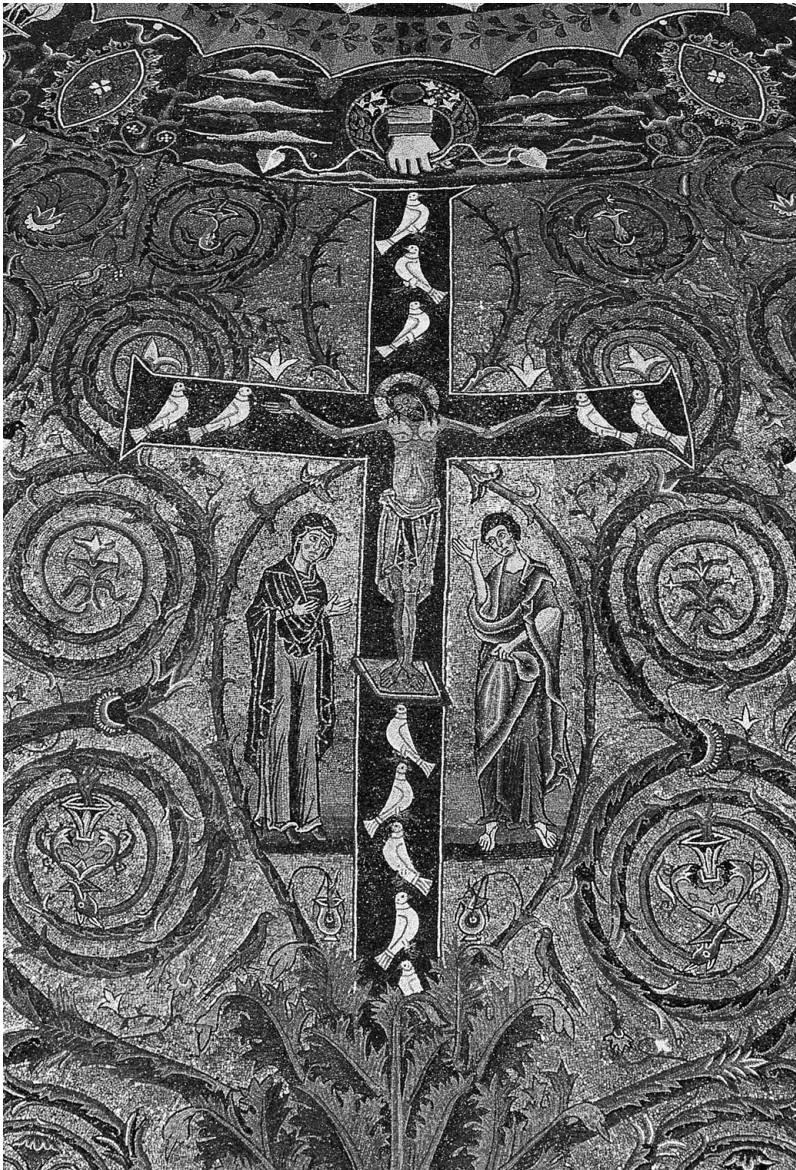


Figure 4.6. San Clemente, Rome, apse of upper church, mosaic, detail of the Hand of God.





Figure 4.7. San Marco, Venice, narthex, mosaic, 1215–35, dome with Genesis scenes.

immediately under this scene with Adam giving animals their names, the Temptation, the Fall, and the Expulsion from Paradise.

A beardless Word – here, too, much more Roman than Byzantine – gives life to the cosmos. He stands in the inner band, that of primeval Creation, immobile, as His feet show, resting always in the same position, while His right hand stretches out toward the objects of creation. But the dove of the Spirit moves, fluttering with agility, almost whirling over the primordial waters. Movement, however, has already been impressed upon the world, as the scene with the creation of Sun and Moon shows. Since this is found under the panel of the Spirit, whereas it should correspond to that of the division of light from darkness, it invites the observer to spin off the second band. As one progresses along the latter, the creating Logos

begins Himself to move, at times seated, at times standing, bending over Adam when He puts him to sleep to create Eve, finally walking when He finds the two sinners ("walking in the garden in the cool of the day," as recounted in Gen 3:8).

The mosaics of Monreale, San Marco, and San Clemente date from the twelfth to the early thirteenth centuries. Notwithstanding modern approximations regarding their origins, it is impossible to determine with certainty the order in which they were executed, and some researchers go as far as to doubt a Byzantine influence, attributing a common ascendancy to Roman mosaic. However, they present both surprising affinities and significant differences. In all three cases, the movement that is Creation is set by the Word's hand. In all three cases, the Logos is immobile in the scenes of primordial Creation. It is only in Monreale that the scene appears of the Pantokrator Son who, through the Spirit as intermediary, gives life directly to the waters with the energy that flows out of his breast.

The representations of Creation in Chartres Cathedral date back to the same general period.<sup>17</sup> Three different works are to be considered here: the sculpted reliefs on the portal of the north transept (1194–1230), the typological glazed window of the Good Samaritan in the third bay of the central nave (1205–15), and the rose window in the skylight of the north transept (1230–5). Unfortunately, they cannot all be illustrated here, and hence we concentrate on some of their representations of God. In the portal reliefs, God is always bearded, but He appears in a considerable variety of postures. In the scene of the first day, for instance, He is shown twice, both times seated (Figure 4.8). But the two depictions differ. In the lower scene He turns and raises His left hand up – that is to say, toward the work of creation He is about to accomplish. In the upper scene He rests his head on one of his hands as if He were meditating, and keeps on His knees a book He reads. This may be an allusion to the Model He has on His mind and will follow in creating the world. This figure creates the impression of someone making an effort to give birth to an idea. Likely, the book is the *Liber Vitae* (Book of Life), but perhaps it is the Bible itself or Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia*, which was composed in the milieu of Chartres in the middle of the twelfth century. In the lower panel, the book seems to have become a scroll, as if God were holding the cosmos rolled up in His hand.

<sup>17</sup> See Delaporte, *La Cathédrale de Chartres*; Delaporte, *Les trois Notre-Dame*; Mâle, *Notre-Dame de Chartres*.



Figure 4.8. Chartres Cathedral, north transept, portal sculpture, 1194–1230, first day of Creation.

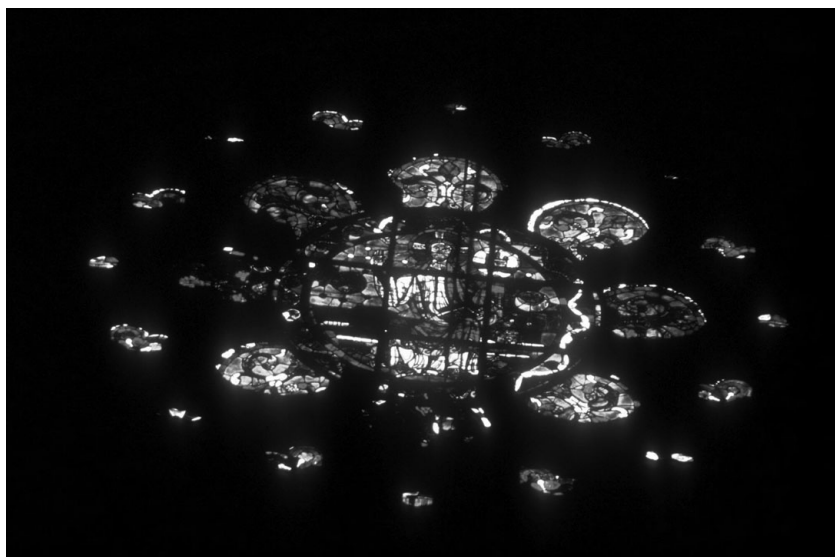


Figure 4.9. Chartres Cathedral, north transept, rose window, stained glass, 1230–35, Christ creates the cosmos.

These sculpted representations of Creation dramatically articulate very “human” representations of the divine figure – a sense conveyed also by others in the Chartres Cathedral not shown here. In the lower scene of the creation of Day and Night, God again appears with a book on His knees and His hand to the head, whereas in the upper scene He raises His right arm toward His chin and turns His eyes upward. In the scene of Adam’s creation, God bends toward man, supporting man’s head in one of His hands, while His other hand touches the top of man’s head to transmit the spirit of life to him. The “human” representation of God is likewise articulated in the Genesis scenes of the Good Samaritan window, where a bearded God creates Adam, and then Eve, by holding the former’s chin and imposing His hand on the latter’s head. In another scene, He warns them severely, pointing His index finger to the Tree of Knowledge.

The “human” portrayal of God in the Gothic Chartres Cathedral might suggest movement of a sort. But when one comes to the rose window in the north transept (Figure 4.9), produced later than the scenes just described, God’s immobility again becomes absolute. In fact, the stress lies here on God’s total might. He appears as second person of the Trinity – the Word – seated on His throne, blessing with one hand, and holding in

the other the globe of the universe. Underneath Him, the rolling lines represent the primordial waters, and under them a flat surface might indicate air. Above Him, there is a yellow object that could represent a city. To the left, there emerges a red disk surrounded by smaller circles – the sun and the stars. To the right, a crescent surrounded by smaller, white circles appears – the moon and, again, the stars. The Gothic style cannot, in sum, give primary movement to Creation: when the intention is to represent the very Beginning, the Prime Mover is absolutely immobile and unmoved.

### 3 A mobile creator: literary representation

When, then, does the Mover begin to move from the very beginning of Creation? The first occurrence would seem to be not in the figurative arts, but in literature – by Dante. He has a true passion for the theme of Creation, with which he opens and closes the *Comedy*. From *Inferno* I to *Paradiso* XXXIII, divine love “moves” the universe – that is, creates it – to the point of including Dante himself in the new Creation:<sup>18</sup>

e'l sol montava'n su con quelle stelle  
ch'eran con lui quando l'amor divino  
mosse di prima quelle cose belle<sup>19</sup>

The sun was rising now in fellowship  
with the same stars that had escorted it  
when Divine Love first made those things of beauty

l'amor che move il sole e le altre stelle<sup>20</sup>

the Love that moves the sun and the other stars

The theme is present throughout the poem's three *cantiche*, from *Inferno* III (creation of hell) to *Purgatorio* XVI (the individual soul that “issues from the hand” of God) and *Purgatorio* XXV (God breathing rational soul into the fetus), then more and more frequently in the *Paradiso*, in cantos VII, X, XIII, XIX, XXIX, and XXXII. Dante approaches Creation each time with a new and profound meditation: by going back to Boethius' lesson, by translating neo-Platonic images of irradiation, sparkling, and mirroring splendor, by recurring to Aristotelian categories such as *potentia*

<sup>18</sup> Citations from Dante's *Commedia* are from the Petrocchi edition; English from the Mandelbaum translation.

<sup>19</sup> *Inferno* I, 38–40. <sup>20</sup> *Paradiso* XXXIII, 145.



and *actus*, by using the Sapiential image of the compass, by underlining the order and gradations of being, or the differences between creation and generation, or the art of the supreme Artist and the harmony of the cosmos.<sup>21</sup>

But there is a culminating moment when Dante clearly envisages the movement of the Prime Mover. When, in *Paradiso* XXIX, his beloved Beatrice presents a definitive account of the creation of angels, she begins with the image of the Eternal Love opening Himself up onto “new loves” (the angels), “so that His splendor might, / as it shines back to Him, declare ‘*Subsisto*.’” She then passes on to the creation of prime matter and of the heavens – which she says took place at the same time as that of the angels – by going back to the Aristotelian concepts of form, matter, and substance:

Forma e materia, congiunte e purette,  
usciro ad esser che non avia fallo,  
come d’arco tricordo tre saette.  
E come in vetro, in ambra o in cristallo  
raggio resplende sì, che dal venire  
a l’esser tutto non è intervallo,  
così l’triforme effetto del suo sire  
ne l’esser suo raggiò insieme tutto  
sanza distinzione in essordire.  
Concreato fu ordine e costruito  
a le sustanze; e quelle furon cima  
nel mondo in che puro atto fu prodotto;  
pura potenza tenne la parte ima;  
nel mezzo strinse potenza con atto  
tal vime, che già mai non si divima . . .<sup>22</sup>

Then form and matter, either separately  
or in mixed state, emerged as flawless being,  
as from a three-stringed bow, three arrows spring.  
And as a ray shines into amber, crystal, or glass, so that there is no interval  
between its coming and its lighting all,  
so did the three – form, matter, and their union –  
flash into being from the Lord with no  
distinction in beginning: all at once.  
Created with the substances were order  
and pattern; at the summit of the world  
were those in whom pure act had been produced;  
and pure potentiality possessed

<sup>21</sup> See Boitani, “Poetry and Poetics”; Moevs, *Metaphysics*.

<sup>22</sup> *Paradiso* XXIX, 22–38; see Boitani, “Creazione e cadute.”



the lowest part; and in the middle, act  
 so joined potentiality that they  
 never disjoin . . .

Right at the center of her speech, however, Beatrice picks up – and this significantly is the only time – the narrative of Genesis, namely of verse 1:2c. But she transforms it with unheard of daring: “Né prima quasi torpente si giacque,” she declares, referring to the supreme Love, God, “ché né prima né poscia procedette / lo discorrer di Dio sovra quest’acque” (“Nor did He lie, before this, as if languid; / there was no *after*, no *before* – they were / not there until God moved upon these waters”). Dante replaces the Vulgate’s *ferebatur* with *discorrer*, that is to say, the *irruerat* of some traditional interpretations, the swift, impetuous movement of “the Spirit God.” *Discorrer* allows Dante to obliquely evoke the action of the Word, but also to indirectly refer to the *Liber de causis*, as he had already done in the *Convivio*, where he wrote: “la prima bontade manda le sue bontadi sopra le cose con uno *discorrimento*” (“The primal goodness makes his goodnesses flow upon all things with a single flowing”).<sup>23</sup>

God is not “torpente” (torpid, sleepy); He is mobile, even quick, as He “runs” over the face of the waters. A tradition going from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas, and aptly summarized by Peter Lombard, interprets this as the “will of the creator that ‘passes above’ the matter it wishes to shape” (*voluntas artificis quae superfertur materiae quam vult formare*).<sup>24</sup> Dante, who was certainly at home within this tradition, is thus describing the action whereby the supreme Agent-Artisan-Artist is preparing to give shape to shapeless matter, to the *res fabricandae*, the things to be created. For him, this is the key moment of Creation – what the artists of the Tapiz de la Creación represent with the movement that takes place *around* the creating Logos; what the artists of San Marco render with the movement that transmits itself from one concentric circle to another; what the artists of Chartres show us in passing from a thinking, reading God to the God who raises His hand; what finally the artists of Monreale represent with the flowing of the vital stream from the Pantokrator’s breast down into the billowing deep. Dante attributes all this to God Himself, the Eternal Love – a bow that shoots three arrows at the same

<sup>23</sup> Dante, *Convivio* III vii 3. Compare *Liber de causis*, Prop. XIX, 157. Dante’s term *discorrimento* replaces the original *influxio*. See Nardi, “discorrer di Dio”; Pépin, *Théologie Cosmique et Chrétienne*, 390–422.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae*, II, XII, c. 3. Compare Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, I, vii, 12; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 66, I ad 2.

time, a ray of light that shines fully, penetrating into glass, amber, or crystal. God is archer and irradiator. Finally, God is supremely mobile even for a poet who had confessed to Saint Peter in *Paradiso* XXIV his belief “in one God—sole, / eternal—He who, *motionless, moves all* / the heavens with His love and love for Him.”

#### 4 Artistic portrayals of the mobile creator

We must wait over a century before the notion of a mobile creator is transferred into painting. It is undoubtedly not by chance that it was an Italian who introduced the novelty, and an Italian, at that, who illustrated the third *cantica* of the *Comedy*. Around 1445 (hence probably in the same period he did the illuminations for the *Paradiso*), the Siense Giovanni di Paolo painted a *Creation of the World with the Expulsion from Paradise* (Figure 4.10), now at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City.<sup>25</sup>

In his illuminations, Giovanni never illustrated the theory of Creation of *Paradiso* XXIX, but this must have left some trace on his imagination, because in his picture the bearded Father, His head surrounded by a halo, draped in a blue and white mantle and supported by blue Cherubim, throws Himself impetuously down, stretching His right arm, hand, and index in order to set an immense zodiacal globe in motion. Inside the sphere, a nucleus contains the known Earth, then the zones of water, air, and fire, the circles of the seven heavenly bodies, the band of the Zodiac, and finally, on the outside, the Primum Mobile. It is in fact on the latter that God points His finger to spur the whole to move. The structure of the cosmos is the same as that in Dante’s *Comedy*; the idea of the *discorrer di Dio* (of God, not of the Spirit) has obviously inspired Giovanni. The Mover has become mobile. Swift and heavy to the point of having to be supported by the Cherubim, God’s élan looks like lightning, an irresistible *irruere* (the wings of the Cherubim stress the impetuosity) that translates into an icon the “will of the creator which ‘passes above’ the matter it wishes to shape.” The rapidity of God lies in the instantaneity of thought, will, and action.

Giovanni’s image is revolutionary. Throughout the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries, Creation continues to be represented, even in Italy, according to traditional canons. Thus the Roman Jacopo Torriti, at the end of the thirteenth century in Assisi’s Upper Basilica,

<sup>25</sup> On Giovanni di Paolo, see Pope-Hennessy, *Giovanni di Paolo*.

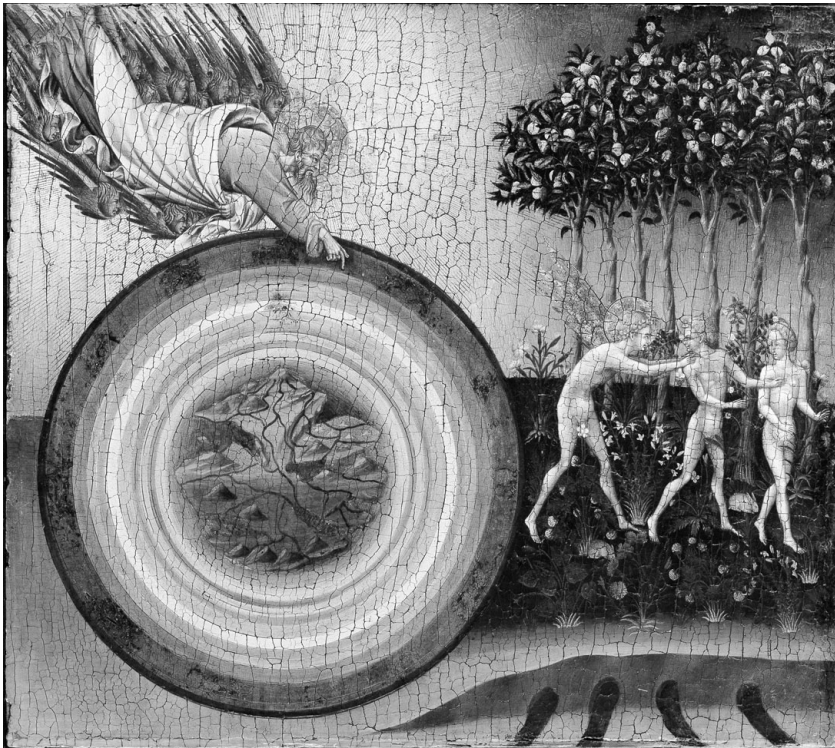


Figure 4.10. Giovanni di Paolo, *Creation of the World and Expulsion from Paradise*, tempera and gold on wood, 1445, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Robert Lehman Collection, 1975).

and the Tuscan Giusto de' Menabuoi, in the last decades of the fourteenth in the Padua Baptistry, do not move away from canonical models. Even in the Quattrocento, Paolo Uccello is the only painter that gives any movement to the creating God, in the Green Cloister of Santa Maria Novella, Florence (1432–48), but he does so in the scenes concerning Adam and Eve, as artists had already done in the Middle Ages.

Pietro Perugino, who painted the fresco in the vault of the Incendio di Borgo room in the Vatican between 1507 and 1508, represented a fundamentally immobile God (Figure 4.11). In the adjoining room of the Segnatura, Raphael presented, between 1509 and 1511 (i.e., in the same years Michelangelo painted the Sistine vault), a young Prime Mover who, although turning his body, remains substantially immobile (Figure 4.12).



Figure 4.II. Perugino, God the Creator, fresco, 1507–08, ceiling of the Stanza dell'Incendio di Borgo, Vatican.

Lorenzo Lotto, who had almost certainly seen the work of Michelangelo and Raphael in the Vatican,<sup>26</sup> prepared his extraordinary cartoons for the wooden tarsias of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo between 1523 and 1532. There Lotto depicted the creating God as an imperious, immobile Old Man that shapes the cosmos and man with the simple gesture of His two hands; and in the *coperto* (the wooden panel that covers the tarsia) he sketched the eye that stretches the two arms (of mercy and justice) through the nine concentric spheres toward the darkness of the deep (*Magnum Chaos*) by firmly resting its feet on Earth.<sup>27</sup>

In northern Europe things are even more traditional. From the Grabow Altarpiece by Betram von Minden (1373–83) to the *Lutherbibel* (1534) by Lucas Cranach, God remains absolutely rooted to His place. Even Hieronymus Bosch, who painted an extraordinarily suggestive *World* (probably on the third day of Creation) on the exterior panels of his

<sup>26</sup> Raphael will paint in the Vatican Loggias several scenes of Creation following Michelangelo's model: his God there is mobile, although at times He looks like a caricature of the "terrible" Creator of the Sistine vault.

<sup>27</sup> The tarsia and coperto discussed here are illustrated in Zanchi, *Bibbia*, 48–9. On Lotto and the tarsias of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo, see Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto*; Humfrey, *Lorenzo Lotto*; Bonnet, *Lorenzo Lotto*.





Figure 4.12. Raphael, *The Prime Mover*, fresco, 1509–11, ceiling of the Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican.



Figure 4.13. Michelangelo, Separation of Light and Darkness, fresco, 1512, ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Vatican.

*Garden of Earthly Delights* between 1490 and 1510, in the Haywain triptych (1500–2) represented a Creator immobile on His infinitely remote summit.

It is Michelangelo, of course, in the frescoes for the Sistine vault he painted between 1508 and 1512, that consecrates once and for all the icon of the moving Mover inaugurated by Giovanni di Paolo.<sup>28</sup> A faithful reader of Dante, Michelangelo does not hesitate to endow his Creator with an impetuous, even spinning movement. In the panel representing the separation of light and darkness (Figure 4.13), for instance, a bearded, old God as Father whirls in space, sketching an S with His body and mantle, opening up His arms in a circle toward light, His head turned to darkness. It is certainly not by chance that this scene also depicts God hovering over the waters, the *irruere* therefore reaching a climactic point.

Divine motion is also powerfully depicted in the panel of the separation of water and dry land (Figure 4.14). Supported by two *putti* (it is

<sup>28</sup> On the Sistine vault, see de Tolnay, *Art and Thought of Michelangelo*; Pfeiffer, *La Sistine svelata*; Verdon, *Michelangelo teologo*; Wind, *Religious Symbolism*.



Figure 4.14. Michelangelo, Separation of Water and Dry Land, fresco, 1512, ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Vatican.

difficult to believe Michelangelo did not know Giovanni di Paolo's painting), the Old Father here bends down, His arms open again in the gesture of imposition. The movement, and what has been called the "terribility" of God,<sup>29</sup> are so intense in the famous double scene of the Creation of Sun, Moon, and Planets (Figure 4.15), that in the right section of the fresco God's body and arms form two arches crossed in extreme tension, as if the upper one, a bow made up of the arms, were shooting the globes of Sun and Moon like arrows. God's impetuosity is such that no fewer than four figures are necessary now to support and hold Him. In the left section, by contrast, the Creator's body, now without any support, bends into an inverted S, showing His strong buttocks – the *posteriora Dei* of Exodus.<sup>30</sup> The back and the knees form

<sup>29</sup> On the terribility of Michelangelo's Creator, see Vasari, *Le vite*, 894; and Wind, *Religious Symbolism*, 39 (and n. 29).

<sup>30</sup> *Posteriora* is Jerome's translation in the Vulgate of the Hebrew term *ahorai* in Exod 33:23 ("And you shall see *my back parts*"). Wind, *Religious Symbolism*, 80, thinks that Michelangelo showed God's face and back in an allusion to Paul, 1 Cor 13:12, *videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem* ("We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face"). Thus, Michelangelo would, like all Christian tradition, have played on the opposition between Old and New Testament, considering the latter as the former's fulfillment: Moses could see – *per speculum in aenigmate* – only God's *posteriora*, Christians see his *faciem*.





Figure 4.15. Michelangelo, *Creation of Sun, Moon, and Planets*, fresco, 1512, ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Vatican.

another arch, inverted with regard to that of the right-hand side figure, so that space itself is splayed into a dynamic depth, whereas the waving mantles wedge in two opposing flights.

Finally, in another panel (not shown here), nine figures support God in the enormous cloud that envelops Him. “One would say,” Giorgio Vasari writes, “that they support not only a figure, but the weight of the entire world.”<sup>31</sup> Here He stretches His arm and index finger toward Adam. His visage is more benign and His flight less tense, as His body and light tunic form an open arch that perfectly corresponds to the languid curve sketched in by man’s body and the arms join God and Adam across space.

Michelangelo goes well beyond Giovanni di Paolo and Dante. Deeply inspired, as Edgar Wind has shown, by Saint Augustine, he conceived the primordial phases of Creation as a war of the elements, between darkness and light – a battle that prompts God to plunge into a “contorted immersion into the recalcitrant substance He is about to split.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Vasari, *Le vite*, 895.

<sup>32</sup> Wind, *Religious Symbolism*, 77.

Michelangelo's choice of God's whirling movement responds to his instinctively dramatic vocation, but also to the needs of theological complexity and mythical imagination. After thousands of years, Michelangelo finally expressed the *ruah elohim*, the "spirit" or "wind" of God, as a violent, powerful *storm* (another sense of the Hebrew term *ruah*), and thus paved the way to modernity.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Pointing the way to Du Bartas, Tasso, Acevedo, Milton, and later to Haydn and Blake. See Boitani, *Letteratura europea*, 247–86.

## *Deconstructing the dual Torah*

### *A Jewish response to the Muslim model of scripture*

Meira Polliack<sup>1</sup>

Unlike Christianity, Judaism privileged the original Hebrew text of the Bible. Nonetheless, as discussed in [Chapter 3](#), Jewish Bible translations were composed since antiquity, some quite influential (e.g., the Greek Septuagint) and even achieving quasi-canonical status (the Aramaic Targumim). The current chapter considers the implications of a third major Jewish Bible translation movement – into Arabic in the tenth century – which brought with it a transformation of the very conception of sacred scripture among some Jewish thinkers in the Muslim orbit. Here we witness not only the rendering of the Hebrew Bible into another tongue, but also the adoption by Jews of the idioms of another faith, with which they were otherwise engaged intellectually, politically, and culturally. Jews who thought and wrote about the Hebrew Bible in Arabic – and at times even read the sacred text in that language – inevitably took Muslim conceptions of sacred scripture into account. Furthermore, Muslim claims regarding the inaccuracy and inauthenticity of the Hebrew Bible required responses that informed the encounters of Arabic-speaking Jews with their own sacred text.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

The notion that the Oral Torah was given to Moses on Mount Sinai alongside the Written Torah was entrenched in Jewish tradition since late antiquity. With time, the term “Written Torah” (*Torah she-bi-khtav*) came to signify the entire Hebrew Bible, and “Oral Torah” (*Torah she-be-‘al-peh*)

<sup>1</sup> The final version of this chapter was prepared within the framework of the DFG-DIP project *Biblia Arabica: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, directed by Camilla Adang, Meira Polliack, and Sabine Schmidtke. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Camilla Adang and Sidney Griffith for reading an earlier draft and providing valuable insights. I am grateful to Mordechai Cohen and Adele Berlin for their untiringly tolerant and illuminating suggestions when revising the various drafts of this chapter, and for having thereby enabled it to reach its current and hopefully distilled form. Yet I remain responsible for any errors it may contain.

the traditions preserved in the Mishnah and Talmud. In medieval Jewish thought and jurisprudence (*halakhah*) the latter became a necessary accompaniment to the Bible, paramount for the understanding and interpretation of its laws. Yet the conception of a dual Torah was increasingly challenged as Jews became aware of the Muslim model of a singular scripture, the Qur'an, and the value of the written word and literacy in general that it inspired. In this model, the Qur'an alone was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad as an earthly replica of a Divine book (*umm al-kitāb*), and its status as revealed scripture was uncontested. Although *ḥadīth* literature came to embody a Muslim oral tradition, it did not have the same religious status as the Qur'an and its claim to revelation was not presented together with it in a dual structure. Jewish scholars in their centers of learning in the Muslim East, especially in the academies of Babylonia that produced the Talmud, became aware of the Muslim model as a result of their encounter with Islamic thought and literature. Their first reaction was to ignore and even resist new Arabic forms of study that reflected the value of the written word afforded to the Qur'an. Instead, they focused inward on the traditional forms of Jewish learning, which revolved around the Oral Torah as a means of comprehending the Written Torah. But from the late ninth century onward it became crucial to address the paradoxical nature of the traditional dual Torah model by comparison with the singular Muslim model of scripture. A conservative approach was adopted by Saadia Gaon (882–942), a powerful intellect who embraced new Arabic literary genres and translated the Hebrew Bible into Arabic, producing what would become new standards in various fields of Jewish literature. Yet Saadia retained, and even strengthened, the axiom that the Written Torah was insufficient by itself and depended on the interpretations of the Oral Torah. He devoted much of his effort to harmonize revealed scripture and oral tradition, thus providing a traditional hermeneutic couched in contemporary Arabic terminology. This approach was eventually adopted within the geonic world and provided an intellectual foundation for what came to be known as “Rabbanite” Judaism.

A radical response, on the other hand, was advanced by Karaite thinkers in the late ninth and tenth centuries. The Karaites were scripturalists who argued for a return to the Bible and the Land of Israel, and rejected the authority of the Oral Law embodied in the Mishnah and Talmud. Like Saadia, they produced Arabic translations of the Bible and composed works of philosophy, exegesis, and grammar that followed Arabic models. Yet, their suffusion with Arabic learning led them to the opposite of the geonic path of silent resistance. Instead, the Karaites devised a daring

strategy to counter the challenge posed by Islam: by dismantling the “dual Torah” model, they sought to reinstate the Hebrew Bible as the sole revealed basis for the Jewish creed. The Karaites recognized that within the Islamic cultural milieu the “dual Torah” model destabilized the authenticity of the Hebrew Bible as a revealed text. In particular, it opened Jewish scripture to Muslim claims that it had been distorted by the Jews (*taḥrīf*), and that it was abrogated by the Qurʾan (*naskh*). The seminal tenth-century Karaite thinkers Jacob Qirqisānī, Salmon ben Jeruham, and Yefet ben Eli diverted these claims to apply to the rabbinic Oral Torah, thereby protecting the integrity of the Written Torah. These leading Karaite scholars deconstructed the Jewish foundational narrative of the “dual Torah,” and in its place reconstructed a new narrative in which the singular written Torah formed the sole revealed source of Judaism, allowing them to cast Karaite Judaism as the most authentically scripture-based religion of the age, and the ultimate “other” with respect to both Rabbanite Judaism and Islam.

### I Karaism and the prestige of the written word

In his anti-Rabbanite polemical work, *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*, written c. 934 in rhymed Hebrew prose, Salmon ben Jeruham of Jerusalem (born c. 915) criticizes Saadia in the following lines:

He has written that the six divisions of the Mishnah are like the Law of Moses // And that they wrote it down so that it would not be forgotten. // I shall answer him concerning this, for I will not be silent . . . // Had [God] deemed it proper to have them skillfully written down . . . He would have ordered His servant Moses to inscribe them [in a book]. // If it is proper for men like us // Who have none of the holy spirit in us // To turn the Oral Law into Written Law by writing it down // Why would it not be right for us to turn the Written Law into a Law [preserved only] in our mouths?<sup>2</sup>

Salmon argues that “writing down” and “inscribing” the “Oral Law” is inherently problematic since it breaks down its very distinction from the “Written Law.” After all, he reasons, since “God had revealed and dictated His word to His prophets, who duly wrote it down during biblical times, we must conclude that whatever was not written down was not meant to receive the same status.” In Salmon’s view, the criterion of “the written” must be respected in order to protect the divine message, which is

<sup>2</sup> *Wars of the Lord*, Davidson ed., 42–3. English translation, Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology*, 77–8. On Salmon’s work and role in the Karaite Jerusalem school, see Wechsler, “Salmon ben Jeruham.”

jeopardized when it is blended with “the oral,” as rabbinic tradition does. Behind Salmon’s argument one can discern an unconscious system of values in which oral culture is associated with illiteracy, as he implies that the “Law [preserved only] in our mouths” is a negatively charged form of knowledge, inferior to that which is “inscribed” in a book.<sup>3</sup>

A similar condemnation of the Rabbanite intertwining of the oral and the written is voiced by Salmon’s younger contemporary, the great Karaite exegete of Jerusalem Yefet ben Eli (fl. 960–1005):

In the end of the time of the exile those books (*kutub*) which people claim to have been from Moses will become null, and no one will follow them. Rather they will return to the written Torah (*al-torah al-mudawwana*)<sup>4</sup> . . . and no one will turn to the Mishnah and Talmud for they will know that they are “precepts taught by men” (Isa 29:13)<sup>5</sup> . . . for they (the Rabbanites) are sinners before God since they established (*atbbatū*) these [talmudic] books (*kutub*) and compelled the nation to believe in them and act according to them . . . [they] sealed (*khatamu*) the Mishnah and Talmud and did not leave a path for those who came after them to establish even a single letter (*ḥarf wāḥid*).<sup>6</sup>

The recurring term “books” (*kutub*) in this critique of the Mishnah and Talmud pinpoints the Karaite abhorrence of the canonized textual guise given to the “Oral Torah,” which set it in place of the “written Torah.”

The Karaite de-legitimization of the Oral Torah reflects the mentality of the Jewish elites and wider educated circles of this period who were informed by a new system of values in which books, their authorship, editing, copying, reading, acquisition, accumulation, borrowing, and so on, were a central component of self-definition and esteem. Rina Drory has shown how Arabic models of written composition permeated the Judaeo-Arabic oeuvre from the tenth century onward.<sup>7</sup> Shlomo Dov Goitein and more recent historians have discussed the material and social expression of this bookishness in the formation of private libraries, as well as the exchange, buying, and selling of books among the emerging

<sup>3</sup> One might compare this with the way in which the written word became a “standard of cultural progress” in Western Europe; see Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 8. I thank Miriam Frenkel for drawing my attention to this work and to its relevance for the study of medieval Judaism.

<sup>4</sup> The somewhat awkward Arabic phrase (literally, “the torah that is written/in writing”) seems to be a calque of the rabbinic Hebrew phrase *Torah she-bi-khtav*.

<sup>5</sup> This is a common term used by the Karaites to criticize rabbinic law. See Frank, *Search Scripture Well*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Commentary on Zech 5:7–8, MS Bodleian Library Or. 2401, 174b–175a. On this passage, see Ben-Shammai, “Return to Scriptures,” 320–7; Polliack, “Medieval Karaism,” 314–15.

<sup>7</sup> See Drory, *Emergence*. See also idem, *Models and Contacts*.

networks of the Jewish merchant-class and its dependents.<sup>8</sup> To understand the implications of this development within the Karaite community, it is helpful to consider the observation of Brian Stock:

Texts . . . when introduced into a largely oral society not only created a contrast between two ways of looking at the world. They also raised the possibility that reality could be understood as a series of relationships, such as outer versus inner, independent object as opposed to reflecting object, or abstract sets of rules in contrast to a coherent texture of facts and meanings . . . This . . . resulted in a rebirth of hermeneutics as a critical philosophy of meaning, in a renewed search for epistemological order, and in a widespread interest in diachrony, development, and processual evolution.<sup>9</sup>

This observation, though made in relation to a different historical context, fittingly characterizes the innovative Karaite textual mentalité. Within an emerging Judeo-Arabic cultural world that increasingly valued textuality, the Karaites rejected the hallowed rabbinic notion of the Oral Torah, along with the dynamic open-endedness and indeterminacy of meaning of rabbinic midrashic interpretation, in favor of a diachronic “epistemological order” that critically delineates the stages of development in Jewish tradition.

While the increasing prestige of the written word within the Islamic realm can be discerned in Karaite writings, the very conception of sacred scripture advanced by Islam seems to have spurred a crisis in Jewish thought about the Hebrew Bible. This matter relates to the debates among modern scholars who seek to explain the emergence of Karaism, yet has not been recognized sufficiently or given its due place in the broader cultural picture. Some scholars, including Zvi Ankori, Yoram Erder, Moshe Gil, Jacob Mann, and Naphtali Wieder emphasized “internal” Jewish factors such as the growing tensions between the dominant rabbinic center of learning in Baghdad (i.e., the “Babylonian” *yeshivot* led by the *geonim*) and the established yet marginalized center in the Land of Israel (i.e., the “Palestinian” *yeshivah*) as well as other outlying Jewish communities, such as the one in Persia. In their view, the Karaites consolidated heretofore archaic local Jewish streams of thought and practice that had been submerged and suppressed; but due to the rise of Islam these streams now found themselves in a position to compete for their share of power

<sup>8</sup> See Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, Vol. V, chapter X, part 4 (“Schism and Counter Reformation”). Cf. Allony, *Jewish Library*; Bar-Levav, “Sacred Space”; Frenkel, “Literary Canon and Social Elite.”

<sup>9</sup> Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 531.



and a voice in the Jewish world, which was becoming unified under Muslim rule.<sup>10</sup> Other scholars – including Fred Astren, Haggai Ben-Shammai, Daniel Lasker, Marina Rustow, and Sabine Schimdtke – have pointed to currents in the Islamic milieu at large, such as the theology of Kalām and the Shi‘ite schism, as factors that precipitated the rise of Karaism.<sup>11</sup>

The current study does not preclude these earlier views regarding the emergence of Karaite Judaism, and even builds on some of the insights they offer. Yet it changes the focus of the debate by advancing the theory that a leading factor in Karaism’s rise was the need to authenticate Hebrew scripture vis-à-vis the Islamic conception of the Qur’an’s formation as a book – a need that became especially urgent with the Jews’ cultural awakening to literacy in general, on the one hand, and their being sensitized to the paradoxical nature of the dual Torah concept, on the other hand. For the Karaites, rabbinic tradition lacked a cogent, sustainable, and logical narrative of the formation of the Hebrew Bible that could be expounded in the terms of an intellectual framework that privileged the written word, in other words, within “a universe of communications governed by Books,” to borrow a phrase coined by Brian Stock.<sup>12</sup> The Karaites were the first among the Jews to internalize this crisis and to offer a sustainable solution. It involved, on the one hand, a *deconstruction* of the “dual Torah” as a double-based edifice and, on the other hand, a *reconstruction* of a single base for the Jewish faith, one from which a logical hierarchy can be derived, wherein divine revelation, that is, the Written Torah alone, leads to all forms of religious knowledge and creativity.

## 2 Muslim conceptions of the formation of the Qur’an

Muslim conceptions of the Qur’an as scripture were an important factor in the increasing prestige of the written word in Arabic culture at large. As observed by Stefan Wild, “[t]he Qur’an emerges as the most self-conscious text among the three holy books and probably the most self-reflexive and self-referential foundational text of any world religion . . . The resolute and

<sup>10</sup> See Erder, “Sadducee dilemma”; Gil, “Origins of the Karaites”; Reeves, “Afterlife of Jewish Pseudepigrapha”; Wieder, *Judean Scrolls and Karaism*.

<sup>11</sup> See Adang, Schmidtke and Sklare, *A Common Rationality*; Astren, *Karaite Judaism and Historical Understanding*, 1–123; Ben-Shammai, “Return to Scriptures”; Cook, “Anan and Islam”; Lasker, “Islamic Influences on Karaite Origins”; Polliack, “Rethinking Karaism”; Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community*.

<sup>12</sup> Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 3.

irreversible self-referential or meta-textual turn of the Qur'an is a noteworthy and far-reaching feature connected to a specifically Muslim view of scripture. . . . The relation between divine speech and human history is a constant and explicit topic in the Qur'an."<sup>13</sup> It is not difficult to see how this aspect of Muslim thinking would have engendered the Arabic valuation of textuality. Gregor Schoeler has noted further how this centrality accounts for the preeminence of the book format in Islam: "In the various stages through which it passed, the process by which the Koran was constituted as a written text essentially prefigured the process by which the traditional Islamic sciences became written disciplines: in *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, Koranic exegesis . . . history, and philology there were at first only notes as aids to memory, then systematically organized collections, and not until a fair while later edited and published books, books in the proper sense of the word."<sup>14</sup>

By the end of the ninth century, Muslims could put forward a well-articulated narrative concerning the formation of their scripture. The language of the Qur'an was conceived as "miraculous" with respect to its historical uniqueness and literary inimitability (*i'jāz al-qur'ān*).<sup>15</sup> From a theological viewpoint, the Qur'an as a book in the hands of humans was regarded as the earthly embodiment of the celestial book (*umm al-kitāb*) containing the direct word of God revealed to his Prophet Muhammad.<sup>16</sup> The Qur'an's formation as a physical written text was explained as a multi-stage process: first, as verses attributed to the Prophet and memorized records of his communications documented on various materials (little boards, leaves) kept by his wives and devotees; second, as a collection of sorts undertaken by the Prophet's companions and immediate successors, the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr – described as "the first to have collected the Qur'an between two covers" – and 'Umar; third, and last, as a fully written text, codified in a model copy (*nuskha*) and further disseminated in the form of an authorized codex (*muṣḥaf*), that is, book, by the third caliph 'Uthmān.<sup>17</sup>

In a comparatively short time span, then, the emerging religion of Islam formulated a detailed and ordered theological-historical account of authorship, collation, codification, and dissemination of the Qur'an as a

<sup>13</sup> See Wild, "Why Self-Referentiality?" (quotation from p. 3). Cf. Pedersen, *Arabic Book*, 3–36.

<sup>14</sup> See Schoeler, "Writing and Publishing," 432–3. <sup>15</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 11, at Notes 64, 65.

<sup>17</sup> Dissenting voices, in particular the Shi'ite questioning of the authenticity of the Uthmanic version, which concentrated on alleged additions (*ziyāda*) and omissions (*naqs/nuṣṣan*) to the Prophet Muhammad's original language, abated in the tenth century. See Kohlberg, "Imāmīte Attitude to the Qur'an." See also Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 90–1.

*book*. Of paramount importance to this foundational religious narrative was the presentation of the role of the Companions as purely secondary in relation to the role of the Prophet, who was the only direct recipient of the revealed divine text “authored” solely and completely by God. This airtight narrative compositional theory of the Qur’an proved its efficacy in interreligious polemics, rendering Jewish and Christian scriptures deficient by comparison. Although Islam theoretically acknowledged the divine revelation of those earlier scriptures, it developed the notion that the Qur’an superseded and abrogated (*naskh*) them, and furthermore that their original prophetic content had been distorted and altered (*tahrīf*) by their historical bearers, the “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kitāb*). The foundational narrative of the Qur’an’s formation as a book as well as its miraculous nature and inimitability (see [Chapter 3](#)) ultimately was believed to demonstrate *inter alia* its veracity and authenticity, which, in contrast to the earlier Jewish and Christian scriptures, could not have been corrupted by its transmitters and codifiers.<sup>18</sup> The credibility of this narrative was hard to match in the competing Jewish and Christian traditions, which were not focused on the question of authentication and the textual formation of their scriptures. This problem was especially pressing for the Jews, who were heirs to the most layered sacred texts, as the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible were composed and transmitted over many centuries, a process further complicated by the entrenched accompanying oral tradition – that itself took a textual form in late antiquity.

### 3 Traditional Jewish conceptions of the Bible’s formation

At the dawn of the Islamic age, Judaism had no clear foundational narrative of the textual formation of its scripture. Instead, it celebrated the Oral Torah as being equal in stature to the Written Torah, as reflected in the saying attributed to Rabban Gamliel II (second century CE): “the people of Israel have been given two torahs: one in writing and one in oral recitation.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, with regard to the Oral Torah, the Jews could point to a suitable foundational narrative in the Mishnah (*Avot* 1:1), which

<sup>18</sup> See Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 192–248; Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, 139–61; Griffith, *Bible in Arabic*; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 19–49; idem, “*Tahrīf* and Thirteen Torah Scrolls”; Resnick, “Falsification of Scripture.” On the connection between of the Torah’s abrogation (*naskh*) and the inimitability (*i’jāz*) of the Qur’an, see Sklare, “Responses to Islamic Polemics.”

<sup>19</sup> See *Sifrei Deut* §351. On the possible connection of the “dual Torah” notion to the competition with Christianity, “a religion that also spoke of two teachings, the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ,” see Yuval, “Orality of Jewish Oral Law.”

contains a report of the Torah's "chain of transmission" beginning with Moses down to the Tannaitic Sages.<sup>20</sup> But with regard to the *composition* of the entire Bible they had no such record, except the *baraita* (tannaitic source not incorporated into the Mishnah) quoted in b. *Bava Batra* 14–15, which lists the biblical figures who "wrote" the various biblical books (in order to support the notion that the books were divinely inspired) – but without describing their compilation and transmission in greater detail.<sup>21</sup> These statements do not amount to a coherent foundational narrative regarding the formation of the Hebrew Bible, or even the Pentateuch itself, as a complete written text. Judaism's main *modus operandi* in the post-biblical era was one of continuous interpretation of the biblical text, mainly through *midrash*, which included various forms of exegetical comments and narratives on the Bible that eventually came to form part of the classical corpus of midrashic and talmudic literature. In the pre-Islamic era, most of the answers Judaism provided to religious and existential questions were couched in this broadly interpretive form of reflection upon the Bible.<sup>22</sup> As a religion that evolved from the ancient period, holding its oral modes of learning and discourse in high esteem well into the ninth century, Judaism was at a loss to explain how exactly its literary canon came into being – a question that became central to the rationalistic-philosophical and highly literate mentality of the Islamic-Arabic milieu.

Michael Cook has rightly observed the surprising silence of the leaders (*geonim*) of the Jewish centers of learning (*yeshivot*) in Palestine and Babylonia regarding the canonical compilation of the Mishnah and Talmud as written texts. As he remarks: "the Rabbanite silence was an embarrassed one: the major scholars of geonic Judaism had no explanation for the fact that a literary situation had come about that was in flagrant contradiction to the oralist principles enshrined in their heritage."<sup>23</sup> If this

<sup>20</sup> "Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, and Joshua transmitted it to the Elders . . ." Thus begins a chain of the transmission of the "Oral Law" that leads up to the Mishnaic period. On this tradition see, for instance, Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth*, 140–6; Alexander, "Orality of Rabbinic Writing."

<sup>21</sup> As noted by Jed Wyrick, this light treatment indicates that the Sages of the Talmud lacked a sophisticated understanding of the Bible's "textualization." See Wyrick, *Ascension of Authorship*, 80–110. More concrete views on the Mosaic composition of the Pentateuch have been identified in Hellenistic Jewish sources, mainly in the works of Philo and Josephus, and in Christian Syriac sources. See Wyrick, *Ascension of Authorship*, 136–202; Najman, *Seconding Sinai*; Moss, "Scholasticism, Exegesis, and Historicization."

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>23</sup> Cook, "Opponents of Writing," 516. Cook (512–19) notes that even the celebrated passages in the Epistle of Sherira Gaon (see Note 29) and Saadia Gaon in his *Sefer ha-Galuy* largely circumvent the matter, though they would have been aware of the Karaite attacks on the authenticity of these "oral" canons.

was the case with regard to the Jewish canon of the Oral Torah, then what could the *geonim* have been able to say about the Bible as their written heritage when faced with the Muslim foundational narrative regarding the formation of the Qur'an as a book and with Muslim polemics regarding the Bible's falsification and abrogation? It stands to reason that the learned Jewish elites of the time were no less embarrassed by questions pertaining to the compilation of the Hebrew Bible as a written text, than they were by questions regarding the compilation of the Mishnah and Talmud as written texts.

Jewish scholars in Muslim lands were forced to contend with a variety of questions related to this subject. For example: Why were there different vocalization and cantillation systems of the Bible in different centers of the Jewish world? Why did its ritual reading in the synagogues of Tiberias and Baghdad sound so different? What is the reason for the disparity between the "reading traditions" (*qeri*) that differ from the way certain biblical words are written (*ktiv*)?<sup>24</sup> A more pressing challenge stemmed from the numerous contradictions between the literal sense of the laws and the stories conveyed in the biblical text and their "derived" sense attested in the Oral Torah, as recorded in rabbinic literature. With the canonization (and "textualization") of the Babylonian Talmud in the geonic era, these contradictions became even more obvious and hence more troubling.<sup>25</sup> On top of all this, there were a few potentially embarrassing testimonies in the Bible and in rabbinic literature regarding changes or transmutations of the biblical text itself, for example, Josiah's recovery of a lost "book" of the Torah described in 2 Kings 22–3, and references in rabbinic literature to changes in the shape of the Torah's Hebrew letters by Ezra at the beginning of the Second Temple era.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4 A new Jewish strategy for constructing a scriptural model

Jews would have been well-aware of the Islamic conception of the formation of the Qur'an as a book, the sort of subject discussed in the

<sup>24</sup> The Muslims, too, had to contend with the question of why there circulated different readings (*qirā'āt*) of the Qur'an. But here, too, they had more readily available solutions by attributing to the Prophet self-referential statements confirming and approving this situation. I am grateful to Camilla Adang for pointing out this difference. Paul Kahle was among the first to compare the systems and to identify an Arabic model behind the codifying enterprises of the Tiberian Masoretes. See Kahle, *Cairo Geniza*, 141–88. See also Drory, *Emergence*, 134–55.

<sup>25</sup> The genre of "questions on the Bible" emerged at this time, for example, those raised by Hiwi ha-Balkhi, to which Saadia responded. See Schechter, "Oldest Collection." See also Drory, *Emergence*, 185–9.

<sup>26</sup> See Krakowski, "Many Days," and further references cited there. See also [Note 32](#).

interreligious encounters (*majālis*) among Christians, Muslims, and Jews that took place in the ninth and tenth centuries in Baghdad and in other major Muslim cities. In these contexts, Jewish interlocutors were compelled to address the challenges posed by the Muslim notions of the Qur'an's inimitable uniqueness (*i'jāz*), of its supersession/abrogation (*naskh*) of earlier sacred scriptures, as well as the accusation that the Jews had falsified the Hebrew Bible itself (*tahrīf*). Leading Jewish figures of the tenth century, including the Rabbanite Samuel ben Hofni Gaon and the Karaite Yūsuf al-Baṣīr, participated in *majālis* and describe them in their writings.<sup>27</sup>

With respect to the promotion of a scriptural basis for Judaism, a pronounced difference comes into view between Rabbanite and Karaite sources. While Rabbanite authors generally refrain from extensive engagement in the question of the formation of Hebrew scripture, Karaite authors reflect upon it often, almost as if they were filling in those gaps in Rabbanite thought. This contrast is suggestive of the self-positioning of both groups vis-à-vis each other and their host culture, though not necessarily in a conscious way. In effect, both were responding to the same impetus in opposite ways, as alternative expressions of the Jewish reaction to the encounter with the Islamic scriptural model.

The absence of a detailed discussion on the Hebrew Bible's formation in the extant works of the highly innovative Rabbanite thinker Saadia Gaon, for instance, is conspicuous when we consider his oeuvre at large. Saadia innovatively placed the Bible at the center of a new Judeo-Arabic curriculum – that included a translation of the Bible into Arabic, Bible commentaries, and works on grammar, philology, and theology – all fully engaged with parallel Arabic literary models.<sup>28</sup> Saadia's silence on the Bible's formation was not broken by Samuel ben Hofni Gaon (d. 1013) or later *geonim*.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, it is perhaps less surprising when we consider the different course of the Rabbanite intellectual tradition, which grappled with the notion of a divine origin of the Torah through a variety of forms

<sup>27</sup> See Sklare, "Responses to Islamic Polemics."

<sup>28</sup> On Saadia oeuvre and his role in the engagement with Arabic genres, see Drory, *Emergence*, 156–78. See also Brody, *Sa'adyah Gaon*.

<sup>29</sup> Though Samuel ben Hofni defined a wide list of exegetical principles, commented on the Bible extensively, and polemicized with Muslim critics, he is not known to have elaborated on the issue of the Bible's historical formation *per se*. See Sklare, *Samuel ben Hofni*, 1–67. Sherira Gaon, in his famous *Iggeret* (epistle, completed in 987), responding to questions from the scholars of Qayrawān, explains the composition of the Mishnah and Talmud – but not the Bible. See Cook, "Opponents," 512–19; Brody, *Geonim of Babylonia*, 20–6; Fishman, *People of the Talmud*, 23–36.

of exegetical (especially midrashic) discourse more than through strictly theological or philosophical modes.<sup>30</sup>

It is possible that the Rabbanites refrained from engaging in the question of the formation of the Hebrew Bible out of a fear that the traditional statements about it are inherently problematic – and therefore ought not be discussed openly, as they would then be available to Muslims and serve as ammunition for their anti-Jewish polemics. This concern is raised, in fact, by the major Karaite theologian and exegete Jacob Qirqisānī in his treatise *Kitāb al-Anwār wal-Marāqib* (The Book of Lights and Watch-towers), composed c. 937:

They (= the Rabbanites) assert that the Torah which is in the hands of the people is not the Torah which Moses (peace be upon him) brought, but was composed by Ezra, for they say that the Torah brought by Moses perished and was lost and disappeared. This amounts to the destruction of the whole religion. Were the Muslims to learn of this, they would need nothing else with which to revile and confute us. Some of their theologians argue against us saying: “Your Torah is not the Torah brought to Moses.” Against one who makes this claim we proclaim that he is lying out of a desire to contradict, and that they are reduced to this because they (= the Muslims) have nothing to say and need an argument. But were they to discover this teaching of the Rabbanites (may God forgive them) the field would be open to them and they would need nothing else.<sup>31</sup>

As Qirqisānī notes, Jewish claims regarding the Bible’s authenticity can potentially be undermined by rabbinic traditions concerning the role of Ezra in the formation of the Torah, and they should therefore be withheld from the Muslims. According to one talmudic source, Ezra altered the biblical script from its original Paleo-Hebrew form to the Aramaic characters in which it is currently written.<sup>32</sup> Another talmudic source states that the Torah was “forgotten” during the Babylonian exile and reestablished by Ezra.<sup>33</sup> Confirming Qirqisānī’s fears, his younger contemporary Salmon ben Jeruham remarks that the Muslims “revile us for what we . . . have not

<sup>30</sup> On Saadia’s “harmonistic” attempt to incorporate the rabbinic (midrashic and targumic) heritage alongside contemporary Christian and Muslim modes of scriptural exegesis in his Bible translations and commentaries, see Ben-Shammai, “Tension”; Freidenreich, “Islamic Sources”; Steiner, *Biblical Translation*, 32–51.

<sup>31</sup> For the Arabic original see Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-anwār*, vol. I, chapter 3, section 3, pp. 14–5. For the English translation see Chiesa and Lockwood, *Ya’qūb al-Qirqisānī*, 105–6. See also Khan, “Qirqisānī’s Opinions.”

<sup>32</sup> B. *Sanhedrin* 21b–22a. See Naeh, “Script of the Torah.”

<sup>33</sup> See B. *Sukkah* 20a; compare *Sifrei* Deut §160. See also Krakowski, “Many Days,” for discussions by Qirqisānī and Yefet regarding the “recovery” of the lost Torah scroll in the days of Josiah, as described in 2 Kgs 22:3–23:25.



done . . . [when] they state that we have said, ‘Uzayr [=Ezra] is [God]’s son, and that we have reversed the letters of the Torah.’<sup>34</sup> In light of the remarks by these Karaite authors, we may conjecture that the Rabbanite reluctance to openly address the question of the Torah’s formation was based on a fear of opening a Pandora’s box that would bring forth these potentially embarrassing rabbinic traditions.

Yet this subject held a natural attraction for the widening circles of learned Jews, whose inquisitiveness was stoked by their newly acquired Arabic literacy and general awareness of the competing scriptural model offered by Islam. Whereas the Rabbanites were bound by the talmudic discussions, the Karaites were able to open new avenues of thinking about the formation of the biblical text and engage with the Muslim counter-claims more directly. Qirqisānī, for example, points to what he regards as the inherent flaws of the talmudic position on Ezra’s role in the formation of the Bible.<sup>35</sup> In the preamble to his commentary on the Torah, Qirqisānī presents his own view that Mosaic authorship of the entire Torah from beginning to end is “one of the fundamental principles of biblical exegesis.” As he goes on to elaborate:

We must know that our prophet the master Moses was the one who wrote the Pentateuch, from its beginning in Genesis to its end. It was he who handed down to us all the accounts contained therein regarding the events from God’s creation of the world down to Moses’ own death . . . that is why it is associated with his name in more than one place as his Law.<sup>36</sup>

In taking this stance, Qirqisānī clearly opposes the view in b. *Bava Batra* 15b that the last eight verses of the Torah were written by Joshua. Both of Qirqisānī’s arguments – one regarding Ezra, the other regarding Moses – serve the same purpose: to deny any possible break in the Bible’s history of textual transmission. His arguments set the Bible off and seal it hermetically as a sacred text formulated by “God’s dictation, canonized in ancient biblical times, and transmitted intact through the ages.”

As part of his interest in the formation of the biblical text, Qirqisānī pioneered a line of investigation into the role of the biblical “narrator / redactor” (*mudawwin*) that was developed more fully by later Karaite exegetes, especially Yefet ben Eli – a subject discussed extensively in recent

<sup>34</sup> Marwick, *Arabic Commentary*, 9. On the use of Ezra and his identification with ‘Uzayr in Muslim anti-Jewish polemics, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 50–74. See also Whittingham, “Ezra as Corrupter of Torah?”

<sup>35</sup> See Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-anwār*, vol. II, chapter 22, section 2, pp. 153–4.

<sup>36</sup> Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology*, 60.

scholarship.<sup>37</sup> While Qirqisānī identified Moses as the *mudawwin* of the Pentateuch, Yefet made a fine differentiation between the abstract concept of the *mudawwin* as biblical narrator and the historical character of Moses as described in the Pentateuchal narrative.<sup>38</sup> Yefet applied this concept throughout his Bible commentaries, identifying multiple layers of redaction within various biblical books, and tracing how the ancient prophetic oracles and historical accounts were collected and edited within the canon of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>39</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to dwell further on this aspect of Karaite exegesis, but we should emphasize that the bold use of the notion of the *mudawwin* by Karaite exegetes underscores the importance they ascribed to the question of the formation of the various books of the Bible. It would seem that this represents Jewish participation in a Muslim “universe of communications governed by texts.”<sup>40</sup> The theory of biblical composition and redaction that the Karaite exegetes developed throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries is, in fact, a major contribution to the history of biblical interpretation in the Middle Ages and beyond.<sup>41</sup>

## 5 Textuality as a criterion of authentication

Alongside his exploration into the formation of the Written Law, Qirqisānī devotes a good deal of space to what ultimately became the textual manifestation of the Oral Law, that is, the Mishnah and Talmud. His need to respond here to Muslim polemics about the authenticity of Jewish tradition is evident:

It should also be said to them (i.e., the Rabbanites): the Muslims require of us to prove the authenticity/veracity (*ṣiḥḥa*) of the prophecy of Moses, peace be

<sup>37</sup> See Ben-Shammai, “On *Mudawwin*”; Polliack, “Karaite Conception”; idem, “‘Voice’ of the Narrator”; Zawanowska, *Abraham Narratives*, 41–57.

<sup>38</sup> See Polliack, “Karaite Conception”; Zawanowska, *Abraham Narratives*, 41–57 and cf. Ben-Shammai, “On *Mudawwin*.”

<sup>39</sup> See Polliack, “*Qīṣaṣ wa-akhbār*”; Wechsler, *Esther*, 27–34, 66–71.

<sup>40</sup> As Stock remarks with respect to Christian Europe: “[T]hroughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries an important transformation began to take place. The written did not simply supersede the oral, although that happened in large measure: a new type of interdependence also arose between the two. . . . [O]ral discourse effectively began to function within a universe of communications governed by texts. On many occasions actual texts were not present, but people often thought or behaved as if they were. Texts thereby emerged as a reference system both of everyday activities and for giving shape to many larger vehicles of explanation” (*Implications of Literacy*, 3).

<sup>41</sup> On the possible influence of the Karaite concept of the *mudawwin* on Rabbanite interpretation in Byzantium and even in Western Europe, see Steiner, “Biblical Redaction.”

upon him. . . . [To this we can respond] that the accounts of our prophet [Moses] are composed/written in a book (*mudawwana fi kitāb*) which was transmitted by the nation as a whole and there is no disagreement among them (the Jews) in this regard . . . Whoever you may ask among them (the Jews) in this respect would be able to recount [these accounts], in keeping with/memorizing the compilation (i.e., the Bible) which has been written (*yuhfaẓ dhālika al-diwān al-mudawwan*), without allowing for addition or omission (*al-ziyāda wal-nuqṣān*). Whereas the miracles that they (the Muslims) claim with regard to their prophet are not as this, for one cannot find in his book (the Qur'an) any [mention] of them and so they are dependent on a weak matter (*amr ḍa'īf*), namely, so and so reported (a tradition, i.e., *ḥadīth*) from so and so (*ḥaddathana fulān 'an fulān*); and whoever takes up this method cannot come to anything reliable and no correct knowledge can issue from him; since those who recount this are from the start a small (i.e., closed/self-serving) group who are capable of collusion and lying in this respect as in many others. And the same [conclusion] obligates you (i.e., the Rabbanites) in regard to your claim regarding this Oral Torah: since it has *not* been written (*kānat lam tudawwan*), and does not have the support of a (written) record/document (*wathīqa*), it is possible that it underwent addition and omission (*al-ziyāda wal-nuqṣān*). . . . it is [even] possible that most of it was lost and forgotten . . . and this cancels your claim regarding [the strength and continuity of] its transmission. And if they (the Rabbanites) were to say: "Is it not all collected in the Mishnah and in the Talmud in written form (*mudawwanan*)?" [To this we can respond:] Surely, it has not been written down (*yudawwan*) in the generation of the prophets and it has not been transmitted by the nation in its entirety! Rather, the Mishnah was composed/written (*duwwinat*) two hundred years after the [time of the] prophets. Proof of this [is found] in their saying in the Mishnah as to how the transmission occurred, and that is in [tractate] *Avot* (Note 20) wherein they say: Moses received the [oral] Torah from Sinai and passed it onto Joshua, and Joshua passed it onto the elders, and the elders to the prophets and the prophets to the men of the Great Assembly . . . then they claim that Simeon the righteous was among the remnants of the Great Assembly . . .

What makes this matter even more easy [to disprove] is that none of the Rabbanites claim that the Mishnah was transmitted in written form (*naqlan mudawwanan*) but that it was written down at the end of the Second Temple [period].<sup>42</sup>

This passage illustrates the reshaping of Judaism in two steps taken in tandem: Qirqisānī's validation of the Bible as an authentic, ancient written text is predicated upon the invalidation of the Mishnah and Talmud as such. Drawing upon Muslim *ḥadīth* terminology, which differentiates

<sup>42</sup> For the Arabic text see Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-anwār*, vol. II, chapter 13, sections 10–11, pp. 119–20.

between “weak” (unreliable) and “strong” (reliable) traditions (the former being based upon a single source, the latter based on multiple, concurring sources), Qirqisānī argues that the traditions recorded in the Mishnah and Talmud cannot be authenticated, whereas the Bible is unanimously acknowledged in its entirety and is therefore known to be absolutely authentic. Qirqisānī embraces the literate mentality of his time by subjecting the Mishnah and Talmud to historical scrutiny as *written works* just as the Bible is evaluated. The prophecies and miraculous reports of the Bible were transmitted in writing from the biblical period and are universally accepted as genuine within the Jewish community. On the other hand, the Mishnah and Talmud purvey traditions subject to internal debate that were transmitted orally until being committed to writing in late antiquity. Their alleged historical pairing with the Written Law at Sinai must therefore be deemed a fabricated construct by the Sages themselves.

Echoes of this critique can be heard in *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*, in which Qirqisānī’s elaborate theological argument is cast in a more direct poetic expression by his younger contemporary Salmon ben Jeruham:

We believe firmly that the Written Law  
 Was in truth given to Israel by the right hand of the Almighty,  
 According to the testimony of the whole congregation of the Lily,<sup>43</sup>  
 Who are scattered in every land . . .  
 Divided as they are by language and tongue,  
 All Israel, from the east to the westernmost ends of the world,  
 Testify to the sanctity of the Written Law . . .  
 By their united and universal consent, without challenge.  
 Now if Israel and Judah are all united  
 Concerning the validity of the Oral Law, which is, as they say, perfect,  
 Let them offer their testimony, and let their voices be heard!<sup>44</sup>

Again turning to the Arabic notion of “consensus” as an indication of authenticity, Salmon emphasizes that the Oral Law falls short, whereas the written text of the Bible is universally recognized as ancient and authentic.

## 6 Conclusion

Tenth-century Karaites, such as Qirqisānī, Salmon, and Yefet, attempted to reconstruct Judaism as a book-orientated textually authentic religion. In

<sup>43</sup> This was one of the self-appellations of the Karaite community in Jerusalem, see Frank, “*Shoshanim*.”

<sup>44</sup> For the Hebrew text, see *Wars of the Lord*, Davidson ed., 37–8. English translation from Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology*, 73–4.

seeking to uncover its genuine and singular scriptural base they were reacting to the destabilization of the “dual Torah” edifice, an edifice that informed so much of post-biblical Jewish thought. This edifice was now crumbling, partly as the result of the encounter with the Islamic-Arabic model of textuality and literacy at large, and the model of written scripture in particular. Karaite thinkers devised a solution in response to the Islamic presentation of the Hebrew Bible as an abrogated and distorted scripture, as can be seen most clearly in Qirqisānī’s references to Muslim claims (quoted above). Nevertheless, for the Karaites, the anti-Islamic polemic appears to have been only one concern – and perhaps only a secondary one – whereas their main focus was directed inward to provide a new matrix for Jewish cultural definition of their time. The de-legitimization of the Oral Law went hand-in-hand with the authentication of the Written Law as two sides of the same coin. The Rabbanites were unable to sustain one without the other due to their continuing sanctification of the concept of the “dual Torah” as the twin base of Judaism. In contrast, the Karaites boldly split this sanctified pairing, motivated by the new literacy that they had internalized, and the rational criteria they adopted as a central part of their reformed self-conception as Jews, which prompted them to distinguish sharply between the oral and the written. For the Karaites, the attempt to maintain the rabbinic “dual Torah” structure meant that its “weak” or “defective” part (the Oral Law) would continue to undermine its “strong” or “perfect” part (the Written Law). If so, the suspicions pertaining to the textual transmission and revelatory content of the Oral Law would seep into the Written Law and corrupt it as well, leading them to cave into each other and thus threaten the basis of Judaism as an authentic religion. In essence, such a scenario was already set in motion through Muslim arguments regarding Jewish falsification (*tahrīf*) of scripture. The Karaites evidently sensed the innate danger to Judaism in maintaining the foundational narrative of the “dual Torah.” By freeing themselves from it, they were able to defend Judaism within the literate consciousness of their Arabic host culture and ward off the undermining of Jewish scripture by Islamic doctrine.



PART II

*Conceptions of the literal sense*





## CHAPTER 6

### *The literal sense of Christian scripture Redefinition and revolution*

*Jon Whitman*<sup>1</sup>

The conventional assumption of early Christian interpreters that the Bible is a cryptic document, the true sense of which lies deep beneath its surface,<sup>2</sup> generated intensive investigations into the relationship between the “literal” and “spiritual” senses of the sacred text. This dichotomy has been a commonplace in Christian hermeneutical thinking from late antiquity well into the modern period. Yet, as outlined in the current chapter, this apparent continuity belies critical changes that occurred from the medieval period onward in the ways that the literal sense was defined in relation to the spiritual sense. This shift precipitated an increasing valuation of the literal sense that became more pronounced in the Reformation and eventually had a substantial impact on literary theory and interpretation at large.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

In the movement of a civilization sometimes there are revolutions that are not clearly registered in the official records. They are not dramatically announced in elaborate manifestos, nor are they widely recognized in conventional histories. They operate not by directly overturning the institutions of a civilization but by subtly changing its idioms, transfiguring them from the inside, so that the civilization that they transform comes to speak an altered language almost without realizing it.

The historical and conceptual change discussed in this chapter is a revolution of that kind. It is a revolution in the way Christian civilization defines the primal sense of its foundational text. The revolution acquires its first systematic expression in the late medieval period. But in both its

<sup>1</sup> For their thoughtful and dedicated work in coordinating the research group in which I participated when I composed the initial version of this essay, I am deeply grateful to Mordechai Cohen and Meir Bar-Asher.

<sup>2</sup> This assumption and its implications are discussed in [Chapter 1](#) and [Chapter 2](#).

intellectual origins and its eventual consequences, it extends far beyond the Christian Middle Ages. In the end, it helps to shape the development of modern approaches to textual signification at large.

The revolution referred to here is an extended attempt to reconceive the “literal” sense of Christian scripture. This change is a complex process, which has yet to receive adequate clarification in contemporary scholarship. This chapter will examine the critical medieval turn itself while situating it in changing approaches to the literal sense from antiquity to the modern era. The discussion of this process here remains only a partial sketch, concentrating on certain theoretical expressions of the change at formative stages of its development. At the close of this chapter a few thoughts will be offered about some of the provocative implications of the change outside the treatment of Christian scripture.

## 1 Preliminary alignments: antiquity and the early Middle Ages

It should be stressed at the outset that the late medieval revolution in the treatment of the literal sense is not the first major development in Christian attitudes toward the subject. To assess this specific change, it is helpful first to sketch three of the principal approaches to the “letter” of scripture that developed earlier in the Christian world.

### *a The “letter” / legal prescriptions*

The first is the alignment of the letter – Greek *gramma*; Latin *littera* (or *litera*) – with the law. This alignment is influentially formulated already by Paul, who uses *gramma* to refer not only to what is written – the scriptural text – but more specifically, to what is legally prescribed by the text. Discussing the law of circumcision, for example, Paul distinguishes radically between the exterior prescription of the letter and the interior requirement of the spirit. As he puts it (Rom 2:28–9): “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly (*en tō phanerō*); neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh (*en sarkī*): But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit (*pneumatī*), and not in the letter (*grammatī*).” Elsewhere Paul broadly associates *gramma* with what he considers to be a fatal failing in the law at large, in contrast to the vivifying spirit of a “new testament” (*kainēs diathēkēs*). In Paul’s stark, far-reaching pronouncement in his

epistle to the Corinthians: “the letter (*gramma*) killeth, but the spirit (*pneuma*) giveth life” (2 Cor 3:6).<sup>3</sup>

While ancient Christian interpreters after Paul continue to associate the “letter” with a deficient form of ritual, they increasingly come to align it with a defective way of reading – a way of reading the divine law that does not penetrate beyond its letter to its spirit. In the third century, Origen explicitly uses the Pauline announcement to the Corinthians to argue that the law itself (*nomos*) is twofold (*dittos*), with “letter” (*gramma*) and “spirit” (*pneuma*) designating two differing senses of the scriptural text.<sup>4</sup> By the end of antiquity, Latin writers such as the church fathers Ambrose and Jerome are conspicuously correlating the term *littera* with a fleshly (*carnalis*) or fatal approach to scripture, in contrast to a spiritual understanding of the text.<sup>5</sup> In such movements, a critique of legal specifications elaborately expands into a critique of interpretive orientation.

The general distinction between the “letter” of the law and the “spirit” that transforms it deeply influences Christian approaches to the “literal sense” of scripture from late antiquity to the modern period. In its ancient origins the contrast appears to draw in part upon previous (non-Christian) legal distinctions between what is written (*scriptum*) in a particular document and the underlying will (*voluntas*) of the writer.<sup>6</sup> This is not the occasion to discuss how such Roman legal distinctions about human will are radically transformed by the Christian conception of a divine *pneuma* or *spiritus* informing the scriptural text. In the context of this study it is necessary only to stress that already in antique Christian scriptural interpretation the alignment of the “letter” with legal prescriptions intersects with a somewhat different approach to the “letter” – its alignment with historical events.

<sup>3</sup> On these and other aspects of *gramma* in Paul, see, for example, *TDNT*, s.v. γράμμα. The chronic question of how Paul assesses the law itself remains conspicuously controversial. See Sanders, *Paul*.

<sup>4</sup> See Origen, *Contra Celsum* VII.20, Marcovich ed., 475.

<sup>5</sup> For Ambrose on literal understanding (“intellectum secundum litteram”) as carnal understanding (“intellectus . . . carnalis”), see *De Interpellatione Iob et David* 1.5.12, Schenk ed., 217. For Jerome on understanding according to the killing letter (“occidentem litteram”), not the vivifying spirit (“spiritum vivificantem”), see *Commentaria in Isaiam* 7, 21, 4–5, in *PL* 24:262B. For a range of related early examples, see *Thesaurus*, s.v. *littera* I.C.2, columns 1519–20. For overviews of the “letter”/“spirit” distinction in ancient and medieval Christian interpretive formulations, see Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 24–78 and de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, I:225–51, II:5–9, 25–7, 35–7, 50–62.

<sup>6</sup> See *Thesaurus*, s.v. *littera* I.C.1, column 1519, with Eden, *Hermeneutics*, 7–63.

*b The "letter" / historical events*

This approach to the "letter" of scripture regards it not primarily as the specification of ritual practice, but as the record of sacred history. Already in the work of Origen a notion of the "literal" sense of scripture is recurrently associated with the notion of its historical dimension.<sup>7</sup> In the work of Jerome in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the expressions *juxta historiam* ("according to history") and *juxta litteram* ("according to the letter") are conspicuously used as parallel phrases in scriptural interpretation. "Let us speak *first according to history (juxta historiam)*," writes Jerome in one commentary, outlining a threefold exposition according to historical, tropological, and prophetic senses of scripture. It is commanded to understand scripture "in a threefold way (*tripliciter*)," he writes in another commentary: "*First, according to the letter (juxta litteram) . . .*"<sup>8</sup>

As the passages from Jerome suggest, from late antiquity the "literal" or "historical" sense of Christian scripture is regularly contrasted with other, "allegorical" senses, although the precise number, nature, and names of those other senses (for example, tropological, mystical, anagogical) vary among Christian interpreters. This broad contrast with "other" senses evokes something of the Pauline impulse to privilege the "spirit" over the "letter." But unlike the alignment of the letter with obsolescent ritual, the alignment of the letter with sacred history at large gives the "letter" an enhanced status.

This status is a function of the foundational role of scriptural events in Christian interpretive theory, however limited or strained the treatment of events may be in interpretive practice. For Christians the sacred *historia* is the indispensable basis for the gradual revelation of spiritual order. When, for example, the early medieval church father Gregory the Great composes his vast and influential moralized reading of the Book of Job, he specifies at the outset that "first" we "lay down the foundations (*fundamenta*) of the

<sup>7</sup> The linguistic evidence is complicated by the loss of various texts in the original Greek. See, for example, the Greek formulations in *Contra Celsum* IV.21 (Origen 234), with the discussions of Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 58–9; Chydenius, *Typological Problem in Dante*, 28; and de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* II:5–6.

<sup>8</sup> See Jerome, *Commentaria in Isaiam* 9, 28, 1, in *PL* 24:315B, and *Commentaria in Ezechielem* 5, 16, 30–1, in *PL* 25:147C–D; my italics. Compare Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 65–8 and Chydenius, *Typological Problem in Dante*, 31–3, with 36, quoting the early medieval expressions "Historice . . . juxta litteram" of Isidore of Seville and "Historia . . . secundum litteram" of Bede.

history,” and throughout the Middle Ages Christian interpreters repeatedly argue that exegesis must begin with the *fundamentum* of history.<sup>9</sup>

Although the use of *historia* to mean events themselves at times overlaps with the use of *historia* to mean the story of events, or even, more broadly, the style of narrative, so close is the alignment of the scriptural “letter” with actual deeds that the ninth-century theologian John Scotus Eriugena can declare that the “letter is the deed (*Littera est factum*) that the sacred history reports.”<sup>10</sup> By the late Middle Ages interpreters of Christian scripture routinely refer compositely to its “literal or historical” sense.<sup>11</sup>

### c The “letter” / grammatical propriety

The conception of the letter as fundamental acquires another dimension in a third early Christian approach to the literal sense. In contrast to the “legal” and “historical” notions of the “letter” outlined earlier, this might be called a “grammatical” or “rhetorical” notion of it. This notion is associated with the concept of a “proper” sense of discourse, in which terms strictly fit the things to which they refer.<sup>12</sup> Such a grammatical approach to the “letter” of course predates both Christianity and the very expression *sensus litteralis* or “literal sense.”

Taking diverse forms in ancient Greek and Roman treatises, the notion that a word has a sense “proper” to it already acquires formulaic expression in the early first-century-BCE *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, attributed in the Middle Ages to Cicero but now known not to have been written by him. As the author of the work puts it, “Proper terms (*propria*) are such as are, or can be, the designations specially characteristic of the subject (*rei*) of our discourse.”<sup>13</sup> A few decades later, Cicero himself refers to such “proper”

<sup>9</sup> For Gregory, see *Moralia in Job*, dedicatory letter, sect. 3, in Gregory, *Morales sur Job*, 124: “Nam primum quidem fundamenta historiae ponimus . . .” For repeated pronouncements from late antiquity to the late Middle Ages on the *fundamentum* of history, see de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* II:47–50, citing (among others) Augustine, Alcuin, Rabanus Maurus, Rupert of Deutz, Hugh of St. Victor, and Dionysius the Carthusian. The extent to which Christian critical practice itself reflects such pronouncements has long been a subject of controversy.

<sup>10</sup> See John Scotus Eriugena, *Commentarius*, fragment 2, cited and translated in de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* II:44 (with n. 29): “Littera est factum, quod sancta narrat historia . . .”

<sup>11</sup> In an expanded discussion it would be possible to examine the complications involved in late medieval applications of the notion of “literal or historical” to pagan poetry.

<sup>12</sup> In this context the English term “proper” is used primarily to suggest the notion in Latin *proprius* of what “belongs” to something, what is “its own,” what is its “property” – although this overlaps with the notion of what is “appropriate” or “suitable.”

<sup>13</sup> See *Rhetorica ad Herennium* IV.xii.17, Caplan trans., 270–1. For somewhat different Greek categories that partially underlie such Roman conceptions, see Barwick, *Probleme der stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik*, 92 and Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 104–5, 247.

terms as words that “were almost born at the same time as the things” (*rebus*) that they designate – in contrast to words used metaphorically, transferred (*transferuntur*) and “placed in a connexion not really belonging to them.”<sup>14</sup> Such distinctions deeply inform later antique approaches to poetic discourse. In the canonical definition of a trope (*tropus*) articulated by the late antique grammarian Donatus, a trope is “a word transferred from its proper signification (*a propria significatione*) to a likeness that is not proper to it (*ad non propriam similitudinem*).”<sup>15</sup>

From one perspective, of course, the general notion of transfer from one sense to another underlies both of the early Christian distinctions referred to earlier – the contrast between the letter of the law and its spiritual fulfillment and the contrast between the letter of history and its allegorical dimensions. But these grammatical and rhetorical distinctions are more stylistic in focus, concentrating on the linguistic decorum of relations between words and things. Further, as the terminology of “proper” and “not proper” suggests, they tend to give a privileged status not to the transferred sense of a term, but to a sense regarded as inherently belonging to it.<sup>16</sup> From such a perspective, figurative transfer is not necessarily a fulfillment; it is a deviation from linguistic propriety that requires a stylistic rationale.<sup>17</sup>

It is revealing that such grammatical or rhetorical approaches to linguistic propriety are only slowly accommodated to Christian notions of the “letter.” Their first systematic application to the interpretation of Christian scripture appears at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries, in the work of the rhetorician-turned-theologian Augustine. It is significant that in his study *On Christian Doctrine*, the first Christian treatise on semiotics, Augustine specifically indicates that if a scriptural expression “properly” (*proprie*) conveys a Christian message, it is not to be regarded as figurative (*nulla putetur figurata locutio*).<sup>18</sup> From such a perspective, there are cases in which even “proper,” non-figurative language can be doctrinally instructive.<sup>19</sup> Yet even Augustine tends to relegate the “letter” to a

<sup>14</sup> Cicero, *De Oratore* III.xxxvii.149, Rackham trans., 118–19.

<sup>15</sup> Donatus, *Ars maior* III.6, in Keil, *Grammatici latini*, 4:399: “Tropus est dictio translata a propria significatione ad non propriam similitudinem ornatus necessitatis causa”; trans. in Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 97. Compare the similar formulation in the late antique *Ars grammatica* of Diomedes, in Keil, *Grammatici latini*, I:456.

<sup>16</sup> This perspective is articulated in Muslim interpretive theory. See Chapter 8, esp. at Note 5.

<sup>17</sup> For brief overviews of changing approaches to this question from late antiquity to the Middle Ages, see Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 28–38 and 69–70. I am grateful to Rita Copeland for sharing information with me about changes in grammatical and rhetorical theory.

<sup>18</sup> *De doctrina Christiana* III.xv.23, in PL 34:74.

<sup>19</sup> See Eden, *Hermeneutics*, 59–61 and Copeland, “Ciceronian Rhetorical Tradition,” 246.



subordinate – at times, suspect – status. As he cautions in *On Christian Doctrine*, “you must be very careful lest you take figurative expressions literally (*ad litteram*). What the Apostle says pertains to this problem” – and Augustine immediately quotes Paul’s declaration to the Corinthians (2 Cor 3:6) that “the letter killeth,” in contrast to the vivifying spirit.<sup>20</sup>

As this comment suggests, the three approaches to the “letter” we have briefly described – legal, historical, and grammatical – tend not to be clearly distinguished in early Christian interpretation.<sup>21</sup> The conceptual overlap is understandable. In terms of the “letter,” a sheep in scripture, for example, might be the kind that according to law is to be offered on the altar before the Tabernacle; or it might be the specific one that according to history is sacrificed instead of Isaac by Abraham; or it might be the one that according to grammar is used as a figure of speech by the prophet Nathan to rebuke David for taking Bathsheba. From a Christian perspective, each of these scriptural sheep has not only a “literal” sense, but a transferred one. But the common feature of interpretive transfer tends to blur the question of whether what is “literal” involves a ritual observance, or a historical precedent, or a rhetorical trope. The blurring of these (and other) conceptions of the “letter” in Christian interpretation extends from antiquity to the Middle Ages. There is more than the notion of interpretive transfer that is shared by these overlapping conceptions of the *littera* and (in the expression of a related phrase that develops expansively in the Middle Ages) the *sensus litteralis*.<sup>22</sup> They share a general tendency to correlate the “letter” with “external” or “outward” conditions – in the first case, the practices of the law; in the second, the phenomena of history; in the third, the definitions of words. The very idiom of ancient and medieval Christian commentary emphasizes the point. The “letter” is variously

<sup>20</sup> *De doctrina Christiana* III.v.9, in PL 34:68–9; Robertson trans., 84.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Krewitt, *Metapher und tropische Rede*, 108, citing Jerome on *historia* that is “metaphorically woven” (*historia ista metaphoricè textitur*), and Pèpin, *Tradition de l’allégorie*, 283, n. 110, quoting Augustine on what is to be understood not only *historice* and *proprie*, but also *figurative* and *prophetic*. On the overlap between historical and linguistic signification in Christian interpretive theory and some of its complications in the early Middle Ages, see Whitman, *Allegory*, 126–31.

