The Composition of the Qur'an

Rhetorical Analysis

Michel Cuypers

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Bloomsbury Academic
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WC1B 3DP
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1385 Broadway
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USA

www.bloomsbury.com

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First published 2015

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978–1–4742–2748–3
ePDF: 978–1–4742–2747–6
ePub: 978–1–4742–2746–9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk, UK

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Introduction

Even though this book deals with literary traits of the Qur'an that are still not generally recognized, it does not pretend to offer some sort of secret code or esoteric deciphering technique to the public – something that appeals to certain people nowadays. More simply, it tries to systematically describe a certain number of literary procedures which assure the coherence of a Book that seems incoherent to many. In other words, our book will explain the different rhetorical principles that enter into play in the composition of the Qur'anic text. It will be a 'treatise of Qur'anic rhetoric' but different from treatises of rhetoric handed down by Arab (as well as by Western) literary traditions. Notably, unlike most of these treatises, it will not include the study of multiple tropes or figures of style and ornamentation (metaphors, metonymies, comparisons, ellipses, etc.). Our perspective will limit itself to what classical Greco-Latin rhetoric called *dispositio* – the study of the articulation of the different parts of a discourse. The Greeks and Latins envisaged this question above all from the point of view of the argumentation, in a court setting: how to organize the discourse of the defence so as to be convincing? But we do not present a treatise of argumentation according to the Qur'an. Our perspective will be more ample and more strictly literary: how the discourse or text of the Qur'an, whatever might be its literary genre (recital, exhortation, law, prayer . . .), is composed in each one of its parts and in the organization of the parts among themselves so as to form a coherent whole and be the bearer of a meaning. For, after all, it is the search for meaning that is at issue.

This is a challenge given the apparent disorder of the Qur'anic text – a fact everyone recognizes: the first Muslim scholars were already defending the text against the detractors who reproached its fragmentation. In spite of their efforts this problem has persisted down to the present.

In order to discover the organization of the Qur'anic discourse, one must first take into account the fact that it belongs to the Semitic culture and has adopted its manners of thinking and expressing itself. Consequently, it is

necessary to let oneself be disorientated by resolutely leaving behind the perspective of classical Greek rhetoric that we have all inherited – even the Arabs. In classical rhetoric the disposition of the parts of the discourse follows a linear logical order: introduction, narration, proof, argumentation, conclusion. This is what we all learned in school: a well-written text should begin with an introduction, and proceed with a continuous development in order to arrive at a conclusion. The ancient Semitic texts, however, do not function in this way; that is why they disconcert us so much and this is what makes their comprehension difficult. Their basic principle, in fact, is not progress in a straight line but rather *symmetry*. This symmetry, which can take diverse forms, follows very precise rules that, however, leave the author or editor ample liberty to structure the text according to his or her tastes and intentions. It is thus not a question of fixed and pre-established forms as is the case of the classical poetry of the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Persians or others, but rather of a certain number of literary procedures or 'figures of composition' that offer multiple possibilities of combination while remaining perfectly codifiable. The knowledge of this rhetorical code – the object of this book – permits a person to enter into the understanding of the text with greater assurance. Since the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, we are more aware that any textual unity finds its precise signification only within the structure of which it is a part. The structure opens the gate to the meaning of the different elements that compose it.

This means that our rhetorical study will be opposed to most of the ancient and modern commentators on the Qur'an who explain the verses one after the other, often without taking their literary context into consideration, i.e. the rhetorical structure of which these verses are a part. But we all know the danger of taking a verse out of context; it can be made to say just about anything.

Unfortunately the rules of Semitic rhetoric were never put into writing by the scribes of the ancient Near East as was the case for the rules of Greek rhetoric; at least the Semitic equivalent of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* or Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* has never been found. The only solution lies in the meticulous examination of the texts themselves in order to unpack by induction the principles that guide their composition. This is what has been undertaken, since the middle of the eighteenth century, by a line of scholars who studied the Biblical texts in depth. During the last fifteen years, we have, in our turn, applied these same principles to about thirty brief or normal length Qur'anic

suras[1] and, more recently, to the long sura 5 known as 'The Table Spread' (cf. the References section at the end of this book). Even though these studies are still limited to a miniscule part of the Qur'an, it seems that it is time to propose to the reader a theoretic synthesis of the rhetoric of the Qur'an.

However, we will not limit ourselves to explaining the different rules of 'Qur'anic rhetoric'. Our goal will also be to propose to the student or the researcher a methodology for the application of these rules that we will call – following the lead of the Bible scholars – 'rhetorical analysis': how to proceed, step by step, in the application of the rules of Semitic rhetoric so as to illustrate, as perfectly as possible, the complex structure of the Qur'anic texts?

Since the principles put forth in this book are the result of Biblical studies, we should recognize our very particular debt to the Jesuit Roland Meynet, professor of Biblical Theology at the Gregorian University of Rome and the leading theorist of rhetorical analysis in our times. Our work will be based, without any scruples, on his recent and monumental *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric* (cf. References section). But we have chosen to write something less detailed and more accessible, and leave to specialists the liberty of referencing the *Treatise* for more complete information. What we will put forth in this book should amply suffice for a thorough rhetorical analysis of the Qur'anic text.

A first preliminary chapter will sketch the antecedents of Semitic rhetorical analysis in the history of Islamic scholarly culture and in modern Qur'anic studies as well as its development on the basis of Biblical studies.

The next five chapters are the main body of the book. They will describe the different procedures of Semitic rhetoric and the stages in the work of textual analysis. The second chapter will be a sort of introduction into the spirit of Semitic rhetoric with an explanation of the binarity and parataxis (or juxtaposition) that are general characteristics of this rhetoric. The third chapter will define the different levels of the text that an analysis must carefully take into consideration – from the lowest to the highest level. Next we will study the three figures of composition that are always present in Semitic rhetoric: parallelism, mirror composition and concentric or ring composition. A fifth chapter will concern the study of the centres of concentric compositions given their very special characteristics and importance. The sixth chapter will set forth the rules of re-writing, which will enable us to visualize the rhetorical structures in the form of diagrams.

The distribution of the subject matter among these chapters responds to a somewhat artificial pedagogical necessity in the measure in which these different aspects of the rhetorical analysis interpenetrate. The textual levels are, in fact, distinguished by their figures of composition and, in order to visualize levels and figures, we cannot avoid the re-writing of the text in the form of diagrams.

After these chapters – which are essential and rather technical (warning to the reader!) – we will deal with what is the aim and the normal result of this process: the interpretation. The technical work of exegesis is only in order to understand the meaning of the text. But interpretation also demands the respect of certain principles that will be formulated from our concrete experience of the texts. Most of the examples will be taken from difficult texts whose interpretation is eventually open to question. This will demonstrate how rhetorical analysis can become an indispensable exegetical instrument for a better comprehension of the Qur'anic text.

Finally, a concluding chapter will open some perspectives. It will pose the question of the extension of this type of rhetoric in time and space and will examine some anthropological aspects of Semitic rhetoric: is it rooted in oral tradition or written literature? Is it spontaneous and unconscious or is it transmitted by tradition and conscious?

The translation of the numerous quotations from the Qur'an will try to be as literal as possible in order to remain maximally faithful to the vocabulary and syntax of the Arab text. The English translation of the Qur'an is based on different translations that already exist, especially that of Richard Bell.

When an Arab word is translated by several English words, these will be joined by a hyphen.

The date of the death of persons belonging to the Islamic tradition is indicated by the letter d. (deceased) followed by the year of the Hijra calendar and the year of the Common Era: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) died in 606 according to the Hijra calendar, or in AD 1209.

The bibliographical references in the Notes at the end of the book are simplified. Complete references can be found in the References section also at the end of the book.

Cairo, IDEO, March 2011

Abbreviations

f.	following page
ff.	following pages
n	note
S.	Sura
The Banquet	Michel Cuypers, *The Banquet. A Reading of the fifth Sura of the Qur'an* (Miami: Convivium Press, 2009).
trans.	translation
Treatise	Roland Meynet, *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2012)
Une apocalypse	Michel Cuypers, *Une apocalypse coranique. Une lecture des trente-trois dernières sourates du Coran* (Pendé, France: Gabalda, 2014)
v.	verse

Transliteration

To avoid making the text too heavy, transliterations of the Arabic words have been reduced to the absolute minimum, where they can shed light upon the rhetorical analysis. Some consonants are followed by an h: *th* (pronounced like the English *thick*), *kh* (like the Spanish jota), *dh* (English *this*), *sh* (English *she*); emphatic consonants and the hard *h* have a point underneath. Long vowels are over-lined. The inverted apostrophe corresponds to *ʿayn*, a fricative laryngeal sound characteristic of Arabic and the typographical apostrophe corresponds to *hamza*, an occlusive guttural sound.

Well-known Arabic names or terms, such as Qur'an, Muhammad, Mecca, etc., are written as they usually are in English.

ʾ (hamza)	in non-initial position	ḍ	ض
b	ب	ṭ	ط
t	ت	ẓ	ظ
th	ث	ʿ	ع
j	ج	gh	غ
ḥ	ح	f	ف
kh	خ	q	ق
d	د	k	ك
dh	ذ	l	ل
r	ر	m	م
z	ز	n	ن
s	س	h	ه
sh	ش	w	و
ṣ	ص	y	ى

1

The Question of the Coherence of the Qur'anic Text

It is an old cliché to highlight the impression of disorder the Qur'anic text leaves – at least among the readers or listeners who have not grown up with this text. The only order that can be clearly discerned in the Book is the succession of the suras according to their decreasing length. It seems that this corresponds to a certain usage in Antiquity since the epistles of Saint Paul are similarly arranged in the New Testament. Be that as it may, this purely quantitative order does not correspond to the logic nor to the chronology of the text. Moreover, even this quantitative order is not rigorously respected; some longer suras follow shorter ones. Is this the effect of a supplementary disorder or is it the sign of the interference of another principle of organization? But, if this is the case, which principle?

In the Islamic tradition

If we believe what the Qur'an itself affirms, the question of the coherence of the Qur'anic discourse had already risen during the lifetime of the Prophet: 'The incredulous say: "If only the Qur'an had come down to him all at once!"' (25: 32). As a response, another verse justifies the discontinuous character of the revelation: 'We have fragmented this Qur'an so that you recite it to people more slowly' (17: 106).

The discontinuity of the text is, without a doubt, the main reason why – from the origins down to our times – an 'atomistic' exegesis has developed that comments on the text verse by verse usually without taking the literary context into consideration.

On the margins of exegesis, however, certain scholars and rhetoricians have

engaged in studies of the coherence of the text. From the third and fourth centuries after the Hegira (ninth and tenth centuries), there was a series of studies of 'the composition of the Qur'an' (*Naẓm al-Qur'ān*). Unfortunately these books have been lost but there is a partial knowledge of their content in other studies that followed and deal with the inimitable character of the Qur'an (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān*). These works – among other concerns – try to respond to certain critics of the lack of coherence in the Qur'anic text. Their responses are, to tell the truth, very partial and limited: they are only concerned with small textual units, phrases or verses and are *not* based on any general theory of the Book's composition. Even 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471 or 474/1078), the author of the greatest of the works on the inimitability of the Qur'an – *Dalā'il al-i'jāz fī l-Qur'ān* (*The reasons for the inimitability of the Qur'an*), never went beyond the level of the phrase even though he anticipated the principles of modern linguistic structure that would have allowed him to go much further.

Among the classical exegetes, there is no doubt that it was Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) who led the way in the exploration of the coherence of the text by calling attention to the arrangements (*tartībāt*) and correlations (*rawābiṭ*) among the verses. A century later, there appeared a work that dealt with 'the propriety of the arranging of the suras of the Qur'an' (*Al-Burhān fī munāsaba tartīb suwar al-Qur'ān* by Abū Ja'far ibn al-Zubayr (d. 708/1308). Subsequently, in the encyclopedias of 'Qur'anic sciences' (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*) by Zarkashī (d. 794/1391) and Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) these observations wind up by constituting a 'science of proprieties' (*'ilm al-munāsabāt*) between the verses and the suras. In these works there is an attempt to show why and how a verse is linked to what precedes it or how the end of a sura corresponds to the beginning of the following sura. There is thus a certain preoccupation with the linkage between verses and suras but without arriving at an authentic organic structure between the different parts of a sura or among the suras themselves. The diverse elements of composition that have been brought to light (parallelisms, repetitions, antitheses, etc.) remain isolated and do not constitute a system. The commentator Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī (d. 885/1480) explicitly applied 'the science of proprieties and correlations between verses and suras' in his great Qur'anic commentary and even announced it in the title of his work: *The order of pearls or the correlation of*

verses and suras.[1] But here again the notations do not arrive at the elaboration of a rhetorical system.

Another way extensively explored by Rāzī and other exegetes is that of 'the commentary of the Qur'an by the Qur'an': the meaning of a verse is made clear by another verse of the Qur'an. This obviously presupposes that the Qur'anic text has a global coherence and unity. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1327) considered this method the most sure because it does not have recourse to any explanation exterior to the text such as the 'occasions of revelation' (*asbāb-al-nuzūl*), which the majority of exegetes use and abuse: in order to explain a verse, they refer to an event (most often very anecdotal) in the life of the Prophet or of the primitive Muslim community that supposedly provoked the revelation of the verse in question. If the method of explaining the Qur'an by the Qur'an has the advantage of basing itself solely on the text, it is also dependent on the sagacity of the exegete in his choices of the verses that are to be placed in relation to one another with the risk of arbitrariness that this implies.

Some twentieth-century commentators have taken up the question and tried to explore the structure of the Qur'anic text. Shaykh Sa'īd Ḥawwā (d. 1989), in his commentary *The Foundations of Exegesis* (*Al-Asās fī l-tafsīr*), assigns himself the task of studying the coherence among the different parts of the suras. In his introduction, he states that such a study has never been undertaken before.[2] He divides the text of the suras into parts and sub-parts according to four levels (which he calls, in descending order: *qism*, *maqṭā'*, *faqra*, *majmū'a*) with the intention of showing how the relations among these units assure the coherence of the text. This attempt is real progress but a progress that remains based on a quite elementary literary theory. As a result, many of the divisions he makes in the text are subjective and controversial. It is to be noted, however, that Sa'īd Ḥawwā, who was well versed in the classic commentaries, was aware of the absolute originality of his work. It can thus be concluded that it would be in vain to hope to find a general theory of the composition of the Qur'anic text within the vast patrimony of Qur'anic sciences.

All the same, in the same decade of the 1980s, while Sa'īd Ḥawwā was writing his *tafsīr* in a Syrian prison, an Urdu-speaking Pakistani exegete, Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlaḥī (d. 1997), came to an astonishing conclusion in his commentary *Reflections on the Qur'an* (*Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*). In his opinion, most – if not

all – of the suras form thematic pairs through similitude, antithesis or complementarity.[3] Our rhetorical analysis of the last thirty suras was able to confirm the thesis of Iṣlaḥī. The final two suras (113–114) are clearly similar. But the eight suras that precede them also form pairs, thematically antithetic, opposing belief (as in the case of sura 112, 'The Purity [of Faith]') to impiety (as in sura 111 'The Palm Fibre'). Sura 93 ('The Morning Brightness') and 94 ('The Relief') are very similar – to the point where certain commentators considered them a single sura. Sura 5 also shares many themes in common with sura 4. The discovery of Iṣlaḥī thus represents a first step towards a theory of the overall composition of the Qur'an, a theory based on the principle – if not of symmetry, at least of binarity. We will return to this theme in the following chapter.

In modern Western research

Since its beginning, during the middle of the nineteenth century – and parallel to Biblical studies – the scientific study of the Qur'an by Western orientalists has massively adopted the historical-critical method with the hope of establishing a History of the Qur'an. Such is the title of the famous reference book by the German scholar Theodor Nöldeke (d. 1930), *Geschichte des Qorāns*, published in 1860 and subsequently completed by his disciples. Among the other great representatives of this school are the Scotsman Richard Bell (d. 1952) and the Frenchman Régis Blachère (d. 1973), both of whom published translations of the Qur'an in which they use a reconstructed chronology of the text. As was the case with Biblical studies, the method of historical criticism, which uses a diachronical perspective on the text, has totally dominated Western research of the Qur'an until recently. Even if the method put forth in our book does not use the same perspective, there is no intention of denying the enormous contributions of the historical-critical research of the Qur'an. A summary can be found in the reference article by Alford T. Welch in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edn).[4] In addition to the strictly historical aspects – such as the history of the collection of the Qur'an, the establishment of the text, the different canonical readings[5] and the chronology of the text – the article deals with linguistic aspects – such as the language of the Qur'an, its foreign vocabulary, the rhymes (at the end of the verses) and the refrains

(formulas repeated at a certain distance from one another) – as well as the schematic form. The article also presents the most important literary forms that can be found scattered throughout the Qur'an: oaths (found at the beginning of many short suras), 'sign' passages (reminders of 'signs' God has left in Nature or in History), 'say' passages (passages introduced by the imperative 'say' addressed to the Prophet), the stories (mainly concerning the prophets), regulations and liturgical formulas. The lexicological study of the text, and its repartition into units of signification according to different literary forms, are undisputable acquisitions for the exegesis of the text.

Beginning in the year 1981, however, there appeared research work based on a hypothesis opposed to that which, until then, had been predominant in historical criticism. Instead of parting from the principle that the text is composed of small fragments whose chronology might be reconstituted by using indications like grammatical or stylistic incoherence, repetitions, differences of style or the evolution of themes, it is presupposed that the text, in its final redaction, should have a unity and coherence that the exegete ought to enlighten. The diachronic approach of historical criticism is being replaced by a synchronic perspective. This method does not focus directly on the history of the text but more on its structure, such as it appears in the canonical version of the Book which we have now and which is the only version that serves as a reference for Muslim faith. Likewise there is no effort expended to classify the literary forms found throughout the text. Rather the research centres on the composition of each sura, in itself, in order to understand its coherence and signification. The pioneers of this research, Angelika Neuwirth and Pierre Crapon de Caprona, were interested in the short suras of the Meccan epoch, which were easier to analyse than the long suras of Medina.[6] They tried to understand the composition of the suras by using indications such as rhythm, rhyme, themes, literary genres – elements they inherited from historical criticism. This accounts for the composite character of their method. It is only since the year 2000 that two Anglophone researchers, Neal Robinson[7] and A. H. Mathias Zahniser[8] have attempted to also analyse the composition of the longer Medinan suras using indications such as the repetitions, at a certain distance, of terms or verses that might reveal textual symmetries. The method was pertinent but it lacked the theoretical systemization necessary for arriving at absolutely certain conclusions and it only focused on the overall structures of the text.

Such a systemization exists but in the domain of scientific Biblical exegesis. For this reason, Qur'anic studies would have much to gain if they used an interdisciplinary approach.

From Biblical studies to Qur'anic studies

The synchronic approach to Biblical texts, even though it has had difficulty affirming itself alongside the diachronic approach of historical criticism, is not a recent development.[9] Its first outlines can be seen in the mid-eighteenth century with the discovery of the *parallelism of members* in the poetic texts of the Bible by the English scholar Robert Lowth and the realization of the importance of *chiasmus* and *concentric* or *ring composition* in the Bible by the German Johann Albrecht Bengel. But it was above all the Englishmen John Jebb and Thomas Boys who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, gave theoretical form to most of the rules of composition of the Biblical texts. They wanted to respond to the same question we have raised above regarding the Qur'an: what is the unity and coherence of the Biblical texts – certain of which are also present in a very fragmented way, as a series of little semantic units among which there is sparse evidence of a logical link? Let us just think of the last four books of the Pentateuch, which mix together laws, stories, exhortations and threats, the prophetic books made up of a series of independent oracles, or even the Gospels whose pericopes mix together miracle stories, parables and other teachings of Jesus. Unfortunately, the intuitions of Jebb and Boys were hardly exploited and, with the exception of a few researchers who followed the same path (Albert Condamin, Nils W. Lund, Marcel Jousse and several others), they were generally ignored by the triumphant school of historical criticism.

Today, as we mentioned in the Introduction, it is the Jesuit Roland Meynet who deserves all the credit for having magisterially systemized the rules of composition for the Biblical texts according to the method he calls 'rhetorical analysis' and that is mainly expounded in English in two books: *Rhetorical Analysis. An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (1998), recently revised and updated in the vast work entitled *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric* (2012).[10]

Other synchronic methods of analysing the Biblical texts have developed in the course of these last few decades – notably structural analysis (which later

became semiotic), narrative analysis and 'rhetorical criticism', which applies the categories of Greco-Roman rhetoric to the Biblical texts. These methods were all elaborated outside of Biblical exegesis, which simply applied them to its own domain. Western Islamologists followed the same path: *Le Coran revisité: le feu, l'eau, l'air et la terre* by Heidi Toelle, for example, is a brilliant application of the semiotic method to the cosmology of the Qur'an. Rhetorical analysis, on the other hand, comes directly from the detailed study of the Biblical texts themselves. Therefore its laws have quite naturally been considered, in a first reaction, as being those of 'Hebrew rhetoric', different from Greco-Latin rhetoric. When there comes the realization that these laws apply not only to the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament, but also to the Greek texts of the New Testament, we then speak of a 'Biblical rhetoric'. Preliminary studies in other sacred Semitic texts of Antiquity – Akkadian, Ugaritic and Pharaonic (second and third millennium BC) – have however shown that the same laws of composition also regulate these texts – texts much more ancient than the Bible.[11] In Lebanon, at the beginning of the 1990s, a small research group of four, including both Christians and Muslims, attempted a comparison between the composition of Biblical texts and that of some hadiths that were taken mainly from the corpus of Bukhārī (ninth century) and arrived at the same result.[12] For our part, in 1995, using the same method we published our first articles on the composition of the suras of the Qur'an. Since then, 'Biblical rhetoric' was renamed 'Semitic rhetoric' since it became clear that it was not limited to the Bible but could be found elsewhere in the Semitic world in texts prior to and after the Bible. At present, research is ongoing in other domains of the Ancient Middle East, Greece and Iran, whose most ancient texts seem to obey the same 'Semitic' rhetoric. This could one day bring about a change of the qualification of this type of rhetoric (cf. Chapter 8 of this book).

A brief explanation of the method

Before getting into the details of Semitic rhetoric, it is better to explain some underlying concepts that (we hope) will help the reader to follow the development of our presentation.

Semitic rhetoric is, as we have already pointed out, entirely founded on the principle of symmetry, which confers on the text's composition a form that is, in a way, more geometrical or spatial than linear. The reader will easily become aware of that through the tables which will appear in the following chapters.

The symmetry can take three forms or three 'figures of composition' – a characteristic already noted by Lowth and Bengel in the eighteenth century: parallelism, when the related terms are arranged according to a same order: for example AB/A'B'; mirror composition, when the related terms are presented in an inverted order: AB/B'A' (on the level of the phrase, the term *chiasmus* is used); the concentric composition, where a central element is placed between the two sides of the parallelism (ABC/x/A'B'C') or the mirror construction (ABC/x/C'B'A').

These three figures of composition can be found at different textual levels; on the lowest level, the segment can combine two or three members (which, generally, correspond to an equal number of syntagmas) according to one or another of these figures of composition; on the next highest level, the piece will combine the segments in the same way and this process will continue on the following levels that are called, in ascending order, the part, the passage, the sequence, the section and, finally, the book. Keeping in mind that there can be sub-parts, sub-sequences and sub-sections, a long text, like the fifth sura,[13] can have up to ten textual levels!

What are the signs of symmetry? This can be a simple repetition, a synonymy, an antithesis, an assonance or a paronymy (or quasi-homonymy) – even a homography (primitive Arab writing ignores diacritical signs and uses identical written forms for phonetically distinct letters). There can also be symmetry in a same grammatical form: for example, two verbs in the imperative tense or two phrases with the same syntactic structure.

When most of the terms of symmetry correspond, we speak of total symmetry. More frequently, only some of the terms correspond and this is referred to as partial symmetry.

The signs of a partial symmetry can be found at the beginning of corresponding units (as initial terms), at the end (final terms) or in the middle (central terms); or they can be found at the beginning and the end of a unit they delimit (extreme terms – the classical *inclusio*) or even at the end of

one unit and the beginning of the following unit in order to bring them together (median terms – the Biblical scholars refer to them as link or hook-words).

In the Qur'an, and notably in sura 5, the figure of composition that is by far the most frequent in the higher textual levels is concentric composition. In Semitic rhetoric, the centre of such compositions has a very particular importance: it is most often the key to the interpretation of the textual whole of which it is the centre. It is often a question, or a maxim, a quotation, a parable – something that provokes reflection and the taking of a position.

As can be seen from this bird's eye view of the method, the originality of Semitic rhetoric does not reside in the occasional usage of parallelisms or chiasm or even a ring composition – figures that can certainly be found sporadically or more or less frequently in all types of literature. What is characteristic of Semitic rhetoric is the absolutely systematic usage of these figures of composition at all levels of the text. Semitic rhetoric really constitutes a system. This is why it is necessary, in the analysis of the text, to push the application of this system as much as possible because there *is* a system and it structures the whole text – in its totality as in its details.

Some scholars reproach us for applying the rules of Semitic rhetoric in a manner that is too constant and systematic. Our response is that the figures of composition are not ornamental figures to which an author can have occasional resort – but without exaggeration if he or she wants to avoid an excessive mannerism! It is more fitting to compare the system of Semitic rhetoric to grammar. Aside from modern poetry, an author cannot choose to apply the rules of grammar or not. These rules constitute a system that imposes itself on the totality of the text – although with a certain amount of flexibility: the author or editor will have a choice among several syntactic structures but they should all obey the possibilities of a given language. It is the same for the rhetorical composition of the Semitic discourse. What is true – and we will come back to this in the study of textual levels – is that the figures of composition can be more or less emphasized. In one place a parallelism will be hardly noticeable whereas in another it will be very obvious. With more or less insistence, Semitic rhetoric is, however, always at work in all parts of the text to compose it and give it its coherence.

The presuppositions of the rhetorical analysis

From what we have said above, it follows that rhetorical analysis of the Qur'anic text entails certain presuppositions.[14] These presuppositions are not a priori prejudgements imposed on the text like a prefabricated theory, but the consequences of long and meticulous observations of the Biblical texts and, more recently, upon the Qur'anic text. Since these consequences have been confirmed with experience, they can henceforth serve as presuppositions that facilitate the work of any new analysis.

The Qur'anic text is well composed

Over and above the partial observations of the Islamic exegetical tradition regarding the propriety (*munāsaba*) among the verses (the relation of a verse with the preceding verse, the inclusion between the beginning and the end of a sura etc.) and the semantic relations among verses scattered throughout the Book (which are the privileged object of the 'thematic commentaries'), it is supposed that the ensemble of the text of a sura is composed according to a complex structure and it is precisely the goal of rhetorical analysis to manifest this structure. Unlike Western historical criticism, rhetorical analysis will not regard the different textual units of a sura as disparate fragments fortuitously brought together by the final editors of the Book, but rather as elements of a whole whose formal and semantic relationships must be discovered. Theodor Nöldeke, taking the view of historical criticism, denounces as a stylistic weakness the fact that the Qur'an 'brusquely interrupts one subject to jump to another which it will also abandon to return to the first'.[15] But that is precisely the (awkward) description of a deliberate rhetorical structure (mirror or concentric composition) and not the effect of stylistic negligence.

The structure of the text does not reveal itself easily – at least for those of us who do not think nor write like the Semites of Antiquity. Much patience and perseverance is needed. Sometimes one must struggle with a text for months – even years – before finally discovering its true and fully satisfying structure. Let the debutant or the amateur be prudent! One has to know the trade, have experience and perhaps a certain predisposition of the spirit to sense the links between the elements of the text. But, ultimately, the text will

reveal its architecture, sometimes very elaborate and even sophisticated, sometimes more sober and relaxed.

There is a Semitic rhetoric, different from Greek rhetoric

Whether of the Arabic or Western literary tradition, rhetoric is considered from the point of view of Greek rhetoric. The first book of Arab rhetoric that has come down to us, *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*, by the poet and caliph (for a single day!) Ibn al-Muʿtazz (assassinated in 295/908), states that its goal is to demonstrate that the figures of rhetoric which the 'new style' borrowed from the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle, recently translated into Arabic, were not an invention of the Greeks nor of the 'modern' poets but could already be found in the Qur'an; he did not suspect that another rhetoric existed that, in reality, impregnated the Qur'anic text. As strange and implausible as it seems, this other rhetoric was already totally forgotten by that time.

Modern Western studies of the rhetoric of the Qur'an have abundant recourse to the classical Islamic literary and exegetical traditions, centred on the studies of rhetorical figures or ornamental figures – above all, the metaphor. Taking their inspiration from the Biblical *Formgeschichte*, they have added the study of the characteristic forms of the Qur'an: comparing the Qur'anic texts among themselves, they discovered a certain number of 'forms' that permitted a classification of texts (e.g. the *'signs'-passages*, which evoke the signs of God's All-Mightiness in Nature or in Revelation; the *oaths*, which open a certain number of short suras, the *laws* etc.). Semitic rhetoric is not directly concerned with figures of ornamentation, nor with these diverse 'forms' scattered throughout the Book. Rather it concerns itself with the specific organization of each sura, according to precise laws, but applied each time in an original way.

Respect of the text such as it is

This presupposition is a critical stance as regards historical criticism. Faced with the 'incoherencies' of the text, its lack of a logical sequence, those of the school of historical criticism have a tendency to displace certain verses in order to recompose the text in a manner more coherent and logical (according to our logic inherited from the Greeks). The translation of Richard Bell 'with a

critical rearrangement of the suras'[16] is the most complete example. But if the laws of Semitic rhetoric are known, most of these incoherencies disappear by themselves. We have presented a case above with the quotation from Theodor Nöldeke. In our study of sura 5 (*The Banquet*) we have, on several occasions pointed out the displacement of verses suggested by Bell or Blachère.[17] These verses are, in reality, perfectly situated in their proper place according to the laws of Semitic rhetoric.

Thus it is that the 'ruptures of logic', the 'discontinuities' etc. that historical criticism finds, often coincide with those also noted by rhetorical analysis. But instead of concluding that there were editorial modifications and additions, rhetorical analysis sees in them the signs of different textual units and tries to find the links that unite them in a same coherent structure.

2

Binarity and Parataxis, two Characteristics of Qur'anic Rhetoric

According to Roland Meynet, binarity and parataxis[1] are the essential characteristics of Biblical language and rhetoric. The same could be said for Qur'anic language and rhetoric. In so far as they concern the Qur'an, these characteristics are not without rapport with what Louis Gardet has called the 'dialectic' or 'bi-polarity' of Arab-Muslim thought – 'the alternative rhythm of a thought which goes from similarity to similarity or to its contrary; from more to less or vice versa; a comparison of two facts which both control and oppose one another'.[2] He studies these in several Arabic grammatical categories such as words that can have two opposed meanings (*ḍidd*), derivatives from a root word of three consonants that always conserve a semantic rapport with the fundamental sense of the root word (*taḍmīn* and *takhrīj*) as well as in 'correlatives of opposition' (*muqābal*), which we will come across later on.

Binarity

Binarity designates the fact that two linguistic elements or two meanings are intentionally put into relationship in the text. One can see here the first traces of the great law of symmetry that underlies all the (Semitic) rhetoric of the Qur'an.

On the level of terms and concepts

Binarity can extend beyond symmetry as, for example, in the usage of the grammatical 'dual' (which does not exist in French or in English): a single word with a dual form refers to two identical realities. Sura 55 ('The Merciful') is noted for its systematic usage of the dual: 'The Lord of the two-Easts and the

two-Wests. He has mingled the two-seas which meet [. . .]. Anyone who fears to stand before his Lord will have two-gardens with branches; each will have two-springs, running, each will have a pair for every kind of fruit' (v. 17, 19, 46, 48, 50, 52).[3] Sura 18 ('The Cave') proposes a parable of two men, one of whom possessed two gardens (v. 32 and ff.). Another little parable of 'two-men' can be found in sura 16 ('The Bee', v. 76). According to the Qur'an, God created all things in pairs: humans, animals and fruits (6: 143–144), the 'two-Easts' (43: 38).

The most evident case of binarity is that of the pairing of terms. The Qur'an makes frequent use of 'binomes of totality' in order to designate reality in its entirety: 'the heavens and the earth' (46: 3), 'the sun and the moon' (41: 37), 'the land and the sea' (6: 97), 'night and day' (3: 190), 'the east and the west' (2: 177), 'death and life' (67: 2), 'the nearer life and the Hereafter' (9: 38), 'the invisible and the visible' (9: 94). Most of the divine epithets are given as synonymous pairs – such as the verse that opens the Qur'an and figures at the head of all the other suras (with the exception of sura 9): 'The Mercy-giving, the Merciful' (*al-Raḥmān, al-Raḥīm*). Other examples: God is 'Forgiving, Loving' (*al-Ghafūr, al-Wadūd*, 85: 14), 'Gentle, Merciful' (*Ra'ūf, Raḥīm*, 2: 143), 'All-Knowing, All-Wise' ('*Alīm, Ḥakīm*, 4: 11). These pairs of divine epithets can notably be found in the theological clausulae, which conclude a sura or part of a sura: 'God is Oft-Forgiving, Most-Merciful', at the end of sura 33, v. 73, and at the end of the central passage of the first sub-sequence (v. 1–4) of sura 5: 3.[4]

The Qur'an is readily qualified by two terms that mutually cast light upon one another: for believers, it is 'guidance and mercy' (6: 154), 'guidance and good news' (27: 2), 'guidance and healing' (41: 44), 'guidance and reminder' (40: 54). Muhammad and the other prophets are qualified as 'bearer of good news and warner' (2: 119).

Toshihiko Izutsu has shown that the Qur'anic *Weltanschauung* was structured on a base of a system of conceptual oppositions: God/man, faith/disbelief, Muslim/infidel, visible/invisible, present world/world to come, Heaven/Hell etc.[5]

At the levels of the discourse

As we will see at length later on, the verses or subdivisions of verses generally form pairs.

➢ Their parallelism is particularly stressed in the domains of morality and eschatology.

He who fears will accept the Reminder
and the most miserable will avoid it. (87: 10–11)

Verily to Us will be their Return.
Then it will be for Us to call them to account. (88: 25–26)

➢ In the following example, the two opposing verses are each composed of three members that correspond among themselves:

:: [15] But as for man, when his Lord tries him
.. giving him honor and blessings,
+ then he says: 'My Lord has honored me!'

:: [16] But when He tries him
.. restricting his provision,
+ then he says: 'My Lord has humiliated me!' (89: 15–16)

➢ On a higher level, two pieces that compose a part can also form an antithesis:

– [2] FACES ON THAT DAY WILL BE DOWNCAST
– [3] toiling and weary.

= [4] They enter a **BURNING FIRE**,
= [5] forced to drink from a BOILING SPRING.

+ [6] They will have no food but of *ḌARĪ* '[6]
+ [7] which neither fatten nor satisfy hunger.

- -

– [8] FACES ON THAT DAY WILL BE RADIANT,
– [9] well pleased with their labor,

= [10] in a **GARDEN** on high,
= [11] wherein they will hear no vain talk,
= [12] wherein is a FLOWING SPRING,

+ [13–14] wherein are couches raised high and *CUPS* ready placed
+ [15–16] and cushions set in rows and carpets spread. (88: 2–16)

We will find numerous examples of this type in the rest of this book.

We need to recall an important aspect of binarity in the Qur'an – the discovery made by the Pakistani exegete Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlaḥī (whom we already

mentioned in Chapter 1, see p. 3) that most, if not all, of the suras form, with their neighbouring sura, complementary pairs with similar themes. Iṣlaḥī distinguishes different types of complementarity according to 'their brevity and detail', 'principle and illustration', 'different types of evidence', 'difference in emphasis', 'premise and conclusion', 'unity of opposites'.[7] Whatever might be the propriety of this classification, our study of the last 30 suras totally confirms the existence of pairs of contiguous suras and even larger ensembles.[8]

➢ We will not cite the last two suras, 113 and 114 – whose similarity is too evident – but use as an example, suras 109 and 110.

S. 109	S. 110
[1]Say: O **DISBELIEVERS**![2] I do not worship what you worship[3] and you do not worship what **I worship**,[4] and I will not worship that which you worship, [5] and you will not worship what **I worship**.[6] Unto you your religion, and ***unto me my religion***. »	[1] When comes the help of God and the victory[2] and you see **PEOPLE** entering ***the religion of God*** **IN CROWDS**, [3] **celebrate the praise** of your Lord and ask His forgiveness: [4] He is always ready to accept repentance.

According to tradition, these two suras were dated from two epochs very far apart chronologically: sura 109 is considered the 18th in the chronological order of the suras whereas sura 110 is classified as the 114th. In spite of that, they have been put side by side in the final redaction of the Book because of their thematic similarity; in the face of true religion, people react differently; the unbelievers adore according to their religion, the 'I' adores according to 'his (my) religion' (109) and the crowds enter 'the religion of God' (110).

Parataxis

Parataxis, in grammar, designates the juxtaposition of two propositions, with or without a conjunction of coordination. It distinguishes itself from the complex phrase made up of a principal proposition and subordinate propositions introduced by a pronoun or a subordinating conjunction (that, which, because, in order to …). The Arabic language 'often coordinates propositions without precisely explaining their conceptual relationships'.[9]

The Arabic language rarely uses the verb 'to be' in the present or future tense. It prefers the nominal phrase, without a verb – a phenomenon that already represents a first form of juxtaposition. Thus, in the example of sura 88 given above, it says of the Final Judgement: 'Faces on that day downcast' (v. 2), which we have translated as: 'Faces on that day will be downcast.' 'Verily to Us their Return' (v. 25), which we have translated as: 'Verily to Us will be their Return.'

➢ In the same sura 88, several phrases are simply juxtaposed without a conjunction of coordination:

[4] They enter a burning fire,
[5] they are forced to drink from a boiling spring.

We have translated the following segment thus:

[6] They will have no food but of *ḍarīʿ*
[7] *which* neither fattens nor satisfies hunger.

Whereas the text simply says:

[6] They will have no food but of *ḍarīʿ*
[7] it neither fattens nor satisfies hunger.

The two members are not linked by any conjunction. On the other hand, the two phrases of verse 7 are coordinated by the conjunction 'and' (*wa*). Our translation makes the second member two coordinated relatives joined to the principal proposition by the relative pronoun 'which'. According to Arabic grammar, indefinite subjects do not require a relative pronoun.

➢ To describe Paradise, verses 88: 11–16 juxtapose three subordinate phrases of place (two of which are nominal, 12 and 13–16) introduced by 'in which' (*fī-hā*; literally 'in it') but without any coordinating conjunction linking these phrases:

– [8] Faces on that day will be radiant,
– [9] well pleased with their labor,

= [10] in a Garden on high,
= [11] *wherein* they will hear no vain talk,
= [12] *wherein* is a flowing spring,

+ [13–14] *wherein* are couches raised high and cups ready placed
+ [15–16] and cushions set in rows and carpets spread. (88: 2–16)

The simple juxtaposition of these phrases leaves room for interpretation on the part of the reader or listener: it could be understood that, in Paradise, the chosen will not hear any more frivolities but only the bubbling of a flowing source. But, at the same time, one can imagine the source that flows at the feet of the 'couches raised high' where the chosen are lounging. Nothing of that is made explicit: it is up to the reader to complete, in his or her own way, what the text only hints at.

The two parallel antithetical segments – 88: 2–7 and 88: 8–16 – that we previously cited as examples of binarity (see p. 15) are not linked by any conjunction. They begin with the same type of nominal antithetic phrase: 'Faces, on that day contrite/radiant' (2 and 8). A reader with a Greek mentality would accentuate the antithesis of the second segment with something like: 'While the elect, their faces radiant and pleased by their efforts, are in a Garden on high . . . etc.'

➢ An antithesis between two phrases can only be marked by the conjunction 'and' (*wa*), as in the example given above of sura 87: 10–11 (see p. 15):

> He who fears will accept the Reminder
> and the most miserable will avoid it. (87: 10–11)

Some will translate the conjunction as 'while' (T. B. Irving) or 'but' (A. Yusuf Ali, M. Pickthall, M. A. S. Abdel Haleem) in order to underline the logical link of opposition that the text, in itself, does not make explicit.

In all the examples so far, the logical link between the juxtaposed phrases or group of phrases remains rather clear. But there is a stylistic characteristic of the Qur'an (that can also be found, to a lesser extent, in ancient Arabic poetry) that is more disconcerting for the logical mind. The Arab rhetoricians have called it *iltifāt* (literally, the act of turning – as a person turns his head from left to right) to designate the brusque change from one grammatical person to another.

➢ Very often, for example, the divine discourse passes from the majestic 'We' to the third person or vice versa as in sura 27: 60:

> *He who* created the heavens and the earth and sent down for you water; then
> *We* cause to grow thereby gardens of delight . . .

➢ Or as in sura 96:

[14] Does he not know that *God* sees?
[15] No! If he does not desist, surely *We* will seize him by the forelock.

This phenomenon, which certain Western scholars – such as Nöldeke[10] – judge negatively is, on the contrary, considered by Arab commentators to be an exquisite subtlety. Classical rhetoricians and commentators have only studied the *iltifāt* on a grammatical level. What strikes the modern reader more are the abrupt semantic leaps when the text passes from one theme to another without transition, through simple juxtaposition, without any logical explanation.

