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The Qur'an in Comparison and the Birth of 'scriptures'*

Alexander Bevilacqua (WILLIAMS COLLEGE)

Jan Loop (UNIVERSITY OF KENT)

The Qur'an was a protean book in early modern Europe. From the sixteenth century to the eighteenth, Europeans developed several distinct ways of thinking about it and about the person whom they took to be its author, the Prophet Muḥammad. Medieval Western Christians already regarded the Qur'an as a lawbook. In the Renaissance, this tradition blossomed into treating Muḥammad as a Machiavellian armed prophet. This, in turn, made the Qur'an available as an important example to be considered by a comparative political science. At the same time, consideration of the Qur'an's metre and rhyme brought into view that the Qur'an was a work of literature. This made Muḥammad an orator, and the success of his revelation a result of persuasion rather than of coercion. These distinct traditions intersected and eventually merged. Together, they made the Qur'an fruitful for 'thinking with' under a variety of headings. Philologists, not *philosophers*, advanced this long-term process, though prominent non-scholars like Jean-Jacques Rousseau took advantage of its fruits and used the example of Muḥammad and the Qur'an in their work.

The Qur'an made another contribution to what is now called the Enlightenment. Not too foreign and yet at an intellectually productive distance from Judaism and Christianity, it was a useful point of comparison for the Hebrew Bible. The reinterpretation of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an proceeded in lockstep, often through bidirectional comparison, as both works came to be perceived through new aesthetic, rhetorical, and historical lenses. As a result, the two works converged as never before in European intellectual history. What is more, the study of the Qur'an helped to generate a new comparative concept: that of lowercase, plural scriptures.

1. The Qur'an as Law

From the origins of Western Christian scholarly engagement with Islam, in twelfth-century Toledo, the Qur'an was regarded as a book of law and a political constitution. Law was an avenue for taking the Qur'an seriously, and making sense of it. The first Western translation of the Qur'an, translated into Latin by Robert of Ketton (1143), was entitled 'The Law of Mahomet the Pseudo-Prophet' (*Lex Mahumet pseudoprophetae*).¹ When Robert's translation was published in Basel in 1543, the book's subtitle mentioned the Qur'an, 'by means of which, as by the authentic code

of divine laws (*velut authentico legum divinarum codice*), the Hagarene [i.e., Arab], Turkish and some other people who oppose Christ are governed'.² The construction *velut authentico legum divinarum codice* emphasised the Qur'an's able forgery; it did not present the work as an equivalent of the Holy Scripture.

On this conception, the Qur'an pretended to be a source of law on the model of the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels, the Old and New Law respectively—it acted as a dispensation, or a divine legislation, albeit a false one. In this sense, the 'law of Muḥammad' meant something broader than positive law—it meant the religion itself. Divine law, as Thomas Aquinas theorised, was law derived from Scripture, and ultimately from revelation.³ The Qur'an, though false, provided the law by which so many people lived and were governed. The specific rules and norms by which Muslims lived mattered to Christian polemic because they revealed the depravity of Islam: for example, its permission of polygamy, and the use of violence in spreading the religion.⁴

Interest in the legal aspects of Muslim life received a more practical colouring in the era of the chartered trading companies. The French diplomat André du Ryer produced the first vernacular translation of the Qur'an made directly from Arabic at a time when Europeans worked as commercial agents in Muslim territories. Du Ryer introduced his French translation of 1643 by remarking that, although the 'Turks' were liable to disobey the Ottoman sultan's laws if they could, especially in their dealings with Christians, nevertheless 'if that which is contained in [the sultan's] laws (*commandemens*) leans on the law, sentences, passages, and examples of the Alcoran' then Ottoman judges feel compelled to apply it, 'whether out of hypocrisy or veneration'.⁵ Understanding the Qur'an meant understanding the most venerated part of Ottoman legislation. Thus Du Ryer justified his translation in the first instance as a way of 'beating [the Turks] with their own weapons, and employing their doctrine against the malice of those who wish to trouble the tranquility of merchants'.⁶ Through his translation of the Qur'an into French, Du Ryer sought to give French merchants in the Ottoman Empire knowledge of Islamic law as a way to protect and advance their commercial interests. Du Ryer's translation was, as Alastair Hamilton and Francis Richard have remarked, a commercial product, but it was also a product of commerce.⁷