<sup>22</sup> The use of the term *litteralis* to refer to a sense that is distinct from a transferred sense is associated already (in a mythographic context) with Fulgentius (fifth–sixth centuries CE) in *Thesaurus*, s.v. *litteralis*, column 1529. But the attribution of the cited work to Fulgentius is controversial; the text may have been composed many centuries later. For medieval instances of *litteralis* with a sense of this kind, see *Novum Glossarium*, s.v. *litteralis*, category 5 (and s.v. *litteraliter*), and *Dictionary of Medieval Latin*, s.v. *litteralis*, *litteralis*, category 6 (and s.v. *litteraliter*, *litteraliter*, category 3). Though at times medieval interpreters seek to distinguish *sensus litteralis* from *littera* or *ad litteram*, as in the fifteenth-century controversy discussed by Froelich, “Literal Sense,” there is considerable overlap among these expressions in medieval theory and practice.

associated with the “surface” of the text (*superficies*), in contrast to its depth or height; its “body” (*corpus*), in contrast to its soul; its “shell” (*cortex*), in contrast to its kernel; what is written “outside” (*foris*), in contrast to what is written inside.<sup>23</sup> Whether or not the “letter” of the scriptural text “kills,” for Christian interpreters in antiquity and the early Middle Ages it is normally not the spirit of the text.

## 2 Late medieval turns: broad outlines

It is thus extraordinary that in the late Middle Ages, Christian interpreters increasingly claim that the literal sense displays a spirit of its own – a spirit that lies in effect beneath or beyond the surface of the text. According to this approach, the “literal sense” of Christian scripture is the intention (*intentio*) of the author. The term *intentio* in medieval Latin is broad in semantic scope, including not only the notion of purpose or aim, but also the notion of conceptual design.<sup>24</sup> In the Christian world, incipient forms of the alignment of the literal sense with *intentio* appear in the twelfth century, but its first systematic formulations develop in the thirteenth century. For the purposes of this sketch, we initially note only two of those theoretical formulations.

### a The literal sense and authorial intention

One formulation is from the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas, a work written in the late 1260s and early 1270s. Near the beginning of the work, dated to the initial part of that period,<sup>25</sup> Aquinas discusses the multiple senses of Christian scripture. The “literal sense” (*sensus litteralis*), he maintains, “is that which the author intends” (*quem auctor intendit*), and the “author” (*auctor*) of Holy Scripture, he continues, “is God, Who by one act comprehends all things.”<sup>26</sup> The other formulation is from the

<sup>23</sup> For selective instances of such associations, see, respectively, de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* I:133 (with n. 9) and II:79 (with nn. 32, 35, and 42); I:137 (with n. 29); II:27 (with n. 139); and II:8 (with n. 78) and II:82 (with n. 76).

<sup>24</sup> On this semantic range, partially overlapping with its range in ancient Latin, see, for example, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, *Dictionary of Medieval Latin*, and *Thesaurus*, s.v. *intentio*.

<sup>25</sup> On the dating of the *Summa theologiae* (not completed when Aquinas died in 1274), see Weisheipl, *Thomas D'Aquino*, 360–2, associating the first part of the work with the period 1266–8; Johnson, “Another Look,” 120 correlates the excerpted passage with 1266–7.

<sup>26</sup> See *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 10, Resp., in Aquinas, *Summa* I:9: “Quia vero sensus litteralis est, quem auctor intendit: auctor autem sacrae Scripturae Deus est, qui omnia simul suo intellectu comprehendit”; trans. in *Basic Writings*, I:17.

*Summa theologiae* of Albert the Great, a passage perhaps written about 1270.<sup>27</sup> The “intention of the speaker (*intentio dicentis*) as expressed in the letter (*in littera*),” indicates Albert, “is the literal sense (*litteralis sensus*).”<sup>28</sup> For centuries after the development of these and similar formulations, the notion that the literal sense is the intention of the author passes expansively into the interpretive theory and practice of the Christian world. It never completely displaces the earlier alignments of the “letter” with the prescriptions of law, or the phenomena of history, or the definitions of words, but it tends to shift – sometimes dramatically – the treatment of those alignments, and finally to transform radically the approach of Christians to the primal sense of their foundational text.

At first glance it may not appear to be very provocative to claim that the literal sense of a text is the intention of the author. But appearances, if we may use the expression in this case, can be deceptive. To give only a preliminary example, the alignment of the literal sense with authorial intention can reverse one of the most familiar views of the subject to this day – the view that the literal sense of an expression is its primary or customary sense, as distinguished from some metaphorical or transferred sense that may be assigned to it. This view originates in part with the ancient alignment between the “letter” of a text and its grammatically “proper” meaning – the third of the early approaches to the “letter” just sketched. The argument that the literal sense is the intention of the author potentially turns such a view upside down. In the continuation of the passage cited from Aquinas, for example, Aquinas insists that in a figurative expression such as the “arm” of God, the “literal sense” of the expression is precisely not the conventional sense of “arm.” “Nor is the figure itself (*figura ipsa*), but that which is figured (*id quod est figuratum*), the literal sense. When scripture speaks of God’s arm (*brachium*), the literal sense (*litteralis sensus*) is not that God has such a member, but only what is signified by this member, namely, operative power (*virtus operativa*).”<sup>29</sup> In effect, what today would normally be called the metaphorical sense of

<sup>27</sup> On the date, see Minnis, *Authorship*, 73, indicating that the passage was written “shortly after 1270,” and the introduction to Albertus, *Summa theologiae sive de mirabili scientia Dei*, xvi–xvii, noting the use in the *Summa* of a 1268 translation of a work by Proclus.

<sup>28</sup> See *Summa theologiae* I, tract. 1, q. 5, cap. 4, ad 3, in Albertus, *Summa theologiae sive de mirabili scientia Dei*, 21: “*intentio dicentis expressa in littera est litteralis sensus*”; trans. in Minnis, *Authorship*, 73.

<sup>29</sup> See *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 10, ad 3, in Aquinas, *Summa* 1: 9: “*nec est litteralis sensus ipsa figura, sed id quod est figuratum. Non enim cum Scriptura nominat Dei brachium, est litteralis sensus quod in Deo sit membrum huiusmodi corporale: sed id quod per hoc membrum significatur, scilicet virtus operativa.*” For the translation, see *Basic Writings*, 1: 17.

that “outstretched arm” in Exod 6:6 is declared by Aquinas to be its literal sense. In such an argument, what is being “outstretched,” as it were, is not only the divine arm, but the literal sense itself.

In the Muslim and Jewish worlds there are precedents for some of the general tendencies of Aquinas and his Christian successors, although it is difficult to say whether any of them quite presents this radical alliance of literality and intentionality.<sup>30</sup> In any case, whatever the degree to which there may be a conceptual overlap between attitudes outside and inside the Christian world regarding this issue, the particular origins and implications of the Christian turn in perspective make that turn a distinctive – and fateful – change. As will be suggested in the later part of this chapter, the transfiguration of the “literal sense” eventually helps to shape not only the revaluation of the “letter” in Reformation approaches to Christian scripture, but also the empowerment of literary language in later poetics. It would seem to mark a paradigm shift that alters approaches to textuality from the late medieval to the modern period.

But it takes time to clarify a paradigm shift, even when there is a gradual awareness of a change. In scholarship on medieval Christian interpretation, it has long been thought that there is something new in comments such as those of Aquinas about the *sensus litteralis* of Christian scripture. But for generations these thoughts have regularly centered around the view that such comments give new precision and priority to “the literal” understanding of the text, in contrast to “the allegorical” approaches of earlier interpretation.<sup>31</sup> From this perspective, the appeal to authorial intention in accounts of Christian scripture reflects a broad critical movement in the late Middle Ages to explore the concerns and contexts of the original authors. There is no question that such a movement significantly informs Christian interpretation in this period.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> For discussions on this subject I am grateful to Robert Gleave, Meir Bar-Asher, and Mordechai Cohen. In the Muslim interpretation, for example, *ḥaqīqa* at times seems suggestive of *sensus litteralis*, but as *ḥaqīqa* is critically distinguished from the extended sense of *majāz*, the intended sense of an expression such as the divine “hand” is categorized not as *ḥaqīqa*, but as *majāz*. (See further discussion in Chapters 8 and 11.) For Aquinas, by contrast, the *sensus litteralis* is itself the intended sense. In Jewish interpretation, perhaps the closest analogue to Aquinas’ conception is Maimonides’ alignment of scriptural *peshat* with meaning that is divinely authorized at Sinai. (See Chapter 9, Sec. 5, and Cohen, *Gates*, 295–304.) But for Christian interpreters, the alignment of the “literal” sense with the intention of the author is part of a general approach to textual signification at large. It applies to texts beyond scriptural ones, and eventually informs theories of textuality itself, as discussed in this chapter.

<sup>31</sup> See Spicq, *Esquisse*, 269–88 and Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 101, 300–2, 368.

<sup>32</sup> See especially the fundamental work of Minnis, *Authorship*.

But that movement has pervasive counter-strains and complexities, not least in the notion of authorial intention itself. For however distinct-ive the human authors of scripture, they compose finally under divine auspices, and inquiries about divine intentionality involve an *auctor* who (in Aquinas's phrase) "comprehends all things" (*Omnia . . . comprehendit*). In aligning the *sensus litteralis* with the intentions of that author, Christian interpreters tend to open the "literal sense" to a potentially limitless range of meanings. Eventually they transform the very category of the "literal" almost beyond recognition.

*b Contexts of change: intentionality and causality*

In its immediate origins, this late medieval revolution draws upon deep changes in intellectual orientation that acquire provisional expression already in the twelfth century. It is particularly telling that inquiries about the issue of intentionality should intensify during this century, a period long associated with what has been called "a search for the causes of things."<sup>33</sup> It would be possible to explore the linguistic implications of that investigation of causality in a range of ways.

In the speculations of the early- to mid-twelfth-century theologian Gilbert of Poitiers, for example, the intense effort to distinguish between what a thing is (*quod est*) and that *by which* the thing is what it is (*quo est*) shapes his approach to the world at large – including the linguistic world, as when he stresses his aim to convey the sense of an author (*sensus auctoris*) by considering not just the expressions (*dicta*) of the author, but the reasons (*rationes*) underlying those expressions.<sup>34</sup> Somewhat later a related distinction acquires influential form in the contrast between what is called the "sense that words make" and the sense "from which" (*ex quo*) they are made. Thus, an avant-garde theologian who is influenced by Gilbert of Poitiers and who is active in the last decades of the century, Simon of Tournai, argues that there is "a double (*duplex*) sense of words." Sometimes, he continues, words are true (*vera*) "according to the sense from which they are made, not from the sense that they make: as here" – at which point he cites a standard

<sup>33</sup> See Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> On Gilbert and the distinction between *quod est* and *quo est*, see Häring, "Case"; Marenbon, "Gilbert of Poitiers." On *dicta* and *rationes*, see *De trinitate liber primus*, *Gisleberti prologus primus*, I, i, 7, in Gilbert, *Commentaries on Boethius*, Häring ed., 54. The notion of *quo est*, of course, is broader than the notion of *rationes*.

example of figurative language – “‘the meadow smiles.’ Whoever says this intends (*intendit*) to signify that the meadow is a cause (*causam*) of smiling.”<sup>35</sup> Here a figurative expression is called “true” by virtue of an intention that itself indicates causality. The invocation of the sense “from which” words are made can still be found much later in the Middle Ages.<sup>36</sup>

Yet while formulations of this kind display a new sensitivity to the intentional or causal dimension of language, they emphasize the *distinction* between what is said and what is intended. In this respect they resemble the old distinction between what is written (*scriptum*) and what is willed by the writer (*voluntas*), a contrast noted earlier in this chapter. The crucial shift in the thirteenth century is the *identification* of the “literal sense” with the intention of the author. The question remains how that sense – long associated by Christians with the “outer” realm of legal prescriptions, or historical events, or verbal definitions – could be aligned with a realm as it were beneath or beyond the surface of a text, the realm of intention.

### 3 Late medieval turns: specific realignments

To situate that change it would be necessary to pass beyond treatments of intentionality at large<sup>37</sup> to more specific revaluations of the “literal sense” itself. Perhaps the point can be exemplified by even a brief glance at certain critical twelfth- and thirteenth-century reassessments of the three early alignments indicated at the start of this chapter, beginning with the alignment of the “letter” of scripture with legal prescriptions.

<sup>35</sup> On Simon of Tournai, see Luscombe, “Tournai,” with the introduction to Simon, *Les Disputationes*, xxxi–xxxiii, xxxix–xli. For the citation, see *Disputationes*, disputatio 59, q. 2, in Simon, *Les Disputationes*, 167; for the translation, see Copeland, *Pedagogy*, 109, who also calls attention to disputatio 5, q. 3.

<sup>36</sup> On the distinction and its late medieval afterlife, see Häring, “Commentary,” 196; Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, 69–70; Copeland, *Pedagogy*, 108–10; Froelich, “Literal Sense,” 36; Preus, *Shadow to Promise*, 107.

<sup>37</sup> These include the early twelfth-century ethical theory of the controversial philosopher Peter Abelard, who argues that the moral assessment of an exterior action radically depends upon the intention of the actor. See Abelard, *Ethics*, Luscombe ed., xxxi–xxxii, 28; see also Luscombe, “Peter Abelard,” 304–6. While Abelard contributes substantially to late medieval approaches to intentionality and interiority, he does not systematically apply his ethical theory to the question of the senses of language. Moreover, the theory itself, which is severely criticized both during and after his time, is largely superseded by other theories and terminologies by the time of Aquinas. See Lottin, *Psychologie*, II:423–65.

## a The “letter” / legal prescriptions – reassessments

From antiquity to the Middle Ages the critique of the “letter” of the law concentrates not on what Christians regard as its ethical precepts, but on what they view as its “ceremonial” prescriptions, such as circumcision and animal sacrifices. According to that critique, such practices make sense as shadowy figures superseded by their spiritual fulfillments in the New Covenant. In the twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Christian world, there are intermittent attempts to treat ceremonial observance not just as a figure of things to come, but as a form of worship that needs to be understood in its own right.<sup>38</sup> This approach is noticeably advanced by the translation of Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* into Latin in the 1220s. Maimonides’ elaborate effort to show that the rituals of the Law have a historical rationale and that such practices at large derive from the “first intention” (Latin: *prima intentio*) of God to draw his people away from idolatry, significantly influences thirteenth-century Christian thought.<sup>39</sup> It is revealing that one of the first Christian theologians to make extensive use of the *Guide*, William of Auvergne, writing around the year 1230, argues that “those things which seem to be nonsensical in the law” are to be understood “according to the letter” (*juxta litteram*) and that its regulations involve “just and reasonable causes” (*causas . . . iustas ac rationabiles*).<sup>40</sup> Later in the thirteenth century, Aquinas is elaborately arguing that while ceremonial prescriptions have “figurative causes” (*causas figurales*), foreshadowing Christ, they also have “literal causes” (*causas litterales*), reflecting their original contexts.<sup>41</sup> But the striking turn in Aquinas’ argument is his view that just as “the use of metaphorical expressions (*metaphoricae locutionis*) in scripture belongs to the literal sense (*litteralis*), because the words are employed in order to convey that particular meaning, so also the meaning of those legal ceremonies which commemorated certain divine benefits, because of which they were instituted . . . does not go beyond the order of literal causes (*litteralium causarum*).”<sup>42</sup> From such a perspective, not only

<sup>38</sup> See Smalley, “William of Auvergne,” 14–16. My discussion of this subject is indebted to the article as a whole.

<sup>39</sup> See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III:26, 29, 32, Pines trans., 507–8, 517–18, 527–31. For *prima intentio*, see Smalley, “William of Auvergne,” 35, n. 41.

<sup>40</sup> See *De Legibus* 15, in William of Auvergne, *Guilielmi*, 46. For William’s approach to further, “spiritual” dimensions of the law, see *De Legibus* 16 and 17, in *Guilielmi*, 47–9. On his position as a whole, see Smalley, “William of Auvergne,” 27–46.

<sup>41</sup> See *Summa theologiae* Ia-IIae, q. 102, a. 2, in Aquinas, *Summa* II:472; trans. in *Basic Writings*, II:863.

<sup>42</sup> See *Summa theologiae* Ia-IIae, q. 102, a. 2, ad 1, in Aquinas, *Summa* II:472; trans. in *Basic Writings*, II:864.



does the “letter” of the law have a substantial causality of its own; such causality, like the meaning underlying a metaphorical expression, is *included* in its literality.

*b The “letter” / historical events – reassessments*

Yet for medieval Christians, the “letter” of scripture passes far beyond legal prescriptions. It is the narrative of sacred history – the second of the three categories indicated at the start of this chapter. It has long been argued that the twelfth century marks a new concentration on the “historical” sense of Christian scripture, and that the School of St. Victor, intellectually led in the early twelfth century by Hugh of St. Victor, is the vanguard of that historicizing movement.<sup>43</sup> But more recent research has helped to clarify how twelfth- and thirteenth-century readers of Christian scripture seek to incorporate aspects of historical causality within the texture of the narrative itself.<sup>44</sup> Such research has explored, for example, the ways in which critical categories in introductions to ancient authors (*accessus ad auctores*) – including the category of *intentio* – come to be used in introductions to scriptural books. It has examined the application of Aristotelian concepts of causal activity, such as “efficient causes,” to describe the divine and human forces underlying a scriptural text. And it has assessed the tendency to consider the designs of Christian scripture not so much in terms of a contrast between historical and allegorical “senses” as in terms of a range of stylistic “modes” that deeply move its readers. Over the course of this period the scriptural *historia* is gradually treated less as a verbal “surface” than as a narrative setting for subtle modulations of intent and idiom. One important expression of that development is a *summa* associated with the thirteenth-century theologian Alexander of Hales, and it is significant that according to this work the “historical interpretation” (*historicum*) of

<sup>43</sup> For an influential early form of the argument, see Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 83–195. But the claim (101) that Hugh tends to align the literal sense with authorial intention (including the projected meanings of figurative expressions) needs considerable caution. While it has been argued that Hugh includes metaphorical meaning in the literal sense itself (e.g., Turner, *Eros and Allegory*, 273, n. 6), to my knowledge there is no statement by Hugh that unambiguously correlates either metaphorical meaning in general or authorial intention at large with the literal sense of Christian Scripture as a whole. Although the recent dissertation of Marcus Paul Elder, *Eruditio Sacri Eloquii*, is not available to me except in fragmentary form, it appears that his study argues in detail against including figurative meaning in the literal sense as conceived by Hugh. See Chapter 7, Note 19.

<sup>44</sup> In recent decades the preeminent position in this research belongs to Alastair Minnis, to whose work I am deeply indebted. For detailed treatments of the points briefly mentioned in this paragraph, see especially Minnis, *Authorship*, and Minnis, Scott and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*.

Christian scripture relates not only to “things” but also to “the likenesses of things” (*rei similitudinem*), as in “parables in the Gospels” that must be understood “not in terms of their actually happening but of the possibility of their happening.”<sup>45</sup> Even a narrative that is transparently impossible – the tale of the talking trees in Judges 9 – does not, according to the *summa*, contradict the principle that the *sensus litteralis* is founded on the truth (*supra verum*). For “in parables of this sort there is truth in respect of that purpose to serve which (*id quod propter quod*) they are spoken.”<sup>46</sup> From such perspectives, the “historical” or “literal” sense of Christian scripture includes not only brief metaphorical expressions. It includes extended parabolic narratives, which belong to the *fundamentum* of history due to their underlying aims.

c The “letter” / grammatical propriety – reassessments

But how could the view that figurative language belongs to the *historia* or the *littera* be reconciled with the third approach to the “literal” sense noted earlier – its alignment with the “proper” sense of language? Though linguistic theory in the late Middle Ages is complex and elusive, we wish only to note that questions about the diverse conditions in which terms acquire and alter their meanings preoccupy investigations of language in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the early movement of “speculative grammar” during this period, for example, one of the basic concerns is to clarify the rationale underlying the primary meanings and secondary uses of words – what is called the “cause of invention” of language (*causa inventionis*). The effort already takes elaborate form in the first medieval grammatical *summa*, a twelfth-century commentary by Petrus Helias on the ancient grammatical work of Priscian, in which the commentator opens his discussion of the question by aligning the “cause of invention” of an expression with the “will” (*voluntatem*) of the speaker.<sup>47</sup> But over the course of this period inquiries about the changing designs of expression sometimes take more provocative forms, as in a commentary composed

<sup>45</sup> See *Summa theologica*, Introductory Treatise, q. 1, ch. 4, a. 4, in Alexander of Hales, *Doctoris irrefragabilis*, I:12; trans. in Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 222; the comment about “parables in the Gospels” has an Augustinian reference point.

<sup>46</sup> See the pages cited in Note 45.

<sup>47</sup> For the quotation, see Petrus Helias, *Summa super Priscianum*, Reilly ed., I:177. For overviews of varying approaches to such issues in twelfth-century grammatical discussions, see Fredborg, “Speculative Grammar,” 181–6 and Reynolds, *Medieval Reading*, 45–60.

about a century later<sup>48</sup> on a section of the work of Donatus – in fact, the very section on tropes quoted earlier in this chapter. Referring to the passages about “proper” forms of signification cited from Donatus and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*,<sup>49</sup> the commentator argues that there is a “twofold (*duplex*) signifying potential in a word” and that in effect there are thus different kinds of propriety. A word can be “used in context to express its proper meaning (*significationem . . . propriam*).” But a word can also “signify its opposite (*significare oppositum*) by somehow considering the single word itself by itself, without taking into account its original imposition. . . . In this way, it may signify its opposite, because words are arbitrary (*ad placitum*). When one looks at it like this, a word properly (*proprie*) signifies the opposite (*oppositum*) of its meaning.”<sup>50</sup> From such a perspective, even verbal propriety has its contingencies.

Whatever the degree to which the specific arguments displayed in this mid-thirteenth-century treatise may have been shared by others in the period, they reflect a more general tendency in late medieval linguistic theory to scrutinize the category of grammatical propriety and to explore the substitutions and transfers involved in the generation of meaning. Their importance for this discussion lies in their overlap with thirteenth-century reassessments of the “letter.” By the third quarter of that century, when Aquinas explicitly aligns intentionality with literality in his account of Christian scripture, the dimensions of the “literal” sense are undergoing a conspicuous transformation. Though the literal sense may be aligned with legal prescriptions, even such prescriptions can be given a rationale of their own. Although the literal sense may be aligned with historical events, even elaborate similitudes can be considered historical in orientation, in view of the aim of the language. Though the literal sense may be aligned with grammatical propriety, even propriety can be compatible with diversity of signification. The “surface” of the *littera* is gradually acquiring a new depth.

<sup>48</sup> For the commentary, see Kilwardby, *In Donati Artem Maiorem III*. For a partial translation of this work and some remarks about it, see Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 724–34. The attribution of the commentary to Kilwardby has been called into question; but it has been dated to about the middle of the thirteenth century.

<sup>49</sup> For the citations, see Notes 15 and 13. In the commentary, see Kilwardby, *In Donati Artem Maiorem III*, 137.37–45; trans. Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 729. On slight differences regarding the text of Donatus, see Copeland and Sluiter, *ibid.*, 729, n. 4. There are considerable differences between the passage in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and the formulation in the commentary.

<sup>50</sup> See Kilwardby, *In Donati Artem Maiorem III*, 138.87–105; trans. Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 729–30.

## 4 Foundations in flux: the late Middle Ages to the modern period

### a *Locus classicus / dislocations*

It is such a sense of depth to which Thomas Aquinas appeals when he argues – in what becomes a *locus classicus* in later interpretation – that the “literal sense is that which the author intends” (Note 26). For Aquinas, a “literal sense” of this kind has a fundamental importance. It seems to offer a way to stabilize the conspicuous ambivalences of the language of Christian scripture. In fact, this very statement in the *Summa* belongs to a section of the work that opens with the problem of multiple meaning – the fourfold range of meaning – in the Christian canon. “For many different senses in one text,” indicates Aquinas near the start of the section, “produce confusion and deception and destroy all force of argument.” But “Holy Scripture ought to be able to state the truth without any fallacy.”<sup>51</sup> The multiplicity of senses institutionalized in Christian interpretation seems to call into question whether there is any stable foundation on which a systematic Christian theology can proceed.

In seeking to resolve that question, Aquinas argues that however elusive scriptural words may seem, they point – whether “properly” or “figuratively” – to a realm of “things” (*res*), a realm that is ordered by God himself. These “things,” argues Aquinas, are the reference points for the “first signification” (*prima significatio*) of the words, the signification that belongs to “the first sense (*primum sensum*), the historical or literal (*sensus historicus vel litteralis*).”<sup>52</sup> It is true, maintains Aquinas, that things in sacred history have other significations – allegorical, moral, anagogical. But these significations are authorized by the divine author of history itself. From this perspective, there is a primal, stable starting point for signification, and this starting point Aquinas calls the “literal sense.” “Thus in Holy Scripture,” responds Aquinas to the concern about multiple meaning at the opening of the section, “no confusion results, for all the senses are founded on one—the literal—from which alone can any argument be drawn.”<sup>53</sup> For

<sup>51</sup> See *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 10, in Aquinas, *Summa* I:8–9; trans. in *Basic Writings*, I:16.

<sup>52</sup> See *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 10, Resp., in Aquinas, *Summa* I:9 (typography adjusted); trans. in *Basic Writings*, I:16–17.

<sup>53</sup> See *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 10, ad 1, in Aquinas, *Summa* I:9; trans. in *Basic Writings*, I:17 (with the reference in the passage to Augustine). It should be stressed that the kind of argumentation to which Aquinas appeals differs from the kind of exposition to which Augustine refers or the kinds

Aquinas, the flux of scriptural figuration is stabilized by the *fundamentum* of historical facts.

At least that was Aquinas' intention – if one may use the term. But in the history of Christian interpretation, the notion of referential depth that Aquinas applies to the literal sense increasingly turns into a form of referential drift. For the moment that even transferred senses of language are included in the “literal sense,” it becomes increasingly unclear exactly where the literal sense ends.

Already in Aquinas' own work there are comments about the “literal sense” that facilitate such a referential drift. In some of his earliest remarks about the subject, a detailed set of reflections that appear to date from 1256, he indicates that a metaphorical expression in the book of Daniel (2:34) refers directly to Christ, so that Christ himself is the “literal sense” (*sensum litteralem*) of that expression.<sup>54</sup> Although this is a case in which according to Aquinas the metaphor has no preliminary, mediating *res*, elsewhere in the same set of reflections Aquinas suggests that a single scriptural expression can be used (even by human authors) to designate two different but actual things. Prophets, he indicates, can speak of present facts (*factis*) while intending (*intenderunt*) future events.<sup>55</sup> About a decade later Aquinas uses formulations that can be taken to mean that different senses of a single scriptural expression may each be included in the category of the literal sense itself. For it is “part of the dignity of Holy Scripture that under one *littera* it contains many senses (*multos sensus*).”<sup>56</sup> Whatever the ambiguities

of analysis that might be used in areas such as canon law. I am grateful to Alastair Minnis for comments about this subject.

<sup>54</sup> For the reflections at large, eventually framed as a set of articles in *Quodlibetum* VII, q. 6, see Aquinas, *Questiones quodlibetales* 273–80 (in which the articles are numbered 14–16); for the date, see v–vii of the introduction, with Weisheipl, *Thomas D'Aquino*, 96–7, 104–6; for a translation (in which the articles are numbered 1–3), see Turner, *Eros and Allegory*, 343–52. For the argument about Daniel 2:34, see a. 15, ad 1, in Aquinas, *Questiones quodlibetales* 277–8; trans. in Turner, *Eros and Allegory*, 348–9. According to a reported form of lectures that may date from the last years of Aquinas' life, there are words in Psalms (21:2 [MT 22:2]) that are said of Christ alone (*solo*), so that in this passage the only literal sense (*sensum litteralem*) is christological. See Aquinas, *Super Evangelium* ch. 1, lect. 5; for a translation, see Boyle, “Aquinas and Sacred Scripture,” n. 20. On the dating of the lectures and the question of their relation to Aquinas' own words, see Holmes, “Aquinas' *Lectura*,” 74–7, 96.

<sup>55</sup> See *Quodlibetum* VII, q. 6, a. 14, ad 5, in Aquinas, *Questiones quodlibetales* 275; trans. Turner, *Eros and Allegory*, 345–6.

<sup>56</sup> See *De potentia* q. 4, a. 1, Resp., in Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae*: “hoc enim ad dignitatem divinae Scripturae pertinet, ut sub una littera multos sensus contineat,” trans. (slightly adjusted), English Dominican Fathers, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia dei*. For the approximate date of the discussion (1265–6) and a detailed argument that in this context *multos sensus* refers to “a multiplicity of the literal sense,” see Johnson, “Another Look,” 120, 126–33, with his extensive bibliography on the long-controversial question of whether Aquinas holds that a passage can have

in Aquinas' own position, in the generations after him his view that the "literal sense" can be signified in two *ways* (*dupliciter*) – properly and figuratively<sup>57</sup> – eventually passes into the view that the "literal sense" can include two *significations*, one of which points to the other.

*b Divided senses: the late Middle Ages and the Reformation*

In its early stages this view is expressed in terms of a "double literal sense" (*duplex sensus litteralis*), a complex concept with a far-reaching afterlife. As the conception modulates over time it is not always accompanied by the specific terminology of intention, though repeatedly it is. Nor would it be practical in this limited survey to trace the movement in any detail. But perhaps we can at least suggest something of its general orientation by calling attention to a few revealing remarks about the literal sense by Christian interpreters after Aquinas.

One of the most important interpreters of the late Middle Ages, the fourteenth-century commentator Nicholas of Lyre, indicates that in Christian scripture the "same letter" (*eadem litera*) at times has "a double literal sense" (*duplicem sensum literalem*). A passage in the Old Testament (1 Chr 17:13) regarding a "son" of the divine father refers "literally" (*ad litteram*) to Solomon, but the same passage invoked in the New Testament (Hebrews 1:5) refers "literally" (*ad litteram*) to Christ. Each exposition is "literal simply speaking" (*litteralis simpliciter*), even though the second one is "spiritual and mystical in a derived sense, in that Solomon was a figure (*figura*) of Christ." What had been regarded for over a thousand years as the allegorical relation between a figure from the "Old" Testament and a fulfillment in the "New" one is coming to be regarded as a relation inside the literal realm itself.<sup>58</sup>

more than one literal sense. The point made here is not that Aquinas does or does not hold this view, but that his formulations are ambiguous.

<sup>57</sup> See *Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Galatas lectura*, ch. 4, lect. 7, in Aquinas, *Super Epistolam*: "dupliciter ... secundum proprietatem locutionis ... vel secundum similitudinem seu metaphoram." Compare Aquinas, *Expositio super Iob ad litteram*, ch. 1; trans. in Minnis, *Authorship*, 74.

<sup>58</sup> For the quotation, see Nicholas of Lyre, "Prologus secundus"; trans. Preus, *Shadow to Promise*, 68. A reassessment is needed regarding the comment in Preus, *ibid.*, 69, that "For the first time in the literature, a New Testament reading of an Old Testament passage is dignified with the label 'literal,' and arguments are brought forward to defend it." As indicated earlier, such a reading of an "Old Testament passage" can be called "literal" by Aquinas, but Nicholas applies the argument to an "Old Testament passage" that for him remains "literal" in its own right. For certain telling uses of "literal" in earlier Christian interpretation, with terminological complications, see Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 232–3. On the *duplex sensus litteralis* and Nicholas' contemporary William of Nottingham, see Minnis,

By the early fifteenth century, the notion of a *duplex sensus litteralis* sometimes takes a more radical form. Some argue that scriptural passages at large can be read according to two literal senses, one of which is deceptive, the other of which is true. In the process, certain fundamental Christian categories regarding the literal sense turn virtually inside out. In a wide-ranging ecclesiastical controversy in the first quarter of the century about the question of whether the literal sense always “kills” – a controversy provoked by the issue of whether the assassination in 1407 of the brother of the French king violated scriptural law – it is argued that the true *sensus litteralis* of scripture is not the “superficial” sense of the letter. For the literal (*litteralis*) sense can be understood in “a twofold way” (*dupliciter*): “One is called the *interior* sense; the other, exterior; one superficial; the other, of the *innermost* parts.”<sup>59</sup> From such a perspective, even the “outer”/“inner” relation is a feature of the literal sense; to disclose its interior is to discern its spirit. Not the least irony in this argument is that such approaches to the literal sense are apparently used by certain participants in the controversy to defend the assassination itself. It seems that for some interpreters, not only can the *littera* kill; so can its replacement, the new *sensus litteralis*.

It is possible to trace such realignments of the “literal sense” in other late medieval controversies, sometimes violent in complexion.<sup>60</sup> But the recurring effort in the period to reconfigure the *sensus litteralis* is not just a testimony to factional rivalries. It is part of an intensive struggle to specify under increasing interpretive pressures the authority by which scriptural language is to be appropriately construed.<sup>61</sup> The powerful churchman Jean Gerson, an opponent of the assassination who participates in the fifteenth-century debate, associates such authority with a form of “theological”

Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 205–6. On the broader intersection of “literal” and “spiritual” readings in late medieval interpretive practice, see Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*.

<sup>59</sup> For the passage, see Gerson, *Joannis Gersonii*, Vol. 5, col. 900A: “Unus vocatur sensus interior; alius exterior: unus superficialis; alius medullarum” (my italics). For related language, see Vol. 5, col. 766A, and compare col. 809C, for the argument that the superficial sense of the double literal sense differs from the sense that the speaker “intends” (*quem loquens intendit*). For these and other references, see Froelich, “Literal Sense.” On the controversy at large, involving statements requested by a commission of the Council of Constance, see his overview (28–9), noting that “the names of the writers are suppressed in the official deposition.”

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Copeland, *Pedagogy*, 99–140 and Ghosh, *Wycliffite Heresy*, on disputes about the *sensus litteralis* in the “Wycliffite” controversies of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

<sup>61</sup> For various aspects of this question see, for example, the references in Note 60 and Minnis, “Authorial Intention”; idem, “Fifteenth-Century Versions.” In a more extended discussion it would be possible to examine the pressures involved, ranging from changing attitudes toward the reliability of language at large to changing social conditions in the Christian world.



understanding that he aligns with the institutional church itself.<sup>62</sup> While he seeks to salvage the *sensus litteralis* by invoking that understanding, he has his own way of dividing the literal sense. Commenting on a statement in Genesis (17:14) about an uncircumcised male, Gerson maintains that in the “Old Law” this statement has a *duplicem sensum litteralem*. One part of that sense is preceptive – indicating the precept in the “old” order. The other part is “figurative” – figuring forth baptism – and under the “New Law,” that “figurative” sense (*figurativa*) is its only “literal sense” (*sensum litteralem*).<sup>63</sup> Paul had radically distinguished between outward and inward circumcision, correlating the one with the “letter,” the other with the “spirit.” For Jean Gerson, the *spiritual* reference point of a passage about circumcision belongs to the “literal sense” itself.

Over the course of the fifteenth century, there are expanding efforts to show that the *fundamentum* of scripture has itself a christological foundation, inhering in the very resonances of its words or the spiritual perceptions of its readers. After interpreters in this period repeatedly argue that passages in the Hebrew Bible are spoken “literally” of Christ, it is hardly surprising that for the early sixteenth-century humanist Jacques Lefèvre there is in effect little difference between the “literal” and “spiritual” senses. As he puts it, “let us call the sense of the letter (*sensum litterae*) that which is concordant with the Spirit (*cum Spiritu concordat*).”<sup>64</sup> But the interiorization of the spirit in the “letter” of Christian scripture takes a deeper turn with a commentator whose interpretive approaches help to shape a Reformation. In the “literal and prophetic” (*litteralis et propheticus*) sense, argues Luther already in his early theology, a Psalm (118 [MT 119]) is “a petition for the advent of Christ, and a commendation of the church of Christ.” More broadly, the very texture of scripture at large consists of *testimonia*, promising Christ to individuals at every stage of history. Such approaches eventually lead to the claim in early Protestant interpretation that the “literal sense” – with its “prophetic” as well as “historical” dimensions – is the “one sense” of Christian scripture as a whole.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> On Gerson and the *sensus theologicus litteralis*, see Preus, *Shadow to Promise*, 79–85 and Froelich, “Literal Sense,” 41–4.

<sup>63</sup> For the quotation as a whole, see Froelich, “Literal Sense,” 42, n. 40.

<sup>64</sup> For fifteenth-century developments, see Preus, *Shadow to Promise*, 79–122 on Gerson, Paul of Burgos, and James Perez of Valencia, and Minnis, “Fifteenth-Century Versions,” 172–3, on Alfonso de Madrigal. For Lefèvre, see Preus, *Shadow to Promise*, 137–42, including the quotation (139, n. 22; my translation) from the Preface to Lefèvre’s *Quincuplex Psalterium*.

<sup>65</sup> On Luther and *testimonia*, see Preus, *Shadow to Promise*, 176–99, including 177–8 for the quotation and translation (typography adjusted). On the early Protestant notion of “one sense” and some of its complications, see Kümmel, *New Testament*, 22; Muller, “Biblical Interpretation,”

The theory of a “single” sense has its variants, and in any case it is not adopted by every Protestant commentator in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But even when it is, the multiple interpretation of Christian scripture – endorsed for over a thousand years by earlier interpreters such as Aquinas – is not so much abandoned as reconfigured in the newly expansive “literal” sense. Perhaps nothing more graphically shows this kind of reconfiguration than a late sixteenth-century discussion of Christian scripture by the English theologian William Whitaker, who in countering the notion of “various senses” invokes the principle of intentionality itself to “reread” Aquinas. Maintaining that in scripture “there is but one sense, and that the literal,” and citing Aquinas’ argument that “the literal sense is that which the author *intends*,” Whitaker continues: “Since then that is the sense of scripture, and the literal sense, which the Holy Spirit intends (*intendit*), however it may be gathered; certainly, if the Holy Spirit intended (*intendebat*) the tropologic, anagogic, or allegoric sense of any place, these senses are not different from the *literal*, as Thomas hath expressly taught us.” It is a breathtaking exposé of how what is divinely “intended” may be indefinitely extended.<sup>66</sup>

Aquinas might have been dismayed, but even Paul is regularly reframed by the “literal” sense of the new era. The one passage in which Paul uses a form of the word “allegory” (*allēgoroumena*) – Gal 4:24, according to which Ishmael and Isaac are correlated “allegorically” with two covenants, the one an order of enslavement, the other an order of emancipation – is repeatedly subject to critical adjustment in the Reformation.<sup>67</sup> As the influential theologian William Perkins puts it in a work published early in the

11–12; Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 116–25; see also the discussion later in this chapter. On early Protestant views of textuality and theology in the reading of Christian Scripture, see Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 184–213.

<sup>66</sup> For the quotations, see *Disputatio* q. 5, ch. 2, in Whitaker, *Disputatio de sacra scriptura*, 301, 303–4; trans. Fitzgerald, *Disputation*, 405, 408–9 (my italics). For Aquinas’ statement and its ambiguities, see the discussion in sec. 4a. It would require another study to examine the elision of Aquinas’s “first signification” of the words in Whitaker’s expansive notion of the “literal sense,” but one of the factors (among others) is the Protestant tendency to blend the initial Thomistic reference point of “things” into a continuum of “signs.” See, for example, Whitaker’s approach in *Disputatio* (302) to proceeding a *signo ad rem signatam* (“from the sign to the thing signified”; trans. Fitzgerald, *Disputation*, 407). For a different, late medieval version of how fourfold interpretation can be included in the “literal” sense (via “metaphor”) in the special case of the Song of Songs, see the citation of (Aquinas’ student) Remigio dei Girolami in de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, IV:307. In the twentieth century, in the ambience of the New Criticism, Whitaker’s approach to signification comes to be associated with Coleridge’s notion of the “poetic imagination,” involving a reconciliation of the “idea” with the “image”; see Cannon, “Whitaker’s *Disputatio*,” 138, and the discussion later in this chapter.

<sup>67</sup> On this passage, see the opening of Chapter 2. On critical unease with Paul’s terminology in this passage already in Christian antiquity, see Whitman, “Textual to Temporal,” 164. Over a

seventeenth century, there is “but one full and intire sense of every place of scripture, and that is also the literal sense.” Though it may be said that “the historie of Abrahams familie” has not only a “proper and literall sense,” but also “a spiritual or mysticall sense,” these are “not two senses,” counters Perkins, “but two parts of one full and intire sense. For not onely the bare historie, but also *that which is thereby signified*,” is the “full sense” of the Holy Spirit.<sup>68</sup>

Whether it is argued that such versions of the “literal sense” of scripture have anything to do with its “actual” sense – whatever that may be – depends of course on the orientation of the interpreter. From a modern academic perspective, it goes without saying, such approaches to the “literal sense” of Hebrew scripture move not closer to the text, but further and further away from it. But that is not the immediate issue. The issue is the increasing relocation of the literal sense in realms scarcely dreamed of by early Christian theorists of the “letter.”

### c Relocations: movements to modernity

And new dreams, in turn, have irresistible drifts of their own. As the interpretation of Christian scripture becomes increasingly historicized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the “intention” of the author gradually comes to be aligned less with Christian belief than with the archaic, primal mentalities of the ancient Near Eastern writers of the text.<sup>69</sup> And the “spirit” of that text tends to be located, as it were, not so much “above” it as “below” it, in the spirit of the age from which the text is thought to emerge. This is of course not to say that the notion of the “literal sense” of Christian scripture disappears. On the contrary, the philological inquiries of the Reformation, and the quite different “historical-critical” methods that develop in later centuries, offer unprecedented techniques for construing that sense in terms of grammatical contexts, rhetorical strategies, and social circumstances in antiquity.<sup>70</sup>

millennium later, the Protestant protest invokes the reformed concept of the “literal”; see the discussion later in this chapter.

<sup>68</sup> For the quoted passages, see the citation in Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 121 of Perkins’ *A Commentarie or Exposition upon the Five First Chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians*; my italics. For a related treatment of Gal 4:24 in Whitaker, see *Disputatio* q. 5, ch. 2, in Whitaker, *Disputatio de sacra scriptura*, 301; trans. Fitzgerald, *Disputation*, 405–6.

<sup>69</sup> The eighteenth-century English Hebraist Robert Lowth is a fine example of this tendency, as discussed in [Chapter 14](#).

<sup>70</sup> Such movements, of course, like all historicizing movements, have ideologies of their own. See, for example, Cummings, *Literary Culture*, on Reformation philology. See also [Chapter 15](#).

But this very critical movement gradually compromises the conviction that the “literal or historical sense” of the text is the *fundamentum* of Christian faith, and it increasingly distances studies of early textuality from the designs of contemporary theology.<sup>71</sup>

Not all aspects of all of these changes, of course, are uniformly exemplified in Christian interpretation after the Reformation, and especially in Catholic settings there are interpreters who resist certain tendencies in the continuing revolution of the literal sense.<sup>72</sup> Yet it would not be appropriate to close this account without at least noting one more radical turn in that revolution; its extension, as it were, to other spheres. In the Christian world, theories of scriptural writing had always intersected with theories of writing at large. But in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as theories of the primal human imagination come to be increasingly applied to scriptures other than Christian ones – including works of contemporary literature – the integration of “letter” and “spirit” is invoked in the very emergence of modern aesthetics.

For whatever the characterization of the theology of Immanuel Kant, the philosophic founder of modern aesthetics, he adapts a familiar idiom when he comes to define the “aesthetical Idea” in the late eighteenth century. We say of certain works that we expect to be beautiful, Kant indicates as he approaches his definition of the aesthetical Idea, that such works are “without spirit” (*Geist*). A “poem may be very neat and elegant, but without spirit.” A “history” (*Geschichte*), he continues, “may be exact and well arranged, but without spirit.” Spirit of this kind, he indicates, operates through aesthetical Ideas, which are expansive representations of the human Imagination. Such an imaginative representation evokes “ineffable thought,” the feeling of which binds up “spirit” (*Geist*) with the mere “letter” (*Buchstaben*) of language.<sup>73</sup>

Such notions of the infusion of the “letter” with “spirit,” like the Romantic theories of “symbolic” language with which they rapidly

<sup>71</sup> On the complex developments briefly indicated in this paragraph, see the detailed study of Frei, *Eclipse*, with the discussion of Childs and the comments on twentieth-century perspectives in Frei, “Literal Reading.”

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Childs, “Sensus Literalis,” 88. From the perspective of historical scholarship on Christian interpretation, perhaps the most extensive twentieth-century expression of this resistance is de Lubac’s *Exégèse Médiévale*. See Chapter 7, Sec. 1.

<sup>73</sup> See Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, section 49, pp. 313–16; Bernard trans., 197–201. For other eighteenth-century discussions drawing upon the idiom of “letter” and “spirit,” see Koelb, *Revivifying Word*, 5, 9–10, 14–21, citing (along with Kant) Hamann, Herder, and Fichte. In all these discussions, of course, the Pauline idiom is partially reconceived in terms of perspectives that develop long after Paul.

converge, of course have sources far beyond Christian interpretation.<sup>74</sup> But it is revealing that for the principal English theorist of the modern “symbol,” Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the Christian Bible itself is explicitly the exemplar of symbolic language – a language that is intensively self-contained yet almost infinitely expressive. “In the Scriptures,” declares Coleridge early in the nineteenth century, “Facts and Persons” have “a two-fold significance,” including both “a temporary and a perpetual” application. Such sacred language offers “a medium between *Literal* and *Metaphorical*.” Avoiding the “dead letter,” on the one hand, and unsubstantial “Allegory,” on the other, it is the prime example of the “Symbol,” which to Coleridge is not allegorical (saying something other than itself), but tautegorical – *ho estin aei tautēgorikon*, he writes in Greek – always saying something identical with itself. A “Symbol” is characterized by “the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal.”<sup>75</sup> It is a kind of verbal Incarnation. The definition of the symbol in this passage has become canonical in modern literary theory. What is less known is that the definition appears in a treatise on the Christian canon, a treatise in which Coleridge argues that Christian scripture is a manual not only for the life of the church, but also for the life of the state. For a century and a half after such formulations by Coleridge and his contemporaries, critical theory is pervaded by discussions of “symbolic” language, according to which particular images are indissolubly fused with expansive ideas. Though discussions of the subject include variations and sometimes reservations, it is not until the latter part of the twentieth century that the mystique of the “symbol” tends to be systematically questioned and displaced in critical theory by recurrent appeals to a term that had shadowed it from the start: “allegory.”<sup>76</sup>

Long before Romantic approaches to literary language, during hundreds of years of commentary on Christian scripture itself, the term “allegory” had repeatedly been marginalized, superseded by the transfiguration of the “literal sense.” In view of that extended history, it may be asked why the category of the “literal” comes to be transformed in the Christian world to a degree unparalleled by its approximate counterparts in the Jewish and Islamic worlds. There is no simple answer to this question. But it would

<sup>74</sup> See the reference points in Whitman, “Present Perspectives,” 290.

<sup>75</sup> See “Statesman’s Manual” (1816), in Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, 30. For similarities and differences between such early Romantic theory and early Christian interpretive theory, see Whitman, “Textual to Temporal.”

<sup>76</sup> For aspects of this process, see Whitman, “Retrospective Forward” and “Present Perspectives,” 289–303, with the references in the notes.

seem that at least one major factor is the central role of interpretive transfer in the very definition of Christianity itself. For the Christian community, the transfer from one sense of its sacred text to another involves more than it appears to involve in the Jewish and Islamic communities. It is more, for example, than a way to adapt early idioms to later circumstances, or a means to preserve orthodoxy amid the apparent abberancies of language, or an attempt to display the plenitude of divine signification, or an effort to deepen religious understanding. It is the institutional foundation of the church, and it is that institutional foundation which Christians seek to support by trying finally to incorporate a “spiritual” sense in the *fundamentum* of the “literal” sense itself.

The first decisive stage in that interpretive revolution, it would seem, is the conspicuous thirteenth-century claim that the intention of the author *is* the literal sense. Long before Kant’s “Copernican revolution” in placing the mind at the center of phenomena, long before even Copernicus’ own revolution in placing the sun at the center of the cosmos, medieval Christian interpreters produce a kind of “Copernican revolution” in the history of scriptural interpretation. The literal sense, which had long been relegated to the outer circles of Christian scripture, comes increasingly to be resituated in the inner ones, via its alignment with intention and spirit. In the process, it turns into an expansive new form of the “letter,” a kind of *littera nova*. Over the centuries, that nova eventually turns into a sort of supernova that tends to explode the very category of the “literal” sense, and eventually to fragment Christian views about the *fundamentum* of sacred history itself. But an account of that further transformation of the *fundamentum* is beyond the scope of this essay. This chapter’s principal intention, if the word may be used, has been only to describe some of the foundations of that historic change.

## CHAPTER 7

### *Figuring the letter* *Making sense of sensus litteralis in late-medieval* *Christian exegesis* *Alastair J. Minnis*

As discussed in [Chapter 6](#), the literal sense of sacred scripture came to occupy an increasingly central position in Christian hermeneutics from the Middle Ages onward. Although earlier scholars tended to view the growing valuation of the literal sense as a forerunner of the interpretive outlook of modern historical-critical scholarship, the current chapter seeks instead to understand this development in terms of contemporaneous literary theory and its applications to sacred scripture. The chapter focuses on the transition period during which significations once assigned to the “spiritual” sense were redefined as belonging to the “literal” sense, an “expansion” of the *sensus litteralis* that reflects new conceptions of authorship that were emerging in late medieval Latin learning.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

Scripture is like soft wax on which the impression of a seal adopts its shape, so that if the seal contains an eagle, the same wax will, when impressed by it, have the shape of an eagle. In this way the same thing may sometimes signify the devil, sometimes Christ. We should not be surprised by this quality in Scripture: it can give an object (or person) different meanings according to their behavior. When King David committed adultery and murder he prefigured not Christ but the devil; when he loved his enemies and behaved well to them he prefigured not the devil but Christ.<sup>1</sup>

So we read in the prologue to the *Speculum humanae salvationis*. Written originally in Latin verse during the period c.1310–24 but soon translated into the major European vernaculars, this highly popular work (extant in approximately 394 manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) systematically reads human history in terms of Old Testament prefiguration and New Testament fulfillment. Its anonymous author proceeds to reassure

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from *The Mirour of Mans Saluacioun*, 218. I have used Henry’s translation of part of the Latin prologue, which is not translated into Middle English in the text she edits here.



us that no-one should “object to Christ sometimes being represented by an evil-doer.” The mixed signals – some of them very negative – given by David’s deeds should not worry the teachers to whom the *Speculum* is addressed. On such occasions an “appropriate interpretation” must be made. To take another example, “although Absalom wickedly took revenge on his father (2 Samuel 15–18), nevertheless Christ is prefigured by him on account of some similarities.” This is not, of course, because Absalom “treated his father badly, but because he was the most beautiful of men and was hanged on a tree.” Thereby he prefigures Christ, who was “beautiful above the sons of men” (Ps 44:3 [MT 45:3]) and hanged from the tree of the Cross.

Here, in this popularizing explanation of the ways in which troubling biblical episodes should be read, we find an illustration of interpretive principles that professional theologians had been arguing about for centuries, a debate which had been given a new urgency by crucial developments in hermeneutic theory and practice. For various reasons, which are the subject of the present chapter, theologians were taking a fresh interest in the *sensus litteralis* – generally regarded as the most obvious and immediate sense of holy scripture, and coterminous with the *sensus historicus* or “historical sense.”<sup>2</sup> Inevitably, this involved a reappraisal of the value of the *sensus spiritualis* or *mysticus*, usually broken down into the moral sense, the allegorical or prefigural sense (of greatest importance in the *Speculum humanae salvationis*), and the anagogical sense (which involved reference to the “Last Things” of Christian eschatology – the resurrection, Last Judgment, and ultimate blessedness or damnation). At stake was the significance of the metaphors, fictions, or indeed lies, which are found throughout the Christian Bible, as distinctive features of its special, indeed unique, style – as generally characterized by the schoolmen of the high Middle Ages.

In addressing these complex matters we will first ascertain how recent scholarly discussion has been framed. This will involve a consideration of the sharp differences in approach between Beryl Smalley (1905–84) and Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), whose contributions to the history of medieval hermeneutics have been highly influential. Then we will offer a preliminary sketch toward the bigger picture that subsequent research is enabling us to see.

## 1 Smalley and de Lubac on the literal sense

Beryl Smalley was a tutor in History at St Hilda’s College, Oxford. Her doctoral dissertation on the *quaestiones* of Stephen Langton (c.1150–1228),

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 6, Sec. 1b.

which was supervised by F. M. Powicke, took her to Paris, where she studied with Georges Lacombe and acquired the interests that came to fruition in *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (originally published in 1941 and republished in several later editions).<sup>3</sup> A quite extraordinary scholar by any standards, the fact that, as a woman, Smalley achieved eminence in what was, in her time, a quite patriarchal sphere of scholarship, makes her achievement all the more remarkable.<sup>4</sup> Her influence still affects, in many beneficial ways, contemporary study of medieval hermeneutics, and helps explain certain present-day concerns and emphases.<sup>5</sup>

*The Study of the Bible* sought, and found, in the high Middle Ages crucial developments which presaged nineteenth- and early twentieth-century biblical scholarship, with its valorization of the philological and the historical. These are the criteria Smalley has in mind when she says, "what we should now call exegesis, which is based on the study of the text and of biblical history, in its widest sense, belongs to the 'literal exposition.'" <sup>6</sup> Therefore the grand narrative of her book is "the medieval study of the literal sense and the story of how it came into more prominence."<sup>7</sup> Sound literal exposition was not easy to find, given what Smalley deemed the tendency of medieval readers to "not look at the text, but through it."<sup>8</sup> This led to the proliferation of "spiritual exposition," which, she says rather dismissively, "generally consists of pious meditations or religious teaching for which the text is used merely as a convenient starting-point. It follows that so long as this conception of Bible studies holds good, we shall have many commentaries containing little exegesis."<sup>9</sup> "Exegesis" here means literal exposition.

In Smalley's opinion, then, medieval exegetes inherited a hermeneutic problem – it might be better to speak of a hermeneutic confusion – from the church fathers, and they finally managed to solve it:

<sup>3</sup> See further, Martin, "Smalley, Beryl"; Southern, "Beryl Smalley."

<sup>4</sup> Smalley was highly attracted by the socialist politics that permeated Oxbridge in the 1930s, and subsequently (in the early years of World War II) joined the Communist Party. But in 1930 she had been received into the Roman Catholic Church. The most secretive of persons, Smalley never talked about the personal dilemmas that lay behind those conflicted choices.

<sup>5</sup> I gratefully acknowledge Dr. Smalley's substantial influence on my own work, and indeed on my career as a whole. I first met her at Oxford in 1971, and for approximately a decade we met frequently and discussed many matters of common interest. Her kindness to a young scholar, and the generosity with which she shared her own ideas and helped me to develop my own, are affectionately remembered.

<sup>6</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, vii.

<sup>8</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 2.

The initial step in the progress of biblical science was to work out the patristic distinction between letter and spirit. The distinction itself was bound to relegate “the letter” to an inferior place; but before it could be even cursorily expounded, commentators had to decide what the letter was. Biblical scholarship would have no future if metaphor, prophecy and parable were to be included in the subjective “spiritual” exposition.<sup>10</sup>

How was this problem solved? By commentators learning to focus on the literal sense understood as the expression of the mind of the scriptural author.

Here, of course, they were anticipating what Smalley regarded as sound modern principles of scholarship:

The interpretation of an ancient text is bound to be subjective to some extent. It will derive from the interpreter’s preconceptions and from the techniques which he has at his disposal. But in order to be a scholar at all he must wish to use and to improve upon existing techniques with the aim of entering into the mind of his author.<sup>11</sup>

A major breakthrough occurred in the twelfth century, with the great masters of the Abbey of St. Victor at Paris, namely Hugh, Andrew, and Richard, who opened up a new period of “scientific study” of scripture.<sup>12</sup> In particular, Hugh distinguished between the senses of scripture in a way which “enormously increased the dignity of the historical [or literal] sense,”<sup>13</sup> and ridiculed those “who hurry over the literal sense in their haste to reach the mystery.”<sup>14</sup> To be more precise, Hugh did not denigrate the *sensus spiritualis* altogether. Rather, “his great service to exegesis was to lay more stress on the literal interpretation *relatively* to the spiritual, and to develop the sources for it.”<sup>15</sup> Those sources included materials from Jewish exegesis – not only as recorded by Saint Jerome but also acquired at first hand from Jewish teachers who belonged to what Smalley termed “the contemporary North French school of rationalist exegetes founded by Rashi.”<sup>16</sup> So then, on Smalley’s reading, Hugh valued the twin totems of proper biblical scholarship as she understood it, the historical and the philological.

<sup>10</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 41.      <sup>11</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 356.

<sup>12</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 85; cf. 88.      <sup>13</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 89.

<sup>14</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 93. Smalley presents Hugh as believing that “To despise the literal sense is to despise the whole of sacred literature.”

<sup>15</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 102. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>16</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 103. On the northern French *peshat* (“plain sense”) school founded by Rashi, see Chapter 9, Sec. 3, and Chapter 12, Sec. 3.

Even greater achievements in these spheres were to come, thanks to the innovative scriptural exegesis of thirteenth-century friars, particularly St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). Smalley sees Aquinas as building on the legacy of Hugh while being highly responsive to the epistemology of the “new” Aristotle – the recently recovered works of the philosopher, which had arrived in the West accompanied by an extensive apparatus of Islamic scholarship (particularly the work of Averroes and Avicenna). Here are some of Smalley’s most brilliant statements:

Transferring his view of body and soul to “letter and spirit,” the Aristotelian would perceive the “spirit” of Scripture as something not hidden behind or added on to, but expressed by the text. . . . The Aristotelian thought in terms of causality rather than reflections. God, pure action, is the first mover, who moves the inferior causes from potentiality to act. Just as the body won a new dignity, so the inferior causes won a power of action which they had not possessed in the Augustinian tradition, and this also reacted on Bible study. As God is the “first mover” of the universe, so he is the “first author” of Scripture; the sacred writers are authors too, chosen by God as instruments of his revelation, and acting under his motion, but choosing their own words and their own material. Scripture began to seem less like a mirror of universal truth and more like a collection of works whose authors had intended to teach particular truths; so exegesis was bound to resolve itself into the scientific study of these authors. The exegete fastened his attention on the letter . . .<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, she goes so far as to claim that “St. Thomas, perfecting the tentative efforts of his predecessors, has supplied a theory of the relations between the senses which lays the stress on the literal interpretation, now defined as the full meaning of the author.”<sup>18</sup> Sense is made of the literal sense by linking it to the *intentio auctoris*, read as the “full meaning” of the human author of scripture.

This powerful, albeit rather one-sided, tale of the triumph of *sensus litteralis* (with Aquinas as the hero of the hour and the Victorines as his advance scouts)<sup>19</sup> was critiqued by that other major pioneer of the study of medieval hermeneutics, the Jesuit scholar Henri de Lubac, one of the greatest (and on

<sup>17</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 293.

<sup>18</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 368.

<sup>19</sup> A similar relationship between Hugh of St. Victor and Thomas Aquinas was postulated by Ceslas Spicq, O.P. (1901–93), a distinguished biblical scholar who won particular renown for his work on *agape* in the New Testament. In *Esquisse d'une histoire de l'exégèse latine au moyen âge*, 288, Spicq stated that Hugh's analysis of the “modes de signification des mots signifiants, et des choses signifiées et signifiantes” was a crucial development that valorized literal exegesis and “réduisait considérablement l'intérêt des interprétations mystiques.” However, Spicq's estimate of Aquinas' original contribution is far lower than Smalley's, and indeed nearer to de Lubac's; that is, Aquinas brought greater order and system to what was there before. Recently, Marcus Paul Elder has

occasion one of the most controversial) French theologians of the twentieth century. His extraordinary career included being wounded at Verdun in World War I, promoting “spiritual resistance” against the occupying Nazis during World War II (and speaking out against anti-semitism, at high personal risk<sup>20</sup>), founding the series *Sources Chrétiennes* with fellow-Jesuit Jean Daniélou, and playing a key role in the *nouvelle théologie*, which encouraged the fresh thinking that led to the Second Vatican Council (1962–5). In 1983 Pope John Paul II elevated him to the rank of cardinal. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, has praised de Lubac’s first book, *Catholicisme* (1938), as having been “an essential milestone” on his “own theological journey.”<sup>21</sup> However, de Lubac’s relations with authority were quite strained during the period 1950–9, when his Jesuit superiors barred him from teaching and required him to submit his writings to censorship. This was due to the furor that followed publication of his book *Surnaturel* (1946), wherein he questioned aspects of the interpretation of Aquinas’ thought by two founding fathers of Neo-Thomism (the dominant Catholic theological position at the time de Lubac was writing), the Dominican Cardinal Cajetan (1469–1534) and the Jesuit Francisco Suárez (1548–1617).<sup>22</sup> In de Lubac’s view, a wedge had been driven between reason and faith, philosophy and theology, nature and grace. More precisely, the supernatural world had been distanced from a natural world that was largely self-sufficient, within which the business of philosophy and politics could be conducted without much, if any, reference to God. This, de Lubac felt, was a travesty of St. Thomas’ thought,<sup>23</sup> wherein he found evidence for the belief that man has a natural desire for the supernatural. In response, he highlighted what Aquinas had said about the human longing for complete happiness, which can come about only with the beatific vision of God, and which cannot be satisfied by any other means, certainly not through any form of earthly happiness. More generally, since we are God’s creatures, the

challenged the view, as held by Smalley and Spicq, that Hugh’s hermeneutics is the clear forerunner of St. Thomas’. Elder argues – quite convincingly, to my mind – that the oft-quoted fifth chapter of Hugh’s *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris* “is not plausibly read as supporting the notion that Hugh of St. Victor anticipated the thomistic hermeneutical doctrine classifying the scriptural use of figurative language under the literal sense” (“*Eruditio Sacri Eloquii*,” 185).

<sup>20</sup> See Fouilloux, “Henri de Lubac,” 13–16.

<sup>21</sup> *Catholicism*, 11 (Foreword to the 1988 English edition).

<sup>22</sup> See Milbank, *Suspended Middle*, 16–47, 79–87; Hollon, *Everything is Sacred*, 83–94. See also the account by de Lubac’s pupil Von Balthasar, *Theology*, 17–18; and the excellent essays in Bonino, *Surnaturel*. The contribution by Torrell is particularly moot; see further the critique of Torrell’s position by Milbank, *Suspended Middle*, 79–87.

<sup>23</sup> De Lubac’s friend and ally Étienne Gilson sent him a supportive letter, which included the remark that “Thomas has been castrated” by Cajetan’s commentary on him. Von Balthasar, *Theology*, 13–14.

supernatural is already present within ordinary creation – but one cannot appropriately call creation “ordinary.”

Given these beliefs, it is hardly surprising that de Lubac’s monumental *Exégèse médiévale* (1959–64), the first volume of which was published in the year when the restrictions on his work were lifted, resists any move to separate letter from spirit, history from eternity, sense from salvation.<sup>24</sup> “Historical realities possess a profound sense and are to be understood in a spiritual manner.”<sup>25</sup> Man’s reading of the *sensus spiritualis* of scripture is an expression of his desire for the supernatural, a reflex of his awareness of its presence within creation as we know it. This is the driving force behind de Lubac’s discussion. Whereas Smalley had regarded “pious meditations or religious teaching” as deviations from the historicist and philological imperatives of true Bible scholarship, for de Lubac they are the very point and objective of medieval exegesis. In making the following remarks, he definitely has Smalley in mind:

... we shall not forget that a greater or lesser critical spirit or knowledge of languages, a greater or lesser eagerness to associate with the rabbis, or a greater or lesser interest in the ancient phase of salvation history[,] in no way prejudices an author’s greater or lesser “allegorism.” We must watch out for artificial antinomies.<sup>26</sup>

It is naïve, de Lubac continues, to attribute to “the ancients generally the idea of a disjunction between science and allegory, or between history and symbolism – an idea that exists only in a certain recent state of mind,” and then to be surprised by the discovery that such men “could nevertheless still be interested in something other than the literal sense of the Bible.” This is an infantilizing move. “Such infantilism in minds that otherwise appear seriously adult! How perplexing is human nature!” How could they possibly believe that “there is a hidden sense in the Bible, surpassing the investigations of grammar and philology”?<sup>27</sup>

“The investigations of grammar and philology” do have much to offer, de Lubac easily accepts, but nevertheless he finds modern “scientific” exegesis inadequate.<sup>28</sup> Its “techniques may . . . be construed as an instance of enormous progress,” but they must be kept “in their right and proper place.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> As Mark Sebanc, one of its translators, notes, *Exégèse médiévale* is “not a reference work; it is a long, intricate, detailed, and cogent argument in defense of the ‘spiritual’ interpretation of the Bible” (de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, I:ix). For convenience, the English translation of de Lubac’s work will be cited in this chapter whenever possible.

<sup>25</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 165. <sup>26</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II:212.

<sup>27</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II:212. <sup>28</sup> Hollon, *Everything is Sacred*, 100.

<sup>29</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, I:xx.

The “ancients” will help us to do just that, by ensuring we are aware of the “whole picture.” Which de Lubac describes as follows:

The mystical or spiritual understanding of scripture and the mystical or spiritual life are, in the end, one and the same. Christian mysticism is that understanding pushed to its most fruitful phase by its four traditional dimensions—history, “allegory” or doctrine, ethics or “tropology” and anagogy—each of which is absorbed by the following one. . . . The analogical sense by which the spirit raises itself to God in a unique intuition has the richness of the three preceding dimensions concentrated within itself. Far from excluding them or freeing itself from them, it included the full historical realization of salvation that is the permanent and indispensable base for mysticism, a gift of God.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the great tradition of medieval exegesis, all four of those “dimensions” worked together as a unity, the one leading to the other within a hierarchical progression. Here, then, is how de Lubac made sense of the *sensus literalis*:

We pass by means of a natural and necessary movement “from history to allegory, and from allegory to morality.” Allegory is in truth *the truth* of history; the latter, just by itself, would be incapable of bringing itself intelligibly to fulfillment; allegory fulfills history by giving it its sense.<sup>31</sup>

The intense conviction of such assertions commands total respect. But one unfortunate consequence of de Lubac’s apotheosis of the spiritual sense is a reluctance to allow major innovations within the ongoing history of hermeneutics, not even by Hugh of St. Victor or Thomas Aquinas. The impact of the “new” Aristotle, with his discourse of prime mover and instrumental causes, is shrugged off. According to de Lubac, we are dealing with matters of expression rather than of conceptualization: Aquinas simply brought to bear a terminology that is more logical and rational, which enabled him to avoid certain confusions – although de Lubac suspects those confusions may be in the minds of modern scholars who hastily attribute them to medieval commentators.<sup>32</sup> The singular unitive power of Catholic Christianity that he affirmed in *Catholicisme* is alive and well in its ongoing tradition of commentary, replete with its interpretive apparatus of senses.<sup>33</sup> Alas, things began to go wrong around the time

<sup>30</sup> De Lubac, “Mysticism and Mystery,” 58.      <sup>31</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II:201.

<sup>32</sup> De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, II:2, 278. “Thomas . . . summarizes luminously but brings ‘nothing new.’” See Von Balthasar, *Theology*, 81.

<sup>33</sup> De Lubac identifies the “secret soul” of the theory of the four senses as their “dynamic unity, their reciprocal interiority.” “Each sense leads to the other as its end. So they are several, but they constitute a unity. A unity of source, and a unity of convergence” (*Medieval Exegesis*, II:201, 203).



of Nicholas of Lyre, O.F.M. (d. 1349). Lyre is generally regarded as the best-equipped literalistic commentator of the later Middle Ages,<sup>34</sup> but de Lubac felt that his fame was unjustified, and spoke disparagingly of subsequent exegesis in terms of “décadence,” “un caricature de l’allégorie traditionnelle.”<sup>35</sup> “L’application est toute mécanique. Ils n’en renouvellent pas la sève.”<sup>36</sup> Here, then, we witness what de Lubac’s pupil Hans Urs Von Balthasar terms a “gradual but inexorable loss of inner vitality and the mechanical sclerosis of the theory of the four senses.”<sup>37</sup> A sad decline from the time when scholars put their faith in the belief that the literal is inseparable from, and does not make sense without, the spiritual. This may be taken as de Lubac’s own, quite personal, understanding of 2 Cor 3:6, “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

In the “retractions” in the preface to the third edition of *The Study of the Bible*, Smalley admits to having been a creature of her time, a time when “the term *Heilgeschichte* had little currency outside Germany, nor was it thought desirable to add ‘and Society’ to one’s title.”<sup>38</sup> De Lubac is generously credited with having shown that “the spiritual exposition was no deviant, but essential to devotional Bible study and teaching,” and Smalley regrets that her overriding concern with *sensus literalis* led her to concentrate on the secular schools and scholasticism, to the neglect of monastic spirituality, wherein religious “*lectio divina* implied the spiritual exposition.”<sup>39</sup> (What she could have said, but does not, was that de Lubac’s concentration on his “ancients” – mainly patristic and early medieval commentators – led him to neglect scholasticism and university *lectio*, forcing exegesis from the later Middle Ages into an intellectual framework constructed predominantly from earlier materials.) A partial apology is offered for her characterization of the millennial exegesis of Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202) and his followers as “an attack of senile dementia” in the spiritual exposition. Now she prefers to say that this was a case of “the spiritual exposition in its old age” producing “a thriving child” – while adding the waspish rider, “not one that

<sup>34</sup> On Lyre as an innovative and profoundly influential reader of *sensus literalis*, and his debt to Aquinas, see especially Levy’s excellent article, “Literal Sense.”

<sup>35</sup> De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, II:2, 344–67, 381–2. <sup>36</sup> De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, II:2, 310.

<sup>37</sup> Von Balthasar, *Theology*, 81. He has particularly in mind *Exégèse médiévale*, II:2, 310–18.

<sup>38</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, vii.

<sup>39</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, viii–ix. Compare Smalley’s remark, “The spiritual senses were too integral to the faith and too useful in homiletics to be dropped or even pushed far into the margin” (*ibid.*, xiv).

I should care to adopt.”<sup>40</sup> (For de Lubac, Joachim was a “great” man to whom “full justice” should be done.<sup>41</sup>)

Considered as a whole, this preface does not add up to a recantation. Smalley insists that, while the four senses “formed part of the schoolmen’s world,” nevertheless “they were an awkward part.” “Their value outweighed their awkwardness in the early middle ages; indeed it went unperceived. It came to be realized and to raise insoluble problems in some quarters during the thirteenth century.” Given those problems, it was all the more remarkable that the four senses managed to survive, Smalley implies; this pays tribute “to their deep roots in the medieval concept of the Bible.”<sup>42</sup> Evidently, on Smalley’s estimate, sometimes they were more trouble than they were worth.

Subsequent research has turned up much material that supports those insights. *Pace* de Lubac’s postulation of harmonious and continuous rapport between the four senses, major fissures are often perceptible between them, rendered visible in the theoretical discussions of many of the best minds of scholasticism. Some of those discussions will now be investigated, beginning with Aquinas’ *Summa theologiae*.

## 2 Stability of the literal sense: a new look

Thomas Aquinas asks: “Can one passage of Holy Scripture have several senses?”<sup>43</sup> And, if so, does this result in “confusion and deception” and remove “any firm basis from argument” based on biblical texts? His answers are “yes” and “no” respectively. The first and foundational meaning of scripture, whereby its words signify things, is the historical or literal sense. In turn, those things signify other things, and that meaning is called the spiritual sense; it “is based upon the literal sense and presupposes it.”<sup>44</sup> Aquinas proceeds to divide the spiritual sense into the usual three components, explaining that other apparent senses – history, etiology, and analogy – in fact fall within the parameters of the literal sense. Included in the literal sense, likewise, is the “paraboli- cal sense,”<sup>45</sup> which appertains

<sup>40</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, xiii. Still, this is better than burying that child “while it was still alive,” which, Smalley remarks rather grotesquely, is what she had done previously.

<sup>41</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II:417. <sup>42</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, xvi.

<sup>43</sup> *Summa theologiae*, Ia, qu. 1, art. 9, trans. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 239–40.

<sup>44</sup> Here Aquinas deploys the common exegetical distinction between significative words and significative things, which had received its most influential formulation from Augustine in *De doctrina christiana*, I.ii.2. Compare Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 66.

<sup>45</sup> See Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 242.

in the many parables deployed by Christ in his preaching, although Aquinas and his contemporaries tend to apply it to figurative language in general. It is clear, then, that the literal sense is conveyed at times by “proper” language (words which bear their primary and obvious meaning), and at other times by figurative language. As Aquinas remarks:

[T]he literal sense is not itself a figure, but rather that which is designated by the figure. For when Scripture names the arm of God, the literal sense is not that God has a physical limb of this kind but rather that he has that which is signified by this limb, namely, effective power. It is clear from this that nothing false can underlie the literal sense of Holy Scripture.<sup>46</sup>

So, then, the literal sense is quite capacious. Further, no real confusion or deception can arise in argument, since all the senses of scripture are based on one: the literal. From it alone may any argument be drawn, “and not from what is said in the allegorical sense, as Augustine says in the letter against Vincent the Donatist.”<sup>47</sup>

This is far from being the most ample account of the four senses to survive from the thirteenth century. Aquinas had little time for matters symbolic and poetic, as one of the most perceptive of his recent interpreters, Marie-Dominique Chenu, openly admits.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Aquinas was a “conservative” (albeit an “enlightened” one) rather than a “radical” in respect of the four senses, as Smalley came to see.<sup>49</sup> But the *quaestio* cited earlier is admirable in its precision and concision, and usefully points our own inquiry in profitable directions. So then, the literal sense is reliable, safe, and secure; it is a means of grounding the other senses and supporting the entire edifice of scripture. To quote from Nicholas of Lyre’s second prologue to his monumental *Postilla litteralis*, “just as a building which begins to part company with its foundations is inclined to collapse, so a mystical exposition which deviates from the literal sense must be considered unseemly and inappropriate, or at any rate less seemly and less appropriate, than other interpretations.”<sup>50</sup> As the *Summa theologiae* associated with Alexander of Hales O.F.M. (d. 1245) put it, the literal sense

<sup>46</sup> *Summa theologiae*, 1a, qu. 1, art. 10, trans. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 243. See also Chapter 6, at Note 29.

<sup>47</sup> *Summa theologiae*, 1a, qu. 1, art. 10, trans. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 242.

<sup>48</sup> Chenu, *Understanding St. Thomas*, 169–70, 228. It may be noted that Chenu was a supporter of much of de Lubac’s progressive thinking, and, like him, served as a *peritus* (theological expert) at the Second Vatican Council.

<sup>49</sup> Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, xvi.

<sup>50</sup> *Postilla litteralis*, prologus secundus, trans. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 268.

“does not multiply. But the spiritual meaning is varied.”<sup>51</sup> And there, in a nutshell, is the problem. But also the solution. The *sensus litteralis* offers stability and singularity, policing the other senses by keeping their potential for proliferation within proper limits.

The virtues of the literal sense are elegantly explained by the Spanish exegete Alfonso de Madrigal (c.1410–55), who enumerates no fewer than five of them.<sup>52</sup> First, the literal sense is the only “immediate” sense, whereas the spiritual or mystical senses are “mediate”; that is, they are not the senses of the *littera* but rather of the things that the *littera* signifies. Second, the literal sense is fixed, determinate, single, and incapable of being changed by us, whereas the spiritual senses can be assigned as we wish, mean whatever we want them to mean. Third, it is verifiable; that is, it can be adjudged to be true or false, which cannot be done with a spiritual sense. Fourth, scripture cannot be completed or fulfilled in its mystical sense but only in its literal sense, for only a sense which is either true or false can be verified as fulfilled or not. Fifth, arguments may be drawn only from the literal sense of scripture. The spiritual sense cannot prove anything because we cannot say that a given passage is true or false in its spiritual sense, only in its literal sense. Spiritual senses are uncertain since it is not evident whether *this* is the sense of a passage rather than *that*. Indeed, a single passage can have disparate and opposing spiritual senses, and thus could be cited in arguing for different and contradictory things. All of this renders the spiritual sense impossible to use when one is trying to prove something definitively. In short, only from the literal sense may proof in argument be drawn.

Which brings us back to Aquinas’ references to Augustine’s “letter against Vincent the Donatist” (Note 47). When Aquinas and de Madrigal speak of the claim (which they attribute to Augustine) that an “argument” can be drawn from the literal sense alone, they mean a strictly logical argument – the stuff of syllogisms. This is to impress a present pedagogic need on a text which originally had a different agenda (a practice commonplace in scholasticism, which regarded an *auctoritas*, that is, an extract from an author, as collateral to be deployed in disputation, no matter how much it was quoted out of context). In his letter against Vincent, Augustine was talking about the Rogatists (a breakaway Donatist group) who

<sup>51</sup> *Summa Alexandri*, Tract. introd., qu. 1, cap. 4, art. 4, resp., trans. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 221. This treatise, henceforth referred to as the *Summa Alexandri*, was assembled after Alexander’s death by Franciscan followers who included a great deal of their own work in it.

<sup>52</sup> Minnis, “Fifteenth-Century Versions,” 172–4.

interpreted "Where you feed, where you rest in the south" (Song 1:7) in their own interests, as affirming divine approval of the sect's doctrine and its geographical location. Augustine's response was to exclaim, "Who would dare, without the greatest impudence, to interpret in his own favor something expressed in allegory, unless he had manifest testimonies whose light would illumine the obscurities?"<sup>53</sup> The medieval schoolmen, on the other hand, found in that passage a commendation of how the literal sense throws light on the obscurities of allegorical expression: one text, with a clear literal sense, can enable the correct interpretation of another, allegorical, one. For his part, Augustine had been specifically interested in the blatantly biased appropriation of allegory by his heretical opponents.

This will serve to remind us that medieval scriptural exegesis did not occupy some autonomous, specially privileged, and segregated site of its own. It was never simply a matter of professional engagement with textual cruces, or a methodology for academic exercises without import beyond the classroom. Rather, it was significant within the wider world of power politics and social change, prominent in the battles for textual authorization waged between heretics and their orthodox opponents, crucial in many a dispute between princes or between princes and pontiffs.

An excellent example of political appropriation of the literal sense may be found in the *Breviloquium de principatu tyrannico super divina et humana* by the renegade Franciscan friar William of Ockham (d. 1347?).<sup>54</sup> Its target is an interpretation of the "two swords" mentioned in Luke 22:38 (and generally read as signifying the competing powers of church and state), which goes against the interests of his patron and protector, Ludvig of Bavaria. Ockham argues that his opponents' position lacks credibility because it is based on a spiritual sense that lacks the confirmation of the literal sense of a verse anywhere in scripture. It is perfectly permissible, he concedes, to adduce "a mystical sense of Scripture that is not contrary to the truth" for purposes of "edification and exhortation."<sup>55</sup> However, if that particular meaning "is not in divine scripture explicitly in itself or in something which implies it, it should not and cannot be adduced to prove

<sup>53</sup> Epistola 93, cap. 8, 24; *PL*, 33:334.

<sup>54</sup> This was one of the anti-papal treatises that Ockham wrote in Munich between 1332 and his death. The following account is based on Minnis, "Material Swords." De Lubac briefly quotes some of Ockham's remarks on allegory, treating them as evidence of that "decadence" of the theory of the four senses, which he sees as characteristic of the exegesis of the last medieval centuries. See De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, II:2, 381–2.

<sup>55</sup> *Breviloquium*, ed. Scholz, 171; trans. Kilcullen, 133–4.

and confirm disputable and doubtful things about which Christians disagree.” He proceeds to say that “a mystical sense not explicit in sacred Scripture can never be adduced in this way, except in so far as it rests on another scripture or on evident reason,” and criticizes those who “try to prove whatever they please by mystical senses which they invent (*fingunt*).” At that point Augustine’s Letter to Vincent the Donatist is cited:

Blessed Augustine says to Vincent: “Who would dare, without the greatest impudence, to interpret in his own favor something expressed in allegory, unless he had manifest testimonies whose light would illumine the obscurities?” From these words we gather that one disputing with another should not adduce an allegorical sense unless it is explicit in Scripture, because if it cannot be proved explicitly by Scripture his opponent will say that it can be as easily despised as approved.<sup>56</sup>

Anyone can make up (*fingit*) a spiritual sense “according to the strength of his wit.” Therefore it is unreliable in argument. Whereas John of Paris’ treatise *De potestate regia et papali* (c. 1302) – a major influence on Ockham’s *Breviloquium* – attacks various allegorical readings of Luke 22:38 that his opponents had adduced, Ockham goes farther, in dismissing allegory *tout court* as a means of reaching secure truth in the matter under discussion.<sup>57</sup>

However, Ockham believes it is quite permissible to use allegory as a kind of back-up strategy: “whenever a truth is certain first through sacred scripture or evident argument, it is permissible afterwards to adduce mystical senses in favor of that certain truth—to delight those who know the truth, many of whom are delighted when they see that mystical senses of the words of Scripture can be fitted to the truth.”<sup>58</sup> And this production of spiritual readings certainly demoralizes one’s opponents, “who grieve that such senses can be fitted to the truth which they deny.” In short, here we are dealing with the provocation and exploitation of certain emotional responses rather than with proof of the type that is achieved through disputation “among experts (*inter peritos*).” Giving pleasure is one thing, gaining proof quite another. Interestingly, Ockham *does* use some mystical senses in advocating his case in this treatise – presumably justified on the grounds that “it is permissible afterwards to adduce mystical senses in favor” of an argument which *already* has been proved by a literal sense or an argument solidly grounded on a literal sense.

<sup>56</sup> *Breviloquium*, ed. Scholz, 171–2; trans. Kilcullen, 134.

<sup>58</sup> *Breviloquium*, Scholz ed., 174; trans. Kilcullen, 136.

<sup>57</sup> Minnis, “Material Swords,” 301–3.

Ockham also remarks that spiritual senses can be used for purposes of “edification and exhortation.”<sup>59</sup> “Edification” (*edificatio*) meant building up the faith; “exhortation” (*exhortatio*) meant pious exhortation and encouragement, as in sermons.<sup>60</sup> A commentator could engage in rigorous literal/historical analysis of some textual crux, while a preacher (perhaps the commentator himself, performing a different function) could subject that same passage to virtuosio allegorizing that moved far beyond “the letter” – a common justification being that preaching sought to move rather than prove, to persuade rather than offer logical proof. Nicholas of Lyre, the most able literalist exegete of his time, produced a *Postilla moralis* “for the readers of Bibles and preachers of the word of God.”<sup>61</sup> And Alfonso de Madrigal found nothing incongruous in affirming the superiority of literal sense over spiritual sense (as quoted earlier) while planning a bigger and better version of that same treatise of Lyre’s.<sup>62</sup> In sum, the methodologies of medieval exegesis were a lot more flexible and context-specific than has sometimes been allowed. In practice what often mattered was not whether the Bible *should* be interpreted in one way or another but rather such pragmatic considerations as the specific pedagogic purpose of the given interpretation and the perceived nature and needs of its target-audience.

Furthermore, even a cursory reading of the theological *quaestiones* produced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (whether in *Sentences* commentaries, *summae*, or *quodlibets*) makes it abundantly clear that the spiritual sense was not banished from the intellectual scrum of scholastic debate. In interpreting and appropriating biblical *auctoritates*, the schoolmen were fully prepared to offer one type of exegesis in one place and another type in another, bending the waxen nose of authority<sup>63</sup> to take on different meanings, whether literal or allegorical. Scriptural passages with spiritual extrapolations occasionally appear in the academic genres mentioned earlier in this section, without apology or any apparent anxiety; for instance, there is no automatic reassurance that the reading being followed is supported by a literal sense from somewhere else in scripture, or a warning about its discourse being less than totally reliable. The depth

<sup>59</sup> *Breviloquium*, Scholz ed., 171; trans. Kilcullen, 133–4.

<sup>60</sup> Compare Smalley, “Use of the ‘Spiritual’ Sense.” This important article (which was published posthumously) has not received the attention it deserves.

<sup>61</sup> Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 108.

<sup>62</sup> Minnis, “Fifteenth-Century Versions,” 179.

<sup>63</sup> Alan of Lille once remarked that an authority “has a wax nose, which means that it can be bent into taking on different meanings.” See *PL* 210:3331. Compare Chenu, *Understanding St. Thomas*, 144–5.



of sacred scripture, Saint Bonaventure believed, is evidenced by the abundant allegorical senses and interpretations of the sacred scriptures.<sup>64</sup> The vastness of that depth requires no less.