➢ Sura 88 (of which we have made a partial study above) offers a characteristic example of this. Here is the whole text:

[1] Has the story reached you of THE OVERWHELMING?
[2] Faces on that day will be downcast
[3] toiling and weary.
[4] They enter a burning fire,
[5] forced to drink from a boiling spring.
[6] They will have no food but of *ḍarīʿ*
[7] which neither fatten nor satisfy hunger.

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[8] Faces on that day will be radiant,
[9] well pleased with their labour,
[10] in a Garden on high,
[11] wherein they will hear no vain talk
[12] wherein is a flowing spring,
[13–14] wherein are couches raised high and cups ready placed
[15–16] and cushions set in rows and carpets spread.

[17] Do they not look at the camels, how they have been created,
[18] and at the sky, how it has been lifted up,
[19] and at the mountains, how they have been erected,
[20] and at the earth, how it has been spread out?

[21] So remind! You are only a reminder,
[22] you are not a watcher over them.
[23] But whoever turns back and disbelieves,
[24] God will chastise him with the greatest chastisement.
[25] Surely to Us is THEIR RETURN,
[26] then surely upon Us is THEIR RECKONING. (88)

The three parts that make up this sura do not appear to have any relationship with one another. Richard Bell, one of the most eminent representatives in the application of historical criticism to the Qur'an, indicates 'several interruptions in sense' in this sura.[11] He distinguishes a description of the 'contrasted fates of the evil and the good at the Judgement Day' (1–10), of 'the power of Allah in nature' (17–20, a later text with 'no apparent connection with the context'), and of the Prophet as a warner (21–24). In Bell's opinion, the other verses (13–16 and 25–26) are later additions. Analysed in such a way the text literally falls apart. A totally different approach to the text is called for.

A first observation is that the sura is framed by an inclusion: the terms 'the Overwhelming' (1) and 'their return', 'their reckoning' (25–26) all designate the Day of Resurrection and Judgement. The final part (21–26) gives the reason for discernment between the damned and the chosen whose final lot is described in the first part (1–16): those who have turned aside from the Reminder (the preaching of the Qur'an) and not believed in it will be damned. It is upon this that God will judge the peoples at the time of 'their return' (25) and on the basis of this that He will exercise 'their reckoning' (26). There is, then, a relation (though not explicit) of effect (v. 1–16) and cause (v. 21–26) between the two parts, which correspond with one another.

At first view, the central part does not seem to have any relationship with the rest of the sura as Bell affirmed. But it must be noted that it is in the form of a question, as is often the case with centres of concentric construction. It is a way of inviting the reader/listener to reflect. One can thus understand that the creation of all things by God is evoked here for two reasons:

1 First, to found the reality of the Last Judgement; He who created all things also has the power to re-create on the Day of Resurrection and to give to each the retribution the person has merited. Although this is not explicit, it is the logical link of the centre (17–20) with the first part (1–16).
2 Second, to found the veracity of the Qur'anic revelation; He who addresses the Reminder to the peoples, through the Envoy who reminds (21), is He who created all things. Therefore He can only be truthful. Thus the centre has a logical link, although this link is also only implicit, with the third part (21–26).

So it can be seen that creation is evoked, in the centre, as justification of a double consequence: the Resurrection/Judgement (part I) and the Revelation

(part II). There is, indeed, a whole argument in this text but this argument remains latent. It is the task of the reader/listener to formulate it or at least sense it. Here one can experimentally perceive the difference with the Greek spirit that does the opposite and seeks to be as explicit as possible in its argumentation in order to gain the attention of the listener. The Greek mentality should not omit anything while in Semite discourse part of the work is left to the listener. 'The Greek imposes, the Semite proposes' (as the saying goes) or 'the Greek demonstrates, the Semite shows'.[12] This is not to contradict the fact that the Qur'an often uses the same type of arguments[13] (for example – the signs of God in nature, proof of his All-Mightiness); each time, the argument is repeated without being totally explicit.

[1] Has the story reached you of THE OVERWHELMING?
[2] Faces on that day will be downcast
[3] toiling and weary.
[4] They enter a burning fire,
[5] forced to drink from a boiling spring.
[6] They will have no food but of *ḍarīʿ*
[7] which neither fatten nor satisfy hunger.

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[8] Faces on that day will be radiant,
[9] well pleased with their labour,
[10] in a Garden on high,
[11] wherein they will hear no vain talk
[12] wherein is a flowing spring,
[13–14] wherein are couches raised high and cups ready placed
[15–16] and cushions set in rows and carpets spread.

[17] Do they not look at the camels, how they have been created,
[18] and at the sky, how it has been lifted up,
[19] and at the mountains, how they have been erected,
[20] and at the earth, how it has been spread out?

[21] So remind! You are only a reminder,
[22] you are not a watcher over them.
[23] But whoever turns back and disbelieves,
[24] God will chastise him with the greatest chastisement.
[25] Surely to Us is THEIR RETURN,
[26] then surely upon Us is THEIR RECKONING. (88)

3

The Levels of Composition

Any text can be analysed according to its levels of composition: in a poem one can differentiate the word, the verse, eventually the strophe and, finally, the entire poem. In prose one can differentiate the word, the phrase, the paragraph, the entire discourse or chapter, the whole book.

What is specific to Semitic rhetoric is the multiplicity of levels (a long text can contain ten) and the fact that each of these levels is constructed on the basis of a common principle of symmetry, even though this principle is applied in a different way at each level according to one or another of the 'figures of composition': parallel, mirror or concentric construction (which we will study in the next chapter). The result is a complex architecture that the exegete has to analyse level by level.

The Arabic editions and the ancient translations of the Qur'an present the suras as a continual text, like prose and without returning to the line indicating paragraphs. Aside from the titles of the suras and the formula of the *basmalla* ('In the name of God, the Merciful, the All-Merciful'), which introduces each sura (with the exception of sura 9), nothing in the written text enables the reader to find the divisions of the text and, hence, the articulations of its composition. The very numbering of the verses is only a very uncertain and insufficient indication. Moreover, the numeration is neither primitive nor stable; certain versions regroup in a single verse what other versions break up into several verses.

How then can one analyse a sura when nothing in the printed or manuscript text indicates its divisions? There is a great temptation to determine its structure once and for all by using the major thematic unities or its semantic blocks as did, for example, Saʿīd Ḥawwā in his commentary (cited in Chapter 1, see p. 3). By doing this, the scholar almost inevitably projects subjective divisions that correspond more to the logic of the exegete than to that of the text.

This is not, then, the road we shall take but rather a path going in the opposite direction – a journey that is longer and more difficult but the only sure route. Start from the smallest textual units to ascend progressively towards larger ensembles *by following the compositional indicators that are found in the text itself*. Upon analysis, it becomes evident that the text of a sura is not only divided into several large semantic blocks but that it is a very elaborate construction, using basic elements that, upon regrouping according to certain formulas or 'figures of composition', constitute a first level of the text. These, in turn, supply new elements that, on being combined, form a second level and so on up to the entire sura or even the whole book. It is exactly like a brick construction. The arrangement of the bricks serves to build the walls whose combination form the rooms that are organized into apartments that constitute a floor and all the floors become a building. Thus it is for the text of the Qur'an. Our starting point, the basic elements, is the *term*. Terms combine among themselves to form *members*. The joining together of two or three members constitute *segments* that, in their turn, organize themselves into *pieces*, then *parts*, *passages*, *sequences* and *sections*. Sometimes, for longer and more complicated texts, there will be intermediate levels: *sub-parts*, *sub-sequences* or *sub-sections*.

The terminology used here is obviously conventional; it is that used by Meynet and hopefully will become more common. It is simple and clear and only employs everyday words rather than getting weighed down by Greek etymologies, as is often the case with other Biblical exegetes. All the same, each of the terms has a well-defined technical meaning that we will study in this chapter.

Among Western scholars, Jacques Berque has clearly sensed the hierarchical nature of the text of the Qur'an and the necessity of respecting it in order to grasp its composition.

> To begin the study of the Qur'an by studying its composition means approaching it through its most difficult aspect. It means seeking the relationships between the ensemble affirmed by the text, its sub-ensembles or suras and their divisions and verses. It perhaps means going even further, analyzing the distribution of verses into sentences and these into groups of words. And – who knows? – arrive at the ultimate level where phonology joins grammar, a logic, a *rhetoric*. This can happen if one goes

> about these tasks without ceasing to pay attention to the long or brief rhythms which make this immense text vibrate with a single vibration. And to finish, take the opposite route and reconstruct the whole from its dismembered parts.[1]

The intuition of Berque is quite pertinent but, contrary to what he suggests in this quotation, the analysis should begin with the lower levels and progressively work its way towards superior divisions and levels. Since the symmetries, similitudes and repetitions in the text are, in fact, innumerable, the pretext of defining its major divisions all at once involves the risk of a choice both subjective and arbitrary among the indications of composition – whereas these elements could just as well be combined in a different manner. Now the object of rhetorical analysis is precisely to take exegesis out of the realm of subjectivity in order to try – as much as possible – to recover the real composition of the text such as the author or editor conceived it. Whereas in architecture one first notices the large exterior parts of a building and sees it as a whole, and then the smaller parts that are inside, rhetorical analysis summons us to first plunge into the interior of the text, at the level of its smallest divisions and only discover its major divisions progressively. So we are going to describe, one by one, all the levels of the text of the Qur'an, starting from the lowest.

The term

The term is the minimal unit, the basic material ('the brick') with which the rhetoric or the composition of the text will be elaborated. It globally corresponds to what linguistics calls a *lexeme* (or a *lexical moneme*).

➢ The *basmalla*, the first verse of sura 1 (*al-Fātiḥa* or 'The Opening') has four terms:

> In-the-name / of-God, / the Mercy-giving, / the Merciful.

Note that the preposition 'in' (*bi*) and the article 'the' (*al*) are considered as being part of the same term as the word to which they are linked: they are likewise identified in written Arabic:

Bi-smi / llāh / al-raḥmān / al-raḥīm

➢ It is the same for affixed pronouns as well as for the last of the four terms of the following member (v. 7 of the *Fātiḥa*).

The path / of-those / you-have-blessed / them (*'alay-him*)

For the monosyllabic morphemes (such as *man*, 'who') it will often be the rhythm that will decide whether to consider them as complete terms or not.[2]

The member

Although the Qur'an is not, strictly speaking, poetry, its prose is not ordinary. This is obvious for those suras considered as the most ancient (from the Meccan epoch), which can be found at the end of the Book with their emphatic rhythm and rhyme (a rhythm and rhyme inevitably lost in translations). The style of those suras is so similar to that of the soothsayers of those times that the sceptical audiences of Muhammad accused him of being just a poet (sura 21: 5) or a soothsayer (52: 29). There are traces of this poetic style even in the more prosaic suras of the latter epoch of revelation (that of Medina). The rhyme at the end of the verses will never be abandoned – even in the longest verses.

In order to be able to visualize in some way the poetic and rhythmic character of the prose of the Qur'an, the modern translations of the Qur'an, such as those of Denise Masson or André Chouraqui, cut up the verses into short superimposed lines – like those of a free verse poem. We will do the same thing but basing the dismemberment on the composition of the Arabic text and not on the rhythm of the English phrase (e.g. Ahmed Ali's translation, Princeton University Press, 1993).

The member will correspond to a line (a row of bricks). It is the 'elementary unit of rhetorical organization'[3] that, combining with a similar element, begins to construct and rhetorically compose the text. The *member* will usually contain several *terms* that, together, form a *syntagma* (or group of terms grammatically linked among themselves), or a *proposition*.

➢ The following member is a proposition:

You we worship (1: 5).

➢ The proposition can be a subordinate clause like the relative sentence of the first member of the following trimember (84: 7–8).

– [7] Then *whoever is given his book in his right-hand*
= [8] will be reckoned with by an easy reckoning
= [9] and shall go back to his people joyfully.

➢ A member can sometimes combine two coordinated verbs:

He begot not nor was he begotten (112: 3)

➢ Habitually the principal proposition and the subordinated one form two different members. But it can happen that because of the rhythm of a verse and its parallelism with one or two other verses, they will constitute a single member. Such is the case of the first member in the following example (87: 10–11).

[10] *He will-accept-the-Reminder*	*who fears*
[11] and will-turn-aside from it	the most miserable.

➢ A single proposition can be divided into two members such as in 89: 27–28, address/command.

[27] O you, trustful soul,
[28] return to your Lord, approving and approved.

➢ There are syntagmas without verbs.

Master of the Day of Judgement (1: 4)

➢ Nominal propositions (without verbs) are frequent in Arabic:

Verily, man [is] in loss (103: 2)

➢ It sometimes happens that a member has just one term.

The Striking! (101: 1)

These examples show that it is not always easy to know how to divide the text in members. The member is not something fixed like the verse in poetry. Short

and long members can be found in a single text. In brief suras the member usually corresponds to a verse, is numbered, and ends in a rhyme. But this is not always the case. In the *Fātiḥa*, verse 7 has three members and only the last one provides the rhyme:

[7] The path of those you have blessed
not those who incur anger
nor those who go astray.

➢ On the other hand, in sura 88, two members each count two verses (see Chapter 6, p. 141):

[13] wherein are	couches raised high	[14]and cups ready placed
[15] and	cushions set in rows	[16]and carpets spread.

➢ Verses 74: 40 and 41 also make up a single member:

[40] In gardens	they shall ask each other	[41] about the guilty

It is impossible to determine its limits by simply considering its internal coherence. What will define it better will be its *external coherence*, i.e. its aptitude to form a symmetry with another member – be that member contiguous or not.

➢ In the following example (sura 101 'The Striking'), members 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9 are clearly defined both by their internal coherence and by their combination with a contiguous member. There could be hesitation concerning members 3a and b as well as 10a and b: do they form one or two members? In the Arabic text, 3b is strictly identical to 2 (*mā-l-qāriʿa*). This would lead to making them parallel (external coherence), leaving 3a at the centre of a concentric trimember. Consequently, v. 10 would also be split up into two members symmetrical with 3a and b. In the same way, do 4a and b and 5a and b form two members (4 and 5) or four (4a and b; 5a and b)? The rhythmic symmetry of 4–5 with 6–9 (external coherence) suggests rather a splitting up into four members. Members 1 and 11, even though they are far from one another, define one another. Their form is similar (isolated terms, outside of phrases) and in a symmetrical position of inclusion at the extremities of the sura.

[1] The Striking!

[2] What is the Striking?
[3a] And what will let you know
[b] what is the Striking?

[4a] The day on which	will be	men
[b] as moths		scattered
[5a] and	will be	the mountains
[b] As wool		carded.
[6] Then as for him	whose balances	are heavy
[7] he [will be]	in a pleasant	life
[8] and as for him	whose balances	are light
[9] his mother	[will be]	a pit.

[10a] And what will let you know
[b] what it is?

[11] A blazing fire!

Let us add, however, that doubt can sometimes linger and the exact division of the members (which, in any case, cannot be neglected!) does not always play a major role in the composition of the text. If, in the example of sura 101, the members 3a and b, 4a and b, 5a and b and 10a and b were considered as four members instead of eight, that would not, in the end, change much of anything – neither for the composition of the text nor for its interpretation. Meynet prudently concludes his analysis of the member with these words: 'It's probably better to leave a certain liberty to the analyst!'[4]

The segment

The segment is made up of two or three members – or even by just one.

Segments with two members[5]

Two member segments, which are called *bimembers* (or *distichs*), are by far the most frequent.

➢ In the example of sura 101 quoted above, segments 6–7 and 8–9 are formed from a relative clause followed by the main clause.

[6] Then as for him whose balances are heavy
[7] he [will be] in a pleasant life

[8] and as for him whose balances are light
[9] his mother [will be] a pit.

Segments with one member

Remaining with sura 101 as an example, the two isolated members (1 and 11) do not combine with a contiguous member but, as we have seen, with another member situated at a distance in the text. Since these two members figure at the same textual level as the other segments, they will also be considered segments but *unimembers* (or *monostichs*).

Three member segments

Segments with three members are called *trimembers* (or *tristichs*).

➢ Here are two taken from sura 84 ('The Rendering Apart')

[7] *Then whoever is given his book in his right hand*,
[8] will be reckoned with by an easy reckoning,
[9] and shall go back to his people joyfully.

[10] *But whoever is given his book behind his back*,
[11] he shall call for destruction,
[12] and shall burn in a blazing-fire.

These trimembers each have their own internal coherence, made up of three propositions, a relative clause followed by two coordinated main clauses, each proposition corresponding to a time of judgement: the audit of acts (7 and 10), the judgement and its effect on the one who is judged (8 and 11) and the retribution (9 and 12). The internal coherence of each of the trimembers is confirmed by the external coherence, which in this case is the similitude of the contiguous symmetrical trimembers. The two trimembers are parallel to one another and antithetic in their signification.

Just as the members are determined both by their internal coherence and their external coherence (their aptitude to form segments by combining with one or two other parallel members), segments are likewise determined by both their internal coherence and their external coherence with symmetrical segments.

The four configurations of the trimembers

Four structural types of trimember segments can be identified. Usually (if not always) two of the three members of a trimember have a greater similarity between them than with the third member. Thus there will be trimembers with the form ABB', AA'B or ABA'. If the three members are equal, we would have a trimember AA'A" or ABC. This last form seems very rare in the Qur'an. There is rather a general tendency to reduce the tripartition of the trimember to a certain unequal binarity.

➢ The two trimembers cited above (84: 7–12) are of the ABB' form. In trimember 84: 7–9, the last two members are more similar. They are composed of coordinated main clauses, having three terms and the same rhyme in *ra* whereas the first member is a relative clause with five terms and rhymes in *ih*. The first member also gives the reason for the two following; because he has received the book in his right hand (first member), the person will be judged benignly (second member) and will be able to joyfully rejoin his relatives (third member). The trimember 10–12 is similarly constructed except that the last two members are made up of two terms and not three.

A *Then whoever is given his book in his right-hand*,
B will be reckoned with by an easy reckoning
B' and shall go back to his people joyfully. (84: 7–9)

A *But whoever is given his book behind his back*,
B he shall call for destruction
B' and will burn [in] a blazing-fire (84: 10–12)

➢ The following trimember, taken from v. 41 of sura 5, is equally of the form ABB'.

– Those who	God does not wish	to purify their hearts,
= *to them*	*in the here-and-now*	*is dishonor*,
= *and to them*,	*in the hereafter*	*is a huge punishment*.

➢ The two following trimembers are of form AA'B

A Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the **'Ād**,
A' **Iram**, *possessor of pillars*,
B whose like has never been made ***among the cities***?

A And the **Thamūd** who cut out rocks in the valley
A' and **Pharaoh**, *possessor of stakes*,
B who transgressed ***among the cities***? (89: 6–11)

The first two members of each of the two trimembers include the name of a population chastised by God: 'Ād – Iram / Thamūd – Pharaoh (the equivalent of Egypt).[6] Each time the third member is a relative phrase.

➢ In sura 5, the revolt of the sons of Israel against Moses when he wanted them to enter into the Holy Land is expressed in a trimember of the form AA'B:

A So *go forth*,	you and your Lord,
A' and *fight*	you both!

B Surely we will here sit down. (5: 24)

The first two members have imperative verbs, urging Moses to combat with the assistance of God. These members are in opposition to the third, which expresses, through a present participle, the refusal of Israel to fight with them.

➢ Also in sura 5 we have the following trimember (v. 12), which is of form ABA':

A And truly *God* has received **the covenant** of the sons of Israel
B – and we sent among them twelve leaders. –
A' and *God* said: '**I am with you**'. (5: 12)

The extreme members are complementary and follow one another: 'God' is the subject of the two propositions. In member A, he 'receives' the covenant of the sons of Israel. In the member A' he responds by a formula of covenant: 'I am with you'. Member B is a narrative incision in the first person plural,

which is only understood in the light of a verse (23) that appears later in the text.[7]

➢ In sura 86, the extreme members of the following trimember, also with the form ABA', oppose the absolute power of God over the destinies of peoples to the total powerlessness of mankind on the Day of Judgement. The central member is a temporal subordinate that can be linked either with the preceding member or the following member (translations reflect both options).

A Surely He has *power* to bring him back,
  B the day secrets will be tested,
A' there will be for him *neither strength nor helper*. (86: 8–10)

Sometimes the three members seem to be equal; in such a case they can be figured as ABC.

➢ The following trimember enumerates, according to a descending order of severity, the chastisements of those who revolt against God and his Envoy or sow corruption on earth:

A Will be	*that they will be killed*	or they will be crucified,
B or	*that will be cut off*	their opposing hands and feet,
C or	*that they will be banished*	from the earth. (5: 33)

But it is not rare that some trimembers have a *mixed form*. They can present themselves under two different forms according to the angle from which they are seen.

➢ Segment 89: 21–23, given here below, can be considered as having form AA'B if priority is given to the assonances that conclude the first two members and make them very similar: '*dakkan, dakkan*' (an approximate translation would be 'to powder, to powder', v. 21) / '*ṣaffan, ṣaffan*' ('rank upon rank', v. 22). Or the trimember could be considered as of the form ABB' if priority is given to the conjunction *wa* (and), followed by a verb of movement 'come/be brought' (a verb from the same Arabic root) at the beginning of the last two members.

[21] Nay! When the earth will be pounded	*to powder, to powder*
[22] **and will come** your Lord and the angels	*rank upon rank*
[23] **and will be brought**, that Day, the Hell, (89: 21–23)	

Segments can have one, two or three members but never more

➢ When there is a sequence of four, five, six or more similar members, we see that the series can be divided into segments of one, two or three members as can be seen from the beginning of sura 81 ('The Darkness').

– [1] *When*	the sun	shall be darkened,
– [2] *and when*	the stars	shall be dimmed
= [3] *and when*	**the mountains**	shall be moved
+ [4] *and when*	***the she-camels-ten-months-with-young***	shall be left
+ [5] *and when*	***the wild-beasts***	shall be driven together
= [6] *and when*	the seas	shall be made up to boil,

The first six verses of the sura are all constructed in the same way – with three terms: a proposition indicating time ('when' *idhā*) followed by a subject noun and a verb. They could be considered simply as a series of eight members. But it will be noted that the first two verses (1–2) clearly make a pair. The heavenly lights, the 'sun' and the 'stars' will grow dim on the Day of Judgement. Verse 3 is a unimember; the mountains have nothing in common with the lights of verses 1 and 2 nor with the animals of verses 4 and 5. Verses 4 and 5 form a new bimember – both domestic animals and wild animals are threatened by death. The camels in their tenth month, on the point of giving birth, are abandoned by their fleeing guardians and the savage beasts join together because of their terror (ready to let themselves die, according to the commentaries). Another unimember, verse 6, follows; the seas have nothing in common with the animals of the preceding segment. On the other hand, there is a complementarity between members 3 and 6 that bracket the segment 4–5. On the Day of Judgement, the natural elements, 'mountains' and 'seas', will be set in motion.

Multiple configuration of segments

Since, as we have seen, the length of members can vary greatly, it will inevitably be the same for the segments. The two or three members of the segment will

not necessarily contain the same number of terms. There can thus be multiple configurations of segments. We will point out some of them, occasionally using examples we have already given.

– A unimember segment with one term:

The Striking (101: 1)

– A unimember segment with two terms:

A fire blazing (101: 11)

– A bimember segment whose first member has two terms and whose second has three:

The Mercy-giving,		the Merciful
Master	of-the-Day	of-Judgement. (1: 3–4)

– A bimember segment whose two members have three terms:

By the day	when	it-reveals-it [= the sun]
By the night	when	it-covers-it. (91: 3–4)

– A bimember whose first member has three terms and the second four:

Guide-us	on-the-path	right
The path	of-those	you-have-blessed them (1: 6–7a)

– A bimember whose first member has three terms and the second two:

not	those-who-incur-anger	against-them
nor	those-who-go-astray. (1: 7b–c)	

– A bimember segment whose first member has six terms and the second four:

God	has promised	to those	who believe	and do	good deeds,
to them	forgiveness	and reward	mighty. (5: 9a–b)		

– A trimember segment whose first member has five terms while the following two have three:

Then	whoever	is given	his-book	in-his-right-hand,
will be reckoned	by a-reckoning	easy		
and shall go back	to-his-people	joyfully. (84: 7–9)		

We could multiply examples of different possible combinations. These should be enough to illustrate that parallel members are rarely constructed identically and that there can be a great variety of forms.

The piece

Just as the segment is most often the combination of two or three members but sometimes can have only one member, the piece also usually has two or three segments but can occasionally have just one. The piece will not, however, have more than three segments.

➢ Verses 2–6 of sura 109 ('The Unbelievers') constitute a piece made up of three segments. The first members of the first two segments (2 and 4) are almost identical; the second members (3 and 5) are perfectly identical. The two members of the third segment (6a and b) also correspond in that they oppose 'your religion' to 'my religion'.

– [2] I DO NOT WORSHIP		WHAT YOU WORSHIP	
= [3] *AND YOU DO NOT WORSHIP*		*WHAT I WORSHIP*,	
– [4] AND I WILL NOT WORSHIP		WHAT YOU WORSHIP,	
= [5] *AND YOU WILL NOT WORSHIP*		*WHAT I WORSHIP*.	
+ [6a] To you	your religion,		
+ [b] and to me	my religion.		(109)

➢ Members 1–6 of sura 81, which are so much alike, form (as we have seen above) segments of one or two members. These segments rejoin together to form two pieces. The first piece (1–2) has just one segment:

– [1] *When*	the sun	shall be darkened,	
– [2] *and when*	the stars	shall be dimmed	(81: 1–2)

The second piece (3–6) is composed of three segments (a unimember, a bimember and another unimember). Segments 3 and 6 evoke the movement of the elements (mountains and sea) while verses 4–5 tell of the proximate death of animals.

= [3] *and when*	**the mountains**	shall be moved
+ [4] *and when*	***the she-camels-ten-months-with-young***	shall be left
+ [5] *and when*	***the wild-beasts***	shall be driven together
= [6] *and when*	**the seas**	shall be made up to boil, (81)

Multiple configuration of pieces

Even more than in the case of the segments, there are a number of possible configurations for the piece. Among the examples given above, verses 1–6 of sura 81 have two pieces. The first (1–2) has only one segment while the second has three (3, 4–5 and 6).

➢ Verses 11–17 of sura 86 ('The Night Star') come together in two pieces. The first is made up of just a bimember of rhetorical oaths (11–12) while the second has three bimembers (13–14, 15–16 and 17ab) in which God reacts to the mockeries of the unbelievers when the Qur'an is preached to them.

– [11] By the heaven	which returns!		
– [12] By the earth	which splits!		
= [13] Verily it is	a decisive Word,		
= [14] and it is not	a pleasantry.		
+ [15] Verily,	they plot	a plot,	
+ [16]	and I plot	a plot.	
: [17a] So respite	the unbelievers!		
: [b] Give them respite	for a while !		(86: 11–17)

➢ Sura 87 ('The Most High') begins with a piece containing a unimember segment that is a call to praise (1), followed by two bimembers (2–3 and 4–5) that deal with the reasons for giving praise to God.

– [1] Glorify	the name	of your Lord,	the Most High,	
= [2] *who* created,	and formed,			
= [3] and *who* determined,	and guided,			
+ [4] and *who* brought forth	the pasture,			
+ [5] then made it	debris	dark.		(87: 1–5)

➢ The dialogue between Joseph and his father at the beginning of sura 12 ('Joseph') starts with two pieces. The first is composed of a unimember segment (4a – the words of Joseph to his father) and a trimember (4b–d – his speech). The second contains a unimember (5a – words of his father to Joseph), a trimember (5b–d – a speech of warning) and, at the end, a unimember (5e – a sentence of wisdom).

– [4a] When Joseph **said** to his father:
:: [b] '***O my father***,
  = [c] *I saw* eleven stars, and the sun and the moon,
  = [d] *I saw* them to me doing obedience',

- -

– [5a] he **said**:
:: [b] '***O my son***,
  = [c] do not recount *your vision* to your brothers,
  = [d] they would plot a plot against you.
  + [e] Verily, Satan is to man a manifest enemy.' (12: 4–5)

➢ Sura 5 ends with two pieces:

+ [119a] God said:
+ [b] 'This is the day
+ [c] when the truthful will take advantage of their truthfulness.

– [d] To them [will be] gardens,
– [e] under which streams will flow,
– [f] in which they will be immortal forever.'

= [g] God will be pleased with them,
= [h] and they will be pleased with him:
= [i] – here is the great triumph.

- -

+ [120a] To God is the kingship of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.
+ [b] He is powerful over all things. (5: 119–120)

The first piece contains three trimember segments (119a–c, d–f and g–i); the second (a doxological clause) has one bimember segment (120a–b).

The multiplicity of the possible combination of pieces once again shows the flexibility of the rhetoric of the Qur'an, which is not submissive to the regularity of the poetic strophe (with which some tend to identify with the rhetorical piece).

Pieces with three segments can be described in the same way as trimember segments in so far as two of the segments can be more similar between them than they are to the third segment. Pieces can thus be found having various forms: AA'B, ABB' or ABA'.

➢ In the second piece of the example given above, sura 86: 11–17, the first two segments (13–14 and 15–16) each begin with a word of insistence, *inna* ('verily'), and oppose the attitude of the unbelievers to that of God. For the former, the Word of God is only a 'pleasantry' whereas it is really 'the Word that separates [the True from the False]'. Their stratagem for avoiding the evidence of the revelation is opposed to the divine strategy that will judge them in the end. The third segment (17a–b) is addressed to the Prophet in the imperative mood and counsels him to be patient: its form and content are different. This piece can be described according to the formula AA'B.

A	= [13] **Verily**,	IT IS	A DECISIVE WORD,	
	= [14] and	IT IS NOT	A PLEASANTRY.	
A'	+ [15] **Verily**,	*THEY PLOT*	*A PLOT*,	
	+ [16] and	*I PLOT*	*A PLOT*.	
	B – [17a] *So Respite*		The Unbelievers!	
	– [b] *Give Them Respite*		For a While!	(86: 13–17)

➢ The first piece of sura 87 is composed of a unimember segment, main clause in the second person of the imperative (1) followed by two bimember segments of relative clauses in the third person. Thus it corresponds to the formula ABB'.

A – [1] Glorify	the name	of your Lord,	the Most High,	
B = [2] who created	and formed			
= [3] and who determined,	and guided,			
B' + [4] and who brought forth the pasture,				
+ [5] then made it	debris	dark.		(87: 1–5)

➢ We have already analysed verses 3–6 of sura 81 from the perspective of its variety of segments (see pp. 36–37). They constitute a piece of the form ABA'. The movement of the mountains (3) and the seas (6) – two unimember segments – frame the fate of the animals evoked in the central bimember (4–5).

A = [3] *and when*	**the mountains**	SHALL BE MOVED,	
B + [4] *and when*	***the she-camels ten months with young***	shall be left,	
+ [5] *and when*	***the wild beasts***	shall be driven together,	
A' = [6] *and when*	**the seas**	SHALL BE MADE UP TO BOIL,	(81: 3–6)

The part

Just as the segment can count one, two or three members and the piece one, two or three segments, the part can also be composed of one, two or three pieces but never more than that.

➢ The part 5: 112–113 is made up of two parallel pieces, each formed by two segments.

– [112a] When *the apostles said*:	'O Jesus son of Mary,	
– [b] can your Lord		
– [c] send down to us	**A BANQUET-TABLE** from heaven?'	
= [d]	HE SAID: 'Fear God,	
= [e] if you are	*believers*.'	
– [113a] *They said*:	'We wish to **EAT** of it,	
– [b] and to be assured in our hearts,		
= [c] that we may know that	YOU HAVE SPOKEN TRUTHFULLY to us,	
= [d] and that we may be among its	*witnesses*.'	(5: 112–113)

In the first members of each piece the apostles speak up ('the apostles/they said' (112a and 113a) then ask for food (112c) and want to eat it (113a). The second segments begin with declarative verbs: 'He (Jesus) said' (*qāla*, 112d) – 'You (Jesus) have spoken to us the truth' (*ṣadaqtanā*, 113c) and conclude with terms whose meaning is similar and that rhyme: 'believers' (*mu'minīn*, 112d) and 'witnesses' (*shāhidīn*, 113).

➢ The part 5: 7–8 has three pieces.

– [7a] And remember **GOD'S BLESSING** upon you
– [b] and His covenant by which he bound you

∗ [c] when you said: 'We have heard and ***we have obeyed***.'

= [d] **And fear God,**
= [e] **for God knows what is in the breasts.**

- -

∗ [8a] O you who **believe**
∗ [b] be upright before God,
∗ [c] witnesses of ***equity***

- -

– [d] And do not let incite you **HATRED OF ANY PEOPLE**
– [e] ***not to be just.***

∗ [f] ***Be just!***
∗ [g] This is closest to fear [of God].

= [h] **And fear God**,
= [i] **for God is informed of what you do.** (5: 7–8)

The extreme pieces correspond to one another and are complimentary. They begin with antithetical syntagmas: 'God's blessing' / 'hatred of any people' (7a, 8d). Obedience to the covenant, the blessing of God, implies that the believers exercise justice towards all people – even towards their enemies whom they hate. The obedience (7c), equity (8c) and justice (8e, 8f), spread throughout the three segments, go together. The same can be said of the fear of God in the extreme pieces (7d, 8g, 8h) and faith in the central piece ('O you who believe': 8a) The extreme pieces end in nearly identical clausulae (7d–e; 8h–i). In the member 7e, however, the accent is on God's knowledge of what is in the hearts of the believers, whereas in 8i the accent is more on God's knowledge of their external works.

The multiple configuration of the parts

➢ Verses 13–19 of sura 82 ('The Rending') form a part constituted by three irregular segments. The first two (13–16 and 17–18) each have two bimember segments. The last is the length of a single bimember segment.

– [13] Verily,	*the righteous*	[will be] ***in bliss***,
– [14] and verily	*the wicked*	[will be] ***in a Fire***.
= [15] They will enter ***it***,		ON THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT,
= [16] and they *will not be able* to keep away from ***it***.		
[17a] And what will let you know		
:: [b] what is		THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT?
[18a] And again, what will let you know		
:: [b] what is		THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT?
+ [19a] THE DAY when no soul *will be able* [to do] for [another] soul anything.		
+ [b] The command,		THAT DAY, [will be] with God. (82: 13–19)

The parallelisms of the members within the segments are indicated by small italic characters, either simple or bold. The affinities among the pieces are marked by small capitals. The 'Day of Judgement' announced in the first piece (15) is repeated twice in the central segment (17b and 18b) and reappears under the shortened form of 'Day' or 'that Day' in the last segment (19a and b). The central piece is framed by two members that evoke (through different words in Arabic that, however, have the same meaning and that we have translated with the verb 'to be able') the powerlessness of the damned to escape from Hell (16) or that of anyone to be able to come to the aid of another (19) on 'that Day'. This central piece is made up of a twofold rhetorical question. In a later chapter (Chapter 5) we will see that, very often, a question lies at the centre of a rhetorical system.

➢ Above (see p. 30), we used verses 7–12 of sura 84 ('The Rendering Apart') as an example of two segments with three members. These verses, along with the members 13–15, constitute a piece with three trimember segments. As we can see in the following table, this piece is the third piece of an irregular part.

The first piece (1–5) has two parallel segments: the first members (1 and 3) have an affinity, as do the final members (2 and 5). The central piece (6) is the size of a bimember segment. The third piece has three trimember segments. Aside from the parallelisms internal to each segment and each piece, there is

the repetition of 'his Lord' at the end of the extreme pieces (5 and 15) echoed by 'your Lord' in the central piece (6a). This central piece is the only one in the second person and this distinguishes it from the pieces surrounding it, which are in the third person. There is an antithesis between the verbs in 'you will meet him' at the end of the central part (6b) and 'he will not return' at the end of the third piece (14). The three pieces correspond to three moments on the Day of Judgement: the cosmic upheaval, the encounter of man with God the Judge and, finally, the judgement itself.

The final segment marks a return to the unheeding life of the impious. In this segment can be seen a contrast with the beginning of the part. While heaven and earth 'listen to its Lord' (2 and 5), the impious 'thought that he will not return [to God]' (14). The cosmos listens to God and obeys Him infallibly; only mankind is capable of turning its back on God and thus making itself liable to judgement.

= [1] **When**	**the sky**	shall be rent asunder	
– [2] *and shall listen to*	ITS LORD	*as it rightly must,*	
= [3] and **when**	**the earth**	shall be leveled out	
= [4] and shall cast out	what is within it	and become empty	
– [5] *and shall listen to*	ITS LORD	*as it rightly must,*	
∗ [6a] O man,	you will toil	toward YOUR LORD	a hard **toiling**,
∗ [b] and	**YOU WILL MEET HIM**.		
– [7] **Then whoever**	**is given**	**his book**	**in his right-hand,**
– [8] will be reckoned with	by a reckoning	easy,	
– [9] and shall go back	to his people	joyfully.	
= [10] **But whoever**	**is given**	**his book**	**behind his back,**
= [11] he shall call	for destruction,		
= [12] and shall burn	[in] a blazing-fire.		
+ [13] *Truly*, he ***was***	among his people	joyful.	
+ [14] *Truly*, he thought	that **HE WILL NOT RETURN** [to God],		
+ [15] Yea! *Truly*	HIS LORD	***was*** of him	watchful.

(84: 1–15)

Rhyme changes, when these occur (some suras keep the same rhyme throughout the verses), are often indications of composition (among others).

The verses of the first piece of sura 84 all end with a rhyme in *at*. Verse 6 of the central piece, which, moreover, is conspicuous for its length, ends with a rhyme in *hi*. The third piece alternates rhymes in *th, īra* and *ūra*. The following verses have a rhyme in *aq*, an indication that the text has passed on to another unit. Thus the rhyme sometimes serves to confirm a division of the text but it is not, in itself, sufficient to establish this division. The division depends, above all, on the formal symmetric and semantic correspondences among members, segments and pieces. In suras with many verses that can be as long as a part (and even longer) the rhyme has a purely ornamental function. The following example, taken from the beginning of sura 5, illustrates this.

➢ Verse 5: 1 constitutes a part in itself. It is composed of three irregular pieces (1ab, c–f and g): the first piece has only one bimember segment, the second has two bimember segments (c–d and e–f), while the third contains only a unimember segment.

– [1a] O you who *believe*,
– [b] *be faithful* to **YOUR COMMITMENTS**.

= [c] Is made LAWFUL for you **the beast of flocks**
+ [d] except what will be recited to you.

= [e] Is NOT LAWFUL **game**
+ [f] when you are in a state of interdict.

[g] Truly, **GOD COMMANDS** what he wishes. (5: 1)

The extreme pieces (1ab and g) correspond. The believers are invited to be faithful to the 'engagements' they have contracted concerning what 'God commands' (g) of His own free will. The central piece (1c–f) specifies which animals can be licitly consumed during the pilgrimage and which cannot. The beasts of the flock are licit (c: with the exceptions announced in member d and enumerated in verse 3 of the sura) while game is not lawful (e).

It has been noted that parts with three pieces are often concentric in their composition. There is a correspondence between the extreme pieces and they encircle a centre that differs from them. They could also be configured according to the formula ABA'.

The sub-parts

It happens that in the more complex compositions one must subdivide a part into *sub-parts* that have the same status as parts and can be made up of one, two or three pieces.

➢ Verses 12–14 of sura 5 constitute a passage composed of two parallel parts of unequal length (12–13; 14). The first part concerns the Jews, the second the Christians. Both groups are reproached for their infidelity to the covenant and to their Scriptures. The differences in typography in the following table underline the correspondences between the two parts.

> [12a] And truly **GOD HAS RECEIVED THE COVENANT OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL**. [b] And we sent among them twelve leaders. [c] And God said, 'I am with you. [d] If you perform the prayer, and pay the alms, [e] and believe in my messengers and succor them, [f] and lend to God a good loan, [g] surely I will erase from you your misdeeds, [h] and surely I will let you enter gardens [i] underneath which flow streams. [j] And whoever among you misbelieves after this, [k] truly he has gone astray from the right way.'
>
> [13a] And then, because of their violation of their covenant, **we cursed them** [b] **and made their hearts hard**. [c] They change the words from their places [d] and *THEY HAVE FORGOTTEN PART OF WHAT THEY WERE REMINDED OF*. [e] And you will never cease to discern some betrayal by them, [f] except a few of them: [g] release them and forgive them. [h] Surely GOD loves the good-doers.
>
> [14a] And **THOSE WHO SAY, 'WE ARE CHRISTIANS', WE HAVE RECEIVED THEIR COVENANT**, [b] but *THEY HAVE FORGOTTEN PART OF WHAT THEY WERE REMINDED OF*. [c] So **we have raised among them hostility and hatred until the day of the resurrection**. [d] And GOD will inform them of what they have done. (5: 12–14)

The first part is composed of two sub-parts (12; 13) (see next page):

In the first member of each sub-part (12a and 13a) the term 'covenant' appears. This covenant is first received by God, then violated by the sons of Israel. The part is framed by the word 'God' (12 a, c and 13h). In the first sub-part, the sons of Israel are invited to believe in God's envoys and to help them (12e). In contrast, the second sub-part recognizes that they have betrayed the Prophet (13e).

In the first sub-part (12g), God promises to the Jews who remained faithful to their covenant that their past evil deeds will be pardoned. Like an echo, the Prophet is invited to pardon the 'few' Jews who have not turned traitors and have remained faithful to their covenant and to forget their past faults (13g).