The English lawyer George Sale joined the tradition of treating the Qur'an like a constitution when he wrote, in the 'Preliminary Discourse' to his 1734 English *Koran*, 'To be acquainted with the various laws and constitutions of civilized nations, especially of those who flourish in our own time, is, perhaps, the most useful part of knowledge.'⁸ This project of political utility—a comparative political science—was sufficient motivation for studying the central text of Islam, though Sale also listed others, including religious polemic and the pursuit of religious truth.⁹ He continued, 'if the religious and civil institutions of foreign nations are worth our knowledge, those

of *Mohammed*, the law-giver of the *Arabians*, and founder of an empire, which, in less than a century, spread itself over a greater part of the world than the *Romans* were ever masters of, must needs be so.’ The importance Sale ascribed to Islam was related to both past and present: Muḥammad had founded a state whose remarkable success in the century after its creation demanded explanation. Moreover, Muslim states still ‘flourish[ed] in [Sale’s] own time’. The project of studying Islam was not a merely historical or scholarly one; it brimmed with contemporary relevance.

On the terms of European political thought, understanding Islam as a political constitution implied that it had a founder, also known as a lawgiver or legislator. Successful political constitutions were most often understood to be the products of a single mind. In the Renaissance, Niccolò Machiavelli breathed new life into the concept of the legislator, which had enjoyed a significant career in political thought starting in classical antiquity.¹⁰ As part of the political science of his *Il principe* (‘The Prince’), he analysed the deeds of great founders of states, a category in which he included Moses, even as he conceded that the Hebrew prophet, being divinely guided, differed from any other historical figure. Founders who took up arms were destined to succeed, because they could compel their followers if they came to doubt: ‘all armed prophets win, and unarmed ones fail.’ His examples of prophets who had made people ‘believe by force’ were Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus.¹¹

Machiavelli did not discuss Muḥammad as an example of armed prophecy, but, influenced by his secular analysis of power, writers of the Cinquecento applied his analytical categories to the Muslim prophet.¹² Qualifying the traditional image of a violent and lascivious impostor, these authors and others in their wake ascribed Muḥammad’s success to his inspired rhetorical skills and his prudent lawgiving and statesmanship. This again set Muḥammad into a comparative perspective alongside other great orators and legislators of antiquity, above all Moses.

In the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, the comparative category of legislator served diverse ends, including the goal of undermining the legitimacy of any revelation: reducing prophets to mere human political figures and their revelations to populist and rhetorical machinations was the strategy of the *Traité des trois imposteurs*, the anonymous treatise that decried not only the imposture of Muḥammad but those of Moses and Jesus as well. Revealed religion, for this literature, was an evil alliance between the priesthood and secular power. Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad all exemplified the fraudulent use of superstition for the sake of establishing despotic political institutions.¹³

Those who instead admired Muḥammad and his achievements promoted him to a great legislator, an armed founder of the kind Machiavelli had described. To the Italian naturalist Francesco Redi he was ‘not just equal to all other ethnic legislators but far superior to them’.¹⁴ To the Englishman Henry Stubbe he was ‘the wisest Legislator

that ever was',¹⁵ and to the French nobleman Henri de Boulainvilliers he was 'a Legislator superior to all those that ancient Greece had produced.'¹⁶ David Nerreter's introduction to his German Qur'an translation, which appeared in 1701, though it adheres to a traditional anti-Islamic polemical tone, explains Muḥammad's prudent policy (*weltkluge Politic*) entirely by reference to the Prophet's astute political, legal, and military manoeuvres.¹⁷ This approach was imported into European Arabic scholarship as well. Even George Sale, the Qur'an translator, referred in his epistle dedicatory to Muḥammad as 'the Legislator of the *Arabs*'.¹⁸