### 3 Ultimate ends of the “book of life”

If discussion of the “efficient cause” of the Bible – with God as its primary efficient cause and the human authors as its instrumental causes – gave exegetes the occasion and opportunity to discuss sacred authorship and authority, that other Aristotelian heading, the “final cause,” facilitated investigation of the ultimate ends of scripture, its role in effecting salvation and leading men to their ultimate homeland in heaven and the “new heaven, new earth” beyond (compare Apocalypse 21:1).<sup>65</sup> For the Bible is no ordinary book, but “the book of life” (Ecclesiasticus 24:32). Discussing that passage at the very beginning of his *Postilla litteralis*, Nicholas of Lyre affirms that “No other written text . . . leads directly to the blessed life, which is the only life in the unqualified sense of the word, since it is totally untouched by death.”<sup>66</sup> It offers its readers the “opportunity to obtain eternal bliss,” which is the end (*finis*, coterminous with *causa finalis*) of theology. Nicholas proceeds to quote Ecclesiasticus 24:31, “Those who elucidate me will have eternal life.” “Holy Scripture is elucidated when it is truly expounded and is put into practice in the form of a holy life,” he adds. This, it is quite evident, is the best possible exegesis – not mere scholarly investigation but rather the implementation of the Bible’s teaching in godly living, with heaven as the inestimable reward. Spiritual exegesis can help us get there – and so, at the beginning of his *Postilla moralis*, Lyre cites Ecclesiasticus 24:32 once again, reaffirming that the Bible is the Book of Life.

Here we return to what spiritual exegesis meant for de Lubac. “The mystical or spiritual understanding of scripture and the mystical or spiritual life are, in the end, one and the same.”<sup>67</sup> De Lubac envisages each of the four senses leading to the other as its end, until (as Bryan C. Hollon puts it) “we come to anagogy, which shows us that the experience of time was but a preparation for eternity.”<sup>68</sup> Anagogy “stirs up the desire for eternity

<sup>64</sup> *Breviloquium*, prologus, 4, trans., Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 233–5.

<sup>65</sup> On the “Aristotelian Prologue,” with its apparatus of the four causes, in Bible and Sentences commentaries see Minnis, *Authorship*, 28–9, and *infra*.

<sup>66</sup> *Postilla litteralis*, Prologus generalis, trans. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 267.

<sup>67</sup> See Note 30. <sup>68</sup> Hollon, *Everything is Sacred*, 103.

in us,<sup>69</sup> that longing for the supernatural, which, according to de Lubac, is natural to man. Hence his sensitivity to the limitations of the literal sense, with its historical realities and factual details, and of the modern scientific exegesis – so treasured by Smalley – which concentrated on them.

However, de Lubac failed to appreciate the cultural significance of the late-medieval expansion of the literal sense to include figurative language of all kinds, including parables, proverbs, likenesses, ironies, metaphors, and similes, these being textual features that previously (and concurrently, in certain contemporary contexts) were treated as, or assumed to be, parts of the spiritual sense.<sup>70</sup> This development cannot grandly be dismissed as evidence of “décadence,” “un caricature de l’allégorie traditionnelle.”<sup>71</sup> Rather, we are witnessing fresh engagement with, and exploitation of, a pliable tradition. The literal sense has (as it were) invaded and occupied territory previously governed by the spiritual sense, a major redrawing of boundary lines being the consequence:<sup>72</sup> a move suggestive of intellectual vitality rather than of fatigue.

The new positioning of parable affords an excellent case in point. Aquinas’ statement that “the parabolical sense is contained within the category of the literal sense” has already been noted.<sup>73</sup> Not merely to be applied *ad hoc* in the exegesis of individual parables in the New Testament, this principle could provide the basis for interpretation of an entire book of the Bible – as in the reading of the Song of Songs that forms part of Nicholas of Lyre’s *Postilla litteralis*.<sup>74</sup> For Lyre this is an historical account

<sup>69</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II:197.

<sup>70</sup> Perhaps this was, in at least some measure, due to his eagerness to recuperate the ultimate insights of medieval spiritual exegesis (as he saw them) for the needs of the Catholic Church of his time. On the *ressourcement* movement see Hollon, *Everything is Sacred*, 4–107, 148–51, and Holsinger, *Premodern Condition*, 40–2, 163–68. Holsinger relates the *nouvelle théologie* of de Lubac and Jean Daniélou to the *nouvelle critique* of Bataille and Barthes (see esp. pp. 21–2, 179–89), arguing for “the centrality of the medieval in the ongoing encounter between contemporary theology and the theoretical discourses of poststructuralism and postmodernism” (p. 120). He also notes the influence of the first volume of de Lubac’s *Exégèse médiévale* on medievalist literary critic D. W. Robertson, which has been criticized by Lee Patterson – quite rightly, in my view – as providing a “catalogue of totalizings” at the service of a “conservative, universalist, and institutional view of the middle ages” in general and medieval secular poetry in particular. See Holsinger, *Premodern Condition*, 183; Patterson, *Negotiating the Past* 32–3.

<sup>71</sup> See Note 35.

<sup>72</sup> The differences in thinking involved here are well described by Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory*, 94–9, who distinguishes between the “metaphoricist” approach (figurative language belongs with the spiritual sense) and the “anti-metaphoricist” approach (figurative language can be read as a part of the literal sense). See also Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*, 37ff.

<sup>73</sup> Minnis, Scott and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 242. See discussion at Note 45.

<sup>74</sup> This follows Dove, “Literal Senses.” Compare the Jewish treatment of the *peshat* (“plain sense”) in the Song of Songs discussed in Chapter 9, Sec. 3 and in Chapter 12, Sec. 3.

of the relationship between God and the Christian church. And this is its paramount sense – indeed its literal sense, since the whole book is written *parabolice*, as an extended parable. Such a reading is rendered possible by the belief that Solomon (its putative author) was divinely inspired, with foreknowledge of the future. However, the text's pattern of signification is even more complicated than that. As Mary Dove has pointed out, here we find parable within parable: what she describes as “three *parabole* that stand out like islands amidst the parabolic flow of the narrative.”<sup>75</sup> These are: the first parable of the beautiful woman (Song 4:1–5), the parable of the strong and beloved young man (5:10–16), and the second parable of the beautiful woman (7:1–7). According to all Jewish and Christian scholars, Lyre asserts confidently, the young man signifies God. The first woman indicates “the spiritual beauty of the bride in her Israelite manifestation”; the second, “her beauty in her New Testament guise”<sup>76</sup> – as the text proceeds from Old Testament prefiguration to christological fulfillment. In these cases there is a tendency toward twofold parabolic interpretation – the emergence of a *duplex sensus parabolicus*.

As far as I know, no medieval schoolman actually came up with that term. But some of them did speak of a *duplex sensus litteralis*. Nicholas of Lyre proposed that this was to be found at 1 Chr 17:13.<sup>77</sup> Here “the word of God” comes to the prophet Nathan, declaring that He will be a father to Solomon (David's seed), and Solomon shall be a son to Him. Here, then, Solomon is presented as having been adopted by God through grace – that being a literal reading of scripture. Yet at Hebrews 1:5 the same episode is interpreted as referring to Christ, and Lyre claims that this too is a literal reading. Lyre solves the problem by postulating that the Chronicles passage has a double literal sense. However, in the grand scheme of things it seems that one such sense is more important than the other. The principle for determining the priorities is clear: since Solomon was the son of God by grace he fulfilled the prophecy less perfectly than did Christ, who was the son of God by nature. Here, then, two scriptural passages are securely brought within the purview of the literal sense, a capacious category that allows for different valuations of constituent senses in respect of our ultimate salvation, which is the *finis* or *causa finalis* of the Book of Life.

<sup>75</sup> Dove, “Literal Senses,” 144.

<sup>76</sup> These phrases are adapted from Dove, “Literal Senses,” 144.

<sup>77</sup> Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 205–6. See further Levy, “Literal Sense,” 788–9, who proceeds to discuss later reactions to Lyre's notion of *duplex sensus litteralis*. On Alfonso de Madrigal's use of it (a direct development of Lyre's) see Minnis, “Fifteenth-Century Versions,” 172–3.

Indeed, even the Apocalypse – that most symbolically encrusted of all the books of the Bible – could be rendered literal thanks to the hermeneutic maneuverability afforded by the *duplex sensus litteralis*. In 1329 Lyre revised and completed his commentary on this text, writing under the shadow of the papal condemnation (in 1326) of the Apocalypse commentary of his fellow-Franciscan Peter John Olivi (d. 1298). Olivi was an ardent supporter of the Millenarian hermeneutics of Joachim of Fiore – that “thriving child” of “the spiritual exposition in its old age” that Beryl Smalley felt no urge to adopt (Note 40). Yet, paradoxically enough, the spiritual interpretation of the Apocalypse practiced by Joachim and Olivi was actually about history – events past, present, and future, which were unfolding even as they wrote. In his turn, Lyre set about correlating words, images and symbols from his text with a sequence of actual events, while avoiding those dangerous identifications that had brought his predecessors into disrepute. In correcting their excesses, the exegetical tool that he used systematically (though not at every point in the text) was that of the *duplex sensus litteralis*, as Philip D. W. Krey has shown.<sup>78</sup> Krey notes that this allows for a “literal” christological interpretation of an Old Testament text “without doing violence to the literal meaning for its own time.”<sup>79</sup> (Here he has in mind Lyre’s reading of 1 Chr 17:13, as summarized in this section.) And it presupposes that a particular Old Testament text may have meaning – a single literal sense – only within the circumstances of its own time. As applied to the most difficult of all the books of the New Testament, Lyre’s method delivers a reading that interprets some of St. John’s symbols in terms of both ancient and recent history (the latter extending as far as the twelfth century), while leaving other symbols safely in the past, in the belief that – due to their textual context – they can apply only to John’s own time. Typically, Lyre consulted a considerable number of chronicles and annals, to get the history as right as he could. He had no qualms about identifying cases in which that history simply did not fit, and therefore ruled out certain prophetic readings of the revelatory text. The result is a “chastened” and mutedly triumphalist “view of the Christian mission,” which is “dominated by Christology, trinitarianism, eucharistic piety, and ecclesiology.”<sup>80</sup>

Here, then, are some of the ways in which the “double literal sense” functioned in medieval scriptural exegesis. One might be forgiven for

<sup>78</sup> Krey, “Introduction,” 17–23. Compare Chapter 6, Sec. 4b. <sup>79</sup> Krey, “Introduction,” 19.

<sup>80</sup> Krey, “Introduction,” 18. For a very different readings of Lyre’s commentaries on the Apocalypse and the Song of Songs, see de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, II:2, 345–8.

asking, was there any reading of a biblical passage that could *not* be maneuvered into the literal sense? How useful or convincing actually were those hermeneutic acrobatics? Such issues need not concern us, as they are beside the point being made here, which is that the developments under scrutiny point to a new, and higher, valuation of the literal sense. Clearly, the *sensus litteralis* was, for many an exegetical statement, the intellectually fashionable place to be. It had come to be associated with logical rigor, historical accuracy, and (in at least some instances) with secure textual transmission.<sup>81</sup> The category bespoke prestige, inspired confidence.

#### 4 Truth and the literal sense

With all of this came certain anxieties. Long-established ways of getting around the embarrassing difficulties presented by some biblical passages became harder to credit. Literalism meant that a harsher light was being shone upon the sins and lies of many authoritative figures. The prologue to the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, with which this chapter began, lists some troubling cases: King David committing adultery and murder, Absalom wickedly avenging himself on his father, and Samson spending a night of passion with a prostitute. There were plenty more, including Jacob's theft of the birthright of his brother Esau by lying to his father Isaac (Gen 27:24), and King Solomon's womanizing and worship of strange gods (3 Kgs [MT 1 Kgs] 11:1–8). Furthermore, at Exod 1:17–19 we read of how certain “midwives lied to avoid having to kill the Hebrew babies, a lie which God approved of and rewarded,” and – even more strangely – at Judg 9:8 the tale is told of how “the trees of the forest went forth to anoint themselves a king,” which is “quite at variance with the truth,” since trees can neither speak nor behave in such a manner.<sup>82</sup>

Here we have moved into a *quaestio* found in the *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum* of the secular Parisian master Henry of Ghent (d. 1293), formulated as “whether truth is inherent in every exposition and sense” of scripture.<sup>83</sup> Henry begins with the long-established position (here sourced from Augustine) that a certain text may have no true historical meaning, in

<sup>81</sup> See especially Lyre's famous criticism of the inadequate standards of textual accuracy and layout in the copying of Bibles; *Postilla litteralis*, prologus secundus, in Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 269.

<sup>82</sup> *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum*, art. 16, qu. 5. See Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 263–4.

<sup>83</sup> A full reference is provided in [Note 82](#).

which case “recourse must be had to the mystical sense” and the passage understood metaphorically. This takes care of the problem posed by Judg 9:8. Isidore of Seville, as quoted in the *Glossa Ordinaria*, “understands the trees as signifying men according to the allegorical sense of the text.” In the case of Jacob and Esau, we should think of them not as representing “their own persons, but rather what is signified by those persons” – a version of the argument, which, in the prologue to the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, we see applied more simply as a defense of prefiguration. Henry proceeds to cite Augustine on the principle that “whatever is done or said with a figurative significance is not a lie.” Esau represents “the synagogue of the Jews,” whereas Jacob represents the Christian church – in these terms, it was quite right that he should triumph over his brother. However, when Henry comes to the case of David’s adultery with Bathsheba, he balks at identifying David with Christ, Uriah with the devil, and Bathsheba as the church (that being an interpretation then attributed to Bede). Instead he makes a literalistic distinction between the “substance” of the action and the “quality” of the action. In terms of the latter, that is, the way in which a certain action is performed, “no true exposition in a good sense” is possible. In terms of the “substance” of the action, however, it should be noted that a prince might well order the death of a knight and take his wife for himself, without committing a sin. So, then, here is a rationale for expounding an apparently evil action in a way that is good. However, when he comes to the case of the mendacious midwives, Henry adopts a much more conservative stance. The fact that God rewarded the midwives by building them houses (Exod 1:21) does not mean that their lie was not really a sin; as Gregory the Great says, they were punished for it by being rewarded on earth rather than in the hereafter.<sup>84</sup>

Indeed, Henry’s entire handling of the question is marked by a certain timidity, whereas many of his contemporaries took a more robust line, as I have shown elsewhere.<sup>85</sup> That tendency was already well-developed by the previous century, when thinkers, in the words of Marcia Colish, sought to revalue “some lies and frauds as righteous,” thereby undermining the hard line taken (in her view) by church fathers such as Augustine and Gregory. Consequently, some of “the lies of biblical worthies” were rationalized, and turned “into truths and virtues.”<sup>86</sup> As contributory cultural factors Colish cites a new “intentionalism” in ethical theory (well

<sup>84</sup> On twelfth-century readings of these very same cruxes see Colish, “Rethinking Lying.”

<sup>85</sup> See Minnis, *Authorship*, 103–12; Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 208–9.

<sup>86</sup> Colish, “Rethinking Lying,” 169–70.

exemplified by Peter Abelard's *Ethics*), the application of legal categories within exegetical procedure, and "the heightened appreciation of the didactic uses of fable and figures of speech that marks the literary sensibility of the twelfth century."<sup>87</sup>

That last statement in particular raises a host of issues of the first importance for this chapter. In (partial) defense of Augustine, it must be said that the sophistication of his treatment of scriptural "lying" should be recognized; what the saint has to say on the subject is certainly more nuanced than Henry of Ghent's brief summary of his views might suggest. Addressing the problem posed by the tale of the trees anointing their king (Judg 9:8), Augustine compares it to beast fables as told by Horace and Aesop. "By a fictitious narrative a true signification may be assigned"; "there is no man so untaught as to think that they should be called lies."<sup>88</sup> The tradition that the poets are liars goes back to Plato at least, but here Augustine seems quite relaxed with the idea that pagan and Christian authors share certain literary techniques. However, despite the heightened appreciation of the didactic uses of fable and figures of speech, which indeed characterizes the literary sensibility of the twelfth century, many writers of the time were keen to keep pagan falsehood and Christian truth far apart. For instance, Conrad of Hirsau (c.1070-c.1150?) remarked that, when the young monk seeks out truth in the writing of Ovid, it is like looking for gold in the midst of dung.<sup>89</sup> This assessment appears in Conrad's *Dialogus super auctores*, a conversation-piece between master and pupil that includes much material from the *accessus ad auctores* tradition, wherein secular literature is regularly said to "pertain to ethics," to be of use in the instruction of moral behavior – and this is its highest possible objective. As such, secular literature cannot possibly compare, and certainly not compete, with the superior *finis* or *causa finalis* of Holy Scripture, which is our ultimate salvation.

The matter was further complicated by the arrival in Western universities of recently recovered works of Aristotle, which enabled the question of the "scientific" nature of various forms of knowledge to be raised with new standards of acuity and complexity. Among the many controversial claims made by "the philosopher" was the statement (in his *Metaphysics*) that theology and poetry were connected inasmuch as the first poets were theologians. Furthermore, in the laws of the community (by which

<sup>87</sup> Colish, "Rethinking Lying," 173. See also Chapter 6, Note 37.

<sup>88</sup> *Contra mendacium*, xiii. 28; *CSEL* 41:508–9.

<sup>89</sup> *Dialogus super auctores*, trans. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 56.



Aristotle means here its traditional customs, regulations, and religious ideals), many mythical and fabulous elements were intermixed with wisdom.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps this is the source of two among the 217 propositions that were condemned in 1277 by Stephen Tempier, Bishop of Paris: “the statements of the theologians are based on fables”; and “there are fables and falsehoods in the Christian law just as in others.” Henry of Ghent was a member of the commission of theologians that assisted Tempier. Given the febrile intellectual atmosphere in which they and their contemporaries were evidently working, it is little wonder that questions concerning the truth of Holy Scripture should be redolent of anxiety.

Following those condemnations, the theologians of Paris (and other major European universities) managed to achieve a pragmatic assimilation of at least some of the ideas of Aristotle, including those that pertained to the distinctive subject-matters and modes of procedure of the various sciences.<sup>91</sup> Where did this leave theology, the body of knowledge based on the Bible, and supported by the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, which started being used as the foundational theological textbook in the 1220s? It became a commonplace to say that the merely human sciences proceed by means of analyses, definitions, and arguments – the standard methods of logic. In contrast, the Bible appropriately proceeds in a way which “is poetic or historical or parabolical,” for it operates through the inculcation of a pious disposition or affect (*affectus pietatis*) in men.<sup>92</sup> This citation is from the *Summa Alexandri*’s account of the formal cause of theology. By discussing the *causa formalis* apart from the *causa efficiens*, this and similar treatises were effectively separating authorial style from authorial sense and intention. But the literalizing trend of the resultant discourse is quite obvious. Scriptural styles, genres, and didactic methods are being accommodated within the *sensus litteralis*, where they can sit comfortably with the *sensus parabolicus*. Consequently, we may detect a certain (and, to some, troubling) confluence of theology and ethics. Given that the fables of the poets “pertain to ethics” (according to legions of *accessus*), which is a branch of practical philosophy, it would seem that they have more in common with biblical

<sup>90</sup> See Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 210–11.

<sup>91</sup> On these developments see especially Chenu, *Théologie comme science* and Köpf, *Anfänge der theologischen Wissenschaftstheorie*.

<sup>92</sup> *Summa Alexandri*, Tract. introd., qu. 1, cap. 4, art. 1, trans. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 212–15. See also Minnis, “Ethical Poetry”; idem, “Trouble with Theology.”

exemplification than some would like to think. The supreme science of theology deploys a *modus tractandi*, which “is poetic or historical or parabolical,”<sup>93</sup> and apparently poets both pagan and scriptural wrote to improve human behavior, showing us how to follow after the good and flee from the evil. Here is a rather different world from the one presupposed in Conrad of Hirsau’s *Dialogus super auctores*.

No wonder that, to many of its medieval readers, the Bible looked like soft wax on which various seals could impress their shapes.<sup>94</sup> In their attempts to make sense of *sensus litteralis* in late-medieval Christian exegesis, modern scholars have also left their marks, none more indelible than those of Beryl Smalley and Henri de Lubac. De Lubac affirmed that “the sense of history and the mystic urge are in no way incompatible.”<sup>95</sup> He himself was living proof of that. However, his protestation that “allegory is in truth *the truth* of history,”<sup>96</sup> requires some qualification. Allegory has its own complex and convoluted historical truth, wherein change sometimes triumphed over continuity, diversity and fragmentation over unity. De Lubac saw the four senses as leading one to another in an orderly progression toward eternity. It could equally well be said that, during their earthly manifestations within various late-medieval sociopolitical contexts, they were quite porous and permeable. Thus vast tracts of the spiritual sense could be annexed by the literal sense, and extensively remapped. For de Lubac, “Allegory fulfills history by giving it its sense.”<sup>97</sup> Conversely, we may say that history gave allegory many senses, thereby fulfilling parts of its extraordinary potential – as when those one-time constituents of the *sensus spiritualis*, figures, metaphors, and images, were included within an all-embracing *sensus litteralis*. So, then, in the continuing investigation of the ideas that cluster around the literal sense, Smalley’s controversial treatment of “The Spiritual Exposition in Decline” retains much of its original challenge. But that term “decline” needs careful attention; it is better to speak of redeployment, relocation, revaluation. And we should keep adding “and Society” (along with “and Politics”) to our titles.

<sup>93</sup> To return to the idiom, as quoted earlier, from the *Summa Alexandri*. Where, incidentally, the tale of the trees anointing a king is treated as a parable. *Summa Alexandri*, Tract. introd., qu. 1, cap. 4, art. 4, trans. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory*, 222–3.

<sup>94</sup> See Note 63 and at Note 1.

<sup>95</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II:214.

<sup>96</sup> Note 31.

<sup>97</sup> Note 31.

## *Conceptions of the literal sense (zāhir, ḥaqīqa) in Muslim interpretive thought*

Robert M. Gleave

The preceding two chapters explored how the concept of the literal sense modulated within Christian interpretation. This chapter turns to conceptions of the literal sense in Muslim thought, a transition to a different faith that brings with it new terminology and a new outlook. Beyond the linguistic shift from Latin to Arabic, the discussion moves into a new conceptual realm. Within Islam, scripture is a central source of religious law that is all-encompassing. Accordingly, some of the most detailed hermeneutical discussions of the literal sense occur within the tradition of Muslim jurisprudence (Ar. *uṣūl al-fiqh*, lit. the roots or principles of the law). This has no clear counterpart in Christian tradition, in which scripture is not regarded primarily as a source of law.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, investigations of Muslim theorists regarding the literal sense, *mutatis mutandis*, shed light by contrast on parallel Christian concerns.

As observed earlier in this volume, Christianity is founded upon the assumption that a proper reading of scripture must go beyond the text, to discover its deeper spiritual meaning. The value of the literal sense was therefore questioned, and was at times associated with the flawed Jewish reading of the Law. In Islam, the study of the literal sense of the Qur'an – a work that announces itself as a clear Arabic text (see [Chapter 3](#)) – does not require justification, and therefore begins on a different plane of valuation. The privileged status enjoyed by the literal sense in Muslim hermeneutics manifests itself in the widely held maxim that any given qur'anic verse must, as a rule, be regarded as *ḥaqīqa* (proper, literal language) and understood according to its *zāhir* (apparent, obvious, literal sense), except when there are compelling reasons (sometimes referred to as *qarā'in*; “contextual indicators”) to posit that it is *majāz* (non-literal language) and to apply *ta'wīl* (figurative/non-literal interpretation) to it. The exception was invoked liberally in some schools, most famously among

<sup>1</sup> It will, however, find a parallel in the Jewish interpretive tradition, as discussed in [Chapter 9](#).

the Mu‘tazilites, who held that God is completely incorporeal, and who therefore applied figurative or otherwise non-literal interpretations to the qur’anic passages that speak of Him in anthropomorphic terms.<sup>2</sup> But even Ibn Ḥazm, the staunch exponent of the so-called *ẓāhirī* (“literalist”) school, conceded that the *ẓāhir* must be abandoned in the face of conclusive evidence to the contrary from scripture, the consensus of Muslim tradition, or sense perception.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in *uṣūl al-fiqh* it was recognized within most schools that Muslim religious law could not be based entirely on what is stated explicitly (*naṣṣ/manṣūṣ*) in the foundational texts, that is, the Qur’an and *ḥadīth*, and that the application of *qiyās* (analogical reasoning) is therefore required.<sup>4</sup>

Yet there always remained a certain anxiety in Muslim interpretation and legal hermeneutics about diverging from the literal sense. The various statements in the Qur’an that insist that it is written in “clear Arabic” led interpreters to favor interpretations that did not involve “guesswork.” The literal sense was a sort of pre-interpretive meaning that the language possesses in and of itself.<sup>5</sup> As such, it is a context-free, “objective” meaning that is not susceptible to the partiality of human reason – which the application of *ta’wīl* and *qiyās* necessarily involve. And yet, while the theological tensions in Christianity over the literal sense were mostly foreign to Islam, Muslim interpreters of the Qur’an encountered a variety of complexities when seeking to define the literal sense of scripture. The current chapter is devoted to understanding these complexities.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

The idea of a literal meaning in Islamic exegesis generally, and in legal exegesis in particular, was well developed by the fifth/eleventh century – the era of “classical” Muslim jurisprudence. It was associated with the meanings attached to words through an act of assignation or coining (*wad‘*) in some primordial past moment. When a word is used in accordance with that original coinage, it is said to be *ḥaqīqa* (lit. truth; that is, proper, literal usage). Some Muslim thinkers opined that God himself was the “originator” (*wādī*; “coiner”) of language, which endows the *ḥaqīqa* with a special divine connection, and renders non-literal meaning (*majāz*) a deviation from God’s created intention.<sup>6</sup> Yet even for those who

<sup>2</sup> See Gimaret, *Lecture Mu‘tazilite*. <sup>3</sup> Goldziher, *Ẓāhiris*, 116–18.

<sup>4</sup> See Hallaq, *Origins*, 114–20. The *ẓāhirites*, however, rejected the validity of *qiyās*.

<sup>5</sup> See Lowry, “Legal Hermeneutics,” 35.

<sup>6</sup> See al-Ḥillī, *Nihāyat*, I:152; Ibn Ḥazm, *Iḥkām*, I:34, 37, 276; Gleave, *Literalism*, 31–2; 150–4.

attributed the original coinage of language to humans, the literal sense was privileged, as indicated in the oft-repeated axiom in classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* that an utterance's meaning is assumed to be *ḥaqīqa* until external, contextual factors (*qarā'in*; sing. *qarīna*) are identified which indicate that a non-literal meaning was intended.<sup>7</sup> However, this conception of literal meaning, associated with a myth linked to the invention of language, took time to develop. This chapter traces how the equation of literal meaning with the originally "assigned" meaning emerged in Islamic jurisprudential writings through two linked explorations. First, it outlines how the notion of literal meaning defined in modern pragmatics illuminates the analysis of medieval Muslim jurisprudence. Second, it explores early Islamic juristic texts to understand their developing conceptions of the operation of language as a communicative tool. In conclusion, it outlines how these conceptions were incorporated into a more general theory of the origins of language and the literal meaning of revelatory texts such as the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet (*aḥādīth*; sing. *ḥadīth*).

## **I Introduction: medieval Muslim and modern terminology**

Embarking on an examination of the concept of literal meaning and its role in qur'anic hermeneutics in general and in Muslim jurisprudence in particular confronts two immediate challenges. First, the perennial terminological problem: Which of the many technical terms and locutions employed by medieval Muslim interpreters are candidates for the literal meaning/sense, or the literal interpretation of a text? This is more than just a problem of translation. It has long been recognized that the aim of a perfect match between words in two languages is both unachievable and wrong-headed: asserting a simple correspondence between, say, a word in Arabic and a word in English is naïve and misleading, particularly when it comes to technical terms used within involved systems of thought. The task of understanding the concept of literalness in Muslim hermeneutics is made more challenging in that, unlike in the study of the *sensus literalis* in Christian exegesis, there is no convenient linguistic cognate from which to begin an exposition. There is no obvious single term for "literal sense/meaning" in the Arabic interpretive tradition. Or rather, there are numerous possible terms. More importantly, while these sometimes refer to what one might consider today to be the "literal meaning" of a phrase or scriptural passage, at other times the terms are used in ways that differ

<sup>7</sup> On *qarīna*, see [Chapter II, Sec. 3](#).

from what most people today would understand as the “literal meaning.” The approach of this chapter therefore is to trace the journey of the idea of “literal meaning” in early Muslim jurisprudence rather than the history of a specific term and its technical use.

The second set of challenges, which spins out of any consideration of this terminological impasse, is conceptual: What do *we* mean by literal meaning? Are there elements of Muslim legal hermeneutics that correspond to this idea? Can we therefore regard as “literalists” those Muslim theorists who rejected meanings that we would consider non-literal? The current chapter begins with this second set of questions, as they are perhaps more fundamental, while terminology, at least in early Muslim hermeneutic reflection, is rather fluid and author-specific.

## 2 Literal and non-literal meaning

An idea central to the notion of literalness in Muslim hermeneutics is illuminated by a distinction made in modern pragmatics between what is explicit and what is implied. When a friend asks “Are you hungry?” and I reply “I’ve had breakfast,” this is taken as a negative response. What I mean is “No, I am not hungry because I have already had breakfast this morning.” The intended meaning is implied; but what was said explicitly is that I have, at some point in my life, eaten breakfast. “I’ve had breakfast,” taken “literally,” has no specific time marker (“today,” “this morning” are not part of its meaning, but rather are part of the shared understanding of the speaker and audience), other than “at some point in my life.”<sup>8</sup>

This distinction can be found in Muslim jurisprudence, for example, in a discussion of the following prophetic report (*ḥadīth*):

A Bedouin came to the Prophet (may God bless and grant him peace) and said to him: “I am doomed and I have caused another to be doomed.”

The Prophet said to him, “What have you done?”

He said, “I had sexual intercourse intentionally with my wife during the daytime in Ramadan.”

He said to him, “Free a slave.”<sup>9</sup>

The jurists understood this to establish that the penance for engaging in sexual intercourse during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan is the

<sup>8</sup> The discussion of the Literal/non-Literal dynamic in modern linguistic philosophy is extensive. For two perspectives, see Recanati, *Literary Meaning*; Bach, “You Don’t Say?”

<sup>9</sup> See al-Āmidī, *Iḥkām*, III:280; see also Weiss, *Search*, 601. During Ramadan, sexual intercourse, like eating, is prohibited in the daytime but permitted at night.

freeing of a slave. Yet this is only an implication from the conversation, rather than what the Prophet actually said. He ordered the Bedouin to free a slave, but gave no indication why he was obligated to do so. It is the context that leads naturally to the interpretation that freeing a slave is a penance.

In these sorts of utterances, the intended meaning of the speaker is merely implied, while the utterance's own intrinsic meaning can be viewed as independent of the speaker's intention. When dealing with revelatory texts, discovering the intended meaning of the speaker (that is, God), the *murād Allāh*, or *maqṣūd Allāh* is the point of the hermeneutic exercise. What the text means in and of itself – the pre-interpretive sense – is interesting in so far as it might help us understand God's intended meaning. In the Muslim hermeneutic system this independent meaning inherent within the utterance is the imagined starting point for the exegete in his search for the intended meaning. For this reason, understanding what this meaning might be is an important element in any exegetical theory. The distinction between the speaker's intended meaning and the utterance's inherent meaning seems obvious and unproblematic once understood, but in Muslim hermeneutics it was not immediately axiomatic and took time to embed itself within a general theory of interpretation. Various conceptions were tested before Muslim jurisprudence arrived at a stable framework for the understanding of this notion of an independent, inherent utterance-meaning – which would seem an initial candidate for the literal meaning.

Paul Grice, credited with founding the modern discipline of pragmatics, devised a theory of underlying maxims that are operative in conversation but are unspoken.<sup>10</sup> These maxims explain how listeners grasp a speaker's intended meaning when it is not what the utterance itself means. In the above "free a slave" example, Grice might describe the process as accessing the implied meaning through "the maxim of relevance" adopted by both the Prophet and the Bedouin. That is, both were communicating on the assumption that each element in a conversational sequence is a response to, and has relevance for, the previous element. Maxims such as these enable speakers to utilize the universal feature of what Grice calls "conversational implicature."<sup>11</sup> That is, an utterance often communicates an "Implicated Meaning" that goes beyond what it means independent of context ("Sentence Meaning") and even beyond its minimal meaning in context ("What is Said"). Returning to our example:

<sup>10</sup> Grice, "Logic and Conversation."

<sup>11</sup> Grice, "Presupposition and Conversational Implicature."



- (1) The Sentence Meaning of the Prophet's statement "Free a slave" is that the person being addressed by the Prophet should free a slave;<sup>12</sup>
- (2) "What is Said" introduces the notion that the person being addressed by the Prophet's statement is the man informing him about his transgression. This identification of the addressee is not present in the Sentence Meaning, but it is present in What is Said. What is Said is the Sentence Meaning plus those elements of conversational context required to make it assessable as a statement. In this example, without the identification of the addressee it is impossible to know who must free a slave.
- (3) The Implicated Meaning here is the Prophet's intended meaning – that the person should free a slave as penance for transgressing God's rule concerning sexual intercourse during the daytime in Ramadan.

In Muslim hermeneutics, as in modern pragmatics, the move from Sentence Meaning to What is Said to Implicated Meaning is achieved through external contextual factors (*qarā'in*) that the listener processes. These external factors graduate the listener's comprehension of the utterance from stage to stage, eventually enabling him or her to grasp the intended message.<sup>13</sup> This idealized account represents the basic structure of how Muslim jurists understood the communicative process to intersect with language.

In terms of the literal meaning, Grice's first two categories would appear *prima facie* candidates for consideration: namely, Sentence Meaning and What is Said, categories that Grice deemed "closely related."<sup>14</sup> Consider the qur'anic verse:

For you, the catch from the sea and its consumption is lawful, as a benefit for you and for the traveler. (Q. 5:96)

The Sentence Meaning of this verse, in isolation, is deficient, since the addressee ("you") is not specified. In the pragmatists' terms, there is "semantic under-determination"<sup>15</sup> in the Sentence Meaning that prevents the formulation of a fully comprehensible proposition. In and of itself, the Sentence Meaning lacks an assessable message. Specifying the referent of

<sup>12</sup> The sentence meaning of an imperative was much debated by Muslim legal theorists, some saying it required immediate performance, whereas others permitted delay. Some said it required a single performance, others said it required repeated performance. See Gleave, "Delaying the Elucidation."

<sup>13</sup> See Hallaq, "*Qarīna*." <sup>14</sup> Grice, "Logic and Conversation."

<sup>15</sup> See Pfister, *Metaphysics and Epistemology of Meaning*.

“you” requires contextual factors. The reference must, at a minimum, be something like “the people who were present when the Prophet transmitted this message.” This, one might argue, is “What is said,” as opposed to the “Sentence Meaning.” But the introduction of this minimal contextual information (“filling the indexical slots”) was not seen by Muslim jurists as moving into a non-literal understanding. Context was involved in this process, but it was not seen as triggering a true diversion from the utterance’s own meaning. Indeed, most modern pragmatists agree. François Recanati, in his critique of Grice’s framework and the role of literal meaning within it, says that these minimal departures from the Sentence Meaning are still ordinarily considered within the realms of the literal meaning.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the utterance “the catch from the sea is lawful” would seem, in itself, to permit the addressees to use the catch for whatever they wish, not merely for food (which is explicitly mentioned in the verse) but also for other purposes (the bones could be utensils, the oil for medicine, etc.) This was still considered by Muslim jurists to be within the realm of the literal.<sup>17</sup>

However, there may be yet further elements to what we might call “the literal meaning”: it would seem that the “you” in the verse refers not only those who are present at the point of articulation, but people throughout the ages, from the point of articulation until the day of resurrection. By understanding the verse in this way, we are moving yet further away from the Sentence Meaning, and we have also, one supposes, departed from What is Said. Muslim jurists, in general, still considered this qur’anic use of the second person plural to apply to all believers, not only those present at the point of articulation; and this meaning was still to be found in the text, and was not an implication from it.

Some Muslim jurists, however, distinguished between these different literal meanings and further implications, which would be classified under the rubric of *qiyās*, that is, legal analogical reasoning.<sup>18</sup> A distinction is thus made between what is stated explicitly (*maṭṭūq*) in a language expression, and what is “understood” (*mafhūm*) from it.<sup>19</sup> For example, if one were to deduce from the statement “the catch from the sea and its consumption is lawful” that while the catch from the sea is lawful, the “catch from the land” is not, this might be regarded as a departure from the literal. This

<sup>16</sup> Recanati, *Literal Meaning*, 7–22.

<sup>17</sup> See Weiss, *Search*, 452. In a cognate case, there was debate over the statement “Forbidden to you are carrion, blood and the meat of swine” (Q. 5:3). The question was whether this meant all uses of these items, or only their consumption as food.

<sup>18</sup> See Hallaq, “Non-Analogical Arguments.” <sup>19</sup> Ḥillī, *Nihāyat*, II:513.

sort of deduction, referred to as “contrary implication” (known as *maḥḥūm al-mukhālafa*), may be valid; but for some Muslim jurists, it was distinguished from the literal meaning inhering in the utterance.<sup>20</sup> Considering the “you” in the verse to apply to all Muslims throughout time, however, constitutes only a *minimal* departure from the Sentence Meaning and thus remains within the realm of the “literal,” whereas the alleged involvement of guesswork in the case of “contrary implication” was taken as an indication that it is outside the realm of the literal.

All of this has resonance with the different types of literal meaning outlined by Recanati:

- (i) Sentence Meaning (“type-literal” or t-literal) is the linguistically determined meaning;
- (ii) What is Said which is still literal but involves minimal departure from the t-literal (“minimal-literal,” m-literal);
- (iii) An increased incorporation of contextual factors, and an incorporation of some understanding of the speaker’s intention, but which still appear rooted within the text, having a sort of “primary” quality (p-literal; as opposed the “secondary” quality of implications).<sup>21</sup>

All of these can be distinguished from implications, such as the argument that the catch from the land is forbidden. In implications, there is a presumption that the speaker’s intention in making the utterance went well beyond the meaning present within the text. The range of potential elements of literal meaning revealed by Recanati’s analysis illuminates the variety of understandings of the meanings that inhere in the text – that the text “owns” – according to Muslim jurists. This powerful idea, that the text has a meaning independent of, and in some sense prior to the speaker’s intention, was an essential element in the development of a workable Muslim hermeneutic system, even when one of the central aims of that system was to explain how and when reinterpretation (*ta’wīl*) is required to override the literal meaning.

<sup>20</sup> The validity of this sort of contrary implication was actually debated sharply in early *uṣūl al-fiqh*, with some jurists rejecting it altogether, whereas others went so far as to argue that it is part of the meaning of the language in and of itself. Ibn al-Qaṣṣār (discussed below), for example, saw contrary implications of this sort not as additions to the inherent meaning of the text, but as part of the *ẓāhir* of the text (that is, in the way the term is used here, the text’s “literal meaning”). See the discussion at Notes 33, 41. For another category of *maḥḥūm*, as distinct from what is stated explicitly, see the citation at Note 36.

<sup>21</sup> Recanati, *Literary Meaning*, 70–4.

### 3 Shāfiʿī's conceptions of literal meaning

Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), founder of one of the four major schools of Muslim jurisprudence,<sup>22</sup> is credited with a short work titled *al-Risāla*, regarded as the earliest work of Islamic legal theory.<sup>23</sup> The most obvious candidate for a term that connotes *literal meaning* in Shāfiʿī's hermeneutic system is *ẓāhir*. The Arabic lexicographical texts and subsequent dictionaries give the semantic range of this active participle/adjective as “manifest,” “obvious,” “apparent,” “clear,” “evident,” “exterior,” “outward.”<sup>24</sup> When applied to the meaning of a word, it might be glossed as a “literal meaning” of sorts, which is indeed manifest in Shāfiʿī's usage of the term, particularly when contrasted with the term *bāṭin* (hidden, inner, obscure [sense]), as in one chapter title in *al-Risāla*: “The type [of speech] in which its expression indicates its *bāṭin* rather than its *ẓāhir*.”<sup>25</sup> The section continues:

God (may he be blessed and glorified), when he was relating the statement of Joseph's brothers to their father, said, “... Ask the town in which we have been and the caravan in which we returned. We are indeed telling the truth.” (Q. 12:81–2). Amongst those who are knowledgeable about language (*ahl al-ʿilm bil-lisān*) there is no dispute that [the brothers] demanded that their father ask the *people* of the town and the *people* of the caravan because the town and the caravan [themselves] could not testify to their honesty.<sup>26</sup>

The *ẓāhir* of “Ask the town” is that one should ask the buildings of the town; its *bāṭin* is that one should ask the people of the town. The *bāṭin* is not available to all listeners, as only those “knowledgeable in language” discern it. It is unclear whether those are specialists, or anyone who speaks the language well. But it is clear that one may have some knowledge of Arabic and understand only the *ẓāhir*. In this case, by *ẓāhir*, Shāfiʿī means “the sense apparent to people with a deficient level of linguistic knowledge.”

Yet in some cases in Shāfiʿī's usage it is the *bāṭin* rather than the *ẓāhir* that is said to be apparent. Regarding the Qurʾānic verse “How many towns

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 3, Note 7.

<sup>23</sup> This attribution and characterization (common within Muslim tradition) are subject of academic dispute. See Calder, *Early Muslim Jurisprudence*, 223–44; Hallaq, “Master Architect”; Stewart, “Manual of Jurisprudence”; idem, “Genre of *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*.” My view, based in part on the analysis of al-Shāfiʿī's conception of literal meaning that will be presented here, is that the hermeneutic conceptions in the *Risāla* are congruent with the intellectual currents of the early ninth century.

<sup>24</sup> See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:1926. <sup>25</sup> Shāfiʿī, *Risāla*, #212, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> Shāfiʿī, *Risāla*, #212–13, p. 64. Emphasis added.

which were immoral have we destroyed?” (Q. 21:12), he states that “the hearer will [understand] that the *only* immoral ones [referred to here] are the people [of the towns], not the buildings [of the town] which cannot be immoral.”<sup>27</sup> Upon hearing the word “town” in this verse, the listener, according to Shāfi‘ī, gains one, and *only* one, meaning – the people of the town. In a related example, he describes this process of understanding as “knowledge encompassing” (*aḥāṭa al-‘ilm*) the hearer.<sup>28</sup> According to the previously cited taxonomy, “people of the town” is the *bāṭin*, and “buildings” the *ẓāhir*; but now we see that the *ẓāhir* is not necessarily the “apparent” meaning, at least not for all people. It may seem counter-intuitive, but at times the meaning immediately understood by the educated hearer is the *bāṭin*. For Shāfi‘ī then, the *ẓāhir* cannot necessarily be identified categorically as the immediately understood (“apparent”) meaning, because that will vary according to the hearer’s level of linguistic proficiency.

Elsewhere, Shāfi‘ī returns to the theme of linguistic proficiency in connection with literal understanding. In discussing how clear (*wāḍiḥ*) or otherwise three different uses of a particular Arabic term might sound, he remarks:

For one who is ignorant of the Arabic language the first (the most “literal”) is clearer than the second, and the second clearer than the third (the least “literal”). Amongst the Arabs, however, there is no difference in the clarity of these verses.<sup>29</sup>

For Shāfi‘ī, someone inexperienced in the Arabic language is most likely to cling to the *ẓāhir*, and will turn to the non-*ẓāhir* meaning in each case with varying levels of difficulty. But the expert – who knows *lisān al-‘arab* (“the Arabic tongue”) – always moves to the non-*ẓāhir* meaning with consummate ease. In this discussion, clinging to the *ẓāhir* is a sign of ignorance of the actual usage of the Arabic language, which one might know only as an abstract system.

The distinction Recanati makes between the different types of literal meanings helps to explain the ambiguity in the *Risāla* around the relationship of the *ẓāhir* to a supposedly “linguistically-determined” meaning. At the m-literal level (“minimal” departure from the linguistically determined meaning), the language is a simple code, and the incorrect, simplistic *ẓāhir* alone is reached. In such cases, the interpreter is not wrong semantically,

<sup>27</sup> Shāfi‘ī, *Risāla*, #211, p. 63. Emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> Shāfi‘ī, *Risāla*, #211, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Shāfi‘ī, *Risāla*, #206, p. 61.

but is mistaken about the text's meaning – something obvious to anyone proficient in the language. At the p-literal level ("primary" literal sense, which includes contextual factors but excludes implication), there is a deep understanding of the linguistic system, and the *bāṭin* is reached. However, just as m- and p-meanings are still literal (in the sense that they fall within the realm of language and do not require implication), the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin* are both linguistically determined, without recourse to real-world, contextual factors.

At another point, Shāfi'ī speaks of the *ẓāhir* as the meaning that "emerges" or can be "extracted" from the utterance itself (*makhraj al-lafz*, *makhraj al-kalām*). For example, the punishment for theft is specified in the Qur'an as amputation of the hand (Q. 5:38), and from the qur'anic statement alone it would appear that any act of theft – no matter how small – deserves this punishment. Similarly, the qur'anic text indicates that all fornicators receive lashes, whether or not the culprits are virgins. Most Muslim jurists, Shāfi'ī noted, thought the law to be more nuanced:

The Prophet of God made a *sunna* (a practice to be emulated) that amputation is for him whose theft amounts to a quarter of a dinar or more, and lashing is for free virgins, not for free non-virgins and slaves. The Prophet of God's *sunna* indicates that God meant by [the verses] a particular meaning (*khāṣṣ*) of fornicators and thieves, even though what emerges from the speech is of general reference in the *ẓāhir* (*makhraj al-kalām 'amman fī al-ẓāhir*) concerning [all] thieves and fornicators.<sup>30</sup>

In order to glean these "particular" meanings ("less-than-quarter dinar thief" and "virgin fornicator") from the "general" qur'anic expression, the Prophet's example (*sunna*) is essential. Without it, the rule that all thieves and fornicators are subject to the stipulated punishments is a reasonable interpretation because it derives from the speech itself.

Where the *sunna* "elucidates" (that is, acts as a *bayān* upon) the intended meaning of the qur'anic text, the *ẓāhir* (which is not the intended meaning) would have otherwise been a reasonable meaning since it is linguistically determined by the text. This meaning, unmodified by the external evidence, is the *ẓāhir* and might then be legitimately called the "literal meaning." The circumstances that call for a non-literal interpretation (by this definition) are indicated by the maxim that Shāfi'ī formulates:

<sup>30</sup> Shāfi'ī, *Risāla*, #616, pp. 223–4.

Every expression which is *ẓāhir* general (*‘āmm ẓāhir*) in the *sunna* of the Prophet of God is [to be understood] according to its *ẓuhūr* [*“ẓāhir-ness”*] and its generality, until a *ḥadīth* proven to be from the Prophet of God is known which indicates that what is intended by a general statement in the *ẓāhir* is actually some of [that indicated by the general statement] and not others.<sup>31</sup>

The promotion of the *ẓāhir* as a default would seem to contradict the previously cited examples in which the *ẓāhir* is characterized as the meaning the ignorant person understands. There the linguistically expert person understands immediately that something other than the *ẓāhir* is meant. Here, however, the *ẓāhir* is the exegete’s default position. There thus seems to be an inconsistency within the *Risāla* concerning the primacy of *ẓāhir*, which is linked to the supposed immediacy within which it is (or is not) comprehended. It is quite possible that inconsistencies (or, perhaps more charitably, methodological untidiness) such as this one demonstrate the theoretical underdevelopment within the *Risāla*.

In sum, Shāfi‘ī has a notion of a pre-interpretive meaning inherent within the text, a meaning linked to language rather than to the speaker’s intention. What he and most of his contemporaries have not yet determined is whether that meaning is discernible through an examination of language operating as an abstract system, or through language use, or as the immediately understood meaning of the educated, linguistically-skilled member of the language community. For Shāfi‘ī, the literal meaning – that is, the meaning that inheres within the text – is at times termed the *bāṭin*, and at other times as the *ẓāhir*. Shāfi‘ī’s imprecision over whether the *bāṭin* was a literal or non-literal meaning (depending on whether it is linguistically or contextually determined) demonstrates the embryonic nature of hermeneutic theory displayed not only in his *Risāla* but also in other contemporaneous texts.<sup>32</sup>

Shāfi‘ī furthermore displays ambivalence regarding the utility of the *ẓāhir* to aid textual comprehension. At times, the *ẓāhir* is given primacy in the interpretive process; at other times it is viewed as misleading and insufficient. For him, just because a meaning inheres in a text does not always indicate that it is to receive any special consideration. What appears to receive hermeneutic priority is the understanding of the text as an instantiation of the *lisān al-‘arab* – and this meaning is, at times, seen as

<sup>31</sup> Shāfi‘ī, *Risāla*, #923, p. 341.

<sup>32</sup> This can be compared with the fluctuations in the terms *majāz* and *ḥaqīqa* in the early Muslim period discussed in Chapter II.



inhering within the text, and at times as quite distinct from the text (overlying it, as it were). From this jumble of ideas, certain distinct trends would emerge in the subsequent tradition of *uṣūl al-fiqh*.

#### 4 Conceptions of literal meaning in the first mature *uṣūl al-fiqh* works

The groundwork laid by Shāfiʿī's *al-Risāla*, fragmentary and inconsistent as it was at times, did not give rise to an immediate blossoming of the genre of legal theory. Undoubtedly, there are works that have been lost between the *Risāla* and the first wave of mature *uṣūl al-fiqh* works at the end of the fourth/tenth century, around 150 years after Shāfiʿī's death. All we have for this century and a half of *uṣūl al-fiqh*'s development are references in bio-bibliographical works and scattered citations from later works. Those surviving fragments do not prepare us for the sophistication and complexity of works such as *al-Fuṣūl* of Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. d.370/980), *al-Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-fiqh* of Ibn al-Qaṣṣār (d.398/1008), *al-Taqrīb wa'l-irshād al-saghīr* of Abu Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d.403/1013) and other works of the period. Many of the ideas regarding literal meaning within *al-Risāla* may be present in later works of *uṣūl*, but the lexicon of technical terms and the consistency of their use in the later works make a striking contrast with the contents of Shāfiʿī's *Risāla*. The contrast would indicate, at least initially, a lengthy period of development in the *uṣūl* discipline, even though we have none of the intervening texts to track this development with accuracy. Notwithstanding the trend toward consistency as the field of Muslim jurisprudence matured, a variety of competing conceptions of literal meaning operate within the theories of these post-Shāfiʿī authors. Three such conceptions of the context-free, pre-interpretive ("literal") meaning present within the text itself – even when the speaker intends something quite different – can be delineated in this phase of Muslim jurisprudence.

##### *i Literal meaning and language use*

Perhaps the most immediately plausible notion of literal meaning is the meaning that a language user perceives as being present within the text. We have seen this conception already in Shāfiʿī's *Risāla* (that *all* thieves are punishable by amputation is the *ẓāhir* of Q. 5:38), and it is articulated in rough and ready form in the work of al-Jaṣṣāṣ. This can be understood from the following example related to the hermeneutic mechanism

*mafhūm al-mukhālafa* (“contrary implication”), the validity of which was debated by the followers of Shāfi‘ī and Abū Ḥanīfa (the so-called “Hanafi” school of Muslim jurisprudence).<sup>33</sup> This interpretive technique is used to determine that a conditional permission or order implies the prohibition of its opposite, even though the statement does not actually say so. There is a qur’anic verse:

There is no sin for you if you shorten your prayer if you fear those who disbelieve might attack. (Q. 4:101)

If the Muslims have made peace with the enemies, then there is no fear of attack from the unbelievers. Does this mean that the permission to shorten one’s prayer has lapsed? If *mafhūm al-mukhālafa* is a valid interpretive mechanism, then it would not be permitted to shorten prayer when there is no fear of attack, since God permitted shortening prayer *only* under those circumstances, that is, when there is fear of attack. However, we know from elsewhere in revelation that shortening prayer is permitted on other occasions, for example, when one is travelling. This caused confusion, according to one report, among the followers of the Prophet Muhammad:

Ya‘lā b. Ummaya said to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, “There is no sin for you if you shorten your prayer if you fear those who disbelieve might attack.” (Q. 4:101) The people have made peace [so we cannot shorten prayer].

Ya‘lā is portrayed as believing that *mafhūm al-mukhālafa* should operate, and hence prayer cannot be shortened when there is a peace treaty. ‘Umar replies:

I pondered on this like you did. I asked the Messenger of God about this and he said, “God has given you a gift (*ṣadaqa*); so accept his gift.”<sup>34</sup>

In saying “I pondered on this” ‘Umar indicates his belief that *mafhūm al-mukhālafa* should operate. Yet the Prophet said that God has given the “gift” of the dispensation to shorten prayer, not just on this occasion but on other occasions also. From the qur’anic verse alone, one might use *mafhūm al-mukhālafa* to conclude that shortening prayer was permitted *only* when there is a fear of attack. For Shāfi‘īs, the fact that the learned companions Ya‘lā and ‘Umar drew this conclusion – even though the Prophet made a singular exception in this case – indicates that *mafhūm al-mukhālafa* is a legitimate interpretive assumption that normally should be employed by jurists. The exception, on this occasion, proves the rule. For

<sup>33</sup> See Hallaq, “Non-Analogical Arguments,” and [Note 20](#).

<sup>34</sup> Nisabūri, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, II:143.

Ḥanafīs, on the other hand, the Prophet's rejection of *mafhūm al-mukhā-lafa* here is an indication of its categorical rejection. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, as a Ḥanafī, argues for the latter position as he refutes the Shāfi'īs. The importance for the discussion over literal meaning is the debate over whether the contrary implication (for example, when there is no fear of attack, prayer may not be shortened) is considered to be "in the text" or merely derived from it. If in the text, then it is part of the literal meaning (as I use the term here); if outside of the text (and hence an implication), then it is not part of the literal meaning. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ writes:

If it is said:

It is known from the way people speak (*khiṭāb al-nās*) . . . that if someone says, "If Zayd enters the house, then give him a dirham," then the handing over of the dirham is necessitated by the entering. If he does not enter, then it is not permitted to give.

Then it is said to him:

This is actually a point against you, for every rational person (*ʿāqil*), when he hears this statement understands from it that he is not forbidden from giving the dirham when [Zayd] does not enter [the house]. The entering is simply a stipulation that the dirham should be handed over. And so, it is permitted to give a dirham freely.<sup>35</sup>

The Shāfi'īs say that contrary implication is a "natural" understanding of a language user: it is a natural deduction from people's way of speaking (*khiṭāb al-nās*). The Ḥanafīs, represented by al-Jaṣṣāṣ, reply that the literal meaning of the conditional order "If Zayd enters the house, then give him a dirham" says nothing about giving him a dirham on some other occasion – and that this literal meaning is what every rational person knows when he hears the statement. With regard to the qur'anic statement above, the rational person would understand from this that shortening prayer was permitted when there is a fear of attack, but he would not understand that this is the only occasion on which prayer may be shortened. For al-Jaṣṣāṣ, the meaning that a statement possesses in and of itself – as opposed to any hidden implication – is the meaning that an ordinary, rational language user detects or understands from it.

## *ii Literal meaning and grammatical meaning*

The rise of Arabic grammar (*al-naḥw*) as a distinct and recognized field had inevitable effects on legal hermeneutics as expressed in *uṣūl al-fiqh*. The

<sup>35</sup> Jaṣṣāṣ, *Fuṣūl*, I:316–17

study of Arabic language evolved gradually over the first three centuries of Islam, from the early attempts of Sibawayh (d. 177/793) to the more sophisticated grammars of the fourth/tenth century. Arabic, indeed any language, was viewed by grammarians as a regular abstract system wherein utterances gained meaning through its operation. From these developments, it is not surprising that legal theorists were drawn to the idea that the meaning that the text has in and of itself is dictated by the science of Arabic grammar. This is explored in al-Bāqillānī's *al-Taqrīb wa'l-Irshād* through a distinction between texts that reveal their meaning in and of themselves (termed *naṣṣ*), and those that reveal their meaning via implication (*mafhūm*). The former category of *naṣṣ* refers to texts in which every element of the sentence is used in the manner determined by language (*al-lughā*). The latter category (*mafhūm*) refers to texts that convey meaning beyond what is linguistically determined. This latter category includes, for example, the notion that one should not hit one's parents from the statement that one should not "say *uff* (fie!) to them" (Q. 17:23). Al-Bāqillānī regards such implied meanings as being so obvious that no elaborate reasoning process is required to discover them. Yet he differentiates between what is stated explicitly (*naṣṣ*) and what can be understood (*mafhūm*):

the understanding not mentioned explicitly (*lam yudhkir fī ṣarīḥihī*) is more immediate (*asrā'*; "quicker" to understand) than what is explicitly expressed (*mimmā nuṣṣa 'alayhī*). And if it is not more immediate, then they are simultaneous.<sup>36</sup>

The explicitly expressed meaning of "do not say *uff*" to one's parents is that only saying *uff* is prohibited. The implied meaning is that one should not beat them, since this is worse than saying *uff*. What is understood is: "do not *even* say *uff* to your parents." Though al-Bāqillānī believes that this process of understanding is immediate, he distinguishes here between the explicit meaning and the implied meaning. The first is dictated by language, the second by language users – and is the product of interpretation. In making this distinction he is breaking the essential connection between immediate understanding and literal meaning central in al-Jaṣṣāṣ' theory, and also present in embryonic form in Shāfi'ī's *al-Risāla*. Al-Bāqillānī's literal meaning (the meaning determined by linguistic structures) is termed by him *ḥaqīqa* (the "true," real meaning) and this was to become a standard element of classical Muslim theories of literal meaning. The term

<sup>36</sup> Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, I:342.

*ḥaqīqa* was not unknown to al-Jaṣṣāṣ,<sup>37</sup> but in al-Bāqillānī's work it takes on a more specific technical connotation: the meaning assigned to a word or a collection of words in the linguistic system (*al-lughā*) that forms an integral element of the text itself. It is quite distinct from what the hearer may immediately understand, as any hearer is, by definition, hearing and interpreting the utterance in a context, whereas this literal meaning is unaffected by context. Al-Bāqillānī defines *ḥaqīqa* as "the quality of speech in which . . . the statement is used in the way to which it was assigned originally."<sup>38</sup> He outlines a number of mechanisms whereby *ḥaqīqa* can be distinguished from *majāz*, all of which are grammatical in nature, relating, for example, to etymology and declension – that is, morphological features that were defined in the science of grammar.<sup>39</sup> None of the mechanisms for identifying literal meaning enumerated by al-Bāqillānī emerges from language usage; they are conceived, rather, as technical grammatical criteria. In fact, for al-Bāqillānī the literal meaning (identified by the term *ḥaqīqa* rather than *ẓāhir*) is not necessarily primary, as it was at certain points in Shāfi'ī's *Risāla*. It does not even assume a privileged place within al-Bāqillānī's hermeneutic process. It is simply an element in his description of the communicative process by which the grammarians' conceptions of language and its operation are incorporated into *uṣūl al-fiqh*.

### *iii The language of the Arabs and literal meaning*

The third trend in the conceptualization of literal meaning in early *uṣūl al-fiqh* is linked to the notion that perfect knowledge of Arabic is preserved in the ancient linguistic usage of the Arabs (*lughat al-'arab*). This association, which had become established by the late fourth/tenth century, can be seen in Ibn al-Qaṣṣār's treatment of *maṣhūm al-mukhālafa* ("contrary implication"), sometimes referred to by him as *dalīl al-khiṭāb* ("that which is indicated by the speech").<sup>40</sup> Discussing an example we have already encountered, Ibn al-Qaṣṣār states:

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Jaṣṣāṣ, *Fuṣūl*, I:370 and following.

<sup>38</sup> Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, I:352.

<sup>39</sup> See Gleave, *Literalism*, 118–19.

<sup>40</sup> The terminological categorization may be significant here. The expression *maṣhūm al-mukhālafa* ("contrary implication") suggests that the derived meaning is implied by the text but not actually a part of it, since *maṣhūm* means *something understood*, that is, by someone, as it is in the passive mood. On the other hand, *dalīl al-khiṭāb* ("that which is indicated by the text") suggests a meaning more intimately connected with the text since there is a causal link between the verbal address (*khiṭāb*) and the thing it "indicates."

The companions of the Messenger of God asked about shortening prayer when there is a peace treaty, as they had heard God's words, "There is no sin for you if you shorten your prayer because you fear that those who disbelieve will attack you" (Q. 4:101). For them it was the case that whenever there was no "fear," there was a "peace treaty" with the opposite [ruling]. The Messenger of God said to them, "God has given you a gift (*ṣadaqa*); so accept his gift." He does not refute what they thought, and he does not say they have erred in what they had assessed. His language and theirs (*luḡhatuhu . . . waluḡhatuhum*) prove that [namely, that contrary implication is valid]. This demonstrates that affirming *dalīl al-khiṭāb* is correct.<sup>41</sup>

This passage affirms two propositions: (1) that the measure of proper usage is the *luḡhat al-ʿarab* ("the language of the Arabs") and (2) that the type of implication known as *mafhūm al-mukhālaḡa / dalīl al-khiṭāb* is included in this proper usage, and therefore is a justifiable meaning derived from the text itself without regard to contextual indicators. For Ibn al-Qaṣṣār, furthermore, it appears that "contrary implication" is not an implication (in the sense of something external to the text), but actually an element of the explicit, inherent (literal) meaning of a text:

Discourse (*khiṭāb*) can come in different ways. The *zāhir* of [the discourse; *khiṭāb*] is that when it comes denuded [of context] (*taḡarrada*), it indicates that its opposite is the opposite of it, unless there is an indicator to the contrary. The proof of this opinion of [Mālik] in favor of *dalīl al-khiṭāb* is that, when it comes context-free, this was [included in] the language of the Arabs (*luḡhat al-ʿarab*). For [divine] discourse comes only in the Arabic language (*al-lisān al-ʿarabī*), and its explanation is attained from [the Arabic language].<sup>42</sup>

He goes on to cite examples of how various conditional statements were understood within the Muslim legal tradition. In each case, what is termed an implication by some jurists (*mafhūm*) is regarded by Ibn al-Qaṣṣār as inherent within the meaning of the statement (and not dependent upon interpretation) because it was viewed in this way by the ancient speakers of Arabic.

## 5 Literal meaning in classical uṣūl al-fiqh after 1050

The development traced in this chapter is roughly as follows. Shāfiʿī's *Risāla* manifests a bundle of ideas regarding the pre-interpretive, literal meaning, which are disaggregated in the following century, with different authors of *uṣūl al-fiqh* placing emphasis on different elements. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ

<sup>41</sup> Ibn al-Qaṣṣār, *Muqaddima*, 86.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn al-Qaṣṣār, *Muqaddima*, 85–6.

relates literal meaning to language use, al-Bāqillānī to the linguistically/ grammatically determined meaning, and Ibn al-Qaṣṣār to the meaning understood by Arabic speakers of antiquity. In classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* that emerged subsequently, these ideas of literal meaning were employed within a more developed system that increasingly focused on the notion of *waḍʿ* (“assignment,” “coining”). In the theory of communication to which nearly all classical jurists adhered, it was posited that sounds had been given meanings in an imagined primordial event of assignation. This tying of word to meaning was arbitrary (any meaning could, in theory, be assigned to any sound), but once achieved, it was permanent. That original meaning of a word was termed *al-maʿnā al-mawḍūʿ lahu* (“the meaning which has been assigned to it”), and when a speaker used words in this way, the expression was called *ḥaqīqa*. At times, this literal meaning was termed *al-maʿnā al-ḥaqīqī* (“the true [or veridical] meaning”) or *al-maʿnā al-waḍʿī* (“the assigned meaning”).

There is, however, a fundamental shift in the theory of this later period, as the different models of literal meaning adduced in earlier *uṣūl al-fiqh* works became not the literal meanings themselves, but “indications” (*adilla*) or “signs” (*ʿalamāt*) of the literal meanings. That is, in trying to determine what the literal meaning (that is, the original coinage) might be, the three earlier notions of literal meaning (immediately understood meaning, grammatically determined meaning, usage of the ancient Arabs) were used as tools of discovery, but they were not identified as the literal meaning itself. In fact, though it was posited that the literal meaning exists, it was not identifiable in every case.

With the earlier notions of literal meaning now functioning as evidence for the original coinage, they at times had to be weighed against each other and in consideration of other types of evidence by the exegete seeking to determine the literal meaning. So, for example, al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d.726/1325) makes a list of these “signs,” including:

When one hears the vocable (*lafẓ*) stripped of any context (*qarāʾin*), and a meaning (*maʿnā*) appears in the understanding of the speakers of the language (*ahl al-lughā*), then this makes it *ḥaqīqa*, because if it were not the assigned meaning (*al-mawḍūʿ lahu*) and something else was, then it would not appear in their understanding.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ḥillī, *Nihāyat*, I:292. This can be compared with the contemporary view that “the literal meaning of a sentence is entirely determined by the meanings of its component words (or morphemes) and the syntactical rules according to which these elements are combined” (Searle, “Literal Meaning,” 207).



In referring to the “speakers of the language” here, al-Ḥillī does not specify if he is referring to ordinary language users, the archaic Arabs, or the linguistic experts. What is clear is that he regards the unreflective understanding of the language users as an indication of literal meaning. In a similar vein, we find literal meaning defined as “the thing that occurs in the mind” and the statement that “immediacy [that is, the thing that appears first in the mind] is an indication of *ḥaqīqa* usage” (*al-tabādur dalīl al-ḥaqīqa*).<sup>44</sup> Here the language user’s understanding is taken as an indirect indicator of the literal meaning, or even a proxy for it. As within other areas of juristic reasoning in classical *uṣūl al-fiqh*, absolute certainty is not thought to be attainable in every instance. Hence, the meaning assigned to a word in the primordial creation of the language may not be known for certain, but there are indicators and signs (*adilla* and *‘alamāt*) that will produce a preponderant opinion (*ghalbat al-zann*) as to what it might be. Once this has been gained, the interpretive process (that is, deducing whether or not the literal meaning is God’s intended meaning) can commence.

Elsewhere al-Ḥillī refers to grammatical evidence that might be marshalled as a sign of literal usage. He states that if it is impossible to trace the meaning proposed for a vocable to its linguistic roots (a process known as *ishṭiqāq*; that is, etymological derivation), then this is a sign that it is *majāz*. If it is possible to trace it, then this is a sign that it is *ḥaqīqa*. Etymology – a branch of the science of grammar – can thus indicate *ḥaqīqa* usage, that is, that the word is used according to its original coinage (the *wad’i* meaning).<sup>45</sup>

Language expertise is also called upon elsewhere by al-Ḥillī as an “indicator” of the *ḥaqīqa* usage:

If the experts in the language (*al-lughā*) declare that the coiner of language (*wād’i al-lughā*) has designated this [as *ḥaqīqa*]. . . then it is *ḥaqīqa*.<sup>46</sup>

Here authority is given to the language experts. If they identify a word-meaning relationship as originally assigned by the “coiner of language,” then it is *ḥaqīqa* usage, and the literal meaning has been discovered.

To be sure, there are mechanisms for identifying *ḥaqīqa* and non-*ḥaqīqa* (that is, *majāz*) usage, including logic and reason, which fall outside of the three conceptions of literal meaning identified here. So, for example:

<sup>44</sup> Ḥillī, *Nihāyat*, I:294

<sup>45</sup> Ḥillī, *Nihāyat*, I:296–7.

<sup>46</sup> Ḥillī, *Nihāyat*, I:292.

If you can negate an utterance and it still is true, then this is an indication of *majāz*. For example, “That man is a donkey” can be negated and still be true (for he is not actually a donkey).<sup>47</sup>

However, statements like these do not predominate. In the main, the characteristics that are cited in classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* as signs of *ḥaqīqa* usage encompass language use, the Arabic of antiquity, and linguistically determined meaning.

The shift from a meaning *being* the literal meaning to it being a *sign* of the literal meaning (now defined as the original coinage) makes the latter a little more distant, and the hermeneutic system more flexible. The exegete now deals in meanings which are signs of the literal meaning, rather than with the literal meaning itself, which remains a step removed from the exegetical process. This distance is important because, in the classical system, the meaning assigned to an utterance in the *waqf* (original coinage of the language) holds a particular epistemological privilege in the exegetical exercise, since other, non-literal meanings are tainted by human interpretive effort, and therefore potentially infected by whim. This does not affect the literal meaning, which gives it an epistemological advantage in the competition among meanings. For this reason, in classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* an utterance’s meaning is assumed to be *ḥaqīqa* until external, contextual factors (*qarā’in*) are identified that indicate a non-literal intended meaning. If the exegete deals only in “signs” that “indicate” or “point to” the literal meaning, in a non-determinate (but probabilistic) manner, then the mechanism of meaning discovery becomes considerably looser. The assumed invariable link between the sign (of the literal meaning) and the signified (the literal meaning itself) is broken, and this facilitates debate and discussion not only over whether an utterance is *ḥaqīqa* or *majāz*, but also over what the *ḥaqīqa* meaning actually is. While the literal meaning of a text – the meaning that inheres in it and which has a greater claim to being the intended meaning of the speaker – may have appeared to occupy more secure epistemological ground in classical *uṣūl al-fiqh*, in reality, it was recognized that even the pre-interpretive sense is subject to interpretation.

<sup>47</sup> Hilli, *Nihāyat*, I:298. The point that a sentence like this can make a claim to truth is based on what Lasersohn refers to as the “pragmatic slack” in the use of the word “donkey,” that is, that the “halo” around “donkey” includes “stupid person.” As he remarks, “[S]peakers frequently say things that are not, strictly speaking, true . . . [yet they] are neither lies nor mistakes, but a completely normal part of honest, error-free discourse” (“Pragmatic Halos,” 528).

## CHAPTER 9

# *Emergence of the rule of peshat in medieval Jewish Bible exegesis*

*Mordechai Z. Cohen*

The Jewish conception of *peshat* (“plain sense” exegesis) that emerged in the medieval period is often regarded as a forerunner of modern historical-critical scholarship, getting at what the Bible “really means,” as opposed to fanciful midrashic interpretation. Recent scholarship of the development of *peshat* interpretation has pointed to the ways in which it seems to parallel conceptions of the literal sense of scripture in Christian and Muslim interpretation (*sensus litteralis*, *ẓāhir* / *ḥaqīqa*). As those investigations reveal, however, these Jewish hermeneutical conceptions are best understood against the backdrop of developments in Latin and Arabic learning, respectively. In this spirit, the current chapter aims to understand the major schools of *peshat* interpretation in Muslim and Christian lands in their intellectual and cultural contexts. This study thus considers both the internal dynamics of the various streams of Jewish learning that produced these *peshat* schools, as well as their possible incorporation of Arabic and Latin hermeneutical conceptions (as discussed in other chapters of this volume) to define their new *peshat* encounters with the Hebrew Bible.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

The method of Jewish Bible interpretation termed *peshat* crystalized in different centers of Jewish learning in the medieval period. This endeavor to interpret the Hebrew Bible philologically and contextually marked a departure from the rabbinic midrashic methods that had previously characterized Jewish interpretation.<sup>1</sup> The *pashtanim* (practitioners of *peshat*) drew their authority from the talmudic maxim that “a biblical verse does not leave the realm (lit. “hands”) of its *peshat*” (henceforth “the *peshat* maxim”).<sup>2</sup> But modern scholars have associated the *peshat* method with other streams of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1 of this volume and at Note 37 in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> See b. *Shabbat* 63a. On the translation of this maxim, see Cohen, *Gates*, 495–9.

Bible interpretation outside Jewish tradition. At times compared to the increasing Christian valuation of the Bible's literal sense that emerged in the Middle Ages, *peshat* is viewed by some as a precursor of the modern historical-critical method.<sup>3</sup> The medieval *peshat* school is thus often regarded as a pivotal point within a trajectory from rabbinic times to the modern era that sought to discover what "the Bible really says," in contrast to midrashic homiletics. Though useful as a simplified overview, this unified or "homogenized" conception of *peshat* overlooks the complexities of its various medieval manifestations, which are better understood as distinctive Jewish strategies of reading the Bible that remained faithful to the spirit of rabbinic Judaism while incorporating new forms of learning that had developed both within Judaism, and in the surrounding Muslim and Christian cultures.<sup>4</sup> The current chapter traces key points in the varied, dynamic trajectories within the Jewish *peshat* movement. It charts how the originally marginal talmudic *peshat* maxim became a firm hermeneutical principle (the "rule of *peshat*" in one sense), and ultimately was invoked to establish the dominion of *peshat* over other forms of interpretation (a second sense of the "rule of *peshat*").<sup>5</sup>

## I Methodological preface: dynamic model of *peshat*

Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac; Troyes, 1040–1105) and Abraham Ibn Ezra (Spain, Italy, France, England, 1089–1164) are perhaps the best-known *peshat* interpreters, and were regarded as authorities on the literal sense even by Christian Hebraists.<sup>6</sup> Yet these two *pashtanim* represent different perspectives: Rashi was an Ashkenazi (Franco-German) talmudist trained in the rabbinic academies of the Rhineland, whereas Ibn Ezra was a scion of the Sefardi (Spanish) tradition that had perfected a grammatical-literary interpretive method in Muslim lands, especially his native al-Andalus (Muslim Spain). Rashi famously remarks that the rabbis engaged in midrashic exegesis, whereas he "comes to interpret the *peshat* of scripture"; but in practice he

<sup>3</sup> Compare the discussion of Beryl Smalley's view in [Chapter 6, Sec. 1](#).

<sup>4</sup> Karaite Judaism likewise appropriated new forms of learning to develop a philological-contextual reading of the Bible, as discussed in [Chapter 5](#). The current chapter focuses on the interpretive tradition of the Rabbanites (i.e., adherents of rabbinic tradition), who grappled with the challenge of coordinating their novel *peshat* methods with the authority of rabbinic tradition. For this reason they were eager to draw support from the talmudic *peshat* maxim – a source that was not authoritative for the Karaites.

<sup>5</sup> This chapter is a synopsis of some of the findings presented at length in my forthcoming monograph *The Rule of Peshat: Jewish Constructions of the Plain Sense of Scripture in Their Christian and Muslim Contexts, c. 900–1300*, to be published by the University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Burnett, "Strange Career"; Klepper, *Insight of Unbelievers*, 48–56.

relies often on midrashic interpretation. This was noted in a barbed criticism by Ibn Ezra (cited below in this chapter), who aimed to set the record straight in his commentaries, written in the last decades of his life, while he wandered from town to town in Christian Europe after having fled from Spain.

Some modern scholars (following Ibn Ezra) regarded the disparity between Rashi's programmatic statements and exegetical practice as an indication of his poor grasp of *peshat*. Moshe Greenberg, however, advocates another approach:

[T]he concept of *peshat* was considered so self-evident that scholars of Rashi saw no need to discern precisely how he understood it, and regarded his work as missing the mark rather than asking if he had set a different target than they imagined.<sup>7</sup>

This suggests that *peshat* is not a static concept, but, rather, was developed and shaped by the *pashtanim* themselves. Taking up Greenberg's challenge, his student Sarah Kamin methodically defined Rashi's complex *peshat* model and argued that it must be understood against the backdrop of his talmudic Ashkenazi intellectual milieu and (hostile) Christian environment. As Kamin showed, Rashi engaged the Christian understanding of the Bible to offer a new and well-defined Jewish alternative, in part by recruiting the talmudic *peshat* maxim as his touchstone. Kamin showed further that in the Talmud itself the meaning of the maxim is rather vague, and that it was Rashi who transformed it into a methodological directive.<sup>8</sup>

Recent scholarship is increasingly recognizing the usefulness of Kamin's model for charting the complex trajectories of the medieval *peshat* movement as manifested in the work of other commentators.<sup>9</sup> A larger roster of medieval Jewish Bible interpreters than ever before has now come into view thanks to new studies and editions of previously lost or inaccessible writings. In addition to drawing attention to a broadened spectrum of perspectives on the medieval Jewish interpretive horizon, this development makes it imperative to define the fundamentally varied ways in which the *peshat* maxim was construed to support new hermeneutical models in the intellectually vibrant medieval period.

As a preliminary step, we must clarify a point about translating the term *peshat*, sometimes rendered simply "the literal sense," implying a contrast with allegorical or otherwise non-literal midrashic readings. But that translation – while fitting in some instances – is now recognized as

<sup>7</sup> Greenberg, "Rashi and Rashbam," 561.

<sup>8</sup> See Kamin, *Rashi's Categorization*, 23–110; idem, *Jews and Christians*, xxi–xxxv.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Cohen, *Gates*, xviii–xix, 4–20.

inadequate for expressing the more nuanced *peshat*-midrash dichotomy.<sup>10</sup> We can illustrate this with an example from Rashi's commentary on Gen 18:17–18, where God, planning to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, ponders to Himself: "Shall I hide [this] from Abraham . . . ? And Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him." Seeking to understand the connection between these two remarks, Rashi offers two alternative explanations with opposing methodological "tags":

[According to] the midrash: "the mention of the righteous is blessed" (Prov 10:7); therefore, since He mentioned him, He blessed him.

But according to its *peshat*, [the Lord thought to himself:] "Could I hide anything from *him*? For he is so dear to Me that he will become a great nation from whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed!"<sup>11</sup>

The distinction between the two methods is not a matter of taking the words literally or not. Whereas the midrashic interpretation allows for a discontinuity within God's words, making verse 18 a parenthetical statement, the *peshat* interpretation seeks to explain how this seeming non-sequitur actually fits the logical flow of the narrative citation of God's words.

The desire for contextual integrity at times leads a *pashtan* to offer a figurative interpretation of a locution that the rabbis took literally. For example, Exod 13:9, "And this shall serve you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder between your eyes . . . that with a mighty hand the Lord freed you from Egypt" is interpreted by Rashi, following the rabbis, as a source for the obligation to don phylacteries (*tefillin*), which are literally placed on the arm and forehead. But Rashi's grandson and student, the great *peshat* exegete Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel ben Meir), sensitive to the fact that Exod 13:3–10 speaks of the annual celebration of the unleavened bread festival commemorating the exodus, seeks to interpret Exod 13:9 squarely within that context, rather than taking it as a reference to the separate daily precept of *tefillin*:

"As a sign on your hand" – according to its profound (lit. deep) *peshat*: it should always be on your mind (lit. a memory for you), as if it were written on you hand. Like [the verse] "Make me as a seal upon your heart, [as a seal upon your arm]" (Song 8:6).

<sup>10</sup> See Garfinkel, "Clearing," 131–2.

<sup>11</sup> Rashi, comm. on Gen 18:18, Berliner ed., 34–5. Rashi commonly differentiated between the two alternative methods. See [Note 40](#).

“Between your eyes” – like an ornament or a gold chain customarily placed on the forehead for decoration.<sup>12</sup>

Rashbam takes these as metaphorical expressions connoting continual awareness, as if the memory of the exodus were imprinted “on your hand” and an adornment “between your eyes.” Citing a proof-text from the Song of Songs, he demonstrates that this sort of poetic imagery is conventional in biblical literature. While Rashbam is aware of the rabbinic interpretation that determines the *halakhah*, he offers this literary-contextual one as “the profound *peshat*.”<sup>13</sup>

Based on cases like these, some scholars have concluded that there is no single English equivalent for the term *peshat*, and instead define it as an interpretation of the biblical text “according to its language, syntax, context, genre and literary structure, within a rational approach.”<sup>14</sup> Yet a cautionary methodological note should be added: that definition was formulated to reflect its use in Rashi’s school. But it does not necessarily hold for other interpreters, particularly in the Muslim orbit, where there is substantial variation in the definitions and conceptions of *peshat*. It is noteworthy, for example, that Abraham Ibn Ezra cites the rabbinic reading as evidence that the locutions “a sign on your hand and . . . a reminder between your eyes” must not be taken figuratively.<sup>15</sup> In his view, the *peshat* method must take halakhic implications into account; hence, the literal reading of this verse as a reference to *tefillin* must be upheld as the *peshat*.<sup>16</sup>

## 2 Origins in the Muslim east: weak reading of the maxim

Saadia ben Joseph al-Fayyumi (882–942), Gaon of the Sura Academy (in Baghdad at the time), is termed “the first speaker in all areas” by Abraham Ibn Ezra and the “father of *peshat* exegesis” in modern times.<sup>17</sup> Well-versed in the emerging Arabic disciplines of grammar, philology, poetics, and philosophy, Saadia pioneered a rational, philological-grammatical method of Bible interpretation, which he applied both in his running commentaries and in his Arabic translation of the Bible, including his distinctive and influential Pentateuch translation, the *Tafsīr*. Saadia’s method often exemplifies the notion of *peshat* as it would later be defined by Ibn Ezra.

<sup>12</sup> Rashbam, comm. on Exod 13:9, Rosin ed., 98. <sup>13</sup> See Japhet, “Tension,” 416.

<sup>14</sup> Japhet, “Tension,” 403. Compare Kamin, *Rashi’s Categorization*, 11–22.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn Ezra, short comm. on Exod 13:9, Weiser ed., II:264. <sup>16</sup> Japhet, “Tension,” 414–15.

<sup>17</sup> See Steiner, *Biblical Translation*, 32–44. While this is valid as an overall assessment, Saadia’s interpretation still manifests midrashic tendencies; see Brody, *Sa’adyah Gaon*, 73–8; Ben-Shammai, “Rabbinic Literature.”



Yet rather than invoking the *peshat* maxim, Saadia adapted concepts from qur'anic hermeneutics. Moving away from the midrashic assumption that the true meaning of the Bible lies beneath its surface, he employs a qur'anic idiom (drawn from Q. 3:7) to state, as his baseline assumption, that the language of the Hebrew Bible is clear (*muḥkam*) and to be interpreted according to its *ẓāhir* (obvious, literal sense), and that only when such an interpretation is untenable may one posit that it is “ambiguous” (*mutashābih*) and to be interpreted as *majāz* (non-literal language), by way of *ta'wīl*.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, Saadia establishes the following rule:

One must . . . take Torah according to the apparent sense (*ẓāhir*) of its words. . . . unless (1) sense perception or (2) rational knowledge contradicts [it] . . . or if (3) [it] . . . contradicts another verse that is unambiguous or (4) a tradition [transmitted by the rabbis] . . . [in which case] . . . the verse is not [said] according to its apparent sense, but contains . . . *majāz* (i.e., non-literal language). When one discerns the type of *majāz* it is . . . then the verse will conform to sensory and rational knowledge, the other verse and tradition.<sup>19</sup>

For Saadia, the literal sense is the default position; but if adopting it leads to a contradiction, then one must posit the occurrence of *majāz* and apply *ta'wīl* to arrive at the correct interpretation.

In practice, Saadia engaged freely in *ta'wīl* to interpret scripture in light of a variety of factors that would make *ẓāhir al-naṣṣ* (“the *ẓāhir* of the text [naṣṣ]”) untenable. To begin with, contextual factors (Ar. *qarā'in*; sing. *qarīna*) often preclude a purely literal rendering.<sup>20</sup> As an example, he cites Gen 3:20, “Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of *all living beings*,” which he renders *all human beings* in his *Tafsīr*, explaining that this is a case of ellipsis<sup>21</sup> – a type of *majāz* frequently noted by contemporaneous Qur'an interpreters.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, for Saadia, who presumed that all of the Hebrew Bible is internally consistent, consideration of “context” includes an internal harmonization of all its parts. Saadia also embraced the Mu'tazilite view that scripture must be reconciled with reason, which included theological propositions about God, such as His

<sup>18</sup> On the qur'anic *muḥkam-mutashābih* dichotomy, see the [Introduction at Note 7](#). On the technical terms *ẓāhir*, *majāz* and *ta'wīl*, see [Chapter 8](#), [Chapter 11](#), and Poonawala, “*Ta'wīl*.”

<sup>19</sup> *Saadya on Genesis*, Introduction, Zucker ed., 17–18 (Arabic text); 190–1 (Hebrew translation); see also Brody, *Sa'adyah Gaon*, 67. Saadia repeats this principle elsewhere in his commentaries (in his introductions to Isaiah and Job), as well as in his philosophical treatise, *Beliefs and Opinions* 7:1; see Ben-Shammai, “Tension,” 34–6.