– [12a] *And* truly ***GOD*** has received **THE COVENANT** of the sons of Israel.
– [b] *And* we sent among them twelve leaders.
– [c] *And* ***GOD*** said, 'I am with you.

= [d] If you perform the prayer, and pay the alms,
= [e] *and* ***believe in my messengers and succor them***,
= [f] *and* lend to God a good loan,

+ [g] surely **I will erase from you your misdeeds,**
+ [h] and surely I will let you enter gardens,
+ [i] underneath which flow streams.

– [j] And whoever among you misbelieves after this,
– [k] truly he has gone astray from the right way.'

– [13a] And then, because of their violation of their **COVENANT**, we cursed them
– [b] and made their hearts hard.
= [c] They change the words from their places
= [d] and they have forgotten part of what they were reminded of.

+ [e] And you will never cease to discern some ***betrayal*** by them,
+ [f] except a few of them.

– [g] **Release them and forgive them;**
– [h] Surely ***GOD*** loves the good-doers. (5: 12–13)

The passage

The levels we have studied until now – segments, pieces, parts and sub-parts – are considered inferior levels of composition because they are not autonomous. They are necessarily part of a larger textual ensemble from which they cannot be detached. The passage represents the first of the autonomous levels. It forms a whole both as regards its form and as regards its meaning in such a way that it can be read or recited independently of what precedes it or follows it (in Bible studies it would be called a 'pericope' e.g. in the Gospels, the relating of a healing, a parable).

According to the rules of Semitic rhetoric, discovered by analysing Biblical texts and articulated by Roland Meynet the passage (and the other upper levels: sequence, section), unlike the segment, the piece and the part, can have more than three units of those levels immediately inferior.

➢ Some short suras are no longer than a piece or a part. Yet since they form an independent whole, they are considered passages even though they might be only the length of a piece or a part. The *Fātiḥa* is a passage the length of a single part composed of three pieces. The extreme pieces, each made up of two bimember segments, represent two complementary forms of the prayer: the adoration of God according to some of his most beautiful names and attributes (1–4) and the prayer of petition for guidance along the right path and preservation from the path taken by those who have gone astray (6–7). The central piece (5) links the two pieces. The first member (a) refers to what preceded ('we worship'), while the second member (b) announces what follows ('we ask for help').[8] Thus we have a part that clearly forms a complete and independent whole. This is why it is considered to be a passage even though it is the length of a part.

– [1] In the name	of God,	the Mercy-giving,		the Merciful.
= [2] *Praise be*	*to God*,	Lord		of the worlds,
– [3]		the Mercy-giving,		the Merciful,
= [4]		Master		of the Day of Judgement.
	+ [5a]	You	*we worship*	
	+ [b] and	You	***we ask for help***.	
– [6] ***Guide us***	on the right path,			
– [7a] the path	of those you have blessed,			
= [b] not	those who incur anger,			
= [c] nor	those who go astray.			(1)

➢ Sura 98 ('The Proof') presents itself as a passage made up of two parallel parts, each containing two pieces.

[1] Those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book and the Polytheists were not set free [from their observances] until after the clear Proof came to them, [2] a Messenger from God who recites pure sheets, [3] in which are true Books.

---

[4] Those that have been given the Book did not become divided until there had come to them the Proof. [5] And they have merely been commanded to worship God, purifying religion for Him, as righteous believers, and *to keep up the prayer and to pay the prescribed alms*. **That** is *the true religion*.

[6] Verily, those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book and the Polytheists, shall be in the fire of the hell, abiding therein: they are the worst of creation.

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[7] Verily, those who believe and do good deeds are the best of creation. [8] Their reward with their Lord will be the gardens of Eden beneath which rivers flow, abiding therein for ever. *God shall be pleased with them and they shall be pleased with Him*. **That** *is for him who fears his Lord*. (98)

The two parts have the following correspondences: 'Those who disbelieve from among the people of the Book and the polytheists' is at the beginning of each part (1 and 6) and 'That' (*dhālika*) is at the end of the parts (end of 5 and 8).

But, in reality, the two final trimember segments are similar in their entirety and call attention to the parallelism of the two parts.

– [5a] and to keep up the prayer
– [b] and to pay the prescribed alms.
  + [c] **That** is the true religion.

– [8a] God shall be pleased with them
– [b] and they will be pleased with Him.
  + [c] **That** is for him who fears his Lord.

The first two members (5a–b and 8a–b) describe the behaviour and the religious situation of the justs in a binary rhythm of two propositions in parataxis. The whole passage is heavily rhythmic and assonant in Arabic. The three members (5c and 8c) not only have the same opening word ('That') but their meaning is also similar: the true religion (5c) is that practised by him who fears his Lord (8c).

➢ The following narrative passage (5: 20–26), composed of three parts (20–22, 23 and 24–26) arranged concentrically (A–B /X/ B'–A'), relates the rebellion of the sons of Israel against Moses when he commands them to enter the Holy Land (taken from the Book of Numbers, chapters 13 and 14).

A [20a] And when MOSES *SAID* to his *PEOPLE*: [b] '*PEOPLE*, recall **GOD'S BLESSING UPON YOU**, [c] when He appointed among you prophets, [d] and appointed you kings, [e] and gave to you what he has not given to any human being.
[21a] *PEOPLE*, **ENTER THE HOLY LAND** [b] which God has prescribed for you. [c] And do not turn back on your heels: [d] you would come back as LOSERS.'

B [22a] *THEY SAID*: 'MOSES, there is a people of giants in it! [b] And WE WILL NOT ENTER IT [c] until they have left; [d] but if they leave it, [e] then *WE WILL ENTER*.' (*DĀkhIlŪN*)

X [23a] Said two men of those who feared [God],
[b] – **GOD HAD GIVEN THEM HIS BLESSING** –:
[c] '**ENTER** upon them by the gate.
[d] When you have entered,
[e] surely you will be *VICTORS*.
[f] And have confidence in God, [g] if you are believers.'

B' [24a] THEY SAID: 'MOSES, WE WILL NEVER ENTER IT [b] as long as they are in it! [c] So go forth, you and your Lord, [d] and fight! [e] We *WILL BE SITTING* here.' (*qĀ'IDŪN*)

A' [25a] HE [Moses] SAID: 'Lord, I rule no one, [b] except myself and my brother. [c] Make a separation between us [d] and between the perverse *PEOPLE*.'
[26a] He said: 'It will be forbidden them for forty years, [b] **THEY WILL WANDER IN THE EARTH.** [c] Do not be tormented by the perverse *PEOPLE*.' (5: 20–26)

At the extremities (A and A') of the extreme parts (20–22 and 24–26) is a discourse of Moses – addressed first to his people (20–21) and then to God (25). The sons of Israel are called 'people' (20ab and 21a; 25d and 26c) – a designation not used in the rest of the passage. The syntagma 'Enter the Holy Land' (21a) is in opposition to 'they will wander on the earth' (26b).

The pieces B (22) and B' (24) begin with the same narrative phrase: 'They said, Moses. . .', followed by two discourses of protest by the people, which also begin in a similar manner: 'We will not enter it' (22b) and 'We will never enter it' (24a). Both discourses terminate with assonant present participles but their meanings are opposed: *DĀkhIlŪN*, 'we will enter (literally we are entering) (22e) and *qĀ'IDŪN*, 'we will be sitting here' (we are sitting here) (24e). These are the only rhymes in *ūn* found in this passage (the other pieces rhyme in *īn*).

The central part of the passage (23) is occupied by the discourses of two faithful men whom the commentators identify with Joshua and Caleb. The incise 'God

had given them His blessing' (23b) echoes 'recall God's blessing upon you' (20b) in the first part. The imperative 'Enter', the key word in the discourse of Moses (21a), is taken up again by the two men in the central segment of the ensemble of the passage (23c) and hence strongly valorized. To the 'losers' of 21d are opposed the 'victors' of 23e. To refuse to enter is to be a 'loser'; to enter is to be a 'victor'.

The intervention of the two men is framed by the two speeches of Moses and their rejection by the people. There is a contrast between the remembrance of God's blessings upon His people evoked at the beginning of the passage and God's chastisement of this same people at the end of the passage.

We have seen the possibility of unimember segments, pieces composed of a sole segment or of a sole member and the possibility of parts with only one piece. Likewise, there can be found passages composed of a single part, a single piece, even a single segment. The brief suras at the end of the Qur'an that form independent wholes should be considered as passages even though they might have just one part or one piece.

The sequence

The sequence represents the level of composition immediately superior to the passage. The text that we studied above (5: 20–26) is the third of three passages that make up the sequence 5: 12–26. The narration of the failed entry of the sons of Israel into the Holy Land takes on all its meaning as a metaphor of the refusal of the peoples of the Book, Jews and Christians, to enter into the Islamic covenant announced by the preaching of Muhammad.

The sequence is composed according to a concentric structure that could be schematized in the following way:

Jews and Christians are unfaithful to their covenant	12–14
The Prophet is sent to the People of the Book	15–19
The people of Moses refuse to enter the Promised Land	20–26

The extreme passages have a correspondence. The first (12–14) denounces the infidelity of the people of the Book (Jews and Christians) to the covenant that God had contracted with them, while the third (20–26) illustrates this infidelity by the story of the revolt of the Israelites against Moses when he orders them to enter the Holy Land. In the central passage (15–19), Muhammad is sent to the people of the Book to rectify their dogmatic errors.

Many affinities between the extreme passages give proof of the connection that unites them. Member 12b 'And We sent among them twelve leaders' has no relation to its immediate context – a problem that has puzzled both the ancient and modern commentators. But the passage was not placed there by mistake. Indeed it already announces the narrative found further on, in the third passage. The 'twelve leaders' are the 'twelve princes' or 'Israelite chiefs' mentioned in the Book of Numbers (Nb 13: 2–3)[9] sent by Moses to explore the Holy Land, which was to be conquered.

The fact that this member had been placed at the beginning of the sequence signifies the unity of this ensemble, which begins at verse 12 and ends with the conclusion of the narrative at verse 26.

We can find the following correspondences of terms and syntagmas between the two passages:

– The '*twelve* leaders' (12b) echoes the '*two* men' (23a) who were taken from among the twelve. In both cases, they are said to be taken 'from among' a group. The twelve are taken from 'among them [the sons of Israel]' (12b) and the two 'from among those who feared [God]' (23a).
– Immediately after this designation, the chosen are assured or reminded of God's protection: 'And God said: "I am with you"' (12c) / 'God had given them His blessing' (23b).
– To the divine promise: 'I will let you *enter* gardens' (12i) corresponds the order: '*Enter* the Holy Land' (21a) and the other uses of the verb to 'enter' in the final passage (22b.e; 23c.d) with its antithesis: 'we will never enter it' (24a) and 'they will wander on the earth' (26b).
– In the two passages, there is an appeal to faith under the form of a conditional proposition: 'If you. . .believe in My messengers' (12f) and 'if you are believers' (23g).
– 'If. . .you lend to God a good loan' (12g) echoes the order 'So go forth, you and your Lord and fight!' (24c). In the Qur'an the expression 'good loan' signifies, above all, the active engagement in the combat for God.

[12a] And truly God has received **THE COVENANT OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL**. [b] And **WE SENT AMONG THEM TWELVE LEADERS**. [c] And God said: ***'I AM WITH YOU.*** [d] **If you** perform the prayer, [e] and pay the alms, [f] and **believe** in ***MY MESSENGERS*** and succor them, [g] and LEND TO GOD A GOOD LOAN, [h] surely I will erase from you your misdeeds, [i] and surely, ***I will let you enter gardens***, [j] underneath which flow streams. [k] And whoever among you misbelieves after this, [l] truly **he has gone astray from the right way**.' [13a] And then, because of their violation of their covenant, we cursed them [b] and made their hearts hard. [c] **THEY CHANGE THE WORDS FROM THEIR PLACES** [d] and they have forgotten part of what they were reminded of. [e][14]

[15a] O **PEOPLE OF THE BOOK,** has come to you ***OUR MESSENGER***; [b] he clarifies to you much of what you have hidden from the Scriptures [c] and effaces many things. [d] Surely, came to you from God a light and a clear Scripture. [16a] Through this God guides those who observe his good pleasure on the way of peace, [b] and He brings them out of the darkness into the light with His permission, [c] and **He guides them onto a right path**.

[17a] Surely, they have misbelieved ***WHO SAID:*** **'GOD IS THE CHRIST, THE SON *OF MARY!*** [18a] And **HAVE SAID THE JEWS AND CHRISTIANS: 'WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD AND HIS BELOVED.'** [b] Say: 'So why does he chastise you for your sins? [c] No, you are human beings, of his creating.' [d ... g]

[19a] O **PEOPLE OF THE BOOK**, has come to you ***OUR MESSENGER***. [b] He makes clear to you, after a break of the ***MESSENGERS***, [c] so that you will not say: 'There came not to us a herald or a warner!' [d] However, there has come to you a herald and a warner! [e] And God is powerful over everything.

[20a] And when ***MOSES*** said to his people: [b] 'People, recall God's blessing upon you, [c] when **HE APPOINTED AMONG YOU PROPHETS,** [d] **AND APPOINTED YOU KINGS**, [e] and gave to you what He has not given to any human being. [21a] People, ***enter the Holy Land*** [b] which God has prescribed for you. [c] And do not turn back on your heels: [d] you would come back as losers.' [22a] They said: 'Moses, there is a people of giants in it! [b] And *we will not enter it* [c] until they have left; [d] but if they leave it, [e] then *we will enter*.' [23a] Said **TWO MEN OF THOSE WHO FEARED [GOD]**, [b] – GOD HAD GIVEN THEM HIS BLESSING –: [c] '*Enter upon them* by the gate. [d] When *you have entered*, [e] surely you will be victors. [f] And have confidence in God, [g] **if you are believers**.' [24a] They said: 'Moses, *we will never enter it* [b] as long as they are in it! [c] SO GO FORTH, YOU AND YOUR LORD, [d] AND FIGHT! [e] We will be sitting here.' [25a] He said: 'Lord, I rule no one, [b] except myself and my brother. [c] Make **A SEPARATION BETWEEN US** [d] **AND BETWEEN THE PERVERSE PEOPLE.** [26a] He said: 'It will be forbidden them for forty years, [b] *they will wander in the earth*. [c] Do not be tormented by the perverse people.'

(5: 12–26)

– 'The covenant of the sons of Israel' (12a) is an antithetical response to the syntagma 'a separation between us and between the perverse people' (25c–d). These two syntagmas fulfil the function of extreme terms of the sequence. The covenant, sealed at the beginning of the narrative, comes apart at the end.
– The disobedience of the people to the orders of the prophet Moses signifies a rupture of the covenant both with God and his prophet.

All these correspondences show the link between the first passage, where the covenant offered by God is violated by the Jews and Christians, and the third passage, which relates the revolt of Israel against Moses and their refusal to enter the Holy Land. This leads to the divine chastisement condemning them to wander in the desert for 40 years.

In its turn, the central passage is constructed in a concentric manner and has affinities with the first passage. The outer parts (15–16 and 19) are directly addressed to 'the people of the Book' to attest that a messenger (15a; 19a) has, indeed, come to them and even 'messengers' (19b). This last plural term corresponds to 'believe in my messengers' (12f) and to the verb 'we have sent' (12b); although the verb has a different root, its meaning is the same. As God had once sent twelve leaders to save the Israelites who were wandering in the desert, so also did He send his prophets and, ultimately, Muhammad, towards the Jews and Christians who were wandering in the 'darkness' of error (16b) to lead them in the 'right path' (16c) on 'the way of peace' (16a). These last two terms correspond to the 'right way' – from which the impious had deviated according to the first passage (12l). These metaphors are explained in the member: 'He makes explicit for you much of what you have hidden from the Scriptures', which corresponds to the accusations made to Jews and Christians (13c–d and 14b) of manipulating the Scriptures. In the central part of the central passage there is finally a clear expression of what is at stake: the doctrine of the divinity of Christ (17a) and also that of the divine filiation of Christians and Jews (18).

This sequence is an excellent example for showing the manner in which we must read a text constructed according to the laws of Semitic rhetoric. The key to understanding it is found in the centre. That should be the starting point for grasping the rest. The dogmatic affirmations of the divinity of Christ and the divine filiation of believers are rectified by the Prophet, the Envoy of God. It is by these affirmations that the Scriptures are falsified and it is because of this that the Covenant with the Jews and Christians has been broken – for Scriptures are the road map of the Covenant.

The sub-sequence

Certain complex sequences should be divided into sub-sequences.

➢ The first sequence of sura 5 (1–11) is made up of two sub-sequences arranged in a mirror construction. We will first consider the first sub-sequence (5: 1–4) in itself. It has three passages (1–2, 3 and 4). The first is composed of two parts, the second of three parts and the third of a single part.[10]

[1a] O you who believe, [b] be faithful to your commitments! [c] **IS MADE LAWFUL FOR YOU**, **THE BEAST OF FLOCKS**, [d] Except what will be recited to you. [e] Is not lawful **GAME** [f] when you are in a state of interdict. [g] Truly, God commands what he wishes.

[2a] O you who believe, do not declare lawful God's rites, nor the holy month [b] nor the offerings, nor the garlands, [c] nor those making their way to the Holy House [d] who seek favour and satisfaction from their Lord. [e] But when you are no longer in a sacred state, then **GO HUNTING**! [f] And do not let hatred of a people [g] who held you back from the Holy Mosque [h] to transgress. [i] Help one another to righteousness and fear [of God], [j] and do not help one another into sin and hostility. [k] *FEAR GOD!* [L] *TRULY, GOD IS TERRIBLE IN HIS PUNISHMENTS*.

[3a] **ARE FORBIDDEN TO YOU DEAD ANIMAL**, and blood, and pig-flesh, [b] as is whatever another name but God's has called down upon, [c] and the suffocated or knocked-out animal or an animal killed by a fall or by goring, [d] and whatever the wild animal has devoured, [e] – unless you have drained its blood – [f] and whatever has had its throat cut on the steles, [g] and drawing lots by arrows, [h] that is an abomination!

[i] Today those who do disbelieve despair of your religion. [j] Do not fear them; [k] ***FEAR[-ME]***. [l] Today I have completed your religion for you [m] and I have perfected my blessing upon you, [n] and I have approved submission for you as [your] religion.

[o] And [towards] one who is in distress during a famine, [p] without [however] inclining purposely to, [q] God is Forgiving, Merciful.

[4a] They question you about what has been made lawful for them. [b] Say: '**HAVE BEEN MADE LAWFUL FOR YOU THE GOOD THINGS**. [c] And if you teach some **CARNIVORES**, training them like dogs, [d] you teach them what God has taught you: [e] eat what **THEY HAVE CAUGHT** for you [f] and call down God's name upon it. [g] *FEAR GOD !* [h] *TRULY, GOD IS SWIFT TO TAKE ACCOUNT* !' (5: 1–4)

The extreme passages (1–2; 4) correspond to one another. They begin with a common declaration of legality; 'Have been made lawful for you the beast of flocks' (1c) and 'have been made lawful for you the good things' (4b). The central passage (3) is in contrast, with an antithetical beginning: 'Are forbidden to you. . .' (3a).

There are other indications of a correspondence between the extreme passages:

– The 'beast of the flock' (1c) has its counterpart in the 'carnivores' trained for the chase (4c).
– In both passages there are problems of hunting: in the first passage, hunting is forbidden to a man who is in a sacred state (1f, 2e). In the final passage, hunting of licit prey, carried out by trained carnivores, is lawful (4c).
– Finally, the extreme passages conclude with the same recommendation: 'Fear God' (2k, 4g) followed by a divine threat in two parallel and assonant formulas: 'Truly, God is terrible in His punishments' (2l) and 'Truly, God is swift to take account' (4b):

Inna llāha shadīdu *l-ʿiqābi* (2l)
Inna llāha sarīʿu *l-ḥisābi* (4h)

The central passage was announced by the central member of the first passage (1d): in that member there is an allusion to illicit meats, which will be indicated elsewhere. The 'elsewhere' is the central passage that numerates them (3a–f).

In the outer passages, general considerations frame particular precepts. The central passage is all to the contrary: particular rules provide the framework for the solemn declaration on the completion of Islam. The central situation of this declaration gives meaning to the entire sub-sequence, which is given over to precepts on the licit and illicit. These precepts are the expression of 'the completion of religion', a religion named *Islām*, the 'submission' whose adepts are committed to observe the prescriptions commanded by God.

Here is the same sub-sequence combined with the second sub-sequence of the sequence 5: 1–11.

[1a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE, [b] be faithful to your commitments! [c] Is made lawful for you, the beast of flocks, [d] except what will be recited to you. [e] Is not lawful game [f] when you are in a state of interdict. [g] Truly, God commands what he wishes.

[2a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE, do not profane God's rites, nor the holy month [b] nor the offerings, nor the garlands, [c] nor those making their way to the Holy House [d] who seek favour and satisfaction from their Lord. [e] But when you are no longer in a sacred state, then go hunting! [f] ***AND DO NOT LET HATRED OF A PEOPLE*** [g] ***who held you back from the Holy Mosque*** [h] incite you ***TO TRANSGRESS***. [i] ***Help one another to righteousness*** and **fear** [of God], [j] and do not help one another into sin and hostility. [k] **Fear God**! [l] Truly, **God** is terrible in his punishments.

[3a] Are forbidden to you dead animal, and blood, and pig-flesh, [b...h] TODAY, those who do disbelieve despair of your religion. [j] Do not fear them ; [k] fear[-Me]. [l] TODAY I have completed your religion for you [m] **and I have perfected my blessings upon you**, [n] and I have approved submission for you as [your] religion. [o] And [towards] one who is in distress during a famine, [p] without [however] inclining purposely to, [q] **GOD IS FORGIVING, MERCIFUL.**

[4a] They question you about what has been made lawful for them. [b] Say: '**Have been made lawful for you the good things.** [c] And if you teach some carnivores, training them like dogs, [d] you teach them what God has taught you: [e] ***eat what they have caught for you*** [f] and call down God's name upon it. [g] Fear God! [h] Truly, God is swift to take account !'

[5a] TODAY **have been made lawful for you the good things**, [b] and ***the food of those to whom the Scriptures have been given is lawful for you*** [c] and your food is lawful for them, [d] and the virtuous-women among the believers [e] and the virtuous-women among those to whom the Scriptures has been given before you, [f...k].

[6a] O you who believe, when you prepare for prayer, [b] wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows [c] and wipe your heads and your feet up to the ankles. [d...k] **GOD DOES NOT WISH TO MAKE ANY IMPEDIMENT FOR YOU** [m] but he wishes to purify you [n] **and perfect his blessing for you.** [o] Perhaps you will be thankful !

[7a] And **REMEMBER God**'s blessing upon you [b] and his **COVENANT** by which he bound you, [c] when you said: 'We have heard and we have obeyed'. [d] And **fear God**, [e] for God knows what is in the breasts.
[8a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE**, be upright before **God**, [b] witnesses of equity. [c] ***AND DO NOT LET HATRED OF A PEOPLE INCITE YOU*** [d] ***NOT TO BE JUST***. [e] ***Be just*** ! [f] This is closest to **fear**[-of God]. [g] And **fear God**, [h] for God is informed of what you do. [9a] God has promised to those who believe and carry out good works, [b] theirs will be forgiveness and immense reward; [10a] and to those who are unbelievers and call our revelations lies: [b] those are companions of hell.
[11a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE,** remember **God**'s blessing upon you, [b] when ***a people planned to raise their hands against you***, [c] and he turned their hands from you. [d] And **fear God**, [e] let put their trust in **God** all **BELIEVERS**.

In the extreme passages of the sequence – and only there – can be found recommendations concerning the attitude Muslims should have towards the pagan enemies they found themselves up against (2f–h and 8c–d).

The second and the penultimate passages present the interdicts and obligations as the achievement of religion, 'a blessing given by God' to the believers (3m and 6n) not to molest them but in order to purify them.

The central passages (4 and 5) give the basic principle for the prescriptions concerning the licit and the illicit: good things are licit (4b and 5a). This supposes, implicitly, that illicit things are not good. Some particular things, whose origin could cast doubts on their lawfulness, are specified as licit.

The section

The level of composition superior to the sequence is the *section* (with the possibility of an intermediate level, the *sub-section*, as will be seen in the example below). Given its dimensions, it is impossible to transcribe the integral text of a section in these pages. For that, we will refer the reader who is interested to other studies.[11] Here we will simply make a schematic presentation of the two sections (5: 1–71 and 72–120) that make up sura 5 ('The Table').

➢ The first section has five sequences spread out over three sub-sections. The two first subsections each have two sequences. The third has just one.

First sub-section: Entering the covenant	
Sequence 1: **The completion of the covenant in Islam**	1–11
Sequence 2: **Jews and Christians refuse to enter the covenant**	12–26

Second sub-section: On justice in the Muslim city	
Sequence 3: **Crimes and punishments**	27–40
Sequence 4: **The Prophet's jurisdiction over Jews and Christians**	41–50

Third sub-section:	
Sequence 5: **The status of Muslims and the People of the Book**	51–71

The two sequences that compose the first sub-section are complementary and revolve around the theme of the covenant. The first sequence summons Muslims to remain faithful to the Covenant that links them with God. The second sequence reprimands the Jews and Christians for their infidelity to their covenant, then summons them to enter into the Islamic covenant.

The second sub-section is juridical: it defines the exercise of justice in the new Muslim City. The first sequence regulates punishments for certain crimes; the second makes Muhammad the supreme judge in the City.

The third sub-section deals with the religious and political status of the different groups within the Muslim City (Muslims, Jews and Christians) and their mutual relations.

Thus the whole section is concerned with the organization of the new Muslim society: it is founded on respect for the covenant with God, it recognizes the Prophet as the supreme judiciary authority. But since the Muslim community is not alone in the world, it has to define its relationship with the two other great religious communities also present – the Jews and Christians.

➢ The second section (5: 72–120) has three sequences:

Sequence 1: **Call to Christians to convert**	72–86
Sequence 2: **A legislative code for the community of believers**	87–108
Sequence 3: **Jesus' and his apostles' profession of monotheistic faith**	109–120

The three sequences are arranged in a concentric figure. The extreme sequences (1 and 3) are addressed to the peoples of the Book, and more specifically to the Christians, in a series of arguments intended to convince them to leave behind their dogmatic errors and embrace the pure monotheism of Islam. The central sequence (2) interrupts this development by addressing a series of legal dispositions to the believers (Muslims).

The Book

Normally the level of composition superior to the section is the Book itself. For our case here, that would mean the whole Qur'an. However, research has not advanced sufficiently for us to know how the ensemble of the Qur'an is constructed.

Below the level of the Book, the long suras at the beginning of the Qur'an also go beyond the dimensions of a single section. For the time being we will consider them as 'booklets' included within the whole Book.

➢ Opposite are the two sections of sura 5, organized so as to form the entire sura.

The six sub-sections of the sura are divided into two sections in a mirror construction. Since they are of the same textual level, with the same function as the sub-sections of the first section, the three sequences of the second section will be considered here as three sub-sections, each having a single sequence.

The extreme sub-sections (1–26; 109–120) are concerned with the entry into the covenant: first by the believers who have entered it (sequence A1); then the Jews and Christians who refuse to enter it (sequence A2); and, finally, the Christians who have entered into the covenant or who are strongly invited to do so (Sequence B3).

The middle sub-sections (27–50 and 87–108) are both legislative in character and concern the rules and juridical organization of the Muslim community for both the believers within the community as well as the people of the Scriptures who live among then.

The contiguous sub-sections (51–71 and 72–86) focus on the rapports of the people of the Scripture with Islam: their special status in their relationships with Muslims and the appeal addressed to them to convert to Islam.

First section (A)

First sub-section: Entering the covenant

Sequence A1: **The completion of the covenant in Islam** 1–11
Sequence A2: **Jews and Christians refuse to enter the covenant** 12–26

Second sub-section: On justice in the Muslim city

Sequence A3: **Crimes and punishments** 27–40
Sequence A4: **The Prophet's jurisdiction over Jews and Christians** 41–50

Third sub-section:

Sequence A5: **Status of Muslims and People of the Book** 51–71

Second section (B)

First sub-section:

Sequence B1: **Call to Christians to convert** 72–86

Second sub-section:

Sequence B2: **A legislative code for the community of believers** 87–108

Third sub-section:

Sequence B3: **Jesus' and his apostles' profession of monotheistic faith** 109–120

4

The Figures of Composition

The Western and Arab rhetorical traditions, each in their own way, have assimilated the Greek heritage and, over the course of time, have shown an increasing interest in the figures of rhetoric, in classifications that have become more and more refined. This has resulted in the expansion of that part of classical rhetoric which is concerned with the ornamentation of discourse. This is not our preoccupation here.

This chapter will only study a very limited number of figures – three, in all – whose purpose is not to embellish the discourse but to construct and compose it by delimiting each textual unit and defining its relationship with other units. This is why they will be called *figures of composition*. The three figures of composition of Semitic rhetoric (parallel, mirror and concentric) are all forms of *symmetries*.

There are two distinct categories of symmetries: *total* and *partial*. In total symmetries, all the elements of a portion of text (or most of them) correspond to another portion of the text. In partial symmetries, only one (or a few) terms have their correspondent in another textual unit and thus serve as a compositional indicator. Partial symmetries are, to be sure, more difficult to pinpoint and less immediately evident than total symmetries even though they are the most frequent.

A. Total symmetries

There are three types of total symmetries: parallel composition, mirror composition and concentric composition.

1 Parallel composition

There is parallel composition when the elements of two or three textual units correspond in the same order: AB/A'B'; ABC/A'B'C'; ABC/A'B'C'/A"B"C".

In the first chapter, we saw that it was the English Biblical scholar, Robert Lowth (d. 1787), who was the first to clearly establish three forms of parallelism among the members through his studies of the psalter and the prophetic books of the Bible in his now classical Biblical study: *On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1753). He distinguishes synonymic parallelism, antithetic parallelism and synthetic or complementary parallelism. This classification of parallelisms according to their semantic function can be considered universal. It is applicable to Biblical texts as well as to the Qur'an.

The segment

The synonymic parallel segment

There are many segments composed of two or three synonymic members. When we use the word 'synonym' in rhetorical analysis, it should be understood in the broad sense of 'terms or members with a similar meaning'.

➢ The initial particles of the two members of the following segment are identical. The two subject nouns belong to the same semantic field (the stars). The two verbs are synonyms:

– When	the sun	shall be darkened,
– and when	the stars	shall be dimmed (81: 1–2)

➢ In the discourse of Jacob to his son Joseph, the two members of segment 12: 6 have the same verb and the particle 'on'. The final terms designate all the members of the patriarchal family.

: ***He*** (= God) ***will perfect*** His blessing *on* you and *on* the House of **Jacob**,
: as ***He perfected*** it earlier *on* your forefathers, **Abraham** and **Isaac**.

➢ In this same sura 12, the story ends with the beautiful prayer of Joseph (12: 101) made up of three synonymic parallel bimembers:

– My Lord! Indeed	*You have given me*	some authority
– and	*You have taught me*	some interpretation of events.
= *Creator*	of the heavens	and *the earth*,
= You are my *protector*	in *this world*	and in the Hereafter.

+ *Call me*	a submissive
+ and *join me*	with the righteous. (12: 101)

➢ Parallelism can take the form of a trimember as in the following examples:

– and when	the heaven	shall be stripped away,
– and when	the hell	shall be heated up,
– and when	the Paradise	shall be brought near (81: 11–13)

= Today	I have completed	for you	your religion
= and	I have perfected	for you	my blessing,
= and	I have approved	for you	submission as religion. (5: 3)

The antithetic parallel segment

➢ Antithetic parallelisms are often based on eschatology or morality:

+ Verily,	*the righteous*	[will be]	in bliss,
– and verily,	*the wicked*	[will be]	in a Fire. (82: 13–14)

+ *Help one another*	to righteousness	and fear [of God]
– and *do not help one another*	into sin	and hostility. (5: 2)

➢ But the action of God also has its contrary aspects:

– Thus God	*leaves to stray*	whoever He will
+ and	*guides*	whoever He will. (74: 31)

➢ In sura 12, Jacob gives antithetic instructions to his son:

– O my sons,	enter not	by one gate,
+ but	enter	by different gates. (12: 67)

➢ A same action can be expressed positively, then negatively as in the case of Joseph hiding his identity from his brothers:

+ But Joseph	*concealed* it	in himself
– and	*did not let* it *appear*	to them. (12: 77)

➢ Those who admire the beauty of Joseph describe him first negatively, then positively:

– This *is not* a human being.
+ This *is nothing but* a noble angel. (12: 31)

The synthetic or complementary parallel segment

This type of segment includes parallelisms other than those that are synonymous or antithetic; one member completes the meaning of a first member through such relations as explanation, consequence, causality, reason, chronology, etc.

➢ In the following two bimembers, the second member explains the meaning of the first by echoing the final term.

= For *the covenant of Quraysh,*
= *their covenant* for their winter and summer journeys (106: 1–2)

+ Guide-us *on the right path*,
+ *the path* of those you have blessed (1: 6–7)

➢ The second member often expresses the *consequence* of the first, as in the following segment:

– By no means! To Our signs he has become obstinate:
– I will drive him up the crag of a mountain. (74: 16–17)

➢ In the following segment, the interdiction of Paradise is the *consequence* of associating anything with God:

– Truly, whoever associates [anything] with *God*,
– *God* will forbid him the Paradise. (5: 72)

➢ Sometimes the second member gives *the reason* for the first:

= And fear *God*,
= *for God* knows of what you do. (5: 7)

➢ In the following two examples, the second member introduces an exception to the general affirmation of the first member:

+ Every soul	for its deeds	is held in pledge
+ *except*	the people	of the right hand. (74: 38–39)
– Is made lawful	for you,	the beast of flocks,
– *except*	what will be recited	to you. (5: 1)

➢ The second member of the following segment gives the condition of the rule decreed in the first:

= Is not lawful	game
= when you are	in a state of interdict [during the Pilgrimage]. (5: 1)

➢ A member of a story can introduce a discourse as in the following segment. There is also a notable opposition between the extreme terms of the segment: gardens (of Paradise) fire (of Hell).

+ In *gardens*	they will question each other	about sinners:
+ 'What led you	into *Fire*?' (74: 40–42)	

➢ The attitude of incredulous audiences to the preaching of Muhammad in sura 74 is described in a trimember that touches on the three moments of curiosity, scepticism and refusal in three members, which follow and complete one another.

– Then	he looked.	
– Then	he frowned	and scowled.
– Then	he turned back	and was haughty. (74: 21–23)

➢ Similarly, the murder of Cain is described in sura 5 by a trimember where the three moments of intention, execution and consequence follow each other:

= Then his soul	led him	to *kill*	his brother
= and he *killed* him			
= and he became	one of the losers. (5: 30)		

➢ In the following trimember (of form ABB'), the last two members relate the consequence of the first; the decision of the non-believer leads to his condemnation to death:

– Surely,	he thought	and *plotted*!
=	*May he be killed*	how *he plotted*!
= Again,	*may he be killed*	how *he plotted*! (74: 18–20)

➢ In the case of the trimember cited below, also of the form ABB', it is the first member that expresses the consequence of the next two members. The chastisement of the robber is a punishment for his theft and a chastisement from God:

– And of male and female thieves,	cut off their hands,
= *in retribution*	of what they have earned,
= *as punishment*	on behalf of God. (5: 38)

The piece

The synonymic pieces

The segments that compose a piece can be synonymic and thus seal the internal coherence of a piece.

➢ The first two segments of sura 1, the *Fātiḥa*[1]; members 1 and 3 are partially identical; members two and four each contain a title of divine sovereignty ('Lord' / 'Sovereign') followed by a complement ('of the worlds' / 'of the Day of Judgement').

– [1] In the name	of God,	THE MERCY-GIVING,	THE MERCIFUL.	
+ [2] Praise	to God,	*LORD*	*of the worlds*,	
– [3]		THE MERCY-GIVING,	THE MERCIFUL,	
+ [4]		*MASTER*	*of the Day of Judgement*.	(1: 1–4)

➢ In the following piece, taken from sura 90 ('The City'), the first members of each of the segments (4 and 6) are expressions of the distress of mankind – first in a discourse of God (4), then in a discourse by man (6) – and conclude with assonant terms. The second and third members (5a–b and 7a–b) are synonymous questions. There is thus a global synonymy between the two segments.

– [4] Verily We have created man		in trouble *[kaBAD]*.	
+ [5a] DOES HE THINK			
+ [b] that will have power over	*HIM*	*NO ONE ?*	
– [6] He says: 'I have wasted wealth		untold *[luBAD]*.'	
+ [7a] DOES HE THINK			
+ [b] that has seen	*HIM*	*NO ONE ?*	(90: 4–7)

➢ In the first piece of sura 91 ('The Sun'), the first members of each segment correspond ('by the sun' / 'by the day') as do the second members ('by the moon' / 'by the night'). The four members end with a possessive or personal pronoun affixed with the same form – *hā*.

–[1] *By the sun*	and the brightness of	it!	
+ [2] ***By the moon***	when it follows	it!	
–[3] *By the day*	when it reveals the splendor of	it!	
+[4] ***By the night***	when it veils	it!	(91: 1–4)

➢ In the following piece (form AA'B), which is delimited in its extreme members (6 and 14) by the term 'your Lord', the first two trimember segments are synonymic and have a close parallelism. The third segment differs.

– [6] Have you not seen how	YOUR LORD	dealt with the 'ĀD,	
= [7]	*IRAM*	*possessor of pillars*,	
+[8] whose like has never been made		among the cities?	
– [9] And the *THAMŪD*	who cut out rocks in the valley,		
= [10] and	*PHARAOH,*	*possessor of stakes,*	
+ [11] who transgressed		among the cities?	
[12] And they multiplied iniquity therein,			
[13] and did pour on them,	YOUR LORD,	the scourge of a chastisement.	
[14] Surely,	YOUR LORD	is watching.	(89: 6–14)

The antithetic pieces

➢ Sura 12 (v. 26–27) describes opposed situations in two antithetic bimembers:

+ [26a] If his shirt	is rent	from front,	
+ [b] she speaks the truth	and he is a liar.		
= [27a] And if his shirt	is rent	from behind,	
= [b] she tells a lie	and he is truthful.		(12: 26–27)

➢ The piece 5: 82 opposes two antithetic bimembers:

– You will find	the people	most fiercely hostile	to those who believe
= *[to be] the Jews and those who associate [with God].*			
– And you will find	the people	closest in friendship	to those who believe
= *[to be] those who say: 'We are Christians'.*			(5: 82)

The complementary pieces

➢ In the next piece, taken from verse 3 of sura 5, the first trimember segment (3i–k) describes the attitude of people when they are confronted with the religion of God; first the incredulous, then the believers. The second trimember segment (l–n), describes the action of God. The initial members, i and l, both begin with 'today' and end with the term 'your religion'. The final members, k and n, exalt two fundamental attitudes of the new religion: the fear of God and submission, *islām*. There is a cause-to-effect relation between the second trimember and the first. If 'today' the incredulous despair and if the believers should fear God, it is because 'today' God has perfected religion:

– [3i] TODAY	those who disbelieve	despair of	*YOUR RELIGION*.	
– [j]	Do not fear.	them.		
– [k]	*Fear*	[-Me]		
= [l] TODAY	I have completed	for you	*YOUR RELIGION*	
= [m] and	I have perfected	upon you	my blessing,	
= [n] and	I have approved	for you	*submission* as religion.	(5: 3)

➢ Joseph interprets the king's dream in a piece with three trimembers that are parallel among themselves, each one describing an episode of the dream, with members that correspond and occupy the same position. The members AA'A" indicate the length of the years of infertility and famine. The members BB'B" represent the good and bad consequences for the people, while the members CC'C" recount how people reacted to the situation. Yet the first two segments are in closer rapport with one another due to their antithesis and the repetition of 'seven' and 'except a little'. The narrative syntagma 'he says' is situated as a 'common factor' since it commands the whole piece and not just number 47a. We will see this phenomenon again in the chapter on re-writing (Chapter 6).

[47a] He said:		

A – 'You shall sow	for SEVEN YEARS	as usual,
B = [b] and what you reap,	leave it	in its ear,
C + [c] *except a little*	of which you shall eat.	
A' – [48a] Then will come,	SEVEN hard [years]	
B' = [b] which will devour	what you shall have laid by in advance for them,	
C' + [c] *except a little*	which you shall have guarded.	
A" – [49a] Then will come after that	A YEAR	
B" = [b] *in which*	the people will be succored,	
C" + [c] and *in which*	they shall press.'	(12: 47–49)

➢ The two trimember segments at the beginning of sura 96 ('The Clot') correspond member for member. The first segment invites people to invoke God as Creator; the second as Revealer.[2] It is rare in the Qur'an that the members of parallel segments correspond to each other in such an orderly way.

– [1] INVOKE	the name	of YOUR LORD	
= **who**	*created*,		
+ [2] *created*	MAN	from a clot.	
– [3] INVOKE,	for YOUR LORD [is]	the Most Generous	
= [4] **who**	*taught*	by the pen,	
+ [5] *taught*	MAN	what he did not know.	(96: 1–5)

The part

➢ The pieces that compose part 89: 15–16 correspond member for member, except the introductory member 15a:

:: [15a] But as for man,
: [b] when his Lord tries him
. . [c] giving him honor and blessings,

+ [d] then he says:
= [e] 'My Lord has honored me!'