2. The Bible and the Qur'an as Literature

In the seventeenth century, the play of comparisons between the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an became generative for European thought. In earlier centuries, European writers had read the Qur'an through the lens of the Bible, arguing that it was merely derivative, and in fact a forgery.¹⁹ In the course of the seventeenth century, by contrast, many began to read and interpret the Bible through the lens of the Qur'an. As a product of the same linguistic family and of a kindred cultural context, the Qur'an seemed to offer relevant information for a historical interpretation of the Bible. Recent scholarship has stressed the significance of Arabic for early modern Protestant Old Testament studies, but Christian scholars of Hebrew used the Qur'an as more than a linguistic archive.²⁰ Ancient Qur'an manuscripts in Kufic script served to document the historical development of the Hebrew script, Qur'anic passages helped explain Near Eastern rituals mentioned in the Bible, and, as we will see, the Qur'an's style and its poetic structure allowed European scholars to assess the stylistic and aesthetic characteristics of the Hebrew Bible, which had puzzled them for centuries.²¹

Vernacular translation often coincided with the changing European perception of both Bible and Qur'an. Vernacular translations of the Bible, which proliferated in post-Reformation Europe, increasingly raised the question of the Sacred Scriptures' literary qualities.²² In a similar fashion, European vernacular translations of the Qur'an encouraged the perception of the Qur'an as literature. Pier Mattia Tommasino has shown how the first vernacular translation of the Qur'an in the West—Giovanni Battista Castrodardo's version into Italian, published in Venice in 1547—was influenced by Dante Alighieri's *Divina Comedia* ('Divine Comedy'), the principal literary work in the Italian vernacular. The translator's word choices, Tommasino reveals, reflected his extensive acquaintance with Dante's poem.²³ This, in turn, enhanced Italian readers' experience of the Qur'an as a literary work. Similar processes were renewed with André Du Ryer's 1647 translation into French and with George Sale's 1734 translation into English. Among other things, both translations aimed to offer readers a work of literary merit.²⁴

Biblical scholarship in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century emphasised the Hebrew Bible's foreignness and antiquity, undermining the prophetic connections between the Old and the New Testament.²⁵ Scholars also attempted to limit the validity of the legal precepts of the Hebrew Bible by restricting them to their historical and geographical context of origin.²⁶ In this historicist moment, the poetic reading of the Bible seemed an opportunity to overcome the historical, theological, and legal distance that had opened up between the Hebrew Bible and its modern readers. Revealing its poetic dimensions was a way to make it into an active participant in modern life.²⁷ The poetic reading of the Bible did not just bridge the gap between Biblical antiquity and modern life. It also brought the Bible closer to the Qur'an, and the Qur'an closer to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe.

In the early seventeenth century, Joseph Justus Scaliger initiated the rapprochement of Hebrew Bible and Qur'an. In his masterpiece of historical chronology, the *Thesaurus temporum* (1606), Scaliger intervened in the debate about the form of Biblical poetry that had occupied Christian scholars of Hebrew since the sixteenth century. Challenging Jerome's claim that the poetic books of the Hebrew Bible were written in classical metre, Scaliger compares the poetry of the Hebrews with that of the Arabs and Syriacs in order to prove that their poetry differed from the Greek and the Latin tradition. Scaliger points to the absence of any metre in the Hebrew Bible, and compares it to the Qur'an, which likewise lacked any discernible metre but did however use rhyme.²⁸

The observation broke new ground; scholars of Hebrew and of the Bible would develop the comparison in the course of the seventeenth century. In an essay of 1688 dedicated to the characteristics of Hebrew poetry, the Protestant refugee Jean Le Clerc remarked that the poetic quality of the Hebrew Bible consists solely of 'extremely irregular rhymed verses'.²⁹ He found a fruitful point of comparison for this style that combines rhyme with verses of unequal length in the Qur'an, which itself emulates common genres of Arabic poetry:³⁰

This whole book [the Qur'an] is almost entirely composed of rhymes, though the clauses are very uneven; and it seems to them so well written, that Mahomet himself boasts in several places that neither angels nor Demons will be able to equal the elegance of its style. One can conclude that this style had been established for a long time among the Arabs, otherwise this impostor would not have chosen it, or it would have not appealed to them as it did [...]