<sup>20</sup> On the notion of *qarīna* in Qur'an interpretation, see [Chapter 11](#), [Sec. 3](#).

<sup>21</sup> *Saadya on Genesis*, Zucker ed., 78 (Arabic text); 296 (Hebrew translation).

<sup>22</sup> See [Chapter 11](#), [Sec. 1](#).

incorporeality and perfection. As a Rabbanite, Saadia also maintained that scripture must be interpreted in light of rabbinic traditions – especially in the realm of *halakhah*.<sup>23</sup> Thus, for example, he takes Exod 23:19 (“You shall not cook a kid in its mother’s milk”) to mean “you shall not cook meat with milk” in accordance with the talmudic understanding of this verse.<sup>24</sup>

At times there is an overlap between the notion of *zāhir* applied by Saadia and *peshat* as used, for example, by Rashi.<sup>25</sup> But it would be incorrect to equate the two, just as *peshuto shel miqra* is not simply *the literal sense*. Indeed, Rashi – and Rashbam after him – often engaged in what Saadia would call *ta’wīl*, that is, adjusting the literal sense in light of textual and extra-textual factors.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes Saadia and Rashi arrive at the same interpretation – that diverges from the *zāhir* of the biblical text.<sup>27</sup> Yet Saadia, unlike Rashi, does not cast his interpretive goals in terms of *peshuto shel miqra*. Adopting Arabic terminology, he seeks to define what he regards as the methodologically proper approach, judiciously balancing the immediacy of the *zāhir* with the recurrent need for *ta’wīl*.<sup>28</sup>

Only a generation later was the connection made between Saadia’s principle and the talmudic *peshat* maxim, as his successor Samuel ben Hofni Gaon (d. 1013) establishes:

One must leave the texts as they are and interpret them according to their apparent sense (*zāhir*), as the Sages said: “A biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*.” Except for that which (1) clashes with sense perception, or (2) is against reason, or (3) contradicts another text (*naṣṣ*) that is unequivocal, or (4) that it contradicts the tradition.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See Ben-Shammai, “Rabbinic Literature,” 35–6. In accordance with this principle, Saadia’s *Tafsīr* contains many similar instances in which he abandons the literal sense and renders the text according to talmudic *halakhah*; see Zucker, *Translation*, 319–441.

<sup>24</sup> See Saadia’s *Tafsīr* ad loc., Derenbourg ed., 115; cf. Zucker, *Translation*, 358; *Saadya on Genesis*, Zucker ed., 18 (Arabic text); 192 (Hebrew translation).

<sup>25</sup> Sometimes using the expression *peshuto ke-mashma’o* (its *peshat* is according to its literal sense). See, for example, his commentary on Gen 8:7, Berliner ed., 17.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, at Note 13.

<sup>27</sup> This is evident, for example, by comparing Rashi’s gloss (endorsed by Rashbam) and Saadia’s *Tafsīr* on Gen 28:10, both of which diverge identically from a literal reading, which Ibn Ezra favors. See Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 77.

<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, this terminological distinction is blurred by some of the translations of his work in which the Arabic term *zāhir* is rendered *peshat*, a translation that has misled some modern scholars. See Cohen, *Gates*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> This citation from Samuel ben Hofni is published in Zucker, *Saadya on Genesis*, 448 (Arabic text); cf. French translation in Fenton, *Jardin*, 276. Elsewhere Samuel ben Hofni glosses the talmudic term *peshat* using the Arabic term *zāhir*; see *Prooemium Talmudis*, Abramson ed., 159 (Ar.); 184 (Heb.).

With the transplantation of the Judeo-Arabic center of learning to al-Andalus in the eleventh century, this usage spread westward. Samuel ha-Nagid (993–1056; al-Andalus), a poet, talmudist and Bible commentator, for example, cited the *peshat* maxim to support Saadia's axiom.<sup>30</sup> Samuel ben Hofni's construal of the *peshat* maxim thus represents a pivotal step in the history of Jewish interpretation, as he establishes the maxim as a fundamental rule of biblical hermeneutics. Yet we must note that he essentially adopts a "weak reading" of the maxim, that is, that the literal sense – which he equates with *peshat* – is merely a default position, as the interpreter must also carefully consider the various circumstances that call for a non-literal interpretation.<sup>31</sup>

### 3 Strong reading of the maxim in al-Andalus and northern France

A stronger construal of the *peshat* maxim would be advanced by Jonah Ibn Janah (Saragossa, early eleventh century), an intellectual rival of Samuel ha-Nagid, who would become a most influential figure on the Andalusian exegetical landscape. In the introduction to his key grammatical work *Kitāb al-Luma'*, Ibn Janah addresses anonymous talmudists who criticized him for departing from rabbinic interpretation in his philological analysis of the Bible. Such zealots, he argues, act out of

ignorance of the dictum of our early [Sage]s of blessed memory: "A biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*" and . . . [their rule that] "the *peshat* of a biblical verse is one thing (lit. alone), and the *halakhah* is another (lit. alone)."<sup>32</sup> For it is possible for one language expression to bear two correct meanings and more, as our Rabbis of blessed memory said: "One verse can have a number of meanings."<sup>33</sup>

When faced with an authoritative rabbinic halakhic interpretation, Saadia and Samuel ben Hofni would embrace it at the expense of the *ẓāhir*, that is, the interpretation that otherwise would seem philologically sound.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See Wechter, *Ibn Barun*, 56–7; Cohen, *Gates*, 54.

<sup>31</sup> This calls into question the assessment of David Weiss Halivni that "Samuel ben Hofni was the first . . . to interpret the word *peshuto* in the celebrated dictum to mean simple or plain meaning and to make the dictum imply the invincibility of *peshat*" (*Peshat & Derash*, 90). Samuel ben Hofni's equation of the talmudic concept of *peshat* with Arabic *ẓāhir* hardly implies "the invincibility of *peshat*," since the presumed validity of (what Halivni calls) the "simple or plain meaning" is actually quite vulnerable.

<sup>32</sup> While this exact formulation does not appear in rabbinic literature, the Talmud does occasionally make such a distinction; see Kamin, *Rashi's Categorization*, 32–7.

<sup>33</sup> *Luma'*, 8; Hebrew trans., *Riqmah*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> See Note 24. This sort of scenario is attested in qur'anic exegesis as well. See Chapter 8, at Note 30.

Ibn Janah, on the other hand, allows the philological-contextual interpretation – which he termed *peshat* – to stand on its own, by positing that scripture conveys two different meanings simultaneously: the philological *peshat* and the rabbinic midrash.

Samuel ben Hofni equated *peshat* with *zāhir*, that is, the obvious, literal sense, which may or may not be correct in the final analysis; but for Ibn Janah, *peshat* connotes the philological-contextual sense of the text (as in the definition cited at [Note 14](#)). Accordingly, two different construals of the *peshat* maxim can be discerned in the Geonic-Andalusian school:

- (1) *Weak* reading (Samuel ben Hofni): scripture must be interpreted according to its obvious, literal sense (*peshat* / *zāhir*) – unless there is a reason to interpret it non-literally.
- (2) *Strong* reading (Ibn Janah): scripture can never be deprived of its philological-contextual sense (= *peshat*), notwithstanding the authoritative midrashic reading.

Construal (1) renders the “rule of *peshat*” weak, since *zāhir al-naṣṣ* is simply a first assumption, to be adjusted in light of other relevant factors. By contrast, construal (2) is a strong reading that makes *peshat* inviolate. As a Rabbanite, Ibn Janah does not claim that *peshat* is the single correct sense of scripture, but rather that it exists side by side with the authoritative midrashic halakhic reading. He uses the *peshat* maxim to create a niche for the new philological-contextual method and dispense with the need to harmonize it with the talmudic halakhic system, as Saadia and his followers had done.<sup>35</sup>

Across the Pyrenees in northern France a parallel concept of *peshat* would emerge two generations later in the school of Rashi, who formulated the following programmatic statement:

There are many midrashic *aggadot* (sing. *aggadah*; i.e., ancient rabbinic sayings, traditions), and our Sages have already arranged them in their appropriate place in *Genesis Rabbah* and other midrashim. But I have come only for [i.e., to relate] *peshto shel miqra* (=the *peshat* of scripture) and the [sort of] *aggadah* that conforms to (lit. settles) the words of scripture.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> A heretofore little-known tradition of Rabbanite Jewish exegesis in Byzantine lands (including the Balkans and southern Italy) dating to the early eleventh century has been brought to light by recent findings in the Cairo Genizah. An incipient interest in *peshat* exegesis can be discerned in this tradition, occasionally accompanied by citations of the talmudic *peshat* maxim. See Brin, *Reuel and His Friends*; Cohen, *Rule of Peshat*, chapter three; Ta-Shma, “Hebrew-Byzantine Bible Exegesis.” However, since the Byzantine exegetical writings lack the methodological decisiveness of the *pashtanim* addressed here, their analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter.

<sup>36</sup> Comm. on Gen 3:8, Berliner ed., 7–8. On this and the other programmatic statements by Rashi, see Kamin, *Rashi’s Categorization*, 57–110; Grossman, “Literal Exegesis,” 334–6.

Within Rashi's Ashkenazi milieu, the vast majority of the exegetical writings of the Geonic-Andalusian school – penned in Arabic – were virtually inaccessible, and rabbinic literature was regarded as the primary, if not exclusive, source of Jewish Bible interpretation. Yet Rashi boldly advances his new standard of *peshuto shel miqra* in this programmatic statement and similar ones in his writings.

A contemporaneous assessment of Rashi's innovation appears in the commentary of his grandson Rashbam, a seminal *pashtan* in his own right:

Our Rabbis taught us that “a biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*,” even though the essence (*iqqar*) of Torah comes to teach and inform us the *haggadot*, *halakhot* and *dinim* (i.e., tenets, doctrines, and precepts of Judaism) through the hints of the *peshat* by way of redundant language, and through the thirty-two *middot* (midrashic hermeneutical rules) of R. Eliezer . . . and the thirteen *middot* of R. Ishmael . . . The early generations, because of their piety, tended to delve into the *derashot*, since they are the essence (*iqqar*), and therefore they were not accustomed to the profound (lit. deep) *peshat* of scripture. But our master, Rabbi Solomon, the father of my mother, luminary of the Diaspora, who interpreted the Torah, Prophets and Writings, aimed to interpret the *peshat* of scripture. And I, Samuel . . . debated with him personally, and he admitted to me that if he had the opportunity, he would have to write new commentaries according to the *peshat* [interpretation]s that newly emerge (*ha-mithaddeshim*) every day.<sup>37</sup>

Unaware of earlier exegetical advances in al-Andalus, Rashbam credits Rashi with the “discovery” of *peshat*. Yet, in Rashbam's view, his grandfather's application of the ideal fell short, leaving room for him to refine the method.

As already noted, many scholars have pondered why Rashi, in practice, relied so heavily on midrashic interpretation, and did not adhere more consistently to the *peshat* method that he pioneered. To answer this question, Sarah Kamin carefully examined Rashi's programmatic statements and concluded that *peshuto shel miqra* was not his exclusive goal. Rather, he used this new concept to establish a commentary that “settles” the language of scripture, that is, provides a coherent and internally consistent running commentary that involves both *peshat* and midrash in a sort of dual hermeneutic. This program is articulated most clearly in Rashi's introduction to the Song of Songs:

<sup>37</sup> Rashbam, comm. on Gen 37:2, Rosin ed., 49. The thirty-two *middot* of R. Eliezer and the thirteen of R. Ishmael epitomize the methods of midrashic interpretation. On these midrashic hermeneutical rules, see Enelow, *Mishnah of Rabbi Eliezer*; Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 97–121.

“One thing God has spoken; two things have I heard” (Ps 62:12) – “One verse can have a number of meanings” (b. *Sanhedrin* 34a), yet . . . a biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat* . . . Even though the prophets uttered their words in allegory (*dugma*), one must fit (lit. settle) the allegorical meaning (*dugma*) on its basis and sequence, according to the sequence of the verses. Now I have seen many aggadic *midrashim* on this book . . . that do not fit (lit. are not settled on) the language of scripture and the sequence of the verses. I therefore decided to establish (lit. take hold of) the literal sense (*mashmaʿ*) of scripture . . . and the rabbinic *midrashim* I shall set, one by one, each in its proper place.<sup>38</sup>

For Rashi, the midrashic reading of the Song as an allegory reflecting the relationship between God (the lover) and Israel (the beloved) reflects its ultimate meaning. Yet he introduces a contextual-philological analysis of the literal love tale depicted in the Song, which he terms *peshto shel miqra*. To justify this endeavor, he combines two separate talmudic statements: “one verse can have a number of meanings” and “a biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*.”<sup>39</sup> As he conceives it, the Song must be interpreted on two methodological planes: [a] midrashically, and [b] according to the *peshat* method, as a collection of love-songs.

While Rashi’s methodological remarks regarding scripture’s dual signification are made in reference to the Song of Songs, which he takes to be an allegorical text and as such might seem to be a special case, his comments elsewhere indicate that he applied this bifurcation to all of scripture, as he often juxtaposes his *peshat* commentaries with parallel midrashic ones – each labeled accordingly.<sup>40</sup> Even Rashbam, whose commentary focused entirely on “the *peshat*,” emphasizes that scripture is to be interpreted both [a] midrashically and [b] according to *peshat*. In his above-cited programmatic statement, Rashbam even terms the former “the essence” of scripture. Indeed, by stipulating the theoretical superiority of the midrash, he could draw conclusions about *peshto shel miqra* without concern over conflicts with Jewish law, which is determined by the midrashic reading. In this spirit Rashbam writes in his introduction to the first major law code of the Pentateuch:

I have not come to explain *halakhot*, even though they are the essence (*iqqar*), as I explained in Genesis (Note 37), for the *haggadot* and *halakhot* can be inferred from the redundancies of the scriptures, and some of them can be found in the commentaries of Rabbi Solomon my grandfather (may the

<sup>38</sup> Rashi, comm. on Song of Songs, Kamin and Saltman ed., 81 (Hebrew section). For analysis of this important passage, see Kamin, *Rashi’s Categorization*, 79–86, 123–4.

<sup>39</sup> See Kamin, *Jews and Christians*, xxxii–xxxiii.

<sup>40</sup> See the example cited at Note 11. See also Kamin, *Rashi’s Categorization*, 158–208.

memory of the righteous be blessed). But I have come to interpret the *peshat* of the scriptures. And I shall interpret the laws and *halakhot* according to “the way of the world” (*derekh ereṣ*). And yet, the *halakhot* (i.e., as interpreted by the rabbis) are the essence (*‘iqqar*), as our Rabbis said: “the *halakhah* uproots scripture” (b. *Soṭah* 16a).<sup>41</sup>

Since Rashi had already interpreted the legal portions of the Pentateuch based on rabbinic halakhic exegesis, Rashbam was free to devote his energies to “the *peshat* of the scriptures,” which he characterizes here as being “according to the way of the world,” an expression he uses to connote his rationally inclined, linguistically sensitive exegetical approach.<sup>42</sup> Manifesting ingenuity and originality in his analysis, which is often at odds with rabbinic halakhic interpretation, Rashbam effectively creates an alternative, non-talmudic “shadow” system of *halakhah* based on his reading of scripture itself.<sup>43</sup> To justify this bold course, Rashbam refers to his programmatic statement on Gen 37:2, where he cited the talmudic *peshat* maxim. Here he augments this with a disclaimer: in the realm of *halakhah* the midrashic interpretation is authoritative (“the essence”; *‘iqqar*), as “the *halakhah* uproots scripture,” that is, it overrides any conflicting *peshat* interpretation, which is nonetheless valid on its own.

As the preceding discussion reveals, the northern French *pashtanim* understood the *peshat* maxim as construed by Ibn Janah. Indeed, Rashi’s presentation of the maxim in his introduction to the Song of Songs strongly resembles that of Ibn Janah in *Kitāb al-Luma’*.<sup>44</sup> Marshaling this parallel and other indirect evidence, some scholars have argued that the *peshat* revolution in northern France was sparked by awareness of the Andalusian philological method, in which Ibn Janah’s role was pivotal.<sup>45</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address this matter at length, but the following reservations regarding this theory should be mentioned. To begin with, there is no direct evidence that Rashi had access to Ibn Janah’s writings, which were not translated into Hebrew until late in the twelfth century. Second, the relative valuation placed on *peshat* and *derash* in the northern French *peshat* school was distinct: as Rashbam remarks, midrash is the “essence.” For Rashbam, as for Rashi, midrashic interpretation conveys the true inner meaning of the

<sup>41</sup> Rashbam, comm. on Exod 21:1, Rosin ed., 113. On this programmatic statement and the talmudic maxim Rashbam cites, see Touitou, *Exegesis*, 105.

<sup>42</sup> See Cohen, “Rashbam Scholarship,” 394–7.

<sup>43</sup> See Touitou, *Exegesis*, 126–39; Japhet, “Tension”; Cohen, *Gates*, 139–53.

<sup>44</sup> See at Notes 33, 38. See also, Cohen, *Gates*, 363.

<sup>45</sup> See Grossman, “Literal Exegesis,” 327. More recently, it has been argued that Rashi drew inspiration from the incipient notion of *peshat* in the Byzantine exegetical school. See Ta-Shma, “Hebrew-Byzantine Bible Exegesis,” 253–6. For an evaluation of these views, see Cohen, “Spanish Source”; idem, *Rule of Peshat*, chapter four; Grossman, “Impact of Rabbi Samuel.”



Bible, and therefore dictates the norms and tenets of Judaism. In this respect, the northern French *pashtanim* retain the fundamental hermeneutical assumption of ancient Jewish interpretation that the Bible expresses its true meaning indirectly, through hints, allusions, and hidden references.<sup>46</sup> This relegates *peshat* to a secondary – even ancillary – status. Yet this move allowed Rashbam to freely interpret the halakhic sections of the Torah without regard for their Talmudic interpretation. The midrash-*peshat* hierarchy constructed by Rashi and Rashbam separates them from Ibn Janah, who regarded *peshat* as a final goal. But it resembles attitudes within contemporaneous Christian interpretation that was showing increasing interest in the literal sense of scripture, without questioning that the true meaning of scripture is its spiritual sense. This parallel suggests that the *peshat* revolution in northern France can best be explained within the context of developments in Latin learning to which Rashi and his students may have been exposed.

Recent scholarship on the interpretive method developed in the cathedral school of Rheims, discussed in [Chapter 10](#), is especially relevant in this regard. About 65 miles from Rashi's home city of Troyes, Rheims was an important hub of travel. There, Rashi's older contemporary Bruno the Carthusian (1030–1101) developed a distinctive grammatical method of interpretation as a criterion for selecting critically among the allegorical readings of the earlier church fathers. Bruno emphasized the language and sequence (“ordo verborum,” that is, order of the words) of the scriptural text in order to best ascertain the biblical authors' intentions – which he assumed to be christological. Rashi, *mutatis mutandis*, valued *peshat* less as an ultimate goal than as a sure-footed stepping stone to midrashic interpretation, guiding him to select the rabbinic readings that best adhere to (“settle”) the language and sequence of the biblical text.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4 Ibn Ezra: singular *peshat* model

A celebrated Hebrew poet in his native Spain, Ibn Ezra turned to writing Bible commentaries only upon his arrival in Rome in 1140, a project he continued for the rest of his life. Aiming to bring the philological Andalusian method to Jewish audiences in Christian Europe accustomed to midrashic commentary, Ibn Ezra offers a radical construal of the *peshat* maxim:

<sup>46</sup> See [Chapter 1](#), Sec. 6.

<sup>47</sup> See citation at [Note 38](#). For more on the implications of the parallels between the Jewish *peshat* school in northern France and contemporaneous developments in Latin Bible interpretation there, see Cohen, *Rule of Peshat*, chapters Four and Five.

Our early [Sages] . . . interpreted sections, verses, words and even letters by way of *derash* in the Mishnah, Talmud and Baraitas. Now there is no doubt that they knew the straight path as it is and therefore expressed the rule: “A biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*,” whereas the *derash* is an added idea. But the later generations made *derash* the essence (*‘iqqar*) and foundation, like Rabbi Solomon (=Rashi) of blessed memory, who interpreted scripture by way of *derash*. He thought that it is by way of *peshat*, but the *peshat* in his book[s] is less than one in a thousand. Yet the sages of our generation celebrate these books.<sup>48</sup>

Rashi’s claim to present “the *peshat* of scripture,” coupled with his popularity among Jews in Christian Europe, rankled Ibn Ezra, who located *peshat* within his own Andalusian heritage. Yet Ibn Ezra actually departs from the two models of *peshat* current in al-Andalus in his time, that is, that of Samuel ha-Nagid (following Samuel ben Hofni) and of Ibn Janah. Instead, he synthesizes a new hermeneutical conception by adapting elements from both. To begin with, in Ibn Ezra’s lexicon, *peshat* connotes *methodologically correct interpretation* – “the straight path” in the above-cited passage, and elsewhere called simply “the truth” (*emet*) or “the essence” (*‘iqqar*).<sup>49</sup> In this respect, Ibn Ezra seems closer to Ibn Janah than to Samuel ben Hofni, who equated *peshuto shel miqra* with *ḡābir al-naṣṣ* (which is merely a default position that may require adjustment). Yet Ibn Ezra implicitly rejects Ibn Janah’s dual hermeneutic, as he regards *peshat* alone as the single correct interpretation, with midrash relegated by him to the status of “an added idea.” Elsewhere he clarifies the theoretical assumption underlying this conception:

The words of any author, whether a prophet or a sage, [have but] one meaning (*ṭa’ām*), although those with great wisdom (i.e., the rabbis) augment [this] and infer one thing from another thing . . . at times by way of *derash* or by way of *asmakhta*. About this the early Sages, of blessed memory, said: “A biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*.”<sup>50</sup>

Whereas Ibn Janah characterized midrash as a viable alternative to *peshat*, Ibn Ezra merely lauds its authors’ ingenuity, but does not place it on par

<sup>48</sup> *Safah Berurah*, Wilensky ed., 288. It is unclear if Ibn Ezra knew Rashbam’s commentary when he wrote these lines – in Verona, Italy, in 1146. (See Sela and Freundenthal, “Chronological Listing,” 19, 32–3; Simon, *Ear Discerns*, 100–11.) But if he did, this may be a veiled criticism of Rashbam’s programmatic remarks that midrashic interpretation is the “essence” (*‘iqqar*) of the Bible. See the citations at Notes 37, 41.

<sup>49</sup> See Ibn Ezra, introduction to the Torah (in both the standard and alternate versions), Weiser ed., I:1, 137; short comm. on Exod 21:8, Weiser ed., II:291.

<sup>50</sup> *Yesod Diqduq*, Allony ed., 86. An *asmakhta* (lit. support), as Ibn Ezra uses the term, is a verse attached artificially to a law or concept as a mnemonic device. See citation at Note 52.

with the “way of *peshat*.” His is yet a third construal of the *peshat* maxim, to be placed alongside the two delineated above:

(3) *Very strong* reading – *peshat* is the only genuine interpretation of scripture, no matter what other “readings” might be projected onto it by way of *derash*.

*Peshat* now rules; and the *peshat* maxim has become the “rule of *peshat*,” in the sense of asserting dominion over other forms of scriptural signification.

The notion that scripture has but one correct meaning can be traced to Saadia and Samuel ben Hofni. Yet Ibn Ezra alone refers to this single correct meaning as *peshuto shel miqra*, reflecting a shift to Hebrew (and talmudic) terminology, as opposed to his predecessors’ Arabic terms. Nonetheless, he embraced Saadia’s axiom (which he translated into Hebrew), as he writes:

I shall tell you a principle in Torah, whether in scripture, Mishnah, any talmudic tractate or midrashic work: that if we find in any of them something that contradicts one of three things, (1) sound reason, (2) another verse or (3) transmitted [rabbinic] tradition, then we must attempt to adjust it . . . by interpreting it figuratively or by adding a letter or word, according to the way of our language.<sup>51</sup>

As Saadia and Samuel ben Hofni had established, a correct interpretation of any biblical verse must take into account all relevant sources of knowledge, including the immediate and broader biblical context, reason, and tradition. Yet Ibn Ezra does not refer to the default position – the apparent sense (*zāhir*) – as *peshat* (as Samuel ben Hofni had done); instead, he defines *peshat* as the final interpretation that takes into account all relevant sources of knowledge.

Ibn Ezra’s attitude toward the last case mentioned by Saadia, that is, the need to harmonize scripture with tradition, entails some complexity, since, in his view, rabbinic literature itself is subject to reinterpretation where it conflicts with reason or (what is stated plainly in) scripture. He uses Saadia’s axiom for this purpose as well, as he goes on to state:

And this is what we shall do if we find in the tradition something that contradicts scripture. We shall determine which one is correct, and adjust the other that stands against it, for there are known places where our predecessors [i.e., the rabbis] engaged in *derash* merely as an aide memoire and *asmakhta*, although they knew the *peshat*.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Introduction to the Torah (alternate version), Weiser ed., I:139. See Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 39–42.

An earlier, more rudimentary Hebrew version of this rule was articulated by the eleventh-century Karaite exegete Yeshu’ah ben Yehudah (whom Ibn Ezra cites occasionally); see Fenton, *Jardin*, 269.

<sup>52</sup> Introduction to the Torah (alternate version), Weiser ed., I:140–1.

Ibn Ezra argues that in many cases rabbinic halakhic readings are not the true source of talmudic law, but were devised secondarily to link the biblical text with ancient traditions from Sinai.<sup>53</sup> Acutely aware of Karaite critiques, Ibn Ezra can thus posit that the rabbis “knew the *peshat*,” and never actually used midrashic methods to determine the meaning of scripture.

But there are instances when Ibn Ezra is compelled to accept the rabbinic halakhic interpretation – even when it is at odds with his own philological analysis. In that case, though, he posits that the halakhic interpretation represents the *peshat* – the single correct interpretation – and his own interpretation must be deemed incorrect. Indeed, in the introduction to his Torah commentary, after boldly asserting that he will pursue his philological method independently, Ibn Ezra makes an exception in halakhic exegesis, stating that he will defer in that realm to the interpretations of the rabbis.<sup>54</sup> Whereas Rashbam could embrace anti-halakhic *peshat* interpretations because his dual hermeneutic allowed for an alternative – and even superior – midrashic layer of scriptural signification, Ibn Ezra’s singular model excluded this option. Regarding talmudic *halakhah* as a fixed system, he was compelled to adjust his *peshat* exegesis accordingly.<sup>55</sup> Intriguingly, the great talmudist Maimonides would open another path, based on yet another construal of the rule of *peshat*, to which we now turn.

## 5 Maimonides: integrating *peshat* and *halakhah*

Although the Talmud, in practice, was the source of Rabbanite *halakhah*, the great talmudist-philosopher Moses Maimonides sought to identify the scriptural legal basis of the *halakhah* in his *Book of the Commandments*. That work is a systematic enumeration of the “613 commandments (*mišvot*)” – a total number referred to often in rabbinic literature, but without a precise listing. To begin with, Maimonides establishes as Principle 1 that this enumeration includes only commandments of biblical (*de-orayta*) force, not those commandments instituted by the rabbis, which are of rabbinic authority (*de-rabbanan*).<sup>56</sup> He thus excludes from this inventory rabbinically instituted commandments such as kindling the

<sup>53</sup> See Harris, *Fragmentation*, 76–85.

<sup>54</sup> Introduction to the Torah (standard version), Weiser ed., I:10.

<sup>55</sup> Compare, for example, these two exegetes’ opposing interpretations of Exod 13:9 cited at Note 16. See also Cohen, *Gates*, 138–68, 362–74; Japhet, “Tension”; Simon, *Ear Discerns*, 100–33.

<sup>56</sup> *Book of the Commandments*, Kafih ed., 9.

Hanukkah lights and reading the scroll of Esther on Purim, stating that the sole source of the 613 commandments is *nuṣṣaṣ Torah* (“the texts of the Torah”), that is, the written record of the revelation at Mount Sinai.<sup>57</sup> Although the distinction between biblical and rabbinic law is talmudic, this emphasis on the biblical text is revolutionary, and leads to his formulation of Principle 2 that laws derived using the “thirteen *middot* by which the Torah is interpreted” – the prototypical midrashic modes of halakhic derivation (see Note 37) – must be excluded from enumeration, as they derive from rabbinic authority only.<sup>58</sup>

Maimonides emphasizes that the commandments derived midrashically are binding, since he accepts the authority of the rabbis implicitly. Yet these rabbinic commandments must be excluded from the enumeration of the commandments because they are like “branches” derived from the “roots,” the original core of the 613 biblical commandments. Using this and other idioms borrowed from Muslim jurisprudence, he explains that the “roots” draw their authority from the *naṣṣ* (the plain text of scripture itself), whereas the “branches” are based upon the sort of inference known as *qiyās* (legal analogy or reasoning), the term by which he characterizes the midrashic hermeneutical rules.<sup>59</sup> For support, Maimonides invokes the talmudic *peshat* maxim:

[The Sages] of blessed memory taught us . . . : “a biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*” and the Talmud in many places inquires: “of what does the verse itself speak?” when they found a verse from which many matters are learned by way of [midrashic] commentary and inference.<sup>60</sup>

This rule would guide Maimonides in *Mishneh Torah*, his comprehensive code of Jewish law, in which he endeavors systematically to cite verses from the Pentateuch – rather than midrashic derivations – to establish the basis of the *halakhah*.<sup>61</sup> In this respect, he departs sharply from both Ibn Janah and Rashbam – who distinguished between *peshat* and *halakhah*, the latter being, in their view, based essentially on the midrashic reading of scripture. Just how revolutionary Maimonides was in this respect can be gauged by Nahmanides’ trenchant critique:

[Maimonides’] Principle 2 . . . is shockingly beyond my comprehension, and I cannot bear it, for . . . that would render the *peshat* of scripture alone true, to the exclusion of matters derived midrashically. And he bases this on

<sup>57</sup> *Book of the Commandments*, Kafih ed., 12.

<sup>58</sup> *Book of the Commandments*, Kafih ed., 12.

<sup>59</sup> *Book of the Commandments*, Kafih ed., 15. For further details, including complications in the application of this radical rule of *peshat* primacy, see Cohen, *Gates*, 247–51, 287–304.

<sup>60</sup> *Book of the Commandments*, Kafih ed., 14.

<sup>61</sup> See Cohen, *Gates*, 439–45; Twersky, *Code*, 57–8.

their dictum "A biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*." In doing so, he uproots the thirteen *middot* by which the Torah is interpreted, as well as the bulk of the Talmud, which is dependent upon them.<sup>62</sup>

Nahmanides zeroes in on the sharp edge of Maimonides' reading of the *peshat* maxim: "the *peshat* of scripture alone [is] true, to the exclusion of matters derived midrashically," an echo of Ibn Ezra's singular model of *peshat*. But even Ibn Ezra conceded that some biblical laws were transmitted orally, whereas Maimonides argues that *peshat* is the exclusive source of biblical law. Maimonides thus actually presents a fourth construal of the *peshat* maxim:

(4) *Super-strong* reading: *peshat* alone expresses scripture's intent, and is the exclusive source of *halakhah* derived from the Bible (having biblical authority), whereas laws derived midrashically are of rabbinic authority only.

Taking the rule of *peshat* further than any of his predecessors had done, Maimonides transforms the theoretical underpinnings of halakhic jurisprudence.

What motivated Maimonides to take such a radical step? Three potential motives come to mind: (1) his exposure to Muslim jurisprudence, (2) the Karaite challenge, and (3) the increasing prestige of *peshat* within the Rabbanite Jewish interpretive tradition. Maimonides embraced the distinction made in Muslim jurisprudence between a clear text (*naṣṣ*), which indicates God's will (*murād Allāh*) with absolute certainty, and further inference by analogy (*qiyās*), which yields laws that are known to be correct with only a lesser degree of certainty. Aligning this epistemological-hermeneutical distinction with the *peshat-derash* dichotomy he knew from the Jewish exegetical tradition, Maimonides established a system for differentiating the numerous laws in the Talmud said to be "derived" from scripture in undifferentiated ways. Muslim jurisprudence provided a set of theoretical categories that enabled Maimonides to separate out the original commandments "stated clearly" in scripture (*naṣṣ/peshat*) and thus known with certainty to express God's will, that is, the 613 commandments, as opposed to further midrashic legal inferences and derivations (*qiyās/middot*), which have rabbinic force only.

Maimonides was aware of the Karaite critique of the rabbis for disregarding what is stated explicitly in the Bible, and it is conceivable that his "rule of *peshat*" was devised to counter it.<sup>63</sup> Despite his professed disdain for Karaism, Maimonides cedes key points to its critique of the traditional

<sup>62</sup> *Hassagot Ramban*, Chavel ed., 44.

<sup>63</sup> See Twersky, *Code*, 84–6; Lasker, "Karaism," 146–50.

Rabbanite account of *halakhah*.<sup>64</sup> He acknowledges (as the Karaites averred) that the rabbis used the midrashic *middot* to extrapolate from scripture entirely new laws, rather than arguing (as some earlier Rabbanite authorities – including Saadia – had done) that those laws were already known through an oral tradition and merely confirmed using the *middot*.<sup>65</sup> Nor could Maimonides return to a naïve reading of rabbinic literature and view the *middot* as genuine methods of interpretation, as talmudists unfamiliar with the *peshat* revolution might have been able to do. The possibility that remained for him was to create a stratified system to distinguish between the text of the Torah (*peshateh di-qera*) and laws derived from it midrashically.

Notwithstanding the weightiness of the previous two factors, Maimonides could not have formulated his rule of *peshat* primacy if not for the increasing prestige of *peshuto shel miqra* within his Geonic-Andalusian tradition. Samuel ben Hofni's weak reading of the *peshat* maxim had long given way to Ibn Janah's strong reading that made *peshat* inviolate. Maimonides' older contemporary Abraham Ibn Ezra took the next step by rendering *peshat* the single correct construal of scripture and relegating midrash to a secondary status. As a master jurist, Maimonides built upon that foundation to argue that the halakhic authority of the Pentateuch (Torah, *orayta*) derives from *peshuto shel miqra* alone, to the exclusion of midrash.

## 6 Conclusion

Maimonides' audacious construal of the *peshat* maxim helps to illustrate its range of uses in the Jewish interpretive tradition. In the northern French exegetical school, *peshat* was kept distinct from *halakhah*. There it co-existed with the traditional midrashic reading, which was deemed the "essence" of scripture, much as medieval Christian interpretation continued to favor the spiritual senses of scripture over the *sensus litteralis*. A different trajectory is evident in the Geonic-Andalusian tradition. *Peshat* began there as a default position, equated with Arabic *ẓāhir* by Samuel ben Hofni in his weak reading of the *peshat* maxim, to be discarded when non-literal interpretation (*ta'wil*) is required in order to harmonize scripture with reason and with rabbinic tradition. *Peshuto shel miqra* would be

<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Maimonides' openly negative attitude did not preclude his adoption of certain Karaite views that he deemed reasonable. See Lasker, "Karaism," 150–61.

<sup>65</sup> See Halbertal, *People*, 55–63.



privileged by Ibn Janah in his strong reading of the maxim, though even he validates midrashic reading as an authoritative alternative interpretive mode. Ibn Ezra's very strong reading of the maxim privileges *peshat* further, rendering it the sole legitimate sense of scripture. Ibn Ezra thus invoked the *peshat* maxim to establish the absolute rule, that is, the dominion, of *peshat* over other interpretive modes. Maimonides' super-strong construal draws the logical conclusion from Ibn Ezra's hermeneutical hierarchy – from which Ibn Ezra himself had recoiled, out of respect for conventional talmudic jurisprudence. As such, Maimonides boldly illustrates the potential reach of the dominion of *peshat* within a Rabbanite system. While his successors would reject his audacious hermeneutical-legal hierarchy, they were forced to engage in a dialogue with Maimonides rather than simply ignoring him. This is amply illustrated by Nahmanides, whose critique of Principle 2 actually leads to a nuanced system that tacitly adopts critical Maimonidean elements, and is hardly a simple return to older *peshat* models.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> See Cohen, *Gates*, 375–81; idem, *Rule of Peshat*, chapter 8.



PART III

*Rhetoric and the poetics of reading*



*Poetry and commentary in the medieval  
school of Rheims  
Reading Virgil, reading David  
A. B. Kraebel*

The Jewish and Christian Bibles and the Qur'an enjoyed – each within its own faith community – an elevated status that guided interpreters to develop unique tools for their analysis, distinct from those applied to secular literature. The special characteristic features of early Bible interpretation, both Jewish and Christian, predicated on the assumptions about the Bible's plethora of recondite meanings (outlined in [Chapter 1](#)) and the notion of the “inimitability” of the Qur'an (discussed in [Chapter 3](#)), would seem to place these scriptures outside the bounds of human literary classification. Yet eventually schools of scriptural interpretation emerged that conspicuously drew upon the “language arts” of grammar and rhetoric developed for the analysis of secular language and literature. The current chapter treats a Christian version of this movement in the medieval cathedral school of Rheims, where it led to new ways of confirming that the Bible's christological “mystical” sense converges with the intentions of its ancient Hebrew prophetic authors.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

In Latin Christianity, Jerome (d. 420) appears to be the first author of any influence to advance an understanding of the Psalter as a collection of lyric poems. Throughout his writings, and especially in his commentaries on prophetic books, Jerome refers to the Psalms as “composed in a lyric fashion,”<sup>1</sup> or, more simply, he states that “David sang a lyric song.”<sup>2</sup> The phrase Jerome uses to describe the Psalms, *lyricum carmen*, is found elsewhere in his writings applied to the works of Pindar and Horace,<sup>3</sup> while, in his Letter 22 to Eustochium, Jerome equates, at least formally, the Psalter and Horace's odes: “What has Horace to do with the Psalter? Virgil

<sup>1</sup> *Commentarii in Prophetas Minores*, II:618. The Latin original of the citations throughout this chapter is provided only when it is drawn from unpublished archival material.

<sup>2</sup> *In Hieremiam*, 110.      <sup>3</sup> *Commentarii in Prophetas Minores*, I:215.

with the Gospels? Cicero with Paul?"<sup>4</sup> Jerome compares, generically speaking, like with like: what need has a Christian for a pagan rhetorician, when he has the writings of the Christian rhetorician, Paul, or why would he read the poetry of Horace, filled as it is with accounts of false gods, when he has the poetry of David?<sup>5</sup>

Even as he denigrates the content of classical poetry, therefore, Jerome indicates that it may be compared with biblical literature, and he thus introduces the possibility that the techniques used in the interpretation of former – that is, the techniques of the grammatical curriculum<sup>6</sup> – could be employed in the exposition of the latter. In his extant writing on the Psalter, however, Jerome does not appear to have developed this potential translation of interpretive techniques;<sup>7</sup> likewise, the authoritative patristic exegesis of the Psalter, the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* of Augustine (d. 430), derives largely from the bishop's sermons on individual psalms, and the preacherly priorities of Augustine's commentary do not include the interpretation of the Psalms as comparable to classical verse.<sup>8</sup> The disjuncture between Jerome's formal insights and the content of Augustine's exegesis was repaired, in part, in the *Expositio Psalmorum* of Cassiodorus (d. c. 585). The founder of Vivarium appears to have followed Jerome and regarded the Psalms as poems, and the vocabulary of the liberal arts curriculum is therefore present in Cassiodorus' commentary. At times, after he offers an interpretation of a verse, Cassiodorus will then note that the verse exemplifies a particular literary device or rhetorical mood.<sup>9</sup> The result of such a procedure is to turn the Psalter into a book of models useful for the teaching of literary exposition, but it does not present the consistent application of such expository techniques to the Psalms.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, I:189.

<sup>5</sup> Kugel, *Idea*, 149–56. Jerome's views were also disseminated in the influential *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, VI.ii.17. For further discussion, see Kraebel, "Prophecy and Poetry," 448–50.

<sup>6</sup> On the grammatical tradition, see Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, and Irvine, *Textual Culture*.

<sup>7</sup> A Psalter commentary spuriously attributed to Jerome was often quoted in later-medieval exegesis; this appears instead to be a ninth-century work. *PL* 26:821–1278.

<sup>8</sup> On Augustine's exegesis of the Psalter, see Bourke, "Augustine on the Psalms."

<sup>9</sup> Cf., for example, Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, I:34, 36, 41, 42, 43, 47, 48, 53, 166. For a further discussion of Cassiodorus' use of figures, and the relationship between his commentary and medieval glosses, see Kraebel, "Grammatica," 74–5. Grondeux, "Teaching and Learning," traces the influence of Cassiodorus' use of tropes in a variety of texts, although not the commentaries discussed here; see also Grondeux, "L'apport de Cassiodore." On the elements of the rhetoric in Cassiodorus' commentary, see Chapter 13.

<sup>10</sup> Bede (d. 735) recognized Cassiodorus' intention in pointing to literary devices in the Psalter as a means of teaching such devices to his readers, and he thus drew on Cassiodorus when he compiled his own textbook, *De schematibus et tropis*.

It was left to the schoolmen of the Middle Ages to marry Augustinian interpretations to a Hieronymian understanding of the Psalms as poems. In what follows, we will see how this marriage was effected, in the late ninth and, especially, the late eleventh centuries, by exegetes active in the cathedral school of Rheims. To narrate this hermeneutic development, it will be necessary to trace two interpretive traditions or exegetical histories. First, we will note the persistent influence of the Servian tradition of commentary on the works of Virgil. The influential commentary of the late-fourth-century grammarian Servius was central in medieval teaching of the *trivium*, and it presented the schoolmen with a model of literary exposition. Second, of course, will be the tradition of commentaries on the Psalms – here, in particular, we will see, in contrast to the *Expositio* of Cassiodorus, that Remois masters expected their readers to be familiar with the Servian tradition, and to be able to apply the techniques of poetic exegesis to the recovery of the psalmist's authorial intentions. In Rheims, reading Virgil was propaedeutic to reading David.

## I Remigius of Auxerre and the early school of Rheims

As Rheims recovered from the devastation of Norman raids, c. 883, Archbishop Fulco sought the best teachers available to establish new schools in the city. Those masters came from the school of Auxerre: Hucbald and, more importantly, Remigius of Auxerre (d. c. 908). Remigius' renown as a teacher of the liberal arts was so great that, according to the chronicler Flodoard (d. 966), Archbishop Fulco himself sat at Remigius' feet as his student.<sup>11</sup> Not all recent critics have been as kind to Remigius as was Flodoard: although H. A. Kelly calls Remigius "one of the most learned men of the Carolingian renaissance,"<sup>12</sup> Pierre Courcelle believed that Remigius was "un vieux savant, médiocrement intelligent, qui se préoccupe moins de comprendre, interpréter, et juger le texte . . . que de le garnir de notes . . . où il pourra faire étalage d'érudition."<sup>13</sup> Courcelle's view has been moderated by Jacqueline Beaumont,<sup>14</sup> and it seems now that we

<sup>11</sup> Remigius' life and works are discussed by Cora Lutz in her introduction to *Remigii Autissiodorensis Commentum in Martianum Capellam*, I:5–16; more recently, see Jeudy, "L'œuvre de Remi d'Auxerre"; idem, "Remigii autissiodorensis opera." On the date of Remigius' arrival in Rheims as 883, rather than 893, as some recent historians maintain, see *In Martianum*, ed. Lutz, I:7–8, n. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy*, 50.

<sup>13</sup> Courcelle, *La Consolation de la Philosophie*, 278. Further views of Remigius similar to Courcelle's are collected by Lutz, "Remigius' Ideas on the Origin," 38–9.

<sup>14</sup> Beaumont, "Latin Tradition."



might best understand Remigius in the terms used by G. P. Goold to describe Servius, who “distinguishes himself by the clear simplicity which characterizes the great and successful teacher.” Goold goes on: “An elementary teacher, to reach in due season the end of his curriculum, must every hour turn a Nelson eye to serious problems and refrain from pursuing truth beyond the charted boundaries of the textbook.”<sup>15</sup>

Courcelle’s view notwithstanding, Remigius began an academic tradition at Rheims which continued into the eleventh century, and which, thereafter, exerted influence on a variety of later exegetes.<sup>16</sup> Remigius’ importance to the intellectual life of Rheims is, in part, indicated by the copies of his commentaries that may be identified as the work of Remois scriptoria, and which continued to be preserved in that city for some time after their creation: for example, the copy of Remigius’ commentary on *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* by the early-fifth-century writer Martianus Capella, now London, British Library, MS Royal 15 A. xxxiii, and the copy of his Psalter commentary, still MS 132 at the Bibliothèque municipale de Rheims.<sup>17</sup> To consider Remigius in the terms Goold applied to Servius seems particularly apt: like Servius, Remigius’ exegetical energy appears to have been focused especially on the central texts of the grammatical curriculum, such as Donatus’ *Ars minor* and *Ars maior*,<sup>18</sup> and, as we will see, even in his glosses on more obviously literary material, Remigius’ interests largely remain restricted to questions essential to a certain *explication de texte*.<sup>19</sup>

That Servius provided a model for Remigius is suggested throughout the Carolingian exegete’s various works, apparent especially in Remigius’ commentary on *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*. Twice in his commentary on Book I, Remigius cites Servius by name, for example, alluding to *Aen.* 1.8, “Servius says that Juno is called Curitis from ‘chariot’ (*curru*), since warriors make use of chariots.”<sup>20</sup> On this line in the *Aeneid*,

<sup>15</sup> Goold, “Servius and the Helen Episode,” 74.

<sup>16</sup> See Kraebel, “Prophecy and Poetry.” The clearest signs of this tradition’s later influence are the marginal attributions of comments to Remigius in the *Magna glosatura* of Peter Lombard (d. 1164).

<sup>17</sup> Both of these manuscripts were the work of Gifardus, apparently a scribe of the monastery of St.-Remi in Rheims; Gifardus’ subscription may be found in MS Rheims 132, f. 2r; MS Royal 15 A. xxxiii, f. 4r. This could be the Gifardus whose death is recorded in the monastery’s necrology in 945: Rheims, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 548, f. 2. He also copied a manuscript of Apuleius, *Peri hermeneias*, now Krakow, Biblioteka Jagiellonska, MS Berol. lat. 4<sup>o</sup> 687-II.

<sup>18</sup> Jeudy, “L’œuvre de Remi,” 380–7, and “Remigii opera,” 475–84.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Irvine, *Textual Culture*, 89: “Remigius . . . [was] thoroughly classicizing in [his] sense of latinity and in [his] appeals to textual authority.”

<sup>20</sup> *In Martianum*, I:182; see also I:116. For Servius’s commentary, see the edition by Thilo and Hagan, cited here by the line numbers of Virgil’s poems.

Servius had written, "Juno has many names: she is Curitis, who uses the chariot and the spear," and he then cites *Aen.* 1.16–17 to support this assertion. Perhaps more illustrative of Servius' and Remigius' exegetical sympathies are those instances in Remigius' commentaries where, as he cites Virgil, his choice of words suggests that Remigius is reading Servius' commentary as well as the work of the poet: in these cases, Remigius makes the text of Servius' commentary his own. Again in his gloss on the *Marriage*, Remigius writes, citing *Georgics* 3.81, "*Sinewy brawn*. Brawn is the swellings (*eminientiae*) or the flesh (*pulpae*) of one's arms. Thus Virgil, concerning a horse: 'His bold breast revels in its brawn.'" <sup>21</sup> Compare Servius on the same lines: "*His bold breast revels in its brawn*. Bold: knotty and swelling with flesh (*eminens pulpis*)." The same sort of silent verbal borrowing from Servius may be seen in the commentary on the poetry of Prudentius (d. c. 413) attributed to Remigius. <sup>22</sup> In sum, it would appear that when Remigius read Virgil Servius was never far away.

Although we cannot identify Servius as a source for Remigius' Psalter commentary with the same sort of certitude as we can for his glosses on Martianus and (if authentic) Prudentius, we may nevertheless find Remigius at times reading the Psalter in a Servian manner. <sup>23</sup> Remigius' awareness of the formal insights found in the writing of Jerome, perhaps mediated by Isidore or Cassiodorus, <sup>24</sup> is suggested in the prologue to his commentary, where he writes,

A psalm is a hymn or the praise of God. They are called hymns because they recite the praise of God metrically in their original language. For a hymn is praise composed according to a specific meter. <sup>25</sup>

At different moments throughout his commentary, Remigius extends this formal notion of the psalms as poems to his interpretation of their content; he works like a grammarian glossing poetry. Most simply, Remigius' grammatical approach may be seen in his occasional attempts to determine

<sup>21</sup> *In Martianum*, I:74.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, *Commentaire anonyme sur Prudence*, 58. Although he calls the commentary "anonyme," the editor, John Burnam, notes, "l'ouvrage doit être attribué à Remi d'Auxerre" (7). See further Jeudy, "L'œuvre de Remi," 392; idem, "Remigii opera," 495–6; idem, "Commentaire de Prudence." See also O'Sullivan, *Early Medieval Glosses on Prudentius*, 26–7.

<sup>23</sup> Remigius' Psalter commentary remains unedited; the commentary attributed to him in *PL* 132 is spurious. The authentic text survives in two recensions, discussed by Vaccari, "Il genuino commento ai Salmi"; Jeudy, "L'œuvre de Remi," 376–7; idem, "Remigii opera," 466–7; Kraebel, "*Grammatica*," 75–8; idem, "John of Rheims," 260–3.

<sup>24</sup> *Etymologies*, VI.ii.17; *Expositio Psalmorum*, I:18, 40.

<sup>25</sup> MS Rheims 132, f. 1r: "Psalmus uero est hymnus uel laus Dei. Dicuntur autem hymni, quod laudem Dei metrice in sua lingua canunt. Nam hymnus est laus cuiuscumque metri ratione composita."

the proper way to parse the text of the Psalter. Commenting on Ps 7:9,<sup>26</sup> “Judge me, O Lord, according to my justice, and according to my innocence above me (*super me*),” Remigius notes that the imperative “judge” applies to both “justice” and “innocence,” and he attempts to explain how a person’s innocence could be said to be “above” (*super*) him. He writes, “*And according to my innocence – supply ‘Judge me’ – which innocence is above me, since it is given to me from heaven.*”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, as was sometimes required in commentary on classical poetry, Remigius supplies a more idiomatic order for the psalmist’s words; for example, on Ps 17:42 (MT 18:42), “*They cried, but there was no one to save them, to the Lord.* The order of the words (*ordo verborum*) is: They cried to the Lord, but there was no one to save them.”<sup>28</sup> Such comments are common in Servius’ commentary on the *Aeneid*.<sup>29</sup>

Remigius’ Servian (or, more generally, grammatical) interpretive style, and his treatment of the Psalms as poems, are most apparent when he invokes a literary device or scheme to explain the text of a psalm. Concerning Ps 9:2, for example, Remigius believes that the psalmist has described an undertaking that is impossible for any human being to accomplish.

*I will tell all your wonders.* This is synecdoche, just as elsewhere, “With my lips I have pronounced all the judgments of your mouth” (Ps 118:13; MT 119:13). For no mortal man is capable of imagining, let alone telling, all of the divine wonders.<sup>30</sup>

Hyperbole may at first appear to be a better way of accounting for the interpretation that Remigius advances here, but synecdoche makes sense in the context of his exegesis of this psalm more generally.<sup>31</sup> The psalmist will indeed go on to narrate a select set of God’s wonders, and Remigius tells us, therefore, that these wonders, referred to collectively in Ps 9:2, stand in

<sup>26</sup> Throughout the present chapter, psalms are referred to by their Vulgate numbering (with MT numbering in parenthesis where it differs).

<sup>27</sup> MS Rheims 132, f. 8vb: “*Et secundum innocentiam meam, subaudi iudica me, quae innocentia mea super me est, quia caelitus mihi est data.*” This does not have an antecedent in Cassiodorus’ gloss on Ps 7:9, *Expositio*, I:84.

<sup>28</sup> MS Rheims 132, f. 26rb: “*Clamauerunt, nec erat qui saluos faceret, ad Dominum.* Ordo uerborum est: Clamauerunt ad Dominum, nec erat qui faceret.” This gloss does not find an antecedent in Cassiodorus’ commentary on this verse. See *Expositio* I:165.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Servius’ commentary on *Aeneid* 1.53, 1.81, 1.109, 1.133, 1.181, 1.195.

<sup>30</sup> MS Rheims 132, f. 10v: “*Narrabo omnia mirabilia tua.* Synecdochicos est accipiendum, sicut et illud, ‘In labiis meis pronuntiaui omnia iudicia oris tui.’ Neque enim aliquis mortalís omnia diuina mirabilia sufficit cogitare necdum narrare.”

<sup>31</sup> On hyperbole and synecdoche, see *PEPP*, s.v. “Hyperbole,” and s.v. “Synecdoche.”

synecdochically for all of the divine wonders.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Remigius accounts for the shift between Ps 17:2 (MT 18:2), “I will love you, O Lord,” and Ps 17:3 (MT 18:3), “The Lord is my firmament,” by identifying the earlier verse as an apostrophe to God. When Ps 17:35 (MT 18:36) refers to God again in the second person, Remigius identifies another instance of apostrophe.<sup>33</sup>

Such devices were the common fare of the late antique and medieval Latin grammatical tradition,<sup>34</sup> and it is therefore by no means necessary for Remigius to have relied on Servius for his understanding of apostrophe and synecdoche, nor for the notion of how such terms could be used in literary criticism. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Mountford and Schultz identify three and twenty examples, respectively, of these devices in Servius’ Virgilian commentaries,<sup>35</sup> and, as we have seen in this chapter, these are texts that we can be sure Remigius read. Using such techniques, Remigius has composed a commentary on the Psalms that, at times, reads as though it were Servius’ commentary on the works of Virgil, or, indeed, one of Remigius’ own commentaries on non-biblical literature. The psalms are thus treated as poetry, and they are interpreted by means of the same techniques as were the Latin poets.

His use of apostrophe in particular suggests what appears to be Remigius’ primary motivation for identifying literary devices in the psalmist’s writing: Remigius attempts to interpret each psalm as a discrete unit, and variations within a psalm – such as the shift in voice in Psalm 17 (MT 18) – need to be explained if the coherence of the psalm is to be maintained. This sense of each psalm’s internal coherence is supported further by the lengthy prefaces that Remigius supplies before his gloss on each psalm: often adapted from Cassiodorus and framed as interpretations of the psalm’s title or superscription, these prefaces allow Remigius to give an account of his general interpretation of the content of each psalm. Thus, for example, before his commentary on Psalm 15 (MT 16), Remigius writes,

The Prophet speaks in this psalm concerning the Passion of Christ, and so he has given it [i.e., the psalm] this particular title [i.e., “The inscription of a title to David himself”], for he sees by divine inspiration the title (*titulum*)

<sup>32</sup> Here, Remigius appears indebted to Cassiodorus, *Expositio*, I:97, who also cites this device à propos Ps 9:2, though without providing the comparable example from Psalm 118.

<sup>33</sup> MS Rheims 132, ff. 22v and 25v. In this case, Remigius’ citations of apostrophe do not find a precedent in Cassiodorus’s gloss on these verses, *Expositio*, I:151, 163–4. “Apostrophe” in the classical rhetorical tradition meant “turning away” from the principal audience to poetically address another (usually unhearing) audience, such as inanimate objects, animals, absent dead people or abstractions. See *PEPP*, s.v. “Apostrophe.”

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the various devices discussed by Isidore, *Etymologies*, I.xxvi–xxvii.

<sup>35</sup> *Index*, 18b and 162b. These numbers do not include instances in Servius Danielis.

that, in the future, Pilate will affix to the Lord's Cross [i.e., "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews"; cf. John 19:19].<sup>36</sup>

The Prophet does not simply relate historical narratives, but, as Jerome suggested, he writes lyric poems, that is, he does not always speak *in propria persona*. Earlier in the preface to Psalm 15 (MT 16), Remigius writes that "it should be known that, throughout this psalm, the humanity of Christ speaks, chiefly concerning his Passion and Resurrection," and, as he begins his gloss on the psalm proper, Remigius again notes, "This is the voice of Christ calling on his Father in his Passion."<sup>37</sup> With this overall interpretation in mind, Remigius goes on to interpret Psalm 15 (MT 16) as a prophecy of the Crucifixion, written consistently in the voice of Christ.

As we have suggested, Remigius adapts much of the material in these prefaces from Cassiodorus: in the case of Psalm 15 (MT 16), his reference to the *titulum* in John 19 comes from this earlier source, as, indeed, does the notion that "the *persona* of the Lord and Savior is introduced [i.e., speaks] throughout this psalm."<sup>38</sup> Yet if Remigius took from Cassiodorus the general notion that different psalms are spoken in different lyric voices, his procedure for interpreting what those voices say is at times, as we have seen, more obviously indebted to the Servian tradition than it is to the patristic exegete.<sup>39</sup> Unlike Cassiodorus, who often simply explains the christological content of each verse, largely derived from Augustine's *Enarrationes*, Remigius is intent, in his teacherly manner, on parsing the text of the Psalms. Although Remigius is by no means consistent in this approach, he nevertheless set an important precedent, which was to be drawn upon by later Remois exegetes.

## 2 Compilation and adaptation: the tenth century

After Remigius', no new Psalms commentaries appear to have been composed in the school of Rheims until the eleventh century, but this does not

<sup>36</sup> MS Rheims 132, f. 19ra: "Locuturus Propheta in hoc psalmo de Passione Christi praetitulauit eum huiusmodi inscriptione, praeuidens diuina inspiratione futurum quod a Pilato iam dictus titulus dominicae erat cruci affigendus."

<sup>37</sup> MS Rheims 132, f. 19ra: "sciendum quia humanitas Christi per totum hunc psalmum de Passione et Resurrectione sua maxime loquitur" ("It should be known that the humanity of Christ speaks throughout this entire psalm concerning his Passion and, especially, his Resurrection"); and f. 19rb: "Vox Christi est Deum Patrem in Passione inuocantis" ("This is the voice of Christ calling on God the Father in his Passion").

<sup>38</sup> *Expositio*, I:136–7.

<sup>39</sup> See the earlier discussion of Remigius' glosses on Psalms 7 and 17, for which he does not draw on Cassiodorus.

mean that all biblical exegetical activities ceased. Rheims, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 133 appears to have been produced in Rheims during the archiepiscopacy of Adalberon (r. 969–88),<sup>40</sup> and it presents what Margaret Gibson described as a “late Carolingian glossed Psalter”:<sup>41</sup> prefatory and marginal notes surround the text of the Psalms, presented in a larger central column on each page, followed by the six ferial canticles and other liturgical songs, which receive only sporadic glossing.<sup>42</sup> As with many of the examples discussed by Gibson, MS Rheims 133 appears to have been a particularly local production: two notes in the manuscript’s margins suggest that it was prepared for Archbishop Adalberon, and there is no evidence that it was read or copied outside of Rheims.<sup>43</sup> Its particularly Remois character becomes more readily apparent when we note that the compiler’s major sources include Remigius’ commentary on the Psalms.

Though Gibson suggests that Carolingian glossed Psalters, as a genre, are “exegetically conservative,”<sup>44</sup> the compiler of MS Rheims 133 appears to have drawn a large number of his glosses from the recent commentary of Remigius. The compiler adapted Remigius’ general prologue for his preface in MS Rheims 133,<sup>45</sup> and his indebtedness to Remigius continues throughout his glosses on individual psalms, especially in the lengthy notes that preface each one. Unlike the shorter marginal glosses flanking the text of the psalms, these prefaces are written across two or even three columns. (See [Plate 10.1](#) for an example of this layout.) The compiler’s preface to Psalm 3, commenting at least in part on the psalm’s superscription (“A psalm of David, when he fled from the face of his son Absalom”), exemplifies his careful, selective adaptation of Remigius’ exegesis:

This psalm, though third in order, concerns events occurring after the fiftieth psalm, since David, repenting his adultery and homicide, sang, *Have mercy on me, God* (Ps 50:3; MT 51:3), in penitence, and then it happened that he suffered the persecution of his son. . . . But if the fiftieth psalm ought to be put before it, why is this one third? Without doubt it is because of the mystery of the Lord’s Resurrection, which took place on the third day, and which this psalm commemorates. For first David composed all of the psalms and their titles, and then Ezra, who is also known as a prophet, put them in their current order. And since, under the guidance of

<sup>40</sup> On the reforms undertaken at Rheims during Adalberon’s rule, see Bur, “Saint-Thierry.”

<sup>41</sup> Gibson, “Glossed Psalters.” Gibson’s important essay does not address MS Rheims 133 specifically.

<sup>42</sup> MS Rheims 133 is described by Vaccari, “Il genuino commento,” 87–8.

<sup>43</sup> For these ownership notes, see MS Rheims 133, ff. 2v–3r and 35v–36r. On Adalberon’s role in the production of the manuscript, see Kraebel, “John of Rheims.” Gibson, “Glossed Psalters,” 91, describes these Psalters as “luxury manuscripts,” often intended for such elite patrons.

<sup>44</sup> Gibson, “Glossed Psalters,” 79. <sup>45</sup> MS Rheims 133, f. 1v; see Kraebel “John of Rheims,” 260–3.





Absalom is interpreted “peace of the father” by contrary, for Absalom pursuing David signifies Judas.<sup>46</sup>

Much of the second half of this preface, that is, the material glossing the psalm’s title, is taken from the preface to Psalm 3 in Remigius’ commentary: Remigius too notes that “David signifies Christ, and Uriah the devil,”<sup>47</sup> and the compiler has taken verbatim from Remigius the phrase, “Neither is it amazing . . . the order of things.”<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the etymological gloss of “Absalom” appears to be an adaptation of Remigius, who writes, “Absalom is interpreted ‘peace of the father’ by contrary, for he had pursued his father, and he signifies Judas.”<sup>49</sup> Yet this borrowing is not quite as slavish as it might at first appear – for the first half of his preface, the compiler has adapted material not from Remigius’ notes on Psalm 3, but rather from Remigius’ general prologue to the Psalter, which the compiler had already adapted in his own general preface. The compiler thus adapts Remigius’ assertion that

David sang all of the psalms. . . . but they are not in the order in which he sang them. For example: he sinned with the wife of Uriah before he endured the persecution of his son, and he sang concerning his penitence, *Have mercy on me, God*, before, concerning his persecution, he sang, *Lord, why are they multiplied*. But these are believed to have been put in their current order, with divine inspiration, by the prophet Ezra.<sup>50</sup>

Compared to his adaptation of Remigius’ preface to Psalm 3, the compiler’s use of this general prologue material is considerably looser. There

<sup>46</sup> MS Rheims 133, f. 4v: “Hic psalmus, licet tertius ponatur in ordine, quinquagesimo actu inuenitur posterior, quoniam ante Dauid poenitentiam agens de adulterio et homicidio cantauit in poenitentiam dicens, *Miserere mei, Deus*, et caetera, ac deinde passus est persecutionem filii. . . . Cum ergo prius quinquagesimus debeat poni, quare constitutus est tertius? Nimirum propter mysterium dominicae resurrectionis tertia die factum, quam hic psalmus commemorat. Primus siquidem Dauid composuit omnes psalmos et eorum titulos; Esdras uero, qui et propheta intelligitur, ordinauit illos. Et quia Spiritu sancto reuelante cognouit Christum tertia die resurrecturum, idcirco tertio loco eum posuit. . . . Dauid enim Christum significat, Vrias diabolium. Nec mirum si per iustum et martyrem significat diabolium, per peccatorem uero iustus, id est Christus. Aliquando enim rerum significationes a contrario sumuntur. Nec enim ista contraria significatio rerum ordinem mutat. . . . Absalon patris pax interpretatur per contrarium. Absalon enim Dauid persequens Iudam significat.”

<sup>47</sup> MS Rheims 132, f. 3va: “Dauid enim Christum significat; Vrias diabolium.”

<sup>48</sup> MS Rheims 132, f. 3va: “Nec mirum . . . rerum ordinem mutat.”

<sup>49</sup> MS Rheims 132, f. 3va: “Absalon patris pax interpretatur per contrarium; persecutus est enim patrem suum et significat Iudam.”

<sup>50</sup> MS Rheims 132, f. 1rb: “Omnes ergo psalmos Dauid cecinit . . . , nec eo modo ordinati sunt et constituti quo a Dauid cantati. Verbi gratia: Ante peccauit cum uxore Vriae Aethei quam sustinisset persecutionem filii sui, et ante cecinit de poenitentia, *Miserere mei, Deus*, quam de persecutione, *Domine, quid multiplicati sunt*. Sed ab Esdra propheta instinctu diuino ita ordinati esse creduntur.”



are certainly echoes of Remigius' phrases in the later work, but the compiler has added much material of his own. Since Remigius' discussion of the ordering of the Psalms appears in his general prologue, Remigius does not address the question of why this psalm is positioned third in the Psalter. Yet Ezra is working, as Remigius says, with divine inspiration (*instinctu diuino*), and so there must be a reason for this arrangement. Perhaps influenced by Cassiodorus' statement that "the resurrection of the Lord is fittingly signified by the liberation of David," the compiler has supplied an answer.<sup>51</sup> While this preface is thus the compiler's own creation, it is also thoroughly Remigian, and such adaptation of Remigius' commentary continues throughout MS Rheims 133.

The gloss in MS Rheims 133 merits more attention than it can be given here, yet the compiler's careful adaptation of glosses taken from Remigius' commentary seems to suggest that Remigius' text quickly came to be regarded as authoritative in Rheims. Remigius' authority was certainly established by the end of the eleventh century, at the same time as the gloss in MS Rheims 133 itself was drawn upon by exegetes composing new commentaries. Although this gloss may be a unique witness to tenth-century Remois efforts at exegesis, it was nevertheless indicative of the direction in which future commentaries would tend.

### 3 Bruno the Carthusian

MS Rheims 133 appears to have been compiled, as noted earlier, in the 970s or 980s, during the archiepiscopacy of Adalberon, and it therefore stands roughly halfway between the death of Remigius, c. 908, and the beginning of the teaching career of Bruno, c. 1060, later the founder of the Carthusian Order. In the Psalter commentary attributed to him, Bruno once cites Remigius by name, glossing Ps 47:8, and specific borrowings from Remigius' Psalter commentary may be found, unacknowledged, throughout the later master's exegesis.<sup>52</sup> While Bruno thus derives some of his exegetical content from Remigius' work, he also, more significantly, appears to have found an interpretive strategy in the earlier commentary, one which he eagerly adopted and expanded. Throughout his commentary on the Psalter, Bruno treats the Psalms as poems, and, taking for granted his readers' familiarity with the Servian (and Remigian) tradition of

<sup>51</sup> *Expositio*, I:50.

<sup>52</sup> For both the named and silent borrowings, see Kraebel, "Grammatica," 75–8. For further examples of Bruno's use of Remigius' commentary, see Kraebel, "Place of Allegory." The traditional attribution of the Psalter commentary to Bruno, though challenged in modern scholarship, has been re-established by Kraebel, "Grammatica."

commentary on classical poets, Bruno uses the techniques of the liberal arts curriculum to expose the psalmist's prophetic intentions. This approach appears to have been influential, and we may identify at least two commentaries that are likely the work of Bruno's students at Rheims and which continue his hermeneutic project: one has been attributed to Roscellinus of Compiègne,<sup>53</sup> and another, considered here, seems likely to be the work of John of Rheims.<sup>54</sup>

All of the Servian elements identified earlier in Remigius' Psalter commentary are found throughout Bruno's exegesis, and they appear there with considerably more regularity than they had in the earlier Remois master's work. One example of such continuity is provided by Bruno's *ordo* glosses: for example, on Ps 40:3 (MT 41:3), "The Lord preserve him and give him life." Bruno begins his interpretation by noting that "the order is backwards," since, presumably, it is necessary to be alive before one's life can be preserved.<sup>55</sup> Such a gloss is straightforward. Yet, in other places, Bruno's articulation of this exegetical move reveals the training he expects from his reader. For example, in his commentary on Psalm 67 (MT 68), Bruno writes the following about the sequence of verses 5–10:

All of this, beginning where it says *God in his holy place* (v. 6), is the same (*aequipollens est*) as if it were said in this order: Therefore the people *will be troubled* (v. 5), since *the heavens* (v. 9) will drop *rain* (v. 10), by which *the earth* (v. 9) will be moved, i.e., it will be troubled with a good disturbance, *when you will go forth in the face of your people* (v. 8) and *you will pass through into the desert* (v. 8). And then *you will lead out the bound* (v. 7) and *those who dwell in tombs* (v. 7), and thus *you will make them dwell in a house* (v. 7).<sup>56</sup>

If unidiomatic word order is a feature students of Servius learn to expect when reading Latin poetry, here Bruno sees the psalmist presenting whole hemistichs of his verse out of their more proper prosaic order; the scale of the rearrangement needed from the exegete of the Psalter is greater, but the purpose of the gloss is unchanged. Further, Bruno's use of the technical phrase *aequipollens est* (is the same as) suggests that he expected a certain level of sophistication from his readers; that his work was intended for

<sup>53</sup> Roscellinus' commentary, and its indebtedness to Bruno's work, are discussed by Mews, "Bruno of Rheims and Roscelin of Compiègne"; and Kraebel, "Prophecy and Poetry," 422–4.

<sup>54</sup> For the attribution of this commentary, see Kraebel, "John of Rheims."

<sup>55</sup> PL 152:810a. For similar examples, see PL 152:734d, 1196d, and 1924c. See Note 28 for an example of an "ordo" gloss by Remigius.

<sup>56</sup> PL 152:954cd.

students who had already received their training in the study of the classical poets, and could apply it now to the study of the Psalter.<sup>57</sup>

The same sort of expectation is suggested by Bruno's deployment of literary devices. Bruno takes many of these citations silently from the commentary of Remigius,<sup>58</sup> but he also adds many more of his own, including terms not found in Remigius' text, for example, hendiadys or litotes, which Bruno would appear to have drawn from his study of the classical poets, possibly from Servius.<sup>59</sup> For example, throughout his commentary Bruno regularly cites instances of antonomasia when he believes that the psalmist intends to refer to Christ in an indirect or poetic fashion: on Ps 4:4, he writes, "*His holy one*, i.e., his Son, who is called 'his holy one' by antonomasia," or on Ps 119:4 (MT 120:4), "*The sharp arrows of the mighty one*, i.e., by antonomasia, Christ."<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Bruno regularly identifies some of the psalmist's phrases as poetic "emphasis."<sup>61</sup> For example, glossing the word "strength" in Ps 45:2 (MT 46:2), "God is our refuge and strength," Bruno writes, "*strength*, i.e., secure and unconquerable, but 'strength' is used for emphasis."<sup>62</sup> Bruno uses these literary devices to account for the psalmist's choice of words; elsewhere, he invokes other devices to explain the structure of psalms, as he does in his *ordo* glosses, for example, on Ps 85:9 (MT 86:9), "The verse which precedes this one, to wit, *There is none like to you among the gods*, etc., interposed as a parenthesis, ought to be read after this verse, *all the nations*, etc."<sup>63</sup> In all these cases, as in his use of hendiadys, litotes, antonomasia, and other such devices,<sup>64</sup> Bruno presumes his reader's familiarity with such terms: having studied the liberal arts, one is now equipped to interpret the poetry of the Psalms.

<sup>57</sup> Gibson, "Lanfranc's Commentary," 104–5 and 105 n. 1, notes that *aequipollens* was a particularly recherché term, coming to be used by late-eleventh-century commentators on the Bible and the texts of the liberal arts curriculum.

<sup>58</sup> For examples, see Kraebel, "Grammatica," 78.

<sup>59</sup> Cases of hendiadys and litotes are discussed in Kraebel, "Grammatica," 78–83. For examples of these devices in Servius' glosses, see the index of Mountford and Schultz, *Index*, 76a and 101a, respectively.

<sup>60</sup> *PL* 152:651b and 1315a. See further Kraebel, "Grammatica," 72 n. 24. "Antonomasia" is the substitution of descriptive phrase for a proper name. See *PEPP*, s.v. "Antonomasia."

<sup>61</sup> For a definition of "emphasis" among other literary devices, see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* II.xx.4. For examples of this device in Servius' commentary, see Mountford and Schultz, *Index*, 59a. For a technical definition of this classical trope, see Lausberg, *Literary Rhetoric*, 262–3.

<sup>62</sup> *PL* 152:835c.

<sup>63</sup> *PL* 152:1092. For a definition of "parenthesis" among other literary devices, see Isidore, *Etymologies*, I.xxxvii.18; for examples of this device in Servius' gloss, see Mountford and Schultz, *Index*, 127a.

<sup>64</sup> See Kraebel, "Grammatica," 69–83; idem, "Prophecy and Poetry," 452–6; idem, "Place of Allegory," *passim*.

Like Remigius, Bruno too appears to deploy such glosses noting the *ordo* of a psalm's verses or identifying the psalmist's use of a literary device to demonstrate the coherence of each psalm as a distinct poem. Again, like Remigius, Bruno accounts for the general content of each psalm in prefaces framed as glosses on the psalm's title or superscription, and Bruno draws on Remigius' commentary to identify the voice that the psalmist adopts in each psalm, for example, on Psalm 10, "This is the voice of the perfected Church," or, on Psalm 21 (MT 22), "This is the voice of the head [i.e., Christ] . . . in his Passion."<sup>65</sup> In his prefaces, however, Bruno expands upon Remigius' methods, introducing to his Psalter commentary another interpretive technique derived from the liberal arts curriculum, that is, Bruno uses in his biblical gloss the language of prologue forms proper to the liberal arts. Gilbert Dahan has identified Bruno as perhaps the earliest Latin exegete to use the language of a prologue form traditionally associated with philosophical texts (the so-called "type C" prologue) in his biblical commentary.<sup>66</sup> These prologue forms appear to have originated in late antique glosses, including Servius' prologue to the works of Virgil (an example of the "type B" form),<sup>67</sup> and they were used elaborately in the secular commentaries of Remigius.<sup>68</sup> The forms allowed an exegete to address a variety of general questions concerning the book he was about to gloss; for example, in "type C" prologues, one was expected to discuss, among other things, the *materia libri* (subject-matter) and the *ordo libri* (structure). In his general prologue, Bruno takes two other elements from the "type C" form, the *intentio auctoris* (authorial intention) and the question *cui parti philosophiae supponitur* (to which part of philosophy does it pertain), and applies them to the Psalms. He writes,

The intention of this work is shown to be various through the diversity of its individual titles [i.e., the superscriptions]. For he [i.e., David] sometimes intends to prophesy of the Incarnation, the Nativity, the Passion, the Resurrection, and the other acts of Christ, and at other times of the salvation of the good and the damnation of the wicked.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> PL 152:677a and 718d. Compare Remigius on Psalm 10: "Vox est uel totius Ecclesiae generalis uel uniuscuiusque animae" ("This is the voice of the entire Church, generally, or of each individual soul"; MS Rheims 132, f. 14ra); on Psalm 21: "Vox humanitatis est assumptae a Verbo Dei, praeuident[is] passionem" ("This is the voice of the humanity assumed by the Word of God, foreseeing his Passion"; f. 30va). For a further discussion of Bruno's understanding of the lyric voices of the Psalter, see Kraebel, "Prophecy and Poetry," 446, 452.

<sup>66</sup> Dahan, *Lire la bible*, 64–6 and 395. For further discussion of the "type C" form, see Minnis, *Authorship*, 18–25, 40–72.

<sup>67</sup> Minnis, *Authorship*, 15–16.

<sup>68</sup> Lutz, "One Formula of *Accessus*"; Minnis, *Authorship*, 16–17, 19, and 26–7.

<sup>69</sup> PL 152:638a.

Bruno will go on to acknowledge, expanding upon the Hieronymian understanding articulated in Remigius' commentary, that the Psalter is a collection of poems composed in a lyric meter, and his identification of the Psalter's *intentiones* as "various" would appear to reflect this understanding.<sup>70</sup> A similar sense of the variety of the psalms is suggested in Bruno's elaborate discussion of the *pars philosophie* (part of philosophy) to which the Psalter pertains:

Just as, among secular books, some pertain to physics, some to ethics, and some to logic, so too may we speak of divine books. Some pertain to physics, although in this case the natural phenomena serve as figures – as in Genesis, where the origin of the world is described, and in Ecclesiastes, which describes, mystically, the many natures of things. Others, in place of logic, pertain to ethics, e.g., Job, *Blessed are the undefiled* (i.e., Psalm 118 [MT 119]), and certain other psalms. Others, in place of logic and ethics, pertain to speculation or contemplation – those, that is, which contain the sublime mysteries of God, far removed from comprehension. These include the Song of Songs, in which God is shown speaking with wondrous mystery to the Church, as a Bridegroom to his Bride. This book [i.e., the Psalter], although in part pertaining to ethics, principally pertains to contemplation, since he [i.e., the psalmist] intends mysteriously to speak in particular about the Incarnation, Nativity, and the rest of the acts of Christ.<sup>71</sup>

This note is necessarily longer than his discussion of the psalmist's intention, since, before he can classify the Psalter, Bruno must adapt the categories used to discuss non-biblical literature and determine the three parts of philosophy to which a biblical book may pertain. He first repeats the traditional Hellenistic division of philosophy into physics, ethics, and logic, found also in Remigius' commentary on Martianus,<sup>72</sup> and he posits physics, ethics, and contemplation as the equivalent division for biblical books. Most psalms, Bruno says, pertain to contemplation, since David, as a prophet, contemplates and then writes about future events "far removed from the ordinary comprehension" of his contemporaries; others, however, prescribe behavioral standards and thus pertain to ethics. In this prefatory discussion, therefore, Bruno is clear that, though some things unite the Psalter as a whole, it is on the level of individual psalms that coherence and meaning should be sought.

<sup>70</sup> *PL* 152:638b. Compare Isidore, *Etymologies*, VI.ii.15–17, who suggests that the designation "lyric meter" indicates that different psalms have different meters. See further Kraebel, "Prophecy and Poetry," 448–50.

<sup>71</sup> *PL* 152:638b–639a.

<sup>72</sup> *In Martianum*, II:301. For further discussion, see Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 73; Lutz, "Remigius on the Classification."

Indeed, Bruno regularly begins his commentary on each psalm with a discussion of its particular authorial intention. After glossing the title of Psalm 18 (MT 19), for example, Bruno writes,

Foreseeing the preachers who will be sent by God for the instruction of the Church, and foreseeing too that, by their wondrous office, the Law will be expounded through the Holy Spirit for the instruction of their successors, making it immaculate and holy, the Prophet, in his joy, intends, through the activity of the Holy Spirit, to prophesy all of these future events as though they were happening in the present.<sup>73</sup>

Bruno thus prepares his reader for the opening words of Psalm 18 (MT 19). Although the psalm is written in the present tense (e.g., Ps 18:2 [MT 19:2]: “The heavens show forth [*enarrant*] the glory of God”), Bruno believes it to describe future events, knowledge of which is granted to the psalmist through the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>74</sup> All of this psalm will therefore be read as though it concerned Christian preachers and, in particular, those preachers *par excellence*, the Apostles. On Ps 18:2 (MT 19:2), then, Bruno writes, “*The heavens show forth the glory of God*, i.e., the Apostles, who, according to the loftiness of their virtues, ought to be called *heavens*. They will tell out (*extra narrabunt*), i.e., in the open, the glorious essence of the Son of God, as does John the Evangelist: *In the beginning was the Word*, etc.” (John 1:1).<sup>75</sup> Not only does Bruno immediately foreground the theme of preaching announced in his preface to this psalm, but he also shifts the psalmist’s words from the present tense (*enarrant*) to the future (*extra narrabunt*). Other examples may be found throughout Bruno’s commentary, as he consistently applies the general understandings articulated in his prefaces to his interpretation of each psalm’s language and structure.

#### 4 John of Rheims

The developments evident in Bruno’s exegesis are extended further in another commentary composed in late-eleventh-century Rheims, likely the work of John of Rheims (d. 1125), a student and master in the cathedral school and later sub-prior of the Norman abbey of St.-Evroult.<sup>76</sup> This commentary further illustrates the exegetical continuity of the cathedral school, since, in addition to drawing on Bruno’s work, John appears to have made use of glosses that he found in the tenth-century Remois

<sup>73</sup> PL 152:708bc.

<sup>74</sup> Compare Bruno’s remarks in his general prologue, concerning the tense of the psalms: PL 152:639c.

<sup>75</sup> PL 152:708c. <sup>76</sup> On this work, see Kraebel, “John of Rheims.”

Psalter, now MS Rheims 133. John's commentary includes two prefaces, the first of which is taken, with only minor changes, from this tenth-century glossed Psalter. In his second preface, John follows Bruno's use of the "type C" form, and he includes additional "type C" elements not found in Bruno's commentary. Like Bruno, John too identifies the Psalter as a collection of poems composed in lyric meter:

This book is entitled "Book of Hymns," since all of this work concerns the praise of God and is composed in a lyric song. For the praise of God composed in a lyric song is called a hymn. Nevertheless, on account of the translations, we are not able to discern this lyric song, for this book was first translated from Hebrew into Greek, and then, by St. Jerome, from Greek into Latin.<sup>77</sup>

This gloss of "hymn" as "the praise of God," found also in Bruno's commentary,<sup>78</sup> appears to influence John's definition of the psalmist's authorial intention, for, unlike Bruno, John is able to articulate a single, general intention for the Psalter as a whole. Transitioning from his second preface to gloss Psalm 1, John notes that what is said about this psalm is also true for the Psalter generally:

In this psalm is contained the principal intention of the whole work that follows. . . . Its intention is to stir us to strive to repair in ourselves and, by our example, in others the blessedness that was lost by our first parent.<sup>79</sup>

This discussion may appear to distance John from Bruno's understanding of the psalms as a collection of discrete poems, but such an understanding is clear when John notes the part of philosophy to which the Psalter pertains:

One is accustomed to ask to which part of philosophy a work pertains, to which we respond: In so far as it [i.e., the Psalter] treats behavior, it pertains to ethics. In so far as it treats the nature of the divinity, it can pertain to physics.<sup>80</sup>

As in Bruno's commentary, here too John appears to be influenced by the three traditional Hellenistic divisions of philosophy, and he agrees with Bruno that biblical books can be discussed, generally, in terms of the same categories as secular literature. While Bruno divides the Psalter between ethics and contemplation, however, John identifies ethics and physics as its

<sup>77</sup> Edited in Kraebel, "John of Rheims," 282. In what follows, quotations from John's commentary not edited in that essay are drawn from Salisbury, Cathedral Library, MS 160.

<sup>78</sup> *PL* 152:637b. See also the definition in Remigius' preface, and its possible sources, discussed earlier in this chapter.

<sup>79</sup> Kraebel, "John of Rheims," 284.      <sup>80</sup> Kraebel, "John of Rheims," 283.

primary philosophical affiliations. Regardless, the same point is made: different psalms can pertain to different parts of philosophy. Further diversity is introduced in a variant found in two manuscripts of the commentary from John's abbey of St.-Evroult; this variant might, therefore, represent later authorial revision. In these manuscripts, now Alençon, Bibliothèque municipale 13 and 70, the note on the part of philosophy continues:

In so far as it [i.e., the Psalter] presents reasoned arguments, it pertains to logic, which is called contemplation in divine books, for, although there are reasoned arguments in divine books, none the less these are not meant to teach argumentation, but rather the sight (*speculationem*) of the truth itself, which sight we have through contemplation.<sup>81</sup>

Although the gloss is perhaps more awkward in these manuscripts than in Bruno's commentary, it nevertheless presents the same comparison of the secular field of logic to the divine field of contemplation, and it reveals the possibility of yet greater variety among the many constituent parts of the Psalter.

Additionally, John includes in his second preface the "type C" prologue elements *materia* (subject-matter) and *modus* (the text's stylistic or rhetorical mode).<sup>82</sup> As in the case of intention and philosophical classification, here too John attempts to balance the overall coherence of the Psalter and the diversity of its individual psalms.