: [16a] But when He tries him
. . [b] restricting his provision,

+ [c] then he says:
= [d] 'My Lord has humiliated me!' (89: 15–16)

➢ In the following example (27: 67–68), the first segments of the two pieces have the word 'enter'. The first members of each of the second segments (67c) and 68b) are almost identical. Each of the third segments plays on a verb ('trust' and 'know'), which is repeated three times in three different forms.

– [67a] And he said: 'O my sons! ENTER NOT by one gate,
– [b] but ENTER by different gates.

= [c] *And I cannot avail you aught against God*.
= [d] The judgement rests with God alone.

+ [e] I *trust* in Him
+ [f] and upon Him let those who *trust* set their *trust*.'

- -

– [68a] When they had ENTERED in the way their father commanded them,

= [b] *it did not avail them aught against God;*
= [c] [it was] only a need in the soul of Jacob, which he satisfied,

+ [d] and surely he was possessed by *knowledge* because We have given him *knowledge*,
+ [e] but most people do not *know*. (12: 67–68)

The parallelism among the pieces that make up a part will rarely be as regular as in the above examples. More often it is a question of a parallelism of the ensemble, underlined by certain terms or members that are identical, synonymic or antithetical.

➢ The first two pieces (20 and 21) of the part below, taken from sura 5, are a speech given to the people by Moses. The third piece (22) is the response of the people to Moses. The three pieces have the term 'people' in their first member (20a; 21a; 22a; plus 20b), which refers to the people of Moses in his speech and to the 'people of giants' in the response by the sons of Israel (22a). The verb 'enter' links the last two pieces (21a; 22b and e), which are also characterized by other verbs of movement: 'do not turn back on your heels' (21c), 'you would come back' (21d), 'they have left/leave it' (22c and d).

[20a] And when ***MOSES said*** to his PEOPLE:
[b] 'PEOPLE, recall God's blessing upon you,
[c] when he appointed among you prophets,
[d] and appointed you kings,
[e] and gave you what He has not given to any human being.

- -

[21a] PEOPLE, **enter** the Holy Land
[b] which God has prescribed for you.
[c] And do not turn back on your heels:
[d] you would come back as losers.'

[22a] They ***said***: '***MOSES***, there is a PEOPLE of giants in it!
[b] And **we will not enter** it
[c] until they have left it;
[d] but if they leave it,
[e] then **we will enter**.' (5: 20–22)

➢ A part can also be composed of two parallel sub-parts as in the following example (5: 17–18) where the first pieces (17a–d and 18a–d) of each of the two sub-parts correspond member to member. In the first, the people of the Book proclaim their faith in the divine filiation of Christ (17a–b). In the second, they proclaim their own divine filiation (18a–b). The next segment contains a question introduced by the imperative 'Say' (17c, 18c) and followed by the affirmation of the humanity of Jesus and Mary (17d) and of the people of the Book (18d).

:: [17a] Surely, they have misbelieved who SAID:
+ [b] 'GOD, IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF MARY!'
= [c] SAY: '*Who possesses anything against God,*
– [d] if He wishes to make perish the Christ, the son of Mary, and his mother, and all those who are an earth?'

= [e] And God's is the possession of the heavens and the earth and what is between them.
= [f] He creates what **HE WANTS**,
= [g] and God is over everything powerful.

:: [18a] And HAVE SAID the Jews and Christians:
+ [b] 'WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD AND HIS BELOVED.'
= [c] SAY: '*So why does He chastise you for your sins?*
– [d] No, you are human beings, of His creating.'

+ [e] He forgives those **HE WILL**,
+ [f] and He chastises those **HE WILL**.

– [g] And God's is the possession of the heavens and the earth and what is between them.
– [h] And to Him is what is to come. (5: 17–18)

The second pieces (17e–g and 18e–h) focus attention on the All-powerful Divine Will ('what He wants') and repeat a same phrase (17c, 18g).

The passage

Passages composed of two parallel parts seem to be rare in the Qur'an. Most of the time they are composed of three parts arranged in a concentric manner. We will see examples later on.

➢ In the preceding chapter we already gave sura 98 ('The Proof') as an example of a passage with two parts (see p. 48).

> [1] Those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book and the Polytheists were not set free [from their observances] until after the clear Proof came to them, [2] a Messenger from God who recites pure sheets, [3] in which are true Books.
>
> ---
>
> [4] Those that have been given the Book did not become divided until there had come to them the Proof. [5] And they have merely been commanded to worship God, purifying religion for Him, as righteous believers, and to keep up the prayer and to pay the prescribed alms. **That is the true religion**.

> [6] Verily, those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book and the Polytheists, shall be in the fire of the Hell, abiding therein: they are the worst of creation.
>
> ---
>
> [7] Verily, those who believe and do good deeds are the best of creation. [8] Their reward with their Lord will be the gardens of Eden beneath which rivers flow, abiding therein for ever. God shall be pleased with them and they shall be pleased with Him. **That is for him who fears his Lord**. (98)

Both of the two parts have two pieces. They begin with an identical member: 'Those among the people of the Book and the polytheists who do not believe' (1 and 6), and end with a member introduced by 'That' (*dhālika*) (at the end of 5 and 8) followed by two similar expressions: 'the true religion' / 'he who fears his Lord'. The true religion is that of the person who fears his Lord.

The sequence

➢ The sequence 5: 72–86 contains two parallel passages: the first (72–77) denounces the dogmatic errors of Christians; the second (78–86) denounces the culpable conduct of the Jews and notes the disposition of certain Christians to convert to Islam. The two passages are constructed in the same manner: in three parts, each of the extreme parts being organized in three pieces. The central parts (74 and 82a–d) have just one piece.

First passage (5: 72–77)	Second passage (5: 78–86)
72a Surely **they have disbelieved** who say: b 'Truly, God is **THE MESSIAH, SON OF MARY**.' c Though the Messiah had said: d 'O ***CHILDREN OF ISRAEL***, worship God, my Lord and your Lord.'	78a They are cursed, who **have been unbelievers** among ***THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL***, b by the tongue of David and the tongue of **JESUS SON OF MARY**. c because they disobeyed d and they transgressed. [79]
e Truly, whoever associates [anything] with God, f God will forbid him the Paradise. g His refuge will be the Fire. h For the unjust there will be no helpers.	80a You see many of them ally themselves to **those who were unbelievers**. b So bad was what they prepared for themselves, c that God got angry with them: d they will remain immortal in their **PUNISHMENT!**
73a Surely, they have disbelieved who say: b 'Truly, God is the third of three.' c There is no god but God the one! d If they do not desist from what they say, e there will surely affect those of them **who have disbelieved**, a painful **PUNISHMENT.**	81a If they believed in God and in the Prophet b and in what has come down upon him, c they would not take them as allies. d But many among them are corrupt.
74a Will they not come back to God, b and will they not ask his forgiveness, c for God is forgiving, compassionate?	82a You will find the most fiercely hostile to those who believe b [to be] the Jews and those who associate [with God]. c And you will find the people closest in friendship to those who believe d [to be] those who say: 'We are Christian.'
75a The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a **messenger**; b and have gone before him the **messengers**. c And his mother was a righteous. d Both ate food. [e...f]	e This is because there are priest and monks among them f and they are not puffed up with pride. 83a When they hear what came down upon the **Messenger**, b you see their eyes fill up with tears, c because of the truth which they recognize.
76a ***Say***: 'Will you adore, besides God, b what has neither disadvantage nor advantage for you, c for God is the hearer and the knower?'	d ***They say***: 'Our Lord, we believe! e Register us among the witnesses![84] 84a Why should we not believe in God b
77a Say: 'O People of the Book, b do not exaggerate your faith, far from the truth! [c...e]	85a God will reward them for what they have said by gardens [b...86b]

The two passages begin with terms that are identical or synonymic: 'they have disbelieved' (72a; 78a): 'the Messiah, son of Mary' (72b) and 'Jesus, son of Mary' (78b); 'sons of Israel' (72d; 78a).

Three central pieces are in an interrogative form (a form that does not appear elsewhere in the two passages): 74, 76 and 84. The first question (74) is formulated by God; the second (76) is dictated by God to his Envoy ('Say. . .'); while the third (84) is addressed by the Christians to themselves.

At the end of the first part of the first passage, God promises a 'punishment' to 'those who have disbelieved' (73a). At the centre of the first part of the second passage, the same 'punishment' is promised to the Jews who allied themselves with 'those who were unbelievers' (80a and d).

At the beginning of the last parts, Jesus and Muhammad are both called 'messenger' (75a; 83d; 84), the same as the other 'messengers' who preceded them (75b).

The central pieces of these parts (76 and 83d–84) are introduced by the verb 'to say'. In 76a, God commands His Messenger to summon Christians to the true faith: 'Say!'. In 83, it is the Christians who 'say' by declaring their faith.

As the contemporary Pakistani exegete Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī has pointed out, many suras (if not all) come together in pairs.[3] Certain pairs of short suras can constitute a sequence with two passages such as suras 91 and 92, 95 and 96, 97 and 98.[4]

➢ The clearest case is that of sura 93 and 94 – which some commentators think originally formed a sole sura (see opposite).
The pieces 93: 6–8 and 94: 1–4 are introduced by the interrogative negation *a lam* followed by a verb of apocopated imperfect. At the centre of the members 93: 6, 7 and 8 and 94: 1, 2 and 4 one finds the affixed personal pronoun *-ka* (you). In the two suras, God reminds the prophet of the favours that He bestowed upon him in his distress.

Sura 93	Sura 94
[1] By the morning light [2] and by the night when it covers with darkness! [3] Your Lord has not forsaken you nor does He hate you. [4] And surely what comes after will be better for you than that which has gone before! [5] And soon will your Lord give you so that you shall be well pleased!	[1] ***(a lam)*** Have We not expanded for YOU your breast [2] and removed from YOU your burden [3] which pressed heavily upon your back, [4] and raised for YOU your reputation ?
[6] ***(a lam)*** Did He not find YOU an orphan, and give you shelter? [7] And did He not find YOU wandering, and give you guidance? [8] And did He not find YOU in need, and enriched you?	[5] So, verily, with every difficulty there is relief; [6] verily with every difficulty there is relief.
[9] *(fa)* So, as for the orphan, *(fa)* be not overbearing [10] *(wa)* and as for the beggar, *(fa)* scold not [11] *(wa)* and as for the blessings of **YOUR LORD, *(fa)* talk about**.	[7] *(fa)* So, when you are freed, *(fa)* rise up, [8] *(wa)* and to **YOUR LORD**, ***(fa)* set your desire**.

The final pieces, 93: 9–11 and 94: 7–8, both begin with the particle *fa*. The following members are introduced by the conjuction *wa*. All of the members end with an imperative preceded by the conjuction *fa*. The centre of the last members is 'your Lord'.

The two suras represent a communication of God to His Prophet, inviting him to commit himself to Him as a response to God's commitment to His Prophet.

Suras 99–104 form a sequence of two sub-sequences. Each sub-sequence is composed of three passages (or suras): 99–101; 102–104.[5] It is the same for the series of suras 85–88 (two sub-sequences 85–86 and 87–88 each one of two passages or suras)[6] and 81–84 (two sub-sequences 81–82 and 83–84).[7]

The section

In the actual state of research, we have been unable to find a section made up of parallel sequences but only of sub-sections.

➢ In sura 5, composed of two large sections, each with three sub-sections (as we will see in the next paragraph on mirror composition), the second sub-section has two parallel sequences:

Second sub-section: On justice in the Muslim city	
Sequence A3: **Crimes and punishments**	27–40
Sequence A4: **The Prophet's jurisdiction over Jews and Christians**	41–50

This whole sub-section is concerned with questions of judicial organization within the community. The first sequence deals with punishments for different crimes, the second deals with the jurisdiction of the Prophet over the peoples of the Book.

Some of the terms highlighted in bold print in the following table appear at the end of the first sequence and the beginning of the second as a link (or median terms) between the two sequences: 'Messenger' (33a; 41a), 'a huge punishment' (33g; 41n): 'He / God wishes' (40c, d; 41j, l).

The centres of the two sequences (32 and 45) are moral or juridical pronouncements concerning crimes against life. In both cases the pronouncement is preceded by 'We prescribed for the children of Israel / them'.

The considerations regarding putting to death (assassination or capital execution) are immediately followed, in both cases, by an exaltation of the opposite attitude. Verse 32e–f ('And whoever makes to live, it is as though he had made the whole of humanity live') is an advance justification of verse 45d–e ('And whoever give alms of this, this will be an expiation for him'). To renounce the law of retaliation brings expiation of sins because it is like giving life to all mankind!

The two centres finish with synonyms. Those who will not receive and practise the principles that have been announced here are 'exploiters' (32h) or 'evildoers' (45g).

The two pronouncements represent a universal principle, the first one in the moral order – the prohibition of murder and the duty to promote life; the second one in the juridical order – the proportion between crime and punishment – but also moral in so far as it is an invitation to go beyond strict justice by the superior ethic of renouncing the law of retaliation.

Sequence A3

27a And recite to them the story of Adam's two sons, truthfully: b...; when they offered a sacrifice, c it was accepted from one of them, d but it was not accepted from the other. e He said: 'Surely I will kill you.' f He said: 'Truly, God only accepts from the pious. [28–29]
30a Then his soul led him to kill his brother, b and he killed him, c and he became one of the losers. [31]

32a Therefore **WE PRESCRIBED FOR THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL** b that WHOEVER KILLS A SOUL, c NOT FOR [AN OTHER] SOUL, OR FOR CORRUPTION ON THE EARTH, d IT IS AS THOUGH HE HAD KILLED THE WHOLE OF HUMANITY. e ***AND WHOEVER MAKES TO LIVE***, f ***IT IS AS THOUGH HE HAD MADE THE WHOLE OF HUMANITY LIVE***.
g Surely, to them came our messengers with proofs, h then truly, many of them, after this, on earth were **exploiters**.

33a The retribution for those who fight God and **HIS MESSENGER** b and who strive to sow corruption on earth c will be that they will be killed or they will be crucified, d or that will be cut off their opposing hands and feet, e or that they will be banished from the earth: f this will be for them a disgrace in the present, g and for them, in the hereafter, ***a huge punishment***, 34a except for those who repent before you have caught them, b and know that God is forgiving, compassionate. [35–39]
40a Do you not know b that to God belongs the possession of the heavens and the earth? c He punishes whom **he wishes** d and he forgives whom **he wishes**. e And God is over all things powerful.

Sequence A4

41a O **MESSENGER**, do not be distressed by those who rush towards impiety, [b...j] And he whom **God wishes** to put to the test, k you will not be able to do nything for him against God. l Those who **God does not wish** to purify their ahearts, m to them in the here-and-now is dishonor, n and to them, in the hereafter is ***a huge punishment***. [42–44]

45a And **WE HAVE PRESCRIBED FOR THEM THEREIN:** b 'LIFE FOR LIFE, EYE FOR EYE, NOSE FOR NOSE, EAR FOR EAR, TOOTH FOR TOOTH, c AND FOR WOUNDS RETALIATION.'
d ***AND WHOEVER WOULD GIVE ALMS OF THIS,*** e ***THIS WILL BE AN EXPIATION FOR HIM.***
f And whoever does not judge according to what God has sent down, g those are **the evildoers.**

46a And we have made Jesus son of Mary walk in their footsteps, b confirming what was before him of the Torah. c And we have given him the Gospel, d in which there is guidance and light, e confirming what was before it of the Torah, f as guidance and exhortation for the pious.
47a And let the people of the Gospel b judge according to what God has sent down therein. c And whoever does not judge according to what God has sent down, d those are the perverse.
48a And We have sent down to you the Scripture with truth, b confirming what of the Scripture was before it, c and preserving it. d So judge between them according to what God has sent down e and do not follow their passions, f far from what has come to you of the truth. [48g–50]

2 Mirror composition

In the mirror composition, four elements or more (always in even numbers) are set up in two inverse symmetric sides: AB/B'A'; ABC/C'B'A'. Here one can recognize a development of the chiasm, a well-known figure of classical rhetoric. We will reserve the term 'chiasm' to refer to short constructions with four terms ('And we will not enter there / until they have left there; but if they leave there, / then, certainly, we will enter' 5: 22) and use the term 'mirror composition' for the more complex constructions.

The segment

➢ The two members of the following segment are set up in a mirror.

– [4–5] Do they not think, THESE [PEOPLE],
: that they will be raised up
.. for a mighty ***day***,
.. [6] ***a day***
: when will rise
– THE PEOPLE to the Lord of the worlds? (83: 4–6)

The piece

➢ In the following piece, a first unimember is followed by two antithetical segments arranged in a chiasm.

[22] They said: 'Moses, there are a people of giants in it!

– **We will not enter** it
= until *they have left it;*

= but if *they leave it,*
– then **we will enter**.' (5: 22)

➢ The final piece of the *Fātiḥa* has two bimember antithetic segments whose four members are set up in a mirror construction. The extreme terms have opposite meanings: 'guide' / 'go astray' and so do the median terms: 'you have blessed' / 'who incur anger'. These two members BB' end in Arabic with the same pronominal syntagma 'to / against them', *'alay-him*.

A [6] GUIDE-us on the right path,
B [7] the path of those *YOU HAVE BLESSED* [*'ALAY-HIM*],

B' not [those who] *INCUR ANGER* [*'ALAY-HIM*],
A' nor [those] WHO GO ASTRAY. (1: 6–7)

➢ In sura 81 ('The Folding up'), the following two segments, whose meaning is complementary, are arranged in a mirror construction.

– [27] This is **nothing less than** a Reminder for ALL PEOPLE,
= [28] for whoever ***wishes*** among ***you*** to go straight.

= [29a] And ***you*** will not so ***wish***
– [b] **except** as God wills, the Lord of ALL PEOPLE. (81: 27–29)

➢ In sura 5, the two trimember segments of the following piece are set up as a mirror.

– [52a] You see those WHOSE HEARTS is sickness,
= [b] press around them.
+ [c] They say: 'We dread being affected by ***a turnaround-in-fate***!'

+ [d] Perhaps God will bring ***success***
= [e] or an order [which comes] from him,
– [f] so that they will regret what they have concealed WITHIN THEIR SOULS. (5: 52)

The part

➢ The discourse of Joseph to his father Jacob in verse 100 of sura 12 constitutes a part composed of two pieces, each having two segments, and arranged as a mirror.

– [a] He said: 'O my father, this is **THE INTERPRETATION** of my vision of old.
= [b] MY LORD has made it come true.

+ [c] And HE **has been kind to me**,
:: [d] when *He brought me out from the prison*.

:: [e] And *He has brought you from the desert,*
+ [f] after SATAN had sown **discord between me and my brothers**.

= [i] Verily, MY LORD is subtle in achieving what He will.
– [j] Verily, He is **THE KNOWING, THE WISE**.' (12: 100)

To the interpretations of the visions by Joseph – a sign of superior wisdom (a) – correspond the knowledge and wisdom of God (j). Members b and i have a similar meaning and both have 'my Lord'. Members c and f are antithetic: they oppose the bounty of God towards Joseph (c) to the dispute between Joseph and his brothers provoked by Satan (f). Members d and e both evoke a 'brought out from'.

The passage

➢ Sura 101 is a passage composed of two parts, each one made up of two pieces. The extreme pieces (1–3; 10–11) have a unimember segment that only has one or two isolated terms (1; 11), followed by a trimember segment (2–3) or a bimember segment (10a–b), which are rhetorical questions. The pieces that are close contain two bimember segments that are strongly parallel (4–5; 6–8). The two parts are complementary. The first part evokes the cosmic upheaval on the Day of Judgement ('the striking', 'people like scattered moths', 'mountains like carded wool'). The second part focuses on the judgement itself ('the balances') with the reward of the just ('pleasant life') and the punishment of the impious ('the pit, a blazing fire').

A –	[1] THE STRIKING!		
B	= [2] *WHAT IS*	the striking?	
	= [3a] *AND WHAT WILL LET YOU KNOW*		
	= [b] *WHAT IS*	the striking?	
C	+ [4a] The day on which	will be	men
	+ [b] as moths		scattered
	* [5a] and	will be	the mountains
	* [b] as wool		carded

C'	* [6] Then as for him	whose balances	are heavy
	* [7] he [will be]	in a pleasant	life
	+ [8] and as for him	whose balances	are light
	+ [9] his mother [will be]		a pit.
B'	= [10a] *AND WHAT WILL LET YOU KNOW*		
	= [b] *WHAT IT IS*?		
A'–	[11] A BLAZING FIRE!		(101)

The sequence

A [1a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE**, **BE FAITHFUL** to your **COMMITMENTS**! [b] Is made lawful for you the beast of the flocks, [c] except what will be recited to you. [d] Is not lawful game/hunting [e] when you are in sacred state.[. . .]

[2a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE**, do not declare lawful God's rites, nor the holy month, [b] nor the offerings, nor the garlands, [c] nor those making their way to the Holy House [d] [and who] seek favour and satisfaction from their Lord. [e] But when you are no longer in a sacred state, then go hunting! [f] ***AND DO NOT LET HATRED OF A PEOPLE*** [g] ***who held you back from the Holy Mosque*** [h] ***TO TRANSGRESS***. [i] ***And help one another to righteousness*** and **fear** [of God], [j] and do not help one another into sin and hostility. [k] **Fear God**! [l] Truly, **God** is terrible in His punishments.

B [3a] Are forbidden to you dead animals, and blood, and pig-flesh, [b] and whatever another name but God's has been called down upon [. . .].

[i] TODAY, those who do disbelieve despair of your religion. [j] Do not fear them; [k] fear [Me]. [l] TODAY I have completed for you your religion [m] **and I have perfected upon you my blessing**, [n] and I have approved for you submission as [your] religion. [o] And [towards] one who is in distress during a famine, [p] without [however] inclining purposely to sin, [q] **GOD IS FORGIVING, MERCIFUL**.

C [4a] They question you about what has been made lawful for them. [b] Say: '**Have been made lawful for you the good things.** [c] And if you teach some carnivores, training them like dogs, [d] you teach them what God has taught you: [e] ***eat what they have caught for you*** [f] and call down God's name upon it. [g] Fear God! [h] Truly, God is swift to take account!'

C' [5a] TODAY **have been made lawful for you the good things**, [b] and ***the food of those to whom the Scriptures have been given is lawful for you*** [c] and your food is lawful for them [. . .].

B' [6a] O you who believe, when you prepare for prayer, [b] wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows [c] and wipe your heads and your feet up to the ankles. [. . .]

[l] **GOD DOES NOT WISH TO MAKE ANY IMPEDIMENT FOR YOU** [m] but he wishes to purify you [n] and **perfect his blessing for you.** [o] Perhaps you will be thankful !

A' [7a] And **REMEMBER God**'s blessing upon you [b] and his **COVENANT** by which He bound you, [c] when you said: 'We have heard and we have obeyed'. [d] And **fear God**, [e] for God knows what is in the breasts.

[8a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE**, be upright before **God**, [b] witnesses of equity. [c] ***AND DO NOT LET HATRED OF ANY PEOPLE INCLINE YOU*** [d] ***NOT TO BE JUST.*** [e] ***Be just***! [f] This is closest to **fear**[of God]. [g] And **fear God**, [h] for God is informed of what you do. [. . .]

[11a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE,** remember **God**'s blessing upon you, [b] when ***A PEOPLE planned to raise their hands against you***, [c] and He turned their hands from you. [d] And **fear God**, [e] and let all **BELIEVERS** put their trust in **God**. (5: 1–11)

The first eleven verses of sura 5 form a sequence of six passages arranged in a mirror figure, grouped in two sub-sequences of three passages:

A (1–2) – B (3) – C (4) / C' (5) – B' (6) – A' (7–11)

In the extreme passages of the sequence (A–A') are recommendations concerning the attitude that Muslims should have towards the pagan enemies with whom they had clashed in the past (2f–h; 8c–d).

The passages B–B' put forth the interdicts and obligations as the perfecting of religion, 'a blessing given by God' to the believers (3m; 6n) not to trouble them but rather to purify them.

Passages C–C' enounce the principle according to which good things are licit (4b; 5a). This supposes, implicitly, that illicit things are not good. Certain particular realities, whose permissiveness could be doubtful, are declared licit.

The section

➢ Sura 12 ('Joseph') constitutes a section composed of twelve sequences arranged, in a mirror composition, into two sub-sections of six sequences in the following manner.

A Prologue	12: 1–3
B Vision of Joseph	4–7
C Problem of Joseph with his brothers: the trickery of the brothers against Joseph	8–18
D Relative promotion of Joseph	19–22
E Attempted seduction of Joseph by a woman	23–34
F Joseph in prison, interpreter of the visions of two prisoners and prophet of monotheism	35–42
F' Joseph in prison, interprets the vision of the king	43–49
E' Denouement of the seduction by the woman: Joseph rehabilitated	50–53
D' Definitive promotion of Joseph	54–57
C' Problems of Joseph with his brothers: the trickery of Joseph against his brothers	58–98
B' Accomplishment of the vision of Joseph	99–101
A' Epilogue	102–111

The sura

The level superior to the section is that of the whole book. We are still far from being able to say how the ensemble of the Qur'an is constructed. But the long sura 5 already presents itself as a small book, which can justify a presentiment that the ensemble of the book has a symmetrical composition. It is made up of two large sections, each containing three sub-sections arranged in a mirror composition.[8]

3 Concentric composition

This composition is extremely frequent in the Qur'an – to the point of apparently being the most general rule at the level of the parts, passages and sequences. It can be found each time that a central element separates (and, at the same time, reunites) the parallel or mirror elements that frame it. The most elaborated form of concentric composition is the following: ABC/x/C'B'A'. But other more simple forms can be found: A/x/A'; AB/x/A'B'; or AB/x/B'A' etc.

The segment

The trimember segment of form ABA' illustrates most clearly an elementary concentric composition.

➢ Synonyms figure in the extreme members of the following trimember: 'morning star' / 'piercing star'. The central member is a rhetorical question (a frequent stereotype in the Qur'an).

– [1] By the sky	and the *morning star*,
= [2] – And what will let you know	what is the morning star? –
– [3] [It is]	*the piercing star*. (86: 1–3)

➢ In the following trimember, the term 'the night of Decree' appears in each of its members. The extreme members (1 and 3) are statements; the central member repeats the same rhetorical question as in the preceding example.

– [1] We sent it down on *the night of Decree*.
= [2] – And what will let you know what is *the night of Decree*? –
– [3] *The night of Decree* is better than a thousand months!
(97: 1–3)

➢ The extreme members of the next segment are antithetic: they oppose the power of God over human destiny to the weakness of man on the Day of Judgement. The central member is a temporal expansion of the first.

– [8] Surely, to bring him [men] back He [God] has *power*,
= [9] the day secrets will be tested,
– [10] there will be for him *neither strength nor helper*. (86: 8–10)

➢ In the segment below, the extreme members are oaths; the central member is a circumstantial incident.

– [1] Nay! I swear by this city
= [2] – and you, you are without protection in this city –
– [3] by parent and offspring! (90: 1–3)

The piece

➢ The short sura 106 ('The Quraysh') is composed of three segments. The extreme segments are synthetic parallel bimembers. In each segment, the second member completes the meaning of the first. Both describe the well-being enjoyed by the Quraysh. Their seasonal caravans assure them of bread and security. In the centre appears a unimember (3), which summons them to the adoration of the Lord of the Ka'ba, the 'House' of God, to give thanks for the benefits they have received.

– [1] For *the covenant*	of Quraysh,		
– [2] their *covenant*	for their winter and summer	journeys,	
+ [3] let them adore	the Lord	of this House,	
= [4a] who feeds them	*against famine*		
= [b] and secures them	*from fear*.		(106)

➢ The extreme members of the piece below correspond. They present the two protagonists: 'man' / 'God'. Both are qualified with a superlative: '*the best stature*' / '*the wisest* of judges'. They express the absolute power of the All-Powerful God over creation and the judgement–condemnation of man. The central segment (which might be an interpolation) introduces an exception to the divine chastisement.

= [4] Surely, We created	MAN	of *THE BEST* stature.		
= [5] Then We reduced him		to the lowest of the low.		
+ [6a] Save those who believe		and do good works,		
+ [b] and theirs is a reward		unfailing.		
– [7] Then what can contradict you,		after this,	as to the Judgement?	
– [8] Is not	GOD	*THE WISEST* of judges?		(95: 4–8)

➢ The extreme segments of the following piece are antithetic. The first states what the Qur'an is: 'the speech of a noble messenger'. The second states what it is not: 'the speech of a cursed devil'. The central segment (22–24) concerns the Prophet. This trimember is, in its turn, organized concentrically ABA'. The extreme members (22 and 24) affirm that the Prophet is not a 'possessed' / 'grudging about the mystery'. The central member (23), well emphasized, is the affirmation of the vision of the noble Messenger (the angel Gabriel according to the tradition), which the Prophet saw 'on a clear horizon'.

– [19] Verily, **this is**	THE SPEECH	OF A NOBLE MESSENGER,	
– [20] endued with power,	beside the Lord of the Throne established,		
– [21] obeyed up there,	trustworthy.		
= [22] And your companion	***is not***	*one possessed*:	
+ [23] he saw him	on the clear horizon;		
= [24] and ***he is not***	about the unseen	*grudging*.	
– [25] And **this is not**	THE SPEECH	OF A CURSED DEVIL!	(81: 19–25)

The part and the sub-part

➢ The extreme pieces (72a–d and 73) and the part here below of sura 5 deal with two theological positions that are attributed to Christians and that are contrary to the Qur'anic conception of the Unicity of God: the Incarnation (first piece) and the Trinity (third piece). The central piece (72e–h) threatens those who profess these erroneous conceptions with the chastisement of Hell. The threat is repeated at the end of the part (73d–e).

– [72a] SURELY, THEY HAVE DISBELIEVED	WHO SAY:
– [b] 'TRULY, GOD	is ***THE MESSIAH, SON OF MARY.'***
= [c] Though the Messiah had said:	
= [d] 'O children of Israel,	WORSHIP GOD, MY LORD AND YOUR LORD.'
+ [e] Truly, whoever	***ASSOCIATES [ANYTHING] WITH GOD,***
+ [f] God will forbid him	the Paradise.
– [g] His refuge [will be]	the Fire;
– [h] For the unjust	[there will be] no helpers.
– [73a] SURELY, THEY HAVE DISBELIEVED	WHO SAY:
– [b] 'TRULY, GOD [is]	***THE THIRD OF THREE.'***
= [c]	THERE IS NO GOD BUT GOD THE ONE!
+ [d] If they do not desist from what they say,	
+ [e] there will surely affect those of them who have disbelieved a painful punishment.	
	(5: 72–73)

The extreme pieces have the same initial terms (72a–b; 73a–b). These are immediately followed by two formulas attributed to Christians and questioned by the Qur'an: '(God is) the Messiah, son of Mary' (72b) and '(God is) the third of three' (73b). Two formulas opposed to these and in conformity with the faith of the Qur'an are given in response. One is at the end of the first piece: 'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord' (72d, a formula attributed to the Messiah) and the other is at the centre of the third piece: 'There is no god but God the one' (73c).

The Qur'an's interpretation of Christian faith is found at the beginning of the centre: 'whoever gives associates to God' (72e). This formula is in correspondence with the beginning of the extreme pieces (72a–b and 73a–b).

➢ Verses 5–21 of sura 92 ('The Night') make up a part formed by two sub-parts (5–18; 19–21), the first of which contains three pieces arranged concentrically ABC/ x /C'B'A'.

= [5] So as for him	***WHO GIVES***	and ***SHOWS PIETY,***
= [6] and counts true		the best,
– [7] We will facilitate for him		the ease.
+ [8] And as for him		**who is miserly and self-satisfied**
+ [9] and DENIES		the best,
– [10] We will facilitate for him		the difficulty.
[11a] And will not profit him		his wealth,
[b] when he falls (*TArADDĀ*).		
:: [12] Surely,	Ours	is the direction;
:: [13] and surely,	Ours	is the Last and the First [life].
[14a] I warn you		of a fire
[b] [that] blazes (*TAlAẒẒĀ*).		
+ [15] None shall reach it		but **the most unfortunate**
+ [16] who DENIES		and turns away.
= [17] And avoid it shall		***THE MOST PIOUS***
= [18]	**WHO GIVES**	his wealth to purify himself.

– [19] And no one has with him any boon for which he should be rewarded,
– [20] except the seeking of the face of his Lord, the Most High.
– [21] And, assuredly, he will be satisfied. (92: 5–21)

In the synonymic extremes of the first sub-part (5–7 and 17–18) there is a correspondence between 'he who gives' / 'who gives'; 'shows piety' / 'the most pious'. In the median synonymous segments (8–10 and 15–16), there is a correspondence of meaning between 'he who is miserly and self-satisfied' / 'the most unfortunate' and the repetition of 'denies'. Segments 11 and 14 both announce, with assonance at their end (*TAraDDĀ / TAIAẒẒĀ*), the punishment of Hell for the incredulous rich and the misers. These two pieces of severe warning addressed to the incredulous rich frame a centre that proclaims the absolute mastery of God over revelation ('direction' or 'guidance') and over the destiny of humanity, both in this life and the hereafter.

The passage

➢ Passage 72–77 of sura 5 consists of three parts concentrically arranged.

[72a] Surely, they have disbelieved who say: [b] 'Truly, God is THE MESSIAH, SON OF MARY.'
[c] Though the Messiah had said: [d] 'O children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord.'

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[e] Truly, ***WHOEVER ASSOCIATES [ANYTHING] WITH*** *GOD*,
[f] *GOD* will forbid him the Paradise.
[g] His refuge will be the Fire. [h] For the unjust there will be no helpers.

[73a] Surely, they have disbelieved who say: [b] 'Truly, God is the third of three.'
[c] **THERE IS NO GOD BUT GOD THE ONE!**

[d] If they do not desist from what they say, [e] there will surely affect those of them who have disbelieved, a painful punishment.

[74a] Will they not come back to GOD,
[b] and will they not ask his forgiveness,
for GOD **is forgiving, compassionate?**

[75a] THE MESSIAH, SON OF MARY was only a messenger; [b] and have gone before him the messengers. [c] And his mother was a righteous one.
[d] **BOTH ATE FOOD.**
[e] See how we show them the signs. [f] Then see how they turn away!

[76a] Say: '***WILL YOU ADORE, BESIDES*** *GOD*,
[b] what has neither disadvantage nor advantage for you,
[c] **for** *GOD* **is the hearer and the knower** ?'

[77a] Say: 'O People of the Book, [b] do not exaggerate your faith, far from the truth!
[c] And do not follow the passions of those who went astray before.
[d] They led astray many, [e] and they have gone astray from the uprightness of the path.'
(5: 72–77)

Each of the extreme parts (72–73; 75–77) has three pieces arranged concentrically. The extreme pieces (72a–d; 77) have only two segments. Pieces 73 and 75 have three segments, one of which is a central unimember.

The extreme parts begin with the same terms 'the Messiah, son of Mary' (72b; 75a). The first piece denounces the errors of Christians concerning the divinity (which cannot be assimilated to the Messiah and is not the third of three). In contrast, the Muslim creed is proclaimed (73c). The final part (75–77) affirms the Muslim faith concerning the Messiah and his mother: they are only humans.

The central pieces of the extreme parts (72e–h; 76) have correspondences among themselves but also with the central part (74):

- A double repetition of the name of 'God' (72e, f; 74a, c; 76a, c).
- 'Whoever associates with God' (72e) is in a symmetrical position to the syntagma of similar meaning 'Will you adore besides God?' (76a) in the first member of the central piece of the extreme parts.
- The central pieces 74 and 76 are in the form of a question – a trait characteristic of centres. These are two appeals to conversion.
- The same pieces 74 and 76 end with a theological clausula of the same form:

for *GOD*	is forgiving,	compassionate	(74c)
for *GOD*	is the hearer	and the knower	(76c)

- The first centre (72e–h) is a threat of the punishment of Hell for the Christians who do not convert. The two following centres (74 and 76) are appeals for their conversion with, in the final clausula of 76c, a new warning: 'God is He who hears and knows', i.e. the Judge who can condemn.

The central unimember segment of the last piece of the first part (73c: 'there is no god but God the one') has its correspondence in the unimember central segment of the first piece of the last part (75d: 'Both ate food'). The humanity of the Messiah and his mother are set in opposition to the divinity of the Unique God.

The sequence

➢ The sequence 5: 109–120, which closes sura 5 in a solemn tone, is constructed in a concentric structure.

It is composed of three passages, each containing three parts, which are also arranged in a concentric structure. The table above shows this only partially. It is, in fact, impossible to manifest all the correspondences at different levels in a single table without confusing everything.[9]

The ensemble of the sequence is framed by 'The Day' in the first members of the extreme parts (109a; 119a). The whole sequence is thus placed in the light of the Day of the Resurrection and Judgement.

The three passages have, as initial terms, (112a; or almost initial in 116b and 110a) the address: 'O Jesus, son of Mary'. This name is used in only one other place: in the central part of the central passage, at the heart of the sequence (114a) where Jesus directs his prayer to God in the name of the apostles. In the extreme passages, this address is preceded by '(And) when God says' (110a; 116a) and in the central passage it is introduced by 'When the apostles said' (112a). In the extreme passages, God addresses Himself to Jesus, son of Mary on the Day of Resurrection while, in the central passage, the apostles begin by addressing Jesus here below.

The three passages begin with a question. In the extreme passages, it is God who, in the Day of Judgement in the world to come, interrogates first the ensemble of his prophets/envoys (109b), then Jesus, son of Mary (116b–c) about their mission. In the central passage, situated in the here and now, it is the apostles who interrogate Jesus.

The central parts of the extreme passages are complementary. In the first part, (110) God reminds Jesus of the miraculous events of his life. In the last part (116d–117), Jesus repeats his prophetic preaching to God. In the last part of the extreme passages, 'submitted / Muslims' (*muslimūn* 111d) is synonymous with 'truthful' (*al-ṣādiqīn*, 119a): these are the believers, the saved. This has a negative echo in the last part of the central passage with 'whoever misbelieves after this' (115b); these are the evil-doers, the damned.

At the beginning of the first passage (109d) and in the middle of the last (116k) there is the same clausula affirming that God alone knows all things: 'Verily, you are the great-knower of the secret things'.

109a **ON THE DAY** when **GOD** will bring the messengers together, b and he **WILL SAY**: 'What was answered to you?', c they will say: 'We have no knowledge ;
d ***TRULY, YOU ARE THE GREAT KNOWER OF THE SECRET THINGS***.'

110a **WHEN GOD SAYS**: '**O JESUS, SON OF MARY**, b recall my goodness to you and to your mother. c When I helped you with the Holy Spirit, d you talked to people, in the cradle and as an adult. e And when I taught you Scripture and Wisdom, f and the Torah and the Gospel.' [. . .]

111a And when I inspired the apostles: b 'Believe in me and in my Messenger', c They said: 'We believe. d And bear witness that we are **SUBMITTED / MUSLIMS!'**

112a When the apostles said: '**O JESUS, SON OF MARY**, b can your Lord c send down to us a table from heaven?' [d...13d]

114a **JESUS, SON OF MARY** said: 'O MY GOD, OUR LORD,
b send down to us a table, from heaven.
c It will be a feast for us,
d for the first among us and the last among us,
e and a sign which comes from you.
f And provide us,
g for You are the best of providers.'

115a God said: 'Surely, I will send it down to you. b But whoever misbelieves after this among you, c I will surely punish him with a punishment d which I have not punished anyone else with.'

116a And **WHEN GOD SAID**: b '**O JESUS, SON OF MARY**, was it you who said to people: c 'Take me and my mother to be two divinities in addition to God'?'

d He said: 'Glory to you! e It is not to me to say f what is not true for me. g If I had said that h you would have known it. i You know what is in me, j but I do not know what is in you. k ***TRULY, YOU ARE THE GREAT KNOWER OF SECRET THINGS.***
117a I only said to them b what you ordered me:
c 'Worship **GOD, MY LORD AND YOUR LORD**.'
d And I was for them a witness, e as long as I was among them. f And when you recalled me [to you], g you watched over them, h for you are a witness to all things.
118a If you punish them, they are your servants. b If you forgive them, you are the Powerful, the Wise One.'
119a **GOD SAID**: 'This is **THE DAY** when **THE TRUTHFUL** will take advantage of their truthfulness. [b...120]
(5: 109–120)

The central passage is given great importance, especially its central part, which is at the heart of the whole sequence. Its refined concentric construction is proof of its significance.

At the centre of the whole sequence and at the centre of the final passage, Jesus addresses God or speaks of God in formulas that are similar: 'O my God, our Lord' (114a) and 'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord' (117c).

The central member of the sequence evokes the whole extent of history: 'For the first among us and for the last among us' (114d). This is to be taken in the context of 'the Day' of the Resurrection at the beginning of the extreme parts (109a and 119a). The Day of Resurrection is also that of the judgement of the whole human history.

The section

➢ The two sections that make up sura 5 each have three sub-sections, arranged concentrically. Here is the scheme of the second section (already presented above, p. 61, but according to another perspective). The extreme sub-sections are addressed to Christians to convince them of their dogmatic errors concerning Jesus. The first sub-section is a vibrant appeal to Christians to convert while the last puts forth the Islamic monotheistic profession of faith by the apostles and Jesus. The central sub-section, which is very different, is a legislative code addressed to the 'believers' (Muslims). It corresponds to the centre of the first section, which also deals with legal questions, while the extreme sub-sections of this same first section are concerned with the rapports of the believers and the peoples of the Book (Jews and Christians) with the Islamic covenant.