As this passage shows, in the second half of the seventeenth century the Qur'an and Arabic poetry did not only serve as linguistic archives for a better *literal* understanding of the Hebrew Bible. They also provided a stylistic model for a better understanding of Biblical poetry's *formal* qualities.

The changing understanding of the stylistic characteristics and aesthetic qualities of the Qur'an and the Bible in the seventeenth and eighteenth century resulted from increased empirical knowledge and often concurred with more sympathetic attitudes to Islamic revelation.³¹ But to read the Qur'an as poetry or as literature did not intrinsically break with traditional polemical attitudes. The comparison with poetry and fiction figures in the traditional Christian view of Muḥammad as an impostor who employed trickery and deception in order to seduce the masses. Indeed, the comparison even predates Christian polemic; the Qur'an itself already rejects accusations from its time of revelation that associate the Prophet Muḥammad with soothsayers, magicians, and, especially, poets.³²

This polemical comparison resonates in some seventeenth-century histories of the origins of fiction in which the Qur'an served as an early example of 'the art of lying pleasantly'.³³ Possibly inspired by similar ideas in Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quijote* (1605), the French scholar Claude Saumaise argued, in 1640, that the genre of the novel had been transmitted via Persian and Arab models to Spain and thence to the rest of Europe.³⁴ The French theologian Pierre Daniel Huet echoed this opinion in his pioneering *Traité de l'origine des romans* of 1670.³⁵ Huet describes an 'esprit poétique' of Oriental nations, by which he means Egyptians, Arabs, Persians, and Syrians, which is 'inventive and loving of fictions'. This poetic spirit expresses itself in figurative discourses, in the frequent use of allegories, fables, and parables in theology, fiction, and philosophy, as well as in politics and morality.³⁶ According to Huet, this Oriental poetic spirit and its inclination for metaphor, allegory, and fiction produced the first fables—and also the Qur'an.³⁷ 'Their Alcoran is of this kind', he argues, but so too the 'lives of their Patriarchs, their Prophets, and Apostles are all fabulous'.³⁸

Huet yoked this novel argument to a traditional polemical enterprise. By ascribing the style of the Qur'an to the 'poetic, inventive, and fiction-loving spirit' of the Orientals and referring to it as an example of the Arabs' mastery of 'lying pleasantly', he sought to undermine Islam's claim to truth and to consign it to the realm of fiction and forgery.³⁹ By contrast, Huet vehemently defended the divine truth found in Sacred Scripture against Baruch Spinoza and other Biblical critics who would place the Bible on the same level as Greek fables and the Qur'an.⁴⁰ Huet wrote that, on a stylistic level, the Hebrew Bible, by means of accommodation to the 'esprit oriental', expressed its divine inspiration in mystical, allegorical, and enigmatic ways. Hence many of the Hebrew Bible's books are 'works of poetry, full of figures'.⁴¹

Against the classicising aesthetic proposed by his opponent Charles Perrault and others, Huet repeatedly defended the aesthetic standards and characteristics of Eastern poetry. He identified and acknowledged the sense of a gap between modern French and ancient Oriental aesthetic norms, be they Arabic, Japanese, or Hebrew:⁴²

What would the good M. Perrault say, if he were to read the poem of Tograi, which is so esteemed among the Arabs, and which he would find to be much more figurative than Pindar? What would he say about the Japanese authors, who express themselves in terms that are so elevated that they are very difficult to understand? The Psalter, the Song of Songs, how grand, how forceful, how elevated are they? Such is the genius of the Orientals and they believe themselves to be equally entitled to give their taste as the rule of good taste, as M. Perrault is.