The Prophet's subject-matter (*materia*) is faith, hope, and the rest of the virtues, for it is about these that he writes. And we ought to be aware of this in advance, lest it [i.e., the Psalter] create in us a certain sense of boredom (*fastidium*), since he tells us about the same material in a variety of ways (*diuersis modis*) and for a variety of reasons. For at different times he presents us with many different dishes of the same matter, just as boiled and roasted meats and other such things are presented to us at supper.<sup>83</sup>

While the identification of the Psalter's subject-matter as different virtues may already appear to bespeak a certain variegation, John sees the text's *materia* as relatively uniform compared to the different ways (*modi*) in which the psalmist expresses that material. The notion that an author would introduce such diversity to his work in order to avoid boredom (*fastidium*) on the part of his readers is commonly found in medieval glosses on classical poets: in the century following the death of John of Rheims, for example, an anonymous commentator on the works of Virgil,

<sup>81</sup> Kraebel, "John of Rheims," 283 (note on line 46).

<sup>82</sup> See Minnis, *Authorship*, 21–2.

<sup>83</sup> Kraebel, "John of Rheims," 283.



expanding Servius' commentary, notes that "works are divided into sections for two reasons: to avoid boredom and so that the earlier material may be led back to one's memory."<sup>84</sup> John's comparison of the Psalter's variety of modes to the many different dishes presented at a meal, suggests that, rather than monotony or tediousness, one will find in Davidic poetry delight and the stimulation of the senses.

Within his commentary proper, John, like Bruno, regularly applies "type C" language to begin his glosses of individual psalms. He thus notes, in his preface to Psalm 2, that "the Prophet's intention in this psalm is . . . to encourage us to recover our lost beatitude,"<sup>85</sup> and he begins his gloss on Psalm 3 similarly: "His intention is to exhort us, though suffering tribulation, to hope for the salvation that is to come not from ourselves, but from the Lord."<sup>86</sup> Though in his preface John states that the Psalter has a single subject-matter, he nevertheless also identifies the *materia* of individual psalms, for example, on Psalm 3: "This psalm's title speaks to its subject-matter."<sup>87</sup> And, again, as in Remigius' and Bruno's commentaries, here too the general statements of John's prefaces are closely tied to the lyric voice he sees speaking in individual psalms, for example, again, on Psalm 3: "In this psalm the Prophet introduces Christ speaking."<sup>88</sup> John thus continues the Remois tradition of applying techniques from the liberal arts curricula to the interpretation of the Psalter.

The writings of Bruno and John were part of a trend in the late eleventh century, as an ever larger group of cathedral schoolmen interpreted biblical books with the aid of hermeneutic strategies previously found in texts of the liberal arts curricula: thus, for example, Lanfranc of Bec, at roughly the same time as Bruno, appears to have brought his rhetorical training to bear on his reading of the Pauline Epistles.<sup>89</sup> While Bruno and John were almost certainly inspired by such contemporary trends, and while they

<sup>84</sup> Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, MS lat. 2° 34, f. 47rb: "Duabus de causis fiunt distinctiones in libris: propter fastidium uitandum et ut praeterita ad memoriam reducantur." On this commentary, see Kraebel, "Expansion of Servius."

<sup>85</sup> MS Sarum 160, f. 3v: "Intentio Prophetarum est in hoc psalmo . . . nos ad amissam beatitudinem reparandam exhortari."

<sup>86</sup> MS Sarum 160, f. 5r: "Intentio sua est nos exhortari quatinus in tribulatione positi, speremus salutem non a nobis sed a Domino uenturam."

<sup>87</sup> MS Sarum 160, f. 4v: "Titulus iste tangit materiam huius psalmi."

<sup>88</sup> MS Sarum 160, f. 5r: "In hoc psalmo introducit Propheta Christum loquentum."

<sup>89</sup> See especially Gibson, "Lanfranc's Commentary"; idem, "Artes in the Eleventh Century"; idem, *Lanfranc of Bec*, 39–62. Gibson's work has been advanced by Collins, *Teacher in Faith*. More recently, however, Hoffmann, *Die Würzburger Paulinenkommentare*, has presented evidence that would challenge the attribution of this gloss to Lanfranc, and Gibson and Collins' work must be reevaluated in light of his findings.

certainly make considerably more extensive use of such interpretive techniques than had their predecessors, the foregoing has nevertheless demonstrated that these eleventh-century Remois writers worked within a local tradition where the study of the Psalter had, since c. 883, benefited from the study of the Latin poets. Having learned how to read the poetry of Virgil with the aid of Servius, the students of Remigius, Bruno, and John were prepared to read the poetry of David.

## 5 From the school of Rheims to the school of Laon

Throughout the commentaries of Remigius, Bruno, and John – and especially in the eleventh-century works – we have found an emphasis on recovering what David, the Prophet, intended to convey in his psalms. According to John, David “did not prophesy in public like other prophets, but he first rejoiced in private concerning the future Incarnation of the Lord, and afterwards he had it [i.e., the Incarnation] recited to others. . . . After he foresaw with divine inspiration the Lord’s Incarnation and the restoration of the human race, and after he set it down in writing, the Prophet sang his prophecy with a psalter.”<sup>90</sup> David would thus appear to be able to write a contemplative text, the divine equivalent of secular logic, because he had, according to Bruno, privileged knowledge of “the sublime mysteries of God, far removed from ordinary comprehension.”<sup>91</sup> A similar notion of David set apart from his fellow Jews, thanks to his special prophetic knowledge, may be found too in Remigius’ commentary: “In this psalm (Psalm 13; MT 14) David writes in the voice of holy men who longingly look forward to the advent of Christ, which David knew was inevitably to come.”<sup>92</sup>

It was the intentions of David as an historical author that the Remois commentators set out to recover. Since, according to Jerome, David’s psalms are poems, the commentators were able to read them according to the same conventions as they would read Latin poetry, following the example of Servius’ readings of the works of Virgil. And, indeed, the tenth-century interpolations in Servius’ commentary suggest that the Remois masters were actively engaged in the reading of both secular and biblical poetry – suggested also by the dual praise of Bruno, in his mortuary rolls, as a grammarian, that is, a teacher of classical poetry, and “a learned

<sup>90</sup> Kraebel, “John of Rheims,” 282. <sup>91</sup> *PL* 152:639a.

<sup>92</sup> MS Rheims 132, f. 12ra: “In eo quippe introducuntur sancti nimio desiderio expetentes aduentum Christi, quem beatus Dauid immutabiliter quidem uenturum nouerat.”

psalmist" (*doctus psalmista*).<sup>93</sup> The prophetic knowledge expressed in David's psalms may set the biblical poems apart from other poetry that Remois students would encounter, but the Psalms were poems none the less. The same ways that Servius had uncovered meaning in the works of Virgil could therefore be applied to the Psalter, but the content revealed by those methods would be incomparably richer.

Bruno departed Rheims in 1080 or 1081, and John seems already to have left two or three years earlier. Both left the cathedral school to enter religious orders: John at the Norman Benedictine house of St.-Evroult, and Bruno, eventually, to found the Grande Chartreuse outside Grenoble. It is likely that both left after uncomfortable years spent opposing the rule of the simoniac Archbishop Manasses I (r. 1070–80).<sup>94</sup> With their departure, the school of Rheims appears to have foundered, and other cathedral schools subsequently rose to prominence as centers for the study of the Bible. Conspicuous among these was the school of Laon under Anselm (d. 1117) and Gilbertus Universalis (d. 1134), both of whom may have been among Bruno's students at Rheims.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, after the departure of Bruno and John, the next Remois exegete about whom we know anything is Alberic of Rheims, who received his training at the school of Laon.<sup>96</sup> If the Remois masters' focus on the psalmist's intentions and poetic constructions did not find further exponents within the school of Rheims, therefore, their methods did find a ready audience in other schools. In the century following the death of Bruno and John, Remois Psalter commentaries appear to have exerted considerable influence on the way the Psalms were read in places like Laon and Paris. It would appear that Bruno and his students set an example that was followed, whether directly or through intermediating commentaries, by what would prove to be the most widely copied Latin glosses on the Psalter: the *Glossa Ordinaria* (c. 1140) and the commentary of Peter Lombard (d. 1160).<sup>97</sup> A tradition of glossing the Psalter as a collection of poems, developed over centuries in the school of Rheims, thus spread beyond the city's walls.

<sup>93</sup> Dufour, *Recueil*, nos. 107 and 156, I:321, 340. For further bibliography on Bruno's mortuary roll, see Kraebel, "Grammatica," 67, n. 10.

<sup>94</sup> Williams, "Archbishop Manasses"; Mews, "Evolution of Scholastic Culture."

<sup>95</sup> The possibility that Anselm was Bruno's student is suggested by Williams, "Cathedral School of Rheims," 669 n. 61; and Merlette, "Écoles et bibliothèques," 43. For a full discussion of Anselm's education and the school of Laon, see Giraud, *Per Verba Magistri*, 35–51; idem, "La *sacra pagina* et les écoles"; idem, "L'école de Laon." On the possibility that Gilbertus was Bruno's student, see Smalley, "Gilbertus Universalis," 51–60.

<sup>96</sup> Alberic may also have been the compiler of the *Glossa Ordinaria* on Acts. See Smalley, "Glossa Ordinaria," 366.

<sup>97</sup> See Kraebel, "Prophecy and Poetry," 428–36, 456–9.

## *On the figurative (majāz) in Muslim interpretation and legal hermeneutics*

Wolfhart P. Heinrichs<sup>1</sup>

The use of classical learning, notwithstanding its pagan origins, to illuminate sacred scripture is nearly as old as Christianity itself and makes its imprint well into the modern period (as we shall see in [Chapters 13](#) through [15](#)). The [preceding chapter](#) addressed key medieval manifestations of the endeavor within Christian interpretation to bring out the Bible's usage of the figures and tropes catalogued in the classical traditions of rhetoric and grammar (which included poetics). Within Muslim interpretive tradition an analogous project of cataloguing the rhetorical features of the Qur'an would arise, in part to establish the Qur'an's "inimitability" (*i'jāz*) by demonstrating its supreme "eloquence" (*balāgha*). This project reached a mature point by the tenth century, as represented, for example, in *I'jāz al-qur'ān* of Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), which aimed to show the superiority of the Qur'an over all Arabic poetry.<sup>2</sup> The Qur'an's rhetorical eloquence was often described in such works by cataloguing the various types of *majāz* that it employed, that is, instances in which its language diverged from *ḥaqīqa* – a term used to connote literal, proper language, as discussed in [Chapter 8](#). Within this terminological opposition, *majāz* is usually taken to connote *figurative language*, and it was, indeed, the overarching category under which the figures and tropes were classified in Muslim learning from the tenth century onward.

Yet the comparison with the Christian interest in the Bible's figures and tropes only partially illuminates Muslim discussions of *majāz* in connection with the Qur'an. As the current chapter shows, these points of contact

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on the lecture "Literal and figurative meaning (*ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*) in Muslim legal hermeneutics (*uṣūl al-fiqh*)," delivered by Wolfhart Heinrichs at the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem on Tuesday, January 4, 2011. Sadly, Professor Heinrichs subsequently became ill and passed away on January 23, 2014. The final version of this chapter was compiled by the editors of this volume, who acknowledge the gracious assistance of Robert Gleave in locating the primary sources cited in the footnotes.

<sup>2</sup> See [Chapter 3](#), [Note 14](#).

between these two interpretive trajectories were hardly inevitable, and must not obscure the distinctive turns within Muslim interpretation that reflect a different sort of encounter with sacred scripture. To begin with, the earlier history of the term *majāz* and its eventual pairing with the term *ḥaqīqa* betray a different set of hermeneutic conceptions that do not precisely match the Christian – and classical – ones. Even once those terms attain the sense that can usefully be compared with familiar classical categories, the overlap remains inexact, and Muslim theorists remain true to concerns that uniquely characterize Qurʾan exegesis. This especially holds within Muslim legal hermeneutics (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), which seems to have been particularly resistant to newly developed poetic conceptions of *majāz*. But the nuanced exegetical insights made within this field influenced how Qurʾan interpreters in general conceptualized the problem of *majāz*.

Given that the Qurʾan is said to be written in “clear Arabic,” as discussed in [Chapters 3](#) and [7](#), *ḥaqīqa* was long privileged in Muslim interpretive theory. This valuation manifests itself in an extreme way in the opinion attested within the tradition of Muslim legal hermeneutics that denied the very existence of *majāz* – in all speech according to some authors, or in the Qurʾan alone according to others (as discussed in this chapter). In the Christian (and even Jewish) tradition – well into the modern period – it would be inconceivable to deny that the Bible is suffused with allegory, metaphor, and other types of figurative language that convey multiple layers of meaning.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the very essence of Christian interpretation of the Old Testament is predicated on the assumption that its literal understanding is inadequate, as made amply clear in earlier chapters of this volume. Within Muslim tradition, it is true, only very few theorists actually denied the existence of *majāz*, whether in general or in the Qurʾan. Yet the arguments that motivated the “deniers” specifically – even though refuted – reflect anxieties about the usage of *majāz* that manifest themselves in the broader concerns taken up by Muslim interpreters who sought to account for its usage in the Qurʾan.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

In the fourth/tenth century one might say that the various fields of intellectual pursuit within Islam come of age. Traditions that had been growing steadily during the preceding two centuries begin to become self-reflective, clarifying

<sup>3</sup> Even a post-Reformation literalist such as Robert Lowth acknowledges “the Spiritual, Mystical, Allegorical, and Anagogical” senses of the Bible. See [Chapter 14](#), at [Note 14](#).

their underlying structures and fundamental principles. These include *uṣūl al-fiqh* (jurisprudence), *naḥw* (grammar), *tafsīr* (Qur'an exegesis), and *balāgha* (rhetoric). Additionally, with the completion of the movement to translate ancient Greek works, Islamic philosophy takes off in earnest. When the various "sciences" (*ʿulūm*) become conscious of themselves, their technical terms, their topics, and their sets of problems (*masā'il*) stabilized and were not subject to radical revision until the advent of modern times.

A striking feature of this phase of maturation is the compartmentalization of Muslim learning within its various disciplines, producing different cultures of scholarship, for example, that of the *faqīh* (jurisprudent and religious scholar), *adīb* (man of letters and language scholar), *hakīm* (philosopher-scientist), and *faqīr* (ascetic, mystic). The self-awareness of experts in these various fields led them to emphasize the independence of each intellectual pursuit. By retrojection, they at times created the impression that the compartmentalization they knew had already existed for centuries, whereas in fact during the formative stages of the Muslim sciences the exchange of ideas between disciplines was common.

The term *majāz* and its associated interpretive problems provide a case in point. In order to properly assess the Muslim hermeneutical conceptions regarding *majāz* in the Qur'an it is crucial not only to examine the mature discussions within the various Muslim disciplines, but also to explore their origins in the formative period – when greater cross-fertilization can be discerned. As demonstrated in this study, those early discussions, while at times obscured and difficult to reconstruct (mostly from later citations), illuminate the mature conceptions of *majāz* that would ultimately take root. Given this orientation, our focus will be the treatment of *majāz* within the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, which tended to retain archaic elements well into its mature phase.

Muslim *uṣūl al-fiqh* works, while nominally about legal methodology, were actually devoted largely to hermeneutics – the correct way to interpret the foundational texts of Islam.<sup>4</sup> The goal of linguistic discussions in *uṣūl al-fiqh* works is to establish the correct nature of the language system of the Arabs in order to be able to correctly ascertain the will of God embodied in the Qur'an, which describes itself as being in clear Arabic. A central concern within these works involved the

<sup>4</sup> While the legal relevance of such discussions was at times apparent, it was more fully developed in books on theoretical legal maxims (*qawā'id uṣūliyya*), for example, *Al-qawā'id wa'l-fawā'id al-uṣūliyya* by the Ḥanbalī Ibn al-Laḥḥām (d. 803/1401), which contain collections of hermeneutical rules and examples of their application.

exegetical conceptualization and treatment of *majāz*, which presented a special challenge, since it introduces ambiguity into the Qur'an.

### I Questions of terminology

The sections on *majāz* in the works of *uṣūl al-fiqh* form their own world, with its set of problems, propositions, and refutations. Before we enter this world, we should raise the question of how to translate the term *majāz*. This is not merely a technical exercise; it represents the endeavor to bridge the gap between the Arabic and western terminological systems. The most common Arabic definition of *majāz* is "a word (or utterance) used for something other than that for which it was originally instituted," exemplified by the ubiquitous example of the word "lion" used to connote *a courageous man*. The opposite is "a word (or utterance) used for that for which it was originally instituted," which is called *ḥaqīqa*, that is, the true, proper, "literal" meaning.<sup>5</sup> While these definitions are simplifications, they seem close to our understanding of literal and non-literal. The problem in English is identifying a non-negative equivalent of "non-literal." The term "figurative" presents a drawback, since it is an adjective with no clearly applicable nominal form. "Figure of speech," which comes to mind, is derived from a classical term, which did *not* denote an utterance with a meaning divergent from the literal; while the classical "figure of thought," which does fit the bill, is no longer in common use.<sup>6</sup> Another possible translation of *majāz* is "trope," a quasi-synonym of "figure of thought," having the advantage of being just one word.<sup>7</sup>

How well do the adjective "figurative" and the noun "trope" actually fit the Arabic conception of *majāz*? Lists in *uṣūl al-fiqh* works that classify the sub-categories of *majāz* (between three and thirty-eight) include classical techniques such as metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche, which are indeed tropes. But the compass of the term *majāz* seems broader, and includes cases that do not seem to fall under the purview of the "trope" or

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 8.

<sup>6</sup> On the definitions of "figure of speech" and "figure of thought" in the classical tradition, see Dominik and Hall, *Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, 186–9.

<sup>7</sup> The awkward thing here is the adjective form of "trope," since "tropical" has an entirely different connotation. For this reason, perhaps, the term "tropological" is sometimes used. One translation that should be avoided is "metaphor" (and "metaphorical") to render *majāz*. That term must be reserved for *isti'āra*, a subcategory of *majāz* in the Arabic tradition, characterized by "similarity" as the basis of the *majāz*-creating word transfer. It is thus a good match for "metaphor," not only because of the shared definition, but also in the way that "metaphor" is classified as a subcategory of "trope." See Cohen, "Poet's Biblical Exegesis," 545–6.

the “figurative.”<sup>8</sup> Three different examples of such applications of the term *majāz* might easily be adduced: (1) It is applied not only to nouns and verbs, but even to particles, which are said to have a *ḥaqīqa* meaning (or “function,” since some scholars denied that particles had independent meanings), and when used in a different way constitute *majāz*.<sup>9</sup> (2) It is applied not only to words, but also to predication. There may be a sentence in which every word is used in its literal sense, yet its predication is said to be by way of *majāz*, for example, “The days of separation have whitened my hair.”<sup>10</sup> This sentence refers to real days, real separation, real hair, and real whiteness. The only thing imaginary here is their combination in a subject–predicate relationship that makes the days the immediate agent of the whitening. (3) The *majāz* lists often include *ziyāda* and *nuqsān* (literally, “excess” and “deficiency,” respectively), and from the examples given we can see that they match the classical terms “pleonasm” and “ellipsis.”<sup>11</sup>

None of these three cases would be considered tropes in the classical tradition. Neither the “figurative” particle nor “figurative” predication are discussed at all, for example, in Lausberg’s *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric*. As for pleonasm and ellipsis, these terms are attested in the classical tradition, but are not related to the tropes.

It is indeed difficult to find a common denominator among all the sub-categories of *majāz* – a problem that did not go unnoticed within the Arabic tradition. Outside the domains of law (*fiqh*) and Qur’an exegesis (*tafsīr*), we find that in Arabic rhetoric and poetics, since the breakthrough of the great theorist ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078 or 474/1081), the notion of *majāz* was freed from the categories of pleonasm and ellipsis, with which it had been saddled until then.<sup>12</sup> Why the same did not happen in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* tradition is hard to tell, especially since it seems to have been modestly influenced by the rhetorical discourse (*balāgha*). One reason might be that the examples of pleonasm and ellipsis were stable and ubiquitous in the traditional Arabic literature about *majāz*.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, with some good will, it is possible to show that both phenomena can be subsumed under *majāz*, as the following two cases illustrate.

<sup>8</sup> See Weiss, *Search*, 135–6.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Gully, *Grammar and Semantics*, 115–92; see also Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), *Mankhūl*, 141–63.

<sup>10</sup> This is sometimes called “*al-majāz al-murakkab*” (“composite” *majāz*). See Modarressi, “Recent Analyses,” 789.

<sup>11</sup> Examples of these cases will be discussed in this chapter.

<sup>12</sup> See Heinrichs, “Hermeneutics,” 277–81. <sup>13</sup> See [Note 51](#).



The standard example cited for pleonasm is *laysa ka-mithlihī shay'un* (Q. 42:11), said of God. It literally means: “like the likes of Him there is nothing.” This implies that there is something like Him, which, of course, is a blasphemous statement. Out of theological necessity, then, it was argued that the particle *ka-*, “like,” is superfluous – *ziyāda* or pleonasm.<sup>14</sup> Differently put, the meaning of *ka* – has changed from its literal meaning *like* to another meaning (dare one say “figurative”?), which is zero. The Ḥanbalī scholar Abū Ya'lā (d. 458/1065) expressly says that it has to be considered *majāz*, because in the given context it is *ghayr mufīd*, that is, “meaningless.”<sup>15</sup>

For ellipsis, the standard example is *is'al-l-qaryata* (Q. 12:82), literally “ask the town,”<sup>16</sup> which clearly means “ask *the people* of the town.” What happened in this qur'anic verse is the following. The first part of the genitive construction, the *muḍāf* (noun in the construct state) “people” was elided. As a result, the second part, the *muḍāf ilayhi* (the governing noun of the genitive construction) “town” slid into its syntactic slot and “acquired” the meaning of the elided term. As a matter of fact, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016), Imāmī-Shī'i poet and theologian, in his work on the *majāzat* (“*majāz* expressions”) of the Qur'an, declares the word *qaryā* (“town”) to be just that, a metonymy from “town” to “townspeople.”<sup>17</sup> Metonymy is indeed one of the tropes; and so, the border between ellipsis and figurative expression is thus rather fluid, as other examples also demonstrate.

In sum we might say regarding the match between Arabic *majāz* and English “figurative”/“trope” that although *majāz* has a larger compass, the idea of the “non-literal” is paramount in it, and thus the use of the terms “figurative” and “trope” can be justified.

## 2 Early history of *majāz* (and *ḥaqīqa*)

While the inclusion of pleonasm and ellipsis as subcategories of *majāz* was worrisome – and al-Jurjānī did well to exclude them – they represent just the sort of “historical baggage” that helps us trace its origins. The term *majāz* is old as far as technical terms go, and is therefore etymologically not quite transparent. Later scholars would explain it as either a verbal noun or

<sup>14</sup> See Winkel, *Mysteries of Purity*, 2–3.

<sup>15</sup> Abū Ya'lā, *Udda* I:172. For this he is promptly taken to task by his modern editor (Aḥmad b. 'Alī Sīr al-Mubārakī), who remarks (n.1): “Meaningless here is not appropriate for the word of God.”

<sup>16</sup> See Heinrichs, “Hermeneutics,” 258–9, 263–5. See also Chapter 8, at Note 26.

<sup>17</sup> Raḍī, *Talkhīs al-bayān*, 117–18.

a noun of place of the verb *jāza* “to pass through,” “to go beyond.”<sup>18</sup> The meaning would then be either “the going beyond” or “the place of going beyond,” that is, “going beyond the literal meaning” or “the place where one goes beyond the literal meaning,” which suits the usages we have just seen rather well. But when we go back to when the term *majāz* makes its first appearances, the situation becomes fuzzier. More than one group of scholars was involved in the early history of the term, seemingly mostly in eighth- and ninth-century Basra. The city of Basra in southern Iraq was home of the so-called Basran school of grammarians; it housed a large contingent of mystical ascetics and early Sufis; and it was the place of origin for the Basran and later the Baghdadian theologians of the Mu‘tazila. There evidently was a liberal give-and-take between the groups in those early days, which became less common with the later solidification of the various disciplines. The term *majāz* seems to have been one of these exchanged commodities, although it is sometimes difficult to trace its exact paths.<sup>19</sup>

A helpful starting point is the philologist Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 209/824–5), whose work *Majāz al-qur’ān* (“The *majāz* expressions of the Qur’an”) enumerates thirty-nine subcategories of *majāz*.<sup>20</sup> However, in his terminology *majāz* (1) has no counterpart *ḥaqīqa* and (2) belongs to an entirely different category, since it means something like “explanatory rewriting” of difficult locutions in normal language. In other words, he uses the term *majāz* to connote what an unusual expression really means when reworded in plain, straightforward language. The cases to which this procedure is applied cover any sort of wording (and even script) that involves a distortion of the regular “mirror” character of language. For example, he comments, “And from among the *majāz* [category] of a plural predicate in the singular form [is the verse in which] God says: ‘And the angels, after that, will be a support’ (Q. 66:4) in the place of ‘supports.’”<sup>21</sup> In Abū ‘Ubayda’s scheme of things, loosely speaking, *majāz* entails irregular, unnatural, and non-literal ways of expression; but what is usually classified as figurative language does not play a great role.

At the same time, Mu‘tazilite theologians use the term *majāz* in a radically different way: (1) It has an opposite counterpart term *ḥaqīqa*, with the sense of “true,” “literal,” “proper,” and (2) it is used to solve not linguistic but theological quandaries, as when the comparative relationship

<sup>18</sup> Almagor, “Early Meaning,” 320–1.

<sup>19</sup> What follows is a summary of my earlier research in Heinrichs, “Genesis.”

<sup>20</sup> These are listed in Wansbrough, “*Majāz al-qur’ān*.” <sup>21</sup> Abū ‘Ubayda, *Majāz al-qur’ān* I:9.

between God and humans is at stake. Thus, for example, the Mu‘tazilite Thumāma b. Ashras (d. 213/859) says that human acts are attributed to man only “by way of *majāz*,” implying that the true (*ḥaqīqa*) actions can be attributed only to God. With regard to qualities and attributes, another theologian, al-Nāshi’ al-Akbar (d. 293/906), says: Only God is really and literally (*fī’l-ḥaqīqa*) knowing, capable, acting, and just; man is all this only in a figurative sense (*fī’l-majāz*). But Bishr al-Marīṣī (d. 293/906) turns this upside down: he teaches that terms such as these, when applied to God, are borrowed (*musta‘ār*; or perhaps “metaphorical”), that is, transposed from the human condition. Thus, according to al-Nāshi’, God is spoken of in the *ḥaqīqa* mode, and man in the *majāz* mode, while for Bishr the terms apply to man in the *ḥaqīqa* mode, and to God in the *majāz* mode.<sup>22</sup>

Two facts emerge from these fragments: (1) In the discussions of the theologians it is not always clear whether the pair of terms *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* are used ontologically or linguistically. Are they talking about “true reality” versus “derivative reality” or about “literal meaning” versus derived, “figurative meaning”? (2) The goal of separating attributes into the divine and human realms can be accomplished in two ways: either by assigning *ḥaqīqa* to God and *majāz* to human or vice versa. Both strategies make sense and both are used, seemingly without concern for the different conceptions they might imply theoretically.

Turning to the mystics, it is clear from later pronouncements that they considered the *ḥaqīqa-majāz* pair ontological categories, as shown by the famous adage: *al-majāzu qanṭaratu’l-ḥaqīqa*, which in an interpretive translation means: “This mundane, derived (*majāz*) reality is the bridge to the divine, absolute reality (*ḥaqīqa*).”<sup>23</sup> It is unclear how far back this idea goes in mystical circles, but it likely originated with the early Basran Sufis, who were exposed to the theological and linguistic discussions of these terms.<sup>24</sup>

The critical turning point in this matter can be seen in Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/885), whose *Ta’wīl mushkil al-qur’ān* (“Explanation of the Difficult [verses] in the Qur’an”) takes the various “distortions” of qur’anic language Abū ‘Ubayda had catalogued and, inspired by the theological use, switched the term *majāz* to this linguistic category, away from Abū ‘Ubayda’s idea of “explanatory rewriting.” He was well equipped to do so, being both a philologist and a theologian (although not a Mu‘tazilite).<sup>25</sup> From Ibn

<sup>22</sup> For detailed references, see Heinrichs, “Genesis,” 136–7; idem, “Hermeneutics,” 256.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Zabīdī, *Taj al-‘arūs* VIII:40. <sup>24</sup> See Heinrichs, “Hermeneutics,” 257.

<sup>25</sup> See Heinrichs, “Genesis,” 130–2.

Qutayba onward the history of the term *majāz* is mainly one of restricting its semantic compass from the earlier conception of all sorts of non-alignments between language and reality to the stricter one that comes closer to the concept of the “trope,” that is, non-literal meaning or function. We find this in the legal literature, although, as already noted, there is still some fluctuation regarding what phenomena to include or exclude within this category.

The strict definition of *majāz* as “trope” is achieved outside the legal tradition by the great literary theorist and grammarian ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, who finally excluded ellipsis (*nuqṣān*) and pleonasm (*ziyāda*) from its purview.<sup>26</sup> That this had little repercussion in the legal literature can be attributed to the tendency toward compartmentalization that pervaded the Islamic sciences. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) mentions al-Jurjānī’s conception of the *majāz* of predication in his *uṣūl al-fiqh* work, but adds that the *uṣūlīs* (i.e., those who write works of *uṣūl al-fiqh*), in general, do not pay any attention to it.<sup>27</sup> Al-Rāzī himself was an un-compartmentalized scholar, as it were, and one of his books was based precisely on the two rhetorical works of al-Jurjānī. Given this fact, it is not surprising that al-Rāzī mentions him in his *uṣūl* work; what is surprising is how little he uses his insight regarding *majāz*.

The foregoing discussion provides the starting-point and some of the parameters for the legal discussion of the challenges posed by *majāz* in the interpretation of the Qur’an. In what follows I will highlight some of the *masā’il* (“questions”; matters of discussion), that the *uṣūlīs* raise in this context.

### 3 Basic concepts: *wad’*, *isti’māl*, *qarīna*, and *‘alāqa*

Within the literature of legal hermeneutics, the term *majāz* is usually defined vis-à-vis its opposite, *ḥaqīqa*, that is, the use of a word according to its original coinage. *Majāz* is a word, as the Ḥanbalī jurist Abū Ya‘lā says, “with which you go beyond that for which it has been coined.”<sup>28</sup> The presupposition is that there was a primordial assignment of sounds to meanings, called the *wad’*, the “instituting,” or the “coining,” of the words, or the language (*luḡha*).<sup>29</sup> There was a heated discussion about whether the “instituting” of the language should be attributed to Divine

<sup>26</sup> See Note 12. <sup>27</sup> Rāzī, *Maḥṣūl* I:322.

<sup>28</sup> Abū Ya‘lā, *‘Udda* I:172 (*kull lafẓ tajūzu bihi ‘an mawḍū‘ihi*).

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 8.

instruction (*tawqīf*) or human convention (*iṣṭilāḥ*).<sup>30</sup> This is at times cited in *uṣūl al-fiqh* works, but in the *ḥaqīqa-majāz* discussions, authors are usually content assuming that the *waḍʿ* had at one point taken place without going into the mechanism involved. Usually the “instituting” is ascribed to “the Arabs,” that is, the native speakers of the *fuṣḥa* (“pure” Arabic). Here and there one finds some passing remarks about how this worked. The Shāfiʿī jurist Ibn Barhān (d. 518/1124), for example, says: “They (the Arabs) instituted *asad* as a name for a certain substance (*ʿayn*) [namely the lion], a name that would take the place of a gesture (*ishāra*).”<sup>31</sup> Sometimes, as in al-Ghazālī’s *Mustaṣfā*, the creation of *majāz* usages is likewise attributed to the Arabs.<sup>32</sup> At first glance, this may sound surprising, as one would think that such divergences from normal, literal language are the product of a creative individual poetic mind – certainly the case with metaphor, which was a prime category of *majāz* for al-Ghazālī. We have then to remind ourselves that we are here in a hermeneutical, not a rhetorical-poetical environment. The final goal of discussing *majāz* in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* works is to understand the language code of the Arabs in order to correctly interpret the foundational texts of the Law: the Qurʾān and the Prophetic Traditions.

Several authors make the point that, before being used, a word is neither literal nor figurative. In theory, there is a chronological gap between the coining and the use (*istiʿmāl*) of a word. That is to say, whereas the use of a word presupposes its coining (*waḍʿ*), the coinage of a word does not necessitate its use. As the Ḥanbalī author al-Ṭūfī (d. 716/1316) remarks: “the coining can be disentangled (*infikāk*) from the use [of a word],” though he adds: “that is no doubt possible, but exceedingly unlikely (*fī ghāyat al-buʿd*).”<sup>33</sup> He plays out such a scenario:

It is thinkable that one of the institutors of the language might have said: “Herewith I create (*anshaʿtu*) the word *asad* and I specify it for this particular predator [i.e., the lion], in order that it signify him when applied without further ado (*idhā uṭliqat*). So, when you, O people, talk to each other, then let the speaker among you apply this word vis-à-vis this predator and let the listener understand that from its application.” So on the part of the institutor [of language] this would be a coinage devoid of any

<sup>30</sup> See Weiss, “Medieval Muslim Discussions”; Shah, “Philological Endeavours”; idem, “Classical Islamic Discourse.”

<sup>31</sup> Ibn Barhān, *Wuṣūl* I:100 (*fa-inna al-ʿarab waḍaʿat al-asad isman li-ʿayn yanubu manāb al-ishāra*). “Gesture” here means *pointing to something*. In other words, instead of actually pointing to a lion, one can use the word *asad* to conjure up a picture of this idea in the listener’s mind.

<sup>32</sup> Ghazālī, *Mustaṣfā* I:203. <sup>33</sup> Ṭūfī, *Sharḥ* I:522.

[direct] use; [the institutor] did, however, let them know the mechanism (*kayfiyya*) of the use. After this has happened, he is exempt from any [further] guidance.

Although “thinkable,” al-Ṭūfī acknowledges that this scenario “has not been . . . witnessed,” and that, in fact, people generally learn language by hearing others speak it, “and the Arabs did not learn this Arabic language, which is instituted according to the utmost wisdom, except just as it was [as a finished product], be it in general terms or as to its details.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, in practice, coinage and usage are inter-dependent.

The preceding discussion deals with *ḥaqīqa* usages, but when it comes to *majāz*, al-Ṭūfī notes a disagreement among earlier authors. Some think that a *majāz* usage is valid only if it was specifically transmitted by earlier Arabic speakers, so that the word *asad* (“lion”), for example, can be used to connote *a brave man* only if this usage is attested in earlier Arabic speech. Others disagree and say that the conceptual “connection” or “bond” (*‘alāqa*) between the *ḥaqīqa* meaning and the *majāz* meaning – which makes the *majāz* possible – is all that is needed. If historical attestation were a *sine qua non*, the bond would not be essential. Al-Ṭūfī offers the following reasoning to support this second view: since all experts stipulate that the bond is, in fact, essential to validate a *majāz* expression, earlier attestation must not be a requirement.<sup>35</sup> While, in practical terms, most *majāz* examples adduced within the *uṣūl* literature are in fact attested in the authoritative texts (including ancient poetry), there is great theoretical import to al-Ṭūfī’s argument, which implies that rather than comprising a pool of pre-fabricated expressions more or less parallel to *ḥaqīqa* usages, the *majāz* category entails a generative principle by which the “bond” is applied to create new *majāz* usages from the original coinage. This view was certainly of great interest to Arab literary theorists, who were keen on exploring the creative possibilities of *majāz*.

Two major elements in the generative principle of *majāz* were discussed in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* literature: one is the aforementioned bond (*‘alāqa*); the other is the *qarīna* (“conjunction,” “context”), that is, the contextual element that indicates a *majāz* (rather than *ḥaqīqa*) usage.<sup>36</sup> The “bond” is the conceptual connection that links the proper and figurative meanings – enabling the latter to be generated from the former.<sup>37</sup> For example, the term *asad* can be used to connote *a brave man* on the basis of the perceived bond of similarity (*mushābaha*) between the two, that is, the

<sup>34</sup> Ṭūfī, *Sharḥ* I:522–3.

<sup>35</sup> Ṭūfī, *Sharḥ* I:526–31.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 8, at Note 7.

<sup>37</sup> Zarkashī, *Baḥr* II:192–3.

attribute of “braveness.” Similarly, *ghayth* (“rain”) may be used to connote *pasture* on the basis of the bond of cause–effect relationship. Other such bonds are *pars-pro-toto* relationships, contiguities, and many more; the later scholar Badr al-Din al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) enumerates thirty-eight.<sup>38</sup>

The *qarīna*, or “tie,” is the contextual element that identifies the *majāz* as such. For example, in the sentence “I saw a lion wielding the sword,” the “sword” constitutes the *qarīna*, which shows that the word “lion” here is not used to denote the feline predator. The *qarīna* might be embedded in the linguistic context (*qarīnat al-maqāl*; “*qarīna* of the speech”), or in the real-world context (*qarīnat al-hāl*; “*qarīna* of the circumstances”). Even the speaker’s visible gesture when uttering an expression might be a sufficient indication (*qarīna*) that it is *majāz* rather than *ḥaqīqa*.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4 The deniers of *majāz*

The aforementioned elements of the *majāz* discussions in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* literature help us understand the surprising position attested within this tradition that denied the existence of *majāz*, either altogether, or specifically in the Qur’an. Absolute denial is attributed to Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāʾīnī (d. 418/1027), a Shāfiʿite in law and Ashʿarite in theology. Unfortunately, his arguments are only partially recorded in the subsequent literature. Al-Ghazālī registers his disbelief that al-Isfarāʾīnī could have even held this opinion, given the ubiquity of metaphors in both prose and poetry. After all, he argues, it is clearly not the same thing to use the word “lion” to connote a *brave man* as it is to use that word to connote a *lion*.<sup>40</sup>

Al-Ghazālī’s student Ibn Barhān elucidates al-Isfarāʾīnī’s view.<sup>41</sup> His argument, says Ibn Barhān, is that *majāz* supposedly entails “a thing from which the word is transferred” (*al-manqūl ‘anhu*) and “a thing to which the word is transferred” (*al-manqūl ilayhi*) – in this order. In other words, there must first be a “proper” *ḥaqīqa* usage, and subsequently a derived *majāz* usage. But according to al-Isfarāʾīnī “there is no ‘before’ or ‘after’ in the language of the Arabs” (*wa-laysa fī lughat’l-‘arab taqdim wa-ta’khir*).<sup>42</sup> As far back as the record goes, Arabs were actually using both the *ḥaqīqa* and (what we call) the *majāz* meanings simultaneously. After all, since speech signs are arbitrary, and language signifies by means of institution

<sup>38</sup> Zarkashī, *Baḥr* II:199–213.

<sup>39</sup> The workings of this mechanism are outlined in Hallaq, “*Qarīna*.”

<sup>40</sup> Ghazālī, *Mankhūl*, 138.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Barhān, *Wuṣūl* I:98–100.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Barhān, *Wuṣūl* I:100.



(*wadʿ*) and convention (*iṣṭilāḥ*), it is not unreasonable to posit that the Arabs used *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* in the same way. The Arabic term *asad* (lion), for example, can be said to have been “coined” – through its actual usage – to connote *a courageous man* just as it was coined to connote *a lion*. To classify one usage *ḥaqīqa* and another *majāz* is a kind of “arbitrariness” (*ḍarbun min al-taḥakkum*).

Ibn Barhān counters all of this by saying that our lack of knowledge of the linguistic development of Arabic does not prove that there was no such development. He also shows that logically it is evident that the *ḥaqīqa* usage is primary, and the *majāz* usage secondary. For example, the word *asad* was instituted as a way of “pointing to” or “naming” a lion – a thing with no other name. But there is an existing proper word to connote *a courageous man*, to which the word *asad* is applied by way of *majāz*.<sup>43</sup> Ibn Barhān also notes that there is ample transmission of metaphorical usages (*istiʿmāl*) – recognized as such – from the ancient Arabs, for example, “[he] stands on the back of the road,” to which he adds the traditional line of commentary “but [the road] has no back” (*fulān ʿalā matn al-ṭarīq wa-lā matn lahā*), indicating that this is clearly *majāz* and not *ḥaqīqa*.<sup>44</sup>

There is another argument cited anonymously by Abūʾl-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, but which al-Ṭūfī attributes to al-Isfarāʾīnī and his followers: since the *qarīna* disambiguates the *majāz*, the two together function as a *ḥaqīqa*. Hence, there is no *ḥaqīqa-majāz* dichotomy.<sup>45</sup> This argument is refuted by al-Baṣrī who points to the fact that the *qarīna* can be an extra-textual circumstance, in which case it cannot be a component of the *ḥaqīqa*, which is a linguistic phenomenon.<sup>46</sup> Al-Rāzī’s counterargument stays within the linguistic realm; he notes that the signification of the *qarīna* is not part of the primordial institution of the language – which is a requirement of the *ḥaqīqa*.<sup>47</sup>

Another group of deniers did not question the existence of *majāz* in general, but denied that it is used in the Qurʾān. A number of groups held this view, including the (now extinct) Zāhirī legal school, some Ḥanbalīs, and, according to al-Ghazālī, the *ḥashwiyya* – a term for literalists, who

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Barhān, *Wuṣūl* I:100.

<sup>44</sup> On this standard format of commenting on metaphorical usage, see Heinrichs, *Hand of the Northwind*, 9–11.

<sup>45</sup> Ṭūfī, *Sharḥ* I:532–3.

<sup>46</sup> Baṣrī, *Muʾtamad* I:30 (*li-anna al-qarāʾin qad takūn shahid al-ḥal wa-ghayr dhālik mim mā laysa min fiʾl al-mutakallim*).

<sup>47</sup> Rāzī, *Mahṣūl* I: 323.



were thus anthropomorphists (i.e., they believed that the qur'anic depictions of God with human attributes must be taken literally).

The earliest preserved Ḥanbalī *uṣūl al-fiqh* treatise, the 'Udda of Abū Ya'la Ibn al-Farrā' (mentioned above) cites these Ḥanbalī deniers, with whom he does not concur.<sup>48</sup> First, in order to be on terra firma with his own school, he says that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (164–241/780–855) himself had explicitly adduced as *majāz* Q. 5:15, *innā ma'akum mustami'un*, "We are with you, listening" in the sense of "I am with you, listening." This is an extremely mild kind of *majāz*, the *pluralis maiestatis*. Nonetheless, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal characterizes this by saying: "This is in the *majāz* of language (*luḡha*)."<sup>49</sup>

Then Abū Ya'la adduces the general principle, which is ubiquitous in this context, namely that God speaks in the Qur'an according to the language of the Arabs; we find that they speak with *majāz* and *ḥaqīqa*; thus the same must be permissible in the speech of God.<sup>50</sup> He proceeds to adduce cases of *majāz* in the Qur'an. Interestingly, his examples fall exclusively into the two categories of pleonasm and ellipsis – indicating their prominence in this realm of discourse.<sup>51</sup> Among them we find ever-recurring verses such as "they were instilled (lit. they drank) in their hearts with the [golden] calf" (*wa-ushribū fī qulūbihim l-ʾijla*; Q. 2:93), meaning "... with the love of the calf" (*ḥubba l-ʾijlā*); and "ask the town" (Q. 12:82), meaning "ask the people of the town."<sup>52</sup>

These two examples are actually cited in the discussion of the opposing view. Abū Ya'la reports that in the (lost) work *Kitāb uṣūl al-fiqh* ("The Book of Jurisprudence") of his co-madhhabist Abū'l-Faḍl al-Tamīmī (d. 410/1020) it is said: "There is no *majāz* in the Qur'an according to our colleagues," and that "the *majāz* has no *ḥaqīqa*" (*al-majāz lā ḥaqīqa fīhi*), which seems to mean that it has no truth to it (though the intention is less than clear.). Al-Tamīmī continues, "As for the verse 'ask the town...' (Q. 12:82), it is possible that inanimate objects speak to the prophets." In other words, there is no *majāz* here; the verse is *ḥaqīqa* and relates a prophetic miracle. Similarly, he records: "I heard the word of al-Kharāzī (probably Abū al-Ḥasan al-Kharāzī, d. 391/1001), when the verse of the calf was recited and he was then asked: 'perhaps [it means] the love of the calf'? He answered: people say [it actually means] 'the calf itself,' just like the 'town' [in 'ask the town']." Abū Ya'la goes on to record a disagreement regarding the verse of the calf: one *tafsīr* tradition has it that the word

<sup>48</sup> Abū Ya'la, 'Udda II:695.

<sup>49</sup> Abū Ya'la, 'Udda II:695.

<sup>50</sup> Abū Ya'la, 'Udda II:695.

<sup>51</sup> See Note 13.

<sup>52</sup> See Note 16; Abū Ya'la, 'Udda II:696.

“love” was elided; but others say that it means that they drank the calf literally, with the following explanation: “When Moses returned, he took the calf which . . . his people had worshipped . . . and he slaughtered it and then burned it and strewed it into the sea . . . Then Moses told them: Drink from it, and they drank. And whoever used to love it [the calf], it went out of his system.” Abū Ya‘lā continues, though:

Abū Bakr says: The better of the two interpretations is . . . *hubba’l-‘ijli* (“love of the calf”), because with reference to water you do not say “so-and-so was given a drink in his heart,” that is only said with regard to love of a thing.

Abū Ya‘lā himself continues:

This is similar to the verse “Ask [the town]” . . . Abū Bakr has explicitly stated that there is a concealed elided element here. The correctness of this is shown by the fact that in any passage in which *al-qarya* (“the town”) is mentioned in the Qur’an, the intended thing is “its people,” such as “how many a town (*qarya*) was insolent toward the command of its Lord . . . so we took it to severe account and punished it . . .”; Q. 65:8). Taking the town to account and punishing it did obviously not have any effect on the wall[s].<sup>53</sup>

The commentator finds two strategies of interpretation in his sources: (1) assuming an ellipsis, and acknowledging *majāz* and (2) denying *majāz* and taking the language literally, which entails a sort of midrashic approach that assumes a miracle (inanimate objects speak to the prophet) or a scenario not recorded in the qur’anic text (the people really were given the calf to drink<sup>54</sup>).

The position of the *Ẓāhirites*, the followers of Dāwūd al-Ẓāhirī (d. 270/884) and his son Abū Bakr Ibn Dāwūd (d. 297/910), who in one way or another rejected the use of *majāz* (and analogical reasoning [*qiyās*]) in Qur’an interpretation, is also difficult to assess, because their literature is preserved only in fragmentary form, and some of the statements ascribed to them are unclear. A helpful source in this respect is Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who records the following arguments that Abū Bakr Ibn Dāwūd offered to reject the possibility of *majāz* in the Qur’an.

(1) If God used *majāz*, of which *isti‘āra* (metaphor; lit. “borrowing”) is a major category, He could be called a *musta‘ir* (“one who borrows”).<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Abū Ya‘lā, *‘Udda* II:699.

<sup>54</sup> This, of course, is how the story is told in the Bible (Exod 32:20). But it is absent from the qur’anic account.

<sup>55</sup> Rāzī, *Maḥṣūl* I:333.

In other sources, as well, Ibn Dāwūd is portrayed as saying that “borrowing” is improper to ascribe to God, as He owns everything and does not need to borrow. One can never be sure whether this sort of argument—recorded by a critic of the Zāhirī position—is not tongue-in-cheek mockery. But there may be more to it. Zarkashī, for instance, reports that the Zāhirites deny the *majāz al-isti’āra*.<sup>56</sup> They possess the “delusion” (*shubha*), he explains, that the metaphor-user “borrows” when the literal becomes too constraining (*dāqa*), and they considered this unthinkable in the case of God—always capable of using straight talk.

(2) *Majāz* does not in itself produce a clear meaning, as it requires a *qarīna*. If the Qur’an included *majāz*, it would contain ambiguity—which is unworthy of God’s speech.<sup>57</sup>

(3) Using *majāz* implies an inability to find the *ḥaqīqa*, which is unthinkable with God.<sup>58</sup>

(4) The word of God is all true/truth (*ḥaqq*). His word must therefore be *ḥaqīqa*, rather than *majāz*.<sup>59</sup>

The common denominator of these arguments is that *majāz* is somehow weaker, less true, language, a speech mode that is second-rate and, therefore, unworthy of God and scripture.

## 5 Conclusion: broader implications of the denial of *majāz*

Most Muslim scholars acknowledged the use of *majāz* in the Qur’an. However, the suspicions voiced by the deniers – notwithstanding the refutation of their views – seem to have generated a tone of unease regarding *majāz* throughout the tradition of Qur’an interpretation. Al-Ghazālī, for instance, remarks: “The speech of the Prophet of God should not be interpreted metaphorically (as *isti’āra*), if possible, because [metaphorical language] is fitting only for preachers, sermonizers and poets.”<sup>60</sup> So he seems to share the view that *majāz* is second-rate language, at least with respect to the word of God. This is true certainly in legal contexts, where it is critical to ascertain God’s will.

This led various interpreters to ask why, indeed, the Qur’an employed *majāz* in the first place. Some of the answers evolved naturally out of the refutation of Ibn Dāwūd’s position. Countering the view that God used it out of necessity, the argument was made that a *majāz* expression may be

<sup>56</sup> Zarkashī, *Baḥr* II:183 (*innamā ankarat al-zāhiriyya majāz al-isti’āra*).

<sup>57</sup> Rāzī, *Maḥṣūl* I:333.

<sup>58</sup> Rāzī, *Maḥṣūl* I:333.

<sup>59</sup> Rāzī, *Maḥṣūl* I:333.

<sup>60</sup> Ghazālī, *Mankhūl*, 204. Metaphor (*isti’āra*) is generally regarded as the primary type of *majāz*. See Note 7 and the citation at Note 55.

more beautiful than the *ḥaqīqa* equivalent, a claim that Zarkashī substantiates by enumerating various stylistic functions of *majāz*. In all of these cases he explains how the *majāz* formulation entails “an increase of eloquence” (*takthīr al-faṣāḥa*). For example, “And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy” (*ikhfaḍ lahumā janāḥa’l-dhulli minā’l-raḥma*; Q. 17:24). This is not *ḥaqīqa* since, as the experts on poetry explained, “humility has no wing.”<sup>61</sup> But the *majāz* formulation entails the technique of “comprehending the intelligible in the form of what can be sensed” (*tafhīm al-ma’qūl fī ṣūrat al-maḥsūs*), also known as “imaginative metaphor” (*isti’āra takhyīliyya*).<sup>62</sup>

Some scholars noted that since understanding the meaning of *majāz* relies on a contextual element (*qarīna*), it entails a certain obscurity that requires mental exertion, and its understanding will thus yield intellectual satisfaction and pleasure. This leads to a second reason given – by Zarkashī – for the use of *majāz* in the Qur’an: to test (*imtiḥān*) the scholars, to strain their minds, and to sharpen their thoughts in solving the puzzle posed by *majāz* by using their creative reasoning (*istikhrāj*). Thus, like the *mutashābih* (ambiguous part of the Qur’an), it requires active thinking, which in turn increases their reward in the Hereafter.<sup>63</sup>

Zarkashī actually offers a striking compromise with the deniers of *majāz* that reflects just how much of their position he has absorbed. “The truth of this matter (*al-ḥaqq fī ḥādhibihī’l-mas’ala*),” he avers, is that, there is no *majāz* in the “original” Qur’an that is “the primordial speech itself” (*naṣf al-kalām al-qadīm*) uttered by God. However, the words of the Qur’an revealed to man certainly contain *majāz*.<sup>64</sup> This, of course, raises a number of questions about the pre-existent mode of the Holy Book: what language, if any, it was in, whether Gabriel translated it into Arabic before he conveyed it to the Prophet, and other questions that are beyond the scope of this study.<sup>65</sup> What is important for our purposes is that even a Muslim scholar who refutes the position of the deniers endorses the basic premise that *majāz* has no place in the original word of God in *umm al-kitāb* – the primordial Qur’an.

<sup>61</sup> See Note 44. <sup>62</sup> Zarkashī, *Baḥr* II:189–90. See also Heinrichs, *Hand of the Northwind*, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Zarkashī, *Baḥr* II:183. On the *mutashābih* see Q. 3:7, and the Introduction at Note 7.

<sup>64</sup> Zarkashī, *Baḥr* II:184.

<sup>65</sup> For a general study of the theological issues around the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur’an see Peters, *God’s Created Speech*.

*Words of eloquence**Rhetoric and poetics in Jewish Bible exegesis in its Muslim and Christian contexts**Mordechai Z. Cohen*

The engagement of medieval Jewish interpreters with the disciplines of rhetoric and poetics was generally mediated by Greco-Arabic learning. A striking exception is Judah Messer Leon, discussed in [Chapter 13](#), a fifteenth-century Italian Jewish humanist who drew heavily upon the Latin tradition of rhetoric to explicate the Bible. More typical is the Andalusian Hebrew poet and literary critic Moses Ibn Ezra (c. 1055–1138), discussed here, who notes the Greek concepts of *rhetorica* and *poetica*, but continues his analysis based on corresponding Arabic concepts. The Muslim context brought with it some of the apprehensions regarding *majāz* (figurative language, tropes) discussed in [Chapter 11](#). The current chapter shows how the insights produced by this tension-fraught combination of classical and Muslim perspectives helped provide a critical framework that enriched Jewish *peshat* interpretation, especially in the Andalusian school. In the *peshat* school that emerged in northern France in the twelfth century, on the other hand, the formal disciplines of rhetoric and poetics were evidently unknown. And yet, as this chapter demonstrates, those *pashtanim* (practitioners of *peshat*) intuitively developed a notion of poetics that proved crucial for their exegetical enterprise, one that can profitably be compared with analogous trends in contemporaneous Christian Bible interpretation.

[Ed.]

**1 Moses Ibn Ezra on the Bible's stylistic features**

While in exile in the northern, Christian sector of Spain, the aged Moses Ibn Ezra recalled an encounter from his early years in the Muslim metropolis of Granada:

In my youth, in my hometown, a Muslim scholar . . . asked me to recite the Ten Commandments in Arabic. I understood his intention, to demonstrate

the paucity of its poetic elegance (*faṣāḥa*). I therefore asked him to recite the opening passage (*fātiḥa*) of his Qur'an in Latin . . . but when he set out to translate it into that language its words became ugly and its beauty tarnished.<sup>1</sup>

This passage is from the *Book of Discussion and Conversation*, a Judeo-Arabic guide for composing Hebrew verse according to the rules of Arabic poetics, as was common in the Golden Age of Hebrew poetry in al-Andalus (Muslim Spain). As this exchange indicates, it was important for both Ibn Ezra and his Muslim interlocutor to assert the elegance of their respective sacred scriptures – according to the Arabic aesthetic yardstick. Indeed, one aim of Ibn Ezra's *Book of Discussion* is to demonstrate the Bible's stylistic excellence, drawing upon the disciplines or "sciences" (*'ulūm*) of Arabic poetics (*'ilm al-baḍī'*) and rhetoric (*'ilm al-balāgha*).<sup>2</sup> The foundation for this endeavor is laid early in the *Book of Discussion*:

The art of oratory (Ar. *khitāba*) is called *rhetorica* in Greek . . . According to the philosopher Aristotle it is speech that persuades . . . Its excellence increases or decreases depending on the speaker's poetic elegance (*faṣāḥa*) and rhetorical eloquence (*balāgha*) . . . And orations are found in our sacred prophetic books . . .<sup>3</sup>

The art of poetry (Ar. *shi'r*) is called *poetica* in Greek . . . The term for poet (Ar. *shā'ir*) in our [Hebrew] language is *navi* (=prophet) . . . [For example:]

"a group of *nevi'im*" (1 Sam 10:5) [means] *a gathering of poets*;

"you shall engage in *nevu'ah* with them" (1 Sam 10:6) [means] *you shall extemporize poetry*.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to presenting the Greek and Arabic concepts of rhetoric and poetry, Ibn Ezra argues that they are both manifested in the Hebrew Bible.

The Arabic terms *balāgha* ("rhetorical excellence," "eloquence") and *faṣāḥa* ("poetic elegance") often traveled together, although associated theoretically with different language arts: *balāgha* with oratory/rhetoric

<sup>1</sup> Moses Ibn Ezra, *Book of Discussion*, 24a. The Muslim claims regarding the Qur'an's stylistic excellence are discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> Arab theorists were concerned with the classification of these disciplines, as reflected, for example, in Alfarabi's *Catalogue of the Sciences*. He referred to rhetoric in Arabic as *khiṭāba*. See Black, *Logic and Rhetoric*, 2–3; 108–10. On the term *balāgha* used to connote the discipline of rhetoric, see the discussion at Notes 7, 8. On the term *baḍī'*, see Note 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 9b, 12a. On the definition of rhetoric as "persuasion" within the Arabic Aristotelian tradition, see Black, *Logic and Rhetoric*, 103–5.

<sup>4</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 12b–14a.

(*khitāba*), and *faṣāḥa* with poetry (*sh'ir*). *Faṣāḥa* derives from an Arabic root that connotes *purity of speech*, and it is easy to see how it was adapted to indicate poetic excellence. The derivation of the technical term *balāgha* (lit. “arriving,” “reaching”) is less transparent. The literary critic Abū Hilāl al-‘Askari (d. 1005), in his *Book of the Two Arts: Rhetoric (or: Oratory) and Poetry (Kitāb al-ṣina‘atayn: al-khitāba wa-l-shi‘r)*, explains that it means “reaching” the listener by conveying one’s ideas to him most effectively.<sup>5</sup> It thus came to connote rhetorical excellence within the discipline of oratory, that is, Arabic *khitāba* and the corresponding Greek notion *rhetorica*.

Yet the theoretical study of oratory took different paths in the two intellectual traditions. In the classical tradition, oratory involved modes of argumentation that played central roles in Greek and Roman public life and society (see [Chapter 13](#)). This was distinct from the discipline of poetics, part of the study of grammar in the classical curriculum.<sup>6</sup> In Islam, oratory had a more limited role – primarily in the Friday sermon in the mosque, subject to its own set of conventions. Consequently, discussions of *balāgha* related to “literary rhetoric,” which includes excellence of expression in both oratory and poetry.<sup>7</sup> Aristotelian Arab authors at times differentiated sharply between rhetoric and poetics, since the aim of the former is to persuade, whereas the latter aims to delight. But in practice, the overlap between the two language arts predominated in the Arabic intellectual tradition, and *balāgha* was often defined in terms of the poetic “ornate style” that came to be termed *badī‘*, which typically entailed *majāz*, that is, figures and tropes.<sup>8</sup>

Corresponding Hebrew terminology developed in the Judeo-Arabic tradition, especially as it was transplanted to Christian lands. The term *faṣāḥa* was equated with Hebrew *ṣaḥot*, a word appearing once in the Bible (Isa 32:4) and rendered *faṣāḥa* in Saadia’s Arabic translation.<sup>9</sup> *Balāgha* was more problematic given its opacity even in Arabic. While the calque *hagga‘ah* (“arriving,” “reaching”) is attested in the Hebrew translation of Ibn Janah’s grammar by Judah Ibn Tibbon (al-Andalus, Provence; c. 1120–90), it did not catch on.<sup>10</sup> So, effectively, *ṣaḥot* did double duty for both *faṣāḥa* and *balāgha*, which makes sense given the overlap between these Arabic concepts. *Khitāba* seems to have first been rendered *halaṣah* in

<sup>5</sup> See Bonebakker, “Literary Rhetoric,” 75, n. 1.

<sup>6</sup> See the [Introduction](#), [Note 19](#).

<sup>7</sup> See Bonebakker, “Literary Rhetoric,” 75–6.

<sup>8</sup> See Bonebakker, “Literary Rhetoric,” 89–90. See also Heinrichs, “*Isti‘ārah* and *Badī‘*.” On the definition of *majāz* in terms of the classically defined figures and tropes, see [Chapter 11](#).

<sup>9</sup> See Dotan, *Dawn of Hebrew Linguistics*, 31; Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 238n.

<sup>10</sup> See Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 240n.

the Hebrew translation tradition attested already in twelfth-century Provence.<sup>11</sup> It was therefore susceptible to being rendered by the related biblical Hebrew term *melīṣah*, as well.<sup>12</sup>

The Arabic term for poetry, *shiʿr*, was readily – and regularly – rendered by the phonetically similar (but etymologically different) biblical Hebrew term *shir* (“song,” “poem”).<sup>13</sup> Moses Ibn Ezra cites an unnamed scholar, probably his teacher Isaac Ibn Ghiyyath (1038–89), who believed that 1 Kgs 5:12, “[Solomon]’s poetry (*shir*) was one thousand and five,” refers to lost Solomonic Hebrew poetry comparable to the highest Arabic poetic forms.<sup>14</sup> While other authors brought evidence for the “poetic” quality of the Bible from biblical passages explicitly labelled *shir(ah)* (pl. *shiroṭ*), Ibn Ezra is more cautious, and argues that Biblical Hebrew *shir(ah)* does not connote *poetry* in the Arabic sense.<sup>15</sup> Adopting the Arabic judgment that poetry (*shiʿr*), that is, rhymed, metrical verse (*naẓm*; lit. “string of pearls”), is superior to prose (*nathr*; lit. “scattering”), he ponders whether “metrical verse was known to our Israelite nation in the [ancient] days of her sovereignty.”<sup>16</sup> Citing the biblical evidence, he concludes: “We have found nothing in [scripture] departing from prose save these three books: Psalms, Job and Proverbs. And these . . . employ neither meter nor rhyme in the manner of the Arabs.”<sup>17</sup>

Ibn Ezra connects the Arabic concept of *shiʿr* with the Bible in more complex – but also more interesting – ways. Instead of citing the Hebrew term *shir*, he makes the less expected equation between Arabic *shāʿir* (poet) and Hebrew *navi* (prophet). Intriguingly, this idiosyncratic assertion would be made by the eighteenth-century English Hebraist Robert Lowth.<sup>18</sup> Ibn Ezra makes this connection (in the passage cited at [Note 4](#)) by recording opinions that the Arabic term for poetry comes from the use

<sup>11</sup> See the citation from Judah Ibn Tibbon’s translation of Judah Ha-Levi’s *Kuzari* at [Note 37](#). This convention continued through the middle ages and beyond. *Sefer ha-Halaṣah* was the title of Todros Todrosi’s Hebrew translation of Averroes’ Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*; see *Be’ur Ibn Roshd*. Judah Messer Leon (1420–98) likewise used the term *halaṣah* for rhetoric, as discussed in [Chapter 13, Sec. 5](#).

<sup>12</sup> See the citation from Radak at [Note 38](#). Profiat Duran (Catalonia, 1350–1414), likewise, uses the term *melīṣah* when differentiating among three language arts: grammar (*dīqdūq*), rhetoric (*melīṣah*), and poetry (*shir*). See Duran, *Ma’aseh Eḥod*, 42–3. The term *melīṣah* was also used to render Arabic *ʾibārah* (interpretation), as in the Arabic translation of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* as *Kitāb al-ʾibārah* – rendered *Sefer ha-melīṣah* in Hebrew.

<sup>13</sup> See Berlin, *Biblical Poetry*, 33–4.

<sup>14</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 25a–b. Compare Ibn Ghiyyath, commentary on Ecclesiastes, introduction, Kafih ed., 168.

<sup>15</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 25a.

<sup>16</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 5a, 10a, 14a–15a. On the Arabic term *naẓm*, see [Chapter 3](#), at [Note 15](#).

<sup>17</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 24a. <sup>18</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, II:14–18. See also [Chapter 14, Sec. 2](#).



of the root *sh-‘r* (form IV) in the sense of *informing*, *notifying*, which is a synonym of the root *n-b-’*, from whence comes Arabic *nabi* (prophet), cognate of Hebrew *navi*.<sup>19</sup> This quasi-philological analysis separates what Ibn Ezra regarded as the essential communicative function of poetry from its formal characteristics, which the Bible does not specify.

Ibn Ezra establishes the “poetic” quality of the Bible by showing that it shares aesthetic features defined in the Greco-Arabic tradition. He remarks:

In his eighth book on logic (the *Poetics*),<sup>20</sup> the Philosopher (Aristotle) enumerated the matters in which poetry excels and is beautified [including] . . . strength of the words, pleasantness of the matters . . . beauty of the comparisons, quality of the metaphors . . . repetition of the ends and the openings . . . The Arabs divided them into many more than this number and scrutinized this matter deeply, as you shall see later in this composition.<sup>21</sup>

Though he credits Aristotle as the ancient authority, it is to the Arabic classification of the *badī‘* – the techniques of ornate style – that he turns to establish the Bible’s literary excellence.<sup>22</sup>

Ibn Ezra’s discussion of metaphor, the first of the twenty such poetic techniques he enumerates, is a prime example:

The first category of the embellishments of poetry is metaphor (*isti‘āra*) . . . Even though precise [i.e., non-metaphorical] language (*muhkam*) is most reliable, in that it is fundamental (*aṣl*), and metaphor is merely [derived] from it, nonetheless [metaphor] has grace. When a composition is enrobed in the cloak of metaphor, its silken garment becomes beautiful and its glaze refined. And the difference between metaphorical speech (*kalām*) and bare [speech] is like the difference between the stammering (*‘ayy*) and the eloquent (*bayān*). Those among the intelligent people of our time who disavow metaphor resist the plainly manifest truth and turn aside from the straight path, for metaphor is manifold in our scriptures.<sup>23</sup>

*Isti‘āra* was considered the primary type of *majāz*, and it is conceivable that the “intelligent people . . . who disavow metaphor” to whom Ibn Ezra refers here were among the Muslim “deniers” of *majāz*.<sup>24</sup> Like Muslim opponents of that view, Ibn Ezra concedes some points raised by the “deniers.” He acknowledges that metaphor is less accurate than literal

<sup>19</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 13a–14a.

<sup>20</sup> In its Arabic version, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* were classified under the rubric of logic. See Black, *Logic and Rhetoric*, 1–16.

<sup>21</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 76a.

<sup>22</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 116b–117b.

<sup>23</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 118a–119a.

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 11, Sec. 5.

language, and that it is a derivative rather than essential form of speech.<sup>25</sup> Yet he argues that metaphorical expression is more elegant and thus necessary, something his own language here demonstrates, as he speaks imaginatively of metaphorical language “enrobing” a naked idea to beautify it. To uphold the legitimacy of metaphor, he notes that it is “manifold in our scriptures,” as he goes on to demonstrate with a list of forty biblical examples.<sup>26</sup>

The problem raised by metaphor reflects the more fundamental objection that “the best of poetry is its most false (*akdhabuhu*).”<sup>27</sup> As Ibn Ezra notes, the Muslim disdain for the “falsehood” of poetry can be traced to the Qur’an, and is echoed by the great Aristotelian Arab philosopher Alfarabi, who remarked that “the poet is like one who makes a design that is visually splendid, but has no truth (*ḥaqīqa*) to it.”<sup>28</sup> To counter these criticisms, Ibn Ezra distinguishes between the content (*murād*; lit. intention) of poetry, which may be true, and its artistic form, which is imaginative and “false.”<sup>29</sup> Speaking in theoretical terms, he applies this distinction to the Bible:

The wording (*lafẓ*) is a vessel for the idea (or: content, meaning; *maʿnā*) . . . [T]he idea is the spirit (*ruh*) and the word is the body (*badan*) . . . And the prophet cannot fulfill his mission except through wording with which he can be understood, even if it differs from the wording that he heard. But what does not change is the idea. Now speech (or: language; *kalām*) is made up of a husk (*qishr*) and a kernel (*lubb*). The husk is . . . perceived by the ear . . . but [sense] perception is not understanding . . . which occurs only in the heart . . . [when] the idea is received by the intellect. . . . The [biblical] sage [says], “Incline your ear and listen to the words of the wise/Direct your heart to my wisdom” (Prov 22:17). . . . He specifies the ear for hearing the husk . . . and the heart for [understanding] the kernel, i.e., the idea.<sup>30</sup>

Applying the Arabic dichotomy between *lafẓ* (wording) and *maʿnā* (idea) – likened to the relation between body and spirit, husk (*qishr*) and kernel (*lubb*)<sup>31</sup> – Ibn Ezra implies that the formulation of prophecy is incidental to the divine message. If the prophet is likened to a poet, he must apply “false” poetic imagery to “enrobe” the naked “intention” (*murād*) received from God so that it most effectively brings the word of God to his listeners.

<sup>25</sup> The implications of these “defects” are discussed in Cohen, “Imagination,” 439–40.

<sup>26</sup> For an analysis of these examples, see Cohen, “Argument,” 6–16.

<sup>27</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 62a. On this adage in the Arabic tradition, see Bonebakker, “Literary Rhetoric,” 91.

<sup>28</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 62a–b, 64a. <sup>29</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 64a. <sup>30</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 77b.

<sup>31</sup> This distinction was common in Christian writings. See, for example, Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* III:xii. See also Chapter 6, Sec. 1c.

As a poet, Ibn Ezra prized the Bible's aesthetic exterior, notwithstanding its potential "falsehood." In the passage cited at the beginning of this chapter (at [Note 1](#)), both Ibn Ezra and his Muslim interlocutor recognized that an accurate translation of scripture – the Bible into Arabic, the Qur'an into Latin – naturally results in the loss of its literary elegance. As a sort of converse, Ibn Ezra elsewhere commends the literary beauty of the versified Arabic Psalms translation by the ninth-century Christian Ḥaṣṣ al-Quṭī (the Goth), although he criticizes its inaccuracy.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps he believed that a translation can be either accurate or beautiful, but not both.

The Song of Songs, interpreted allegorically in Jewish (as in Christian) tradition, but literally composed of love lyrics, shines a spotlight on the potential disparity between the poetic "husk" of scripture and its true inner essence. Ibn Ezra's approach to this disparity emerges from a comment addressing a criticism leveled against the Hebrew poetry of his day depicting human "love and passion," deemed improper by some. He responds:

The love and passion . . . [depicted by] the poets of our people are not repugnant since this is found in the Holy Writings, even though the apparent sense (*ẓāhir*) is not the meaning hidden in that speech (*ma'nā bāṭin dhalik al-kalām*).<sup>33</sup>

Referring to the often erotic depictions in the Song of Songs, Ibn Ezra invokes the standard dichotomy in qur'anic hermeneutics between the *ẓāhir* (apparent sense) and *bāṭin* (hidden, inner meaning).<sup>34</sup> And so, the love poetry in the Song is merely a veneer (worthy of emulation for its poetic beauty); but in truth the Song conveys lofty matters – the relationship between God and Israel.<sup>35</sup>

## 2 Exegetical applications in the Andalusian tradition

The interpretive implications of Ibn Ezra's rhetorical-poetic outlook emerge in his exegetical work, *The Treatise of the Garden on Figurative Language (majāz) and Literal Language (ḥaqīqa)*. In speaking of the Bible's anthropomorphic depictions of God, he remarks:

<sup>32</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 23b, 128a. See also Urvoy, *Psautier*.

<sup>33</sup> *Book of Discussion*, 143a.

<sup>34</sup> See [Chapter 8](#).

<sup>35</sup> Moses Ibn Ezra does not specify this meaning of the Song. But it was a standard view in eleventh-century al-Andalus, as reflected, for example, in the commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra, and the one attributed to Saadia Gaon. See Cohen, *Gates*, 203–8. On another interpretation that emerged in the Andalusian tradition, see [Note 58](#).

The true idea (Ar. *al-ma'nā al-ḥaqīqī*; Heb. *ha'inyan ha-amiti*) that is intended is too wondrous and exalted to be understood precisely. The wise man must [therefore] divest the [true] ideas of their garb of gross figurative expressions (Heb. *ha'avarot*; Ar. *majāzāt*) and [re]clothe them in pleasant garb, so that he will reach through them the intended idea, to the extent of human capacity to comprehend.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas literary composition entails enrobing plain ideas in beautiful language (Note 23), interpretation reverses this process, uncovering the “true idea” underlying scripture’s figurative language by “stripping away” its ornamental husk. Though Ibn Ezra here speaks about a special case (language depicting God, which entails particular theological challenges), this perspective pervades his exegetical treatise, in which he “decodes” the *majāz* in scripture to reveal its inner “truth” (*ḥaqīqa*).

Although Moses Ibn Ezra’s works themselves had a limited circulation, the poetic-rhetorical outlook he articulates played an important role in the unfolding Andalusian exegetical tradition – even as it was transplanted to Christian lands, where Jews did not read Arabic. His protégé Judah Ha-Levi (c. 1075–1141) reflects the thinking of his master in discussing the vision of Micaiah ben Imlah in 1 Kings 22. As part of that prophet’s endeavor to dissuade King Ahab from doing battle at Ramoth Gilead – a course of action encouraged by four hundred prophets and the charismatic Zedekiah ben Chenaanah – Micaiah proclaims that he “saw the Lord seated upon His throne, with all the host of heaven standing in attendance to the right and to the left of Him.” In this elaborate vision, the Lord seeks a volunteer to “entice” Ahab to march to his death, whereupon a “lying spirit” proposes to enter “the mouth of all his prophets” (1 Kgs 22:19–23) and mislead Ahab. Regarding this episode, Ha-Levi remarks in his theological work, the *Kuzari*:

there was no truth (or: literally true language; Ar. *ḥaqīqa*; Heb. *emet*) in this vision beyond what he said: “So the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours.” All the rest is simply an introduction and rhetorical preparation (Ar. *muqaddima wa-tawṭīʿa khiṭābiyya*; Heb. *haqdamah we-ḥaṣaʿah ḥalaṣiyyit*) to confirm and emphasize that this utterance is true.<sup>37</sup>

Originally composed in Judeo-Arabic, the *Kuzari* was translated into Hebrew by Judah Ibn Tibbon, and influenced the Provençal exegete

<sup>36</sup> The text cited here follows the Hebrew translation of Judah Alharizi (p. 137), which brings out the imagery of this passage most sharply. On the slight differences in the original Arabic text, see Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> *Kuzari* III:73, Baneth and Ben-Shammai ed., 144; Hebrew trans. by Ibn Tibbon, Zifroni ed., 212.

Radak (Rabbi David Kimhi; 1160–1235), who prefaces his commentary on this biblical passage with the following remark:

This matter poses a great perplexity to one who takes it literally (*ke-mashma'o*). Now the truth (*emet*) is that God induced the false prophets to mislead Ahab . . . but not that any of them attained prophecy . . .

As for Micaiah's elaborate vision, he explains:

all of these are [merely] words of eloquence/rhetoric (*divrei meliṣah*), which Micaiah formulated as an oratory technique (*derekh haṣa'at devarim*; lit. by way of presenting [his] words), not that Micaiah saw any of these things, nor heard them, since prophecy from God must be true.<sup>38</sup>

Radak argues that the Micaiah's purported vision is a fabrication, a rhetorical dramatization of the message he received from God. Ironically, the tactic to denounce the false prophets employed by Micaiah himself is described by Radak using the Mishnaic definition of a false prophet: "one who prophecies what he did not see or did not hear" (m. *Sanhedrin* 11:5). For Radak, of course, one must judge this prophet's words by the kernel of *truth* they possess: that the prophets are lying, as expressed in his final verse. Indeed, this point is referred to as "the truth" (*ha-emet*) of Micaiah's vision in the first line of Radak's gloss.

As he often does "for the lovers of *derash*"<sup>39</sup> Radak notes the traditional alternative to his *peshat* interpretation, according to which the "spirit" was actually that of Naboth the Jezreelite, who was murdered by Ahab and finds an opportunity here to settle the score. Radak's citation of this approach highlights the revolutionary nature of his *peshat* reading: Radak posits, by way of *peshat*, that a prophetic depiction is not intended literally, by contrast with the midrashic approach, which assumes a factual literal reading.<sup>40</sup> In this respect he is representative of the Andalusian school,<sup>41</sup> in which *peshat* was not simply a literal or even purely philological-contextual reading, but rather an attempt to understand the Hebrew Bible in light of the key role played by rhetoric in ancient prophecy. As Ha-Levi before him argued, Radak posits that Micaiah sought to fulfill his task of persuading Ahab through the art of oratory (*khitāba l meliṣah*), which entails the use of "false" imaginative language. In the spirit of Moses Ibn Ezra's

<sup>38</sup> Radak, comm. on 1 Kgs 22:19.

<sup>39</sup> Introduction to his commentary on The Former Prophets. See Cohen, "Qimhi Family," 396–8.

<sup>40</sup> This occurs elsewhere; see, for example, Radak on Jer 31:14, Hos 1:2. See Cohen, "Qimhi Family," 398–400.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Abraham Ibn Ezra on Hos 1:2; Maimonides, *Guide* II:46. See Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 180–1.

conceptualization, Ha-Levi and Radak believed that one discovers the “truth” (*ḥaqīqa* / *emet*) of the prophet’s words by “stripping away” the rhetorical elaboration that had been added for its emotive effect.

Whereas Radak applies a derivative of Moses Ibn Ezra’s notion of rhetoric to define his *peshat* method and differentiate it from midrashic interpretation, it was more common in the Andalusian tradition to invoke the notion of poetics for this purpose. This is readily apparent in the writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164; no relation to Moses Ibn Ezra), whose *peshat* model was first discussed in [Chapter 9](#). Although he eventually became one of the most important Jewish exegetes of all time, in his early life in Spain Abraham Ibn Ezra was engaged primarily in composing poetry, and is mentioned together with Judah Ha-Levi in Moses Ibn Ezra’s *Book of Discussion* (42b) as an up-and-coming young poet. But in 1140 Abraham Ibn Ezra was forced to flee Spain, and made his way to Rome, where he began a 24-year career writing Bible commentaries during his travels in Italy, France, and England. These Hebrew commentaries made Andalusian Jewish learning (previously available only in Judeo-Arabic) accessible to Jews in Christian lands.

Abraham Ibn Ezra opposed the midrashic assumption that every seemingly superfluous word of scripture conveys new meaning – termed the doctrine of “omniscience” by James Kugel.<sup>42</sup> Ibn Ezra, followed by Radak, argues instead that many repetitions and synonyms are deployed for the sake of poetic elegance (*ṣaḥot*) and therefore must not be interpreted as adding new meaning.<sup>43</sup> For example, Radak remarks on Gen 6:9, “These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God”:

“Noah” appears three times, though once would have sufficed. They (i.e., Abraham Ibn Ezra) said that this is poetic elegance (*ṣaḥot*) in the sacred tongue, and similarly [the name] “Israel,” which appears five times in one verse (Num 8:19).<sup>44</sup>

The redundant references to Noah invited midrashic interpretation (see, e.g., *Tanḥuma*, Noah, §5), which Radak undercuts by noting that such repetition is a poetic convention in biblical Hebrew – an insight he drew from Abraham Ibn Ezra.<sup>45</sup> In this they follow the eleventh-century

<sup>42</sup> See [Chapter 1](#), [Sec. 6](#).

<sup>43</sup> See Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 199–201, 238–45; idem, “Qimhi Family,” 400–2; Kugel, *Idea*, 103–9.

<sup>44</sup> Radak on Gen 6:9, Kamalhar ed., 54.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Ezra on Gen 19:24 makes this observation to counter a midrashic interpretation adopted by Rashi. On Num 8:19, as well, the prooftext cited by both Ibn Ezra and Radak, Rashi adopts a

Andalusian linguist Jonah Ibn Janah, who likewise argued that prolix style was employed by the prophets for the sake of poetic elegance (*faṣāḥa*) and rhetorical eloquence (*balāgha*).<sup>46</sup> The endeavor to “strip away” the ornamental “husk” from the “kernel” of the biblical text thus characterizes the Andalusian “way of *peshat*.”

Rendering in Hebrew Moses Ibn Ezra’s dichotomy between form (*ma’nā*) and content (*lafẓ*), Abraham Ibn Ezra argues further that the specific wording of the biblical text is incidental to its content:

Do not pay attention to the words (*millot*), because they are [merely] like bodies, while the ideas (or: meanings; *ṭe’amim*) are like the spirits. Now cutting with two tools that have the same function is the same activity.<sup>47</sup>

Abraham Ibn Ezra and Radak invoke this principle to counter the mid-rashic tendency to attribute meaning to different nuances in comparable texts. For example, the Ten Commandments appear twice in the Torah, first spoken by God to Israel at Mount Sinai (Exod 20:2–13), and then later recounted by Moses to the next generation (Deut 5:6–17). The rabbis attributed significance to the slight discrepancies between these two versions, to which Ibn Ezra responds by explaining that Moses took the liberty of changing the wording uttered by God because “the words resemble bodies and the ideas the spirits” and

therefore, the custom of all wise men in all languages is that they preserve the meaning (*ṭe’amim*), and have no misgivings about changing the words (*millot*), since they are identical in their meaning (*ṭa’aman*).<sup>48</sup>

For Abraham Ibn Ezra, discovering the content (*ṭa’am*) of scripture – what he terms *peshat* – must be the sole objective of the interpreter, and not the midrashic tendency to attribute meaning to nuances in the wording (*millot*). As he remarks:

The words of any author, whether a prophet or a sage, [have but] one meaning (*ṭa’am*), although those with great wisdom (i.e., the rabbis) augment [this] and infer one thing from another thing ... by way of

midrashic interpretation that draws special meaning from the five-fold repetition of the word “Israel.” See Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 238–9, 319.

<sup>46</sup> *Kitāb al-Luma’*, 288–9; see Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 240–1. Ibn Ezra (followed by Radak), writing in Hebrew for Jewish audiences in Christian lands, used the readily available biblical term *ṣaḥot* for Arabic *faṣāḥa*, and dropped the term *balāgha*, for which there was no readily available Hebrew equivalent.

<sup>47</sup> Comm. on Deut 5:5, Weiser ed., III:230.

<sup>48</sup> Long comm. on Exod 20:1, Weiser ed., II:127. Radak cites Ibn Ezra’s view on this matter in making a similar claim in his commentary on Gen 24:39.

*derash* . . . About this the early Sages, of blessed memory, said: “A biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*.”<sup>49</sup>

As discussed in [Chapter 9 \(Sec. 4\)](#), Ibn Ezra argues that *peshat* alone represents the genuine meaning of the biblical text, that is, the sole intention of its author.

Some of the more dramatic exegetical applications of the Andalusian interpretive outlook outlined earlier are manifested in the writings of Maimonides. This is ironic since Maimonides had little patience for poetry or aesthetics, subscribing wholeheartedly to the philosophical outlook that prized “truth” over beauty ([Note 28](#)). Yet Maimonides, drawing upon Alfarabi and Avicenna, argued that the ancient prophets, who sought to bring the word of God to the people, employed the appropriate rhetorical and poetic strategies to capture their audience’s attention.<sup>50</sup>

Recognizing the key role of the literary imagination in the formation of the Hebrew Bible, Maimonides devotes much thought in his *Guide of the Perplexed* to the “parables” composed by the prophets. In identifying “perplexing” biblical passages as parables (Ar. *amthāl*; Heb. *meshalim*) that are not to be taken literally, Maimonides resolves a variety of theological difficulties.<sup>51</sup> But he also argues that one must recognize that biblical parables employ elaborate language for the sake of literary embellishment.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, he formulates the following interpretive principle: once the general idea (*ma‘nā*) of a biblical parable is identified, one must not ascribe further meaning to its details, since their function is merely literary rather than substantive.<sup>53</sup> Well-versed in rabbinic literature, Maimonides clarifies – rather polemically – that this principle undercuts the sort of over-interpretation characteristic of midrash, saying that it leads to a distortion of the intention of the biblical authors.<sup>54</sup> Here he puts his finger on the fundamental assumption of the Andalusian *peshat* school that counters the midrashic doctrine of “omnisignificance”: that an understanding of the workings of biblical poetics enables the discerning reader to separate out (“strip away”) the incidental stylistic garb of biblical expression to get at its essential content – the intention of the biblical authors, what Abraham Ibn Ezra took as the singular goal of his “way of *peshat*.”

<sup>49</sup> *Yesod Diquduq*, Allony ed., 86.

<sup>50</sup> See Klein-Braslavy, *King Solomon*, 15–30.

<sup>51</sup> *Guide*, introduction; Pines trans., 6. See Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 180–1. Radak is thus following in his footsteps in his commentary on 1 Kgs 22:19 (cited at [Note 38](#)).

<sup>52</sup> *Guide*, introduction; Pines trans., 12.

<sup>53</sup> *Guide*, introduction; Pines trans., 15.