First sub-section: **Appeal for the conversion of Christians**	5: 72–86

Second sub-section: **Legislative code for the community of believers**	87–108

Third sub-section: **Profession of monotheistic faith of the apostles and Jesus**	109–120

B. Partial symmetries

In total symmetries, each or many elements of a unit – or all elements taken together across the board – correspond to those of another unit. Partial symmetries are those that exist between terms or syntagmas, which occupy a specific position in the textual system: initial terms, final terms, extreme terms, central terms, median terms. They can be found at all levels of the organization of the text: segments, pieces, parts etc. Since they serve as indicators of composition, it will be very important to locate them. Such a task is, in fact, the essential process of rhetorical analysis.

Initial terms

Initial terms are 'identical or similar terms marking the start of symmetric textual units'.[10]

➢ Identical terms can mark the beginning of parallel members of a segment as in the following trimember.

– *Have you seen* him who forbids a servant [of God] when he prays?
– *Have you seen* if he were in the guidance or urging to piety?
– *Have you seen* whether he denies [the truth] and turns away?
(96: 9–13)

➢ Or in this bimember taken from the dialogue between the Egyptians and the brothers of Joseph in sura 12 (74–75):

– *They said*: 'What will be *the penalty of this*, if you are liars?'
– *They said*: '*The penalty of this* will be the person in whose bag [the cup] is found.'

➢ They can mark the beginning of parallel segments of a piece as does the particle 'but' (*bal*) in the following piece.

– [19] But,	those who disbelieve [persist]	in denial,	
– [20] and God	from behind them	is surrounding.	
= [21] But,	this is a glorious Qur'an,		
= [22] in a Tablet	preserved.		(85: 19–22)

➢ The parallelism of the three segments of the following piece is indicated by the initial particle 'when' (*idhā*):

+ WHEN God says: – recall my goodness	'O Jesus, to you	son of Mary, and to your mother.	
+ WHEN I helped you – you talked to people,	with the Holy Spirit, in the cradle	and as an adult.	
+ And WHEN I taught you – and	Scripture the Torah	and Wisdom, and the Gospel.'	(5: 110)

➢ Of course, the parallelism of the initial terms can be an antithesis as is the case in the first two segments of the following piece ('is made lawful/unlawful'). This antithesis is, moreover, followed here by a repetition ('for you') and by subjects whose meaning is complementary ('game of the sea/land'). Thus, in this case, the members a and c in their entirety constitute the initial terms of these two segments.

– [a] IS MADE LAWFUL	*FOR YOU*	**THE GAME OF THE SEA** and its food,	
– [b] to be used by you and the caravans.			
= [c] But IS MADE UNLAWFUL	*FOR YOU*	**THE GAME OF THE LAND**,	
= [d] when you are in a sacred state.			
+ [e] Fear God			
+ [f] to whom you will be gathered.			(5: 96)

➢ In the next piece, the verb to ask ('ask questions about') is successively given in a negative form, then in a positive (conditional) form in the first members (a and d) of the first two segments. The two members of the last segment begin with 'God'.

– [a] O you who believe,	DO NOT ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT	things	
– [b] which, if they were revealed to you,			
– [c] would damage you.			
= [d] And	IF YOU ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT	them,	
= [e] while the Qur'an is being sent down,			
= [f] they will be revealed to you.			
+ [g] *GOD* forgives about them:			
+ [h] *GOD* is forgiving, forbearing.			(5: 101)

➢ At the superior level of the part, it is still the same verb, to ask ('ask questions about'), in the two opposed forms, negative and positive, which are found in the first members (5: 101a and 102b) of the two pieces that compose it. The initial terms 'O you who believe' and 'a people (incredulous)' also form an opposition.

– [101a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE, **DO NOT ASK QUESTIONS** *ABOUT THINGS*
– [b] which would damage you if they were revealed to you.

= [c] And if you ask questions about them,
= [d] while the Qur'an is being sent down,
= [e] they will be revealed to you.

+ [f] God forgives about them :
+ [g] God is forgiving, forbearing.

– [102a] A PEOPLE **ASKED QUESTIONS** *ABOUT THEM before* you,
– [b] and later, because of them, they became unbelievers. (5: 101–102)

➢ This part also constitutes the centre of a concentric passage (5: 97–105) whose extreme parts begin with a common noun ('God') and antithetical verbs: 'instituted / has not instituted' (97a and 103a).

[97a] **GOD INSTITUTED** the Ka'ba as the Holy House, built for humanity, [b] and the holy month and the offering, and the garlands. [c] This is so that you may know [d] that God knows everything in the heavens and on earth, [e] and that God is knowing of all things. [98a] Know that God is terrible in punishment, [b] and that God is forgiving, compassionate. [99a] Only proclamation [is incumbent] on the Messenger. [b] And God knows what you reveal and what you hide. [100a] Say: 'The good and the bad are not equal', [b] even if the number of the bad shocks you. [c] Fear God, intelligent people! [d] Perhaps you will prosper !

[101a] O you who believe, do not ask questions about things [b] which would damage you if they were revealed to you. [c] And if you ask questions about them, [d] while the Qur'an is being sent down, [e] they will be revealed to you. [f] God forgives about them: [g] God is forgiving, forbearing. [102a] A people asked questions about them before you, [b] and later, because of them, they became unbelievers.

[103a] **GOD HAS NOT INSTITUTED** *baḥīra*, nor *sā'iba*, nor *waṣīla*, nor *ḥāmi*, [b] but those who are unbelievers create lies about God, [c] and most of them do not think about this. [104a] And when it is said to them: [b] 'Come to what God has made come down, and to the Messenger!' [c] they say: [d] 'Enough for us is that on which we found our ancestors!' [e...105] (5: 97–105)

➢ On the level of the sequence, the first members of the extreme passages of the first sequence of the sura 5 (1–11), which is concentrically formed, begin with synonymic formulas.[11] The inaugural imperative of the sura (1a), which is rather enigmatic (what kind of commitments are being referred to here?), finds its explanation in 7a, which is positioned symmetrically at the beginning of two passages in correspondence with one another: believers should be faithful to the commitments to which they are bound by the covenant, a kindness of God towards them.

[1a] O you who believe! BE FAITHFUL to your **commitments**!

[7a] And REMEMBER God's **blessing** upon you
[b] and his **covenant** by which He bound you.

➢ In the sequence 72–86 of sura 5, the two parallel passages 72–77 and 78–86 begin with a series of terms that are identical or synonyms: 'have disbelieved / have been unbelievers', 'Messiah / Jesus, son of Mary', 'children of Israel'.[12]

– [72] Surely, THEY HAVE DISBELIEVED who say:
= 'Truly, God is **THE MESSIAH, SON OF MARY**.'

– Though the Messiah has said:
= 'O *CHILDREN OF ISRAEL*, worship God, my Lord and your Lord.'

+ [78] They are cursed those WHO HAVE BEEN UNBELIEVERS among *THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL*,
+ by the tongue of David and of **JESUS, SON OF MARY**.

➢ In the section 1–71 of the same sura 5, the extreme sub-sections 1–11 and 51–71 begin with a word to 'those who believe' followed by a negative imperative: 'do not profane' (2) / 'do not take' (51). They thus indicate the symmetry between two sub-sections that deal with the precepts of the covenant.[13]

[1] O YOU WHO BELIEVE, be faithful to your commitments [. . .]
[2] *Do not* profane God's rites

[51] O YOU WHO BELIEVE, *do not take* the Jews and the Christians as allies.

Final terms

The final terms are 'identical or similar terms marking the end of symmetrical textual units'.[14]

➢ The two members of segment 5: 79 end with the same verb 'did', in the third person plural.

+ They did not forbid one another the blameworthy acts which *they did*.
+ How bad was what *they did*!

➢ Almost all the members of the two trimember segments that make up sura 114 ('Mankind', the prayer at the end of the Qur'an) end with 'of men'. The two segments also contain antithetical particles in their initial member: 'with' / 'against' (initial terms).

– [1] Say: « I take refuge	WITH	the Lord	*of men*,	
– [2]		the King	*of men*,	
– [3]		the God	*of men*,	
= [4]	AGAINST	the evil	of the slinking whisperer,	
= [5] which whispers		in the breasts	*of men*,	
= [6] [whether they be]		jinns	*or men*.	(114)

➢ The two segments of the short sura 105 ('The Elephant') have the word 'make' (*ja'ala*) in their final member (2 and 5).

– [1] Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the fellows of the elephant?
– [2] Did He not MAKE their plan go astray?

= [3] And He sent upon them birds in flocks,
= [4] which pelted them with stones of baked clay,
= [5] and MADE them like straw eaten up. (105)

➢ The two pieces of sura 107 ('The Help') end with a member whose meaning is very similar. These final terms are 'synonyms' (in the broad sense of the word). Many commentators believe that these two pieces were originally two independent fragments – the first dating from the epoch of Mecca and the second from the epoch of Medina. The correspondence of the final terms, however, assures the coherence of the ensemble.

– [1] Have you seen him who denies the Judgement?
= [2] That then is the one who repulses the orphan
= [3] AND DOES NOT URGE THE FEEDING OF THE POOR.

– [4] Woe to the praying ones
= [5] who are heedless of their prayer,
= [6] who make show,
= [7] AND WITHHOLD SUCCOR. (107)

➢ The three pieces that form the part 1–9 of sura 85 ('The Constellations') end with terms derived from the same root SH/H/D: 'witness' *shāhid*, 'witnessed' *mashhūd* (3) / 'witnesses', *shuhūd* (7) / 'witness', *shahīd*, (9).

– [1] By the sky holding constellations!
– [2] By the promised day!
– [3] By the **WITNESS** and what is **WITNESSED**!

= [4] Slain be the fellow of the Pit,
= [5] of the Fire fed with fuel,

+ [6] when they sit by it,
+ [7] of what they did with the believers, **WITNESSES**.

– [8a] Their only grievance against them
– [b] was their faith in God, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy
– [9] to whom are the heavens and the earth.

= God is over all things **WITNESS**. (85: 1–9)

➢ At the beginning of the sura 'Joseph', the two pieces that compose part 12: 5–6 (a discourse of Jacob to his son Joseph) finish with a member of the same structure but with an antithetical signification.

– [5] He said: 'O my son!

= Do not relate your vision to your brothers,
= lest they plot a plot against you

+ VERILY SATAN [is] to men A MANIFEST ENEMY.

– [6] Thus will your Lord choose you,
– and teach you the interpretations of events,

= and he will perfect His favour to you and to the posterity of Jacob,
= even as He perfected it to your fathers Abraham and Isaac aforetime.

+ VERILY YOUR LORD [is] KNOWING, WISE.' (12: 5–6)

Extreme terms

The extreme (or outer) terms are 'identical or similar terms marking the extremities of a textual unit'[15]: the *inclusio* of traditional exegesis.

➢ In the short but very important sura 112 ('The Pure Cult'), the two extreme members end with the same term 'One' – thus emphasizing the theme of the whole sura, a veritable credo of Islamic monotheism:

– [1] Say: 'He, God, [is] ONE,
– [2] God, the Rock.[16]

= [3] He begot not nor was he begotten,
= [4] and is like unto Him NO ONE.' (112: 1–4)

➢ The piece 10–15 of sura 87 ('The Most High') is delimited by the two forms of the verb, to remind: 'will remind' / 'remind'.

– [10] HE WILL REMIND, he who fears,
– [11] and will turn aside from it the miserable

= [12] who shall enter the greatest fire;
= [13] then therein he shall neither live nor die.

– [14] He indeed shall be successful who purifies himself
– [15] and REMIND the name of his Lord and pray. (87: 10–15)

➢ Verse 6 of sura 2 ('The Cow') is a piece made up of three segments. Two unimembers (a and d) frame a bimember (b–c). The extreme segments contain synonymous verbs: 'they disbelieve' / 'they do not believe'.

– [6a] As for those who DISBELIEVE
= [b] it is all one for them whether *you have warned them*
= [c] or *you have not warned them*:
– [d] they DO NOT BELIEVE. (2: 6)

➢ In sura 12, the discourse of Joseph to his fellow prisoners, constructed in three pieces concentrically composed, is framed by an antithesis, 'The religion of a people who do not believe in God' / 'right religion' (37a; 40f). The extreme pieces end with a very similar member (38d and 40g – the final terms of two corresponding pieces).

[37a] I have forsaken THE RELIGION OF A PEOPLE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE IN GOD [b] and they are deniers of the hereafter. [38a] And I follow the religion of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. [b] It is not for us to associate anything with God. [c] That is a favour of God to us and to the people.
[d] *But most of the people do not show gratitude.*

[39a] O my two fellow-prisoners, are various Lords better or God the One, the Victorious?

[40a] You do not serve besides Him but names [b] which you have named, you and your fathers. [c] God has not sent down any authority for them. [d] The judgement is only God's. [e] He has commanded that you serve none but Himself [f] That is THE RIGHT RELIGION.
[g] *But most of the people do not know.* (12: 37–40)

➢ In sura 96 – a passage composed of three parts (see p. 117) – the most extreme terms 'Invoke the name of your Lord' / 'draw near [to Him]' correspond semantically (two terms of the cultic semantic field) and phonetically (*IQRA' BI / IQtARIB*). This correspondence of the extreme terms manifests the coherence of a sura reputedly composite.

[1] *Call upon* the name of your Lord (*IQRA' B-Ism-i Rabbika*)
[19] Bow down in adoration and *bring yourself closer [to God]* (*IQtARIB*)

Median terms

Median terms are 'identical or similar terms marking the end of one textual unit and the start of a unit symmetrical with it[17]; the "hook-word" or "linking-word" in traditional Biblical exegesis'.

➢ In the *Fātiḥa* (sura 1), 'the path' at the end of the first member of the segment 6–7a, is taken up again at the beginning of the second member, thus marking the complementarity of the two members of this parallel segment; the second member explains what is the 'right' path enounced in the first member.

[6] Guide-us on the right *path*,
[7a] *The path* of those you have blessed

➢ It is the same for the two members of the initial segment of sura 106 ('The Quraysh'). The term 'covenant' [of the Quraysh] is taken up again at the beginning of the second member and made more explicit.

[1] For *the covenant* of Quraysh,
[2] their *covenant* for their winter and summer journeys (106: 1–2)

➢ The first two parts of sura 96 ('The Clot', see p. 117), in spite of their apparent disparity, are linked through the median term 'man'. This is an indication of a unity of composition for this sura.

[1] Call upon the name of your Lord who created,
[2] created man from a clot.
[3] Call upon, for your Lord is the most generous
[4] who taught by the pen,
[5] taught MAN what he did not know.

[6] Nay! But verily MAN is rebellious
[7] when he sees himself rich.
[8] Verily, unto your Lord is the return. (96: 1–8)

Central terms

The central terms are 'identical or similar terms marking the centres of two symmetrical textual units'.[18]

➢ The final (antithetic) members of the two segments of the following piece have the term 'your Lord' at their centre.

– [1–2] By the morning light and the night when it covers with darkness!
= [3] *He has not forsaken you*, YOUR LORD, *nor did He hate you.*

– [4] And verily, the last will be better for you than the first!
= [5] And verily, *He will give you*, YOUR LORD, *and you will be well pleased!*
(93: 1–5)

But it is especially at levels superior to the segment that the central terms become interesting as indicators of composition.

➢ So it is that, at the centre of each of the extreme pieces of the sub-part 92: 5–18, which we have already analysed when dealing with concentric composition (see p. 87), we find the words 'counts/has counted false' (9 and 16) along with phrases of similar meaning: 'he who is niggardly and considers himself self-sufficient' (8) / 'the most miserable' (15). The central term 'counts false' is repeated, denouncing the incredulity of the sinner who scorns the revelation of the Qur'an, 'the best thing' (9) and turns away from it (16).

A – [5] As for him WHO GIVES and FEARS [God]
– [6] and testifies the best [thing],
– [7] We will ease for him the ease.
B + [8] And as for *HIM WHO IS NIGGARDLY AND CONSIDERS HIMSELF SELF-SUFFICIENT*
+ [9] and **COUNTS FALSE** the best [thing],
+ [10] surely We will ease for him the difficulty,
C [11] and his wealth will not profit him, when he perishes.
- -
X = [12] *Surely Ours is* the guidance.
= [13] and *surely Ours is* the last [life] and the first.
- -
C' [14] I warn you of a fire [that] flames.
B' +[15] None shall reach it but *THE MOST MISERABLE*
+[16] who **HAS COUNTED FALSE** and turned away.
A' –[17] And avoid it who most FEAR [God]
– [18] WHO GIVES his wealth to purify himself,[19] (92: 5–18)

➢ In sura 5, verses 48 and 69, which are of major theological importance, are found respectively at the centre of the final passages (48–50 and 65–71) of contiguous sequences 41–50 and 51–71.[20] They are located in a symmetrical position, at the end of the second (27–50) and third sub-section (51–71) of the first section (1–71) of the sura. They have the same theme in that they proclaim the salvific validity of the different religions named in the second verse. These are the monotheistic religions: those of the 'believers' (Muslims), Jews, Sabians and Christians.

Centre of the final passage 48–50 of sequence 5: 41–50	Centre of the final passage 65–71 of the sequence 5: 51–71
48 For each of you We have made a way and a path, and if God had wanted, He would have made you a single community. But He tests you in what He has given you: **surpass yourselves in good works**. Unto God shall you return, all together: He will tell you of that in which you have been differing.	69 Surely, those who believe, and those who practice Judaism, and the Sabians and the Christians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and **does good works**, there is no fear for them, and they will not be afflicted.

➢ In the same sura 5, the central sub-section (27–50) of the first section (1–71) is composed of two symmetric sequences: 27–40 and 41–50.

Centre of sequence 5: 27–40: v. 32	Centre of sequence 5: 41–50: v. 45
32 Therefore **We prescribed** for the children of Israel that 'whoever kills a soul, – not for [another] soul or for corruption on the earth – it is as though he had killed the whole humanity. And whoever makes to live, it is as though he had made the whole of humanity live'.	45 And **we have prescribed for them**: 'Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and for wounds, retaliation.' And whoever would give alms of this, this will be an expiation for him.

At the centre of both of these sequences, there is a quotation introduced by the same verb 'we have prescribed' (*katabnā*); the first is from the Mishna (32), the second from the Torah (45). These are two maxims concerning life and death. The first states a moral principle that is clearly universal: the prohibition of murder and the duty to promote life. Even though its formulation might be archaic, the second, the law of retaliation, should be understood as a fundamental and universal regulation of justice in so far as it exacts a proportion between the punishment and the crime. The chastisement should

never be greater than the seriousness of the fault. But what really makes verse 45 universal is the incentive to go beyond strict justice through a superior ethic of magnanimity by freely renouncing the punishment of retaliation: 'If anyone remits it as a gift, it is an expiation for him' (trans. R. Bell). Thus, in the centre of two sequences of this sub-section concerned with legal questions, are found two maxims of universal wisdom that enlighten the ensemble of their context.[21] It should be noted that the exception in verse 32 ('not for another soul' i.e. not as punishment for a murder) harmonizes this saying with that of retaliation, which it apparently contradicts globally.

The convergence of indicators

Unity of rhetorical composition usually depends on several indicators. One should be wary of a structure discovered using a sole indicator. Moreover, during the work of analysis, one can often hesitate over several possible structures. In such a case, the structure towards which the greatest number of indicators converge will be chosen.

Book reviews in scholarly journals are a reservoir of critical observations – some justified, others not. Here, as an example, is a quote that can show how much the process of rhetorical analysis is delicate and needs as much a spirit of subtlety (to find all the symmetries) as it does a sense of geometry (to be able to organize them according to the composition of the text at its different levels)! The criticism concerns our analysis of verse 2 of sura 5.[22]

A [2a] O you who BELIEVE,
  B [b] ***do not profane*** *God's rites* nor *the holy month*
    [c] nor *the offerings* nor *the garlands*,
      C [d] nor **those making their way to THE HOLY HOUSE**
        [e] [and] seek favour from their Lord and satisfaction.
        X [f] But when you are no longer in a sacred state, then go hunting!
      C' [g] And let not hatred of people
        [h] **who held you back from THE HOLY MOSQUE**
        [i] incite you to transgress.
  B' [j] And help one another to *righteousness* and *fear* [of God],
    [k] and ***do not help one another*** into *sin* and *hostility*.
A' [l] FEAR God!
  [m] Truly, God is terrible in his punishments. (5: 2)

The critic wrote:

> In the table of page 41 [of *Le Festin*; p. 70 of *The Banquet*], one has the impression that, because there was need of a member C, the author filled that need with '*nor those making their way to the Holy House*' (2d). I find this unjustified since this member has the same grammatical function as the four realities enumerated in B i.e. it is the direct complement of '*do not profane*'. Thus it should also be situated in B. Concerning the same table, the author writes: 'The bimembers B-B' are the only ones to have a plural negative verb in the imperative tense: "Do not profane" / "Do not help one another"'. But this second window B is a false half-window because it is invalidated by a prior plural affirmative imperative 'help one another'.

The criticism focuses on the first piece of a three-piece part (2a–e, f and g–m). This piece has been analysed in the following way.[23]

[2a] O you who believe,

– [b] do not profane	the rites (*shA'Ā'IrA*) of God,	nor the month	HOLY,	
– [c] nor	the offerings,	nor the garlands	(*al-qAlĀ'IdA*),	
= [d] nor those making their way to		the House	HOLY	
= [e] [and] seek	favour from their Lord	and satisfaction.		(5: 2a–e)

After the address, which forms a unimember first segment (a), the two following segments are first of all defined by their internal coherence:

> The second segment (b–c), enumerates four things, two in each member, which are not to be profaned: the rituals of pilgrimage and the holy month, during which it is forbidden to kill (b); the sacrificial offerings and the animals decked with garlands for the sacrifice, which can not be taken for profane use (c). The first and last term in the list have assonance: *shA'Ā'IrA* ('the rituals') and *al-qAlA'IdA* ('the garlands'). [This assonance, which frames the series, marks its limits or, at least, announces its limits: this needs to be confirmed.]
>
> The third segment (d–e) no longer concerns the rituals but people – sacred respect for pilgrims going to 'the Holy House' is demanded. [There is then an important semantic distinction between the two segments: one is concerned with things, the other with persons.][24]

This division is further confirmed by the external coherence of the two segments:

> The first members of the final two segments end with the same term 'holy' and synonyms 'God' (b) and 'Lord' (e) [in each case complements – 'the rites *of* God' / 'the favour *of* their Lord'] at the centre of the outer members [b and e].[25]

On the level of the part as a whole (2a–m), this division is fully corroborated since the three segments of the first piece, diagrammed in the first table as ABC, have their correspondents in the three segments of the third piece, which are arranged in inverse symmetry C'B'A'.

> At either end, the counterpart to the call to the believers (A) is the theological formula (A'), 'fear God' (l); 'fear God' . . . is almost an equivalent to 'believe'.[26]
>
> Bimembers B-B' are the only ones to have a negative plural verb in the imperative: 'do not profane' / 'do not help one another'. Each member enumerates two objects of the divine commandment – 'God's rites' / 'the holy month', the 'offerings' / the 'garlands' (B); 'righteousness' / 'fear of God', 'sin' / 'hostility' (B').
>
> 'Those making their way to the Holy House' (C) is echoed antithetically by '[a people] who held you back from the Holy Mosque' (C'). In C, the believers are ordered not to attack pilgrims in general; in C' they are asked not to be hostile even towards those who once prevented them from going to the Holy Mosque [prior to the victory of the Muslims over the pagans of Mecca]. They too, like any pilgrim, must be allowed to enjoy sacred protection during the pilgrimage. 'The favour of their Lord', object of the desire of every pilgrim in C, is opposed by 'the hatred [of the Muslims] for a people', the object of the fear of this people in C'.[27]

Let us finally respond to the objections of the critic in order to indicate errors to be avoided in an analysis. The fact that member 2d (in C) has the same grammatical function as the two preceding members (2b and c, in B) does not oblige us to put it in the same segment B. Grammatical coherence is one coherence among others and nothing prevents coordinated propositions from belonging to different segments if other coherences (notably semantic) seem more numerous or more decisive. The examples abound. In the example studied here, a whole series of internal and external coherences justify the division we have proposed in spite of a single

grammatical incoherence, pointed out by the critic but that does not have any decisive value.

As for the second criticism, pointing out that, alongside the negative imperative (2k), there is a positive imperative that weakens it, from the point of view of the internal coherence of the segment (2j–k), these are two antithetic imperatives. It is thus a question of an antithetic parallel segment – something that is very common. From the point of view of external coherence, – i.e. on the level of the part – there is truly a grammatical correspondence between this negative imperative and that of member 2b, which is symmetrically positioned. Not all the elements of corresponding textual units need be symmetrical. Aside from the positive imperative of 2j, all the other elements of segments B and B' form a symmetry and this provides ample justification for putting them in relation.

A [2a] O you who BELIEVE,
  B [b] ***do not profane*** *God's rites* nor *the holy month*
    [c] nor *the offerings* nor *the garlands*,
    C [d] nor **those making their way to** **THE HOLY HOUSE**
      [e] [and] seek favour from their Lord and satisfaction.
      X [f] But when you are no longer in a sacred state, then go hunting!
    C' [g] And let hatred of people
      [h] **who held you back from** **THE HOLY MOSQUE**
      [i] incite you to transgress.
  B' [j] And help one another to *righteousness* and *fear* [of God],
    [k] and ***do not help one another*** into *sin* and *hostility*.
A' [l] FEAR God!
  [m] Truly, God is terrible in his punishments. (5: 2)

5

The Centre of Concentric Composition

We have seen that the figure of concentric composition was very frequent in the superior textual levels (passage, sequence, section) of the Qur'an. It is also important for the interpretation of the text due to the particular characteristics of the centre and its specific role in the ensemble of a system.

In his synthetic book, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (1942), the Biblical scholar Nils Wilhelm Lund (1885–1954) put forth seven 'laws' that, in his opinion, structure the texts of the Bible in a typically Semitic manner, unknown to Greek rhetoric.[1] We will consider the first five laws, which can easily be located in the Qur'an.[2] It must be specified here that, by 'law', we are referring to a typical and recurrent process but one that is used freely by an author or editor.

First law of Lund

> The centre is always the turning point. The centre may consist of one, two, three or even four lines.

We can leave the number of lines to one side. The important thing is the role of the centre as a *turning point.*

➢ The *Fātiḥa* is a perfect illustration of this law. The centre ('It is You whom we adore, and it is You whom we implore') makes the transition between the first piece, which is a prayer of adoration of God under some of His most beautiful names, and the third piece, which is a prayer of petition to be guided in the right path and not along the path off those who have gone astray.

[1] In the name of God, the Mercy-giving, the Merciful.
[2] PRAISE TO GOD, Lord of the worlds,
[3] the Mercy-giving, the Merciful,
[4] Master of the Day of Judgement.
- -
[5a] You WE WORSHIP
[b] and You *WE IMPLORE*.
- -
[6] *GUIDE-US* on the right path,
[7a] the path of those you have blessed,
[b] not those who incur anger,
[c] nor those who go astray. (1)

Second law of Lund

At the centre there is often a change in the trend of thought and an antithetical idea is introduced. After this the original trend is resumed and continued until the system is concluded. For want of a better term, we shall designate this feature as the *law of the shift at the centre*.

➢ Verse 2 of sura 5 gives a good example of this process. This verse constitutes a part with a concentric construction. We have already discussed the composition at the end of the preceding chapter.

A [2a] O you who BELIEVE,

B [b] ***do not profane*** *God's rites* nor *the holy month*
[c] nor *the offerings* nor *the garlands*,

C [d] nor **those making their way to THE HOLY HOUSE**
[e] [and] seek favour from their Lord and satisfaction.
- -
[f] But when you are no longer in a sacred state, then go hunting!
- -

C' [g] And let not hatred of people
[h] **who held you back from THE HOLY MOSQUE**
[i] incite you to transgress.

B' [j] And help one another to *righteousness* and *fear* [of God],
[k] and ***do not help one another*** into *sin* and *hostility*.

A' [l] FEAR God!
[m] Truly, God is terrible in his punishments. (5: 2)

The extreme pieces (2a–e and g–m) could very well be read one after the other. Both express the duty to respect sacred things and the life of pilgrims, even ancient enemies, during the pilgrimage. But the trend of thought is brusquely interrupted by the unexpected member f which, in the centre (X) introduces an opposite idea in so far as it authorizes to kill (game) but only after being desacralized – i.e. after the end of the pilgrimage. There is an antithesis between the two statements 'do not profane' (b) and 'when you are no longer in a sacred state' (f), two forms of the same verb in Arabic.

We will examine this text again when we deal with the fourth law of Lund.

The following passage, taken from sura 5 (65–71), is composed concentrically: two long parts (65–68; 70–71) form the framework for the short central part (69).

65a If **THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK** had believed and been pious [b] we would have wiped out from them their bad actions, [c] and we would have let them enter to the gardens of delight. 66a And if they had followed the Torah and the Gospel [b] and what **HAS BEEN SENT DOWN TO THEM** from their Lord, [c] they would have eaten of what is above them and of what is under their feet. [d] Among them is a moderate community, [e] but for ***MANY AMONG THEM*** is bad ***WHAT THEY DO*** !

67a Prophet, communicate what has been sent down to you from your Lord! [b] And if you did not do this, [c] you would not communicate his message. [d] And God will protect you from men. [e] Surely, God does not guide the unbelieving people.

68a Say: 'O people of the Book, you do not rely on anything [b] as long as you do not follow the Torah and the Gospel [c] and what **HAS BEEN SENT DOWN TO YOU** from your Lord.' [d] And certainly makes ***MANY AMONG THEM*** grow [e] what has been sent down to you from your Lord, [f] in rebellion and unbelief. [g] And do not torment yourself for unbelieving people.

69a Surely, those who **believe**, [b] and **THOSE WHO PRACTICE JUDAISM, AND THE SABIENS AND THE CHRISTIANS**, [c] whoever **believes** in God and the Last Day, [d] and does good works, [e] there is no fear for them, [f] and they will not be afflicted.

70a Surely, We have received the covenant of **THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL**, [b] and **WE HAVE SENT TO THEM** messengers. [c] Each time **CAME TO THEM** a messenger [d] with what their souls did not want, [e] some they treated as liars, [f] and some they killed.

71a They reckoned there would be not test, [b] and they became blind and deaf. [c] Then God **CAME BACK TO THEM**. [d] Then became blind and deaf ***MANY AMONG THEM***. [e] But God is well-seeing ***WHAT THEY DO***.

The 'peoples of the Book' appear at the head of each part. They are named as such in 65a, then, in a more detailed way in the central part (69b), then finally reduced to the 'children of Israel' in the third part (70a).

In the extreme parts the peoples of the Book and the children of Israel are the ungrateful beneficiaries of God's solicitude. In the first part, God makes the Qur'an descend to them (66b and 68c); in the third part He sends them his envoys (70b–c) and He Himself 'came back to them' after their first infidelity (71c). But they have not responded to the divine kindness; they are rebels and have not believed (65a; 68f–g). They have treated the prophets as liars and have killed them (70e–f).

But the extreme pieces, as well as the extreme parts, have as final (or almost final) terms the syntagma 'many among them' (66e; 68d; 71d). Thus it is not all the peoples of the Book or children of Israel who are rebellious but 'only' many among them. This means that there are some who are faithful. This is what will be strongly declared in the central part by granting salvation to the Jews, the Sabians and the Christians on equal footing with 'those who believe' (the Muslims) if they believe in God and in the last Day and do good works.

The extreme parts here can still be read in continuity. The central part, which interrupts their development, is antithetical to their overall theme condemning the peoples of the Scripture. With this example can be seen all the theological importance contained in the paradoxical contrast between the centre and the units that frame it.

For Régis Blachère, a specialist in historical criticism, this central verse 69 would not be in its true place since it 'forms a contradiction with v. 70'.[3] It is true that there is a contradiction but that does not mean that the verse is not in its place. The paradox might well be intentional. We will return to this point in the chapter on interpretation (Chapter 7, see p. 169).

[65a] If **THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK** had believed and been pious [b] we would have wiped out from them their bad actions, [c] and we would have let them enter to the gardens of delight. [66a] And if they had followed the Torah and the Gospel [b] and what **HAS BEEN SENT DOWN TO THEM** from their Lord, [c] they would have eaten of what is above them and of what is under their feet. [d] Among them is a moderate community, [e] but for ***MANY AMONG THEM*** is bad ***WHAT THEY DO*** !

[67a] Prophet, communicate what has been sent down to you from your Lord! [b] And if you did not do this, [c] you would not communicate his message. [d] And God will protect you from men. [e] Surely, God does not guide the unbelieving people.

[68a] Say: 'O people of the Book, you do not rely on anything [b] as long as you do not follow the Torah and the Gospel [c] and what **HAS BEEN SENT DOWN TO YOU** from your Lord.' [d] And certainly makes ***MANY AMONG THEM*** grow [e] what has been sent down to you from your Lord, [f] in rebellion and unbelief. [g] And do not torment yourself for unbelieving people.

[69a] Surely, those who **believe**, [b] and **THOSE WHO PRACTICE JUDAISM, AND THE SABIENS AND THE CHRISTIANS**, [c] whoever **believes** in God and the Last Day, [d] and does good works, [e] there is no fear for them, [f] and they will not be afflicted.

[70a] Surely, We have received the covenant of **THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL**, [b] and **WE HAVE SENT TO THEM** messengers. [c] Each time **CAME TO THEM** a messenger [d] with what their souls did not want, [e] some they treated as liars, [f] and some they killed.

[71a] They reckoned there would be not test, [b] and they became blind and deaf. [c] Then God **CAME BACK TO THEM**. [d] Then became blind and deaf ***MANY AMONG THEM***. [e] But God is well-seeing ***WHAT THEY DO.***

Third law of Lund

> Identical ideas are often distributed in such a fashion that they occur in the extremes and at the centre of a system and nowhere else in the system.[4]

This construction seems to be rarer in the Qur'an.

➢ In the first part of sura 84 ('The Rendering'), the encounter of humanity with God is evoked both in the short central piece (6, a bimember segment) and at the end of the part (14) and nowhere else.

---

[1] When the sky shall be rent asunder [2] and shall listen to its Lord as it rightly must, [3] and when the earth shall be leveled out [4] and shall cast out what is within it and become empty [5] and shall listen to its Lord as it rightly must,

- -

[6] O man, you will toil toward your Lord a hard toiling
and ***YOU WILL MEET HIM.***

- -

[7] Then whoever is given his book in his right hand, [8] will be reckoned with by an easy reckoning, [9] and shall go back joyfully to his people. [10] But whoever is given his book behind his back, [11] he shall call for destruction, [12] and shall burn in a blazing fire. [13] Truly, he was joyful among his people. [14] Truly, he thought that ***HE WILL NOT RETURN*** [to God]. [15] Yea! Truly his Lord was watchful of him. (84: 1–15)

Verses 111–121 of sura 2 ('The Cow') form a sequence of three passages arranged concentrically (see opposite). In the first part of the first passage (111–112), the Jews and the Christians pretend to be the object of an exclusive election and salvation whereas, for the Qur'an salvation is offered to all those who 'surrender their face to God' and do good. To put it otherwise – it is faith in God and moral rectitude that saves and not membership in such and such particular community. The idea reappears in the centre, partially expressed with the same words but seen from God's standpoint: 'wherever you may turn, the face of God is there' (115). To paraphrase this: since God is everywhere, everyone can find Him.

111 They say: 'No one will enter the Garden but those who are ***JEWS*** or ***CHRISTIANS***.' Those are their desires. Say: 'Produce your proof if you are truthful.' 112 Nay, **WHOEVER SURRENDERS HIS FACE TO GOD** being a well-doer, has his reward with his Lord. Fear rests not upon him nor does he grieve.

113 The ***JEWS*** say: 'The ***CHRISTIANS*** have no ground to stand on.' And the ***CHRISTIANS*** say: 'The ***JEWS*** have no ground to stand on.' Though they both recite **THE BOOK**! So also those who have no knowledge say much the same. God will judge between them on the Day of Judgement in regard to that in which they have been differing. 114 But who does greater wrong than those who bar the places of God's worship, from having the name of God remembered in them and who strive to destroy them? It was not for them to enter them but in fear. For them is humiliation in this life, and in the hereafter a mighty punishment.

115 To God belong the East and the West. **WHEREVER YOU MAY TURN, THE FACE OF GOD IS THERE**. Verily God is boundless, knowing. 116 They say: 'God has begotten a son.' Glory be to Him! Nay, to Him belongs what is in the heavens and the earth. All are obedient to Him. 117 [He is] the originator of the heavens and the earth, [b] and when He decides upon a thing, [c] He simply says: 'Be' and it is.

118a And those who have no knowledge say: 'Why does not God speak to us? or a sign come to us?' Those who were before them said much the same. Their hearts are much alike. We have made clear the signs to a people who are convinced. 119 We have sent you with the truth, as a bringer of good news and a warner, and you will not be questioned about the companions of the Blazing Fire.

120a Neither the ***JEWS*** nor the ***CHRISTIANS*** will be satisfied with you until you follow their creed. Say: 'The guidance of God is the guidance!' If you follow their desires after the knowledge which has come to you, there will be for you from God neither protector nor helper.

121a Those to whom we have given **THE BOOK** and recite it as it should be recited, they believe in it. And those who disbelieve in it, they are the losers.

(2: 111–121)

Fourth law of Lund

There are also many instances of ideas, occurring at the centre of one system and reoccurring in the extremes of a corresponding system, the second system evidently having been constructed to match the first. We shall call this feature '*law of shift from centre to the extremes*'.

We will spend more time on the fourth law of Lund, which is at the same time frequent, important and very disconcerting. Because they were not familiar with it, the advocates of historical criticism have often declared that a verse was 'displaced', 'not in its place' and that it was 'an addition' when, in reality, it was very much 'in its place' as an indicator of the link that connects two different yet related units at a higher textual level.

➢ The first two verses of sura 5 present a typical case of this law of 'the shift from the centre to the extremities'. In this case, the displacement of the final extremity of the first 'system' (the first part) to the centre of the second 'system' (the second part) indicates that these two systems, different at the level of the parts, are to be taken together at the level of the passage.

[a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE, [b] be faithful to your commitments!
[c] Is made **lawful** for you the beast of the flocks,

- -

[d] except what will be recited to you.

- -

[e] Is not lawful ***HUNTING*** [f] ***when you are in sacred state.***
[g] **TRULY, GOD COMMANDS WHAT HE WISHES.**

[2a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE, [b] ***do not profane*** God's rites nor the holy month [c] nor the offerings nor the garlands, [d] nor those making their way to the Holy House [e] [and] seek favour from their Lord and satisfaction.

- -

[f] But ***when you are no longer in a sacred state***, then go ***HUNTING*** !

- -

[g] And let not hatred of people, [h] who held you back from the Holy Mosque, [i] incite you to transgress. [j] And help one another to righteousness and fear [of God], [k] and do not help one another into sin and hostility. [l] Fear God !
[m] **TRULY, GOD IS TERRIBLE IN HIS PUNISHMENTS.** (5: 1–2)

The correspondence of the initial terms of the two parts: 'O you who believe' (1a, 2a), 'lawful/do not profane'(1c, 2a) as well as the final clauses (1g, 2m) attest the symmetry of the two parts that make up this passage. The link that unites them, however, is reinforced by the antithetical correspondence between the members 1e – the last segment of the first part – and 2f – the central member of the second part. According to a linear reading, the extreme pieces

of the second part (2a–e, 2g–m) follow one another logically. After having dealt with the sacred character of the pilgrims who are going towards the sanctuary (2d–e), the text continues extending this inviolable holiness even to ancient enemies of the believers (2g–i). The authorization to resume hunting once the pilgrimage is over (2f) obviously perturbs this logical order. Richard Bell, a respected representative of historical criticism of the Qur'an, concludes that 'this clause is misplaced'.[5] It is, indeed, for our Western logic but not for the Semitic rhetorical logic at work in the Qur'an.

➢ Sura 96 ('The Clot') is reputed to be composite. Even the Islamic exegetical tradition concurs that verses 1–5 and 6–16 belong to two different moments of the revelation.

[1] Invoke the name of your Lord who created, [2] created man from a clot. [3] Invoke, for your Lord is the most generous [4] who taught by the pen,[5] taught **man** what **HE DID NOT KNOW *(YA'LAM).***

[6] Nay! But **man** is rebellious [7] when he sees himself rich. [8] Verily, unto your Lord is the return.

[9–10] Have you seen him who forbids a servant [of God] when he prays? [11–12] Have you seen if he were in the guidance or urging to piety? [13] Have you seen if he had counted false and turned away?

---

[14] **DOES HE NOT KNOW (*YA'LAM*)** that God sees?

---

[15] Nay! But surely if he does not desist, We shall seize him by the forelock, [16] a lying, sinful forelock. [17] So let him call his council! [18] We shall call the Archangels. [19] Nay, obey him not, but bow down and draw near. (96)

We have already seen above (p. 101), when dealing with median terms, how the term 'man' linked the first part to the second. The extreme parts (1–5 and 9–16) are also linked by the verb 'to know': 'he didn't know' at the end of the first part (5) and 'doesn't he know' at the centre of the third part (14).[6]

➢ The composition by pairs of the short suras at the end of the Qur'an is often announced by the process of the displacement of the centre towards the extremities. Such are the cases of sura 87 and 88.

Sura 87	Sura 88
[1] Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most High, [2] who **CREATED**, and ***FORMED***, [3] and who determined, and guided, [4] and who brought forth the pasture, [5] then made it dark debris. [6] We shall make you recite, so do not forget, [7] except what God wills, for he knows what is manifest and what is hidden. [8] And We will make easy for you the ease.	[1] Has the story reached you of the Overwhelming? [2] Faces on that day will be downcast, [3] toiling and weary. [4] They enter a burning fire, [5] forced to drink from a boiling spring. [6] They will have no food but of *ḍarī'* [7] which neither fatten nor satisfy hunger [8] Faces on that day will be radiant, [9] well pleased with their labor, [10] in a garden on high, [11] wherein they will hear no vain talk, [12] wherein is a flowing spring, [13] wherein are couches raised high [14] and cups ready placed [15] and cushions set in rows [16] and carpets spread.
[9] **So remind**, because **reminding** does benefit.	[17] Do they not look at the camels, how they have been **CREATED**, [18] and at the sky, how it has been lifted up, [19] and at the mountains, how they have been erected, [20] and at the earth, how it has been ***SPREAD OUT?***
[10] He will remind, he who fears [11] and will turn aside from it the miserable [12] who shall enter the greatest fire, [13] then therein he shall neither live nor die. [14] He indeed shall be successful who purifies himself [15] and remind the name of his Lord and pray. [16] Nay! You prefer the life of this world [17] while the hereafter is better and more lasting. [18] Most surely this is in the earlier pages, [19] the pages of Abraham and Moses.	[21] **So remind**! You are only a **reminder**, [22] you are not a watcher over them. [23] but whoever turns back and disbelieves [24] God will chastise him with the greatest chastisement. [25] Surely, to Us is their return [26] then surely upon Us is their reckoning.

Similar themes establish relations between the suras:

- the evocation of the power of the Creator in creation (87: 1–5; 88: 7–20);
- the commandment given to the Prophet to 'remind' along with certain conditions (87: 6–9; 88: 21–22);
- the eschatological judgement of those who will not accept the Reminder (87: 11–13; 88: 23–26).

The theme of the creation, announced by corresponding terms 'created' (87: 2) / 'have been created' (88: 17) and 'formed' (87: 2) / 'has been spread out' (88: 20),

occupies the first part of sura 87 and the centre of sura 88. Inversely, the imperative 'So remind!' is found at the centre of sura 87 and at the beginning of the third and last part of sura 88.

These correspondences between the centre and the extremities come into play not only among contiguous rhetorical systems (parts of a same passage, for example – or two neighbouring suras). In a complex system they can announce a link between separated textual units that are, however, symmetrical.

➢ Within the great summary of charges against the Jews in sura 2 ('The Cow'), which runs through verses 40–122, there can be found a section delimited by verses 87 and 121. This section is composed of three sequences arranged concentrically: 87–103; 104–110; 111–121. The correspondence between the extreme sequences is indicated (among other indicators) by a process of displacement from one extremity towards the centre.
The first sequence begins thus:

> 2,87 'Indeed, We have given the Book to Moses and We have sent messengers after him and We have given proofs to Jesus, son of Mary, and We have comforted him through the Spirit of holiness'.

As this sequence continues, Moses reappears but not Jesus. After a brief mention in v. 87, he disappears from the scene. There are no further allusions to the Christians – only to the Jews. Why then is Jesus son of Mary and the miracles that God enabled him to accomplish as a proof of his mission mentioned here?

We have to wait for the third sequence before the Christians return to the stage alongside the Jews. Exactly in its centre there is a quotation attributed to the Christians: 'God gave himself a son' (116), which echoes (antithetically) verse 87 and thus marks the link between the extreme sequences of the section.

> 87 'We have given proofs to *Jesus son of Mary*'.
> 116 And they said: *'God gave himself a son'*.

➢ We have already seen above (p. 118) that suras 87 and 88 form a pair linked – among other things – by the process of displacement from the centre towards the extremities. But suras 85 to 88 form a sequence composed of two parallel sub-sequences: A (85), B (86) // A'(87), B'(88). The fourth law of Lund is verified not only among the contiguous suras but also among the more distant suras 86 and 88 (B, B') to indicate their symmetry.

Sura 86	Sura 88
[1] By the sky and the morning star, [2] And what will let you know what is the morning star? [3] [It is] the piercing star. [4] There is no soul but has a guardian over it! [5] Let man look from what he was **CREATED**! [6] He was created from a fluid ejected [7] which comes forth from between the loins and the ribs.	[1] Has the story reached you of the Overwhelming? [2] Faces on that **DAY** will be downcast, [3] toiling and weary. [4] They enter a burning fire, [5] forced to drink from a boiling spring. [6] They will have no food but of *ḏari'* [7] which neither fatten nor satisfy hunger. [8] Faces on that **DAY** will be radiant [9] well pleased with their labor, [10] in a garden on high, [11] wherein they will hear no vain talk, [12] wherein is a flowing spring, [13] wherein are couches raised high [14] and cups ready placed [15] and cushions set in rows [16] and carpets spread.
[8] Surely He has power to bring him back, [9] the **DAY** secrets will be tested, [10] there will be for him neither strength nor helper.	[17] Do they not look at the camels, how they have been **CREATED**, [18] and at the sky, how it has been lifted up, [19] and at the mountains, how they have been erected, [20] and at ***THE EARTH***, how it has been spread out?
[11] By the heaven which returns! [12] By ***THE EARTH*** which splits! [13] Verily it is a decisive Word, [14] and it is not a pleasantry. [15] Verily, they plot a plot [16] and I plot a plot. [17] So respite the unbelievers! Give them respite for a while!	[21] So remind! You are only a reminder, [22] you are not a watcher over them. [23] But whoever turns back and disbelieves, [24] God will chastise him with the greatest chastisement. [25] Surely to Us is their return, [26] then surely upon Us is their reckoning.

The term 'day', which figures at the centre of sura 86 (9) reappears in the first part of sura 88 (2, 8) whereas the term 'created', which appears in the first part of sura 86 (5), returns at the centre of sura 88 (17). Likewise, 'the earth' is found in the last part of sura 87 (12) and at the centre of sura 88 (20).

On the basis of this example of sura 88, one can observe the complexity of the correspondences among the rhetorical systems. The indicators of composition that link suras 87 and 88 are not the same as those that link suras 86 and 88 (except the term 'created' in 88: 17, which finds a correspondent term in the first parts of both 86 and 87).

Fifth law of Lund

> There is a definite tendency of certain terms to gravitate towards certain positions within a given system, such as the divine names in the Psalms or the quotations in a central position in the New Testament.

Since Lund, other peculiarities of the centres have been found aside from the fact of often containing divine names (which also often figure in the extremities) or quotations. Just as frequently, the centre includes a question or a maxim of wisdom – even a parable (in the Gospels, for example). These are different ways of drawing the attention of the reader/listener to an important point worthy of reflection. The key for interpreting the ensemble of a system can often be found in its centre.

We will examine, one by one, these different characteristics of the centre.

The divine names

Although there are often literary affinities between the short suras (Meccan period) and the Biblical psalms, the divine names, in the Qur'an, do not seem to be really concentrated in the extremities and centres of systems as is the case in the Psalms. However several examples can be given of such occurrences in the Qur'an.

➢ The first part of sura 84 ('The Rendering') is made up of three pieces arranged concentrically:

---

[1] When the sky shall be rent asunder [2] and shall listen to its **Lord**, as it rightly must, [3] and when the earth shall be leveled out [4] and shall cast out what is within it and become empty [5] and shall listen to its **Lord** as it rightly must,

- -

[6] o Man, you will toil toward your **Lord** a hard toiling,
and you will meet Him.

- -

[7] Then whoever is given his book in his right hand, [8] will be reckoned with by an easy reckoning, [9] and shall go back to his people joyfully. [10] But whoever is given his book behind his back, [11] he shall call for destruction, [12] and shall burn in a blazing-fire. [13] Truly, he was among his people joyful. [14] Truly, he thought that he will not return [to God]. [15] Yea! Truly his **Lord** was of him watchful. (84: 1–15)

The extreme pieces announce the two moments of the last Day: the cosmic upheaval (1–5) and the judgement (7–15) whereas in the central piece, the person presents himself before his Lord. The term 'Lord' is found in the extremities of the system (2 and 15) and in the centre (6) but also in the extremities of the system formed by the first piece (2 and 5).

➢ In the long verse three of sura 5 (see p. 128), which forms a part all by itself, God's name appears in the extremities but only there.

The quotation

Sura 5 offers several examples of quotation in the centre.[7]

➢ The quotation of 45b–c is clearly designated as such by the introductory verb: 'We have prescribed' (*katabnā*).

> [44] Surely we sent down the Torah, in which there is guidance and light. The prophets who submitted judge according to it, for those who are Jews, as do the rabbis and scholars, according to what they kept safe of God's Scripture and were witnesses of. Do not fear people, fear (God), and do not sell my verses at a giveaway price! Whoever does not judge according to what God has sent down, those are the unbelievers.

> [45a] And therein *we have prescribed* for them:
>
> [b] **'LIFE FOR LIFE, EYE FOR EYE, NOSE FOR NOSE, EAR FOR EAR, TOOTH FOR TOOTH [c] AND FOR WOUNDS RETALIATION.'**
>
> [d] And whoever would give alms of this, [e] this will be an expiation for him. [f] And whoever does not judge according to what God has sent down, [g] those are the evildoers.

> [46] And we have made walk in their footsteps Jesus son of Mary, confirming what was before him of the Torah. And we have given him the Gospel, in which there is guidance and light, and confirming what was before it of the Torah, as guidance and exhortation for the pious. [47] And let judge the people of the Gospel, according to what God has sent down therein. And whoever does not judge according to what God has sent down, those are the perverse. (5: 44–47)

The text is almost a literal quotation of the Book of Exodus (21: 23–25) and its parallels in Leviticus (24: 19–20) and Deuteronomy 19: 21). The quote is highlighted by its position in the central part (45) of a passage (44–47), which is itself at the centre of a concentric sequence (41–50).[8]

➢ The following quotation (5: 32) is introduced by the same verb 'We have prescribed' (*katabnā*). Except for the incise 'not for another soul or for the corruption on the earth', it literally repeats the *Mishna Sanhedrin* IV, 5 (end of the second century or beginning of the third century AD).

> [32] Therefore **we prescribed** for the children of Israel that 'whoever kills a soul – not for [another] soul or for corruption on the earth – it is as though he had killed the whole of humanity, and whoever makes to live, it is as though he had made the whole of humanity live.' (5: 32)

➢ In the following example it is Jesus who cites the monotheist commandment of God at the centre of a concentric construction.

> [116] And when **God said**: 'O Jesus, son of Mary, was it you who said to people: Take me and my mother to be two divinities in addition to God?'
>
> > He said: 'Glory to you! It is not to me to say what is not true for me. If I had said that you would have known it. You know what is in me, but I do not know what is in You. **Truly, you are the great knower of secret things**.
> >
> > > [117] I only said to them what you ordered me:
> > > ***'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.'***
> >
> > And I was for them a witness, as long as I was among them. And when you recalled me [to you], you watched over them,
> > **for you are a witness to all things**. [118] If you punish them, they are your servants. If you forgive them, **You are the Powerful, the wise One**.'
>
> [119] **God said**: 'This is the day when the truthful will take advantage of their truthfulness. To them will be gardens, under which streams will flow, in which they will be immortal forever.' God will be pleased with them, and they will be pleased with Him: here is the great triumph. [120] To God is the kingship of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. He is powerful over all things.
>
> (5: 116–120)

The question

Frequently a question is found in the centre.

➢ We have already seen this in the case of sura 96 ('The Clot', v. 14) when we dealt with the fourth law of Lund (p. 117):

Does he not know that God sees?

This question is found at the centre of the third part of the sura (96: 9–19) as a sort of warning addressed to the impious. He will be submitted to the judgement of God from whom nothing escapes. But the question is obviously addressed to the reader/listener as well.

➢ The question at the centre of the sura 'Joseph' is a good example. The sura is constructed in twelve sequences arranged in a mirror composition with two sides of six sequences. In the sixth sequence, (v. 35–42) Joseph, in prison, is asked by two fellow prisoners for help in interpreting their dreams. Before he obliges, Joseph gives them a little speech in which he urges them to forsake the polytheism of their fathers and convert to the One God. This discourse figures in the central passage of the sequence and at the centre of this passage the decisive question of the message of the Qur'an comes to the fore: 'O my two prison mates, are scattered masters any better than the unique God, the dominant God?'

[37a] I have forsaken *the religion of a people who do not believe in God* [b] and they are deniers of the hereafter. [38a] And I follow the religion of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. [b] It is not for us to associate anything with God. [c] That is a favour of God to us and to the people. [d] But most of the people do not show gratitude.

[39a] O my two fellow-prisoners, are various Lords better or God the One, the Victorious?

[40a] You do not serve besides Him but names [b] which you have named, you and your fathers. [c] God has not sent down any authority for them. [d] The judgement is only God's. [e] He has commanded that you serve none but Himself [f] That is *the right religion*. [g] But most of the people do not know. (12: 37–40)

This question, placed at the end of the first side of a large mirror construction, thus figures in the quasi-centre of the whole sura in order to emphasize its monotheistic orientation, very typical of the Qur'an.

➢ Sometimes the question seems purely rhetorical, simply an occasion for drawing the attention of the reader/listener, as in the case of the central bimember segment (17–18) of the second part of sura 82.

---

[13] Verily, the righteous will be in bliss, [14] and verily, the wicked will be in a Fire. [15] They will enter it, on the Day of Judgement, [16] and they will not be able to keep away from it.

- -

[17] *And what will let you know* what the Day of Judgement is?
[18] And again, *what will let you know* what the Day of Judgement is?

- -

[19] The Day when no soul will be able [to do] for [another] soul anything. The command, that Day, [will be] with God. (82: 13–19)

➢ The same type of rhetorical question is found at the centre of sura 90 ('The City'). A first part (1–11) ends by reproaching humanity for not being 'engaged in the ascent' (11). Before explaining in the second part what the ascent signifies (liberate the oppressed, feed the hungry, etc.) a central verse asks the following rhetorical question as a sort of transition:

> And what will let you know what the steep path is?

➢ The short sura 104 ('The Slanderer') uses the same procedure. A first piece ends with the word 'Crusher' to designate Hell (4). It is followed, in the central piece, which is a unimember (5), by the stereotyped question: 'And what will make you know what the Crusher is?' This serves to introduce the response given in the third piece: 'God's Fire, made to blaze etc.' (6).

➢ The question at the centre of the last part of sura 81 ('The Darkening') interrupts the discourse in a strange manner and disconcerts by its brevity – to the point that Richard Bell wondered whether this was not an awkward interpolation.[9] However, it is frequent that centre stand out by their brevity and a style different from the verses that surround it. As for meaning, the text asks the reader/listener: are you going to follow the path of those who treat the message of the word as diabolic and its messenger as one possessed or, on the contrary, are you going to follow the path of those who recognize it as a word brought by an angel to remind the world of the 'right' path?

[81,19] Verily, this is the speech of a noble messenger, [20] endued with power, beside the Lord of the Throne established, [21] obeyed up there, trustworthy. [22] And your companion is not one possessed: [23] he saw him on the clear horizon; [24] and he is not about the unseen grudging. [25] And this is not the speech of a cursed devil!

- -

[26] *SO WHERE ARE YOU GOING*?

- -

[27] This is nothing less than a Reminder for all people, [28] for whoever among you wishes to go straight. [29] And you will not so wish except as God wills, the Lord of all people. (81: 19–29)

➢ The central part of sura 88 ('The Enveloping'), which we cited above when dealing with the fourth law of Lund (p. 120), gives the same impression of brusquely disrupting the line of thought of the text. But this is only a literary artifice. The effect of surprise introduced by this interruption is precisely to attract the attention of the reader/listener and make him realize that the Creator of all things (subject of the central part) will also be the universal Judge (subject of the parts that frame it).

[17] Do they not look	at the camels,	how they have been created,
[18] and	at the sky,	how it has been lifted up,
[19] and	at the mountains	how they have been erected,
[20] and	at the earth,	how it has been spread out?

(88: 17–20)

The maxim

There are many instances in the Qur'an where the centre contains a maxim – often of great sapiential, theological, ethical or legal implications.

Wisdom maxims

➢ At the centre of sura 91 ('The Sun') there is a maxim of wisdom, characteristic of this genre, which opposes the happiness and the misery of mankind.

> 9 Truly, he will be successful who purifies it (the soul),
> 10 and truly, he will fail who corrupts it.

➢ At the centre of sura 94 ('The Opening'), a maxim repeated twice expresses in very general terms what the pieces that frame it say in particular terms in the context of a discourse from God to His Prophet.

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1 Have We not expanded for you your breast 2 and removed from you your burden
3 which pressed upon your back, 4 and exalted for you your reputation?

- -

5 *Lo, along with difficulty there is ease.*
6 *Lo, along with difficulty there is ease.*

- -

7 So when you are free, stand up 8 and towards your Lord direct your longing. (94)

➢ Verses 104–110 of sura 2 ('The Cow') constitute a sequence of three passages concentrically arranged. The central passage has a series of questions – examples of 'the question in the centre' – followed by a wisdom maxim: 'And whoever exchanges belief for unbelief strays aside from the way' (108c–d).

---

107 Do you not know that God's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth?
and that besides God you have no patron nor helper?

- -

108 Or do you wish to question your Messenger as Moses was questioned aforetime?
And whoever exchanges belief for unbelief strays aside from the way. (2: 107–108)

Theological maxims

➢ It can be noted that the first question of the passage we just cited is, at the same time, a theological maxim in an interrogative form: 'Do you not know that to God belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth?' (2: 107).

➢ It is the same of the centre of the Joseph sura (12: 39), which we used above as an example of 'the question in the centre'. This centre is also a major theological maxim: 'O my two fellow prisoners, are scattered masters any better than the unique God, the Dominant God'. The characteristics of the centre can, therefore, be multiple.

➢ In sura 92 ('The Night'), the two parts that frame the centre describe the conduct of the good and the evil and their eschatological destinies. The short central part (a bimember segment) tersely enunciates the theological truth this destiny implies.

[12] Surely Ours is the guidance,
[13] and surely Ours is the last [life] and the first.

➢ In sura 5 the extreme pieces of verse 3 (a–h; o–q), which in itself constitutes a part, contain legal questions concerning the lawfulness of certain meats while the central piece (i–n) is a solemn declaration of the fulfilment of Islam (the 'submission') as religion.

[3a] Are FORBIDDEN to you dead animals and blood, and pig-flesh, [b] as is whatever another name but GOD's has called down upon, [c] and the suffocated or knocked-out animal or an animal killed by a fall or by goring, [d] and whatever the wild animal has devoured, [e] – unless you have drained its blood – [f] and whatever has had its throat cut on the steles, [g] and drawing lots by arrows, [h] that is an ABOMINATION!

[i] *Today those who do disbelieve despair of your religion.*
[j] *Do not fear them;* [k] *fear (-Me).*
[l] *Today I have completed your religion for you* [m] *and I have perfected my blessing upon you,* [n] *and I have approved submission for you as your religion.*

[o] And [towards] one who is in distress during a famine, [p] without inclining to TRANSGRESSION, [q] GOD is Forgiving, Merciful. (5: 3)

➢ In the sequence 2: 111–121, cited above when discussing the third law of Lund (see p. 115), the central passage professes the omnipresence of God and His creative omnipotence. In spite of what Christians say, he has no need to give Himself a son (to make up for his limits).

[2,115] To God belongs the East and the West. Wherever you may turn, the face of God is there. Verily God is boundless, knowing.

- -

[116] And they say: 'God has begotten a son.'

- -

Glory be to Him! Nay, to Him belongs what is in the heavens and the earth. All are obedient to Him. [117] [He is] the originator of the heavens and the earth, and when He decides upon a thing, He simply says: 'Be!' and it is. (2: 115–117)

➢ In the same sura 5, we have already given as examples of central terms (see p. 103) the two verses marked by a similar theme (48 and 69), which are found in a symmetrical position, at the centre of the final passage of two successive sequences. These are of great importance from the point of view of a possible theology of religions in the Qur'an.

Centre of passage 5, 48–50

[48g] For each of you we have made a way and a path, [h] and if God had wanted, He would have made you a single community. [i] But He tests you in what He has given you : [j] **surpass yourselves in good works**. [k] Unto God shall you return, all together: [l] He will tell you of that in which you have been differing.

Centre of passage 5, 65–71

[69a] Surely, those who believe, [b] and those who practice Judaism, and the Sabiens and the Christians, [c] whoever believes in God and the Last Day, [d] and **does good works**, [e] there is no fear for them and they will not be afflicted.

These central maxims are frequently in sharp contrast with the verses that frame them – thus confirming the 'second law of Lund', which calls attention to the frequency of an antithesis between the centre and what surrounds it. Thus the verse 48g–l, which expresses a trans-historical truth, is framed by verses in which God addresses Himself directly to His Prophet in his very concrete problems with the peoples of the Book (beginning of verse 48 and 49). Verse 69, which puts forth one of the most open and tolerant theological positions, is in stark contrast with the polemic verses towards the people of the Book, which serve as its cadre (65–68; 70–71). This obviously poses a serious question of interpretation. We will return to this problem in Chapter 7.

Legal maxims

➢ The law of retaliation, (5: 45) cited above (see p. 103), as an example of 'quotation in the centre' is obviously a major legal sentence.

Ethical maxims

➢ Alongside the quotation of the law of retaliation, in the same verse 5: 45, can be found the following pronouncement: 'And whoever would give alms for this, this will be an expiation for him.' The law of retaliation is presented first as a legal reference, imposing a proportion between the fault and the punishment. But the legal level is immediately transcended by a superior ethic of generosity that encourages the renouncement of this same law.
➢ Even more surprising is verse 5: 93, rarely cited in questions of legal or illegal foods and drinks.

> 93 To those who believe and do good works, no sin [is imputed] for what they have eaten, as long as they fear [God] and believe and do good works, then again fear [God] and believe, then again fear [God] and practice good works. And God loves the good-doers.

This verse, in the third person at the centre of passage 5: 87–96,[10] is in total contrast with the larger content of verses that surround it, imposing a whole series of dietary prohibitions – among them the famous interdiction of fermented drinks: 'O you who believe, fermented drink, gambling, carved stones and divining arrows are corruptions from the work of Satan. Stay away from them.' (90). These paradoxes obviously pose problems of interpretation that we will examine in Chapter 7.

➢ In sura 55 ('The Merciful One'), a sub-part (46–76) describes, in three pieces, the delight of Paradise for the elect. The extreme pieces (46–59; 62–76) are very similar. They are separated by a short piece made up of a single member in the form of an ethical maxim and a question: 'Shall the reward of good be anything but good?' (60).[11]
➢ The quotation of the Mishna in sura 5: 32, which we studied above (p. 103) as an example of a 'quotation in the centre', is, at the same time, a sentence of great ethical importance.

[32] Therefore we prescribed for the children of Israel that 'whoever kills a soul – not for [another] soul or for corruption on the earth – it is as though he had killed the whole of humanity, and whoever makes to live, it is as though he had made the whole of humanity live.'

6

The Work of Analysis and Re-writing

The preceding chapters have dealt with the processes of rhetorical composition in the Qur'an. This chapter will propose some principles and practical advice for the work of textual analysis and for the elaboration of tables which re-write the text in such a way that its composition can be seen more clearly.

Roland Meynet, in his major work *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric*, develops the rules of re-writing down to their smallest details and along the lines of his experience with the Bible. The student or advanced researcher can always consult this book. Here we will limit ourselves to what seems to us to be essential for an analysis of the text of the Qur'an in the light of our own experience. Hence this chapter is a selection of the instructions proposed by Meynet but all the rules we will give are also his. It is important to us that this very recent discipline of rhetorical analysis should use a harmonious vocabulary and ways of procedure in order to avoid each author – as is too often the case with Biblical scholars – elaborating his or her own system and vocabulary.

Some general principles for the work of analysis

– Do not omit the preliminary work of *clarification of vocabulary and grammar*. The Arabic text can have obscure passages. Some can be resolved by rhetorical analysis. But this analysis cannot give itself the luxury of bypassing a consultation of the classical commentators of old (Ṭabarī, Zamakhsharī, Rāzī etc.), of Arabic dictionaries (such as the indispensable *Lisān-al-ʿArab – The Language of the Arabs* by Ibn Manẓūr, d. 711/1311) or even some more modern study in order to resolve philological or grammatical problems. These points will be taken up in a rubric preliminary

to the analysis, 'Questions of Lexicography and of Grammar' or 'Textual Problems'.

- As a first step in rhetorical analysis as such *the work must be studied in the original language.* In the case of the Qur'an, this would be Arabic. Too many elements of the text are erased or modified in translation. The rhymes, the phonetic interplay of assonances and paronymies (or quasi-homonymies) so frequent and important in the Qur'an, disappear in translation when in fact they can be indicators of composition. The original order of the words cannot always be respected in a translation. Synonymies do not function in the same way in Arabic and in a translation. A translation may need several words while the Arabic of the Qur'an, which is very concise, expresses the same concept with a single word. Even a very literal translation will not render all the nuances of the original.[1] After the initial groundwork, a translation can be used concomitantly. A back and forth comparison between the work in Arabic and a translation can be helpful to the progress of analysis. In fact, certain elements of the text could eventually appear better in one language than in the other.
- In a first draft, *the text will be re-written* (hence in Arabic) by aligning the syntagmas that seem to be able to constitute members like poetic verses. This can be done directly on a computer, although writing the text by hand will help to interiorize it quasi-physically.
- Write *the whole text and nothing but the text.* Nothing should be omitted from the text for everything can be important in the composition, even the particles. Suspension points should be absolutely avoided. And, of course, nothing should be added to the text; explanations should be given elsewhere.
- *Respect the order of the text* such as its figures in the canonical Arabic version.[2] Do not displace a verse or a member to give the text a presumably more satisfying logic, as do certain proponents of historical criticism in their translations of the Qur'an (Richard Bell, Régis Blachère). The lack of logic in a text is only apparent. It is precisely the task of rhetorical analysis to understand this unfamiliar logic.
- Once the text has been re-written, *underline, using the same colour, the corresponding terms or syntagmas*: repetitions, synonymies, antithesis, paronomases. It is not a question of finding, all at once, the exact symmetries

that compose the text but to locate all the terms and syntagmas which seem to be in correspondence and could guide towards the composition.

- *Go back and forth from one level to another.* To divide the text according to its different levels, we have seen (in Chapter 3 dealing with this problem) that each level should be defined both by its internal and external coherence, by confrontation with textual elements, which can be adjacent or more remote. Concretely, this means that it is not enough to align the members, then the segments etc. only taking into account the characteristics of the member (most often equivalent to a syntagma) or the segment (parallelism between two or three members). The analysis should never cease to go back and forth between the level being analysed and the level (levels) superior. By confronting one member with another in order to verify its external coherence, one is already at the level of the segment. By comparing one segment with another in order to define its limits more exactly, one is already at the level of the piece etc. The analysis thus proceeds by successive approximations until it arrives at the most satisfying coherence on all the textual levels that influence one another.
- *All levels are not equally significant.* It is not unusual that at an inferior level (segments, pieces) the symmetrical correspondences appear quite weak and of limited interest. That does not mean to say that the correspondences do not exist, but that they are only confirmed by the analysis of the superior levels in which the symmetries are more pronounced and meaningful.
- *The division of the different levels cannot be considered definitive until the entire text has been analysed.* This is a consequence of the preceding remarks. As long as the superior level of a text has not been established, the inferior levels are subject to revision.
- *The best division will be that which reunites the greatest number of compositional indicators.* We have studied this aspect of analysis in Chapter 4 on figures of composition in the paragraph concerning the 'convergence of indicators' (pp. 104–107).
- If something is being published in a language other than Arabic, it is necessary to translate the text of the Qur'an. The goal should be *a translation that is exact but very literal*, word for word, giving maximum respect to Arabic syntax, even if that involves roughing up somewhat the language into which the text is being translated! This holds true at least on the inferior

textual levels (segments, pieces, parts). On the superior levels (passage, sequence, section) there is the possibility of using a translation more in keeping with the syntax of the target language.

– Finally, it is necessary to *present the tables* in such a way that the reader can find, *on a common double page*, the table and its explanation. Sometimes this will involve reproducing the same table more than once, on a right-hand page, then on a left-hand page so that the explications might be read on the right-hand page of the double spread.[3] In principle, if the diagrams are well done, they should speak for themselves. These descriptions are necessary, however, if only to justify the compositions proposed in the tables.

The re-writing according to the levels of the text

A complete analysis supposes re-writing the text as many times as there are textual levels. Each level will be figured by a specific typography, which would immediately indicate the level being dealt with. A long text, like sura 5, can have up to ten different levels, ranging from a member to a section and including sub-parts and sub-sequences. It would obviously be very tedious to present the whole text in this way. Most of the time it is enough to present the more significant levels, beginning with the part for example, while pointing out here and there pieces or segments of special interest. In the pages that follow, we will indicate the typographical peculiarities of each textual level.

The segment

Each member of a segment will be written on a line. A bimember segment will be written on two lines; a trimember on three lines with the beginnings of the members aligned vertically. To distinguish the segment from the rest of the text, it will be preceded and followed by a white line and, eventually, slightly indented with respect to the margin.

By the sun and the brightness of it!
By the moon when it follows it! (91: 1–2)

Today good things have been made lawful for you,
and the food of those to whom the Scriptures has been given is lawful for you
and your food is lawful for them. (5: 5)

In order to underline the form of the trimembers AA'B, ABA' or ABB' the members corresponding to B or B' will be indented as in the above cited example of 5: 5.

Today	have been made lawful	for you	the good things,
and the food	of those to whom the Scriptures has been given		
		is lawful for you	
and the food	of yours	is lawful for them. (5: 5)	

Not only will the beginning of members be aligned but also, in the measure of the possible, the corresponding terms or the rhythmic breaks among the members.

By the sun	and the brightness of it!
By the moon	when it follows it! (91: 1–2)

Today have been made lawful for you the good things,
and the food of those to whom the Scriptures has been given is lawful for you
and your food is lawful for them. (5: 5)

In the above example of 5: 5, if the inverted syntactic order of the original Arabic of the first member (A) is to be respected, only the terms of the last two members (BB') can be aligned perfectly. Terms that correspond among parallel members are sufficiently emphasized by their alignment.

Thus God	makes err	whom He wishes
and	guides	whom He wishes. (74: 31)

But they can also be written in different characters: capital letters, small capitals, italics or bold. This is above all useful in members whose terms are not found in the same order as the others such as member (A) 5: 5.

Today *have been made lawful* **for you** THE GOOD THINGS,
and THE FOOD of those to whom the Scriptures have been given *is lawful* **for you**
and THE FOOD of yours *is lawful* **for them**.

To better indicate their relationship, corresponding members can be preceded by a sign: dash (–), equal (=), plus (+), colon (:), double colon (::), asterisk (*), etc. This is above all useful in a series of segments. The numeration of the members will be placed *after* these signs so as better to show the symmetries they indicate.

–[1] By *the sun*	and the brightness of it!
–[2] By *the moon*	when it follows it!
= [3] By *the day*	when it reveals the splendor of it!
= [4] By *the night*	when it veils it!
+ [5] By *the heaven*	and what built it!
+ [6] By *the earth*	and what spread it out!
:[7] By the soul	and what has fashioned it
: [8] and inspired it	its wickedness and its piety!

::[9] Truly,	he will be *successful*	who purifies it!
:: [10] and truly,	he will *fail*	who corrupts it! (91: 1–10)

For trimembers, the two members that have greater similarity will be indicated in a different way.

– Today	*have been made lawful*	**for you**	THE GOOD THINGS,
: and THE FOOD	of those to whom the Scriptures has been given	*is lawful*	**for you**
: and THE FOOD	of yours	*is lawful*	**for them**. (5: 5)

In a series of parallel segments, corresponding members can be indicated by the same sign.

– [7] *Then whoever*	*is given his book*	*in his right hand*,
= [8] will be reckoned	by a reckoning	easy,
+ [9] and shall go back	to his people	joyfully.
– [10] *But whoever*	*is given his book*	*behind his back*,
= [11] he shall call	for destruction,	
+ [12] and shall burn	in a blazing fire. (84: 7–12)	

The typographical signs can be replaced by letters, in particular in the case of the trimembers, to indicate their form as in the following example, which is of form ABB'.

A Those	whose hearts	God does not wish to purify,
B *to them*,	*in the here-and- now*	**dishonor**,
B' and *to them,*	*in the hereafter*	**a huge punishment**. (5: 41)

The piece

When a piece is presented for itself, as in the case below, it will be separated from the rest of the text by a thin line above and another below. The segments that make up the piece are separated by a blank space.

– And *he* whom	GOD WISHES	[to put to] the test,	
– you will not be able to do anything for him		against God.	
= *Those* whose hearts	GOD DOES NOT WISH	to purify,	
= to them,	in the here-and-now	dishonor,	
= and to them,	in the hereafter	a huge punishment.	(5: 41)

But the pieces within the superior level of the part are separated by discontinuous lines (the length of the framed piece in the case of a concentric composition).

– [89a] GOD will not hold a grudge against you for the haughtiness in		YOUR OATHS,	
– [b] but He will hold a grudge against you for what you swear by		OATHS.	
= [c] THE EXPIATION will be	to feed	***ten poor people***,	
= [d] with the average [food] with which	you feed	your family,	
= [e] or	to clothe them, or to free	***a slave***.	
+ [f] And he who cannot			
+ [g] [is to]	fast for	***three*** days.	
– [h] This is THE EXPIATION	for YOUR OATHS,	when you have sworn.	
= [i] So respect		YOUR OATHS!	
+ [j] This is how GOD explains his signs to you			
+ [k] – may you be grateful.			(5: 89)

Normally, only the rapports of the level being analysed are visualized, which means that 'the rapports visualized at one level are no longer visualized at the

superior level'.[4] The importance of clearly distinguishing the levels of the text cannot be emphasized enough. To try to visualize all the levels in the same table can only mix everything up and cause confusion. *At each level, it is only the correspondences at that specific level that should be illustrated while 'forgetting' the correspondences at inferior levels.*

The two segments that compose the piece 5: 41, if they are analysed for themselves, at the level of segments, will be visualized as follows:

– And *he* whom GOD wishes [to put to] the test,
– you will not be able to do anything for *him* against GOD.

'He' and 'him', two pronouns with the same meaning although of different form, are put in italics. The name 'God', repeated in each member, is written in small capital letters.

= *Those* whose hearts God does not wish to purify,		
+ to *them*,	in the here-and-now	dishonor,
+ and to *them*,	in the hereafter	a huge punishment.

This trimember is in the form of ABB'. The last two members are slightly indented with respect to the first and are preceded by a different sign. Since these last two members are very parallel, the corresponding terms are simply aligned vertically, without any other graphic emphasis, except for the initial pronoun 'them', which has the same meaning as 'those' at the beginning of the first member, picked out by the italics.

If, for some reason, one wants, all the same, to visualize the two levels at the same time (segments and pieces), capitals should be reserved (preferably small capitals, which are more aesthetic) for correspondences between the two segments, and minuscule italics for the correspondences between the members of a segment. But, as the example below demonstrates, this abundance of correspondence does not facilitate the visualization of the composition!

– And *HE* whom	***GOD* WISHES**	[to put to] the test,	
– you will not be able	to do anything for *him*	against *GOD*.	
= *THOSE* whose hearts	***GOD* DOES NOT WISH**	to purify,	
= to *them*,	*in the here-and-now*	*dishonor*,	
= and to *them*,	*in the hereafter*	*a huge punishment*.	(5: 41)

The part (and the sub-parts)

The part is delimited by two thin lines.

➢ The beginning of sura 5 (or verse 1), which we analysed earlier in Chapter 3 ('The Levels of Composition', p. 44) constitutes a part made up of three pieces. The extreme pieces (each having a single segment) are separated by discontinuous lines of the same length as the central piece that they frame.

– [1a] O you who believe,				
– [b] be faithful		TO YOUR COMMITMENTS!		
= [c] Is made	LAWFUL for you	**the beast of flocks**,		
+ [d] – except what will be recited to you.				
= [e] Is	NOT LAWFUL	**game/hunting**		
+ [f] when you are in a sacred state.				
– [g] Truly,	GOD COMMANDS what He wishes.			(5: 1)

➢ The first part of sura 88 ('The Enveloping', 1–16) is also composed of three pieces. A single member piece of introduction (1) announces the Day of Judgement ('The Enveloping') followed by two antithetical pieces. The first (2–7) describes the damned; the second (8–16), the elect. Each piece is made up of three segments. These two pieces, separated by discontinuous lines, are clearly distinguished by the antithetical initial members (2 and 8): 'Faces on that day will be downcast/radiant'.

[1] Has the story reached you of the Overwhelming?				
– [2] FACES,	ON THAT DAY,	WILL BE	DOWNCAST,	
– [3]			toiling, weary.	
= [4] They enter	a burning fire,			
= [5] forced to drink	from a boiling spring.			
+ [6] They will have no food but of *ḍarīʿ*				
+ [7] which neither fatten nor satisfy hunger.				
– [8] FACES,	ON THAT DAY,	WILL BE	RADIANT,	
– [9] with their labor			well pleased,	
= [10] in	a Garden on high,			
= [11] wherein they will hear	no vain talk,			
= [12] wherein is	a flowing spring,			
+ [13–14] wherein are	couches raised high		and cups ready placed	
+ [15–16] and	cushions set in rows		and carpets spread.	(88: 1–16)

The sub-parts are also separated by a continuous thin line:

– [1] WOE to the **DEFRAUDERS**

– [2] who, **when** they take measure from men, fill full,
– [3] and **when** they measure to them or weigh to them, scant!

[4a] Do they not think, these [people],
[4b–5] that they will be raised up for a mighty ***day***,
[6] ***a day*** when will rise the people to the *LORD* of the worlds?

[7] Nay! Most surely, the book of the wicked is ***IN THE SIJJĪN***,
[8] – and what will let you know what the *Sijjīn* is? –
[9] a book inscribed.

– [10] WOE, that day, to **THOSE WHO COUNT FALSE**,
– [11] who count false the Day of Judgement!

= [12] And no one counts it false, but each transgressor sinner:
= [13a] **when** Our verses are recited to him,
= [b] he says: 'Tales of the Ancients!'

[14] Nay! But encrusted on their hearts is what they have been piling up.
[15] Nay! Verily, from their *LORD*, ***that Day***, they will be veiled.

– [16] Further, verily, they will be roasting ***IN HELL***,
– [17] further it will be said: 'This is what **YOU COUNTED FALSE**!' (83: 1–17)

Another possibility would be to make the line delimitating the part twice as thick as the line delimitating the sub-part.

The passage

With the passage, it is no longer a question of passing from one level (the part) to another level, but of passing from the category of inferior non-autonomous levels (members, segments, pieces, parts) to another category – that of superior or autonomous levels, i.e. levels that can constitute a self-sufficient textual ensemble. This is why the re-writing will mark these levels with a clear and distinctive sign: the frame. Thus the reader, when seeing a frame, will know that it is an autonomous level.

➢ The first two verses of sura 5 make up a passage composed of two parts, which correspond to two verses.[5]

– [1a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE,
– [b] be faithful to your commitments!

= [c] Is made **lawful** for you, the beast of flocks,

[d] except what will be recited to you.

+ [e] Is not lawful game/***HUNTING***
+ [f] **WHEN YOU ARE IN A SACRED STATE.**

[g] **TRULY, GOD COMMANDS WHAT HE WISHES.**

[2a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE,

– [b] do not **profane** God's rites, nor the holy month,
– [c] nor the offerings, nor the garlands,

= [d] nor those making their way to the Holy House
= [e] who seek favour and satisfaction from their Lord.

[f] But ***WHEN YOU ARE NO LONGER IN A SACRED STATE***, then ***GO HUNTING***!

+ [g] And do not let hatred of a people
+ [h] who held you back from the Holy Mosque incite you
+ [i] to transgress.

– [j] Help one another to righteousness and fear [of God]
– [k] and do not help one another into sin and hostility.

= [l] Fear God!
= [m] **TRULY, GOD IS TERRIBLE IN HIS PUNISHMENTS**. (5: 1–2)

Each of the parts will be framed. Each has three pieces and their central piece is of only one member. The central piece will be preceded and followed by a discontinuous line of equal length.

Most often, it is useless to maintain the distinction of the members and segments at the level of the passage. It will suffice to indicate the pieces by discontinuous thin lines. But the numeration of the members should be conserved (in superscript) to permit references to the diagram in the commentary.

➢ Thus the same passage 5: 1–2 would appear in the following way:

[1a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE, [b] be faithful to your commitments! [c] Is made **lawful** for you, the beast of flocks,

[d] except what will be recited to you.

[e] Is not lawful ***HUNTING*** [f] ***when you are in a sacred state***.
[g] **TRULY, GOD COMMANDS WHAT HE WISHES.**

[2a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE, [b] ***do not profane*** God's rites nor the holy month [c] nor the offerings, nor the garlands, [d] nor those making their way to the Holy House [e] who seek favour and satisfaction from their Lord.

[f] But ***when you are no longer in a sacred state***, then ***GO HUNTING***!

[g] And do not let hatred of a people [h] who held you back from the Holy Mosque [i] incite you to transgress. [j] Help one another to righteousness and fear [of God], [k] and do not help one another into sin and hostility. [l] Fear God!
[m] **TRULY, GOD IS TERRIBLE IN HIS PUNISHMENTS.** (5: 1–2)

When a passage has a concentric construction, the central part is marked by a thicker frame, indented.