<sup>54</sup> See Cohen, *Gates*, 195–6.



Maimonides' treatment of the book of Job, to which he devotes two chapters in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, is a fine illustration of his application of his reductive interpretive principle. He takes a fundamental step by identifying this tale as a fiction, citing a talmudic precedent that "Job never existed and was never created, but was only a parable (*mashal*)" (b. *Bava Batra* 15a).<sup>55</sup> But this view is actually rejected in the Talmud, and the book of Job was typically assumed to be historical within the subsequent Jewish interpretive tradition. Maimonides, however, found it necessary to posit that Job is a literary fiction, and this permits him to separate out the book's essence, its philosophical content, from its fictional, stylistic format.<sup>56</sup> And, indeed, in the following chapter of the *Guide* Maimonides abstracts five philosophies from the speeches of Job and his companions, while disregarding what he refers to here as "dicta necessary for the order of the discourse." Following the principle articulated in his introduction to the *Guide*, Maimonides claims that these dicta were employed by the author of the book of Job in order to hide the book's true – and potentially dangerous – philosophical content from the masses.<sup>57</sup>

Against this backdrop we can understand Maimonides' interpretive approach to the Song of Songs, presented in passing in his legal work, *Mishneh Torah*:

What is the love of God that is befitting? To love the Eternal with a great and exceeding love . . . like a lovesick individual, whose mind is at no time free from his passion for a particular woman, the thought of her filling his heart at all times . . . Solomon expressed this allegorically (*derekh mashal*) [saying,] "For I am sick with love" (Song 2:5). And the Song of Songs in its entirety is a *mashal* for this notion.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the brevity of this remark, we may unpack its hermeneutical implications. Maimonides boldly draws the logical conclusion from the Andalusian literary interpretive outlook and applies it to the Song of Songs. He does so in the context of describing how a person must love God in an all-consuming way, just as one is overpowered by feelings of romantic love. As he explains, this analogy is the very essence of the Song of Songs – which he takes allegorically to connote the longing of the individual for God.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *Guide* III:22, Pines trans., 486.      <sup>56</sup> *Guide* III:22, Pines trans., 490.

<sup>57</sup> See Cohen, "Maimonides vs. Rashi," 325–32.

<sup>58</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Teshuvah* (Laws of Repentance) 10:3.

<sup>59</sup> See Cohen, *Gates*, 208–12. The traditional midrashic allegorical interpretation took the Song as a national allegory of the love of God for Israel. Maimonides reads it on a philosophical level as the individual's quest for God. See [Note 35](#).

The language Maimonides uses here – “the Song of Songs in its entirety is a *mashal* for this notion” – parallels the language he uses in the *Guide* to describe the literary workings of this genre, in which most of the details are merely poetic embellishment. This implication was drawn out by the post-Maimonidean Provençal commentator Joseph Ibn Kaspi (fourteenth century), who writes in his commentary on the Song of Songs:

Having explained the general idea, we have no need to explain the specific expressions. Only a few of them attest to the [allegorical] meaning. Most are nothing but decorative refinements in the style of poetic art . . . I have no doubt that this book belongs to the type of *meshalim* that [Maimonides] . . . mentioned . . . in which not every word in the *mashal* applies to the *nimshal* [that is, the deeper, allegorical level].<sup>60</sup>

For Maimonides, the expansive style of the Song of Songs poetically heightens the feelings of human love, which in turn represents the way one must love God. Yet, from an interpretive perspective, this dimension of scripture is an incidental “husk” to be “stripped away” as Moses Ibn Ezra might say. It is interesting to note that the traditional midrashic understanding of the Song of Songs exerted a particularly strong influence, and left its mark even on Abraham Ibn Ezra, who (uncharacteristically) interprets this text allegorically detail by detail.<sup>61</sup> It was left for Maimonides to capitalize on the possibility opened by Moses Ibn Ezra’s poetic outlook, and be freed entirely from the need to interpret every detail of the Song of Songs as anything other than a celebration of human love.

### 3 Poetic conceptions in the northern French *peshat* school

Interpreters in the *peshat* school that emerged in eleventh- and early twelfth-century northern France did not know the Greek or Arabic terms for rhetoric or poetics, nor were they able to read the works of their Andalusian co-religionists written in Judeo-Arabic. Yet they developed some analogous literary notions in their quest to explicate “the *peshat* of scripture.” As discussed in [Chapter 9](#), Rashi’s advance of *peshat*, revolutionary in his Ashkenazi talmudic milieu, was never intended to supplant the traditional rabbinic understanding of the Bible. Rather, he sought to supplement and refine the midrashic interpretive methods by framing them anew within a commentary guided by new *peshat* sensibilities. Even Rashbam, who adhered to the *peshat* project more consistently, still

<sup>60</sup> Ibn Kaspi, comm. on the Song of Songs, introduction. See Berlin, *Biblical Poetry*, 105–7.

<sup>61</sup> See Cohen, *Three Approaches*, 263–5.

emphasized the authority of midrash and even characterized it as the “essence” or veritable meaning of scripture.

Rashi’s interpretive ideology is most clearly articulated in his introduction to the Song of Songs. He does not question the allegorical midrashic reading of this text as a historical dialogue between God and Israel. But he invokes the talmudic maxim that “a biblical verse does not leave the realm (lit. “hands”) of its *peshat*” (b. *Shabbat* 63a) to argue that the love lyrics that emerge from a philological-contextual (*peshat*) analysis are worthy of study in their own right as a first point of reference.<sup>62</sup> Rashi then coordinates these two levels of meaning of the Song of Songs:

Solomon foresaw with the Holy Spirit that Israel will be exiled . . . and will recall the original love [of God toward them] . . . saying “I will go and return to my first husband; for then [was it] better with me than now” (Hos 2:7) . . .

And he [Solomon] composed this book through the Holy Spirit in the language of a woman in “living widowhood,” longing for her husband, pining over her lover, recalling to him the love of their youth . . . Likewise, her lover suffers over her pain, and recalls the goodness of her youth and her beauty.<sup>63</sup>

Solomon envisioned through the Holy Spirit that Israel – centuries after his time – would be exiled and distanced from God, and seek to rekindle their relationship with Him. Rashi casts the Song midrashically as an expression of the Jews in his own time communicating with God, recalling the days when His presence was among them, and being assured that God will redeem them. As recent scholarship has shown, this was Rashi’s response to the Christian assertion that God has abandoned Israel – and this message was undoubtedly the essential meaning of the Song of Songs in his view.<sup>64</sup> Yet Rashi also accounts for the literal sense of the Song and its literary format – which he defines as the *peshat*. He does so by constructing a persona and setting for the love lyrics in this biblical book within an imaginative literary framework. In his account, we hear in the Song of Songs the voice of an older woman separated from her husband, in what Rashi terms “living widowhood,” recalling their youthful love and striving to restore it. As Rashi explains, the love poems in the Song of Songs are retrospective – this older woman reliving the romance of their youth.

<sup>62</sup> See Chapter 9, Sec. 3. See also Cohen, *Gates*, 363.

<sup>63</sup> Rashi, Introduction to the Song of Songs, Kamin and Saltman ed., 81.

<sup>64</sup> See Kamin, *Jews and Christians*, 22–57.

Rashi's commentary sparked others within the French *peshat* school.<sup>65</sup> Rashbam, for example, begins his commentary by defining his objective "to understand the poetic language (*melisah*) of this book . . . its *peshat* according to its style and word[ing] . . . its structure and language." He then continues:

[Solomon] wrote (*katav*) his . . . "Song" . . . [in the voice of] a maiden longing and lamenting the loss of her lover, who left her and went to a faraway land. She recalls him and his eternal love for her, and she sings and says: such strong love my darling manifested toward me when he was still with me. And she . . . recounts to her friends and her maidens: such and such my darling said to me and this is how I responded.<sup>66</sup>

Although this portayal echoes Rashi's, Rashbam identifies the beloved as a young maiden, not an older woman, perhaps better to capture the spirit of playful, youthful love in the Song's "poetic language."

In his gloss on Song 1:1, Rashbam introduces his allegorical reading in the spirit of Rashi's midrashic construal:

King Solomon composed [the Song] through the Holy Spirit, for he saw that Israel would grieve in their exile over God, who has become distant from them, as a groom separated from his beloved.<sup>67</sup>

He adopts Rashi's distinctive national reading of the Song, identifying the beloved as a symbol for Israel in exile separated from God and longing to reunite with Him.

Rashbam does not cite the theoretical discipline of poetics, as Moses Ibn Ezra did, but he is aware of secular love poetry and identifies this style as the Song's literary garb, as evident in a later gloss:

The manner of this "Song" is that she sings and grieves . . . over her love for her darling . . . And even nowadays the way of the singers (*jongleurs*?) is to sing a song that recounts the narrative of the love of a couple, with love songs as is the custom of the world.<sup>68</sup>

Is this secular style of the *jongleurs* the work of the Holy Spirit? Whereas Rashi specifically attributed it to the Holy Spirit ("he composed this book with the Holy Spirit in the language of a woman stuck in living widowhood"), Rashbam simply writes: "[Solomon] wrote (*katav*) his . . . Song . . . [in the voice of] a maiden longing and lamenting the loss of her lover" (at [Note 66](#)). The disparity of formulation suggests that the

<sup>65</sup> See Japhet, "MS Prague."

<sup>66</sup> Japhet ed., 233.

<sup>67</sup> Japhet ed., 234.

<sup>68</sup> Gloss on Song 3:5, Japhet ed., 250.

younger *pashtan* considers this poetic garb to be a product of the human ingenuity of King Solomon, as opposed to the prophetic content he received from God.

What is only hinted at in Rashbam becomes crystal clear in an author who appears to have been influenced by him, as we read in an anonymous northern French *peshat* commentary on the opening verse of this biblical book:

*The Song of Songs of Solomon.* Solomon . . . wrote many poems (lit. songs), as it is written “his poems numbered a thousand and one” (1 Kgs 5:12) . . . [F]rom among his poetry the Wise Men selected these poems and combined them, in order to impart a lesson about God and the Community of Israel. And this is what [the opening verse] means: “A poem that was prepared from Solomon’s poetry” – that they anthologized his poems and arranged [this collection] as [a testimonial] regarding God and the Community of Israel, and the remainder they did not use. For this [book] was composed with the Holy Spirit and was included in the Sacred Writings because it is holy of holies, for the Wise Men arranged the words of Solomon, as it is written: “These are the sayings of Solomon that the men of Hezekiah transmitted” (Prov 25:1).<sup>69</sup>

This commentator, using the vocabulary of Rashi and Rashbam, boldly posits two aspects of the Song’s authorship. He views it as a selection of King Solomon’s love poems anthologized by Hezekiah’s “Wise Men.” Going a step beyond Rashbam, he argues that Solomon is responsible solely for the literary dimension of the Song of Songs – what Rashi labeled *peshuto shel miqra* – and that the midrashic allegorical sense was infused into this text, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, only by a later generation of biblical authors.

These developments in the French *peshat* school can be appreciated by comparison with a developing tendency in the Latin commentary tradition to focus on the literary contributions of the Bible’s human authors, as distinct from the role of the Holy Spirit. As Alastair Minnis writes:

In much twelfth-century exegesis . . . the commentators were preoccupied with allegorical interpretation. According to Geoffrey of Auxerre (late twelfth century), it is not important to know who wrote the Song of Songs. Perhaps the human *auctor* knew what he was prophesying, but if he did not, the inspirer (*inspirator*) most certainly knew. What matters is the prophecy itself, of the mystical marriage of Christ and holy Church. But in the early thirteenth century, when emphasis came to be placed

<sup>69</sup> Eppenstein, *Fragment*, 243–4.

on the literal sense of the Scripture, the exegetes' interest in their texts became more literary . . . the emphasis shifted from the divine *auctor* to the human *auctor* of Scripture.<sup>70</sup>

Although this trend emerged in force only in the thirteenth century, Minnis points to exceptional Christian interpreters in Rashbam's time who paved a new path:

In twelfth-century commentaries on the Bible, God was believed to have controlled human authors in a way which defied literary description. Literary criteria and classifications . . . were afforded a relatively unimportant place in Scriptural exegesis. Of course, there are exceptions to this general rule . . . [e.g.,] Peter Abelard (1079–1142) . . . [who] anticipates literary attitudes which were widely held in the thirteenth century. [He] was . . . interested in the individual literary activity of the human *auctor* of Scripture, especially in the author's intention and the rhetorical force of his writing.<sup>71</sup>

While further research is needed to explore this parallel, it is certainly noteworthy that Jewish and Christian interpreters in medieval northern France manifest similar interests in the literal sense/*peshat* and the aesthetic designs of the human authors of scripture, as distinct from the Holy Spirit that guided them.<sup>72</sup>

#### 4 Conclusion

Having surveyed the two key medieval streams of Jewish *peshat* interpretation – the originally Judeo-Arabic Andalusian school and the northern French school pioneered by Rashi – we must note a critical difference between them, despite their shared view of the importance of the aesthetic dimension of the Hebrew Bible. For Abraham Ibn Ezra, *peshat* is the essential idea conveyed by the text of scripture, stripped of its literary form and “embellishments,” as Moses Ibn Ezra would say. This outlook is taken to its logical (but radical) conclusion by Maimonides, who identifies the theological purpose or “message” of the Song of Songs and treats its poetic form merely as an incidental husk, employed for aesthetic purposes only. By contrast, in Rashi's school, the literary form of the Song of Songs is celebrated as “the *peshat* of scripture” and deemed worthy of exegetical

<sup>70</sup> Minnis, *Authorship*, 38–9.      <sup>71</sup> Minnis, *Authorship*, 58–60.

<sup>72</sup> See Cohen, *Rule of Peshat*, chapter five, for further discussion of this and other parallels between the northern French *peshat* school and the literary conceptions reflected in contemporaneous Latin Bible interpretation.

attention, even though it is not the true essence of the book, which is found in the allegorical midrashic reading. This exegetical interest did not wane (if anything, it grew) even when the literary form was increasingly attributed to King Solomon's own poetic sense and not to the Holy Spirit. For Rashi and his followers, even the "husk" of the Bible, the human literary expression of divinely inspired authors, is worthy of exegetical analysis.

## *Classical rhetoric and medieval scriptural interpretation in the Latin West*

Rita Copeland<sup>1</sup>

As discussed in the preceding three chapters, a number of medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interpreters found it necessary to catalog – or at least to consider – how their respective sacred scriptures employed the figures and tropes defined in classical grammar and rhetoric (or their equivalents). These medieval discussions typically revolved around the form–content dichotomy, the distinction between “what is meant,” that is, the inner content, and “what is said,” that is, the external stylistic form. While this dichotomy proved useful for interpreters of scripture in all three faiths, it also generated anxieties and challenges that had to be met theoretically. In Islam there were actually those who denied the existence of *majāz* (non-literal language) in the Qur’an – forcing other Muslim interpreters to address the objections they raised to the prospect that God would use anything but *ḥaqīqa* (literal, “true” language). The primary challenge for Jewish and Christian interpreters was how to coordinate the style–content dichotomy with the multiple layers of meaning they believed to inhere in the Bible. More specifically, is the *peshat* / *sensus litteralis* to be identified with the external style or with the internal content? This pivotal question runs through earlier chapters of this volume – both in the current and preceding sections – and might even be said to epitomize key matters of internal debate in both the Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions throughout the medieval period.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I wish to express my gratitude to Mordechai Cohen and Adele Berlin for many fruitful discussions of the arguments in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Most obviously, the answer to this very question would seem to divide the northern French and Andalusian conceptions of *peshat*, as discussed in [Chapter 12](#). But the question is also relevant for charting the different conceptions (and concomitant valuations) of the *sensus litteralis* in Christian hermeneutical theory. Originally identified as the “exterior” sense of the Bible, the *sensus litteralis* was eventually aligned with the intention of the author – and thus defined as the inner meaning of the biblical text, as discussed in [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#).



The current chapter explores how a select group of Christian authors from late antiquity through the late Middle Ages and a singular early humanist Jewish one, interpreted the Bible through the prism of the innermost element of classical rhetoric – the analysis of persuasive reasoning itself. Unlike the domain of stylistics (i.e., the figures and tropes) that rhetoric shared with grammar, this more distinctive aspect of rhetorical doctrine does not differentiate necessarily between what is said and what is meant. Consequently, these interpreters did not need to negotiate the style–content dichotomy in order to arrive at the intent of the biblical authors. Their powerful tool for drawing out the effect, purpose, and theological arguments of scripture directly was the ancient Latin study of the art of persuasion.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

When, in the Roman empire of the fourth century, Augustine quit his career as a public orator and teacher of rhetoric because he could no longer abide being a *venditor verborum* (*Confessions* 9.5), and when Jerome envisioned being reprimanded by Jesus Christ, who called him a liar for professing to be a Christian and said “you are a Ciceronian, not a Christian” (Ep. 22, *Ad Eustochium*), the expulsion of pagan rhetoric from the Christian community would seem to have been assured. But in fact, these pronouncements of a reformed discourse cleansed of worldly rhetoric signaled the new beginning, not the end, of classical rhetoric. In what is nearly a textbook case of the return of the repressed, Christian culture continued to disavow the classical legacy even as it habitually relied upon classical rhetoric to shape and define its many discourses.<sup>3</sup>

One of the less common forms of reliance upon this legacy was the application of the precepts of rhetorical argumentation to scriptural exposition. By this we mean recruiting the inner and most technical elements of rhetorical doctrine to exegetical purposes. There are just a few but – for that reason – remarkable examples of this particular exegetical practice from late antiquity through to the end of the Middle Ages so much do these individual examples have in common with one another that it is justifiable to call this an exegetical “subtradition.” In working at a deep level of rhetorical understanding, focusing on argumentative logic and argumentative form, these exegetes seem to aspire to a comprehensive conception of rhetoric that can have an intimate relevance to scripture.

<sup>3</sup> See Cameron, *Christianity and Rhetoric*; Brown, *Power and Persuasion*; Shiell, *Reading Acts*.

Such applications of rhetorical theory to exegesis may overlap with the more common concerns of preaching, as in some of the texts to be discussed here, but our interest will be in how the program of rhetoric fared as an expository template. How does rhetoric in its chief capacity as a theory of argumentation become hermeneutics? And how can pagan political and legal rhetoric be turned to the purpose of a sacred hermeneutics?

The concern of this chapter will be to identify the practical apprehensions of rhetorical theory as hermeneutical program first in the Christian West from late antiquity to the later Middle Ages and then in an example of a late medieval-early humanist Jewish instantiation, focusing on those distinctive texts that actually perform and elaborate this program and thus have something in common with one another.<sup>4</sup> We will consider how this practice passes from the classical inheritance of Augustine and Cassiodorus to the monastic expositors of rhetoric Notker of St. Gall and Rupert of Deutz; from there to the highly theoretical *ars praedicandi* of Thomas of Chobham; and finally how the classical rhetorical legacy passes through what is perhaps a more direct route to a singular Hebrew exegetical text, the extraordinary rhetorical treatise by Judah Messer Leon, from the last quarter of the fifteenth century.

The distinctive medieval practice considered here has some commonalities with the modern school of rhetorical criticism in biblical studies. This is a methodology that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, partly in response to Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory.<sup>5</sup> It has developed its own methodological purpose to focus on the persuasive purpose of the biblical text, analyzing the relationship between speaker and audience to situate a given passage in its dynamic speaking context.<sup>6</sup> This is usually reconstructive, to get at the "ancient reality" of the biblical texts: What were the rhetorical assumptions of the culture of Paul or the writers of the Gospels? How do ancient notions of rhetorical argument help us to see the underlying structures of biblical discourse as the original audiences would have responded to them?<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, such reconstruction was not the ambition of medieval rhetorical analysts, who were applying what they saw as a universal notion

<sup>4</sup> The long tradition of Byzantine rhetoric lies beyond the scope of this chapter. The significant scholarship in English includes Kustas, *Byzantine Rhetoric*, and Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric*.

<sup>5</sup> Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*.

<sup>6</sup> Morrison, "Rhetorical Criticism." Rhetorical criticism distinguishes itself from what is known as "form criticism." See the lucid account in Berlin, *Poetics and Biblical Narrative*, 122–9.

<sup>7</sup> Jasper, "Reflections," 478; cf. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 4–6. For an informed but also cautionary overview of the issues in modern rhetorical analysis of Scripture, see Burrridge, "Gospel and Acts." See also Porter, "Paul of Tarsus."

of rhetoric to the Bible and who did not think in sociological terms about the cultural assumptions of the writers and audiences of the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels. But the medieval analysts do find their way presciently to some conclusions that would resonate with modern scholars. The medieval exegetes are also using rhetoric to identify a ground of authorial intention in scripture, which for them entails what they considered a reality of historical truth. Rhetorical analysis revealed to them a certain historical, and thus literal, sense of scriptural argument contained in what they understood as the manifest intention of the author.

Fundamentally, any rhetorical analysis will ask: how does the text persuade, how does it systematically construct arguments that will compel belief or assent, for example, giving assertions along with rationales to produce arguments that compel belief. The medieval exegetes do not necessarily address such questions overtly. Some content themselves with finding rhetorical devices in scripture, that is, discovering that their knowledge in one field (rhetoric) is borne out in another, superior field (the divine science of scripture). But some interpreters penetrate to the heart of the question to ask: how is scripture persuasive? As we will see, Cassiodorus asks this in the sixth century, retracing personally and poignantly his own struggle to understand and be moved by the Psalms and his happy discovery of the persuasive system of rhetoric in the Psalter. He reads the Psalms as genres of argument, thus seeing them not as simple proclamations of truth but as texts that demonstrate their own persuasive exigencies: what did the Psalmist need to argue, what devices did he use to achieve this task? Similarly, we will see how Rupert of Deutz, early in the twelfth century, grasps this question by investigating how God, Moses, or Jesus make their cases for divine truth systematically, and thus how scripture affirms the fundamental rightness of human law and careful legal argumentation, which, when correctly deployed, should mirror God's divine law. Along related lines, Thomas of Chobham, writing an art of preaching in the early thirteenth century, asks: "How can I be persuasive by using Scripture's persuasive devices?"

The focus of this kind of analysis in its medieval forms (as well as its reach into modern criticism), needs to be distinguished from what is generally understood simply as eloquence or even poetics. It is an approach that trains its attention on what were considered to be the essential theoretical dimensions of rhetoric, not (or not limited to) stylistics and figurative speech, which constituted only one part of rhetoric – and which, in ancient and late antique rhetorics, were perceived as much less important than the canon of invention and its teachings on

argument. The identification of rhetoric with style and ornamented discourse represents a truncation of the art, a common distortion that has its own causes within the fortunes of rhetoric's long history.

Style was only one of five canons or parts of classical rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Style is organic and integral to rhetoric, but ancient rhetorical treatises from Aristotle's onward tended to devote most of their attention to the theory of invention. This is because invention carries the most technically demanding and often the most disputed elements of rhetorical thought. How does one "discover" ("invent" – from *invenire*, to discover or come upon) an argument? What kinds of proof furnish an argument? In legal (forensic) rhetoric there are external proofs (what Aristotle called "atechnical"), such as testimonies, confessions, and material evidence. These are givens that the orator does not have to fashion, but which nevertheless must be fitted into the larger framework of the argument that the orator will make. In Ciceronian rhetoric, the orator begins by asking about the "status" of the case and establishing its parameters. Once these have been determined, there are still a host of other mental or logical procedures to cover. The orator must marshal arguments to lend credibility to the case. These arguments come from, or are discovered in, *topoi* or "topics," which are derived from procedures in logic: the attributes of persons and acts (who did it, what did they do, why, where, when did they do it, in what manner, and by what means); and the topics of logical argumentation borrowed from Aristotle's *Categories*. There are procedures for invention for all six parts of the classical oration, and for all three genres of rhetoric (judicial, political, epideictic). This is why invention dominates rhetorical theory.

The other four canons of rhetoric – arrangement, style, memory, and delivery – are essential to manifesting what has been invented. The entirety of rhetoric is regarded as "artful eloquence" – *artificiosa eloquentia*. The treatment of style, usually the figures of diction (involving such matters as accentuation, word order, and sound) and the tropes, was from the start an area that rhetoric seems to have shared with grammar.<sup>8</sup> The ancient Greek and Latin grammarians recorded nearly the same kinds of figures and tropes that the rhetoricians recorded. The grammarians regarded figures and tropes as permissible poetic deviations from proper speech; the rhetoricians regarded them as embellishments that add to sense and to emotional effect. Because of this shared territory, poetics, which deploys the same figures and tropes, often traveled alongside rhetoric. For example,

<sup>8</sup> See Holtz, "Grammairiens et rhéteurs romains."

Horace's *Ars poetica* is a treatise on writing poetry; but it uses many of the ideas associated with rhetoric, and throughout the Middle Ages it was culled for compositional advice in place of more technical rhetorical treatises. Similarly, Greek treatises such as Longinus' *On the Sublime* and Demetrius' *On Style*, which entered the early modern Western canon as contributions to poetic theory, were originally designed to elaborate rhetorical theory.

At various junctures along the historical continuum, where the argumentative, probative, and inventional aspects of classical rhetoric became less relevant to new legal situations and oratorical and literary practices, what was retained of classical doctrine was the teaching on style. Style is always relevant, even when the conditions that supported classical legal and political oratory have disappeared. This is one important reason why the art of rhetoric came to be known by one of its parts, eloquence or style, a truncation that lasted well past the Renaissance, helped along by the rhetorical revolution of Peter Ramus in the sixteenth century (Ramus redivided the art, assigning invention to dialectic and style to rhetoric, thus leaving rhetoric to rule over a fraction of its former kingdom). When philosophers such as John Locke repudiate "rhetoric," what they are rejecting is a notion of style as secondary embellishment.

Thus those biblical exegetes of the medieval West surveyed in this chapter, those commentators who turned to the actual rhetorical texts of antiquity – in the Latin West these would be the Ciceronian rhetorics – recognized that they were dealing with the whole of rhetorical theory, not just a shadow of the discipline. These exegetes knew that a rhetorical approach involves a much larger set of questions about argumentation and persuasion than a stylistic approach alone.<sup>9</sup>

Such disciplinary issues impose some selectivities on the history outlined here. By necessity this account is not a general survey of the medieval appropriation of ornamented language to sacred purposes. Thus, notably, Bede's *De schematibus et tropis*, familiar to modern scholars for its searching out of scriptural examples of the classical figures and tropes, does not belong in this account because it is an offshoot of the grammatical tradition of Donatus and hence its concerns are with

<sup>9</sup> The distinction between rhetoric and poetics was also recognized by the Andalusian Jewish poet Moses Ibn Ezra. See [Chapter 12, Sec. 1](#). As discussed there, Ibn Ezra focused on the Bible's poetic embellishments; but he did not elaborate on the rhetorical strategies found in scripture. His access to these disciplines was through the Arabic reception of the Aristotelian *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*, and probably Alfarabi's *Catalogue of the Sciences*, which treats these texts as representing scientific distinctions.

stylistics.<sup>10</sup> The poetics of the Bible, its stylistic character, metrical principles, and poetic devices, has long been a distinct subject in modern biblical criticism as well.<sup>11</sup>

### I Augustine, Cassiodorus: using rhetoric as an exegetical tool

Unable to disown the rhetorical training that had defined him as a member of the professional Roman elite, Augustine continued to think and write through the categories of rhetoric; it was through the classical theory of invention, which had been the intellectual engine of the ancient tradition, that Augustine formulated a powerful hermeneutical approach to scripture. As is well documented, his treatise *De doctrina christiana* (begun 397, finished 426) sets into motion a theological tradition of rhetoric that takes the form of interpretive program, semiotic teaching, and the disciplines of reading and meditation. This is a systematic treatise that reduces the five canons of classical rhetoric to two crucial elements: discovery and conveying what has been discovered: the “means of discovering (*modus inveniendi*) what is to be understood,” and the “means of setting forth (*modus proferendi*) what has been understood.” The *modus inveniendi* represents his treatment of invention in a new economy of salvation in which all truth has been revealed in scripture, and in which the inventional program of “thinking out” the argument, “coming upon” or “discovering” what is to be argued is converted into a system of textual exegesis. The “commonplaces” or inventional “topics” (*topoi*) have been expanded beyond those of dialectical argumentation (as in classical rhetoric), to include now philology and grammar, a knowledge of the difference between literal and figurative language, and a semiotic theory that distinguishes between signs and things.<sup>12</sup> By calling his hermeneutical program “invention” (*modus inveniendi*), Augustine seems to signal that the new exegetical imperative will assume the privilege that antiquity had accorded to invention as the key intellectual process of rhetoric. If the master genre of pagan late antiquity was the forensic oration, the master genre of medieval Christian culture was exegesis; the immense burden of interpreting correctly required the finely calibrated tools of discourse analysis that had developed in rhetorical teaching, now to be applied to the task of

<sup>10</sup> For discussion and summary of the debates about Bede’s *De schematibus*, see Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 63–4, 256–60.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed consideration of the medieval Christian critical tradition see Kugel, *Idea*, 135–70.

<sup>12</sup> See Copeland, “Ciceronian Rhetorical Tradition,” 239–41, and idem, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 154–8, and references there.

finding and explaining the unknown, obscure, or ambiguous meanings contained in scripture.

Augustine laid out the big picture of an epochal change, the conversion of an entire discourse system to purposes that would originally have been its inverse opposite. For ancient rhetoric was neither a textual system nor an engine of textual exposition, even if its teaching was written down and its model oratory preserved through copying. It was a mental discipline and an art of spoken communication. While the medieval textualization of classical rhetoric has been the occasion for some provocative lamentation in modern scholarship,<sup>13</sup> it was this very process that assured the survival and continuing relevance of classical precept. Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* could be said to have captured this process of conversion at its most crucial moment and to have given it its definitive expression.

But Augustine's treatment remains at a rather abstract level, eschewing most of the technical hardware of rhetorical precept, and instead distilling the essence of rhetorical culture. It remained for the later tradition to discover the exegetical possibilities in the finer points of rhetorical doctrine. In its earliest guise, among those who were still the products of late antique education, this took the form of using the art of rhetoric as a familiar point of reference by which to navigate what seemed the strangeness, the incomprehensibility, of the scriptural text. So in the middle of the sixth century, Cassiodorus, formerly *magister officiorum* at Ravenna, turning to religious writings while in semi-retirement in Constantinople, relates how he could not fathom the Psalms until he understood them – appropriated them – as rhetorical productions. Cassiodorus' *Exposition of the Psalms* is a remarkable attempt to marry the rhetorical learning of late Roman culture to the theological revelation of the Psalms. In his preface to the *Exposition* he explains that he had found the Psalms impenetrable, their profound truths hidden to him beneath a "veil of parables." In applying his rhetorical knowledge to them, he was seeking an exegetical mastery. So he turns the Psalms into a rhetorical laboratory, the consummate statement of rhetorical doctrine.

Cassiodorus' genius was to take a rather technical and increasingly moribund element of rhetorical theory, the genres of rhetoric, and find a surprising relevance for it as a way of classifying the Psalms. From Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (our earliest systematic rhetorical treatise) onward, speeches had been classified in three genres depending on their aims,

<sup>13</sup> Most famously Vickers' chapter "Medieval Fragmentation" in his historical survey *Defence of Rhetoric*.

circumstances, and subjects: deliberative (political), forensic (judicial or legal), and epideictic or demonstrative (praise and blame, or later, simply, the panegyric). But while the rhetorical manuals of late antiquity continued to purvey this teaching about the three genres, the conditions of legal procedure and public discourse in imperial Rome had discouraged the practice of the first two genres. The only genre that really flourished under the harsh conditions of imperial rule was epideictic, the genre for which the orators of the so-called Second Sophistic were best known. But in Cassiodorus' hands all three genres find a fresh and startling relevance as categories through which to view the Psalms as living, persuasive speech. Cassiodorus uses the genres of rhetoric to classify the Psalms: the deliberative genre is for the psalms of meditation and seeking instruction; the judicial genre is for the psalms of penitence; and the epideictic genre is for the psalms of inspiration, revelation, and showing. He also divides each psalm according to the traditional divisions of an oration (exordium, narration, partition, proof, refutation, peroration, i.e., conclusion). Thus the deliberative genre, from Psalm 2:

*And now, O ye kings, understand* (Ps 2:10). The third limb of the psalm is reached here, in which the prophet now urges the human race humbly to obey the Creator at the revelation of these fearful mysteries. Here the deliberative type of utterance begins, expressed most beautifully; for when men's hearts are paralyzed by the unfolding of the mystery, this most salutary and vital adviser appears, urging us to serve the true Lord with fear and trembling, and showing us that the words spoken are valuable from the viewpoint of the useful and the honorable, motifs extremely effective in deliberative speeches.<sup>14</sup>

And his concluding remarks on Psalm 6, illustrating the judicial genre:

Though we should apply our eager intelligence to all the psalms . . . yet we ought to pay particular attention to the psalms of the penitents, for they are like suitable medicine prescribed for the human race . . . They form a sort of judicial genre, in which the defendant appears before the sight of the Judge, atoning for his sin with tears, and dissolving it by confessing it.<sup>15</sup>

Cassiodorus has been called "one of the last completely rhetorical men,"<sup>16</sup> a product of that late antique rhetorical *paideia* through which the elite classes claimed their place in public culture. His exposition of the Psalms reinvents the scriptural text as an *ars rhetorica* in which the formal

<sup>14</sup> *Expositio psalmorum*, Adriaen ed., 1:294, trans. Walsh 1:65.

<sup>15</sup> *Expositio psalmorum*, Adriaen ed., 1:323, trans. Walsh 1:98.

<sup>16</sup> O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 180.



dimensions of rhetoric – the architectonics of genre and the decorative elements of the figures and tropes – are the lenses through which the mysteries of scripture may be illuminated, enabling him to appreciate the particular “eloquence of the divine law ... [which] gleams with the purest possible expression” (Preface 15).<sup>17</sup>

One could say that the men of late antiquity could hardly alienate themselves from their own *paideia* (as much as they proclaimed their liberation from worldly knowledge), so that they could not help referring to rhetoric and the other liberal arts in their new explorations of scripture. It is also true that one reason for the vast popularity of Cassiodorus’ *Expositio Psalmorum* all the way up to the late twelfth century is that it transmitted an authoritative knowledge of rhetorical doctrine, especially of the figures and tropes: it fell out of use only when new treatises emerged to take its place. But if Augustine and Cassiodorus, scholars produced by the late antique schools, turned to classical rhetoric as the familiar map with which they could navigate the daunting complexities of divine eloquence, the opposite was the case for later scholars. For later generations, the Bible is the now-familiar map by which to navigate a less familiar geography of classical rhetoric and indeed the other secular arts of antiquity. The Bible also becomes the standard by which to judge the continuing relevance of the classical sciences. The reasoning here was perhaps circular. The compulsion to conserve classical knowledge needed to be justified in terms of the scriptural relevance of the secular arts; but to determine their scriptural relevance one had to establish that the secular arts of pagan antiquity were already inherent in scripture, that scripture already encompassed all recorded knowledge. Thus to read scripture rhetorically, one had to find the system of rhetoric in scripture.

## 2 Notker of St. Gall: implanting rhetoric in scripture

It would seem that the earliest work to deploy such readings at large is from the ninth or tenth century (possibly as late as the early eleventh century), from the monastery of St. Gall in Switzerland. Notker III of St. Gall (950–1022), also known as Notker Labeo or Notker the German, is usually assumed to be the author of an *ars rhetorica*.<sup>18</sup> The *Nova rhetorica* is an attempt to adapt the rhetorical knowledge conserved in earlier medieval

<sup>17</sup> See Astell, “Cassiodorus’s *Commentary* as *Ars rhetorica*.”

<sup>18</sup> See Bennett, “Notker’s *Rhetorica*,” upon which the discussion here is based. See also Jaffe, “Antiquity and Innovation”; de Rijk, “Curriculum of the Arts”; Conley, *Rhetoric in European Tradition*, 88–90, 106–7.

technographic manuals (Cassiodorus' chapter on rhetoric in his *Institutes*, Isidore of Seville's chapter on rhetoric in the *Etymologies*, Alcuin's *Dialogue* on rhetoric, Remigius' glosses on the rhetoric chapter in Martianus Capella's encyclopedia) to the needs of a monastic community. We see the same impulse earlier, in Rabanus Maurus' *Clerical Institutes* (ninth century), but without the same emphasis on scripture as the actual locus and source of rhetorical doctrine.

Notker's *Nova rhetorica* is intended to vivify rhetoric for its new audience, as an art of negotiating controversy and even eliminating discord through eloquence and logical thought about the natures of controversies and disagreements: this represents the technical heart of the ancient theory of invention, the doctrine of *status* or *stasis*, recognizing and defining the kind of controversy that was under debate.<sup>19</sup> Notker explicitly organizes his treatise around the theory of invention, which he says represents the essence of rhetoric: "So in diverse controversies of all kinds, invention is recognized as being more powerful than all the remaining parts of rhetoric."<sup>20</sup>

The nature of cases may be judged first from the genres of rhetoric, and examples of these may be found in scripture: for example, the judicial case can be found in the Acts of the Apostles, in Peter's defense of his preaching among Gentiles (Acts 11:5); the deliberative case is exemplified in the council of the elders in Judith.<sup>21</sup> But it is when Notker considers the specifics of invention and *status* theory that we see how deeply he has implanted rhetoric in scripture. One kind of *status* question (or "issue") deals with conjecture, where the plea will be supported by conjecture or inference: did the accused do what they are said to have done? (or as Cicero's *De inventione* has it, "was there an act?"). Two biblical examples that Notker supplies to illustrate conjecture under the judicial genre are the stories of Solomon's judgment between the claims of the two mothers, and of Daniel and Susanna in which Daniel proves by inference that the witnesses against Susanna had lied.

<sup>19</sup> In the ancient rhetorical tradition, status theory was a system for determining the juridical "status" of an accusation and identifying the "issues" entailed in a controversy where there is a charge or claim and a defense. It addresses the questions: Was there a deed committed? Was it a criminal deed? Was it justifiable under the circumstances? Under what procedure (or kind of court, e.g., religious or civil) should it be tried? See Calboli Montefusco, *La dottrina degli "status"*; Hohmann, "Stasis."

<sup>20</sup> Notker, *Die kleineren Schriften*, ed. King and Tax, 154; *Die Schriften Notkers*, Piper ed., I:670. King and Tax present the texts of MS Brussels Royal Library 10615-729 (twelfth century) and Munich Clm 4621 (eleventh century) side by side, keyed to the pages of the edition by Piper. The citations here are from the Brussels manuscript.

<sup>21</sup> *Die kleineren Schriften*, King and Tax ed., 152; *Die Schriften Notkers*, Piper ed., I:669; on these examples see Bennett, "Notker's *Rhetorica*," 176.

Invention is the thinking out of true matters ... So Solomon thought out the case that he judged, [namely] which one of the two prostitutes was the mother of the living infant, asserting that [the infant] should be divided in half with a sword. The [true] mother did want to accept this, because she who is a mother loves her child; but she who was not the mother asked that it be done. Similarly, Daniel invented an argument by which he proved that the testimony brought against Susanna was false, because [the claims that she sinned] under a mastic tree and under an oak tree conflicted and could not simultaneously be true.<sup>22</sup>

Another kind of issue or *status* is known as the “qualitative issue” because it answers the question *quale sit*, “of what sort is it?” We may agree that there was a murder (*quid sit*), but was the murder justified? – an issue often illustrated in classical sources by the legal drama of Orestes and his “justified” matricide. Such an issue may be approached by examining the law itself. Among various scriptural examples of this, Notker offers the following, based on Luke 10:27–8, to exemplify disputes over legal definition:

It is Divine Law that you should love your neighbor as you do yourself; the question becomes “Who is my neighbor?”; the definition becomes “he who treats [you] with compassion.”<sup>23</sup>

This turn to scriptural authority shows how Notker effects the transference of classical legal thought to the ethical and behavioral concerns of a monastic community. The primary focus here is not scriptural interpretation in and of itself, as Bennett notes.<sup>24</sup> But Notker has marshalled the rhetorical framework to serve an active understanding and application of scripture in the life of a religious community. Notker presents “a self-confessed revivalist adaptation” of late antique technical manuals on rhetoric with a view to regulating the public controversies of his day, whether those emerge in ecclesiastical or secular situations.<sup>25</sup>

### 3 Rupert of Deutz: scripture as a roadmap for rhetoric

But there is nothing before the twelfth century that can prepare us for the sustained, systematic, and imaginative rhetorical reading of scripture in the work of Rupert of Deutz, a Benedictine of the Rhineland who died in 1129. Rupert of Deutz was a prolific writer best known for his massive salvation

<sup>22</sup> *Die kleineren Schriften*, King and Tax ed., 150; *Die Schriften Notkers*, Piper ed., I: 668. Translation my own (RC).

<sup>23</sup> *Die kleineren Schriften*, King and Tax ed., 132; *Die Schriften Notkers*, Piper ed. I:658. Trans. Bennett, “Notker’s *Rhetorica*,” 179.

<sup>24</sup> Bennett, “Notker’s *Rhetorica*,” 183. <sup>25</sup> Ward, *Ciceronian Rhetoric*, 82; cf. 287.

history, *De sancta trinitate et operibus eius* (On the Holy Trinity and its Works).<sup>26</sup> In the last sections of this work, Rupert considers the human sciences as the sacred works of the Trinity possessing a vital theological and ecclesiological value. Rupert found a conservative application of secular knowledge in the combating of theological error. He devotes much greater space to rhetoric than to the other arts, demonstrating the superiority of scripture over any secular rhetoric, and asserting that scripture is not bound to the technical rules of the rhetorical manuals. But he also proudly demonstrates how beautifully scripture deploys those same rules.<sup>27</sup>

Rupert seems to have contributed little directly to the tremendous advances in rhetorical study that took place within the decades immediately following his activity, the rediscovery of Ciceronian rhetoric as an intellectual discipline that we see in the French cathedral schools of the 1130s and 1140s. Yet Rupert may have benefited from the precursors to those important developments, possibly having access to some of the new Ciceronian commentaries of late eleventh-century northern France and the Rhineland – certainly the depth of his Ciceronian knowledge suggests contact with some of the earlier commentators (William of Champeaux and the commentary possibly associated with Manegald of Lautenbach).<sup>28</sup> But his perspective is radically different from that of twelfth-century Ciceronianism: he is not interested in rhetoric as a guide to composing new arguments, but rather as a framework for understanding, interpreting, and revealing the argumentative structures of scripture. His concerns are not professional or even, as in Notker's *Nova rhetorica*, tactical, but rather, it seems, meditative. In this respect he is very much a product of the monastic tradition. But here too his treatment of rhetoric is surprising, for all the quiet conservatism of his general approach to the arts. He uses scripture to illustrate systematically all the elements of the rhetorical doctrine of invention. Thus we are to gain a greater appreciation of how scripture shapes its salvific message by using the arts of language that were codified by ancient pagans but divinely ordained. With Rupert of Deutz, the medieval inversion of the late classical paradigm comes into its full force. If Cassiodorus had to use rhetoric to understand scripture, now,

<sup>26</sup> On Rupert of Deutz and further references, see Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 390–3.

<sup>27</sup> The notion that Scripture exceeds all secular writings in its eloquence is a commonplace in sacred exegesis in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. What is distinctive about Rupert's claim is that Scripture both exceeds the rules of technical rhetoric and illustrates those rules with greater excellence than any secular writing.

<sup>28</sup> Fredborg, "Commentaries on Cicero's *De inventione*"; Ward, *Ciceronian Rhetoric*, 136.

with Rupert, scripture is not only the justification for conserving ancient rhetoric, but the only plausible and complete roadmap for navigating it. Rhetoric is not simply applied to scripture, but is fulfilled in scripture and thus only knowable through scripture. And rhetoric seems to repay the effort by making scripture, in turn, more knowable.

In demonstrating how to read scripture rhetorically, Rupert focuses on the forensic dimension of rhetorical theory, with special attention to the technicalities of *status* theory. He discovers these complex devices of argumentation and legal processes in the biblical text; every forensic element found in scripture has a corresponding moral and theological purpose. Thus, for example, he illustrates the juridical issue of *remotio criminis* (rejecting responsibility and shifting the blame to another, a sub-subset of *status* theory) by the hollow defenses that Adam and Eve make for themselves, as Adam shifts the blame to Eve, and Eve to the serpent:

Shifting of the question of guilt [*translatio criminis*] and rejection of the responsibility [*remotio criminis*], which are the two remaining parts of the assumptive issue (which in turn was one of the two types of the juridical issue), are to be avoided by the wise everywhere in God's judgment, because in these lie both the origin and the increase of sin. Thus God said to Adam, "And who hath told thee that thou wast naked, but that thou hast eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?" And Adam: "'The woman,' he said, 'whom thou gavest me to be my companion, gave me of the tree and I did eat'" (Gen 3:11–12). By saying this he wanted to shift the question of guilt [i.e., shift the accusation away from himself]. The issue is one of shifting the question of guilt "when we do not deny our act but plead that we were driven to it by the crimes of others" (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.15.25). Here is another example: "And the Lord God said to the woman, 'Why hast thou done this?' And she answered: 'The serpent deceived me, and I did eat'" (Gen 3:13). By saying this surely she wanted, not to remove the accusation from herself, but rather the culpability, that is, the cause of the accusation. The issue is one of rejecting the responsibility [*remotio criminis*] "when we repudiate, not the act charged, but the responsibility, and either transfer it to another person or attribute it to some circumstance" [*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.15.25]. But to what kind of "person" [*persona*] did the woman transfer the accusation, if indeed it is to be dignified by being called a "person"? A snaky spirit, that is, the devil, or a ground creeper, a snake. To what kind of circumstance [*res*]? The deception by the snake. Thus this transference does not exculpate her, but defiles her; it does not absolve her, but envelops her further.<sup>29</sup> ... Let the

<sup>29</sup> Rupert considers *translatio criminis* (shifting responsibility) and *remotio criminis* (rejecting responsibility) the same thing in terms of scriptural law.

woman say that the serpent not only urged her, but also showed her the reason why she should eat the fruit. Does she not make the accusation worse by such a rejection of it? Thus rightly will we say that shifting of responsibility and rejecting responsibility for the accusation should in no way be sought out [by way of behavior models] in sacred Scripture, nor should issues of this sort be argued between man and God; and comparison with the alternative course of wrongdoing is barely acceptable. But concession, or acknowledgement of the crime, is always desirable between us and God, and especially the plea for mercy, which is the better of the two types of concession.<sup>30</sup>

At every turn, the forensic subtleties of classical rhetoric are infused with moral and cosmic significance, and rhetorical theory becomes an exegetical lever for the apprehension of scriptural law and salvation history. The depth, passion, and nuance of Rupert's exegetical internalization of rhetoric will not be seen again in the Christian Latin tradition.

Such principles of rhetorical analysis certainly inform other scriptural commentary of the period. During the 1130s, Abelard embarked on a commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans in which he shows himself sensitive to the implications of rhetorical argument. More than a decade earlier (probably around 1120) Abelard had produced a careful exposition of one of the key late antique sources on rhetorical argumentation, book 4 of Boethius' *De topicis differentiis*, which is devoted to the topics of rhetorical invention as compared with those of dialectical argument. The interests that he emphasized here also manifest themselves in the famous prologue to his *Sic et non* (initiated during the same period as the commentary on Boethius), in which he considers how the church fathers put forth different arguments under specific circumstances, and invokes the rhetorical spirit of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* on behalf of learning how to read between the lines of any kind of argument. In the later commentary on Romans, he returns to these themes, giving particular attention, as both Constant Mews and Alastair Minnis have pointed out, to the rhetorical dimensions of authorial intention behind a proposition about an issue.<sup>31</sup> But we do not see in this the kind of close, rhetorical analysis of scriptural argument that we find in Rupert of Deutz. While a general rhetorical outlook is visible (what von Moos calls an "idiosyncratic

<sup>30</sup> *De sancta trinitate et operibus eius*, Haacke ed. III:2059–60. Trans., Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 403–4.

<sup>31</sup> Mews, "Abelard on Dialectic," 50–1; Minnis, *Authorship*, 59–63; Fredborg has re-edited Abelard's rhetorical commentary on Boethius; see "Abelard on Rhetoric." The text of Abelard's commentary on Romans has been edited by Eloi Buytaert.

rhetorical interpretation),<sup>32</sup> the apparatus of technical rhetoric does not play an explicit role in Abelard's exegesis.

#### 4 Thomas of Chobham: Rhetoric and preaching

It seems that Rupert of Deutz' energetic application of rhetoric to scriptural analysis in the early decades of the twelfth century represents an original highpoint. We must await the work of the fifteenth-century Jewish scholar Judah Messer Leon, wholly independent of the Christian tradition, for a comparable – indeed superior – effort to harmonize scriptural principles of faith with the interior structures of forensic rhetoric. In the Latin West, the professionalization and specialization of rhetorical teaching would become the norm by the end of the twelfth century.

Yet over the next two centuries, the professionalization of rhetorical study in the form of arts of preaching did encourage some systematic attention to scripture as a rhetorical model for the preacher. Most arts of preaching are specialized technographic manuals and therefore tell us little about how preachers might have read scripture rhetorically or thought about the theoretical grounds of their art. But one early *ars praedicandi*, produced before the industrialization of the form, still reflects the excitement of twelfth-century rhetorical study, that intellectual buzz of the Ciceronian renaissance: this is the *Summa de arte praedicandi*, composed in the years just around 1225, by Thomas of Chobham, subdean of Salisbury Cathedral.<sup>33</sup> Thomas' *Summa* demonstrates how the production of sermons could be conceived in terms at once theological and literary, combining exegetical command of scriptural text with the preceptive advice about language, style, and composition delivered in the rhetorical treatises of the previous generation. His treatment of the rhetoric of scripture, and his intention to identify the rhetorical devices and systems that are latent in scriptural discourse, place him in the tradition of Cassiodorus, Notker of St. Gall, and Rupert of Deutz. Like these predecessors, he discovers the essence of rhetoric, its argumentative forms, in scriptural discourse.

Thus scripture is not just the subject for the Christian preacher, but the formal pattern and exemplary model of a system of persuasive speech.

<sup>32</sup> Von Moos, "Literary Aesthetics," 88.

<sup>33</sup> On Thomas of Chobham and for further references, see Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 614–16.

Where classical rhetoric would have used the speeches of famous orators to exemplify individual precepts, Thomas of Chobham uses scripture to illustrate rhetorical devices such as insinuation (used in exordia) and the division of the speech into its parts. More expressly than some of his predecessors, he also enlists the system of rhetorical invention as hermeneutical device, linking him with Augustine's dynamic hermeneutics. The topical system of "attributes of the person and of the act," which the orator uses to construct arguments in the section of the oration known as "proof" (*confirmatio*; *De inventione* 1.24–7), are useful to the scriptural exegete, as Thomas of Chobham shows:

Let us note that in the sacred page one thing signifies another in multiple ways: through the interpretation of a name, through the quality of a thing, and similarly through quantity, condition, action, deed, and number; and especially through cause, manner, place, and time.

Through the interpretation of a name: for example, by the name David, which is interpreted [by Jerome] as "beautiful in appearance, or of strong hands,"<sup>34</sup> Christ is signified, who is "beautiful above the sons of men" (Ps 45:3) ...

Through quality: for example, through Rachel, who was beautiful, the contemplative life is signified; through Leah, who was bleary-eyed and ugly, the active life is signified.

Through quantity something is signified allegorically: as through a quadrangle the stability of the four cardinal virtues is signified.

Through condition: for example, the angel sitting at the sepulcher wore "garments white as snow" (Matt 17:2), and "his countenance was as lighting" (Matt 28:3). By the white vestments is signified the first coming of Christ, which was benign and gentle; through red is signified the second coming which is terrible in its judgment.

Through action: when Stephen saw "Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55), it is signified that Christ is always ready to assist his soldiers.

Through deed allegory is studied, as through this instance: David slew Goliath, by which is signified that Christ vanquished the devil.

Through number: when Abraham "saw three and adored one,"<sup>35</sup> it is signified that God is a trinity and is one.

Through cause: by the example that Jacob served seven years for Rachel, it is signified that the cause of our serving ought to be eternal beatitude.

Through manner: for example, when Heli lightly rebuked the wickedness of his

<sup>34</sup> Jerome, *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, 103, 135.

<sup>35</sup> This play on Gen 18:2–3 is taken from a traditional Christian interpretation as recorded in the *Glossa Ordinaria* ad loc., PL 113:125D.



sons, it is signified that prelates who do not correct their subordinates as is fitting are to be punished severely.

Through place: for example, when God “stood in a plain place” (Luke 6:17) when he preached, it is signified by this that a sermon ought to be open and ample, not obscure.

Through time: when it was said “it was the feast of dedication, and it was winter” (John 10:22) by this it was signified that the chill of infidelity was at that time in man [cf. Augustine, *In Iohannis evangelium*, PL 35:1741] ...

And it is a general principle that every property of each thing, whatever it is, which can be suitably applied either to the soul for the purpose of morals, or to the Church in the present time in its head and its members, or to God and celestial things, can become an allegory.<sup>36</sup>

These inventional devices allow the preacher to amplify his material (also a rhetorical notion) by infinitely unfolding the understanding of a passage. But along more descriptive lines, Thomas finds the whole of rhetorical lore embodied in scripture. The parts of the oration (exordium, narration, partition, proof, refutation, peroration), such as the preacher would use in his own sermon, already have their place in sacred scripture (before pagan rhetoricians codified the art), and all five parts of rhetoric (invention, disposition, style, memory, delivery) are both illustrated and generated in scripture. Thus behind Thomas of Chobham’s immediate objective, to refine a pedagogy of preaching, lies the synthesis of grammar, rhetoric, and hermeneutics that leads back from the vitality of twelfth-century exegesis to the powerful legacy of Augustine.

With the new professionalization of rhetoric in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, the manuals of preaching and letter writing, the relevance of rhetorical doctrine was assured, but under a new, highly specialized guise. One result of this was that the need to justify the continuing value of the ancient teaching was outmoded, and the earlier, imaginative applications of rhetoric to scriptural hermeneutics fell out of currency. Three of the authors surveyed in this chapter were writing from monastic contexts (Cassiodorus, Notker of St. Gall, and Rupert of Deutz), so we might also look to changes in monastic production for some reasons why we have no later developments in the application of technical rhetoric to scriptural reading.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Summa de arte praedicandi*, Morenzoni ed., prologue, lines 164–205. Trans. Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 620–1.

<sup>37</sup> In this tradition we might also place the “shadow” Ciceronianism of the General Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible, produced sometime in the late 1390s to accompany the English translation of the Bible by the followers of John Wyclif. See Copeland, “Wycliffite Ciceronianism.”

A preliminary conclusion that can be drawn from the subtradition of Christian exegetical appropriations of rhetoric – whether, like Augustine and Cassiodorus, using rhetoric to gain a foothold in scripture, or like the later authors, using scripture to navigate rhetoric – is that for the most part, the later contributions do not seem to be mutually influential. Each of the later authors would certainly look back to the exegesis of Augustine and Cassiodorus as precedents that laid the ground for or authorized future attempts to marry scriptural exegesis and rhetoric. But there is no strong evidence that any of the later authors saw themselves as part of a distinctive exegetical development or necessarily knew of each other's efforts (and there is little reason to insist on the influence of Notker's *Nova rhetorica* beyond the monastic culture of St. Gall, since it survives only in two manuscripts). These works seem each to have been individual, original, but isolated efforts, akin to what is known as “multiple independent discovery” in modern studies of science.

## 5 Judah Messer Leon: Jewish application of rhetoric to scripture

This notion of a spontaneous and original effort in isolation is precisely what must describe the extraordinary rhetorical-scriptural commentary by Judah Messer Leon, *The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow*, first published Mantua 1475/6, during the author's lifetime. Modern scholarship tends to situate Messer Leon's treatise on rhetoric squarely in the context of a humanist revival of the art,<sup>38</sup> although his larger career has also been seen as an outgrowth of late medieval scholasticism.<sup>39</sup> His technical Hebrew vocabulary for rhetoric is also informed by Jewish tradition.<sup>40</sup> His humanist milieu may partly account for the classicism of his sources. Yet most of these would be common to his medieval Christian predecessors as well. The traditional elements of his dossier are the Ciceronian rhetorics, the commentary on *De inventione* by the fourth-century Latin neoplatonist Victorinus, and the influential “Magister Alanus” commentary on the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which was composed toward the end of the twelfth century, and which marks a strong shift in preference, over the later medieval centuries, for the *Ad Herennium* over the *De inventione*.<sup>41</sup> The humanist

<sup>38</sup> See Rabinowitz, ed., *Honeycomb's Flow*, xv–xvii, l–liv; Altmann, “*Ars Rhetorica*”; Ruderman, “Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought,” 384–95; Bonfil, “*Honeycomb's Flow*.”

<sup>39</sup> Zonta, “Autumn of Jewish Philosophy,” 476–8.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 12, at Note 11, regarding the technical medieval Hebrew vocabulary for rhetoric from which Judah Messer Leon drew.

<sup>41</sup> Ward, *Ciceronian Rhetoric*, 154–5, 170–8; idem, “Study of Cicero,” 50, 54, 58–9, 74, 465–7.

influence in his dossier is Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, which overshadowed the early Ciceronian works after Poggio Bracciolini transcribed a complete text of it after 1416. Messer Leon also makes use of Aristotelian rhetoric through a Hebrew translation of the *Middle Commentary* on the *Rhetoric* by Averroes: while Aristotle's *Rhetoric* would hardly be unknown to later medieval scholastics, their source would have been the Moerbeke translation into Latin (c. 1269), rather than the Averroistic commentary.

Messer Leon builds his treatment of rhetoric in scripture upon the textual order of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Unlike any of its Christian predecessors, *The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow* is exhaustive in its tracking of the structure and doctrinal topics of a rhetorical manual. In other words, it is a complete rhetoric generated out of the scriptural text. No part of rhetoric is neglected, and thus the Hebrew Bible is conscripted to illustrate the most intricate, intellectually demanding aspects of invention and the legal argumentation and theory that underpin inventional thought. Conversely, the theory of rhetorical argumentation penetrates to the actuality of biblical history and moral effect:

It should be borne in mind that the essential factors in any deed are seven, as Victorinus says in his Commentary on the Old Rhetoric: (1) who the doer is; (2) what he did; (3) in what place; (4) with what as aid he did it; (5) for what cause; (6) in what way; (7) when the deed was done. An example: Joab slew Amasa (2 Sam 20:4–10); here are two of the essential elements, namely the doer, Joab, and what was done, the slaying of Amasa; in what place: *at the great stone which is in Gibeon* (20:8); with what as aid: with the sword, as Scripture says: *And Joab was girded with his apparel of war that he had put on, and thereon was a girdle with a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof*, etc. (20:8); for what cause: his fear that David would appoint Amasa captain of the host in his stead (cf. 2 Sam 19:14); in what way: in the words of Scripture, *And Joab said to Amasa, "Is it well with thee, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand; so he smote him therewith in the groin, and shed out his bowels to the ground*, etc. (20:9–10); when: the day when Joab and Abishai pursued Sheba the son of Bichri (20:7, 10).<sup>42</sup>

The treatise shares the moral-theological message that we have already seen in some of its Christian counterparts, notably the work of Rupert of Deutz, that scripture is the source of scientific knowledge and that the art of rhetoric in scripture, divinely ordained, precedes any formal

<sup>42</sup> *Honeycomb's Flow*, Rabinowitz trans., 95.

codification of the art by secular authors. But its coverage of rhetoric is much more comprehensive than what we see in the Christian texts, and it is also more even-handed in tone than Rupert of Deutz' treatment of the art in *De sancta trinitate*.<sup>43</sup>

What is perhaps most remarkable about Messer Leon's rhetorical commentary is its bold defense of the secular liberal arts, a defense mounted on behalf of, and through the portals of, scripture:

[I]f, after we have come to know all the sciences ... we study the words of the Torah, then the eyes of our understanding open to the fact that the sciences are included in the Torah's words, and we wonder how we could have failed to realize this from the Torah itself to begin with. Such has frequently been our own experience, especially in the science of Rhetoric. For when I studied the words of the Torah in the way now common amongst most people, I had no idea that the science of Rhetoric or any part of it was included therein. But once I had studied and investigated Rhetoric, *searched for her as for hid treasures* (Prov 2:4) out of the treatises written by men of nations other than our own, and afterwards came back to see what is said of her in the Torah and the Holy Scriptures, then *the eyes* of my understanding *were opened* (Gen 3:7), and I saw that it is the Torah which was the giver.<sup>44</sup>

What this seems to offer is almost a double perspective: the learning of the secular art of rhetoric illuminates scripture by *allowing* scripture, in turn, to illuminate rhetoric. Scripture can be, and has been, navigated without the benefit of rhetorical knowledge; but once the reader is possessed of rhetorical knowledge, he finds that science already contained in scripture and sees in scripture a luminous map of this otherwise alien art.

Judah Messer Leon takes us farther in perspective than any of his Christian counterparts. It is unlikely that this is just a function of his humanist milieu. After all, his sources in rhetorical doctrine are almost no different from those of his medieval Christian predecessors (and one source, the important *Ad Herennium* commentary by "Magister Alanus," is a product of medieval scholarship). It would seem, rather, that his original perspective arose from the way he came to apprehend classical rhetoric. His outlook is born, not of a passive saturation in the Latin liberal arts curriculum, which is how his Christian counterparts would have

<sup>43</sup> In terms of an aim to be comprehensive, this bears some comparison with Moses Ibn Ezra's earlier mapping of Arabic poetic devices onto Hebrew Scripture; see Cohen, "Aesthetic Exegesis," 293–300. But Messer Leon has an understanding of the secular tradition of rhetoric as a total system of argument, not simply as eloquence.

<sup>44</sup> *Honeycomb's Flow*, Rabinowitz ed., 145.

encountered rhetoric before making it the object of their scholarship, but of a deliberate autodidactic program in scholastic philosophy and the Latin tradition of the liberal arts. He has been described as both “scholastic” in his philosophical interests and “humanist” in his embrace of rhetoric;<sup>45</sup> but even a humanist outlook on rhetoric does not fully explain his rhetorical approach to scripture. He is performing almost exactly the same kind of exegesis that we see in his medieval Christian predecessors, but understanding it differently. For Messer Leon, there is a fully dialogic process of illumination between rhetoric and scripture. His outlook is in effect a synthesis of the two Christian perspectives traced here: apprehending scripture through rhetoric, which was the pattern for early Christians trained as orators in the schools of the late empire; and the later approach of discovering rhetoric through and within scripture. Surely it is the principle of “multiple independent discovery” that would best account for the exhaustiveness of his rhetorical exposition in comparison with those of his Christian counterparts, and the remarkable originality of his perspective.

And indeed most of the texts, Christian and Jewish, that form the “subtradition” of rhetorical exegesis surveyed here, are instances of “multiple independent discovery.” Whether directly or by the back door, classical rhetoric in its most technical forms found a role in scriptural interpretation. This should not be surprising. Rhetoric provided a highly structured habit of thinking, a way of bringing logic into practical legal and ethical applications.

## 6 Rhetoric and authorial intention

Having traced out these “multiple independent discoveries” of rhetorical theory in biblical exegesis, we should be in a position to advance some conclusions about what the interpreters gained from the structured habit of thinking through rhetoric. At the most fundamental level, early interpreters used rhetoric to grasp what they considered to be authorial intention. In the hands of medieval exegetes, as (in a different way) for modern rhetorical criticism of the Bible, rhetoric represented a kind of reading that gives a sense consonant with the speaker’s or author’s intention, a level of historical or literal truth concerning the text’s argumentation.

<sup>45</sup> For this twofold view see Ruderman, “Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought,” 190.

Here the important disciplinary distinction between rhetoric and poetics takes on a further conceptual significance. In the theory of rhetorical argumentation, unlike in poetry, there is no dichotomy between form and content, between what is meant and what is said. Persuasive reasoning is the interior of rhetorical discourse. While poetic analysis of scripture may focus on how to decode or determine the meaning of a figurative verbal construction, and may entail debates about how (or whether) figurative language is to be penetrated to reveal an interior truth, rhetorical argumentation does not have to involve itself in that dichotomy between external stylistic form and inner content.<sup>46</sup> Of course, there may be many grounds (most of them Platonic) for suspecting and criticizing rhetoric as deceptive, but the core tradition of rhetorical theory for generating an argument and for analyzing given arguments is not premised on a distinction between outer expression and inner truth. Thus, to describe how an argument works is to apprehend directly and fully the impact of that argument.

To restate the question: of what use was classical rhetoric to medieval biblical exegetes? Rhetoric was not only a received body of knowledge, but also a mental discipline that was surprisingly supple, lending its powerful method to scriptural hermeneutics and to expanding the scope of that enterprise over the course of a millennium. In various configurations, it was scripture itself that could ultimately become the roadmap for rhetoric – that could lead theologians and exegetes to an understanding of the pagan rhetorical tradition, which they might embrace or disavow with equal fervor. On the other hand, religious thinkers hardly needed to produce commentaries on Ciceronian rhetoric in order to accomplish the practical aims of homiletics. So what did they achieve by taking on the ancient material? We have seen how rhetorical theory helped the earliest exegetes (Augustine, Cassiodorus) grasp the purpose of the Bible, and later, that the Bible helped religious authors grasp the purpose of rhetoric. In both cases, the exegetes felt a need to grasp rhetoric because it gave them access to a way of thinking. What was this way of thinking? The critical question that rhetoric answered was this: How does the Bible reveal itself in terms of its self-generated arguments? How does the Bible present its assertions and rationales? While the exegetes would bring their prior doctrinal assumptions to their reading, they also acknowledge that the Bible opens itself to

<sup>46</sup> On these questions within Christian interpretive tradition, see [Chapter 6](#). The form–content dichotomy that emerges from an ornamentalist poetic outlook is especially pronounced in certain strains of the Jewish *peshat* tradition, as discussed in [Chapter 12](#).

analysis and that it demands critical understanding. Their conclusions harmonized with their theologies, but rhetorical analysis also encouraged them to consider how the text *produces* the theology, and how the manifest expression of theological reasoning takes us to the author's intention. How does the Bible argue its own case? Reading rhetorical argumentation is a way of reading for a certain historical or literal truth of argumentation. Rupert of Deutz, for example, takes this to the extremes of a literal reading of Genesis, asking under what category of legal reasoning did Adam try to shift the guilt away from himself to Eve, and how God – as prosecutor and judge – could see through that reasoning and invoke a stronger and more appropriate legal category. For him and others, the motivating question is: How does scripture display its truths through a display of rhetorical techniques for inventing arguments. Judah Messer Leon asks perhaps the most comprehensive questions: How does the Bible visibly and materially lend support to the secular sciences? And how is rhetoric revealed in scripture as a kind of truth of argumentative reasoning?

Rhetorical analysis does not entail more sophisticated readings than allegorical understanding, or penetrating through figures and tropes, or finding ways to reconcile the exterior eloquence of the scriptural text with its inner theological truths.<sup>47</sup> It offers a different approach, one that seems to operate comfortably at the level of what is presumed to be the speaker's or author's intention, and thus that opens out to one dimension of its literal or historical meaning. In rhetoric, content is the reasoning, and reasoning is not "form" in the sense of exterior style or language, but rather the formal, structural center of any argument. Thus finding scripture in rhetoric, or finding rhetoric in scripture, offered a strong, direct access to the moral reasoning of scripture. In this we can measure how deeply rhetorical thought had ingrained itself in early and later medieval Christian minds, and in the minds of those Jewish scholars who also absorbed the secular learning derived from the ancients.

<sup>47</sup> This can be contrasted with the discussions in [Chapters 11](#) and [12](#).

*Robert Lowth's biblical poetics and romantic theory**Stephen Prickett*

The complex relation between sacred scripture and secular rhetoric and poetics that occupied medieval Latin thinkers, discussed in [Chapters 10](#) and [13](#), continued to play a key role in Christian interpretive thought well into the modern period. The current chapter explores a revealing manifestation of this interplay that made a decisive impact both on Bible scholarship and on literary theory at large. Robert Lowth, the eighteenth-century English Hebraist famous for his discovery of biblical parallelism (although others had glimpsed it earlier [[Note 21](#)]), might be regarded as a successor of the Christian tradition that conceived the literal sense of the Bible in literary terms, as discussed in [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#). But rather than turning to the classics for his conceptual framework, as his medieval predecessors had done, Lowth sought to read the Bible according to “the manners of the Hebrews,” that is, as he thought the ancient Hebrews did.<sup>1</sup>

The requirement that sacred scripture be read in its original language in order to appreciate its literary force was articulated most clearly in Islam, as discussed in [Chapter 3](#). To grasp the stylistic excellence of the Qur'an (its “inimitability,” or *i'jāz*), one Muslim thinker argues, the very “nature” of the reader must “become Arabic.”<sup>2</sup> Lowth, an avid orientalist (as the term was used in his day), refers to the doctrine of *i'jāz al-qur'ān*,<sup>3</sup> and so it is conceivable that he was familiar with Muslim objections to the translation of their sacred scripture. Yet as a Christian, Lowth believed that the Bible

<sup>1</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, II:309. Pre-modern Jewish scholars, like their Christian counterparts, drew upon foreign learning to account for the Hebrew Bible's poetic and rhetorical dimensions: Moses Ibn Ezra used the Arabic poetic model, and Judah Messer Leon the classical tradition of rhetoric. See [Chapter 12](#), [Sec. 1](#), and [Chapter 13](#), [Sec. 5](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [Chapter 3](#), at [Note 35](#). This point was made by a modern Muslim thinker who actually permitted the translation of the Qur'an. Yet the argument he makes is firmly anchored in the traditional view that a deep knowledge of Arabic is required to appreciate the Qur'an's linguistic perfection.

<sup>3</sup> “Labid, contemporary with Mohammed, the last of the seven Arabian poets . . . struck with the sublimity of a passage in the Koran, became a convert to Mohammedanism; for he concluded, that no man could write in such a manner, unless he were divinely inspired” (Lowth, *Isaiah*, 200).



can – and must – be translated (Note 33). He composed an English translation of Isaiah that aims to replicate the “excellence” of the original. But Lowth’s insistence on reading the Bible as the ancient Hebrews did led him to depart from the classical model, and even to discard the neoclassical English literary sensibilities of his day, and instead seek to devise an inherently “ancient Hebrew” poetics. The resulting theory of poetry contributed not only to Bible scholarship but also to the development of Romantic theory in English (and European) literature.

[Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

Of all the so-called progenitors of Romanticism – that loose and baggy collective term for a Europe-wide collection of movements – Robert Lowth (1710–87) would probably have been the most astonished to learn what he had so successfully triggered.<sup>4</sup> His academic career moved smoothly from Winchester College (probably the best school in the country at the time) to a junior fellowship at Oxford in the 1740s. In 1741 he was made Oxford Professor of Poetry. His lectures on that subject, *Praelectiones Academicae de Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews), were to be published, as they had been delivered, in Latin in 1753.<sup>5</sup> In 1778 he went on to publish a *New Translation of Isaiah*. He was promoted successively to be Bishop of St David’s (1766), Bishop of Oxford (1766–77), Bishop of London (1777–87), and was offered the Archbishopric of Canterbury in 1787 – which he refused, on grounds of failing health. He was also the author of a conservative but highly influential *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762). In conventional terms, a less “Romantic” and more establishment ecclesiastical and academic career can scarcely be imagined.

Nevertheless, with the twenty-twenty vision of hindsight, Lowth’s emphasis on reading the Hebrew Bible historically, “as the Hebrews would have read it,” would contribute to the Higher Criticism in Germany,<sup>6</sup> and the development of what was rapidly to be labelled “hermeneutics.” Similarly, his discovery of the principle of parallelism in Hebrew poetry and his exaltation of the “sublimity” of the simple and domestic language and imagery of the Psalms and the prophetic books makes him one of the

<sup>4</sup> See Prickett, *European Romanticism*, general introduction. It was not until the 1880s that the term “Romanticism” was applied to the British artists and writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who are now given that label. The French critic Hyppolite Taine may have been the first to use this term to describe them.

<sup>5</sup> They would not be translated into English (by George Gregory) until 1787.

<sup>6</sup> See Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 105–28.

key figures in the evolution of British Romanticism, providing vital ingredients for Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, and Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* – not to mention Blake's less-read but even more radical aesthetic manifestos.

## I Robert Lowth's background

Earlier sources of Lowth's proto-radical ideas can be found within his own family. In the mid-seventeenth century, Richard Simon (1638–1712), a French Oratorian, had concluded that the best way to destabilize the Protestant reliance on the Bible unaided by the teaching of the church was to reveal the blatant inconsistencies and contradictions of the historical text. His *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (Paris, 1678) was followed by the even more controversial *Critique du Nouveaux Testament* (Rotterdam, 1689). Attracting almost instant attention, the former was quickly re-published in Amsterdam, then the center of European printing. Simon was promptly attacked from both sides. Jean Le Clerc (1657–1736), a radical Swiss Protestant theologian, by this time based in Amsterdam and London, presented an even more radical critique in 1685 – challenging, among other things, the idea that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, and questioning also the divine inspiration of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Simon's attempt to undermine Protestantism by historical analysis was *also* deemed to undermine Catholic teaching, and his books were banned by the French authorities, with all remaining copies burned. However, a Protestant librarian, Henri Justel, who had fled to England in 1685 after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, brought with him two copies of Simon's first volume. Justel went on to become a librarian to the British monarch William III.

An English edition of Simon's work, *A Critical History of the Old Testament*, translated by an unknown "person of quality" was published in London in 1682. For many, a position attacked both by the Catholic Church and Protestant iconoclasts seemed a reasonable middle-of-the-road

<sup>7</sup> See Rogerson, "Old Testament Critics," 838–40. Le Clerc published his critique, *Sentiments de quelques thologiens de Hollande sur l'histoire critique du Vieux Testament composée par le P. Richard Simon* in 1685. A response by Simon was published in 1686, followed by another round of critique and response later that year and the following year. From 1693 to 1731 Le Clerc produced a series of biblical commentaries starting with Genesis. His challenge to traditional views and arguments for a more scientific inquiry into the origin and meaning of the biblical books proved both influential and highly controversial. Although some of his work was translated into English at the time, his debate with Simon does not seem to have been.

approach to biblical history. The tone is set at the very beginning by the seeming unobjectionable commitment to a historical viewpoint: "It is impossible to understand the Holy Scriptures unless we first know the different states of Text of these Books according to the different times and places, and to be instructed of all the several changes that have happened to it."<sup>8</sup> We know that a number of leading intellectuals possessed copies – including, for instance, John Dryden, who refers to it in his *Religio Laici*.<sup>9</sup> (Whether Simon had influenced Dryden's decision to become a Catholic in 1687 is not known.) More importantly for our purposes, a copy of the English translation of Simon's work was in the library of Lowth's father, William Lowth (1660–1732), a clergyman who "carefully read and annotated almost every Greek and Latin author, classical or ecclesiastical."<sup>10</sup> Though he may have had reason to question Simon's conclusions, William Lowth is no less keen to present his thinking as a scientific and rational enquiry. In his *Vindication of the Divine Authority of the Old and New Testaments* (1692) he defended the inspiration of scripture, from various angles, against Dryden, Hobbes, and Le Clerc.<sup>11</sup> A second edition of Lowth senior's *Vindication*, with a dissertation on the objections to the Pentateuch, followed in 1699. His most popular work, however, was *Directions for the profitable Study of Holy Scripture* (1708), which went through numerous editions. Although Robert Lowth's own work from the 1740s onwards might arguably be seen as progressively abandoning his father's position, the fact that he shared his father's ideals of scholarly enquiry suggests that he would not necessarily have seen it in this light. Certainly, the young Robert had grown up in a household familiar not merely with the theological controversies of the day, but also with the intricacies of biblical translation.

Robert's opportunity came early. It seems that in 1741 the University of Oxford had omitted to appoint a Professor of Poetry – whose sole task it was to deliver a series of lectures on that subject each summer. According to anecdote, when this error was discovered, during the vacation on May 21, 1741, the most junior person present, who happened

<sup>8</sup> Simon, *Critical History*, i.

<sup>9</sup> As William Lowth remarks, "Mr. Dryden, particularly in his *Religio Laici*, makes this comment upon Mr. Simon's Critick, and tells us, delivering that Author's sense, that the Jews have 'Let in Gross Errors to corrupt the Text,/Omitted Paragraphs—and/With vain Traditions stopp'd the Gaping Fence'" (*Vindication*, 7).

<sup>10</sup> Venables, "Lowth," 216.

<sup>11</sup> "[T]he most considerable Writers that have been concern'd in the Controversy about the Integrity and Authority of the Holy Writings are Mr. Simon and his Adversaries" (Lowth, *Vindication*, 5).

to be Robert Lowth, was quickly given the alarming and unwanted task. Faced with this prospect, Lowth, already a noted "orientalist" (in the terminology of the day) at age 31, chose the unexpected topic of the Psalms rather than the more usual classical theme. Even though this was familiar territory for him, it was to take Lowth some time to develop his viewpoint on his subject, and the early lectures give little hint of what was to follow. Thus, taken out of context, what might seem like introductory remarks in fact represent a slow recognition of an emerging theme, and come from Lecture V:

[H]e who would perceive the peculiar and interior elegancies of the Hebrew poetry, must imagine himself exactly situated as the persons for whom it was written, or even as the writers themselves . . . he is to feel them as a Hebrew.<sup>12</sup>

. . . nor is it enough to be acquainted with the language of this people, their manners, discipline, rites and ceremonies; we must even investigate their inmost sentiments, the manner and connexion of their thoughts; in one word, we must see all things with their eyes, estimate all things by their opinion: we must endeavour as much as possible to read Hebrew as the Hebrews would have read it.<sup>13</sup>

In retrospect, that phrase "interior elegancies" is more significant than it might have seemed in 1741. As it stands, it is unclear whether it refers to qualities in the text or in the reader, and we cannot be sure exactly what Lowth meant. What, with hindsight, we can trace is a slow shift of attention from a belief that a biblical (or even secular) text had an *innate* meaning, to a growing understanding that meaning is to be found as much in the reader as in the text. If, in one sense, this is only a logical development of the Protestant emphasis on each believer reading the Bible for him or herself, it is still a significant step from each person discovering "God's word" him/herself to seeing that this inevitably leads to different interpretations according to the nature of each individual. Interpretation is now not delivered by any external authority, be it church or text, but is individual, personalized, and, inescapably therefore, interiorized.

But, for Lowth, the essential interiority of biblical understanding is no excuse for lack of scholarship in approaching the text itself. Here accuracy of translation is paramount. As Lowth was to put it in the Preliminary Dissertation to his *New Translation of Isaiah* over thirty-five years later:

<sup>12</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, I:114.

<sup>13</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, I:113. For a strikingly similar view articulated by a Muslim scholar vis-à-vis the Qur'an, see [Note 2](#).

The first and principal business of a Translator is to give us the plain literal and grammatical sense of his author; the obvious meaning of his words, phrases, and sentences, and to express them in the language into which he translates, as far as may be, in equivalent words, phrases, and sentences . . . This is peculiarly so in subjects of high importance such as the Holy Scriptures, in which so much depends on the phrase and expression; and particularly in the Prophetical books of scripture; where from the letter are often deduced deep and recondite senses, which must all owe their weight and solidity to the just and accurate interpretation of the words of the Prophecy. For whatever senses are supposed to be included in the Prophet's words, Spiritual, Mystical, Allegorical, Anagogical, or the like, they must all entirely depend on the Literal Sense.<sup>14</sup>

Lowth's apparently common-sense observations can easily deflect attention from his extraordinary capacity to make a bridge between two worlds. He begins with what could be taken for a proto-modern statement of the purpose of translation, perhaps superficially reminiscent of the Preface to the Bible Society's *Good News Bible* of 1976.<sup>15</sup> But Lowth then links this immediately with the fourfold-system of medieval exegesis, already centuries old and frowned upon by many – if not all – Protestant commentators.<sup>16</sup> As we shall see, this Janus-faced approach, at once innovative and deeply traditional, is typical of Lowth's scholarship throughout his life.

## 2 “Interior Beauties” of the Bible

Indeed, for Lowth, an understanding of scripture involves more than just a hermeneutic effort to “think and feel as a Hebrew.” On occasion, it requires a radical re-think of what was to be called “aesthetics” – a term originally coined by Sigmund Jacob Baumgarten in the middle of the eighteenth century, but given wider meaning and exposure by Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth. As Lowth writes:

To relish completely all the excellencies of the Hebrew literature, the fountains themselves must be approached, the peculiar flavour of which cannot be conveyed by aqueducts, or indeed by any exertion of modern art.

<sup>14</sup> Lowth, *Isaiah*, xlii.

<sup>15</sup> “The primary concern of the translators has been to provide a faithful translation of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. Their first task was to understand correctly the meaning of the original . . . the translators' next task was to express that meaning in a manner and form easily understood by the readers . . . Every effort has been made to use language that is natural, clear, simple, and unambiguous” (*Good News Bible*, vii–viii).

<sup>16</sup> See Zim, “Reformation.”

The principal design of our late disquisition [i.e. previous lectures in the series] was, by considering the circumstances, customs, opinions, and sentiments of the Hebrews, to facilitate our approach to the interior beauties of their poetry; and, by duly examining the nature of the circumstances, to estimate more properly the force and power of each; to dispel as much as possible the mists of antiquity; to restore their native perspicuity to such passages as appear obscure, their native agreeableness to such as now inspire us with sentiments of disgust, their proper allurements and elegance to those which seem harsh and vulgar, and their original dignity to those which the changeableness of custom has rendered contemptible or mean.<sup>17</sup>

There are here two points of importance. The first is Lowth's belief that the water is always clearest the nearer you go to the spring. In other words, the earlier the document, the more likely it is to be accurate. This point was of peculiar importance, of course, to Christian commentators, whose scriptures – unlike those of Judaism or Islam – are essentially translations, and to a large degree originally those of another religion. Hence the need to work back as far as possible toward the “fountains” and the belief that “aqueducts” (i.e., translations) do not convey the flavor of the original.

The second point concerns Lowth's remarks about the disgustingness, harshness, vulgarity, and meanness of certain biblical passages – remarks that contain, in embryo, the whole aesthetic revolution that we have since come to associate with Romanticism. For the neoclassical tradition in which Lowth was raised, poetic diction was meant to be elevated, refined, and abstract. Often this amounted to a separate vocabulary from ordinary speech. Alexander Pope, in his “Windsor Forest,” famously refers to fish as the “finny tribe.” For Samuel Johnson, “Great thoughts” were “always general.” Whatever qualities Hebrew poetry had, however, it could not be seen as anything other than specific, concrete, and down-to-earth – and therefore, for a neo-classicist, impossibly coarse and vulgar. The psalmist who wrote “Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe . . .” (Ps 60:8 [MT 60:10]) breaks every canon of neoclassical correctness. But in an amazing *volte-face* Lowth now turns this aesthetic against itself, attacking “those theories of rhetoricians which they have so pompously detailed, attributing that to art, which above all things is due to nature alone.”<sup>18</sup> This very contrast with the norms of neoclassical prosody gives it, he argues, its own sublimity:

A principle which pervades all poetry may easily be conceived to prevail, even in a high degree, in the poetry of the Hebrews. Indeed, we have

<sup>17</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, I:183–5.

<sup>18</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, I:309.

already seen how daring these writers are in the selection of their imagery, how forcible in the application of it; and what elegance, splendour and sublimity, they have by these means been enabled to infuse into their compositions . . . It is impossible to conceive of anything more simple and unadorned than the common language of the Hebrews. It is plain, correct, chaste and temperate: the words are uncommon neither in their meaning nor application; there is no appearance of study, nor even of the least attention to the harmony of the periods.<sup>19</sup>

The language may be that of the eighteenth-century critic, but the sentiments, such as the praise of realism, depth of emotion, and sublimity of expression, all look forward to the Romantic era – and were recognized to be so by the Romantics (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley).