➢ This is the case in the following passage (5: 65–71).[6]

[65a] If **THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK** had believed and been pious [b] we would have wiped out from them their bad actions, [c]. [66a] And if they had followed the Torah and the Gospel [b] and what **HAS BEEN SENT DOWN TO THEM** from their Lord, [c] they would have eaten of what is above them and of what is under their feet. [d] Among them is a moderate community, [e] but for ***MANY AMONG THEM*** is bad ***WHAT THEY DO*** !

[67a] Prophet, communicate what has been sent down to you from your Lord! [b…e]

[68a] Say: 'O people of the Book, you do not rely on anything [b] as long as you do not follow the Torah and the Gospel [c] and what **HAS BEEN SENT DOWN TO YOU** from your Lord.' [d…g]

[69a] Surely, those who **believe**, [b] and **THOSE WHO PRACTICE JUDAISM, AND THE SABIENS AND THE CHRISTIANS,** [c] whoever **believes** in God and the Last Day, [d] and does good works, [e] there is no fear for them, [f] and they will not be afflicted.

[70a] Surely, We have received the covenant of **THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL**, [b] and **WE HAVE SENT TO THEM** messengers. [c] Each time **CAME TO THEM** a messenger [d] with what their souls did not want, [e] some they treated as liars, [f] and some they killed.

[71a] They reckoned there would be no test, [b] and they became blind and deaf. [c] Then God **CAME BACK TO THEM**. [d] Then became blind and deaf ***MANY AMONG THEM***. [e] But God is well-seeing ***WHAT THEY DO***.

In the extreme parts, the people of the Book or the children of Israel are denounced for their infidelity to God's solicitude. In sharp contrast to this polemical tone, the central part puts forth the conditions for salvation – not just for the believers (Muslims) but also for the Jews, Christians and Sabians. Since the centre usually has a special semantic importance (as is obviously the case here) it should be underlined by an accentuated and indented frame.

The sequence (and sub-sequences)

Although it is the final result of the work of analysis of a sequence, we place an initial table at the head of a chapter concerning a sequence. This table informs the readers of the different passages of the sequence they are about to study.

The title of each passage has a frame. The frame of the extreme passages is not indented. The other passages are indented using a common indentation for symmetrical passages. The numeration of the verses will be on the right, at the end of the line.

➢ The first sequence of sura 5 is composed of six passages that are re-grouped in two sub-sequences (1–4 and 5–11) arranged in a mirror composition.

Fidelity to the *rules of what is lawful* during pilgrimage			1–2
	Islam, the completion of **religion**		3
		Good things are ***lawful***	4
		Sharing with the people of the Book is ***lawful***	5
	The rites of ablution for Islamic prayer		6
Reminder of the covenant and its *moral demands*			7–11

Both the extreme passages concern precepts of the Islamic covenant: the rules of legality during the pilgrimage (first passage 1–2) and the moral obligations of the covenant (last passage 7–11). The central passages deal with the completion of Islam (3) and the rites of Islamic prayer (6). The median passages consider the lawfulness of good things (4) and of marriages with women from among the peoples of the Book and the sharing of food with Jews and Christians (5). By using identical characters, the terms that indicate symmetry among the passages can be highlighted.

➢ When a sequence is organized concentrically, the framework of the central passage can be accentuated, as can be seen in the second sequence of sura 5.

Jews and Christians are unfaithful to their covenant	12–14
The Prophet is sent to the people of the Book	**15–19**
The people of Moses refuse to enter the Holy Land	20–26

The first passage (12–14) denounces the infidelity of the sons of Israel and the Christians to their covenant. This infidelity is illustrated, in the third passage (20–26), by the story (taken from the Book of Numbers) of the refusal of the Israelites to enter into the Promised Land. The central passage (15–19) explains this infidelity: it consists of dogmatic deviations that the Prophet is sent to rectify.

At the end of a chapter, after all the passages have been analysed in themselves, a table reproduces the ensemble of the text (in its continuity) in frames set up in the same way as those of the initial table. The table should fit on a single page. If this is not possible, a less important portion of the text can be replaced by bracketed dots [. . .].

➢ See sura 5: 1–11 as an example.

[1a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE**, [b] **BE FAITHFUL TO YOUR COMMITMENTS!** [c] Is made lawful for you, the beast of flocks, [d] except what will be recited to you. [e] Is not lawful game [f] when you are in a state of interdict. [g] Truly, God commands what he wishes.
[2a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE**, do not declare lawful God's rites, nor the holy month [b] nor the offerings, nor the garlands, [c] nor those making their way to the Holy House [d] who seek favour and satisfaction from their Lord. [e] But when you are no longer in a sacred state, then go hunting ! [f] ***AND DO NOT LET HATRED OF A PEOPLE*** [g] ***who held you back from the Holy Mosque*** [h] ***TO TRANSGRESS***. [i] ***Help one another to righteousness*** and **fear** [of God], [j] and do not help one another into sin and hostility. [k] **Fear God**! [l] Truly, **God** is terrible in his punishments.

[3a] Are forbidden to you dead animal, and blood, and pig-flesh, [b…g] [h] that is an abomination!
[i] TODAY, those who do disbelieve despair of your religion. [j] Do not fear them; [k] fear[-Me]. [l] TODAY I have completed your religion for you [m] **and I have perfected my blessings upon you**, [n] and I have approved submission for you as [your] religion. [o] And [towards] one who is in distress during a famine, [p] without [however] inclining purposely to, [q] **GOD IS FORGIVING, MERCIFUL.**

[4a] They question you about what has been made lawful for them. [b] Say: '**Have been made lawful for you the good things.** [c] And if you teach some carnivores, training them like dogs, [d] you teach them what God has taught you: [e] ***eat what they have caught for you*** [f] and call down God's name upon it. [g] Fear God! [h] Truly, God is swift to take account!'

[5a] TODAY **have been made lawful for you the good things**, [b] and ***the food of those to whom the Scriptures have been given is lawful for you*** [c] and your food is lawful for them, [d…k]

[6a] O you who believe, when you prepare for prayer, [b] wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows [c] and wipe your heads and your feet up to the ankles. [d] And if you are polluted, [e] purify yourself. [d…k] [l] **GOD DOES NOT WISH TO MAKE ANY IMPEDIMENT FOR YOU** [m] but he wishes to purify you [n] **and perfect his blessing for you.** [o] Perhaps you will be thankful !

[7a] And **REMEMBER God**'s blessing upon you [b] and his **COVENANT** by which he bound you, [c] when you said: 'We have heard and we have obeyed'. [d] And **fear God**, [e] for God knows what is in the breasts.
[8a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE**, be upright before **God**, [b] witnesses of equity. [c] ***AND DO NOT LET HATRED OF A PEOPLE INCITE YOU*** [d] ***NOT TO BE JUST***. [e] ***Be just***! [f] This is closest to **fear**[-of God]. [g…10] [11a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE,** remember **God**'s blessing upon you, [b] when ***A PEOPLE planned to raise their hands against you***, [c] and he turned their hands from you. [d] And **fear God**, [e] let put their trust in **God** all **BELIEVERS**. (5: 1–11)

It is possible to facilitate the reading of such a table by first presenting and commentating on the symmetrical passages drawn up in a double column. Here, for example, are the two extreme passages of the same sequence 5: 1–11.

A (1–2)	A' (7–11)
[1a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE,** **BE FAITHFUL TO YOUR COMMITMENTS**! [b] Is made lawful for you, the beast of flocks, [c] except what will be recited to you. [d] Is not lawful game/hunting [e] when you are in a sacred state. [f] Truly, God commands what he wishes. [2a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE**, do not declare lawful God's rites, nor the holy month [b] nor the offerings, nor the garlands, [c] nor those making their way to the Holy House [d] who seek favour and satisfaction from their Lord. [e] But when you are no longer in a sacred state, then go hunting [f] ***AND DO NOT LET HATRED OF A PEOPLE*** [g] ***who held you back from the Holy Mosque*** [h] ***TO TRANSGRESS***. [i] ***Help one another to righteousness*** and **fear** [of God], [j] and do not help one another into sin and hostility. [k] **Fear God**! [l] Truly, **God** is terrible in his punishments.	[7a] And **REMEMBER God's** blessing upon you [b] and His **COVENANT** by which he bound you, [c] when you said: 'We have heard and we have obeyed'. [d] And **fear God**, [e] for God knows what is in the breasts. [8a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE,** be upright before **God**, [b] witnesses of equity. [c] ***AND DO NOT LET HATRED OF A PEOPLE INCITE YOU*** [d] ***NOT TO BE JUST***. [e] ***Be just***! [f] This is closest to **fear**[-of God]. [g] And **fear God**, [h] for God is informed of what you do. [9a] God has promised to those who believe and carry out good works, [b] theirs will be forgiveness and immense reward; [10a] and to those who are unbelievers and call our revelations lies: [b] those are companions of Hell. [11a] **O YOU WHO BELIEVE,** remember **God**'s blessing upon you, [b] when ***A PEOPLE planned to raise their hands against you***, [c] and he turned their hands from you. [d] And **fear God**, [e] let put their trust in **God** all **BELIEVERS**.

- In each of the two passages the phrase 'O you who believe' is repeated twice (1a, 2a; 8a, 11a) with, at the end and like an echo (11c): 'the believers'.
- Both passages begin with imperatives: 'be faithful' (1a) and 'remember' (7a) followed by synonymous terms, which give meaning to the whole sequence: 'commitments' (1a) and 'covenant': (7b). The whole sequence is a warning to the believers to respect the legal and moral engagements they have contracted in the covenant God has made with them.
- In both texts, there is the same allusion to the hostility of the believers towards a people and even a warning against unjust reprisals (2f–h; 8c–d).
- In both passages there is also allusion to hostile acts of the enemies of the believers: in A they prevented them from entering the sacred Mosque (2g) and in A' they wanted to attack them but were prevented from doing so by God (11b).
- The final clauses also begin with an imperative: 'Fear God' (2k and 11d; but also in 7d and 8g). 'The fear [of God]' is likewise evoked in 2i and 8f, in each case following a moral injunction: 'help one another to righteousness' / 'Be just' (2i and 8e).

The section (and the sub-sections)

The table of the section with, eventually, its sub-sections, should be included first at the beginning of chapters that analyse the different sequences that compose it and for a second time at the end of the study of the sequences, in order to give a more detailed presentation of the composition of the section. In this way the reader is informed, right from the start, of the road to be followed. It is then possible, at the end of the chapter, to get a synthetic view of the path that has been covered.

➢ Sura 5 is made up of two sections, each one with three sub-sections. Since the first two sub-sections each have two sequences, a title has been given to the sub-section in addition to the title of each one of the sequences. But since the third sub-section only has one sequence, it need not have a special title.

FIRST SUB-SECTION: Entering the Islamic covenant	
Sequence A1: The completion of the covenant in Islam	1–11
Sequence A2: Jews and Christians refuse to enter the covenant	12–26

SECOND SUB-SECTION: On justice in the Muslim city	
Sequence A3: The punishment of the rebel children of Israel	27–40
Sequence A4: The Prophet's jurisdiction over Jews and Christians	41–50

THIRD SUB-SECTION:	
Sequence A5: The status of Muslims and the People of the Book	51–71

A certain number of symmetries between the extremities of the sub-sections manifest the concentric composition of the section. That is why the central sub-section is indented and placed within an accentuated framework.

➢ Since it is not possible to visualize the extreme sub-sections in their entirety, in parallel columns, we will have to limit ourselves to depicting only the symmetrical elements. These two sub-sections commence with a summons to the believers: 'O you who believe' (1a and 51a), followed by an imperative – positive in the case of 'Be faithful to your commitments!', then negative (2a): 'Do not profane God's rites etc.' as also in 51b: 'Do not take the Jews and Christians as allies', 51b.

Sequence A1: 1–2a	Sequence A5: 51a–b
[1a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE, [b] be faithful to your commitments [. . .] [2a] *Do not* profane God's rites. . .	[51a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE, [b] *do not* take the Jews and the Christians as allies.

➢ Among the other symmetries between the two sub-sections, let us note the beginning of sequence A2, which reappears in the last passage of A5 but split up into two different places and in inverse order. What is grouped together in A2 in 12a–b and d–i, can be found partially in 65a–c (//12d–i) and partially in 70a–b (//12a–b).

Sequence A2: 12

[12a] And **truly, God has received the covenant of the children of Israel**. [b] **And we have sent among them twelve leaders.**[c] And God said: 'I am with you. [d] ***If you perform the prayer,*** [e] ***and pay the alms,*** [f] ***and believe in my messengers and succor them,*** [g] ***and lend to God a good loan,*** [h] ***surely I will erase from you your misdeeds,*** [i] ***and surely I will let you enter gardens,*** [j] underneath which flow streams. [k] And whoever among you misbelieves after this, [l] truly he has gone astray from the right way.'

Sequence A5: 70; 65

[70a] **Surely, We have received the covenant of the children of Israel.** [b] **And we have sent to them messengers.**

[65a] ***If the people of the Book had believed and been pious*** [b] ***we would have wiped out from them their bad actions,*** [c] ***and we would have let them enter to the gardens of delight.***

On the other hand, it is possible, using some abbreviations and having recourse to brackets with dots [. . .], to visualize the two sequences as a synoptic diagram that composes a section or a sub-section such as sequences A3 and A4, which constitute the second sub-section of sura 5.

Sequence A3	Sequence A4
27a And recite to them the story of Adam's two sons, truthfully: b when they offered a sacrifice, c it was accepted from one of them, d but it was not accepted from the other. e He said: 'Surely I will kill you.' f He said: 'Truly, God only accepts from the pious. 28a If you stretch out your hand against me to kill me, b I will not stretch out my hand against you to kill you, c because I fear God, the Lord of humanity.' [29–31]	41a O **MESSENGER**, do not be distressed by those who rush towards impiety, b of those who have said: 'We believe', with their mouths c but do not believe with their hearts; [d…i] j And he whom **God wishes** to put to the test, k you will not be able to do anything for him against God. l Those who **God does not wish** to purify their hearts, m to them in the here-and-now is dishonor, n and to them, in the hereafter is ***a huge punishment***. [42–44]
32a Therefore **WE PRESCRIBED FOR THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL** b that WHOEVER KILLS A SOUL, c NOT FOR [ANOTHER] SOUL, OR FOR CORRUPTION ON THE EARTH, d IT IS AS THOUGH HE HAD KILLED THE WHOLE OF HUMANITY. e ***AND WHOEVER MAKES TO LIVE,*** f ***IT IS AS THOUGH HE HAD MADE THE WHOLE OF HUMANITY LIVE.*** g Surely, to them came our messengers with proofs, h then truly, many of them, after this, on earth were **exploiters**.	45a And **WE HAVE PRESCRIBED FOR THEM THEREIN:** b 'LIFE FOR LIFE, EYE FOR EYE, NOSE FOR NOSE, EAR FOR EAR, TOOTH FOR TOOTH, c AND FOR WOUNDS RETALIATION.' d ***AND WHOEVER WOULD GIVE ALMS OF THIS,*** e ***THIS WILL BE AN EXPIATION FOR HIM.*** f And whoever does not judge according to what God has sent down, g those are **the evildoers.**
33a The retribution for those who fight God and **HIS MESSENGER** b and who strive to sow corruption on earth c will be that they will be killed or they will be crucified, d or that will be cut off their opposing hands and feet, e or that they will be banished from the earth: f this will be for them a disgrace in the present, g and for them, in the hereafter, ***a huge punishment***, 34a except for those who repent before you have caught them, b and know that God is forgiving, compassionate. [35–39] 40a Do you not know b that to God belongs the possession of the heavens and the earth? c He punishes whom **he wishes** d and he forgives whom **he wishes**. e And God is over all things powerful.	46a And we have made Jesus son of Mary walk in their footsteps, b confirming what was before him of the Torah. c And we have given him the Gospel, d in which there is guidance and light, e confirming what was before it of the Torah, f as guidance and exhortation for the pious. 47a And let the people of the Gospel b judge according to what God has sent down therein. c And whoever does not judge according to what God has sent down, d those are the perverse. 48a And We have sent down to you the Scripture with truth, b confirming what of the Scripture was before it, c and preserving it. [d…50]

The centres of the two sequences clearly correspond to one another. In the chapter where we studied the centres (Chapter 5), we have seen that these are two moral or legal maxims concerning attempts against life.

In addition to the correspondence of the centres, the last passage of sequence A3 and the first passage of sequence A4 have several terms in common (in bold in the synoptic diagram), which can be interpreted as median terms linking the two sequences.

The Book

The level superior to the section is none other than the Book. In the case of the Qur'an, it would thus be a question of the ensemble of the 114 suras that compose it. In the present state of research, we are still far from being able to determine the composition of the whole Qur'an. At the end of Chapter 3 concerning the levels of text, we proposed a visualization of the long sura 5 that represents a 'booklet' within the Book.

A particular case: common factorization

Certain suras – or units within a same sura – are introduced by forms of the verb 'to say'. Most frequently this will be in the form 'he says' (*qāla*), 'they say' (*qālū*) or in the imperative 'say!' (*qul*). When this verb dominates not just a member or segment but a larger unit, the verb can be placed as a 'factor' above the unit it introduces rather than situating it at the beginning of the first member. Suras 109, 112, 113 and 114 are introduced by the imperative 'Say!' Below is sura 112.

[1] Say:		
– 'He, *God*, [is]	ONE,	
– [2] *God*	the Rock.	
= [3] He begot not	nor was he begotten,	
= [4] and is like to Him	NO ONE.'	(112: 1–4)

It is the same for units within the longer suras such as the following piece in sura 2: 97–98.

[97a] Say:

'Whoever is an ENEMY of **GABRIEL**,
– [b] he who brought it [the Book] upon your heart, with the permission of ***GOD***,

= [c] confirming what was before it,
= [d] and as guidance and good news for the **believers**?

+ [98a] Whoever is an ENEMY to ***GOD***,
+ [b] and His angels and His messengers and **GABRIEL** and Michael,
+ [c] verily, ***GOD*** is an ENEMY to the **disbelievers**.' (2: 97–98)

The interpretation of the dream by Joseph (12: 47) is a piece totally dominated by the initial verb 'he said'.

[47a] He said:

A – 'You shall sow	for SEVEN YEARS	as usual,
B = [b] and what you harvest,	leave it	in its ear,
C + [c] *except a little*	of which you eat.	
A' – [48a] Then after that will come,	SEVEN hard [years]	
B' = [b] which will eat up	what you have laid up beforehand for them,	
C' + [c] *except a little*	which you keep guarded.	
A" – [49a] Then after that will come	A YEAR	
B" = [b] *in which*	will be succored,	
C" + [c] and *in which*	they will press [grapes].'	(12: 47–49)

The apostrophe that follows the verb 'to say' could also be used as a common factor, as in the following piece (12: 67).

[67a] He said: 'O my sons,

– *enter not* by one *gate*,
– [b] but *enter* by different *gates*.

= [c] I avail you not at all against *God;*
= [d] the jurisdiction rests alone with *God*

+ [e] Upon Him have I set my *trust*
+ [f] and upon Him let those who *trust* set their *trust*. (12: 67)

The mysterious letters that appear above the first verse of some suras could also be a common factor for the whole sura.[7]

7

Context, Intertext and Interpretation

The goal of any exegesis is to understand the meaning of the text. The preceding chapters had no other purpose than to arrive at the most exact interpretation of the text of the Qur'an as possible. Even so, the interpretation does not flow automatically from an analysis of its composition. We do not pretend to be exhaustive here nor offer a general theory of the interpretation of the Qur'an, but we will attempt to formulate a few steps that have made us pass from the analysis of the composition of the text to its interpretation.

The general idea is that, *once the lexicological and grammatical elements have been established, the meaning of a verse or of a member should be sought according to the symmetrical rapports it has with one or several verses or members within the same rhetorical unity.* It is this unity that constitutes the basic *context* of the verses being studied and opens a path to an *intratextual exegesis*.

In the first chapter, we saw that a method recommended and practised by great exegetes such as Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya consisted of interpreting 'the Qur'an by the Qur'an' by establishing rapports of one verse with other verses found elsewhere in the Book. This is also a case of intratextual exegesis but that, none the less, considers the ensemble of the Qur'an as the context of each verse. This method can be useful, but it risks relating the verses among themselves in a subjective and controversial manner, according to the tastes of the commentator. Rhetorical analysis, on the other hand, determines the neighbouring context of each verse, which is nothing other than the rhetorical unit of which that verse is a part – but without forgetting that this unity is complex and includes a whole series of textual levels. The context is thus multiple, hierarchized, and each level can give a different nuance to the meaning of the verse being studied.

Sometimes it is necessary to add an *intertextual* context to the intratextual context. The literary context is not, in fact, always limited to the text of the Qur'an itself. It overflows every time the text manifests a relationship with other texts prior to the Qur'an but not alien to the scriptural tradition of which the Qur'an, on multiple occasions, claims to be a part. It is principally a question of the Bible (the Old and New Testaments) but also involves parabiblical books: rabbinical writings (Talmud, Mishna), inter-testamentary documents, apocrypha etc. In order to grasp all the nuances of the text, it is indispensable to compare the text of the Qur'an with these older texts while being attentive both to the similarities and dissimilarities. The former bear witness to the literary relationship of the two texts while the latter manifest the specific theological orientation of the new synthesis found in the Qur'an. The idea that the Qur'an is a copy of the Bible[1] has no foundation whatsoever. A copy tries to resemble its model. But the Biblical references in the Qur'an are always treated in a very free and original way – and are disconcerting for a reader familiar with the Bible.[2] If the Qur'an were a copy, it would have to be considered a very poor copy! In reality, the Qur'an is in the line of a whole tradition of sacred literature that it 're-reads' and integrates by adapting it to its own theological conception. The Qur'an does what the Biblical writings have always practised. Over their hundreds of years of history, the Biblical books have never stopped re-working prior texts, modifying them in light of new situations and theologies. Thus it is, for example, that Second Isaiah evokes the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon in terms that call to mind the narrative of the Exodus. The New Testament will assume the same narrative as a symbol of the Christian Easter.

Muslim exegetes have been divided on the use of Biblical writings – the 'Jewish sources' (*isrā'īlīyāt*) – in their commentaries. Some have used them; others have firmly opposed their use. More than anyone, al-Biqā'ī (d. 885/1480), in his great commentary, has abundantly cited Biblical texts from both the Old and New Testament – but he remains an exception. Recently, the Pakistani scholar Mustansir Mir deplored the ignorance of the Bible among Muslims given that it is only by having recourse to the Bible that more meaning can be given to passages from the Qur'an.[3]

We are going to deal with these two aspects of the interpretation by context: in the intratext and in the intertext (when necessary). Actually, only the first

aspect depends directly on rhetorical analysis. But the two aspects are often closely enmeshed and together make up the complete context of the verses being studied. For this reason, we have not been able to remain silent about the intertextual context during our studies of the rhetoric of the suras. In *The Banquet* we gave a heading to it entitled 'Inter-scriptural Context'.

Today, the exegete of the Qur'an runs up against yet another difficulty. In itself, it is not so much the dogma of the uncreated Qur'an, as a direct Word of God, that should be a problem since the rich exegetical tradition shows that the ancients, in spite of this dogma, did not hesitate to interpret the text and, often, in multiple ways, sometimes aligned more than ten possible meanings for the same verse. The difficulty comes more from a quasi-sacralization of the ancient exegetical tradition that results in establishing certain interpretations once and for all to the detriment of other possible interpretations. The paradox is that the great classics are often more flexible than the later tradition we have to deal with today and from which preaching takes inspiration. The result is that a deviation from the popular traditional interpretation is seen as a sacrilege whereas a scrupulous return to the text imposes a revision of the meaning of what has been handed down!

In the examples we are going to study, we will also discuss how to situate the results of our intratextual and intertextual exegesis with respect to the exegetical tradition.

We will not undertake the explanation of the composition of each example we use nor the details of its interpretation. For that, we refer the reader to our studies that have appeared elsewhere or, eventually, to an earlier chapter of this book. Here we will limit ourselves to the minimum necessary for understanding the process that leads from the analysis of the composition of the text to its interpretation.

A first general principle, already formulated by Lund, and that is abundantly verified in the text of the Qur'an is: *pay special attention to the extremities and centre of rhetorical compositions.* They have, in fact, a 'strategic' (Meynet) role and often indicate the major theme of the text.

➢ Let us take, for example, the very first verse of sura 5[4] 'O you who believe, be faithful to your *commitments*!' What commitments? The text is very abrupt and does not specify. The rest of the verse does not enlighten us very much. Right

away it enumerates special dietary prohibitions ('The beast of the flock is made licit for you etc.'). Would the commitments only signify a fidelity to these precepts of what is permitted or forbidden to eat? Or does it refer to the respect of contracts concluded among believers or with polytheists (the opinion of commentators given that verse 2 alludes to polytheists). The greatest exegetes (Ṭabarī, Zamakhsharī, Rāzī) have rightly opined that it is more a question of fidelity to all the obligations of religion. Without doubt, they base their opinion on the fact that this same verse 1 ends with the phrase: 'Truly, God commands what he wishes'. Hence, in rhetorical terms, there is a correspondence between the extreme terms of the part constituted by verse 1:

– [1a] O you who *believe*,
– [b] *be faithful* **TO YOUR COMMITMENTS** !
= [c] Is made LAWFUL for you **the beast of flocks**,
+ [d] – except what will be recited to you.

= [e] Is NOT LAWFUL **game/hunting**
+ [f] when you are in a sacred state.
– [g] Truly, **GOD COMMANDS** what He wishes. (5: 1)

➢ But the analysis can go further. The first sequence of sura 5, verses 1–11, is arranged in a mirror composition (ABC/C'B'A') in which the beginnings of the extreme passages (AA':1–2; 7–11) are in correspondence. Thus there is a symmetry between the initial terms of corresponding passages:

[1] O you who believe, **be faithful** to your *commitments*!

[7] And **remember** God's blessing upon you and *His covenant* (*mīthāq*) by which He bound you, when you said: 'We have heard and we have obeyed.'

A same second-person plural imperative engages the believers to a fidelity to their commitments (1) and to the Covenant that binds them to God (7). The commitments of verse 1, therefore, designate the totality of the obligations of the covenant to which the believers have promised obedience. Thus, from the start, verse 1 announces the central theme of the whole sura: faithfulness to the Covenant.

Two principles can be retained from this example:

- *The interpretation of a term or a member is not necessarily induced from its immediate context* (here 1c–f). *It is necessary to search for the symmetrical element that corresponds to it in the ensemble of the unit* (in this case 1g and 7).
- *Due to the hierarchy of levels in a text, there can be a multiple context for a member and this leaves room for nuances of interpretation.* At the level of the part (1a–g) the member 1a, symmetrical with 1g, is understood as an invitation to fidelity to commitments regarding everything that 'God commands'. But considered on the level of the sequence, the same member 1a, symmetrical of verse 7, takes on the nuance of fidelity to the commitments of the Covenant.

➢ Later on, sura 5 (v. 12 ff.), in contrast with the first sequence, takes on the theme of the infidelities of the sons of Israel to their Covenant.[5] Verse 12 begins as follows:

> And truly, God has received the Covenant of the children of Israel. *And we have sent (or raised up) among them twelve leaders.* And God said: 'I am with you. If you perform the prayer, and pay the alms, and believe in my messengers and succor them, and lend to God a good loan, surely I will erase from you your misdeeds, and surely I will let you enter gardens'.

The phrase 'And we have sent (or raised up) among them twelve leaders' seems out of place. Cross it out and the following phrase (and God said: 'I am with you') fits in perfectly with the preceding ('God received the Covenant of the sons of Israel'). Here again, the context does not explain who these twelve leaders are. The intertextual recourse to the Bible offers different solutions, which ancient and modern commentators have explored without arriving at a convincing conclusion: the twelve sons of Jacob, the princes of the tribes mentioned in the Book of Numbers 1: 16 and 7: 2; the twelve spies sent to reconnoiter Canaan – also mentioned in the Book of Numbers, 13: 1–16; the twelve prophets. The investigation will shift to the general structure of the sequence 12–26 to which this phrase belongs. Its structure is concentric: ABA' (12–14; 15–19; 20–26).[6] In the central part of the last passage A', symmetrical to A, it is a question of 'two men from among those who fear God' (23) who invite the sons of Israel to enter the Holy Land. Everyone agrees that this refers

to Joshua and Caleb, the two explorers of Numbers 14: 6–9 taken from among the twelve leaders of tribes and sent on a mission. The brief allusion to the 'twelve leaders' at the beginning of the sequence (v. 12) indicates the opening of the narrative of the revolt of the sons of Israel who refuse to enter into the Holy Land. This is what Ṭabarī and Zamakhsharī had already understood when they commented on this verse.

This is an example of the application of the fourth law of Lund – *the shift from one extremity of a system towards the centre of another system.* The beginning of the first passage (A) corresponds to the centre of the last passage (A'), which is symmetrical with the first. This procedure, so disconcerting for our Western logic elaborated by the Greeks, is, as we have already noted, very frequent in the Qur'an. It not only enables us to understand the enigmatic phrase of verse 12, but it also indicates *a complementarity between the two passages in their entirety – a fact that should be taken into consideration in their interpretation.* Now the first passage calls to mind the Covenant concluded by God with the sons of Israel and their infidelity and this is again evoked, but in the form of a narrative, by the gift of the Holy Land and the story of the revolt against Moses.

In cases where the context of a verse or a member is both intratextual (involving the rhetorical unit of which the verse is a part) and intertextual (involving a Biblical or other non-Qur'anic text) the interpretation should take into account each of these contexts that sheds light upon one another.

In the two examples above, we have seen that recourse to commentators of the Qur'an can furnish indications but can also cause a great deal of confusion. How should we decide which is the correct interpretation when the commentators disagree or when they sometimes align more than ten different explications for the same verse? In this domain *rhetorical analysis can offer an objective criterion that enables us to discern, among the traditional commentaries, the surest interpretation*, based on elements in the text itself. This also leads to the conclusion *that an interpretation, even a very traditional one, should be considered inexact if it proves alien or contrary to the rhetorical context.*

➢ A blatant example of the latter case is given by verse 2: 106 (known as the verse of 'abrogation'). Nearly all the ancient and modern exegetes consider this verse as the scriptural reference of an exegetic principle according to which

certain verses of the Qur'an would abrogate others because they were anterior to the first.[7] 'As soon as we abrogate a verse or make it to be forgotten, we bring another one better than it or similar to it' (2: 106).

But nothing in the immediate context of this verse, nor in the ensemble of the whole section 2: 87–121 to which it belongs, makes the least allusion to a supposed concurrence among verses of the Qur'an. On the contrary, the whole section is taken up by a polemic with the Jews and (partially) with the Christians who refuse to recognize the revelation of the Qur'an under the pretext that they enjoyed an exclusive election. Thus it was impossible that the Word of God be revealed to a prophet outside of the Jewish or Christian community. But in the immediate context of verse 106 the Qur'an not only affirms the contrary but, in addition, justifies the fact that the Prophet can modify certain verses of the Torah. So what we have is the abrogation of certain verses of the Torah by the Qur'an and not of the Qur'an by the Qur'an.

Here is the analysis of the passage 104–106 that contains the verse in question:

– [104a] O YOU WHO BELIEVE,
= [b] *do not say: 'Favour us!' (as chosen people)*
= [c] *but say: 'Look at us' (have pity on us)*
= [d] and listen.
– [e] For the UNBELIEVERS, a punishment painful.

– [105a] They do not like, THOSE WHO DISBELIEVE among the people of the Book
– [b] and the idolaters
– [c] that any good should be sent down to you from your Lord.
= [d] But God singles out with His mercy whomsoever he pleases;
= [e] and *GOD IS THE LORD OF MIGHTY GRACE.*

– [106a] *Whatever verse We abrogate or cause to be forgotten*
– [b] *We bring one better than it or like it.*
= [c] Do you not know
= [d] that *GOD HAS POWER OVER ALL THINGS*? (2: 104–106)

The two parts (104; 105–106) begin with an antithesis between 'those who believe' (104a) and 'those who disbelieve' (105a). 'Unbelievers' (104e) and 'disbelieve' (105a) serve as median terms between the two parts. They are

therefore closely linked from a formal view point but they are also semantically linked.

What the 'those who disbelieve among the people of the Book' (105a) do not like is that a Book, the favour of God (105c), has also descended on non-Jewish believers whereas the Jews consider themselves as the only 'favoured' of God (104b) (this theme of the exclusivity of the election of the peoples of the Book, Jews and Christians, is developed further in the third sequence of the section in verses 111–121). This Book, moreover, deforms the letter of the Bible since by correcting the prayer of the Jews, which hints at an exclusive election ('Favour us', 104b), the Qur'an modifies the letter of the Scripture. It justifies this in the segment 106a–b.

This analysis totally nullifies the different 'circumstances of revelation' given by the commentators to justify their interpretation. These are obviously unfounded. This is an example, among others, of how rhetorical analysis can correct an exegetical tradition based on a context supposedly historical and external to the text but evidently fabricated to provide an answer to a perceived dilemma.

Several modern Muslim scholars, especially in the Indian peninsula, have taken notice of the error in the classical interpretation of this verse: the reformist Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1889), Maulvi Muḥammad 'Alī (of the Aḥmadīyya community, d. 1951) and even Mawdūdī (d. 1979)! Among Arab authors we have only found Sa'īd Ḥawwā (d. 1989) in his commentary *Al-Asās fī l-tafsīr* and Aḥmad Ḥasan in a study on abrogation.[8] As Ḥasan concludes: 'It seems strange that some of the most eminent authorities in *tafsīr* missed the central question of this verse'.

From our analysis we deduce that *the system of the abrogation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an is not part of the rules of exegeses for the Book* but has been introduced by the jurists (*fuqahā'*) so as to put order among verses that seem contradictory – or at least divergent. It is true that such verses exist but they should be treated otherwise. Later on, we will try to see how this can be done.

This question is clearly of major importance and very relevant today since, in general, the most rigorous and intolerant verses are considered to abrogate the 'milder' or more 'open' verses.

➢ Another case (although less consequential) of the questioning of a traditional interpretation by rhetorical analysis is given in sura 96 ('The Clot'), one of the

most famous suras because it begins with the verse that has traditionally been seen as stating the missionary vocation of the Prophet:[9]

> Read (or recite) in the name of your Lord who created, created man from clotted blood.

Such would have been the first words of the angel Gabriel addressed to Muhammad during one of his spiritual retreats in the grotto of Ḥirā' near Mecca. For the commentators, this is 'the occasion of revelation' of this verse. But all the exegetes have pointed out the difficulty of this sura, which is composed of two fragments stylistically and semantically different. The first five verses are rhymed, perfectly regular and deal (apparently) with the Prophet being sent on a mission by God, the Creator and Revealer. The ensuing verses have a style that is much freer and are an invective against those who try to prevent the 'servant' of God from praying. Tradition links this fragment with the threats of the people of Mecca against Muhammad who was praying alongside the Ka'ba – an incident that took place at least three years after the first revelation.

Even if one admits, in the line of the Islamic tradition and modern historical criticism, that these two fragments so different in style could have had independent origins, their combination in the same sura in the final redaction of the Qur'an should have a reason. What is the semantic, logical and rhetorical unity of this sura – if there is any? Here it is not just seeking the meaning of a verse but of grasping a whole sura that is, apparently, composite.

There is a doubt, first of all, concerning the form and meaning of the opening word of the sura: *iqrā'*. According to a certain number of modern scholars,[10] the formula *iqrā' bi-sm* (which is not found elsewhere in the Qur'an) would be a literal translation of the Hebrew expression *qārā beshêm* 'call', 'invoke the name'. Thus the verse does not want to say: 'Read, in the name of your Lord' but 'Invoke the name of your Lord', signifying an invitation to prayer and, in no way, a being sent out on a mission.

We would thus have, at least in the first five verses, a little invitatory psalm similar to those that can be found in the Biblical Psalter of which Psalm 95 (94) is the best example. In both texts there is the same thematic sequence (a call to praise / God the Creator / the Creator of man) followed by a similar formula: 'For your Lord is the Most Generous One . . .' (sura 96: 3) / 'For He is our God' (Psalm 95: 7).

Sura 96: 1–5	Psalm 95 (94): 1–7
[1] **Invoke the name of your Lord**	[1] Come, **let us sing joyfully to the Lord**, acclaim the Rock of our salvation; [2] let us greet him with thanksgiving; [3] let us joyfully sing psalms to Him, for the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods. [4] In His hand are the depths of the earth and the tops of the mountains are His.
who ***created***,	[5] ***His is the sea, for He has made it; the earth, His hands created it***.
[2] **created man** from a clot.	[6] Come, bow down in worship; let us kneel before the Lord **who made us**!
[3] Call upon, ***for your Lord is the Most Generous*** [4] who taught by the pen, [5] taught man what he did not know.	[7] ***For He is our God***, and we are the people He shepherds, the flock He guides.

Understood in this way, the first five verses are no longer heterogeneous to the following verses; the whole sura is centred on prayer. In rhetorical terms, it forms a *passage* made up of three *parts*: 1–5; 6–7; 8–19 linked by a series of compositional indicators that orientate the interpretation.

[1a] INVOKE (***IQRĀ' BI***) the name of **YOUR LORD** [b] who created, [2] created ***MAN*** from a clot. [3] Invoke, for **YOUR LORD** is the Most Generous [4] who taught by the pen, [5] taught ***MAN*** what ***HE DID NOT KNOW (LAM YA'LAM)***

[6] **NAY**! But ***MAN*** is rebellious [7] when HE SEES himself rich. [8] Verily, unto **YOUR LORD** is **the return**.

[9] HAVE YOU SEEN him who forbids a servant [of God] [10] when he prays? [11] HAVE YOU SEEN if he were in the guidance [12] or urging to piety? [13a] HAVE YOU SEEN if he has counted false [b] and turned away?

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[14] ***DOES HE NOT KNOW (LAM YA'LAM)*** that **GOD** SEES?

[15a] **NAY**! But surely if he does not desist, [b] We shall seize him by the forelock, [16] a lying, sinful forelock. [17] So let him call his council! [18] We shall call the Archangels. [19a] **NAY**! Obey him not, [b] but bow down and **draw near** (***IQTARIB***). (96)

Here, numerous correspondences of terms highlight the pivotal role of the centre (6–8); some correspondences refer to what preceded while others refer to what follows. Thus the terms 'man' and 'your Lord' frame the central trimember (6–8) as they also provide the framework for the two trimembers of the first

part (1a, 2; 3, 5), although they do so in inverse order. The verb 'to see' figures in the centre (7) and in the last part (9, 11, 13, 14). Particularly remarkable is its presence in the two centres (6–8; 14). In verse 7 the rebel 'sees himself' in comfort but in verse 14 it is God who 'sees' his evil deeds. The negation 'Nay' (*kallā*) at the beginning of the centre (6) is taken up again twice in the third part (15a, 19a). In verse 6 it introduces an antithesis. The centre (6–7) puts the rebellion of the self-satisfied rich person in opposition to the generosity of God, Creator and Revealer in the first part. This meaning extends into the last part with the two 'Nay's (15a and 19a), which frame a particular case of the condemnation of the rich in the person of the intruder who prevents the servant of God from praying. Finally, the last member of the centre might establish a correspondence between the eschatological 'return' towards God (8) and the praying person who 'draws near' to God. This could be seen as an instance of the third law of Lund.

The end of the first part 'what he did not know' corresponds to the centre of the third part 'does he not know?' (the same form in Arabic *lam ya'lam)* according to the fourth law of Lund. This correspondence explains the meaning of the enigmatic verse 5: 'taught man what he did not know'. What is it that man does not know? Verse 14 answers: 'that God sees'. God sees the arrogance of the impious and will not leave it unpunished. In other words, God is judge and will judge every person. This also fits in with the meaning of the second segment: 'Towards the Lord is your return'.

Finally, a noteworthy trait links the beginning and the end of the sura. The first term and the last are not only imperatives issuing an invitation to pray but they also form a paronomase: 'invoke' (*IQRĀ' BI)* / 'draw near' (*IQtARIB)*. This rhetorical and phonetic correspondence, which has to be intentional, leaves no doubt as to how *iqrā'* should be understood. It is a call to prayer and not the investiture of a prophetic mission as tradition has interpreted it.

[1a] INVOKE (***IQRĀ' BI***) the name of **YOUR LORD** [b] who created, [2] created ***MAN*** from a clot. [3] Invoke, for **YOUR LORD** is the Most Generous [4] who taught by the pen, [5] taught ***MAN*** what ***HE DID NOT KNOW (LAM YA'LAM)***

– [6] **NAY**! But ***MAN*** is rebellious [7] when HE SEES himself rich. [8] Verily, unto **YOUR LORD** is **the return**.

[9] HAVE YOU SEEN him who forbids a servant [of God] [10] when he prays? [11] HAVE YOU SEEN if he were in the guidance [12] or urging to piety? [13a] HAVE YOU SEEN if he has counted false [b] and turned away?

[14] ***DOES HE NOT KNOW (LAM YA'LAM)*** that **GOD** SEES?

[15a] **NAY**! But surely if he does not desist, [b] We shall seize him by the forelock, [16] a lying, sinful forelock. [17] So let him call his council! [18] We shall call the Archangels. [19a] **NAY**! Obey him not, [b] but bow down and **draw near** (***IQTARIB***). (96)

Hence the sura, framed by an invitation to prayer and to perseverance in prayer (1a, 2; 19a–b), first recalls God's generosity (first part), which expresses itself in creation (1b–2) and revelation (4–5), then denounces (third part), in an eschatological perspective, the ingratitude of an impious man who opposes himself to the prayer of the servant of God. The centre (6–8) links the two other parts by a double maxim, which is both moral and eschatological. It opposes itself as an antithesis to what preceded it (the divine generosity) and announces what will follow – a particular illustration in the impious and rebellious man.

The traditional interpretation of the beginning of this sura is entirely based on an 'occasion of revelation', which is itself based on a possible, but not obligatory, reading of the first word. This initial imperative does not specify who is speaking nor to whom it is addressed nor what would be the object of the reading or listening to what it commands. Moreover, this interpretation does not assure any coherence to the ensemble of the sura. Rhetorical analysis on the contrary, by adopting another reading of the first word, unifies the whole sura in the same way it unifies certain Biblical Psalms. *In this case, the accumulation of compositional indicators invalidates a traditional interpretation based on a single and fragile indication (the initial imperative).*

In the preceding examples, rhetorical analysis has proved to be an instrument of discernment for the Islamic exegetical tradition. But rhetorical analysis can sometimes also *criticize certain positions of modern historical criticism.* In sura 96, rhetorical analysis perceives a rhetorical and semantic coherence whereas historical criticism is, by its methodological principle, more sensitive to stylistic and semantic disparity among the two or three 'fragments' of the sura. And it is not rare that rhetorical analysis contradicts the tendency of historical criticism to consider certain verses as 'out of place'. This is especially the case of constructions, which obey the fourth law of Lund. As we have seen in the chapter on centres (Chapter 5), this law sometimes involves the unexpected positions of certain verses in the text. In order to make the text more logical and give it better continuity, historical criticism will propose repositioning together the two corresponding members that are so strangely separated from one another and of which one, at least, seems to have gone astray in an immediate context that is alien to it. We have already given the example of 5: 12. We have seen other examples in Chapter 5 when we dealt with the fourth law of Lund.

Let us keep in mind the rule that *the centres are often a key of interpretation* and, because of this, merit very special attention.

➢ In the Qur'an, the story of Joseph (sura 12) follows the Genesis narrative rather faithfully. Rhetorical analysis[11] shows that the composition of the sura is divided into twelve sequences arranged in a mirror composition.

A Prologue	12: 1–3
B Vision of Joseph	4–7
C Problem of Joseph with his brothers: the trickery of the brothers against Joseph	8–18
D Relative promotion of Joseph	19–22
E Attempted seduction of Joseph by a woman	23–34
F Joseph in prison, interpreter of the visions of two prisoners and **prophet of monotheism**	35–42
F' Joseph in prison, interprets the vision of the king	43–49
E' Denouement of the seduction by the woman: Joseph rehabilitated	50–53
D' Definitive promotion of Joseph	54–57
C' Problems of Joseph with his brothers: the trickery of Joseph against his brothers	58–98
B' Accomplishment of the vision of Joseph	99–101
A' Epilogue	102–111

At the quasi-centre of the mirror composition, at the extreme point of the first side, there is an episode that is not found in the parallel Biblical story. When Joseph finds himself back in prison, he is invited by his two fellow prisoners to interpret their dreams. But before giving his interpretation, Joseph preaches them a little monotheistic sermon, in a style typical of the Qur'an, and invites them to turn away from idols to embrace the true faith in the unique God (37b–40).

[37] I have forsaken *THE RELIGION OF A PEOPLE* who do not believe in God and they are deniers of the hereafter. [38] And I follow the religion of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It is not for us to associate anything with God. That is a favour of God to us and to the people. BUT MOST OF THE PEOPLE DO NOT SHOW GRATITUDE.

[39] O my two fellow-prisoners,
are ***various Lords*** better
or ***God the One***, the Victorious?

[40] You do not serve besides Him but names which you have named, you and your fathers. God has not sent down any authority for them. The judgement is only God's. He has commanded that you serve none but Himself. That is *THE RIGHT RELIGION*. BUT MOST OF THE PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW.

(12: 37b–40)

The discourse has a concentric composition. In the extreme pieces, Joseph affirms his adhesion to monotheism (37b–38) and invites his fellow prisoners to imitate him (40). The centre poses the essential question of Islam: What is better? Many gods or the unique God?

In the context of the whole narrative, this discourse is very brief but its place in the centre gives it special importance. Joseph changes himself into a prophet of monotheism – something that is not found in the Bible.

This example shows *the major importance of the centre for interpreting the whole system in which it is found* (here the system is the entire sura). In addition, this particular centre also illustrates *the changes made by the Qur'an in its re-reading of the Bible.* In Genesis, the tale of Joseph is centred on the problem of fraternal relationships. At the beginning of the book, the first murder – that committed by Cain – shows jealousy rupturing the fraternal bond. At the end of the book there is a story that illustrates 'the invention of fraternity'[12] through pardon and reconciliation. This aspect is not absent from the story as it stands in the Qur'an but the centrality of Joseph's monotheistic sermon brings about a semantic shift in the major theme of the narrative. The Patriarch Joseph of the Book of Genesis who, in Christianity, has become a type of Jesus suffering and redeeming, here becomes the prophet of monotheism, the figure of Muhammad.

In sura 5 there are some centres with paradoxical characteristics. They apparently affirm the contrary of the verses that frame them, causing trouble for the commentators who have to have recourse to unconvincing occasions of revelation that betray their obvious meaning. These are the verses that are more 'open' in ethical matters or more 'tolerant' in religious matters and in contrast with other verses that are more rigorous or exclusive.

➢ A striking example can be found in the verse 5: 93, which we cited above when discussing ethical maxims (p. 130).[13] It figures in the passage 87–96, which gives a whole list of foods and other things that are licit and illicit. Among them is the famous prohibition of wine:

> O you who believe, *fermented drink*, gambling, carved stones and divining arrows are corruption from the work of Satan. Stay away from them – then you will perhaps prosper! What only wishes Satan is to raise hostility and hatred among you, through *fermented drink* and gambling, and to stop you remembering God and prayer. (90–91)

The passage to which these verses belong has a concentric construction with verse 93 at its centre:

– [93a] To those who		**BELIEVE AND DO GOOD WORKS**	
– [b] no sin [is imputed] for what they have eaten,			
= [c] as long as they	*fear* [God] and	**BELIEVE AND DO GOOD WORKS**,	
= [d] then again	*fear* [God] and	**BELIEVE**,	
= [e] then again	*fear* [God] and	***practice good works***.	
+ [f] And God loves		***the good-doers***.	(5: 93)

Unlike the parts that frame it, this short central part, the length of a piece, does not directly address itself to 'you who believe' but rather to the third person plural as the utterance of a universal principle in a language that is particularly insistent, with an accumulation of repetitions that accentuate the serious conditions involved in this principle.

The importance of this verse, which contradicts the prohibition of wine mentioned just previously, has been annulled by the commentators who have recourse to a 'circumstance of revelation', which makes a rule null and void; in this case the circumstance would have concerned warriors killed in battle after having imbibed wine prior to the promulgation of its prohibition. In other words, practically speaking, verse 93 would be abrogated by verses 90–91.

But given the fact that it is in the third person plural and contains solemn repetitions, this central verse has rather the aspects of a universal moral rule: no fault can be imputed to the true believer because of dietary questions. In the chapter on 'centres' (Chapter 5), we saw that these often have the importance of universal principles in contrast to the more limited and circumstantial importance of the texts that frame it. Here it would seem that the central part of the passage (93) should be taken as the final moral criterion whose purpose is to shed light upon the prohibitions promulgated in the extreme parts and to make them more flexible. Put otherwise, if drinking leads you to drunkenness, disputes and negligence in prayer, abstain from it (91). If this is not the case, there is, in principle, no fault for the believer in drinking moderately as long as the essentials of religion are maintained: faith, fear of God and good works. This was the opinion of the Sudanese reformist scholar Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha: 'When the spiritual traveler arrives at the desired goal – that is a conscience totally pure and a behavior which is totally righteous,

all comestible substances become lawful for that man such as they were in the beginning.'[14]

From the preceding example and other similar ones, the following principle of interpretation can be induced: *the statements that are included in the centre of a concentric construction sometimes reveal principles that are more universal and fundamental than the particular rules that surround them. The latter are rather in the line of counsel, circumstantial exhortation or relative to particular historical situations.*

Rather than have recourse to the rules of the abrogating and the abrogated, it is more productive (but more complex) to respect the whole text such as it is. Nothing is abrogated. But *there is a semantic hierarchy among the verses, as there is a hierarchy between things and principles. This hierarchy is indicated by the structure of the text itself (distinction between the centre and the peripheries)*. The believer is invited to reflect upon this hierarchy and take a position responsibly and with full awareness.

➢ In Chapter 4, where we dealt with the central terms (p. 103), and in Chapter 5 where we dealt with theological maxims (p. 129), we have already quoted the example of verses 5: 48 and 5: 69.

Sura 5: 48

[48g] For each of you we have made a way and a path, [h] and if God had wanted, he would have made you a single community. [i] But he tests you in what he has given you: [j] surpass yourselves in good works. [k] Unto God shall you return, all together: [l] He will tell you of that in which you have been differing.

Sura 5: 69

[69a] Surely, those who believe, [b] and those who practice Judaism and the Sabians and the Christians, [c] whoever believes in God and the Last Day, [d] and does good works, [e] there is no fear for them, and they will not be afflicted.

These two verses, placed at the centre of polemical passages regarding the peoples of the Book, paradoxically recognize the legitimacy and saving power of other monotheistic religions.

In the context of the second law of Lund, we have already analysed the passage where verse 69 constitutes the centre. It can be noted that the content of this verse is on the level of a trans-historic theological principle whereas the surrounding parts allude to particular situations or attitudes inscribed in the contingencies of history.

> If the people of the Book had believed and had been pious [...]; if they had obeyed the Torah and the Gospel [...]; for many among them, what they do is evil [...]; what has come down to you from the part of your Lord makes many among them increase in rebellion and disbelief; they have treated some [prophets] as liars and have killed some of them etc.[15]

Here again we have a difference of levels in the discourse of the Qur'an between a centre, which expresses a universal concept, and the literary units that frame it and which are concerned with historical and contingent facts. *It is in the light of the universality of these centres that the surrounding circumstantial and polemical verses should be understood and put into perspective.*[16]

To finish, here are two more examples that help to exorcise wide-spread popular interpretations that, however, have absolutely no foundation in the text.

➢ It is well known that at the end of the *Fātiḥa* (1: 7), the member 'those who have incurred [Your] anger' is almost unanimously interpreted by the commentators as designating the Jews and 'those who have gone astray' as designating the Christians while 'those whom You have favoured' are, obviously, the Muslims. In accordance with the method of 'explaining the Qur'an by the Qur'an', the exegetes base their interpretation on two verses of sura 5; verse 60, 'God has become angry' with the Jews and verse 77, which warns against the Christians who have 'gone astray and led astray many'.

In his German translation and commentary, Adel Theodor Khoury takes apart this 'proof' by citing a considerable number of other verses where the divine anger and going astray concern a whole range of individuals or groups among whom Jews and Christians are only one case among others.[17] In this example can be seen the risk of making subjective – even ideological – choices by using the method in question.

On the other hand, absolutely nothing in the context of the sura indicates such an explanation. The sura makes no reference to the Jews, Christians or 'peoples of the Book'.

From a rhetorical viewpoint, it should be noted that verses 6 and 7 form a piece composed of two antithetical segments.

– [6] GUIDE-US on the right *path*,
– [7a] *the path* of those You have blessed,
= [b] *not* [those who] incur anger,
= [c] *nor* those WHO GO ASTRAY. (1: 6–7)

The two members of the first segment (6–7a) are linked by the median term 'the path'. They form a complementary parallelism with the second member explaining the first (the 'right path' is that of 'those whom You have blessed'). The two members of the second segment (7b–c) are synonymic and begin with a negation. An antithesis in the extreme terms frames the ensemble of the piece: 'guide us' / 'go astray'. Those who have gone astray are, then, those who do not let themselves be guided. But the second verse of sura 2, which immediately follows the *Fātiḥa*, explains that the 'guide' of those who fear God is the Book. In other words, those who have gone astray are all those who do not fear God and who, moreover, do not let themselves be guided by the teachings of the Qur'an. That holds true for the pagan enemies as well as for the 'hypocrites' among the Muslims (the false Muslims, the *munāfiqūn*) or 'some' or 'the greater part' of the Jews and Christians (and hence not for all), according to an expression frequently used in the Qur'an.

From an intertextual point of view, even though only the 'right path' is explicitly named in the *Fātiḥa*, the very classic theme of the 'two ways'[18] is easily recognizable; in particular it echoes Psalm 1. This psalm, moreover, has other similarities with the *Fātiḥa*: it is also a preface to a corpus of sacred texts more or less long – the 150 psalms – with which a number of the 114 suras (above all those of the Mecca epoch) have stylistic and semantic points of contact. Let us simply recall the last two verses of the psalm.

– [5] Therefore in judgement the wicked shall not stand,
– nor shall sinners in the assembly of the just,
= [6] For YHWH watches over the way of the just,
= but the way of the wicked goes astray. (Ps 1: 5–6)

The sura and the psalm have the following terms that are similar: 'the right way' / 'the way of the just', 'those who have gone astray' / 'goes astray'.

For the psalm, there is not any exegete who sees the necessity for giving further detail about who the 'wicked' and the 'sinners' are. They are simply all

those who, by antithesis, 'are not just'. Likewise, for the sura, Rāzī gives a very general meaning for 'those who have incurred Your anger' and for 'those who have gone astray': they are those who 'do what is wrong'[19] and separate themselves from the divine favour.[20]

To understand the *Fātiḥa* in this manner, at least in its last part, gives it a moral amplitude, which is universal and which goes far beyond the ideological narrowness of the popularized interpretation.

➢ The following example brings us back, for one last time, to sura 5. Verse 51 is often interpreted as forbidding friendships between Muslims and non-Muslims:[21] 'O you who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as friends/allies (*awliyā'*)!'

The word *awliyā'*, the plural of *walī*, can have various meanings: friend, partisan, ally, protector. It is only the context that will determine the exact signification. The context of verse 51 is the sequence (constructed concentrically), which goes from verse 51 to 57. At the end of the central part, in verse 56, we read:

> And whoever allies himself to God and to His Prophet and those who believe: they are God's party (the *ḥizb Allāh*)! They will be the victors!

This verse, and others in the same sequence, clearly shows that it is a question of a political covenant and not of personal relations. The commentators recount here an interesting 'occasion of revelation' that confirms this interpretation. Those inhabitants of Medina who had converted to Islam, allied with the Jews through pacts, deprived of assistance and troubled by the increasing hostility of the Jews towards Islam would have submitted their case to the Prophet who answered them with these verses.[22] Even if the strict historicity of this anecdote can be questioned, it shows that, in any case, the commentators who recorded it interpreted verse 51 in a political sense. Here the declaration of the Qur'an clearly refers to a particular political and historical situation that has now completely changed, whereas an ideological exegesis makes it a permanent interdiction separating Jewish, Christian and Muslim believers once and for all.

A final principle of interpretation can be drawn from the examples given above: *rhetorical analysis can restore a universality to the text of the Qur'an – a*

universality that has been lost due to ideological interpretations that have no real foundation in the text itself.

Let us sum things up. In the measure in which this is possible, the interpretation should arise from the different rapports that exist among the elements of a rhetorical system (intratextual exegesis) or, eventually, between the Qur'an and an earlier text that it 're-interprets' by adapting it to its own theological synthesis (intertexuality).

The meaning that disengages itself might not be the same as that given by an interpretation which has become classical or popularized. It is not rare, however, to rediscover this same meaning among all those proposed by the classical commentators – especially the greatest among them such as Rāzī – whom no one could accuse of heterodoxy! Several examples cited in this chapter illustrate well that popularized interpretation is often directly determined by an exclusivist ideological mindset that seeks to separate Muslims and non-Muslims even though the text reveals itself to be more nuanced and open.

Since the principle of the abrogation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an cannot be justified by the text of the Book, exegesis should abandon it. For all that, it is equally impossible to place all the verses on the same semantic level without running into flagrant contradictions (for example, between the prohibition of fermented drinks and the conditional lawfulness of all food; the condemnation of the peoples of the Book and their possibility of salvation). The concentric composition of most of the structures on the superior textual levels allows us to distinguish a difference of semantic levels among the centres, when they state fundamental and universal principles, and the peripheral verses related to determined historical situations that have now changed. These peripheral verses bear witness to the anchorage of the Qur'an in History but they cannot have the same permanent and trans-historic value as do the centres.

8

Looking Ahead

As a way of concluding, we will propose a few leads for continued research.

Other figures of composition?

At the end of his *Treatise*, Roland Meynet states his belief that other figures of composition can be found in addition to those presented in his synthesis. He draws attention especially to the 'phenomenon of closure'. In fact, certain members seem to enclose a rhetorical system by introducing a new element *in extremis*. It is possible that numerous theological clausulae in the Qur'an correspond, at least in some cases, to such a figure. In our analysis, we have considered them sometimes as one of the extreme terms of a composition, sometimes as one of the final terms of two corresponding systems. Perhaps, in the future, it would be of interest to eventually consider them quite simply as 'terms of closure'.

Semitic rhetoric? Near Eastern? Archaic?

We have always spoken of Semitic rhetoric. The fact that the rhetorical system described in these pages was discovered through studies of the Bible and confirmed by the study of the hadiths and the Qur'an is sufficient to justify this name. But nothing obliges us to think that this rhetoric is limited to these sacred books. The contrary would be surprising since the Bible and the Qur'an express themselves in the languages and cultures of their epoch and milieu. In the first chapter, we pointed out the probes that have been made here and there

into other Semitic texts, Ugaritic, Akkadian, Pharaonic, all composed according to the same rhetoric.

We present an example here – the papyrus of Mutemheb, a short magical Pharaonic text that dates from around the first millennium before Christ.[1] Through this formula the magician tries to neutralize the spirit of a male or female ghost who is attacking a woman by the name of Mutemheb.

The papyrus of Mutemheb

– [1] O enemy, (she) enemy,
– [2] dead, (she) dead,
– [3] adversary **whoever he/she might be**,

= [4] **who comes to attack** MUTEMHEB ***born of*** Ese

+ [5] during the night,
+ [6] during the day,
+ [7] **at any instant**.

= [8] YOU WILL BE DESTROYED in your VAULT;
– [9] you will be sought out **WITH VIOLENCE.**

+ [10] A net will be placed against you in heaven;
∗[11] SETH will be against you on earth.
+ [12] You will be made to sail towards the north without being able to land.

= [13] I WILL DESTROY YOUR VAULT,
– [14] I **WILL SHATTER** YOUR SARCOPHAGUS

– [15] With you **who has made malicious manifestations** in MUTEMHEB.
– [16] It is she Horus in the nest of Shemnis.
– [17] She is this adolescent, ***son of*** Bastet.

This text is the length of a part and is made up of three pieces (1–7; 8–14; 15–17) arranged concentrically.

The first piece has three segments: the first (1–3) identifies the assailant; the second (4) identifies the one attacked (Mutemheb); the third (5–7) indicates the time of the attack. The extreme segments, each composed of three brief members end with a formula of indetermination: 'whoever he/she might be' (3) / 'at any instant' (7).

The extreme pieces (1–7; 15–17) correspond. These are negative identifications of the assailant, 'enemy', 'dead', 'adversary' (1–3) / 'you who have

made malicious manifestations' (15) and positive identifications of the one being attacked: 'Mutemheb' (4 and 15), assimilated to Horus who was healed by Isis (Ese) in the nest of Shemnis and declared 'son of Bastet', the protective goddess (16–17). While the first piece gives indications of time: 'during', 'at any instant' (5–7), the third piece gives indications of place: 'in' (15–17). The link between the two pieces is rhetorically underlined by the repetition of synonymic formulas, first in the centre of the first piece (4), then in the extreme members of the last piece (15, 17): 'who comes to attack Mutemheb born of Ese' (4) / 'who has made malicious manifestations in Mutemheb [. . .] son of Bastet' (15, 17). The procedure of 'the fourth law of Lund' is clearly recognizable.

The central piece (8–14), which interrupts the continuity of the text, has three segments likewise arranged according to a concentric composition.

The extreme segments describe the action of the magician against the ghost: his vault, his sarcophagus will be destroyed (8–9; 13–14). The central trimember segment describes the consequences of this action: earth and heaven will be hostile to the ghost who will have no choice but to sail aimlessly on the Nile. The three members mention the three elements: heaven /earth / water.

The placement of Seth, a fearsome deity, in the central member of the whole text (11), emphasizes his importance – as is also the case for the divine name in the concentric compositions of the Bible and (though more rarely) of the Qur'an.

In her latest work, *Thinking in Circles*,[2] the anthropologist Mary Douglas notes the presence of circular compositions in different texts of Antiquity, be they of Semitic origin or not: Greek (The Iliad), Iranian (the Gathas, Zoroastrian hymns) or even Indian (the Rig Veda). A same type of composition can be found in much more recent texts such as the *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) or even *Tristram Shandy* (1767) by Laurence Sterne.

For these last two examples, it should be noted that the studies which have been made concerning them only focused on the macrostructure of the text. In his thesis on the *Mathnawī*, Seyed Ghahreman Safavi only analyses the general composition of the First Book of the *Mathnawī*, the monumental didactic poem of the great Persian mystic and poet.[3] This already represents an important discovery regarding a book with a reputation for not having a very clear structure. However, it still remains to be demonstrated that the rules of Semitic rhetoric also apply at all the textual levels of the poem, even at the level

of its microstructures, to be able to legitimately extend the field of application of this rhetoric to a date as recent as that of the *Mathnawī* and to the sphere of Persian culture. The same can be said for *Tristram Shandy*. The analysis of Mary Douglas only concerns the structure of the book as a whole. This novel, quite obviously, does not employ all the rules of Semitic rhetoric. The other texts mentioned by Mary Douglas must be analysed one by one – as we have been able to do with a few Pharaonic texts – to prove that it is really a question of the same rhetoric.

In spite of the present limits of research, it can already be affirmed that this 'Semitic' rhetoric is not limited to the texts of the Bible and the Qur'an. We are dealing with the fact of a literary culture that was widespread – at least in the ancient Near East. There is still need of a great deal of research and textual analysis before we can know the exact extent in time and in space of this rhetoric.

Spontaneous oral rhetoric or written erudite rhetoric?

Every time we have had the occasion to speak of Semitic rhetoric in conferences, there is a question that invariably comes up: are these structures conscious or not in the mind of the author or editor? Are they spontaneous or do they conform to norms that the scribes of Antiquity transmitted in their schools? In the course of our experience with these texts, we are inclined to believe that both possibilities interacted.

On the one hand, it can be observed that the three figures of composition that characterize Semitic rhetoric are elementary forms of symmetry. Now nothing is more spontaneous for people than symmetry. The forms of local handicrafts as well as those of decorative arts or architecture give testimony to this fact. Marcel Jousse, in his book *Anthropologie du geste* (1974), has shown the profoundly anthropological roots of literary parallelisms, notably in the popular proverbs and rhymes, due to the fact of the bilateralism of the human body. When a person is reciting, he or she instinctively rocks from left to right, from right to left or forward and back with, eventually, a pause between the two movements and this gives rise to a ternary rhyme. These corporal swaying motions are very naturally reflected in oral recitations and their written translations. Such is the case for the proverbs in the Biblical book of the same

name or the parables of the Gospel. Pushing Jousse's idea a bit further, it is also possible to see roots of inverted parallelism and concentric composition in the structure of the human body. Let us cite Diderot who describes the symmetry of the animal (it can simply be replaced by the human body!).

> Nature has made the animal symmetric, a forehead where one side resembles the other, two eyes, in the middle a nose, two ears, a mouth, two cheeks, two arms, two teats, two thighs, two feet. Cut an animal vertically, passing through the middle of his nose and each of the two halves will be exactly like the other.[4]

Not only does symmetry exist everywhere in Nature (the leaf, the flower, the crystal . . .) but everything that we are, including our body, is admirably symmetric. By expressing ourselves through symmetrical forms, we only imitate nature and conform ourselves to what we are. Moreover, it is uncontestable that a symmetrical disposition of a text helps to memorize it. This was particularly important in Antique Culture, which was more oral than written.

All the same, texts of a certain length, structured according to Semitic rhetoric at different textual levels, seem to us to be of such complexity and sophistication that they can hardly be explained by unconscious spontaneity alone. An erudite and conscious literary craftsmanship is at work. According to Mary Douglas, the poets and bards of Antiquity wanted to show off their literary mastery by rivalling in the complexity of their poetic compositions: 'The search for quality encouraged [the poet] to respect the rules, to refine them and to make the composition ever more complex.'[5] These are anthropological questions raised by rhetorical analysis but outside the subject matter of this book.

The Islamic tradition speaks of the 'inimitability' (*iʿjāz*) of the Qur'an. This is, above all, a dogma expressing faith in the divine origin of the text that, by this fact alone, can only be unique, without an equivalent. We have not used nor discussed this expression in this book, which is strictly literary. It is true, however, that through assiduous reading and textual analysis the exceptionally complex and erudite character of this text has become more and more evident to us. We can no longer endorse what Voltaire wrote in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*: 'The Qur'an is a rhapsody without connections,

without order, without art.' We hope to have demonstrated that, in spite of the impression that a superficial reading might leave, the Qur'an is a text whose parts *are linked* according to clearly definable principles of *order* and a consummate work of *art* even though it is outside of our Western and modern mental habits.

Notes

Introduction

1 Now published in Michel Cuypers, *Une apocalypse coranique. Une lecture des trente-trois dernières sourates du Coran* (Pendé, France: Gabalda, 2014).

Chapter 1

1 Ibrahīm Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī, *Naẓm al-durar. Fī tanāsub al-ayāt wa l-suwar* (Cairo, 1992).
2 Saʿīd Ḥawwā, *Al-Asās fī l-tafsīr* (Cairo: Dār al-Islām, 2003), p. 21.
3 See Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān. A Study of Iṣlāḥī's concept of Naẓm in Taddabur-i Qur'ān* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986), pp. 75–84.
4 Alford T. Welch, '*Al-Ḳur'ān*', *Encyclopaedie of Islam* (2nd edn) (Leiden: Brill, 1986).
5 The primitive written form of the Qur'an was full of defects: a same sign could represent several letters and there were no indications of shortened vowels. It was thus easy to read the text in different ways. Little by little, some readings became accepted as canonical while others were rejected. At present, a text established in Cairo by order of King Fouad in 1923 is accepted by almost all Muslims. We might add that the variants among the different canonical readings only concern details and have no impact on the overall meaning of the text.
6 See Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981); Pierre Crapon de Caprona, *Le Coran: aux sources de la parole oraculaire. Structures rythmiques des sourates mecquoises* (Paris: Publications Orientalises de France, 1981).
7 See Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an. A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003), especially pp. 201–223.
8 See A. H. Mathias Zahniser, 'Sūra as Guidance and Exhortation: The Composition of *Sūrat al-Nisā*', in A. Afsaruddin and A. H. M. Zahniser (eds), *Humanism, Culture and Language in the Near East: Studies in Honor of Georg Krotkoff* (Winona Lake/Indiana, 1997), pp. 71–85; 'Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in two long Sūras: *al Baqara* and *al-Nisā*', in *Literary Structures of Religious*

Meaning in the Qur'ān, I. J. Boullata (ed.) (London – Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), pp. 26–55.

9 A general survey of the history of rhetorical analysis can be found in two works of Roland Meynet: *Rhetorical Analysis. An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 42–166 and *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2012) pp. 27–47.

10 See the References section at the end of this book.

11 Two of these texts can be found at the end of Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis*, pp. 357–359 and a Pharaonic text in the last chapter of this book.

12 The results of this research were first published in Arabic: Roland Meynet, Louis Pouzet, Nayla Farouki and Ahyaf Sinno, *The rhetorical and hermeneutical method. Analyses of texts from the Bible and from the Muslim Tradition* (Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq, 1993) (in Arabic); a revised and updated version later appeared in French: *Rhétorique sémitique. Textes de la Bible et de la Tradition musulmane* (Paris: Cerf, 1998).

13 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*.

14 We are summing up and adapting to the Qur'anic text, the presuppositions that R. Meynet develops regarding the rhetorical analysis of the Bible in *Lire la Bible* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), pp. 145–162.

15 Theodor Nöldeke, *Remarques critiques sur le style et la syntaxe du Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1953), p. 13.

16 Richard Bell, *The Qur'ān. Translated with a critical rearrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937).

17 See below, the example of the member 2f of sura 5. Richard Bell thinks that this member is 'displaced' (Bell, 1937, p. 93, n 3).

Chapter 2

1 Meynet, *Treatise*, pp. 7–20.

2 Louis Gardet, 'La dialectique en morphologie et logique arabes', partially elaborated in '*Ḍidd, taḍmīn et takhrīj, muqābal*', in J. Berque and J.-P. Charnay (eds), *L'ambivalence dans la culture arabe* (Paris: Anthropos, 1967).

3 Here and in the rest of the paragraph on binarity, we will only mention one Qur'anic reference as an example among many others. The reader who is interested will find other references in Sabine Schlidke, 'Pairs and pairing', *Encylopaedia of the Qur'an*.

4 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, pp. 80 and 90.

5 Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran. Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung,* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964). See especially chapter 3, 'The Basic Structure of Qur'anic Weltanschauung', pp. 73–94.
6 The *ḍarī'* is a very bitter plant that grows in Hell to nourish the damned.
7 Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an*, pp. 77–79.
8 See Cuypers, *Une apocalypse*.
9 Nöldeke, *Remarques critiques*, p. 7, n 1.
10 'Grammatical persons sometimes change in the Qur'an in an anti-esthetic and pointless manner.' Nöldeke, *Remarques critiques*, p. 13.
11 Bell, *The Qur'ān*, p. 652.
12 We are paraphrasing formulas used by R. Meynet regarding the Bible 'The Greek demonstrates, the Jew shows'; 'The Greek imposes, the Jew proposes', 'The Greek makes affirmations, the Jew asks questions', see Meynet, *Lire la Bible*, p. 121.
13 See Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même. Vocabulaire et argumentation du discours coranique autoréférentiel* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 205–387. Also Dominique et Marie-Thérèse Urvoy, *L'action psychologique dans le Coran* (Paris: Cerf, 2007), especially chapter 2, 'Procédés structurels'.

Chapter 3

1 'En relisant le Coran' in Jacques Berque, *Le Coran* (Paris: Sindbad, 1990), pp. 711–712. In a related text – but of less depth – written shortly afterwards, *Relire le Coran* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993), J. Berque adds other observations on the structure of the Qur'an, notably concerning the importance of centres, groups of verses or strophes and parallelisms (pp. 27–32).
2 See Meynet, *Treatise*, p. 69.
3 Meynet, *Treatise*, p. 56.
4 Meynet, *Treatise,* p. 71.
5 We will do a more detailed study of the different forms of bimember segments in Chapter 4 'The Figures of Composition'.
6 The 'Ād and the Thamūd are two Arab tribes often given as an example in the Qur'an of peoples destroyed by God. Iram most likely designates Aram, another name for Damascus – a city of many columns and of great power – alongside the Egypt of Pharaoh with its pyramids (possible meaning of 'stakes').
7 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, pp. 136 ff.
8 In the famous library of the Ayatollah Mar'ashī Najafī at Qom (Iran) there is a small manuscript of the Qur'an that represents – and this is exceptional – the *Fātiḥa*

on a double page. On the right-hand page the text stops after the member 5a ('You we worship'), whereas the left-hand page begins with the member 5b ('and You we ask for help'). There can be no doubt that the calligrapher was aware of this thematic bipartition of the *Fātiḥa*, which is clearly signified by the central piece (v. 5).

9 We will return, later on, to this rhetorical construction that corresponds to 'the fourth law of Lund'.

10 For a detailed analysis of this ensemble, see Cuypers, *The Banquet*, pp. 62–93.

11 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, pp. 313–322 and 441–448.

Chapter 4

1 In Islamic tradition, there is a debate about verse 1, the *basmalla.* Some think that it is not a part of the sura (as it is in the other suras). Others, on the contrary, consider it (as we do here) as the first verse of sura 1. Even though both opinions are rhetorically possible, the second gives the text a better balance with two bimember segments where the members 1 and 3, 2 and 4 correspond to each other.

2 For the unusual translation of the initial imperative 'Invoke', see Cuypers, *Une apocalypse*, pp. 168–172.

3 See Chapter 1.

4 See Cuypers, *Une apocalypse*, pp. 156–167, 179–232.

5 See Cuypers, *Une apocalypse*, pp. 233–258.

6 See Cuypers, *Une apocalypse*, pp. 89–174.

7 See Cuypers, *Une apocalypse*, pp. 27–88.

8 See the table of the entire sura 5, on p. 61.

9 An analysis of the parts and passages of this sequence can be found in Cuypers, *The Banquet*, pp. 397 ff.

10 Meynet, *Treatise,* p. 131; Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 49.

11 See the table of the sequence on p. 57 above.

12 See the table of the sequence in Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 353.

13 Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 315.

14 See Meynet, *Treatise*, p. 132; Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 49.

15 See Meynet, *Treatise*, p. 132; Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 49.

16 Concerning this unaccustomed translation of the term *ṣamad,* see Cuypers, *Une apocalypse*, pp. 288 ff.

17 Meynet, *Treatise*, p. 132; Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 49.

18 Meynet, *Treatise*, p. 132, Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 49.

19 The sub-part ends with a comma. It is followed by a short second sub-part (19–21), which prolongs the meaning of verses 17 and 18 (see above, p. 119, the table of the entire part). Some commentators have seen this as an indication of a later addition from the epoch of Medina. This irregular rhetorical division could well validate this point of view.
20 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, pp. 245, 298 and 468.
21 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 465.
22 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, pp. 68–69.
23 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 68.
24 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 68.
25 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 68. An omission slipped into the text of *The Banquet* where the verb 'figure' was dropped. This omission made the phrase difficult to understand.
26 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1966), pp. 195–200.
27 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 70.

Chapter 5

1 See Meynet, *Treatise*, p. 42.
2 The sixth law of Lund ('The largest units are often introduced and concluded by framework-passages') simply designates a concentric composition at the level of the 'large units' – a topic we have studied in the preceding chapter, when dealing with total symmetries. R. Meynet has demonstrated the non-pertinence of the seventh law ('There is often a mixture of chiastic and parallel lines within a common unit'), which results in a confusion among the textual levels (*Treatise*, pp. 407–410).
3 '(Ce verset) forme contradiction avec le v. 70', Régis Blachère, *Le Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1949), vol. III, p. 1132, n 73.
4 This law is reproduced here such as R. Meynet rightfully revised it in *Traité de rhétorique biblique* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2007), p. 98, n 96.
5 Bell, *The Qur'ān,* p. 93, n 3. Bell suggests even more reorganizations for the first two verses of the sura. As for Blachère, he proposes moving the text of 2g–m to after verse 11 in order to preserve a more logical trend of thought (*Le Coran,* III, p. 1112, n 3).
6 We will return to sura 96 in Chapter 7 for other correspondences and their interpretation.
7 In the hadiths, the Qur'an can be cited in the centres. The hadith of Heraclius (Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥiḥ* 1: 6), a sequence composed of seven passages in a concentric

formation, cites, in the central part of the central passage that contains a letter from Muhammad to Heraclius, the verse of the Qur'an 3: 64; 'O people of the Book, come to a word common to you and to us . . .'. See R. Meynet et al., *Rhétorique sémitique, textes de la Bible et de la Tradition musulmane*, pp. 268–269.

8 See the complete table in *The Banquet*, p. 250.

9 'Verse 26 is suspicious both in rhyme and sense', Bell, *The Qur'ān*, p. 638.

10 See the table in Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 371.

11 See Michel Cuypers, 'La sourate 55 (*al-Raḥmān)* et le Psautier', *Luqmān* 37 (Téhéran: Presses Universitaires d'Iran, 2002–2003), p. 98.

Chapter 6

1 Elsewhere we have analysed some hieratic pharaonic texts (see 'The papyrus of Mutemheb' in Chapter 8). Since we did not know the language, we had to work with a very literal translation done by Egyptologists. But subsequently we were able to have the result of our analysis verified by these specialists. This unavoidable exception does not invalidate the general rule, which demands that, whenever possible, this way of proceeding be avoided – at least for Arabic, which is a living and important language in the world today.

2 Several canonical versions exist. That known as 'of Cairo', established by the order of King Fouad in 1923, is now used in most of the Muslim world. We have used this version in our work.

3 This, of course, refers to a publication in a Western language; need it be said that in Arabic the order of the pages would be inverted?

4 Meynet, *Treatise*, p. 199.

5 See the analysis of this passage in the treatment of the fourth law of Lund.

6 For an analysis of this passage, see Cuypers, *The Banquet*, pp. 298–299.

7 Meynet, *Treatise*, pp. 221–223 indicates other possible cases of a common factor that could eventually find an application in the analysis of the text of the Qur'an. For now, we have somewhat simplified his re-writing.

Chapter 7

1 A popular Italian daily newspaper published an article concerning our research under the title: *E il Corano 'copiò' la Bibbia*. Nothing could be further from our thoughts.

2 This is a point made by Emilio Platti in his book *Islam étrange? Au-delà des apparences, au cœur de l'acte d'islam', acte de foi* (Paris: Cerf, 2000).
3 Mustansir Mir, 'Reading the Qur'an with the Bible in Mind'; intervention at the colloquium *The Qur'an, Text, History and Culture*, SOAS, London, November 12–14, 2009.
4 See the whole table of the sequence in Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 120 and the interpretation of the first member, pp. 72–73.
5 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, pp. 136 and 165–170.
6 The entire table of the sequence can be found in Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 170.
7 Two in-depth studies of this verse can be found in Geneviève Gobillot, 'L'abrogation selon le Coran à la lumière des homélies pseudo-clémentines' and Michel Cuypers, 'Le verset de l'abrogation (2: 106) dans son contexte rhétorique', in *Le Coran. Nouvelles approches*, M. Azaiez (ed.).
8 Aḥmad Ḥasan, 'Theory of naskh', *Islamic Studies*, 1965, 2, pp. 181–200.
9 For a detailed study of this sura, see Cuypers, *Une apocalypse*, pp. 198–210.
10 They agree with the opinion of an ancient grammarian who explains the particle *bi-* as being a *bā' zā'ida*, a 'superfluous' *bā*. Abū 'Ubayda, *Majāz al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: ed. F. Sezgin, 1988), p. 304.
11 A detailed analysis of the 'Joseph' sura can be found in M. Cuypers, 'Structures rhétoriques dans le Coran. Une analyse de la sourate "Joseph" et de quelques sourates brèves', pp. 134–191.
12 According to the wonderful formula used in the title of the book of André Wénin, *Joseph ou l'invention de la fraternité. Lecture narrative et anthropologique de la Genèse 37–50* (Bruxelles: Lessius, 2005).
13 See the detail of the analysis and interpretation in Cuypers, *The Banquet*, pp. 373–375.
14 Mahmoud Mohamed Taha *Un Islam à vocation libératrice* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), p. 47. Here we are trying to understand the text of the Qur'an. This is in no way a judgement on the rules of conduct that Islam has set up for itself and demands of its adherents. If the Qur'an is the major source of the Muslim religion, it is not the only source.
15 See Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 298.
16 This conclusion concurs with that of Nasr Abou Zeid: 'The confusion between what is dated, whose pertinence is linked to a very precise historical event, and what is stable and permanent in religious texts always leads to aberrations', *Critique du discours religieux* (Paris: Sindbad – Actes Sud, 1999), p. 72.
17 Adel Theodor Khoury, *Der Koran, Arabisch-Deutsch Übersetzung und wissenschaftlicher Kommentar* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlashaus Gerd Mohn, 1990–2001), I, pp. 157–158.

18 This is notably a cliché in Greek wisdom literature. See T. Grandjean, 'Le thème des deux voies: de Parménide et de Prodicos à Dion Chrysostome, à la *Didachè* et au *Coran*'.
19 Khoury, *Der Koran*, p. 157. Khoury references Rāzī, I, pp. 141–143 and likewise Bayḍāwī, p. 12, and the commentary of *Manār*, pp. 66–72.
20 A more detailed comparison between the sura *al-Fātiḥa* and Psalm 1 can be found in Cuypers, *Une apocalypse*, pp. 319–324.
21 See Cuypers, *The Banquet,* pp. 267 ff.
22 Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān, ʿan taʾwīl al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2005), VI, pp. 275 ff.

Chapter 8

1 The reader can find a detailed study of this text along with two other Pharaonic texts in Laetitia Coilliot, Michel Cuypers and Yvan Koenig, 'La composition rhétorique de trois textes magiques' (Le Caire: *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, 109, 2009).
2 Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles. An Essay on Ring Composition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).
3 Seyed Ghahreman Safavi, *The Structure of Rūmi's Mathnawi. New Interpretation of the Rūmi's Mathnawi as a book for Love and Peace, Book One* (London: London Academy of Iranian Studies Press, 2005).
4 Denis Diderot, *Œuvres esthétiques* (Loutherbourg: Salon de 1765, cited in Paul Robert, *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française,* Paris: Dictionnaire Le Robert, 1979, art. 'Symétrique').
5 Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, pp. 126–127.

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