For Lowth, poetry and prophecy were two sides of the same coin. Poetry was the natural expression of prophecy. Lowth suggested that there had been in the desert “colleges of prophets” whose job it was to teach and encourage the craft of poetic utterance. While the modern reader may smile at a mental image of Lowth’s eighteenth-century Oxford Oriel College arising in the midst of the Negev, he is, of course, perfectly correct in his use of “college” – according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “an organized society of persons performing certain common functions, and possessing special rights and privileges.” By so linking poetry and prophecy, Lowth not merely gives poetry a new status, he also shifts our notion of prophecy. In the mid-eighteenth century poetry was all-too-frequently given the role of “supernumary” embellishment – to express, like wit, in Alexander Pope’s words “what oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed.” In 1704 John Dennis, in an essay entitled *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, had argued that “Poetry has two Ends, a subordinate, and a final one; the subordinate one is Pleasure, and the final one is instruction.”<sup>20</sup> The claim that poetry was the natural expression of prophecy gave it an altogether more serious and weighty status. The corollary, that the sublimity of the simple but impassioned language of the Bible made it “poetic” without having to conform to the conventions of European verse structures, was no less important.

This emphasis on the natural poetic sublimity of everyday language was complimented by Lowth’s most important single contribution to biblical scholarship: a clear account of the workings of Hebrew prosody, which centers on the concept of *parallelismus membrorum* (“parallelism of the

<sup>19</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, I:310–11.

<sup>20</sup> Dennis, *Critical Works*, I:336.

members [i.e., parts of the verse]).<sup>21</sup> For European translators, the most baffling single characteristic of the Psalms – long credited as poetic in Christian tradition<sup>22</sup> – is that they neither rhyme nor scan in the original. Lowth himself took this up with various rabbis and was unable to obtain a satisfactory answer. Nor, in this case, would the argument that the texts were corrupted (see [Note 9](#)) be of great help, for if there had been corruption it would have occurred randomly, and in that case there should also be examples in which the original scansion or rhyme survived. Lowth's solution, when it finally came in Lecture XIX, was to prove ground-breaking.

### 3 Biblical parallelism

The earliest forms of Hebrew poetry, he speculated, were songs or antiphonal chants sung by choruses of women to their heroes on return from battle, as in 1 Sam 18:7, where “the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (a comparison not lost, of course, on Saul, who thereafter tried to have David killed).<sup>23</sup> Lowth explains:

The poetical conformation of the sentences, which has been so often alluded to as characteristic of the Hebrew poetry, consists chiefly in a certain equality, resemblance, or parallelism between the members of each period; so that in two lines (or members of the same period) things for the most part shall answer to things, and words to words, as if fitted to each other by a kind of rule or measure.<sup>24</sup>

This “principle of parallelism,” as he called it, was capable of “much variety and many gradations; it is sometimes more accurate and manifest, sometimes more vague and obscure.”<sup>25</sup> Lowth was later to suggest that there might be as many as eight categories, but in this first exposition he identified three main forms. The first he called “synonymous parallelism,” which occurred

... when the same sentiment is repeated in different, but equivalent terms. This is the most frequent of all, and is often conducted with the utmost

<sup>21</sup> Lowth is generally credited for the discovery of biblical parallelism, being the first to regard it as the essential principle of biblical prosody and to describe its workings systematically. James Kugel points out, however, that Lowth's account was not completely original, since it drew upon earlier European Bible scholarship. See Kugel, *Idea*, 266–73. Kugel also challenges Lowth's analysis of biblical parallelism, devising an alternative account of its workings from a modern literary perspective. See Kugel, *Idea*, 12–58, and [Chapter 15 at Note 12](#). See also Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 3–26.

<sup>22</sup> See [Chapter 10](#). <sup>23</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, II:28–9. See also Kugel, *Idea*, 43–4.

<sup>24</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, II:34. <sup>25</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, II:34.



accuracy and neatness: examples are very numerous, nor will there be any great difficulty in the choice of them: on this account I shall select such as are most remarkable in other respects.<sup>26</sup>

The example he cites is from Psalm 114:

When Israel went out from Egypt / The house of Jacob from a strange people  
 Judah was as his sacred heritage / Israel his dominion. The sea saw, and fled / Jordan turned back  
 The mountains leaped like rams / The hills like the sons of the flock.  
 What ailed thee, O Sea, that thou fleddest / Jordan, that thou turnedst back?  
 Mountains, that ye leaped like rams / And hills, like the sons of the flock?  
 At the presence of the Lord tremble thou Earth / At the presence of the God of Jacob!  
 Who turned the rock into a lake of waters / The flint into a water spring.<sup>27</sup>

Lowth's second major category is what he calls "antithetic parallelism," that is, "when a thing is illustrated by its contrary being opposed to it."<sup>28</sup> As he explains:

This is not confined to any particular form: for sentiments are opposed to sentiments, words to words, singulars to singulars, plurals to plurals, &c. of which the following are examples:

The blows of a friend are faithful / But the kisses of an enemy are treacherous.

There is who maketh himself rich, and wanteth all things / Who maketh himself poor, yet hath much wealth. (Prov 13:7)

The rich man is wise in his own eyes / But the poor man that hath discernment to trace him out will despise him. (Prov 28:11)<sup>29</sup>

Lowth's third major category is "synthetic parallelism," where

the sentences answer to each other, not by the iteration of the same image or sentiment, or the opposition of their contraries, but merely by the form of construction. To this, which may be called the Synthetic or Constructive Parallelism, may be referred all such as do not come within the two former classes: I shall however produce a few of the most remarkable instances:

<sup>26</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, II:35.

<sup>27</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, II:35.

<sup>28</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, II:45.

<sup>29</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, II:45–6.

The law of The Lord is perfect, restoring the soul;  
 The testimony of The Lord is sure, making wise the simple;  
 The precepts of The Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;  
 The commandment of The Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes:  
 The fear of The Lord is pure, enduring for ever;  
 The judgments of The Lord are truth, they are just altogether.  
 More desirable than gold, or than much fine gold;  
 And sweeter than honey, or the dropping of honey-combs  
 (Psalm 19)<sup>30</sup>

The corollary to this analysis of Hebrew poetry was startling – although again it is not clear how far Lowth himself saw its full implications. Early on in the lectures, long before he had seemingly stumbled upon the principle of parallelism, he had noted that “a poem translated literally from the Hebrew into the prose of any other language, whilst the same form of the sentences remain, will still retain, even as far as relates to versification, much of its native dignity, and fair appearance of versification.”<sup>31</sup> But this was more than a coincidental discovery. Parallelism was a game-changer. Lowth's unwitting words became true in a sense that he may have only dimly suspected. The discovery of parallelism in all its varied forms had also revealed something else. Not merely were the Psalms constructed along these lines, so were vast stretches of the other prophetic books. The prophetic books, in fact, together with much of the Wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes), are saturated by the parallelism of Hebrew poetry.

Later critics were not slow to seize upon both the idea of parallelism and the theory of language it implied. For instance, Hugh Blair (1718–1800), minister of the High Kirk and Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the University of Edinburgh – in effect the world's first professor of English literature – thought Lowth's lectures so important that he devoted a whole chapter of his own published lectures to summarizing and commenting on Lowth's ideas. Even the phraseology is reminiscent of Lowth:

It is owing, in great measure, to this form of composition [i.e., parallelism], that our version [of the Bible], though in prose, retains so much of a poetical cast. For the version being strictly word for word after the original, the form and content of the original sentence are preserved; which by this artificial structure, this regular alternation and correspondence of parts, makes the ear sensible of a departure from the common style and tone of prose.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, II:48–9.      <sup>31</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, I:71, from Lecture 3.

<sup>32</sup> Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, II:270–1.

In short, Hebrew poetry translated better into English prose than into verse. For later critics and translators, this unique translatability of Hebrew verse was to seem little short of providential. For some, indeed, it strengthened a growing Christian awareness that, unlike either Judaism or Islam, whose worship was conducted in the language in which it was originally written, it was not merely a religion of the book, but a religion of the *translated* book.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4 Emotive quality of Hebrew verse

For Lowth, what distinguished Hebrew verse from ordinary prose was not its syntactical structure or form, nor even its language, but rather its emotive quality. He opens his seventeenth lecture by citing Longinus to the effect that “the vehemence and enthusiasm of passion” is a source of the sublime; the language of poetry was, therefore, the product of “enthusiasm . . . springing from mental emotion.”<sup>34</sup> It is easy for the modern reader to miss the extraordinary force of that word “enthusiasm” for an eighteenth-century audience. It was, in effect, a dirty word for much of the Enlightenment, suggesting unbalanced fanaticism – and applied, for instance, to such evangelicals as “Methodists” (a word coined at precisely this period in Lowth’s Oxford). To assert that this was a central quality to poetry was, once again, a step with far-reaching consequences. Here, again, is Blair’s take on this: “Our first enquiry must be, what is poetry? and wherein does it differ from prose? . . . it is the language of passion, enlivened imagination.”<sup>35</sup> This, in turn, was to be picked up by Wordsworth in his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. For him – and for Coleridge, his co-author – poetry was nothing less than “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling.” In case there is any doubt that he is here following Blair, and behind Blair, Lowth, Wordsworth continues, “there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.”<sup>36</sup> With this ancestry, the Romantic claim that the language of poetry should be the language of

<sup>33</sup> See the discussion of the translation of scripture – in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – in Chapter 3. For some members of the Bible Society – the largest Christian organization for biblical translation – the Word of God would not be complete until it had been translated into every known language, a process presumably aided by the lamentable decline of minority languages during the twentieth century.

<sup>34</sup> Lowth, *Lectures*, I:365–6. <sup>35</sup> Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, II:212–13.

<sup>36</sup> Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, 253.

“ordinary men” could claim roots both in the classical aesthetics of Longinus<sup>37</sup> and the biblical aesthetics of Lowth. In effect, if it was good enough for the Holy Spirit, it was good enough for the *Lyrical Ballads*.

But, as we have seen, Lowth's exploration of Hebrew prosody had revealed much more than simply what Blair had called the “poetical cast” of the Old Testament. By claiming for its “simple and unadorned” language a new, and for the neoclassically trained critic, unexpected, sublimity, Lowth was introducing a new criterion into biblical criticism: the aesthetic. When Tertullian had asked his famous question, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” the answer for his generation was clear: nothing. The *koinē* Greek of the New Testament was an offence to any properly trained classical scholar. Ambrose and Augustine were not impressed. Jerome, the translator of the Vulgate, admitted that it had made his “skin crawl.” He warned his readers not to expect Ciceronian eloquence: “a translation made for the Church, although it may indeed have some literary merit, ought to conceal and avoid it, so as to address itself, not to the private schools of the philosophers with their handful of disciples, but rather to the whole of the human race.”<sup>38</sup> The message was clear: God was, in effect, making it plain to His followers that the beauty of holiness owed nothing to earthly standards of beauty. Christ's injunction to abandon riches and embrace poverty was as much figurative as literal. Hence the scriptures themselves had eschewed the vanity of rhetoric and the charms of language, and were expressed in plain, vulgar, and unadorned language. Medieval and Renaissance church worship had embellished the Mass with ever more splendid visual and plastic art, music, liturgies, and even incense. Some of the finest of European poets, from Dante to Milton, had turned the power of language toward their faith. But the language of scripture itself was to be judged by a different standard. Fourfold, or even twelvefold, exegesis of the typological significance of the texts had little room for their poetry.<sup>39</sup> Even the King James Bible, hailed by later (post-Romantic) generations as a linguistic masterpiece, had attracted little praise in the first century of its existence. Lancelot Andrewes, one of the guiding spirits of the 1611 Bible, showed little

<sup>37</sup> A point reinforced by Longinus' own reference to “the Lawgiver of the Hebrews” (i.e., Moses) whose opening to Genesis he classifies as “sublime.” See *Longinus on the Sublime*, 18. See also the citation at [Note 40](#).

<sup>38</sup> Ep. 22. Cited in Ackroyd and Evans, *Cambridge History of the Bible* 1:524. See also the [Introduction](#), at [Note 20](#).

<sup>39</sup> On the tensions created by this disparity, see [Chapters 7](#), [10](#), and [13](#).

practical partiality toward it, and was just as likely to use the Geneva version in his sermons or his private notes. Similarly, Lowth himself, a hundred years later, frequently substitutes his own translations for the printed text. Yet simply by introducing aesthetic criteria into biblical criticism, and treating the Psalms for their poetic qualities, Lowth is, in effect, reversing centuries of silence or neglect.

Again, he is building on the work of others in the immediately preceding generations. Longinus was a relatively recent discovery. He seems to have been known in Western Europe from the late fifteenth century, and only became widely influential with the French translation by Boileau in 1674. His praise for the sublimity of Genesis had, even then, to be defended by Boileau against Huet and other critics. Although Longinus' reference had been fleeting enough, it was now taken to suggest that the classical world had acknowledged not merely the moral but also the *aesthetic* supremacy of God's word. Isaac Watts (1674–1748) declares the manifest inferiority of the (classical) "Gentiles . . . when brought into Comparison with MOSES, whom LONGINUS himself, a *Gentile* Critic, cites as a Master of the sublime Stile, when he chose to use it."<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Dennis had cited the authority of Longinus to show that "the greatest sublimity is to be deriv'd from Religious Ideas."<sup>41</sup> For him, therefore, "Poetry is the natural Language of Religion."<sup>42</sup>

But if Lowth had not been the first to express many of these views, it was he who gave a coherent textual and theological grounding to a range of what might otherwise have been isolated insights. Despite having lectured and published in Latin, his ideas were to help shape the aesthetics of the next hundred years. Not merely were they taken up and popularized by such figures as Blair, they rapidly spread to Germany (perhaps even aided by the fact that they were in Latin – still for many scholars the international language) where he was speedily re-published by the biblical scholar Johann David Michaelis (1717–91) at Göttingen with a preface of his own in 1759.<sup>43</sup> Lowth's lectures were to give a powerful impetus to the German Higher Criticism of Eichhorn, Lessing, and Reimarus. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), like Blair, devotes a

<sup>40</sup> Watts, *Horae Lyricae*, xii–xiii.

<sup>41</sup> Dennis, *Critical Works*, I:358.

<sup>42</sup> Dennis, *Critical Works*, I:364.

<sup>43</sup> Brian Hepworth, in his biography of Lowth, makes the significant point that Michaelis sees Lowth not, as one might expect, as a theologian, but as a poet speaking to poets. See Hepworth, *Lowth*, 39. See also Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 105–28.

substantial section of his *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* to a laudatory account of Lowth's pioneering work.<sup>44</sup> Michaelis' daughter, Caroline, was a key member of the self-styled Jena "Romantics" – the original creators of the name that was eventually to be applied to a collection of Europe-wide movements.

## 5 Prophecy and poetry

By the end of the eighteenth century Lowth's influence in Britain was all-pervasive. If, for instance, one had asked in 1700 what the best poetic models for critical judgment were, the reply would almost certainly have been to point to the classics – probably Cicero. If the same question had been asked in 1800 or shortly thereafter, the reply might well have been to point to the Bible, as Blake, for instance, did (see the citation at [Note 48](#)). Just how pervasive that view had become can be seen by some of the phrases in Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* – composed in 1821, but not published until twenty years later. Written in reply to Thomas Love Peacock's provocatively cynical *Four Ages of Poetry*, Shelley defends poetry from the charge that it is a commodity like any other – created by poets in response to demand from wealthy and powerful patrons and warlords who, having gained power, then desire legitimacy and admiration. Though, as befits one who had been expelled from Oxford for writing – and, worse, publishing – a pamphlet entitled "The Necessity of Atheism," beneath the thin secular glaze his phrases hark straight back to the links between poetry and prophecy:

Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar.<sup>45</sup>

Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it.<sup>46</sup>

If "lifting veils" and "swords of lightning" were not enough of a guide to what is going on, the language finally moves from referential to explicit:

Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science [i.e., knowledge], and that to which all science must be referred.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> See Prickett, *Modernity*, 107–28. Herder's *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* was translated into English in 1833 by James Marsh. On the influence of Marsh's translation in England, see Prickett, *Modernity*, 129–48.

<sup>45</sup> Shelley, *Defence*, I:16.

<sup>46</sup> Shelley, *Defence*, I:22.

<sup>47</sup> Shelley, *Defence*, I:40.

Shelley has, in effect, taken the divine inspiration behind Lowth's aesthetics and, instead of showing simply how poetry is the best medium to express Revelation, he made revelation an essential characteristic of poetry in general.

William Blake had little in common with Shelley's secularized aesthetics. Yet he was to come up with some remarkably similar pronouncements. Among a whole wall of graffiti-like multi-directional multi-linguistic scribbles in his *Laocoön*, (1826–7) is the comment: "Jesus & his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists. . . . The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art."<sup>48</sup>

But probably the most remarkable use of Lowth was by Coleridge, who, instead of taking him as authorizing a particular view of scripture, and applying it in aesthetics, actually tries to develop Lowth theologically. The scriptures, Coleridge writes,

... are the living *educts* of the imagination; of that reconciling and meditative power which incorporating the Reason in images of the Sense, and organising (as it were) the flux of the Senses, by the permanence and self-circling energies of the Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the Truths, of which they are the *conductors* . . . Hence . . . The Sacred Book is worthily intitled *the* "WORD OF GOD."<sup>49</sup>

In other words, not merely are the Bible narratives to be considered the epitome of the poetic sublime, Coleridge is prepared to read them aesthetically, as possessing the same symbolic value that one would expect from a modern work of art. In place of the multiplex medieval typological readings that still so fascinated Lowth, we now have the idea of them as poetic "symbols."<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, their literal meaning is charged with powerful resonances, affecting not merely the kind of conscious secondary interpretations that would have drawn the attention of a medieval typologist, but also associative qualities drawing on the (newly-hypothesized) unconscious mind, and thus also giving a glimpse of some kind of "spiritual realm" (Coleridge's interpretation of Kant's "noumena"). The poetic symbol, Coleridge explains,

is characterised by a translucence of the special in the Individual, or of the General in the Especial, or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes

<sup>48</sup> See Russell, *Engravings*, 95. <sup>49</sup> Coleridge, "Statesman's Manual," in *Lay Sermons*, 28–9.

<sup>50</sup> On the ways in which Coleridge's notion of the symbol relates to earlier discussions of the literal and spiritual senses of sacred scripture in Christian tradition, see [Chapter 6, Sec. 4c](#).

of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative.<sup>51</sup>

\*\*\*

The history of ideas has sometimes been described as the history of the confusion of ideas. It has also been said that such "confusions" have been among the most fertile sources for new and creative ideas. If this is so, then translation has frequently been at the epicenter of such "creative confusions." To what degree the influence of Lowth's *Lectures* can be described in these terms is an open question. It might be more accurate to say that the originators of ideas can have no knowledge of where they might lead. In either case, certainly it seems unlikely that Lowth, any more than the ancient psalmists and prophets, such as Isaiah, whom he translated, could have foreseen what conclusions might be drawn from their writings by later generations.

<sup>51</sup> Coleridge, "Statesman's Manual," in *Lay Sermons*, 80.



*From scripture to literature*  
*Modern ways of reading the Bible*

Adele Berlin

Literary approaches to reading the Bible – that is, the application of literary modes of analysis and interpretation to biblical texts – has a long and honorable history. We need only consult earlier chapters in this volume, notably those on medieval hermeneutics and exegesis, so dependent upon grammar, rhetoric, and poetics, to know that using literary tools to interpret scripture is not a modern invention. Distinctly modern, though, is the view that the Bible is a literary work like all other literary works, whereas previously it was considered divinely inspired scripture, *sui generis*, whose meaning could be discerned by means of literary analysis like that used for classical or vernacular literatures. To be sure, ancient thought acknowledged the human authorship of biblical books, in a certain sense. The Talmud (b. *Bava Batra* 14b–15a), drawing on earlier traditions, assigns authorship of various biblical books to the appropriate human biblical figures – for example, Samuel wrote his book and Judges and Ruth, David wrote Psalms. But the Talmud’s point is that all the biblical authors composed through prophecy or divine inspiration; this assignment of authorship underlines that the Bible is *not* like ordinary books. Similarly, in the medieval period some Christian interpreters spoke of the authorial intention of the human author but that author was still a biblical figure, like David for Psalms.<sup>1</sup> Even Baruch Spinoza, among the fathers of modern biblical criticism, who denied that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch and the other prophets their books, substituted Ezra as the Bible’s author (*A Theologico-Political Treatise*, Part 2, chapters 7–8 [1670]). Modern scholarship, on the other hand, posits a series of anonymous authors, ordinary men (female authorship is questionable) who lack any trace of divine inspiration, as do the writings they produced. This view of the Bible as a purely human product – a book like any other book – did not come about all at once. Some scholars, at least until the mid-twentieth century,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters 7 and 10.

attributed to the biblical authors a Hebrew genius, a kind of secular literary inspiration (à la the Greek Muses), that enabled their works to reach the literary heights to which they were esteemed to have risen. Indeed, for a time the Bible, its human origin notwithstanding, was considered superior to all other literature, and only gradually came to be perceived as a work just like any other literary work. In fact, that idea remains difficult for believers to reconcile with the religious conviction that the Bible is the revealed word of God.

The idea that the Bible is, and must be, better than all other literatures (mainly Greek) has ancient roots, going back at least as far as the early Christian centuries.<sup>2</sup> Surprising, though, is how long this idea was sustained, even into the twentieth century, as the first part of this chapter will show. Then it will present, in skeletal form, a cursory overview of the ways that modern and postmodern literary criticism was brought to bear on the interpretation of biblical texts.<sup>3</sup>

## I The Bible and other literatures

Greek and Latin literary models had become the gold standard in western cultures, but when applied to the Bible, the results caused some consternation, for biblical literature did not always follow classical rules. And when classical literature was not the model, then vernacular literatures – most notably Arabic, Italian, and English – took their place. Inevitably, comparing these literatures with the Bible generated a certain amount of anxiety about how the Bible would fare in comparison. Was the Bible as good as other literatures? Did its literary standards fall short? Or was it the greatest literature ever written? The fear that it would prove to be inferior seems to have driven men of faith to overcompensate, to deem that the Bible was the best, even when, or perhaps especially when, it departed from more well-accepted literary practices. One dramatic expression of this tendency was penned in 1772 by the Yale theologian and later President of Yale College, Timothy Dwight, in his *A Dissertation on the History, Eloquence, and Poetry of the Bible*. For Dwight, the distinctiveness of biblical literature is its glory, its claim to genius. He says of the biblical authors:

<sup>2</sup> See Kugel, *Idea*, 135–70.

<sup>3</sup> There are far too many references to list here. For a fuller discussion of the modern and postmodern analyses of biblical narrative see Berlin, “Literary Approaches,” from which parts of this chapter are derived. A later version of that 2008 essay is scheduled to be published as “Literary Approaches to the Hebrew Bible” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, ed. Stephan Chapman and Marvin Sweeney.

Unencumbered by Critical manacles, they gave their imagination an unlimited range . . . and in every period, snatched the grace which is beyond the reach of art, and which, being the genuine offspring of elevated Genius, finds the shortest passage to the human soul. With all this license no writers have so few faulty passages. "But" says the Critic "they don't describe *exactly according to our rules*." True sir: and when you can convince me that *Homer* and *Virgil*, from whom you gather those rules, were sent into the world to give Laws to all other authors; when you can convince me that every beauty of fine writing is to be found, in its highest perfection, in their works, I will allow the beauties of the divine writers to be faults. 'Till that can be demonstrated, I must continue to admire the most shining instances of Genius, unparallel'd in force, or sublimity . . .<sup>4</sup>

For Dwight, the classical model might be the epitome of literature, but, to paraphrase the Hebrew National hot-dog commercial, the Bible answers to a higher authority.

The tension between Athens and Jerusalem regarding the merits of their literatures continued to be felt in various ways. In 1895 Richard G. Moulton wrote *The Literary Study of the Bible* because he wished the Bible to take its due place in the liberal arts curriculum as the equal of classical literature.

It has come by now to be generally recognised that the Classics of Greece and Rome stand to us in the position of an ancestral literature,—the inspiration of our great masters, and the bond of common associations between our poets and their readers. But does not such a position belong equally to the literature of the Bible? If our intellect and imagination have been formed by the Greeks, have we not in similar fashion drawn our moral and emotional training from Hebrew thought?<sup>5</sup>

Moulton is not arguing that the Bible is better; but that it is equally worthy of study. Notice that he sees the Hebrew and Greek writings as having different natures (as other before him had done), which obviates comparing them: the classics are intellectual and imaginative, while the Bible is moral and emotional. How quaint Moulton's plea for parity sounds now that neither classical nor biblical literature are much studied.

By the middle of the twentieth century, the apologetic arguments for the Bible's literary superiority had receded, along with the ebbing of the epitomization of the classical model, setting the scene for more fruitful comparisons between the Bible and other literatures (often Greek) that

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Preminger and Greenstein, *Hebrew Bible*, 2. The quotation is on pp. 4–5 of *A Dissertation on the History, Eloquence, and Poetry of the Bible*. Jon Whitman pointed out to me Dwight's dependence on Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism."

<sup>5</sup> Moulton, *Literary Study*, viii–ix.

were less fraught with value judgments, although not entirely free of them. A high-water mark in the early development of modern literary approaches to the Bible is Erich Auerbach's essay, "Odysseus' Scar," in which he compares the narrative styles of Homer with biblical narrative.<sup>6</sup> Homeric narrative style, Auerbach found, foregrounds every event and every detail, developing each point in full, often creating a lengthy diversion from the main plot. Biblical narrative does just the opposite, highlighting the main action as economically as possible and leaving the rest in obscurity, unexpressed, thereby creating the sense that it is "fraught with background." Auerbach clearly was not trying to squeeze the Bible into the classical mold. On the contrary, he set the two side by side, each in its separate world with its distinct styles (somewhat as Moulton had done). *Vive la différence!* But still, in Auerbach's analysis separate is not equal. Auerbach, heir to the long western tradition of literary criticism, also reveals a "Bible is better" mentality when he explains that the differences in style, including the superior character development in biblical narrative, are attributable to the Bible's higher truth claim; Homer was intended for entertainment while the Bible was, after all, religious literature. The aim of the biblical stories "is not to bewitch the senses," as the Homeric stories aim to do, "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. But their religious intent involves an absolute claim to historical truth."<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, Auerbach's study would rightly be seen, in retrospect, as the beginning of the discovery of biblical narrative poetics, but that did not happen until several decades later, when narratology (the study of the structure and workings of narrative) grew popular among literary scholars and was then applied to the Bible.

Meanwhile, before the new literary theories of the 1970s and 1980s reached them, biblical scholars had become acquainted with newly discovered and deciphered writings from the ancient Near East. Here was a more appropriate group of texts than the Greek classics against which to read the Bible, texts written by the very neighbors of Israel mentioned in the Bible, contemporaneous with the Bible or earlier. Suddenly biblical literature appeared typical rather than idiosyncratic. Many of its forms,

<sup>6</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 1–20.

<sup>7</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 11. The assumption that history is better than legend is found among other scholars, too. While Auerbach admits that the Bible contains legends, he emphasizes that it also contains history, which is its central theme, while the Homeric poems are entirely legends with no claim to historicity.

motifs, and images were part of a common Near Eastern literary stock. The Flood story turned out to be an oft-told tale throughout Mesopotamia and Asia Minor; proverb collections like those in the book of Proverbs were discovered in Egypt and Mesopotamia, some strikingly similar to their biblical counterparts; and the psalmists had forerunners among the poets of Ugarit. Even the covenant between God and Israel, that most biblical of concepts, was found to have borrowed its literary structure, and even its conceptual framework, from ancient vassal treaties – international treaties between the king of an empire and less powerful kingdoms that swore allegiance to him. Just as these treaties stipulate the vassal's obligations and the punishments for any infraction of the treaty, so the Torah spells out the obligations of Israel to God (the laws) and the penalties for disobedience (the curses in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28). What was one to make of these similarities between the Bible and other ancient Near Eastern literature? Here, too, initially at least, the "Bible is better" mindset reared its head. Many early comparativists observed with pride that while ancient Near Eastern literature was polytheistic and mythical, the Bible was monotheistic and anti-mythical – that the Bible used common literary tropes and motifs for a higher religious purpose (reminiscent of Auerbach's comparison with Homer). Duncan B. MacDonald went so far as to question whether ancient Near Eastern literature had any literary merit at all.

We hear much nowadays about Egyptian literature and Babylonian literature. Can anyone who reads those scanty, broken fragments, which are called 'literature' because they are undoubtedly in writing, ever dream of putting them beside the contribution of the Hebrew race to literature?<sup>8</sup>

Even in MacDonald's time, few were so negative about the value of the newly deciphered ancient literatures. Most welcomed them as potentially beneficial for understanding the Bible. In fact, that was first thought to be their primary benefit; together with archeological findings, they would authenticate the Bible's accuracy. Only later, as the fields of Assyriology and Egyptology became independent from biblical studies, were these literatures appreciated for their own worth.

<sup>8</sup> MacDonald, *Hebrew Literary Genius*, 218. MacDonald recognizes only two great ancient literatures, the Hebrew and the Greek. Like others we have mentioned, he rates the Hebrew higher. "We know that Job as the mouthpiece of humanity, is on a higher level and nearer to us than Prometheus on his crag, and that Ecclesiastes preached a practical philosophy richer and nobler than that of any Stoic" (p. 219).

Over time, the need to see the Bible as unique among literatures and superior to all of them diminished; the Bible became literature like all others. Several factors converged to make this so: the classical model lost its hold as the measuring-rod of literary worth; the Bible seemed typical in the context of ancient Near Eastern literature; and increasing numbers of academic biblical scholars took a more objective stance to biblical studies. These factors paved the way for comparing the Bible with other literature in a neutral, non-triumphalist fashion, for the purpose of understanding how it worked as literature and how other literatures might shed light on its meaning.

How different the comparison of the Bible with Greek literature looks now. Like ancient Near Eastern literature, Greek literature can now be used as an aid to understanding biblical literature. No longer the standard against which to measure the Bible, Greek literature is, rather, part of the literary context from which late biblical writings emerged. A significant amount of the Hebrew Bible was written or edited in the Persian period (539 – fourth century BCE), the time of the flourishing of classical Greek drama, philosophy, and historiography. Greek literature thus serves as the context for late biblical writings the way ancient Near Eastern literature serves for earlier biblical writings. For example, the book of Esther shares the stereotypical portrayals of the Persian court found in Greek literature, including the motifs of royal decadence, wine-drinking, bureaucracy, law and legal procedures, and the superb communication system. Reading Esther against Greek descriptions of the Persian court shows how typical of its period that biblical book is.<sup>9</sup>

## 2 Biblical poetry and prose from the mid-twentieth century

Biblical scholars have always looked to other literatures, classical and vernacular, to help them understand the Bible's literary forms, especially poetry. Since meter was often considered the *sine qua non* of poetry, attempts were made over the years to discover Arabic quantitative meters, or English accentual meters, or others, in biblical poems. These efforts met with no lasting acceptance. Biblical poetry never quite fit the formal metrical structures of other poetries, and its own metrical system, if it had one, remained elusive. The most famous solution to this problem was put forth in 1753 (and more definitively in 1778) by Robert Lowth, who abandoned the attempt to discover the metrical system of biblical poetry

<sup>9</sup> Berlin, *Esther*, xxviii–xxxii.

and substituted instead the phenomenon of parallelism as the defining feature of biblical poetry.<sup>10</sup> Lowth's work was to hold sway over the study of biblical poetry for two hundred years, from the late eighteenth century to the 1980s.

Because of the popularity of narratology during the 1970s and 1980s, narrative dominated the literary-critical scene in biblical studies during the mid- and late-twentieth century. Poetry was a distant second.<sup>11</sup> Most of the attention to poetry was directed to its formal features – parallelism, word patterning, and the quest for metrical systems. The Parry-Lord hypothesis regarding the oral composition of the Homeric epics made some short-lived inroads into the study of biblical poetry, but that required the substitution of the so-called fixed word pairs in parallelism for the conventional phrases that signaled oral composition in Homer. Besides, doubts arose about whether poetic books such as Psalms or Job had indeed been composed orally; current biblical scholarship has moved away from its earlier interest in the putative oral underpinnings of the biblical text.

The study of poetry, especially parallelism, benefitted more from other directions. Robert Lowth's three-part categorization of the types of parallelism into synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic, regnant for two hundred years, was overthrown in the 1980s by James Kugel and Robert Alter, who independently concluded that a better way to think of parallelism was, in Kugel's apt expression, "A, what's more, B."<sup>12</sup> The second line of a parallelism extended the meaning of the first in any number of ways, by modifying it, enlarging its scope, or developing one part of it. While this advance did not draw on literary theory per se, it is perhaps no coincidence that Kugel is a scholar with extensive literary training and acuity and Alter is a famous literary critic. Linguistics was also brought to bear on the understanding of parallelism, inspired by the writings of the linguist Roman Jakobson.<sup>13</sup> The study of meter fared less well. Attempts continued to isolate metrical systems based on the number of syllables, accents, or words, but they failed to convince most scholars. (Lowth was right to abandon the search for meter.) The most learned contribution was Michael O'Connor's 1980 effort, in *Hebrew Verse Structure*, to replace the idea that a line of verse was defined by a fixed number of syllables or accents with the definition of a line as containing a fixed number of

<sup>10</sup> Chapter 14.

<sup>11</sup> As can be seen by comparing the number of studies of narrative and of poetry listed in Powell, *Bible and Modern Literary Criticism*.

<sup>12</sup> Kugel, *Idea*, 1–58; Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 3–26.

<sup>13</sup> On the linguistic study of biblical parallelism, with bibliography, see Berlin, *Dynamics*, 7–30.

linguistic constituents. But O'Connor's system was complex and never caught on. Surprisingly little attention was bestowed on the more obvious candidates for poetic analysis, such as metaphor, allusion, or the movement of the poem as a whole. Poetic figures and tropes were identified and catalogued, based to a large extent on classical terminology and definitions, since there were no native designations, but their effect on the poem's message was little considered.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars of the mid-twentieth century had more success with narrative prose, comparing it with modern fiction. Literary theory blossomed in the 1970s and 1980s, and when the then-current literary criticism (beginning with New Criticism) was applied to the Bible, it revealed never-before-noticed aspects of plot and character. Then followed narrative poetics, with its attention to the analysis of discourse. From that time on, literary theory and criticism, in all its permutations, began to drive the study of biblical narrative, and afterwards the study of other biblical genres – prophetic, wisdom, and legal texts. No longer was there a question of the Bible's distinctiveness; the point was to show how the universal features of literature were manifested in it. As one new literary theory or school followed another, each, in turn, found its way into biblical studies: New Criticism, Formalism, Structuralism, Reader-Response Criticism, Feminism, and various types of Postmodernism. (The territory subsumed in these movements is too vast for even a superficial recounting here.) Each new theoretical wave brought new observations about the fabric of biblical discourse, its plot structures, and its compositional techniques. Then came questions about the representation of women, the power-structures reflected in the texts, and the ideology of texts and readers. All this brought with it a much greater awareness of the process of interpretation, of how meaning is made by texts and/or by readers. The notion that a text has a single correct meaning was challenged and replaced by the notion that there are potentially a multitude of meanings (the text is polysemous). This discovery about the multiplicity of meanings is, of course, nothing new to anyone who knows the history of biblical interpretation. But mid-twentieth-century biblical scholars largely ignored and even disdained pre-modern interpretation.

<sup>14</sup> This can be compared with Cassiodorus' tendency to identify in the Psalms literary devices as defined in classical grammar and rhetoric. But, as Andrew Kraebel observes ([Chapter 10](#), at [Note 9](#)), he did not go beyond noting that they endow the Psalms with literary elegance. Moses Ibn Ezra, likewise, enumerated twenty poetic techniques defined by Arabic experts on poetry that are attested in the Bible ([Chapter 12](#), [Sec. 1](#)). Rather than attributing meaning to those techniques, his aim was simply to demonstrate the Bible's poetic elegance.



The early practitioners of literary analyses of biblical narrative set their approaches in opposition to historical criticism, the reigning method in biblical studies. (Richard Moulton had, too, in 1896.) While historical critics sought to get behind the text to its pre-textual and early textual origins (before it reached the form in which we have it now), literary critics concentrated on the final product, the text as it now stands (a diachronic versus a synchronic approach); historical critics assumed the text to be a conglomeration of sources, but literary critics viewed it as a coherent unity; historical critics sought the one correct meaning, but literary critics opened the possibility of many meanings and of different kinds of meaning.

Nevertheless, historical criticism should not be written out of a discussion of literary approaches, because it has become, once again, important to the literary study of the Bible. For example, the Bible is increasingly being seen, both by literary and historical-critical scholars, as a set of interlocking or evolving texts, wherein one part alludes to, interprets, rewrites, or otherwise confronts another part. These phenomena are often collected under the term "inner-biblical interpretation." While the current interest in how parts of the biblical text engage with other parts is a very literary way of looking at things, it brings into play historical questions about the dating of the texts and their development over time, as well as the historical contexts that produced them. Literary criticism is re-connecting with historical criticism.

A second case of the interaction between literary and historical criticism is the recent aim to discover the cultural, social, political, or religious institutions and ideology embedded in the text. This goal was derived from literary or cultural studies, which in itself shows how literary criticism had moved towards more historical concerns, as opposed to New Criticism, Structuralism, and Reader Response Criticism, which analyzed texts in isolation from their historical contexts and did not care when a text had been written. In biblical studies, it led to a move back to a more text-centered approach than advocated by early postmodern biblicists, who were more concerned with the ideology of contemporary readers. Now the ideology of readers has been moved aside by concern with the ideology of the text. The text grew out of a particular historical moment, the time when it was created (as opposed to the time the text purports to be describing). Given that a particular story postdates the events it recounts (probably by many years, if, indeed, the events ever happened), the question now to be asked is: How and why is the past (or remembered past) being presented at the time the story was written? How is the story using the past to talk about the present? But in order to answer these

questions we need to know when the story was written. Here we encounter the perpetual problem of dating biblical texts. And suddenly, historical criticism and redaction criticism, those old efforts to date texts and to construct their textual history, formerly dismissed by literary scholars from New Criticism to early postmodernism, once again become relevant to literary interpretation. The old historical modes of biblical scholarship and the new literary modes are drawing closer together.<sup>15</sup>

### 3 Interpretation and the history of interpretation

Postmodernism validates the study of interpretations from all times and places, and as a result biblical studies has expanded its playing field to include the long history of biblical interpretation. The burning desire of an earlier generation to find the origins behind the biblical writings has cooled, although it is still simmering; and now more passion is ignited by uncovering the afterlife of those writings, the development of interpretation from ancient times till the present – as is reflected in this volume. This task is more rewarding because it is based on actual texts rather than hypothetical ones, and because most extrabiblical texts can be dated with relative certainty and within narrower parameters. They provide us with identifiable readers or groups of readers who left us explicit evidence of their interpretations.

How does the study of the history of biblical interpretation intersect with literary approaches to the Bible? Like early literary postmodernism, on the one hand, the study of early interpretation shines the spotlight on the reader, in this case an earlier interpreter, as the maker of meaning. It does not matter what the text says, or what the contemporary scholar thinks it says; the object of inquiry is what the earlier reader says it means. On the other hand, like historical approaches, the study of early interpretation is rooted in a historical context and its overarching goal is to recover a certain moment in the history of ideas. What did the Bible mean in a given time and place, and why and how was that meaning constructed? The contemporary act of interpreting the Bible, along with the study of its past interpretations, now form a complementary pair. The first is concerned with how the Bible constructs its meaning of the world, and the second with how interpreters construct their meanings of the Bible.

<sup>15</sup> Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, 11, makes a related observation: “Already this survey suggests a potential convergence between recent postmodern synchronic studies and recent diachronic studies. Just as diachronic studies are focusing more on illuminating the present form of the text, synchronic studies are displaying increasing interest in the very textual disunity that was often the mainstay of transmission history.”

## Bibliography

Works for which full bibliographic information is given in the list of abbreviations are not repeated here. Widely available ancient and medieval works published in multiple editions (and in many cases online), such as the writings of Aristotle, Augustine, and Plato, tractates of the Talmud, and medieval Jewish Bible commentaries, are not listed separately here. In the notes they are cited according to the relevant conventional reference system.

### Primary sources

- Abelard, Peter. *Opera theologica 1: Commentaria in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos, Apologia contra Bernardum*. Ed. Eloi M. Buytaert. Turnhout: Brepols, 1969.  
*Peter Abelard's Ethics*. Ed. D. E. Luscombe. Oxford: Clarendon-Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Abū 'Ubayda, Ma'mar ibn al-Muthannā al-Taymī. *Majāz al-Qur'ān*. Ed. Fuat Sezgin. 2 vols. Miṣr: al-Khānjī, 1954.
- Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā', Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Baghdādī. *Al-'Udda fī uṣūl al-fiqh*. Ed. Aḥmad b. 'Alī Sīr al-Mubārakī. 3 vols. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla 1400/1980.
- Albertus Magnus. *Summa theologiae sive de mirabili scientia Dei, libri I pars I, quaestiones 1–50A*. Ed. Dionys Siedler, with Wilhelm Kübel and H. G. Vogels. Monasterii Westfalorum: Aschendorff, 1978.
- Alexander of Hales. *Doctoris irrefragabilis Alexandri de Hales Ordinis minorum Summa theologica*. 4 vols. Quaracchi: Ex typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1924–48.
- al-Āmidī, Sayf al-Dīn. *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*. Riyad: Dār al-Ṣumay'ī, 2003.
- Ambrose. *De Interpellatione Iob et David*. In *Sancti Ambrosii Opera*. Ed. Karl Schenkl, II:209–96. Vienna: F. Tempsky, and Leipzig: G. Freitag, 1897.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Ed. Anton Pegis. 2 vols. New York: Modern Library, 1945.
- Corpus Thomisticum*. Collected and edited by Enrique Alarcón. [Individual texts (cited later) transferred by Roberto Busa; newly examined and arranged by Enrique Alarcón; 2011.] Fundación Tomás de Aquino, 2000–11. [www.corpusthomisticum.org](http://www.corpusthomisticum.org).

- De doctrina Christiana*. In PL 34:15–122. English translation: *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958.
- Expositio super Iob ad litteram*. Leonine text, Rome, 1965. In *Corpus Thomisticum*.
- Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*. Turin text, 1953. In *Corpus Thomisticum*. English translation: *On the Power of God*, trans. English Dominican Fathers. Westminster, MD: Newman, 1952.
- Quaestiones quodlibetales*. Ed. P. Mandonnet. Paris: Lethielleux, 1926.
- Summa theologiae*. Ed. Pietro Caramello. 5 vols. Turin: Marietti, 1952–6.
- Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Galatas lectura*. Turin text, 1953. In *Corpus Thomisticum*.
- Super Evangelium S. Matthaei lectura*. Reportatio Petri de Andria. Turin text, 1951, and Leonine text, 1969. In *Corpus Thomisticum*.
- Averros. See Ibn Rushd.
- al-Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr Ṭayyib. *al-Taqrīb wa al-irshād*. Ed. Abd al-Ḥamīd ‘Alī Abū Zunayd. Beirut: Mu’assasat al-risāla, 1993.
- Basil of Caesarea. *Sulla Genesi: Omelie sull’Esamerone*. Ed. Mario Naldini. Milano: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1990.
- al-Baṣrī, Abū ‘l-Ḥusayn. *al-Mu’tamad fī uṣūl al-fiqh*. Ed. Khalīl al-Mays. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1403/1983.
- Boethius. *The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy/with an English Translation by S. J. Tester*. Ed. and trans., Hugh Fraser Stewart, Edward Kennard Rand, and S. Jim Tester. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973.
- Brethren of Purity. *Rasā’il ikhwān al-ṣafā’*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār ṣādir, n.d.
- Cassiodorus. *Expositio psalmorum*. Ed. M. Adriaen. Turnhout: Brepols, 1958. English translation: *Explanation of the Psalms*, trans. P. G. Walsh, 3 vols. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990–1.
- [Cicero] *Ad. C. Herennium: De ratione dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium)*. Trans. Harry Caplan. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977.
- Cicero. *De Oratore, Book III. De fato. Paradoxa Stoicorum. De partitione oratoria*. Trans. H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*. Ed. Franca Brambilla Ageno. Florence: Casa editrice le lettere, 1995. English translation: *Dante’s Il Convivio (= The Banquet)*, trans. Richard H. Lansing. New York: Garland, 1990.
- La Commedia secondo l’antica vulgata*. Ed. Giorgio Petrocchi. Florence: Casa editrice le lettere, 1994. English: *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum. New York: Knopf, 1995.
- Dufour, Jean, ed. *Recueil des Rouleaux des Morts (VII<sup>e</sup> siècle-vers 1536)*. Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2005.
- Duran, Profiat. *Ma’ashe Efod*. Ed. Y. T. Friedlander and Y. Hachohen. Vienna, 1865; reprint Jerusalem: Maqor, 1969/1970.
- Ephraem the Syrian. *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra Haereses*. Ed. Edmund Beck. Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1957.

- Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*. Ed. Edmund Beck. Louvain: Peeters, 1955.
- Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate*. Ed. Edmund Beck. Louvain: Peeters, 1962.
- Des heiligen des Syrers Paschalhymnen (de Azymis, de Crucifissione, de Resurrectione)*. Ed. Edmund Beck. Louvain: Peeters, 1964.
- Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*. Ed. Kathleen E. McVey. New York: Paulist Press, 1989.
- Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii*. Ed. R.-M. Tonneau. Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1955.
- Eriugena, John Scotus. *A New Edition of Eriugena's Periphyseon*. Ed. Édouard Jeuneau. Turnhout: Brepols, 1999.
- Commentarius in Joannem*. In PL 122: 297–348.
- Fitzgerald, William, trans. *A Disputation on Holy Scripture, against the Papists, Especially Bellarmine and Stapleton*. [By William Whitaker.] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849.
- Gerson, Jean. *Joannis Gersonii Doctoris Theologi & Cancellarii Parisiensis Opera Omnia*. Ed. L. E. du Pin. 5 vols. Antwerp: Sumptibus Societatis, 1706.
- al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥamid. *Al-mankhūl*. Ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan Haytū. 2nd edn. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1400/1980.
- Al-mustasfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl*. Ed. Muḥammad Sulaymān al-Ashqar. 2 vols. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1417/1997.
- Gilbert of Poitiers. *The Commentaries on Boethius by Gilbert of Poitiers*. Ed. Nikolaus M. Häring. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1966.
- Gregory the Great. *Morales sur Job*. Première partie. Livres I et II. Introd. and notes by Robert Gillet. Trans. André de Guadamaris. 2nd edn. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1975.
- Ha-Levi, Judah. *Kuzari = Kitāb al-Radd wa-d-Dalīl fī d-Dīn adh-Dhalīl*. Ed. David Z. Baneth and Haggai Ben-Shammai. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977. Medieval Hebrew translation by Judah Ibn Tibbon, ed. A[vraham] Zifroni. Tel-Aviv: Maḥbarot le-sifrut, 1948.
- al-Ḥillī, al-'Allāma Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ḥasan. *Nihāyat al-wuṣūl ilā 'ilm al-uṣūl*. Qum: Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li-lḥyā' al-Turāth, 2010.
- Ibn Abī Ya'lā, Abū l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad. *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābila*, 2 vols. Cairo: Maṭba'at as-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1371/1952.
- Ibn al-'Arabī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh. *Aḥkam al-Qur'an*. Ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭa. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1416/1996.
- Ibn Barhān, Sharaf al-Islām Abū l-Faṭḥ Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Baghdādī. *Al-Wuṣūl ilā l-uṣūl*. Ed. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd 'Alī Abū Zunayd. Riyadh: Maktabat al-ma'ārif, 1403/1983.
- Ibn Ezra, Abraham. *Pentateuch Commentary = Perushei ha-Torah*. Ed. Asher Weiser. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1977.
- Safah Berurah*. Ed. Michael Wilensky. *Devir* 2 (1924): 274–302.
- Yesod Diqduq*. Ed. Nehemia Allony. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1985.

- Ibn Ezra, Moses. *Book of Discussion and Conversation* = *Kitāb al-Muḥādara wa-l-Mudhākara* (*Sefer ha-Iyyunim we-ha-Diyyunim*). Ed. and trans. (Hebrew) A. S. Halkin. Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1975. Ed. and trans. (Spanish) Montserrat Abumalham Mas. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Filología, 1985.
- The Treatise of the Garden on the Matter of Majāz and Haqiqa* (*Maqālat al-Ḥadīqa fī Ma'na l-Majāz wa-l-Haqiqa*), MS JNUL 8° 570. Partial Hebrew translation by Judah Alharizi, 'Arugat ha-Bosem, in *Zion* 2 (1849) 117–23, 134–7, 157–60, 175.
- Ibn Ghiyyath, Isaac. Commentary on Ecclesiastes (mistakenly attributed to Saadia Gaon). In *The Five Scrolls: Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Lamentations with Ancient Commentaries* (Hebrew). Ed. and trans. (Hebrew), Joseph Kafih, 155–296. Jerusalem: ha-Agudah le-ḥašalat ginzei teiman, 1962.
- Ibn Ḥazm, Abū Muḥammad 'Alī b. Aḥmad. *Kitāb al-muḥallā*. 8 vols. Cairo: Idārat al-Ṭibā'a al-Muniriyya, 1348/1929.
- al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-ahkām*. Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Ḥalabī wa-Shurakāhu lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 1968.
- Ibn Janah, Jonah. *Kitāb al-Luma'* (*Le livre de parterres fleuris: Grammaire hébraïque en arabe d'Abou'l-Walid Merwan Ibn Djanah de Cordoue*). Ed. Joseph Derenbourg. Paris: F. Vieweg, 1886. Hebrew translation by Judah Ibn Tibbon, *Sefer ha-Riqmah*, ed. Michael Wilensky, 2nd edn. Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1964.
- Ibn Kaspi, Joseph. Commentary on the Song of Songs. In *Sheloshah perushim le-shir ha-shirim* (=Three Commentaries on the Song of Songs). Constantinople: n.p., 1504.
- Ibn al-Laḥḥām, 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad. *Al-qawā'id wa-l-fawā'id al-uṣūliyya*. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadīyah, 1956.
- Ibn al-Qaṣṣār al-Baghdādī, Aḥmad Ibn 'Umar. *al-Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-fiqh*. Ed. Muṣṭafā ibn Karāmat Allāh Makhdūm. Riyadh: Dār al-Ma'lamah lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 1999.
- Ibn Qutayba, 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim. *Ta'wīl mushkil al-qur'ān*. Ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr. Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1393/1973.
- Ibn Rushd (Averroes). *Be'ur Ibn Roshd le-sefer ha-halaṣah le-Aristo / be'etiqa milshon Hagari le-'Ivri ... Ṭodros Ṭodrosi*. Ed. Jacob Goldenthal. Leipzig: [Heinrich Franke], 1842.
- Ibn Taymiyya, Taqī al-Dīn. *Iqtidā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1983.
- Ibn-Qudāma al-Maqdisī, 'Abdallāh Ibn-Aḥmad. *al-Kāfī fī fiqh al-imām Aḥmad Ibn-Ḥanbal*. Ed. Muḥammad Fāris. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1994.
- Isidore of Seville. *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*. Ed. W. M. Lindsay. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1911.
- Jacob of Serūg. *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*. Ed. Paul Bedjan. 5 vols. Paris and Leipzig: Via Dicta & Otto Harrassowitz, 1905–1910.
- Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Veil on Moses' Face*. Trans. Sebastian P. Brock. Piscataway: Gorgias, 2009.

- Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Transfiguration of Our Lord*. Trans. Thomas Kollamparampil. Piscataway: Gorgias, 2008.
- A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem by Jacob of Sarug*. Ed. and trans. Joseph P. Amar. Turnhout: Brepols, 1995.
- al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Abū Bakr. *al-Fuṣūl fī al-uṣūl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 1985.
- al-Jazīrī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. *al-Fiqh ʿalā l-madhāhib al-arbaʿa*. Ed. A. F. al-Mazīdī and M. F. Rashād. n.p., n.d.
- Jerome. *Commentaria in Ezechielem*. In PL 25:15–490.
- Commentaria in Isaiam*. In PL 24:18–678.
- Commentarii in Prophetas Minores*. Ed. M. Adriaen. 2 vols. Turnhout: Brepols, 1969–70.
- In Hieremiam Libri VI*. Ed. Siegfried Reiter. Turnhout: Brepols, 1960.
- Hebraicae quaestiones in libro Geneseos, Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum, Commentarioli in Psalmos, Commentarius in Ecclesiasten*. Ed. Paul de Lagarde. Turnhout: Brepols, 1959.
- Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*. Ed. Isidore Hilberg. 3 vols. Vienna: Tempsky, 1910–18.
- Jurjānī, ʿAbd al-Qāhir b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. *Kitāb dalāʾil al-iʿjāz*. Ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1984.
- al-Kāsānī, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Abū Bakr b. Masʿūd. *Badāʾiʾ al-ṣanāʾiʾ fī tartīb al-sharāʾiʾ*. Ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad Muʿawwaḍ and ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd. 10 vols. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿilmiyya 1418/1997.
- Kilwardby, Robert [attribution in question]. *In Donati Artem Maiorem III*. Ed. Laurentius Schmuecker. Brixen: Weger, 1984.
- Le Liber de causis*. Ed. Adriaan Pattin. Leuven: Uitgave van Tijdschrift voor filosofie, 1967.
- Longinus on the Sublime*. Trans. H. L. Havel. London: Macmillan, 1890.
- Maimonides, Moses. *Book of the Commandments (Sefer ha-Miṣwot)*. Ed. and trans. (Hebrew) Joseph Kafih. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1971.
- Guide of the Perplexed = Dalālat al-Hāʾirīn: Moreh Nevukhim*, Ed. and trans. (Hebrew) Joseph Kafih. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1972; English: *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.
- Mishneh Torah* (Code of Jewish Law). Standard printed version with traditional commentaries (Vilna 1900, repr. frequently).
- Messer Leon, Judah. *The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow (Sepher Nopheth Suphim)*. Ed. and trans. Isaac Rabinowitz. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- The Mirour of Mans Saluacioun: A Middle English Translation of Speculum humanae salvationis*. Ed. Avril Henry. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987.
- Nahmanides, Moses. *Sefer ha-Miṣwot ʿim Hassagot ha-Ramban (Critique of Maimonides' Book of the Commandments)*. Ed. Hayyim Dov Chavel. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1981.
- al-Nawawī, Muḥyī al-Dīn b. Sharaf. *al-Majmūʿ*. 27 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmīyah, 1423/2002.



- Nicholas of Lyre. "Prologus secundus, De intentio autoris, & modo procedendi."  
In Vol. 1 of *Biblia sacra cum glossis, interlineari, et ordinaria*... 6 vols.  
Venice: n.p., 1588.
- al-Nīṣabūrī, Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj. *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 1994.
- Notker the German. *Die Schriften Notkers und seiner Schule*. Ed. Paul Piper. 3 vols. Freiburg i.B.: Mohr, 1882.  
*Die Werke Notkers des Deutschen 7, Die kleineren Schriften*. Ed. James C. King and Petrus W. Tax. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1996.
- Ockham, William of. *Breviloquium de principatu tyrannico*. In *Wilhelm von Ockham als politischer Denker und sein Breviloquium de principatu tyrannico*, ed. Richard Scholz. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1952. English: *A Short Discourse on the Tyrannical Government over things Divine and Human*, trans. John Kilcullen, with an introduction by Arthur Stephen McGrade. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Origen. *Contra Celsum libri VIII*. Ed. Miroslav Marcovich. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
- Petrus Helias. *Summa super Priscianum*. Ed. Leo Reilly. 2 vols. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993.
- Qirīṣānī, Jacob. *Kitāb al-anwār wal-marāqib*. Ed. Leon Nemoy. New York: The Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1939–43.
- Qurṭubī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-qurʾān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 1417/1996.
- Radak (Rabbi David Kimhi). Commentary on Genesis. Ed. Moshe Kamalhar. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1982.
- al-Sharīf, al-Raḍī. *Talkhīṣ al-bayān fī majāzāt al-qurʾān*. Ed. Makkī Jāsim. Baghdād: Maṭbaʿat al-Maʿārif, 1955.
- Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel ben Meir). *The Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam) on the Song of Songs*. Ed. Sara Japhet. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2008.  
*Pentateuch Commentary = Perush ha-Torah asher Katav Rashbam*. Ed. David Rosin. Breslau: Shottlender, 1881.
- Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac). *Pentateuch Commentary = Raschi: der Kommentar des Salomo B. Isak Über den Pentateuch*. Ed. Abraham Berliner. 2nd edn. Frankfurt A/M: J. Kaufman, 1905.  
Commentary on the Song of Songs, according to JTS MS Lutzky 778 = "Rashi's Commentary on the Song of Songs," ed. Jacob Rosenthal. In *Samuel K. Mirsky Jubilee Volume*, ed. Simon Bernstein and Gershon Hurgin, 130–88. New York: Va'ad ha-Yovel, 1958. Also in *Secundum Salomonem: A Thirteenth Century Latin Commentary on the Song of Songs*, ed. Sarah Kamin and Avrom Saltman, 81–99 (Hebrew section). Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1989.
- al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn. *al-Maḥṣūl fī ʿilm al-uṣūl*. Ed. Ṭahā Jābir Fayyāḍ al-ʿAlwānī. 2 vols. Riyadh: Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad Ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmiyya, 1399/1979–1401/1981.
- Remigius of Auxerre. *Commentaire anonyme sur Prudence*. Ed. John Burnam. Paris: Picard, 1910.



- Remigii Autissiodorensis Commentum in Martianum Capellam*. Ed. Cora Lutz. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1962–5.
- Rupert of Deutz. *De sancta trinitate et operibus eius*. Ed. Rhabanus M. Haacke. 3 vols. Turnhout: Brepols, 1971–2.
- Saadia Gaon. *Kitāb al-Mukhtār fi-l-Amānāt wa-l-Itiqādāt; Sefer ha-Nivḥar be-Emunot we-De'ot (Book of Selected Beliefs and Opinions)*. Ed. and trans. (Hebrew) Joseph Kafih. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1970.
- Saadya's Commentary on Genesis*. Ed. and trans. (Hebrew) Moses Zucker. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1984.
- Tafsīr (Translation of the Pentateuch) in Oeuvres complètes de R. Saadia ben Iosef al-Fayyūmī*. Ed. Joseph Derenbourg. Paris: E. Leroux, 1893.
- Salmon ben Jeruham. *The Book of the Wars of the Lord: Containing the Polemics of the Karaite Salmon ben Yeruhim against Saadia Gaon*. Ed. Israel Davidson. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1934.
- al-Samarqandī, 'Alā' al-Dīn. *Tuhfat al-fuqahā'*. 3 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyya, 1405/1984.
- Samuel ben Hofni Gaon. *Rabbi Shmuel B. Chofni: Liber Prooemium Talmudis, Textum Arabicum Edidit et Versione Hebraica*. Ed. and trans. (Hebrew) Shraga Abramson. Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1990.
- al-Sarakhsī, Shams al-Dīn. *Kitāb al-mabsūt*. 30 vols. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, 1324–31/1906–13.
- Servius. *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Virgilii carmina commentarii*. Ed. Georg Thilo and Hermann Hagen. 3 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1881–1902.
- al-Shāfi'ī, Muḥammad b. Idrīs. *al-Risāla*. Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1999.
- Shāshī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. *Ḥilyat al-'ulamā' fī ma'rifat madhāhib al-fuqahā'*. Ed. Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāh and Fathī 'Aṭīyah Muḥammad. Mecca: Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafa al-Bāz, 1418/1998.
- al-Shāṭibī, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā. *al-Muwāfaqāt fī uṣūl al-sharī'a*. 3 vols. Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1423/2003.
- Simon of Tournai. *Les Disputationes de Simon de Tournai*. Ed. Joseph Warichez. Louvain: Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense, Bureaux, 1932.
- Thomas of Chobham. *Summa de arte praedicandi*. Ed. Franco Morenzoni. Turnhout: Brepols, 1990.
- al-Ṭūfī, Najm al-Dīn. *Sharḥ mukhtaṣar al-rawḍa*. Ed. 'Abdallāh ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī. 2 vols. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1407/1987.
- Whitaker, William. *Disputatio de sacra scriptura, contra huius temporis papistas...*. Cambridge: Ex officina Thomae Thomasi, 1588.
- William of Auvergne. *Guilielmi Alverni ... Opera omnia*. 2 vols. Paris: Apud Andræam Pralard, 1674. Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1963.
- al-Zabīdī, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Murtaḍā. *Tāj al-'arūs min jawāhir al-qāmūs*. 20 vols. 'Alī Shīrī. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1414/1994.
- al-Zamakhsharī, Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd. *al-Kashshaf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1397/1977.
- al-Zarkashī, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Bahādur. *Al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī uṣūl al-fiqh*. Ed. al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir b. 'Abdallāh al-Shāfi'ī. 2 vols. Kuwait: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1413/1992.

## Secondary sources

- Abou Sheishaa, Mohamed Ali Mohamed. "A Study of the Fatwa by Rashid Rida on the Translation of the Qur'an." [www.islamicwritings.org/quran/language/a-study-of-the-fatwa-by-rashid-rida-on-the-translation-of-the-quran/](http://www.islamicwritings.org/quran/language/a-study-of-the-fatwa-by-rashid-rida-on-the-translation-of-the-quran/)
- Ackroyd, Peter and C. F. Evans. *The Cambridge History of the Bible. Vol. I: From the Beginnings to Jerome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Adang, Camilla. *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Adang, Camilla, Sabine Schmidtke, and David Sklare, eds. *A Common Rationality: Mu'tazilism in Islam and Judaism*. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2007.
- Alexander, Elizabeth S. "The Orality of Rabbinic Writing." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte E. Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, 38–57. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Alexander, Philip. "Retelling the Old Testament." *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture*, ed. D. A. Carson and Hugh G. M. Williamson, 99–121. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Allony, Nehemia. *The Jewish Library in the Middle Ages, Book Lists from the Cairo Genizah* (Hebrew). Ed. Miriam Frenkel and Haggai Ben-Shammai. Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2006.
- Almagor, Ella. 1979. "The Early Meaning of *Majāz* and the Nature of Abū 'Ubayda's Exegesis." In *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D.H. Baneth Dedicata*, ed. Joshua Blau et al., 307–26. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979.
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic Books, 1985.
- Altmann, Alexander. "Ars Rhetorica as Reflected in Some Jewish Figures of the Italian Renaissance." In *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman, 1–22. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Alwan, P. Khalil. "Bibliographie générale raisonnée de Jacques de Saroug (†521)." *Parole de l'Orient* 13 (1986): 313–84.
- Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali. "Persian, the Other Sacred Language of Islam: Some Brief Notes." In *Fortress of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*, ed. Omar Alī-de-Uzgada, 59–75. London: I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011.
- Arberry, Arthur J. *The Koran Interpreted*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1955.
- Argyriou, Astérios. "Perceptions de l'islam et traductions du Coran dans le monde byzantin grec." *Byzantion* 75 (2005): 25–69.
- al-'Asqalānī, Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Ḥajar. *Fatḥ al-bārī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1993.
- Astell, Ann. "Cassiodorus's *Commentary on the Psalms* as an *Ars rhetorica*." *Rhetorica* 17 (1999): 37–75.
- Astren, Fred. *Karaite Judaism and Historical Understanding*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004.
- Atzmon, Arnon. "'The Same Fate is in Store for the Righteous and the Wicked': Form and Content in Midreshei Aggadah." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012): 58–77.

- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Bach, Kent. "You Don't Say?" *Synthese* 128 (2001): 15–44.
- Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991. (Originally published in German in 1976).
- Bar-Asher, Meir M. "Outlines of Early Ismaili-Fatimid Qur'an Exegesis." *Journal Asiatique* 296 (2008): 257–96.
- Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Bar-Levav, Avriel. "The Sacred Space of the Portable Homeland: An Archeology of Unseen Libraries in Jewish Culture from the Medieval Period to the Internet" (Hebrew). In *Ut videant et Contingant: Essays on Pilgrimage and Sacred Space in Honour of Ora Limor*, ed. Yitzhak Hen and Iris Shagrir, 297–320. Raanana: Open University Press, 2011.
- Barwick, Karl. *Probleme der stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957.
- Beaumont, Jaqueline. "The Latin Tradition of the *De consolazione philosophiae*." In *Boethius*, ed. Margaret Gibson, 278–305. Oxford: Blackwell 1981.
- Beck, Edmund. "Das Bild vom Weg mit Meilensteinen und Herbergen bei Ephrām." *Oriens Christianus* 65 (1981): 1–39.
- ed. *Hymnen contra Haereses*. See under Primary Sources, Ephraem the Syrian.
- "Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephrām." *Oriens Christianus* 42 (1958): 19–40.
- "Zur Terminologie von Ephrāms Bildtheologie." *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, ed. Margo Schmidt, 239–277. Eichstätter Beiträge, 4. Regensburg: Pustet, 1982.
- "Zwei ephrämisches Bilder." *Oriens Christianus* 71 (1987): 1–9.
- Becker, Adam. *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- Bennett, Beth S. "The Function of Adaptation in Notker's *Rhetorica*." *Rhetorica* 7 (1989): 171–84.
- Ben-Shammai, Haggai. "On the *Mudawwin*—Editor of the Biblical Books—in Judeo-Arabic Exegesis" (Hebrew). In *From Sages to Savants: Studies Presented to Avraham Grossman*, ed. Joseph R. Hacker, Yosef Kaplan, and B. Z. Kedar, 73–110. Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-Toldot Yisrael, 2010.
- "The Rabbinic Literature in Se'adya's Exegesis: Between Tradition and Innovation" (Hebrew). In *Heritage and Innovation in Medieval Judeo-Arabic Culture*, ed. Joshua Blau and David Doron, 33–69. Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000.
- "Return to the Scriptures in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Sectarianism and in Early Islam." In *Les Retours aux Écritures: Fondamentalismes Présents et Passés*, ed. Evelyne Patlagean and Alain Le Boulluec, 319–39. Louvain: Peeters, 1993.

- "The Tension between Literal Interpretation and Exegetical Freedom: Comparative Observations on Saadia's Method." In *Reverence for the Word*, ed. McAuliffe et al., 33–50.
- Berenson, Bernhard. *Lorenzo Lotto*. Milano: Abscondita, 2008.
- Berlin, Adele. *Biblical Poetry Through Medieval Jewish Eyes*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- Esther*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001.
- "Literary Approaches to Biblical Literature: General Observations and a Case Study of Genesis 34." In *The Hebrew Bible: New Insights and Scholarship*, ed. Frederick Greenspahn, 45–75. New York: New York University Press, 2008.
- Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983.
- Bernstein, Moshe. "'Rewritten Bible': A Generic Category Which Has Outlived Its Usefulness?" *Textus* 22 (2005): 169–96.
- "What Has Happened to the Laws? The Treatment of Legal Material in 4QReworked Pentateuch." *DSD* 15 (2008): 24–49.
- Biesen, Kees den. *Biesen, Kees den: Annotated Bibliography of Ephrem the Syrian*. [S.l.]: Kees den Biesen, 2011.
- Blachère, Régis. *Le Coran*. Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1980.
- Black, Deborah L. *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990.
- Blair, Hugh. *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783). 2 vols. Edinburgh: J. Dick & Co., 1820.
- Bogaert, Pierre-Maurice. "The Latin Bible c. 600 to c. 900." In *The New Cambridge History of the Bible from 600–1450*, ed. Richard Marsden and E. Ann Matter, 69–92. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Boitani, Piero. "Creazione e cadute di Paradiso XXIX." *L'Alighieri* 19 (2002): 87–103.
- Letteratura europea e Medioevo volgare*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007.
- "The Poetry and Poetics of the Creation." In *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, ed. Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, 95–130. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010.
- Bonebakker, Seeger A. "Aspects of the History of Literary Rhetoric and Poetics in Arabic Literature," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 1 (1970): 75–95.
- Bonfil, Robert. "*The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow* by Judah Messer Leon: The Rhetorical Dimension of Jewish Humanism in Fifteenth-Century Italy." *Jewish History* 6 (1992): 21–33.
- Bonnet, Jacques. *Lorenzo Lotto*. Paris: Adam Biro, 1998.
- Bou Mansour, Tanios. *La pensée symbolique de saint Ephrem le Syrien*. Kaslik, Lebanon: Université Saint-Esprit, 1988.
- La théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, 2 volumes. Kaslik, Lebanon: L'Université Saint-Esprit, 1993, 2000.

- Boulos Sony, Behnam M. "La méthode exégétique de Jacques de Saroug." *Parole de l'Orient* 9 (1979–1980): 85–92.
- Bourke, Vernon. "Augustine on the Psalms." In *Augustine, Biblical Exegete*, ed. Frederick van Fleteren and Joseph Schnaubelt, 55–70. New York: Peter Lang, 2011.
- Boyle, John F. "St. Thomas Aquinas and Sacred Scripture." [www.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/Taqandss.htm](http://www.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/Taqandss.htm)
- Bregman, Marc. *The Tanhuma-Yelammedenu Literature: Studies in the Evolution of the Versions*. Piscataway: Gorgias, 2003.
- Brin, Gershon. *Reuel and His Friends: Jewish Byzantine Exegetes from around the Tenth Century C.E.* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 2012.
- Brock, Sebastian P. "Genesis 22 in Syriac Translation." In *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy: Études bibliques offerts à l'occasion de son 60e anniversaire*, ed. Pierre Casetti, 1–30. Fribourg: Éditions Universitaire / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981.
- "Genesis 22: Where was Sarah?" *The Expository Times* 96 (1984): 14–17.
- The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian*. Revised edition. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992.
- "The Poet as Theologian: St. Ephrem." In Sebastian P. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Spirituality*, 53–61. Poona: Anita Printers, 1988.
- "Sarah and the Aqedah." *Le Muséon* 97 (1974): 67–77.
- "Syriac Poetry on Biblical Themes, 2: A Dialogue Poem on the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22)." *The Harp: A Journal of Syriac and Oriental Studies* 7 (1994): 55–72.
- "Ya'qub of Serugh." In *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian P. Brock et al., 434. Piscataway Gorgias, 2011.
- Brody, Robert. *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Sa'adyah Gaon*. Trans. Betsy Rosenberg. Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013.
- Brooke, George. "The Rewritten Law, Prophets, and Psalms: Issues for Understanding the Text of the Bible." In *The Bible as Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Judean Desert Discoveries*, ed. Edward D. Herbert and Emanuel Tov, 31–40. London: British Library and Newcastle, DE: Oak Knoll, 2002.
- Brown, Peter. *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.
- Bur, Michel. "Saint-Thierry et le renouveau monastique dans le diocèse de Reims au X<sup>e</sup> siècle." In *Saint-Thierry: Une abbaye du VI<sup>e</sup> au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Michel Bur, 39–49. Saint-Thierry: Amis de l'Abbaye, 1979.
- Burke, Kenneth. *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logography*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961.
- Burnett, Stephen G. "The Strange Career of the Biblia Rabbinica among Christian Hebraists, 1517–1620." In *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books, Scholars and Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Matthew McLean and Bruce Gordon, 63–83. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

- Burridge, Richard. "The Gospels and Acts." In *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period: 330 BC to AD 400*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, 507–32. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- Calboli Montefusco, Lucia. *La dottrina degli "status" nella retorica greca e romana*. Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1986.
- Calder, Norman. *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.
- Cameron, Avril. *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991.
- Cannon, Charles K. "William Whitaker's *Disputatio de Sacra Scriptura*: A Sixteenth-Century Theory of Allegory." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 25 (1962): 129–38.
- Cantarino, Vicente. *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*. Leiden: Brill, 1975.
- Carr, David M. *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996.
- Chenu, Marie-Dominique. *La théologie comme science au XIIIe siècle*, 3rd edn. Paris: Vrin, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*. Ed. and trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*. Trans. Albert M. Landry and Dominic Hughes. Chicago: Regenery, 1964.
- Chiesa, Bruno and Wilfrid Lockwood. *Ya'qūb al-Qirgīsānī on Jewish Sects and Christianity*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984.
- Childs, Brevard. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem." In *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart, and Rudolf Smend, 80–93. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977.
- Chydenius, Johan. *The Typological Problem in Dante: A Study in the History of Medieval Ideas*. Helsinki: n.p., 1958.
- Cohen, Mark R. *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Cohen, Mordechai Z. "The Aesthetic Exegesis of Moses Ibn Ezra," in *HBOT* 1/2: 282–301.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Imagination, Logic, Truth and Falsehood: Moses Ibn Ezra and Moses Maimonides on Biblical Metaphor in Light of Arabic Poetics and Philosophy" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 73 (2005): 417–58.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Maimonides vs. Rashi: Philosophical, Philological and Psychological Approaches to Job," In *Between Rashi and Maimonides: Themes in Medieval Jewish Thought, Literature and Exegesis*, eds. Ephraim Kanarfogel and Moshe Sokolow, 319–42. New York: Ktav, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Moses Ibn Ezra vs. Maimonides: Argument for a Poetic Definition of Metaphor (*Isti'āra*)," *Edebiyât: Journal of Middle Eastern and Comparative Literature* 11 (2000): 1–28.



- "A Poet's Biblical Exegesis." *JQR* 93 (2003): 533–56.
- "A Possible Spanish Source for Rashi's Concept of *Peshuto Shel Miqra*" (Hebrew). In *Rashi: The Man and His Work* (Hebrew), ed. Avraham Grossman and Sara Japhet, 353–79. Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2008.
- "Rashbam Scholarship in Perpetual Motion." *JQR* 98 (2008): 389–408.
- Opening the Gates of Interpretation: Maimonides' Biblical Hermeneutics in Light of His Geonic-Andalusian Heritage and Muslim Milieu*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- "The Qimhi Family," in *HBOT* I/2: 388–415.
- The Rule of Peshat: Jewish Constructions of the Plain Sense of Scripture in Their Christian and Muslim Contexts, c. 900–1300*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming.
- Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor: From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimhi*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Lay Sermons*. Vol. 6 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Reginald James White. London: Routledge and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- Colish, Marcia. "Rethinking Lying in the Twelfth Century." In *Virtue and Ethics in the Twelfth Century*, ed. István P. Bejczy and Richard G. Newhauser, 155–73. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Collins, Ann R. *Teacher in Faith and Virtue: Lanfranc of Bec's Commentary on St. Paul*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Conley, Thomas M. *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*. New York and London: Longman, 1990.
- Conrad, Peter. *Creation: Artists, Gods & Origins*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2007.
- Cook, Michael. "Anan and Islam: The Origins of Karaite Scripturalism." *Jewish Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987): 161–82.
- The Koran: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- "The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition in Early Islam." *Arabica* 44 (1997): 437–530.
- Copeland, Rita. "The Ciceronian Rhetorical Tradition and Medieval Literary Theory." In *The Rhetoric of Cicero in Its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, ed. Virginia Cox and John O. Ward, 239–65. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- "Wycliffite Ciceronism? The General Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible and Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*." In Mews et al., *Rhetoric and Renewal*, 185–200.
- Copeland, Rita, and Ineke Sluiter, eds. *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300–1475*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- Costet-Tardieu, Francine. *Un réformiste à l'université al-Azhar: œuvre et pensée de Mustafà al-Marāghī, 1881–1945*. Paris: Karthala, 2005.
- Courcelle, Pierre. *La Consolation de la Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire*. Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1967.
- Cox, Virginia, and John O. Ward, eds. *The Rhetoric of Cicero in Its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- Crawford, Sidnie White. "The Pentateuch as Found in the Pre-Samaritan Texts and 4QReworked Pentateuch." In Weissenberg et al, *Changes In Scripture*, 123–36. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011.
- Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- "The 'Rewritten Bible' at Qumran: A Look at Three Texts." *Eretz Israel* 26 (1999): 1–8.
- Cummings, Brian. *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- D'Agostino, Milena, Nicola Panciera, Lucian Lechintan, Emily Reynolds, and Prue Richardson. *Il mistero della salvezza nei mosaici di San Marco*. Castel Bolognese: Itaca, 2005.
- Da Villa Urbani, Maria. *La basilica di San Marco*. Venice: Storti, 2001.
- Dahan, Gilbert. *Lire la bible au moyen âge: Essais d'hermeneutique médiévale*. Geneva: Droz, 2009.
- Danielou, J. *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*. Seattle: CreateSpace, 2011.
- Delaporte, Yves. *La Cathédrale de Chartres et ses vitraux*. Paris: Éditions du Chêne, 1943.
- Les trois Notre-Dame de la cathédrale de Chartres*. Chartres: É. Houvet, 1955.
- Demus, Otto. *The Mosaic Decoration of San Marco, Venice*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1988.
- Dennis, John. *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939.
- Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, R.E. Latham, D. R. Howlett et al. London: Oxford University Press, 1975–2013.
- Dohrmann, Natalie B., and David Stern, eds. *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.
- Dominik, William J. and Jon Hall. *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*. Malden: Blackwell, 2007.
- Dotan, Aron. *The Dawn of Hebrew Linguistics: The Book of Elegance of the Language of the Hebrews by Saadia Gaon: Introduction and Critical Edition* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1997.
- Dove, Mary. *The First English Bible: The Text and Context of the Wycliffite Versions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- "Literal Senses in the Song of Songs." In *Nicholas of Lyra: The Senses of Scripture*, ed. Philip D.W. Krey and Lesley Smith, 129–46. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- Drory, Rina. *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: ha-Ḳibuts ha-me'uḥad, 1988.



- Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and Its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- Eden, Kathy. *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy & Its Humanist Reception*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Elder, Marcus Paul. "Eruditio sacri eloquii: The Integration of Scriptural Hermeneutics and Theological System in Hugh of St. Victor." PhD diss., Yale University, 2010.
- Enelow, Hyman G., ed. *The Mishnah of Rabbi Eliezer: Or The Midrash of Thirty-two Hermeneutical Rules*. New York: Bloch, 1933.
- Eppenstein, Simon. "Fragment d'un commentaire anonyme du Cantique des Cantiques." *Revue des études juives* 53 (1907): 242–54.
- Erder, Yoram. "The Karaites' Sadducee Dilemma." *Israel Oriental Studies* 14 (1994): 195–226.
- Falk, Daniel. *The Parabiblical Texts: Strategies for Extending the Scriptures in the Dead Sea Scrolls*. London: T&T Clark, 2007.
- Fenton, Paul. *Philosophie et exégèse dans le Jardin de la métaphore de Moïse Ibn 'Ezra*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- Fishbane, Eitan P. "With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (review)." *JQR* 96 (2006): 268–71.
- Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.
- Fishman, Talya. *Becoming the People of the Talmud*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- Forlati, Ferdinando. *Mosaici di San Marco*. Milan: Silvana, 1957.
- Fouilloux, Étienne. "Henri de Lubac at the Moment of the Publication of *Surnature*." In *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of the Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino, 3–20. Ave Maria, Florida: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2009.
- Frank, Daniel. *Search Scripture Well: Karaite Exegetes and the Origins of the Jewish Bible Commentary in the Islamic East*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- "The *Shoshanim* of Tenth-Century Jerusalem: Karaite Exegesis, Prayer, and Communal Identity." In *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. Daniel Frank, 199–245. Leiden: Brill, 1995.
- Fredborg, Karin Margareta. "Abelard on Rhetoric." In Mews et al., *Rhetoric and Renewal*, 55–80.
- "The Commentaries on Cicero's *De inventione* and *Rhetorica ad Herennium* by William of Champeaux." *Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen-Âge Grec et Latin* 17 (1976): 1–39.
- "Speculative Grammar." In *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. Peter Dronke, 177–95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Frei, Hans W. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

- "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?" In *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition*, ed. Frank McConnell, 36–77. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Freidenreich, David M. "The Use of Islamic Sources in Saadia Gaon's Tafsīr of the Torah." *JQR* 93 (2003): 353–95.
- Frenkel, Miriam. "Literary Canon and Social Elite in the Genizah Society" (Hebrew). In *Uncovering the Canon, Studies in Canonicity and Genizah*, eds. Menachem Ben-Sasson, Robert Brody, Amia Lieblich and Donna Shalev, 88–110. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2010.
- Friedmann, Yohanan. *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Frishman, Judith. "Type and Reality in the Exegetical Homilies of Mar Narsai." In *Studia Patristica*, vol. XX, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, 169–75. Leuven: Peeters Press, 1989.
- Froelich, Karlfried. "Always to Keep the Literal Sense in Holy Scripture Means to Kill One's Soul": The State of Biblical Hermeneutics at the Beginning of the Fifteenth Century." In *Literary Uses of Typology from the Late Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Earl Miner, 20–48. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- Gardet, L[ouis]. "Kalām." In *EI* IV: 468–70. Leiden: Brill, 1978.
- Garfinkel, Stephen. "Clearing Peshat and Derash." *HBOT* 11/2: 129–34.
- Ghosh, Kantik. *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Gibson, Margaret. "The Artes in the Eleventh Century." In *Arts libéraux et philosophie au moyen âge*, 121–26 and 148–53. Paris: Vrin, 1969.
- "Carolingian Glossed Psalters." In *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration, and Use*, ed. Richard Gameson, 78–100. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- "Lanfranc's Commentary on the Pauline Epistles." *Journal of Theological Studies* ns 22 (1971): 86–112.
- Lanfranc of Bec*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1978.
- Gil, Moshe. "The Origins of the Karaites." In *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*, ed. Meira Polliack, 73–118. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- Gimaret, Daniel. *Une lecture Mu'tazilite du Coran: Le Tafsīr d'Abū 'Aṭī al-Djubbā'ī (m. 303/915) partiellement reconstitué à partir des ses citations*. Louvain-Paris: Peeters, 1994.
- Giraud, Cédric. "La sacra pagina et les écoles du premier XII<sup>e</sup> siècle." In *Arts du langage et théologie aux confins des XI<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècles: Textes, maîtres, débats*, ed. Irène Rosier-Catach, 235–46. Turnhout: Brepols, 2011.
- "L'école de Laon entre arts du langage et théologie." In *Arts du langage et théologie aux confins des XI<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècles: Textes, maîtres, débats*, ed. Irène Rosier-Catach, 351–71. Turnhout: Brepols, 2011.
- Per Verba Magistri: Anselme de Laon et son école au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2010.

- Gleave, Robert. "Delaying the Elucidation' (*Ta'khīr al-Bayān*) in Early Muslim Legal Theory: Theological Issues in Legal Hermeneutics." In *Theological Rationalism in the Medieval Islam: New Sources and Perspectives*, ed. Gregor Schwarb and Lukas Muehlethaler. Leuven: Peters, forthcoming.
- Islam and Literalism: Literal Meaning and Interpretation in Islamic Legal Theory*. Edinburgh University Press, 2012.
- Goitein, Shlomo Dov. *A Mediterranean Society, the Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, Vol. V: *The Individual*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Goldschmidt, Arthur. *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2000.
- Goldziher, Ignaz. *Schools of Koranic Commentators*. Trans. Wolfgang Behn. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006.
- The Zahiris: Their Doctrine and Their History*. Trans. Wolfgang Behn. Leiden: Brill, 1971.
- Good News Bible*. London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1976.
- Goold, G. P. "Servius and the Helen Episode." In *Oxford Readings in Vergil's Aeneid*, ed. S. J. Harrison, 60–126. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Greenberg, Moshe. "The Relationship between Rashi and Rashbam to the Pentateuch" (Hebrew). In *Isaac Leo Seeligmann Volume*, ed. Alexander Rofé and Yair Zakovitch, II:559–67. Jerusalem: E. Rubinstein, 1982.
- Gregory, Tulio. "Le acque sopra il firmamento: Genesi e tradizione esegetica," in *L'acqua nei secoli altomedievali*, 1–41. Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2008.
- Grice, H. Paul. "Logic and Conversation." In *Philosophy of Language*, ed. A. P. Martinich, 165–75. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- "Presupposition and Conversational Implicature." In *Radical Pragmatics*, ed. P. Cole, 183–98. New York: Academic Press, 1981.
- Griffith, Sidney H. *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of "The People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.
- "Ephraem the Exegete (306–373): Biblical Commentary in the Works of Ephraem the Syrian." In *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser, II:1395–1428. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Faith Adoring the Mystery: Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997.
- "Images of Ephraem: The Syrian Holy Man and His Church." *Traditio* 45 (1989–1990): 7–33.
- "The Image of the Image Maker in the Poetry of St. Ephraem the Syrian." In *Studia Patristica*, vol. XXV, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, 258–69. Leuven: Peeters, 1993.
- "The Marks of the 'True Church' according to Ephraem's Hymns against Heresies." In *After Bardaisan: studies on continuity and change in Syriac Christianity in honour of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers, G. J. Reinink, and Alexander Cornelis Klugkist, 125–40. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 1999.

- "Setting Right the Church of Syria: Saint Ephraem's Hymns against Heresies." In *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey, 97–114. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.
- "St. Ephraem, Bar Daysān and the Clash of *Madrāshê* in Aram: Readings in St. Ephraem's *Hymni contra Haereses*." *The Harp* 20 (2006): 1–25.
- Grondeux, Anne. "L'apport de Cassiodore à la Terminologie Grammaticale: La Question des Sources." In *Bilinguisme et Terminologie Grammaticale Gréco-Latine*, ed. Louis Basset et al., 361–36. Leuven: Peeters, 2007.
- "Teaching and Learning Lists of Figures in the Middle Ages." *New Medieval Literatures* 11 (2009): 133–58.
- Grossman, Avraham. "The School of Literal Jewish Exegesis in Northern France." In *HBOT* 1/2: 321–71.
- "The Impact of Rabbi Samuel of Spain and Reuel of Byzantium on Rashi's School" (Hebrew). *Tarbiz* 82 (2014): 447–67.
- Grunebaum, Gustave E. von. *A Tenth-Century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism: The Sections on Poetry of Al-Bāqillānī's I'jāz Al-Qur'ān*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950.
- Guinot, Jean-Noël. "La frontière entre allégorie et typologie: école alexandrine, école antiochienne." *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 92 (2011): 207–28.
- Gully, Adrian. *Grammar and Semantics in Medieval Arabic: A Study of Ibn-Hisham's Muḡnī l-Labīb*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995.
- Halbertal, Moshe. *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning and Authority*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Halivni, David Weiss. *Peshat & Derash*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Hallaq, Wael B. "Non-Analogical Arguments in Sunni Juridical Qiyas." *Arabica*, 36, 3 (1989): 286–306.
- "Notes on the Term *Qarīna* in Islamic Legal Discourse." *JAOS*, 108:3 (1988): 475–80.
- The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- "Was al-Shafi'i the Master Architect of Islamic Jurisprudence?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (1993): 587–605.
- Häring, N. M. "The Case of Gilbert de la Porrée, Bishop of Poitiers (1142–1154)." *Mediaeval Studies* 13 (1951): 1–40.
- "Commentary and Hermeneutics." In *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, with Carol D. Lanham, 173–200. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982.
- Harris, Jay. *How Do We Know This? Midrash and the Fragmentation of Modern Judaism*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1995.
- Heinemann, Joseph. "The Proem in Aggadic Midrashim." *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971): 100–22.
- Heinrichs, Wolfhart P. *Arabische Dichtung und Griechische Poetik. Ḥāzīm al-Qarṭāḡannīs Grundlegung der Poetik mit Hillegriechischer Begriffe*. Beirut: Orient-Institut der DMG, Wiesbaden: Steiner in Komm. 1969.

- "Contacts between Scriptural Hermeneutics and Literary Theory in Islam: The Case of *Majāz*." *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 7 (1991–92): 253–84.
- The Hand of the Northwind: Opinions on Metaphor and the Early Meaning of Isti'āra in Arabic Poetics*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1977.
- "*Isti'ārah* and *Badī'* and Their Terminological Relationship in Early Islamic Literary Criticism," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 1 (1984): 180–211.
- "Literary Theory: The Problem of Its Efficiency." In *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development*, ed. G. E. von Grunebaum, 19–69. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973.
- "On the Genesis of the ḥaqīqa-majāz Dichotomy." *Studia Islamica* 49 (1984): 112–40.
- Hepworth, Brian. *Robert Lowth*. Boston: Twayne, 1978.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried. *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*. Trans. James Marsh. Burlington: E. Smith, 1833.
- Heyd, Uriel. "Ziya Gökalp, the Ideologist of Turkish Nationalism." *The New East* 2 (1951): 108–17 (Hebrew).
- Hoffmann, Hartmut. *Die Würzburger Paulinenkommentare der Ottonenzeit*. Hanover: Hahnsche, 2009.
- Hohmann, Hans. "Stasis." In *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Hollon, Bryan C. *Everything is Sacred: Scriptural Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009.
- Holmes, Jeremy. "Aquinas' *Lectura in Matthaeum*." In *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum, 73–97. London: T&T Clark, 2006.
- Holsinger, Bruce. *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Holtz, L. "Grammairiens et rhéteurs romains en concurrence pour l'enseignement des figures de rhétorique." In *Colloque sur la rhétorique. Calliope I*, ed. Raymond Chevallier, 207–20. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1979.
- Humfrey, Peter. *Lorenzo Lotto*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Ḥusayn, Muḥammad al-Khiḍr. "Naql ma'anī l-Qur'an ilā l-lughāt al-ajnabiyya." *Nūr al-islām* 3 (1350/1931): 122–34.
- Irvine, Martin. *The Making of Textual Culture: "Grammatica" and Literary Theory, 350–1100*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Jaffe, Samuel. "Antiquity and Innovation in Notker's *Nova rhetorica*: The Doctrine of Invention." *Rhetorica* 3 (1985): 165–81.
- Jaffee, Martin S. *Torah in the Mouth, Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE – 400 CE*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Japhet, Sara. "The Anonymous Commentary on the Song of Songs in MS. Prague: A Critical Edition and Introduction." In *To Settle the Plain*

- Meaning of the Verse*": *Studies in Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Sara Japhet and Eran Viezel, 206–47. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2011.
- "The Tension Between Rabbinic Legal Midrash and the 'Plain Meaning' (Peshat) of the Biblical Text – an Unresolved Problem? In the Wake of Rashbam's Commentary on the Pentateuch." In *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume*, ed. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz and Shalom M. Paul, 403–25. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004.
- Jasper, David. "Reflections on the London Conference on the Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture." In *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht, 476–82. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997.
- Jeudy, Colette. "L'œuvre de Remi d'Auxerre." In *L'école carolingienne d'Auxerre: De Murethach à Remi, 830–908*, ed. Dominique Iogna-Prat et al., 373–96. Paris: Beauchesne, 1991.
- "Remi d'Auxerre, Commentaire de Prudence." In *Saint-Germain d'Auxerre: Intellectuels et Artistes dans l'europe Carolingienne, IX<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècles*, 56. Auxerre: Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1990.
- "Remigii autissiodorensis opera (Clavis)." In *L'école carolingienne d'Auxerre: De Murethach à Remi, 830–908*, ed. Dominique Iogna-Prat et al., 457–500. Paris: Beauchesne, 1991.
- Johnson, Mark F. "Another Look at the Plurality of the Literal Sense." *Medieval Philosophy & Theology* 2 (1992): 117–41.
- Kahle, Paul. *The Cairo Geniza*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Kamin, Sarah. *Jews and Christians Interpret the Bible* (Hebrew), 2nd edn., ed. Sara Japhet. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2008.
- Rashi's Exegetical Categorization in Respect to the Distinction between Peshat and Derash* (Hebrew), ed. Sara Japhet. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*. In *Kant, Gesammelte Schriften*, V:165–485. Berlin: Reimer, 1913. English translation: *Kant's Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard. 2nd edn. London: Macmillan, 1914.
- Kartveit, Magnar. *The Origin of the Samaritans*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- Kaster, Robert. *The Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Keil, Henricus, ed. *Grammatici latini*. 8 vols. Hildesheim: Olms, 1961.
- Kelly, Henry A. *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Kennedy, George A. *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.
- Khan, Geoffrey. "Al-Qirqisānī's Opinions Concerning the Text of the Bible and Parallel Muslim Attitudes Towards the Text of the Qur'an." *JQR* 81 (1990): 59–73.



- Kim, Angela Y. "Authorizing Interpretation in Poetic Compositions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Later Jewish and Christian Traditions." *DSD* 10 (2003): 26–58.
- Kister, Meir J. "*Lā yamassuhu illā al-muṭahharūn*. . . Notes on the Interpretation of a Qur'anic Phrase." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 309–34.
- Kitzinger, Ernst. *I mosaici di Monreale*. Palermo: Flaccovio, 1991.
- Klein-Braslavy, Sara. *King Solomon and Philosophical Esotericism in the Thought of Maimonides* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996.
- Klepper, Deanna. *The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Readings of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- Koelb, Clayton. *The Revivifying Word: Literature, Philosophy, and the Theory of Life in Europe's Romantic Age*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008.
- Kohlberg, Etan. "Some notes on the Imāmite Attitude to the Qur'an." In *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays Presented by His Friends and Pupils to Richard Walzer on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. S. M. Stern, Albert Hourani, and Vivian Brown, 209–24. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Kohlberg, Etan. and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi. *Revelation and Falsification the Kitāb al-qir'āt of Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- Kollamparampil, Thomas. *Salvation in Christ According to Jacob of Serugh: An Exegetico-Theological Study on the Homilies of Jacob of Serugh (451–521 AD) on the Feasts of Our Lord*. Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2001.
- Köpf, Ulrich. *Die Anfänge der theologischen Wissenschaftstheorie im 13. Jahrhundert*. Tübingen: Mohr, 1974.
- Kraebel, A. B. "Biblical Exegesis and the Twelfth-Century Expansion of Servius." In *Classical Commentary: Explorations in a Scholarly Genre*, ed. Christine Kraus and Christopher Stray. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- "*Grammatica* and the Authenticity of the Psalms-Commentary Attributed to Bruno the Carthusian." *Mediaeval Studies* 71 (2009): 63–97.
- "John of Rheims and the Psalter-Commentary Attributed to Ivo II of Chartres." *Revue bénédictine* 122 (2012): 252–93.
- "The Place of Allegory in the Psalter-Commentary of Bruno the Carthusian." *Mediaeval Studies* 73 (2011): 207–16.
- "Prophecy and Poetry in the Psalms-Commentaries of St. Bruno and the Pre-Scholastics." *Sacris erudiri* 51 (2011): 413–59.
- Krakowski, Eve. "'Many Days without the God of Truth': Loss and Recovery of Religious Knowledge in Early Karaite Thought." In *Pesher Naḥum: Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature from Antiquity Through the Middle Ages Presented to Norman (Naḥum) Golb*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer and Michael G. Wechsler, 121–40. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2011.
- Krewitt, Ulrich. *Metapher und tropische Rede in der Auffassung des Mittelalters*. Ratingen: A. Henn Verlag, 1971.

- Krey, Philip D.W. "Introduction: Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary (1329)." In *Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary*, trans. Philip D. W. Krey, 1–30. Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications, 1997.
- Kugel, James L. *The Bible as It Was*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- "David the Prophet." In *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, ed. J. Kugel, 45–55. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.
- In Potiphar's House*. San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1990.
- Traditions of the Bible*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Kümmel, Werner Georg. *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*. Trans. S. McLean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee. London: SCM Press, 1972.
- Kustas, George L. *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*. Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, 1973.
- Laato, A. and J. van Ruiten, eds., *Rewritten Bible Reconsidered*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008.
- Lane, Edward William. *An Arabic-English Lexicon Derived from the Best and Most Copious Eastern Sources*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968 (reprint of 1874 edition).
- Larkin, Margaret. "The Inimitability of the Qur'an: Two Perspectives." *Religion and Literature* 20.1 (Spring 1988): 31–7.
- The Theology of Meaning: 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's Theory of Discourse*. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1995.
- Laserson, Peter. "Pragmatic Halos." *Language* 75 (1999): 522–51.
- Lasker, Daniel. "The Influence of Karaism on Maimonides" (Hebrew), *Sefunot* n.s. 5 (1991): 145–61.
- "Islamic Influences on Karaite Origins." In *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, ed. William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks, 23–47. Atlanta: Scholars, 1986.
- Lausberg, Heinrich. *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*. Ed. David E. Orton and R. Dean Anderson. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- Lazarus-Yafeh, Hava. *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- "Taḥrīf and Thirteen Torah Scrolls." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 19 (1995): 81–8.
- Leemhuis, Fred. "Origins and Early Development of the *tafsīr* Tradition." In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin, 13–30. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.
- Legaspi, Michael C. *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Levy, Ian C. "The Literal Sense of Scripture and the Search for Truth in the Late Middle Ages." *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 104 (2009), 783–827.



- Lewalski, Barbara Kiefer. *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Loimeier, Roman. "Translating the Qur'ān in Sub-Saharan Africa: Dynamics and Disputes." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35 (2005): 403–23.
- Lottin, Odon. *Psychologie et morale aux xii<sup>e</sup> et xiii<sup>e</sup> siècles*. 6 vols. Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, and Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1942–60.
- Lowry, Joseph. "The Legal Hermeneutics of al-Shāfi'ī and Ibn Qutayba: A Reconsideration." *Islamic Law and Society*, 11 (2004): 1–41.
- Lowth, Robert. *Isaiah: A New Translation: With a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes, Critical, Philological, and Explanatory*. Boston: William Hilliard, 1834.
- Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. G. Gregory. 2 volumes. London: J. Johnson, 1787.
- Lowth, William. *Vindication of the Divine Authority of the Old and New Testaments*. Oxford: John Wilmot, 1692.
- Lubac, Henri de. *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*. Trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988.
- Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 4 vols. Paris: Aubier, 1959–64.
- Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*. Trans. Mark Sebanc (Vol. 1) and E. M. Macierowski (Vols. 2–3). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, and Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998–2009.
- "Mysticism and Mystery." In *Theological Fragments*, 35–69. Trans. R. H. Balinski. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989.
- Summatum: études historiques*. Paris: Aubier, 1946.
- Lucentini, Paolo, ed. *Il libro dei ventiquattro filosofi*. Milano: Adelphi, 1999.
- Luscombe, D. E. "Peter Abelard." In *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. Peter Dronke, 279–307. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- "Tournai, Simon de (c. 1130?–1201?)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27581](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27581)
- Lutz, Cora. "One Formula of Accessus in Remigius' Works." *Latomus* 19 (1960): 774–80.
- "Remigius' Ideas on the Classification of the Seven Liberal Arts." *Traditio* 12 (1956): 65–86.
- "Remigius' Ideas on the Origin of the Seven Liberal Arts," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 10 (1955): 32–49.
- Ma'ayergi, Hassan. "Translations of the Holy Qur'an into Minority Languages: The Case of Africa," *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 14 (1992): 156–80.
- MacCallum, Lyman. "Turkey Discovers the Koran." *Muslim World* 23 (1933): 24–8.
- MacDonald, Duncan B. *The Hebrew Literary Genius*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1933.

- Madelung, Wilferd. "The Origins of the Controversy concerning the Creation of the Koran." In *Orientalia Hispanica: Arabica Islamica*, vol. 1. ed. J.M. Barral, 504–25. Leiden: Brill, 1974. Reprinted in idem, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, Chapter V. London: Variorum Reprints, 1985.
- Madigan, Daniel A. *The Qur'ān's Self Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Mâle, Emile. *Notre-Dame de Chartres*. Paris: Flammarion, 1992.
- al-Marāghī, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā. *Baḥṭh fī tarjamat al-Qur'ān al-karīm wa-aḥkāmihā*. *Majallat al-Azhar* 7 (1355/1936): 77–122.
- Marenbon, John. "Gilbert of Poitiers." In *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. Peter Dronke, 328–52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Martin, G. H. "Smalley, Beryl (1905–1984)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45660](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45660)
- Martin, Richard. "Inimitability." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, II:526–36. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Marwick, Leon. *The Arabic Commentary of Salmon ben Yeruham the Karaite on the Book of Psalms, Chapters 42–72*. Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1956.
- McAuliffe, Jane Dammen, Barry Walfish, and Joseph Ward Goering, eds. *With Reverence for the Word Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- McCarron, Richard E. "An Epiphany of Mystical Symbols: Jacob of Sarug's Mēmra 109 on Abraham and His Types." *Hugoye* 1 (1998): 57–8.
- McVey, Kathleen E. "Were the Earliest Madrāshē Songs or Recitations?" In *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J. W. Drijvers*, ed. G. J. Reinink, and Alexander Cornelis Klugkist, 185–99. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en dép. oosterse Studies, 1999.
- Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus* (= *Medieval Latin dictionary*). Ed. Jan Frederik Niermeyer, C. van de Kieft, and J. W. J. Burgers. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Menze, Volker R. *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Merlette, Bernard. "Écoles et bibliothèques à Laon, du déclin de l'Antiquité au développement de l'université." In *Actes du 95<sup>e</sup> Congrès national des sociétés savantes (Reims, 1970), section de philologie et d'histoire (jusqu'à 1610), I, Enseignement et vie culturelle (IX<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, 21–53. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1975.
- Mews, Constant. "Bruno of Reims and the Evolution of Scholastic Culture in Northern France, 1050–1100." In *Bruno the Carthusian and His Mortuary Roll*, ed. Hartmut Beyer, Gabriela Signori and Sita Steckel, 49–81. Turnhout: Brepols, 2014.
- "Bruno of Reims and Roscelin of Compiègne on the Psalms." In *Latin Culture in the Eleventh Century*, ed. Michael Herren et al., 129–52. Turnhout: Brepols, 2002.
- Mews, Constant. "Peter Abelard on Dialectic, Rhetoric, and the Principles of Argument." In Mews et al., *Rhetoric and Renewal*, 37–53.

- Mews, Constant, Cary J. Nederman, and Rodney M. Thomson, eds. *Rhetoric and Renewal in the Latin West 1100–1540: Essays in Honour of John O. Ward*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2003.
- Milbank, John. *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Mingana, Alphonse. “An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Kur’ān Exhibiting New Verses and Variants.” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 9 (1925): 188–235. *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts. Volume I: Syriac and Garshunī Manuscripts*. Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1933.
- Minnis, Alastair. “‘Authorial Intention’ and ‘Literal Sense’ in the Exegetical Theories of Richard FitzRalph and John Wyclif: An Essay in the Medieval History of Biblical Hermeneutics.” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Vol. 75, Sect. C, No. 1. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1975.
- “Ethical Poetry, Poetic Theology: A Crisis of Medieval Authority?” In *Medieval and Early Modern Authorship*, ed. Guillemette Bolens and Lukas Erne, 293–308. SPELL: Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature, 25. Tübingen: Narr, 2011.
- “Fifteenth-Century Versions of Thomistic Literalism: Girolami Savonarola and Alfonso de Madrigal.” In *Neue Richtungen in der hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen Bibelexegese*, ed. Robert E. Lerner, in collaboration with Elisabeth Müller-Luckner, 163–80. Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996.
- “Material Swords and Literal Lights: The Status of Allegory in William of Ockham’s Breviloquium on Papal Power.” In *Reverence for the Word*, ed. McAuliffe et al., 292–308.
- Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*. Rev. 2nd edn. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.
- “The Trouble with Theology: Ethical Poetics and the Ends of Scripture.” In *Author, Reader, Book: Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice*, ed. Stephen Partridge and Erik Kwakkel, 21–37. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.
- Minnis, Alastair. and A. B. Scott with David Wallace, eds. *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100–c.1375: The Commentary Tradition*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991, reprint. 2001.
- Modarressi, Hossein. “Some Recent Analyses of the Concept of Majaz in Islamic Jurisprudence.” *JAOS* 106 (1986): 787–91.
- Moevs, Christian. *The Metaphysics of Dante’s Comedy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Moos, Peter von. “Literary Aesthetics in the Latin Middle Ages: The Rhetorical Theology of Peter Abelard.” In Mews et al., *Rhetoric and Renewal*, 81–97.
- Morrison, M. D. “Rhetorical Criticism of the Hebrew Bible.” [www.angelfire.com/md/mdmorrison/ot/rhetoric.htm](http://www.angelfire.com/md/mdmorrison/ot/rhetoric.htm)
- Moss, Yonatan. “Scholasticism, Exegesis, and the Historicization of Mosaic Authorship in Moses Bar Kepha’s *On Paradise*.” *Harvard Theological Review* 104:3 (2011): 325–48.

- Moulton, Richard G. *The Literary Study of the Bible*. Boston: Heath & Co., 1896.
- Mountford, James, and Joseph Schultz. *Index Rerum et Nominum in Scholiis Servii et Aelii Donati Tractatorum*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1930.
- Mourachian, Mark. "Human Freedom in the Context of the Theological Anthropology of St. Ephrem the Syrian." PhD diss., Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, 2012.
- Muller, Richard A. "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: The View from the Middle Ages." In *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, 3–22. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Murphy, James Jerome. *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.
- Murray, Robert. *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*. Revised edition. Piscataway: Gorgias, 2004.
- "The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology." *Parole de l'Orient* 6 & 7 (1975–6): 1–20.
- Nach, Shlomo. "The Script of the Torah in Rabbinic Thought (A): The Traditions Concerning Ezra's Changing of the Script" (Hebrew). *Leshonenu* 70 (2008): 125–43.
- Najīb, Muṣṭafā. *A'lām miṣr fī l-qarn al-'isrīn*. Cairo: Wakālat Anbā' al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ, 1996.
- Najman, Hindy. *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- Naldini, Mario. "Sull'interpretazione esamereale di Gen. 1, 2 'Spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas.'" In *Mémorial Dom Jean Gribomont (1920–1986)*, 445–52. Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1988.
- Nardi, Bruno. "Lo discorrer di Dio sovra quest'acque." In *Nel mondo di Dante*, ed. Bruno Nardi, 305–14. Roma: Edizioni di "Storia e letteratura," 1944.
- Nemoy, Leon. *Karaite Anthology: Excerpts from the Early Literature Translated from Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952.
- Neuwirth, Angelika, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, eds. *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Newby, Gordon D. "Forgery." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane D. McAuliffe. II: 242. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Nickelsburg, George W. E. *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 2nd edn. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.
- Nöldeke, Theodor, Friedrich Schwally, and Gotthelf Bergsträsser. *Geschichte des Qorāns*. 3 vols. Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1909–38.
- Novum glossarium mediae Latinitatis*. Ed. Francesco Araldi and Franz Blatt. Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1959.
- O'Connor, Michael. *Hebrew Verse Structure*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980.

- O'Donnell, James J. *Cassiodorus*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979.
- O'Sullivan, Sinéad. *Early Medieval Glosses on Prudentius' Psychomachia: The Weitz Tradition*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Ocker, Christopher. *Biblical Poetics before Humanism and Reformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Palmer, Andrew. "'A Lyre without a Voice,' the Poetics and the Politics of Ephrem the Syrian." *ARAM* 5 (1993): 371–99.
- "The Merchant of Nisibis: Saint Ephrem and His Faithful Quest for Union in Numbers." In *Early Christian Poetry: A Collection of Essays*, ed. J. den Boeft and A. Hilhorst, 167–233. Leiden: Brill, 1993.
- Patterson, Lee. *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.
- Pedersen, Johannes. *The Arabic Book*. Trans. Geoffrey French. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Pépin, Jean. *La tradition de l'allégorie de Philon d'Alexandrie à Dante: Études historiques*. Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1987.
- Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1964.
- Peters, J. R. *God's Created Speech: A Study in the Speculative Theology of the Mu'tazili Qadi al-Qudat Abu'l-Hasan 'Abd al-Jabbar ibn Ahmad al-Hamadani*. Leiden: Brill, 1976.
- Petersen, Anders. "Rewritten Bible as a Borderline Phenomenon – Genre, Textual Strategy, or Canonical Anachronism." In *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino Garcia Martinez*, ed. A. Hilhorst et al., 285–302. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Pfeiffer, Heinrich. *La Sistina svelata: iconografia di un capolavoro*. Milano: Città del Vaticano: Jaca book; Libreria editrice vaticana, 2007.
- Pfister, Jonas. *The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Meaning*. Berlin: Ontos Verlag, 2007.
- Polliack, Meira. "Karaite Conception of the Biblical Narrator (*Mudawwin*).” In *Encyclopaedia of Midrash: Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, I: 350–74. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- "Medieval Karaism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman, 295–326. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- "*Qīṣaṣ wa-akhbār jarat*: Karaite Distinctions of Biblical Genre in the Work of the Biblical *Mudawwin*." In *The Semitic Languages of Jewish Intellectual Production, Memorial volume for Dr. Friedrich Niessen*, ed. Maria Angeles Gallego and Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, forthcoming.
- "Rethinking Karaism: Between Judaism and Islam." *AJS Review* 30:1 (2006): 67–93.
- "The 'Voice' of the Narrator and the 'Voice' of the Characters in the Bible Commentaries of Yefet ben 'Eli." In *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature and Postbiblical Judaism, Presented to Shalom*

- M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Chaim Cohen et al, II:891–915. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008.
- Poonawala, Ismail. “*Ta’wīl*.” *EI* X:390–92. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- Pope-Hennessy, John. *Giovanni di Paolo 1403–1483*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1937.
- Porter, H. C. “The Nose of Wax: Scripture and the Spirit from Erasmus to Milton.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (Fifth Series), 14 (1964): 155–74.
- Porter, Stanley E. “Paul of Tarsus and His Letters.” In *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period: 330 BC to AD 400*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, 533–86. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- Powell, Mark Allan. *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography*. New York and Westport: Greenwood, 1992.
- Preminger, Alex and Edward L. Greenstein, eds. *The Hebrew Bible in Literary Criticism*. New York: Unger, 1986.
- Preus, James Samuel. *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 1969.
- Prickett, Stephen, ed. *The Edinburgh Companion to the Bible and the Arts*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.
- ed. *European Romanticism: A Reader*. London: Continuum, 2010.
- ed. *Modernity and the Reinvention of Tradition: Backing into the Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Pummer, Reinhard. “The Samaritans and their Pentateuch.” In *The Pentateuch as Torah: New models for understanding its promulgation and acceptance*, ed. Gary Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson, 237–69. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007.
- Recanati, François. *Literal Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Reeves, John C. “Exploring the Afterlife of Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Medieval Near Eastern Religious Traditions: Some Initial Soundings.” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 30 (1999): 148–77.
- Resnick, Irven. “The Falsification of Scripture and Medieval Christian and Jewish Polemics.” *Medieval Encounters* 2 (1996): 344–80.
- Revilla, Fredrico. “Riqueza iconológica del ‘Tapiz de la Creación.’” *Annals de l’Institut d’Estudis Gironins* 35 (1995): 69–96.
- Reynolds, Gabriel Said. *The Qur’an and Its Biblical Subtext*. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Reynolds, Suzanne. *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Riccioni, Stefano. *Il mosaico absidale di S. Clemente a Roma. Exemplum della chiesa riformata*. Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 2006.
- Riḍā, Rashīd. “Tarjamat al-Qur’ān.” *Al-Manār* 11 (1908): 268–74.



- Rijk, L. M. de. "On the Curriculum of the Arts at St. Gall from c. 850 to c. 1000." *Vivarium* 1 (1963): 35–86.
- Rodwell, John M. *The Koran*. London 1909; rept. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1994.
- Rofé, Alexander. "The Arrangement of the Book of Jeremiah." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 101 (1989): 390–8.
- "The Name YHWH SEBA'OT and the Shorter Recension of Jeremiah." In *Prophezie und geschichtliche Wirklichkeit im alten Israel: Festschrift für Siegfried Herrmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Rüdiger Liwak and Siegfried Wagner, 307–15. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991.
- Rogerson, John. "Early Old Testament Critics in the Roman Catholic Church." In *HBOT* II: 837–50.
- Ruderman, David B. "The Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought." In *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy 1: Humanism in Italy*, ed. Albert Rabil, Jr., 382–433. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.
- Russell, Archibald. *The Engravings of William Blake*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912.
- Rustow, Marina. *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.
- Salāmah, Khidr Ibrāhīm. *The Qur'ān Manuscripts in the Al-Haram Al-Sharif Islamic Museum, Jerusalem*. Reading: Garnet/Paris: Unesco, 2001.
- Sanders, E. P. *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.
- Sanderson, Judith E. *An Exodus Scroll from Qumran: 4QpaleoExod and the Samaritan Tradition*. Harvard Semitic Studies 30. Atlanta: Scholars, 1986.
- Sarason, Richard. "The Petiḥtot in *Leviticus Rabba*." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982): 557–67.
- Schattner-Rieser, Ursula. "Der samaritanische Pentateuch im Lichte der präsamaritanischen Qumrantexte." In *Qumran und der biblische Kanon*, ed. Michael Becker et al., 145–68. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2009.
- Schechter, Solomon. "The Oldest Collection of Bible Difficulties by a Jew." *JQR* 13 (1901): 358–69.
- Schirmann, Jefim. "Hebrew Liturgical Poetry and Christian Hymnology," *JQR* 44 (1953–4): 123–61.
- Schoeler, Gregor. "Writing and Publishing: On the Use and Function of Writing in the First Centuries of Islam." *Arabica* XLIV (1997): 423–35.
- Searle, John. "Literal Meaning." *Erkenntnis* 13 (1978): 207–224.
- Sela, Shlomo and Gad Freudenthal. "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings: A Chronological Listing," *Aleph* 6 (2006): 13–55.
- Segal, Michael. "4Q Reworked Pentateuch or 4Q Pentateuch?" In *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years after their Discovery*, ed. Lawrence Schiffman et al., 391–9. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000.
- "Between Bible and Rewritten Bible." In *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze, 10–28. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

- Shah, Mustafa. "Classical Islamic Discourse on the Origins of Language: Cultural Memory and the Defense of Orthodoxy." *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 58 (2011): 314–43.
- "The Philological Endeavours of the Early Arabic Linguists: Theological Implications of the *tawqif-istilāḥ* Antithesis and the *majāz* Controversy." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2:1 (2000): 44–66.
- Shaltūt, Maḥmūd. *Tarjamāt al-Qur'an wa-nuṣūṣ al-'ulamā' fīhā. Nūr al-islām* 7 (1355/1936): 122–34.
- Sheehan, Jonathan. *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *A Defence of Poetry*. In *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, 1:3–49. London: Edward Moxan, 1852.
- Shiell, William David. *Reading Acts: The Lector and the Early Christian Audience*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Shinan, Avigdor. *The Embroidered Targum: the Aggadah in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992.
- "Live translation: On the Nature of the Aramaic Targums to the Pentateuch." *Prooftexts* 3 (1983): 41–9.
- "On the Petihta." *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 1 (1981): 33–43.
- Simon, Richard. *A Critical History of the Old Testament*. London: Walter Davis, 1682.
- Simon, Uriel. *The Ear Discerns Words: Studies in Ibn Ezra's Exegetical Methodology* (Hebrew). Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2013.
- Simpson, James. *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio Amantis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Sinai, Nicolai. "Qur'anic Self-Referentiality as a Strategy of Self-Authorization." In Wild, ed. *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an*, 103–34.
- Sklare, David. "Responses to Islamic Polemics by Jewish Mutakallimun in the Tenth Century." In *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, ed. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Marc R. Cohen, Sasson Somekh, and Sidney H. Griffith, 137–61. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999.
- Samuel ben Hofni Gaon and his Cultural World: Texts and Studies*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Smalley, Beryl. "Gilbertus Universalis, Bishop of London (1128–34), and the Problem of the *Glossa ordinaria*." *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 7 (1935): 235–62 and 8 (1936): 24–60.
- "La *Glossa ordinaria*: Quelques prédécesseurs d'Anselme de Laon." *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 9 (1937): 365–400.
- The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. 3rd edn. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1983.
- "Use of the 'Spiritual' Sense of Scripture in Persuasion and Argument by Scholars in the Middle Ages." *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 52 (1985): 44–63.



- "William of Auvergne, John of La Rochelle, and St. Thomas Aquinas on the Old Law." In *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274–1974: Commemorative Studies*. 2 vols., II:11–71. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974.
- Smith, R. Payne. *Thesaurus Syracus*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879–83.
- Smoroński, Kazimierz. "Et Spiritus Dei Ferebatur Super Aquas: Inquisitio Historico Exegetica in Interpretationem Textus Gen. 1. 2c." *Biblica* 6 (1925): 140–156, 275–93, 361–95.
- Sokoloff, Michael. *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*. Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990.
- A Syriac Lexicon*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns/Piscataway: Gorgias, 2009.
- Sommer, Benjamin D. *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Southern, R. W. "Beryl Smalley (1905–1984)." *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 72 (1986): 455–71.
- Spicq, Ceslas, O.P. *Esquisse d'une histoire de l'exégèse latine au moyen âge*. Bibliothèque thomiste 26. Paris: J. Vrin, 1944.
- Steenberg, Matthew C. *Irenaeus on Creation. The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2008.
- Steiner, George. *Grammars of Creation*. London: Faber & Faber, 2001.
- Steiner, Richard. *A Biblical Translation in the Making: The Evolution and Impact of Saadia Gaon's Tafsīr*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- "A Jewish Theory of Biblical Redaction from Byzantium: Its Rabbinic Roots, Its Diffusion and Its Encounter with the Muslim Doctrine of Falsification." *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* 2 (2003): 123–67.
- Stemberger, Günter. "From Inner-Biblical Interpretation to Rabbinic Exegesis." In *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Richard Marsden and E. Ann Matter, 190–217. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Stewart, Devin. "Muḥammad b. Dawūd Al-Zāhiri's Manual of Jurisprudence, *Al-Wuṣūl ilā ma'rifat al-uṣūl*." In *Studies in Islamic Legal Theory*, ed. Benard G. Weiss, 99–160. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- "Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's *al-Bayān 'an uṣūl al-aḥkām* and the Genre of *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* in Ninth-Century Baghdad." *Abbasid Studies: Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 135 (2004): 321–49.
- Stock, Brian. *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Stone, Michael E. *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.
- Tarabocchia Canavero, Alessandra. *Esegesi Biblica e cosmologica. Note sull'interpretazione patristica e medievale di Gen. 1, 2*. Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1981.
- Ta-Shma, Israel M. "Hebrew-Byzantine Bible Exegesis c. 1000, From the Cairo Genizah" (Hebrew). *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 247–56.

- Thesaurus linguae latinae: index librorum scriptorum inscriptionum ex quibus exempla afferuntur*. Leipzig: Teubner, 1900.
- Tibawi, Abdul Latif. "Is the Qur'an Translatable?" *Muslim World* 52 (1962): 4–21.
- Tolnay, Charles de. *The Art and Thought of Michelangelo*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1964.
- Torrell, Jean-Pierre. "Nature and Grace in Thomas Aquinas." In *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of the Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino, 155–88. Ave Maria, Florida: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2009.
- Toutou, Eleazar. *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion: Studies in the Pentateuchal Commentary of Rabbi Samuel ben Meir* (Hebrew). Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003.
- Tov, Emanuel. "Rewritten Bible Compositions and Biblical Manuscripts, with Special Attention to the Samaritan Pentateuch." *DSD* 5 (1998): 334–54.
- Tov, Emmanuel, and S. White Crawford. "Reworked Pentateuch." In *Qumran Cave 4.VIII: Parabiblical Texts Part 1* (Discoveries in the Judean Desert XIII), ed. Harold W. Attridge et al. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994.
- Treschow, Michael, Willemien Otten, and Walter Hannam. *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Rev'd Dr. Robert D. Crouse*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Turner, Denys. *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995.
- Twersky, Isadore. *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
- Urvoy, Marie-Thérèse. *Le Psautier Mozarabe de Hafs le Goth*. Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1994.
- Vaccari, Alberto. "Il genuino commento ai Salmi di Remigio d'Auxerre." *Biblica* 26 (1945): 52–99.
- Van Rompay, Lucas. "Antiochene Biblical Interpretation: Greek and Syriac." In *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Judith Frishman and Lucas Van Rompay, 103–23. Leuven: Peeters, 1997.
- Vasalou, Sophia. "The Miraculous Eloquence of the Qur'an: General Trajectories and Individual Approaches." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 4:2 (2002): 23–53.
- Vasari, Giorgio. *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani*, ed. Luciano Bellosi and Aldo Rossi. Turin: Einaudi, 1986.
- Venables, Edmund. "Lowth, William." In *The Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Sidney Lee. 34:216–17. London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1893.
- Verdon, Timothy. *Michelangelo teologo: fede e creatività tra Rinascimento e Controriforma*. Milan: Ancora, 2005.
- Vermes, Geza. *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*. Leiden: Brill, 1973.
- Vickers, Brian. *In Defence of Rhetoric*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.
- Viezel, Eran. "Targum Onkelos in Rashi's Exegetical Consciousness." *Review of Rabbinic Judaism-Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* 15,1 (2012): 1–19.

- Wansbrough, John. "Majaz al-qur'ān: Periphrastic Exegesis." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 33 (1970): 247–66.
- Ward, John O. *Ciceronian Rhetoric in Treatise, Scholion, and Commentary*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1995.
- "The Medieval and Early Renaissance Study of Cicero's *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: Commentaries and Contexts." In *The Rhetoric of Cicero in Its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, ed. Virginia Cox and John O. Ward, 3–75. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- Wasserstein, Abraham, and David Wasserstein. *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Watts, Isaac. *Horae Lyricae* (1709), 6th edition. London: Richard Hett, 1731.
- Wechsler, Michael G. *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben 'Eli the Karaite on the Book of Esther*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- "Salmon ben Jeroham (Sulaym ibn Ruhaym.)" In *The Encyclopedia of the Jews of the Islamic World*, ed. Norman Stillman, IV:216–18. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Wechter, Pinchas. *Ibn Barun's Arabic Works on Hebrew Grammar and Lexicography*. Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1964.
- Weisheipl, James A. *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Works*. With corrigenda and addenda. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1983.
- Weiss, Bernard G. "Medieval Muslim Discussions of the Origin of Language." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, 124.1 (1974): 33–41.
- *The Search for God's Law Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf Al-Dīn Al-Amīdī*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992.
- Weiss, Raphael. "Synonymous Variants in Divergences between the Samaritan and Massoretic Texts of the Pentateuch." In *Studies in the Text and Language of the Bible*, ed. Raphael Weiss, 63–189. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981.
- Weissenberg, Hanne von et al., eds. *Changes in Scripture: Rewriting and Interpreting Authoritative Traditions in the Second Temple Period*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011.
- Westermann, Claus. *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994.
- Whitman, Jon. *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987.
- "From the Textual to the Temporal: Early Christian 'Allegory' and Early Romantic 'Symbol.'" *New Literary History* 22 (1991): 161–76.
- "Present Perspectives: The Late Middle Ages to the Modern Period." In *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*, ed. Jon Whitman, 259–314. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- "A Retrospective Forward: Interpretation, Allegory, and Historical Change." In *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*, ed. Jon Whitman, 3–29. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- Whittingham, Martin. "Ezra as the Corrupter of the Torah? Re-Assessing Ibn Hazm's Role in the Long History of an Idea." *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 1 (2013): 253–71.

- Wieder, Naphtali. *The Judean Scrolls and Karaism*. London: East and West Library, 1962.
- Wild, Stefan, ed. *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an*. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2006.
- “The Self-Referentiality of the Qur'an: Sura 3:7 as an Exegetical Challenge.” In McAuliffe et al, eds., *Reverence for the Word*, 422–36.
- “Why Self-Referentiality?” In Wild, ed., *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an*, 1–24.
- Williams, John. “Archbishop Manasses I of Rheims and Pope Gregory VII.” *American Historical Review* 54 (1949): 804–24.
- “The Cathedral School of Rheims in the Eleventh Century.” *Speculum* 29 (1954): 661–77.
- Wind, Edgar. *The Religious Symbolism of Michelangelo: The Sistine Ceiling*, ed. Elizabeth. Sears. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Winkel, Eric, ed. *Mysteries of Purity: Ibn al-'Arabī's asrār al-ṭahārah*. Notre Dame: Cross Cultural Publications, 1995.
- Wolde, Ellen van. *Stories of the Beginning: Genesis I-II and Other Creation Stories*, trans. John Bowden. London: SCM, 1996.
- Wolfson, Harry Austryn. *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers: Faith, Trinity, Incarnation*. 3rd edn. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976.
- Wordsworth, William. *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones. London: Methuen, 1965.
- Wyrick, Jed. *The Ascension of Authorship, Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian Traditions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Yadin, Azzan. *Scripture As Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and the Origins of Midrash*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Yuval, Israel J. “The Orality of Jewish Oral Law: From Pedagogy to Ideology.” In *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Course of History: Exchange and Conflicts*, ed. Lothar Gall and Dietmar Willoweit, 237–60. Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011.
- Zadeh, Travis E. *The Vernacular Qur'an: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Zahn, Molly M. “The Problem of Characterizing the 4QReworked Pentateuch Manuscripts: Bible, Rewritten Bible, or None of the Above?” *DSD* 15 (2008): 315–39.
- Zanchi, Mauro. *La Bibbia secondo Lorenzo Lotto: il coro ligneo della Basilica di Bergamo intarsiato da Capoferri*. Clusone (Bergamo): Ferrari, 2003.
- al-Zarqā', Mustafa. *Fatāwā Muṣṭafā al-Zarqā'*. Ed. Majd Aḥmad Zakī. Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1420/1999.
- Zawanowska, Marzena. *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben 'Eli on the Abraham Narratives*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.
- Zim, Rivkah. “The Reformation: The Trial of God's Word.” In *Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory*, ed. Stephen Prickett, 64–135. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

- Zonta, Mauro. "The Autumn of Medieval Jewish Philosophy: Latin Scholasticism in Late 15th-Century Hebrew Philosophical Literature." In *"Herbst des Mittelalters"? Fragen zur Bewertung des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Jan A. Aertsen and Martin Pickavé, 474–92. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004.
- Zubir, Badri Najib. *Balaghah as an Instrument of Qur'an Interpretation: A Study of Al-Kashshaf*. Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia Press, 2008.
- Zucker, Moses. *Rav Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Torah* (Hebrew). New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1959.

## General index

- 'alāqa*, 259  
 Abel, 91  
 Abelard, Peter, 144, 180, 283, 299  
 Abraham, 36–43, 46, 55–64, 78, 155, 207, 301  
 abrogation, 120, 122–3  
 Absalom, 160, 178, 235, 237  
 Abū 'Ubayda, 255–6  
 Abū'l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, 261  
 Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī, 76  
 Abū Ḥanīfa, 67, 69, 76–8, 196  
 Abū Hilāl al-'Askari, 268  
 Abū Ya'lā, 254, 257, 262–3  
*accessus ad auctores*, 146, 180  
*ad litteram*, 139, 151  
 Adam, 89, 96, 101, 106, 111, 209, 298, 308  
 aesthetics, 11, 156, 277, 314, 321–2, 324  
*aggadah / haggadah*, 52, 56, 58, 212–14, *See also*  
     midrash  
*ahl al-kitāb*, 120  
 Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, 67, 262  
 Aḥmadiyya, 75  
 Albert the Great, 141  
 Alexander of Hales, 146, 169  
 Alexandrian school, 61  
 Alfarabi, 267, 271, 277, 290  
*allegoroumena*, 46, 154  
 allegory, allegorical interpretation/sense, 5–6, 34,  
     42, 46, 63–4, 136, 142, 149, 151, 154, 157, 160,  
     165–6, 171–4, 179, 182, 214, 272, 278–84,  
     301–2  
 Alter, Robert, 332  
 Ambrose, 135, 321  
 anagogical sense, 136, 149, 160, 166  
 ancient Near East, 18, 20, 26, 155, 329, 331  
 Andrewes, Lancelot, 321  
 animal sacrifices, 139, 145  
 Anselm of Laon, 248  
 anthropomorphism, 141, 169, 184, 256, 262, 272  
 Antiochene school, 52, 57, 61  
 antonomasia, 240  
 Apocalypse (biblical book), 177  
 Apocrypha, 4, 25  
 apostrophe (rhetorical technique), 233  
 apparent sense, meaning, 31, 168, 209–10, 218,  
     272. *See also* *ẓāhir*  
 Aquinas, 11, 104, 140–3, 145, 148–50, 154, 163–4,  
     166, 168–70, 175  
 Aramaic, 8, 11, 31, 49, 65, 79, 81, 113, 124, 314  
 Arberry, Arthur J., 65  
 Aristotelian learning, thought, 12, 86, 91, 102–3,  
     146, 162–3, 267–8, 271, 290, 304  
 Aristotle, 9, 15, 85–6, 166, 180–1, 267, 270, 289,  
     292, 304  
 artistic depiction of God, 9, 95–6, 99–102  
*ashilāthā*, 54  
*asmakha*, 217–18  
 Auerbach, Erich, 329–30  
 Augustine, 15, 17, 104, 111, 138–9, 169–72, 178–80,  
     228, 286, 291–4, 302–3, 321  
 authorial intention, 216, 221, 227, 229, 242–4,  
     246–8, 276–7, 283, 286, 288, 299, 306, 308,  
     326, *See also* *intentio*, intentionality, literal  
     sense  
 Averroes, 163, 269, 304  
 Avicenna, 163, 277  
  
 Babylonian exile, 25, 124  
*badi'*, 267–8, 270  
*balāgha*, 14, 16, 66, 68, 249, 251, 253, 267–8, 276  
 Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr al-, 12, 68, 195, 198–9, 201,  
     249  
 Bar Dayṣān, 50  
 Bar Sawmā of Nisibis, 53  
 Barnabas, 42  
 Basil of Caesarea, 85  
 Bathsheba, 139, 179  
*bāṭin*, 191, 193–4, 272  
 Baumgarten, Sigmund Jacob, 314  
*bayān*, 193, 254, 270  
 Beck, Edmund, 61  
 Bede, the Venerable, 15, 136, 179, 228, 290  
 Bell, Richard, 75

- Ben Sira, 34  
*besrānāyā*, 53  
 best of poetry is its most false (Arabic adage), 16, 271  
 Bible. *See also* Rewritten Bible  
   aesthetic quality, sublimity, 17, 19, 266–72, 281–4, 310, 313–25  
   authorship, 116, 119, 125, 174, 282, 311, 326  
   canon, canonization, 5–6, 17, 27–9, 44–5, 49–50, 106, 113, 121–2, 126, 138, 149–50, 157, 288, 290, 315  
   compared with pagan poetry, 15, 227, 232–3, 239, 269, 327–31  
   cryptic nature, 4, 6, 34, 37–9, 49, 133  
   editing, redaction, 25–6, 30, 125, 237  
   emotive force, 19, 275, 320  
   as God's word, 5, 26, 35, 115, 125, 128, 140, 163, 276, 313, 324, 326  
   historical-critical scholarship, 17, 20, 75, 155, 159, 161, 204–5, 310–12, 322, 329–35  
   moral effect, purpose, 35, 181, 286, 298, 304, 308, 328  
   reworked in Qur'an. *See under* Qur'an  
   text falsified by Jews (Muslim claim), 78, 113, 122–3, 129, 312. *See also* *tahrīf*  
   textual development, 27–31, 120–33, 312  
   written for instruction, 4, 33, 35, 37–9, 102, 282  
 Binding of Isaac, 5, 36–43, 55–64  
 Bishr al-Marīṣī, 256  
 Blachère, Régis, 75  
 Blair, Hugh, 319–22  
 Blake, William, 112, 311, 323–4  
 Boethius, 9, 84, 86, 102, 143, 299  
 Bonaventure, 174  
 Bosch, Hieronymus, 107  
 Brethren of Purity (*ikhwān al-ṣafā*), 68  
 Bruno the Carthusian, 15, 216, 238–48  
 Burke, Kenneth, 287  
  
 Cain, 41, 91  
 canon law, 150  
*carnalis*, 135  
 Carolingian glossed Psalter, 235  
 Cassiodorus, 15, 18, 228, 231, 233–4, 238, 291–5, 303  
 Chartres Cathedral, 99–102  
 Chenu, Marie-Dominique, 169  
 Christ, Jesus, 49–52, 286. *See also* crucifixion,  
   Nativity, Passion, resurrection  
   artistic portrayal, 88–99, 123–6  
   depicted in NT, 61, 169, 301  
   in OT literal sense, 150, 153, 176  
   prefigured in OT, 5, 54–63, 159–60, 234, 236, 240–2, 246, 282, 301  
   christological interpretation, sense, 5, 7, 15, 47, 52–3, 150, 153, 176–7, 216, 227, 234  
 Cicero, 137–8, 228, 295, 297, 303, 323  
 circumcision, 134, 145, 153  
 Clement of Alexandria, 42  
 Cole, Michael Samuel, 75  
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 154, 157, 316, 320, 324–5  
 Colish, Marcia, 179  
 commandments, 44, 78, 219–21, 319  
 Conrad of Hirsau, 180  
 contrary implication, 190, 196–7, 199–200  
 conversational implicature, 187  
 Council of Chalcedon, 52  
 creation, biblical account, 9, 84–112, 125  
 crucifixion, 5, 42, 49, 55–6, 58, 60, 64, 234  
 Cyril of Alexandria, 53  
  
*dalīl al-khiṭāb*, 199–200  
 Damascus Document, 27  
 Dante Alighieri, 9, 84, 102–11  
 David, 15, 35, 139, 159–60, 176, 178–9, 227, 229, 233, 235–8, 241–2, 246–8, 293, 301, 304, 317, 326  
 Dāwūd al-Zāhirī, 263  
 Dead Sea scrolls, 4, 25, 27  
 Demetrius, 290  
 denial of majāz, 16, 250, 260–5, 270  
 Dennis, John, 316, 322  
*derekh ereṣ*, 215  
 devil, 41, 159, 179, 236, 298, 301. *See also* Satan  
 Dinah, 32  
*dmūthā*, 51, 54  
 Donatus, 138, 148, 230, 290  
 Dove, Mary, 176  
 Drory, Rina, 116  
 Dryden, John, 312  
 dual Torah, 10, 114–15, 118, 120, 129  
*dugma*, 214  
*duplex sensus litteralis*, 12, 143, 148, 151, 153, 176–7  
 Duran, Profiat, 269  
 Dwight, Timothy, 327–8  
  
 Ecclesiastes, 242, 269, 311, 330  
 Edessa, 53  
 ellipsis, 209, 253–4, 257, 262–3  
 emphasis (literary device), 240  
*enarratio poetarum*, 14  
 Ephraem the Syrian, 5, 47–56, 59–64  
 Eriugena, John Scotus, 86–7, 137  
 Esau, 178  
 Eve, 41, 89, 99, 101, 106, 209, 298, 308  
 eye for an eye, 31–3  
 Ezra, 79, 122, 124–5, 235, 237, 326

- fable, 180–1  
 false prophets, 274  
 falsehood  
     in poetry, 16, 180–1, 228, 271, 274. *See also*  
     best of poetry is its most false, fiction  
     in scripture, 17, 160, 169–70, 178, 180, 272  
*faṣāḥa*, 66, 68, 70, 265, 267–8, 276  
*fātiḥa*, 76, 80, 83, 267  
 fiction, 160, 180, 278, 333  
*figura*, 141, 151  
 figurative causes, 145  
 figures and tropes, 14–17, 138–9, 249, 252, 254,  
     257, 268, 285–6, 289–90, 294, 308, 333. *See also*  
     antonomasia, apostrophe, emphasis,  
     hyperbole, metaphor, parenthesis,  
     synecdoche  
*fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, 12, 183–5, 195, 197–203, 250–3,  
     257–60, 262. *See also* Muslim jurisprudence  
 foreshadowing, 5, 42, 55, 145  
 form-content dichotomy, 271–2, 276–9, 285–6,  
     307–8  
 four senses of scripture, 42, 149, 154, 166–9, 174,  
     182, 314  
*fundamentum*, 137, 147, 150, 153, 156, 158  
*fusḥa*, 258  
  
 Gabriel, 265  
 Genesis Apocryphon, 31, 34  
 Geoffrey of Auxerre, 282  
*geonim*, 117, 121, 123  
 Gerson, Jean, 152  
 Ghazālī, Abū Ḥamid al-, 253, 258, 260–1, 264  
 Gilbert of Poitiers, 143  
 Gilbertus Universalis, 248  
*Glossa Ordinaria*, 179, 248, 301  
 Goitein, Shlomo Dov, 116  
 golden calf, 79, 262–3  
 Gospel, 46, 48–51, 54, 57, 59, 61–2, 67, 81, 287  
*gramma*, 134  
 grammar  
     Arabic, 12, 197, 199, 202, 251, 255, *see also*  
         *nahw*  
     Hebrew, 13, 45, 114, 123, 165, 208, 268  
     Latin, 14–15, 137–40, 147–8, 216, 227, 230, 233,  
         239, 247, 286, 289–91, 302  
 Greenberg, Moshe, 206  
 Gregory the Great, 136, 179  
 Grice, Paul, 187–9  
  
*ḥadīth*, 77, 114, 119, 127, 184–6, 194  
 Ḥafṣ al-Quṭī, 272  
*hagga'ah*, 268  
 Hagar, 46, 63  
*halakhah*, 5, 13–14, 45, 65, 79–81, 83, 114, 208–23  
*halaṣah*, 268, 273  
  
 Ha-Levi, Judah, 269, 273–5  
 Ḥanafī (school), 67, 69, 76–8, 82, 196–7  
 Ḥanbalī (school), 262  
*ḥaqīqa*, 11–12, 16–17, 183–5, 198–203, 249–50,  
     252–3, 255–7, 259–65, 271–5, 285  
*ḥashwiyya*, 261  
 Henry of Ghent, 178, 180–1  
 Herder, Johann Gottfried, 322  
 Hesiod, 42, 85  
 Ḥillī, al-'Allāma al-, 184, 189, 201–3  
 historical sense, 135–6, 139, 144, 146, 148–9, 156,  
     160, 162, 168, 306, 308  
*Hodayot*, 47  
 Holy Spirit, 154–5, 236, 243, 280–4, 321  
 Homer, 42, 328–30, 332  
 Horace, 180, 227, 290  
 Hugh of St. Victor, 11, 137, 146, 162–3, 166  
 Ḥusayn, Muḥammad al-Khidr, 72  
 hyperbole, 232  
  
*i'jāz*, 7, 20, 66, 68–9, 72, 77–8, 119–20, 123, 249, 309  
 Ibn al-'Arabī, Abū Bakr, 76  
 Ibn al-Laḥḥām, 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad, 251  
 Ibn al-Qaṣṣār al-Baghdādī, 12, 190, 195,  
     199–201  
 Ibn Barhān al-Baghdādī, 258, 260–1  
 Ibn Dāwūd, Abū Bakr, 263  
 Ibn Ezra, Abraham, 13, 205–8, 222–3, 275–7, 279,  
     283  
 Ibn Ezra, Moses, 16, 266–73, 283, 290  
 Ibn Ghiyyath, Isaac, 269  
 Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, 77  
 Ibn Ḥazm, Alī b. Aḥmad, 67, 77, 184  
 Ibn Janah, Jonah, 13, 211–12, 215, 217, 220, 222–3,  
     268, 276  
 Ibn Kaspi, Joseph, 279  
 Ibn Qutayba, 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim, 67, 71–2, 256  
 Ibn Taymiyya, Taqī al-Dīn, 70, 77  
 Ibn Tibbon, Judah, 268, 273  
 icon, 58, 61, 92, 105, 109  
 Implicated Meaning, 187–8  
 Incarnation, 157, 241–2, 247  
 inner-biblical interpretation, 4, 334  
*intentio*, *intentio auctoris*, *prima intentio*, 140,  
     145–6, 163, 241  
 intentionality, 142–4, 148, 154  
 Isaac, 36–43, 55–64, 139, 154, 178  
 Isaiah, 19, 25, 30, 35, 209, 309–10, 313–14, 325  
 Isfarā'īnī, Abū Ishāq al-, 260–1  
 Ishmael, 154  
 Isidore of Seville, 136, 179, 228, 240, 295  
*isti'āra*, 252, 256, 263–5, 270  
*isti'māl*, 258, 261  
*istikbrāj*, 265  
*iṣṭilāḥ*, 258, 261



- Jacob, 33, 178–9, 301, 318  
 Jacob of Serūg, 5, 47–8, 52–64  
 Jakobson, Roman, 332  
 Jaṣṣāṣ, Abū Bakr al-, 12, 195–8, 201  
 Jeremiah, 28, 31, 35, 44  
 Jerome, 8, 81, 85, 110, 135–6, 139, 162, 227–8, 231, 234, 244, 247, 286, 301, 321  
 Jerusalem, 2, 9, 46, 115, 128, 249, 321, 328  
 Jesus of Nazareth. *See* Christ, Jesus  
 Joachim of Fiore, 167, 177  
 Job, 37–8, 136, 242, 269, 278, 311, 330, 332  
 John of Paris, 172  
 John of Rheims, 15, 239, 243–7  
 Johnson, Samuel, 315  
*jongleurs*, 281  
 Joseph, 44–5, 191  
 Josephus, 32, 41, 121  
 Joshua, 121, 125, 127  
*Jubilees*, 27, 33–4  
 Judith, 295  
 Jurjānī, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-, 66, 253–4, 257  
 Justel, Henri, 311  
*juxta historiam*, 136  
*juxta litteram*, 136, 145
- kalām*  
*kalām Allāh*, 77  
*kalām al-nas*, 78  
*kalām al-qadīm*, al-, 265  
 Kalām theology, 118  
 speech, 193, 270–2  
 Kamin, Sarah, 206, 213  
 Kant, Immanuel, 156, 158, 324  
 Karaite Judaism, interpretation, thought, 9–10, 45, 113–29, 218, 221  
 Karo, Joseph, 81  
 Kāsānī, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Abī Bakr ibn Mas‘ūd al-, 69, 76–8
- ketiv*, 122  
*khiṭāb al-nās*, 197  
*khiṭāba*, 267, 273–4  
 Kilwardby, Robert, 148  
 Kimhi, David. *See* Radak  
 King James Bible, 82, 321  
 Krey, Philip D. W., 177  
 Kūfī, Abū Yūsuf al-, 69, 76  
 Kugel, James, 275, 332
- lafẓ*, 71, 77, 193, 201, 257, 271, 276  
 Lahori, Muḥammad ‘Alī, 75  
 Lanfranc of Bec, 246  
 law, 5, 12, 14, 31–2, 35, 46, 74, 77, 114, 122, 134–5, 138–9, 141, 145, 152–3, 180–1, 183–4, 193, 214, 219–22, 253, 258, 288, 294, 296, 328, 330–1, *See also* canon law, *fiqh*, *halakhah*, Oral Law, Written Law, *sharī‘a*
- Le Clerc, Jean, 311  
 legal hermeneutics, 12, 183–203, 249–50, 257, *See also* *ūsūl al-fiqh*, Muslim jurisprudence  
*Letter of Aristaeus*, 79, 82  
*lisān al-‘arab*, 192, 194, 200, *See also* *lughā*, *lughat al-‘arab*  
 literacy, 114, 118, 125, 129  
 literal sense, the letter, 5, 42, 46, 52, 61, 91, 122, *See also* apparent sense, *fundamentum*, *ḥaqīqa*, *peshat*, *sensus litteralis*, *zāhir* “the letter killeth”, 135, 139, 152, 167  
 as carnal sense, 53, 135  
 as grammatical sense, 12, 137–8, 147–8, 198–9, 201–2  
 as historical sense. *See* historical sense  
 as inherent meaning, 187, 194, 200, *See also* pre-interpretive sense  
 as intention of the author, 11, 18, 20, 141, 144, 158, 162, 187, 285, 288, *See also* authorial intention  
 as legal prescription, 134–5, 145–6  
 as original coinage, 13, 184, 201–3, 257–9, *See also* *wad’*  
 as surface meaning, 11, 140, 144, 146  
 depends on linguistic proficiency, 191–5, 199–200, 202  
 expansion, includes multiple senses, 11, 148–54, 157–9, 175–8, 182, *See also* *duplex sensus litteralis*  
 modern definitions, 186–90, *See also* Sentence Meaning, What is Said  
 objectivity, stability, strength, 12, 168–74, 184  
 prestige, privilege, 11–12, 162, 178, 185  
 texts lacking a literal sense, 178, 180  
 vs. allegorical, figurative, mystical, spiritual, typological senses, 5, 12, 134–56, 160–74, 314  
 vs. implied meaning, 186–7, 190, 197–8, 200, *See also* contrary implication, conversational implicature, Implicated Meaning, *mafhūm*, *qiyās*
- Locke, John, 290  
 Logos, 90–2, 98–9, 104  
 Lombard, Peter, 104, 181, 230, 248  
 Longinus, 19, 290, 320–2  
 Lotto, Lorenzo, 107  
 love  
 divine, 102–5, 278–80  
 human, 41, 272, 281, 296  
 Lowth, Robert, 18–20, 269, 309–25, 331–2  
 Lowth, William, 312  
 Lubac, Henri de, 11, 163–8, 174, 182  
*lughā*, *lughat al-‘arab*, 73, 198–202, 257, 260, 262  
 Luther, 82, 153

- ma'nā*, 71–2, 77–8, 201, 271–3, 276–7  
 MacDonald, Duncan B., 330  
*madrāshā*, 47, 51, 56, 62  
 Madrigal, Alfonso de, 153, 170, 173, 176  
*mafhum*, *mafhum al-mukhālafā*, 189, 195–6, 198–200  
 Maimonides, 14, 81, 145, 219–23, 277–9, 283  
*majāz*, 14, 16–17, 67–8, 71, 73, 183–4, 199, 202, 209–16, 249–66, 268, 270, 272–3, 285, *See also* denial of *majāz*  
*makhraj al-kalām, al-lafz*, 193  
 Mālikī (school), 67, 200  
 Mani, 50  
*manqūl*, 260  
*manṣūs*, 184  
*manṭūq*, 189  
*maqṣūd*, 203  
 Marāghī, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-, 72–5  
 Marcion, 7, 50  
 Martianus Capella, 230–1, 242, 295  
*mashal*, 14, 278  
*mashma'*, 210, 214, 274  
 masoretic text, 28–9  
*melīṣah*, 14, 269, 274, 281  
*mēmrā*, 47, 52–61, 63–4  
 Messer Leon, Judah, 18, 266, 300, 303–6, 308  
 Messiah, 51, 54–5, 75  
 metaphor, 54, 71, 95, 138, 141, 145–7, 150, 157, 160, 162, 175, 179, 182, 208, 250, 252, 256, 258, 260–1, 263–5, 270–1  
 metonymy, 252, 254  
 Michaelis, Johann David, 322  
 Michelangelo, 9, 106–12  
*mid-dot*, 213, 220–2  
 midrash, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13–14, 17, 31, 39, 43–5, 80, 117, 121, 204–23, 275–84, *See also aggadah*, *mid-dot*, *Petihta*  
*Genesis Rabbah*, 212  
*Mekhilta*, 44  
*Sifrei*, 120, 124  
*Tanhuma*, 45, 275  
 Minnis, Alastair, 282, 299  
 Miriam, 30–1, 116  
 Mirour of Mans Saluacioun. *See Speculum humane salvationis*  
 Mishnah, 5, 45, 113–16, 121–2, 126–8, 217–18  
*Avot*, 120, 127  
*Megillah*, 79  
*Soṭah*, 80  
*modus inveniendi*, 291  
*modus proferendi*, 291  
 moral sense, 136, 149, 160, 166, 173–4  
 Moses, 29–30, 35, 44, 48–9, 54–5, 78, 110, 113, 115–16, 120, 124–7, 219, 263, 276, 288, 311, 321, 326  
 Moulton, Richard G., 328, 334  
*mu'jiz*, 68–9, 78  
 Mu'tazila, Mu'tazilite thought, 13, 184, 209, 255–6  
*mubīn*, 6, 65–7  
*mudawwin*, 116, 125–7  
 Muhammad, 6, 10, 65, 67–8, 70, 74, 114, 119, 186, 189, 193, 196, 309  
*muhkam*, 6, 209, 270  
 multivalence (of Bible), 8, 84, 250, 285, 333  
*murād Allāh*, 12, 203, 221  
 Muslim jurisprudence, 12, 16, 67, 183–7, 191, 195–6, 220–1, *See also fiqh, uṣūl al-fiqh*  
 schools of, 67, *See also* Ḥanafī, Ḥanbalī, Mālikī, Shāfi'ī, Zāhirī  
*mutashābih*, 6, 209, 265  
*mysterion*, 61  
 mystical interpretation / sense, 5, 12, 15, 69, 96, 136, 151, 160, 166, 169, 171–2, 174, 179, 227, 255–6, 282  
*nabi*, 270  
 Nahmanides, 220, 223  
*naḥw*, 197, 251  
 Narsai, 47–8, 53, 56, 63  
 Nāshi' al-Akbar, al-, 256  
*nashb*, 115, 120, 123  
*naṣṣ*, 12, 14, 198, 209–10, 212, 217, 220–1  
*nathr*, 269  
 Nativity, 241–2  
*navi*, 267, 269  
 Nawawī, Muḥyī al-Dīn b. Sharaf al-, 74  
*naẓm*, 69–70, 72, 78, 269  
 Neoplatonism, 91, 102  
 Nestorian, 54  
 New Criticism, 154, 333–4  
 New Testament, 4–5, 41–2, 46, 48–9, 54, 61, 82, 110, 151, 153, 159, 175, 177, 287, 312, 321, 324  
 Nicholas of Lyre, 11, 151, 167, 169, 173–6  
 Nisibis, 47–8, 53  
 non-literal language, interpretation/sense, 3, 6, 12, 14, 183–4, 186, 189, 193–4, 203, 206, 209, 211–12, 222, 252, 254–5, 257, 285, *See also* allegory; *majāz*; spiritual interpretation, sense; *ta'wīl*  
 Notker of St. Gall, 18, 294–6, 303  
*nuqsān*, 127, 253, 257  
 O'Connor, Michael, 333  
 Old Testament, 2, 5, 26–7, 31, 42, 46–7, 49, 53–4, 56, 62, 65, 82, 110, 151, 159, 176–7, 250, 311, 321, 327  
 Olivi, Peter John, 177  
 omniscience, 35, 275, 277  
 Oral Law, 5, 9–10, 114–15, 120, 126, 128

- ordo verborum*, 232, 235, 240–1  
 Organon, 15  
 Origen, 135–6  
 Ovid, 85, 180
- pagrānāyā*, 53  
*Pantokrator*, 88–95, 99, 104  
 Paolo, Giovanni di, 9, 105–11  
 parable, 162, 175, 182, 277  
 parabolic expression, sense, 54, 58, 60, 63, 147, 176  
 parallelism, 19, 309–10, 316–19, 332  
 parenthesis (literary device), 232, 240  
 Passion of Christ, 58–9, 64, 233–4, 241  
 Paul, 4, 46, 63, 82, 88, 110, 122, 134, 139, 146, 153–4, 156, 163–4, 187, 228, 287, 299  
*pelāthā*, 54, 60, 62–3  
 Pentateuch, 25, 27–8, 30, 44, 49, 51, 79, 121–2, 124–6, 214, 216, 220, 222, 311–12, 330. *See also* Reworked Pentateuch, Samaritan Pentateuch, Written Law  
 Persian, 49, 53, 66, 69–71, 76, 78, 331  
 Perugino, Pietro, 106  
*peshat*, 11, 13–14, 17, 142, 162, 175, 204–23, 266, 274–85, 307  
 Peshitta, 31–2, 63  
*Petihta*, 45  
 Petrus Helias, 147  
 Philo, 31, 33–4, 40, 42, 121  
 Pindar, 227  
 Plato, 85–6, 91, 102, 180, 307  
 pleonasm, 253–4, 257, 262  
*pneuma*, 85, 91, 135  
 poetics, poetry  
   Arabic, 16, 253, 265, 267, 269. *See also*  
     *badīʿ*, *balāgha*, best of poetry is its most false, *shīʿr*  
   biblical, 15–16, 19–20, 228, 231, 233, 269–71, 277, 279, 281, 284, 310, 313–24, 332–3. *See also* prophets likened to poets  
   classical, 3, 14–15, 228. *See also* Homer, Horace, Servius, Virgil  
   modern and post-modern, 19, 329, 333–5  
   neoclassical, 19, 310, 315  
   Romantic. *See* Romanticism, Romantic theory vs. rhetoric, 14, 288–91, 307  
 polemics, polemical interpretation, 32, 47, 54, 74, 115, 120, 122, 124–6, 129, 277  
 Pope, Alexander, 315–16, 328  
*posteriora Dei*, 110  
 pragmatics, 185–8  
 prayer, Jewish. *See* *shemaʿ*  
 prayer, Muslim. *See also* *fātiḥa*  
   in translation, 76–8  
   minimal requirements, 83  
   permission to shorten, 196–7, 200  
   using verses from Torah, Gospels, Psalms, 78  
 preaching, 18, 169, 173, 243, 286, 288, 295, 300, 302  
 prefiguration, 5, 49, 119, 159, 176, 179  
 pre-interpretive sense, meaning, 184, 194–5, 200, 203  
 prophets likened to poets, 267, 269, 316  
*propria*, 137–8, 234  
 Proverbs, 44, 269, 311, 330  
 Prudentius, 231  
 Psalms, 15, 35, 67, 78, 227–48, 269, 272, 288, 292–3, 313, 317, 319, 322, 326, 332  
 Pseudepigrapha, 25, 27
- qarīna*, 183, 185, 188, 201, 209, 259, 261, 264–5  
*qawāʿid uṣūliyya*, 251  
*qerī*, 122  
*qirāʾāt*, 122  
 Qirqisānī, Jacob al-, 115, 124–9  
*qiyās*, 12, 14, 184, 189, 220–1, 263  
 Quintilian, 304  
 Qumran, 27–31, 47  
 Qurʾan  
   allegorical interpretation, 6  
   Arabicity, Arabic nature, 7–8, 65, 67, 69, 77–8, 83  
   clarity of language, 6, 10, 65–7, 183–4, 192, 250–1. *See also* *mubīn*  
   formation, 7, 10, 119–20  
   modern critical scholarship, 7  
   opposition to its interpretation, 65, 73  
   primordial, 265  
   reworks biblical material, 6–7  
   requires state of purity, 69  
   self-referentiality, 6, 119, 122  
   singular scripture, 114  
   sublimity, inimitability, 7, 16, 19–20, 66, 68, 72–3, 77–8, 119–20, 227, 249, 309. *See also* *ījāz*, *muʿjiz*
- Rabad, 81  
 Rabanus Maurus, 137, 295  
 Rabbanite/rabbinic Judaism, interpretation, thought, 4–5, 7, 9, 11, 41–5, 65, 79, 114–29, 204–23, 276–7, 279  
 Radak, 269, 273–7  
 Raḍīy, al-Sharīf al-, 254  
 Ramus, Peter, 290  
 Raphael, 106  
 Rashbam, 13, 207–8, 213–17, 219–20, 279, 281–4  
 Rashi, 13, 17, 79, 162, 205–8, 210–17, 279–84  
*rāzā*, 5, 48–64  
 Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-, 257, 261, 263–4

- Recanati, François, 186, 189–90, 192  
 Reformation, 8, 18, 82, 117, 133, 142, 151, 153–6,  
     222, 250, 314  
 Remigius, 15, 229–42, 247  
 resurrection, 58, 60, 64, 160, 189, 238  
 Reworked Pentateuch, 28–31  
 Rewritten Bible, 29–31, 33  
 rhetoric and oratory  
     biblical, 15, 18, 228, 267–8, 273–5, 287–306  
     classical, 268, 286–92, 303–6  
     relation to literal sense, 307–8  
     relation to preaching, 268, 300–2  
     status theory, 289, 295–9  
     vs. poetics, *See under* poetics, poetry  
*Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 137, 148, 298, 303  
 Riḏā, Rashīd, 75  
*rmizāthā*, 58–9, 62  
 Romanticism, Romantic theory, 20, 156, 310–11,  
     315–16, 320–5  
 Roscellinus of Compiègne, 15, 239  
*rūḥānā'īth*, 53, 55  
 Rupert of Deutz, 18, 288, 296–300, 304, 308  
  
 Saadia Gaon, 9, 13, 114–15, 123, 208–12, 218, 222,  
     268  
*sacramentum*, 61  
*ṣaḥot*, 268, 275  
*ṣalmā*, 54–5, 62  
 Salmon ben Jeruham, 115–16, 124, 128  
 Samaritan Pentateuch, 29  
 Samarqandī, 'Alā' al-Dīn al-, 76  
 Samuel ben Hofni, 13, 123, 210–12, 217–18, 222  
 Samuel ha-Nagid, 211, 217  
 Sarah, 56, 58–9, 63  
 Sarakhṣī Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-, 78  
 Satan, 37, 41, 43  
 Schleiermacher, Friedrich, 314  
 Schoeler, Gregor, 119  
 scholasticism, 167–8, 170, 303  
*sensus historicus*, 149, 160  
*sensus litteralis*, 11, 137, 139–43, 147, 151–3, 159–60,  
     163, 166–7, 170, 176, 178, 181–2, 204, 222,  
     285, *See also duplex sensus litteralis*  
*sensus spiritualis*, 160, 162, 165, 182  
 Sentence Meaning, 187–90  
 Septuagint, 28–9, 79, 82, 85, 113  
 Servius, 15, 229–33, 239–41, 246–8  
 Shāfi'ī (school), 77, 196–7, 258, 260  
 Shāfi'ī, Muḥammad b. Idrīs, al-, 12, 76, 191–5,  
     200  
 Shaltūt, Maḥmūd, 71–2, 74–6  
*sharī'a*, 12, 72  
 Shāṭibī, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā al-, 72–3  
 Shaybānī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-, 69, 76–7  
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 311, 316, 323  
  
*Shema'* (prayer), 80–1  
 Sherira Gaon, 121, 123  
 Shi'ite, 6, 10, 76, 118–19  
*shi'r*, 267, 269  
*shir*, 269  
*Shulḥan Arukh*, 81  
 Sībawayh, 198  
*ṣifa*, 77  
 Silvestris, Bernard, 99  
 Simon of Tournai, 143  
 Simon, Richard, 311  
 Sinaitic Law, 46  
 Smalley, Beryl, 11, 160–3, 165, 167–8, 182  
 Solomon, 151, 176, 178, 269, 278, 280–4, 295  
 Song of Songs, 175, 213–14, 242, 272, 278–84  
 speculative grammar, 147  
*Speculum humanae salvationis*, 159–60, 178–9  
 Spicq, Ceslas, 163  
 Spinoza, Baruch, 326  
 spiritual interpretation, sense, 46, 53, 55, 177, *See*  
     *also* allegorical interpretation; mystical  
     interpretation; *sensus spiritualis*; typological  
     interpretation, sense  
     aligned with, “annexed” by literal, 12, 151–5,  
     158–9, 175–8, 182  
     relation to symbol, 11, 156–7, 324  
     vs. literal. *See under* literal sense, the letter  
 Stock, Brian, 117–18  
 subjectivity of interpretation, 12, 162  
 sublimity, the Sublime, 19, 290, 320  
     in the Bible. *See under* Bible  
     in the Qur'an. *See under* Qur'an  
 Sufi, 6, 255–6  
*sunna*, 193–4  
 Sunni, 67, 76  
*ṣurāthā*, 54  
 Susanna, 295  
 symbol, symbolism  
     relation to spiritual sense. *See under* spiritual  
     interpretation, sense  
     in Romantic theory, 11, 157, 324–5  
     in Syriac interpretation, 5, 48, 50, 62, *See also*  
     *rāzā*  
 synecdoche, 232–3, 252  
 Syriac interpretation, liturgy, thought,  
     translation, 5, 46–65, 67, 71, 121, *See also*  
     Peshitta *and under* symbol, symbolism  
  
*tafsīr*, 65, 73–4, 208–10, 251, 253, 262  
*taḥrīf*, 10, 78, 115, 120, 123, 129  
 Talmud, 4, 8, 32, 43, 79–81, 113–16, 121–2,  
     124–8, 206, 210–11, 214–17, 219–23,  
     278, 326  
*Bava Batra*, 121, 125, 278, 326  
*Bava Qamma*, 32

- Talmud (cont.)  
*Berakhot*, 80  
*Massekhet Sefer Torah*, 79  
*Megillah*, 32, 79  
*Qiddushin*, 79  
*Sanhedrin*, 43, 124, 214, 274  
*Shabbat*, 204, 280  
*Soṭah*, 80, 215  
*Sukkah*, 124  
Tamīmī, Abū'l-Faḍl al-, 262  
Tapiz de la Creación (Creation Tapestry), 88–92  
Targum, 31–2, 79, 82, 113  
Onkelos, 79  
Pseudo-Jonathan, 31–2  
*tarjama tafsiṛiyya*, 74  
*tarjamat al-ma'ānī*, 74–5  
*tawātur*, 10  
*ṭelānyāthā*, 54  
Tempier, Stephen, 181  
Tertullian, 321  
test of righteous (by God), 36–8, 43  
Theodore of Mopsuestia, 53, 57, 61, 63  
Thomas of Chobham, 18, 288, 300–2  
Thumāma b. Ashras, 256  
*Torah she-be-'al-peh*, 113  
*Torah she-bi-khtav*, 113, 116  
transferred sense, 105, 138–9, 141, 150, 260  
translation  
of Bible, 7–10, 19, 65, 67, 79–83, 113–14, 310, 319–21, *See also* King James Bible, Peshitta, Septuagint, Vulgate  
of Qur'an, 7–8, 19, 65–83, 309  
*trivium*, 14, 229  
tropes. *See* figures and tropes  
Ṭūfī, Najm al-Dīn al-, 258–9, 261  
*ṭupsā*, 50, 54, 62  
Turkish, 76  
typological interpretation, sense, 5, 41, 46–7, 49, 51–64  
'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, 69, 119, 196  
*umm al-kitāb*, 114, 119, 265  
Uriah, 179, 236–7  
*uṣūl al-fiqh*. *See* *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*  
'Uthmān, 119  
Victorinus, 88, 303–4  
Virgil, 15, 227–30, 233, 241, 246–7, 328  
Von Balthasar, Hans Urs, 167  
Vulgate, 8, 81, 85, 91, 104, 110, 232, 321  
*wad'*, 184, 201–3, 257–8, 261  
Watts, Isaac, 322  
waxen nose of Bible's authority, 8, 173  
What is Said, 187–8, 190  
Whitaker, William, 154  
Whitman, Jon, 64  
will of God, 6, 12, 39, 41, 104–5, 221, 251, 264,  
*See also* *murād Allāh*  
William of Auvergne, 145  
William of Champeaux, 297  
William of Ockham, 171  
Wordsworth, William, 311, 316, 320  
Written Law, 5, 9, 115, 126, 128–9  
Wycliffite, 82, 152, 302  
Ya'lā b. Ummaya, 196  
Yefet ben Eli, 115–16, 124–5, 128  
*yugna*, 51  
Yūsuf al-Baṣīr, 123  
Zadeh, Travis, 66  
*zāhir*, 11–13, 183, 191–5, 200, 209–12, 217–18, 222, 272  
Zāhirī (school), 67, 77, 184, 261, 263  
*zāhiriyya*, 264  
Zamakhsharī, Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-, 69–71, 81  
Zarkashī, Badr al-Dīn al-, 259, 264–5  
Zarqā', Mustafā Aḥmad al-, 70  
Zawāhirī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-, 75  
*ziyāda*, 119, 127, 253–4, 257

## *Scriptural index*

### **Old Testament**

#### Genesis

1, 88, 95  
1:1, 55  
1:2, 9, 85, 88,  
95, 104  
1:3, 84  
3:7, 305  
3:8, 99, 212  
3:11–12, 298  
3:13, 298  
3:20, 209  
4:1, 41  
6:9, 275  
8:7, 210  
17:14, 153  
18:2–3, 301  
18:17–18, 207  
18:18, 207  
19:24, 275  
21:8, 43  
22, 55–6, 58–9  
22:1, 35, 43  
22:1–8, 36  
22:6–8, 38  
22:8, 58  
22:16, 42  
24:39, 276  
27:24, 178  
28:10, 210  
34, 33  
37:2, 208, 215

#### Exodus

1:17–19, 178  
1:21, 179  
6:6, 142  
12:36, 44  
13:3–10, 207  
13:9, 207–8, 219  
13:19, 44

15, 29  
15:20–21, 30  
20, 29  
20:1, 276  
20:2–13, 276  
20:19–22, 29  
21:1, 215  
21:8, 217  
21:24, 32  
23:19, 210  
32:20, 263  
33:23, 110

#### Leviticus

18:21, 32–3  
24:20, 32  
26, 330

#### Numbers

8:19, 275

#### Deuteronomy

5:5, 276  
5:6–17, 276  
5:26, 29  
6:4–9, 80  
6:6–7, 80  
12:31, 32  
18:18–22, 29  
28, 330  
32:11, 85

#### Judges

9, 147  
9:8, 178, 180

#### 1 Samuel

10:5, 267  
10:6, 267  
18:7, 317

#### 2 Samuel

15–18, 160  
19:14, 304  
20:4–10, 304

#### 1 Kings

5:12, 269, 282

1 Kings (cont.)

11:1–8, 178  
 22:19, 274, 277  
 22:19–23, 273

2 Kings

16:3, 32  
 22–23, 122

1 Chronicles

17:13, 151, 176–7

Job

1:6–12, 37  
 2:1–6, 37

Psalms

1, 244  
 2, 246, 293  
 2:10, 293  
 3, 235, 237, 246  
 4:4, 240  
 6, 239, 293  
 7:9, 232  
 9:2, 232  
 10, 241  
 14, 247  
 16, 233–4  
 18, 233  
 18:2, 233  
 18:3, 233  
 18:36, 233  
 18:42, 232  
 19, 243, 319  
 19:2, 243  
 22, 241  
 22:2, 150  
 41:3, 239  
 45:3, 160, 301  
 46:2, 240  
 51:3, 235  
 60:10, 315  
 62:12, 214  
 68:5–10, 239  
 86:9, 240  
 104:4, 91  
 114, 318  
 119, 153, 242  
 119:13, 232  
 120:4, 240  
 147:15, 87

Proverbs

2:4, 305  
 10:7, 207  
 10:8, 44  
 13:7, 318  
 22:17, 271  
 25:1, 282  
 28:11, 318

Song of Songs

1:1, 281  
 1:7, 171  
 2:5, 278  
 3:5, 281  
 4:1–5, 176  
 5:10–16, 176  
 7:1–7, 176  
 8:6, 207

Isaiah

13–23, 26  
 24–27, 26  
 28–33, 26  
 29:13, 116  
 32:4, 268  
 34–35, 26  
 40–66, 25, 30

Jeremiah

7:31, 32  
 19:5, 32  
 31:14, 274

Daniel

2:18, 49  
 2:28, 62  
 2:34, 150

Hosea

1:2, 274  
 2:7, 280

Zechariah

5:7–8, 116

**Apocrypha**Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)

24:31, 174  
 24:32, 174

**Pseudepigrapha**4 Maccabees

13:12, 40

Jubilees

17:15–16, 38  
 30:7–10, 33

**New Testament**Matthew

16:13–20, 55  
 17:1–8, 54  
 28:3, 301

Mark

9:2–8, 54

Luke

6:17, 302

9:28–36, 54  
 10:27–28, 296  
 22:38, 171–2

John

1:1, 55, 243  
 8:25, 88  
 8:28–59, 57  
 8:56, 57, 60  
 8:58, 58  
 10:22, 302  
 19, 234  
 19:19, 234

Acts

2:1–4, 8  
 2:7–11, 8  
 7:55, 301  
 11:5, 295

Romans

2:28–29, 134  
 8:31–32, 42

1 Corinthians

10:11, 4  
 13:12, 110

2 Corinthians

3:6, 135, 139, 167  
 6:18, 88

Galatians

4:22–31, 46  
 4:24, 154–5

Hebrews

1:5, 151, 176  
 1:14, 91

1 John

3:10–12, 41

Apocalypse (Revelation)

21:1, 174

**Qur'an**

2:93, 262  
 3:7, 6, 209, 265  
 4:101, 196, 200  
 5:3, 189  
 5:15, 262  
 5:38, 193, 195  
 5:96, 188  
 7:158, 70  
 12:3, 8, 67  
 12:81–82, 191  
 12:82, 254, 262  
 14:4, 67  
 15:1, 6  
 16:44, 74  
 16:101–103, 67  
 17:23, 198  
 17:24, 265  
 18:11, 71  
 21:12, 192  
 26:196, 78  
 39:28, 67  
 41:44, 76  
 42:11, 254  
 43:3, 65  
 44:43–44, 70  
 56:79, 69  
 65:8, 263  
 66:4, 255  
 87:19–20, 78