Huet attempted to bridge this gap by deploying a relativistic concept of taste as well as an aesthetic concept that captures the (purported) characteristics of ‘Oriental’ style, with its figurative, grand, elevated, and forceful speech. This interpretation runs counter to most other early modern assessments, which approached the Qur’an from a formal perspective and expressed reservations about its stylistic techniques, particularly its use of rhymes. Measured against the classical norms of poetry, the rhymed verses of the Qur’an, which did not follow any recognisable metrical rules, provoked polemical scorn and derision.⁴³

Huet’s assessment of the oriental style and its ‘forceful’ and ‘elevated’ qualities seems to follow a general shift of the focus of literary criticism from form, syntax, semantics, and style to the emotional effects of poetic expressions on their recipients.⁴⁴ The key notion that enabled European readers to capture the aesthetic qualities of Oriental literature, which was traditionally perceived as irrational, disorderly and figurative—was that of the ‘sublime’. The concept was made popular by Nicolas Boileau’s translation of Pseudo-Longinus’s essay *Traité du sublime* (‘On the Sublime’), in 1674, in which the sublime is defined as that which causes *ékstasis* and astonishment, that which shocks and dazzles.⁴⁵ Hence, it provided aesthetic categories for passionate, energetic language which would become the hallmark of poetic language in the eighteenth century and beyond. Its application to Biblical language and style was facilitated by pseudo-Longinus’s use of the beginning of Genesis as an example of the sublime.⁴⁶

So likewise the *Jewish* Legislator, no ordinary person, having conceiv’d a just idea of power of God, has nobly express’d it in the beginning of his Law. ‘And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. “Let the earth be,” and the earth was’.

As a result, the sublime also played a central role in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century quests for Biblical poetry. Sublimity is the chief commendation of Hebrew poetry, the Oxford scholar Robert Lowth writes in his twenty-seventh lecture on the sacred poetry of the Hebrews.⁴⁷

The aesthetic category of the sublime bridged the gap between ancient and modern poetry, as well as between Eastern and Western poetry.⁴⁸ It brought the Bible and the

Qur'an closer together because it transformed the general appreciation of their respective style in similar ways. The traditional hierarchy between Qur'an and Bible was levelled—if not in terms of content, certainly stylistically and linguistically. Scholars often used similar expressions when assessing their respective styles. In the preface to his translation, for instance, Sale describes the style of the Qur'an as 'sublime and magnificent'.⁴⁹ At the beginning of the nineteenth century Johann Wolfgang von Goethe echoed these sentiments; in his annotations to the *West-Östliche Divan*, he writes that the style of the Qur'an is 'severe, great, frightening and in some instances truly sublime'.⁵⁰

3. Muḥammad as Orator and Legislator

From the outset, the rise of Islam prompted European observers to ask what explained its tremendous success. How had the Qur'an's teachings won so many hearts, and so quickly? In the early modern era, European scholars sought to forsake supernatural explanations that interpreted Islam as a divine scourge, and Muḥammad as a tool of God's intervention, or even as Antichrist. These writers also attempted to explain Islam's expansion with more profound historical reasons than Muḥammad's use of violence and his endorsement of polygamy.⁵¹ Understanding the Qur'an as literature offered the European reader useful rhetorical and psychological concepts to this end. The rhetorical and aesthetic approaches explained the Qur'an's hold on its audience. Near the borders to the Ottoman Empire, the scholar Andreas Acoluthus apparently had occasion to observe:⁵²

Muslims so overcome by the elegance and grace of rhymed prose, that, when it came to be expressed in the recitation or rather the chanting of the Koran, they raised their contorted eyes to the sky, in the passion of their devotion and their astonishment at the exquisite words, and they showed other signs of veneration for the Koran (of such kind are the kisses respectfully given to the book, and the application of hands composed in the form of a cross to the chest).

Remarkably, Acoluthus does not just acknowledge the Qur'an's aesthetic effect on Arabic-speaking listeners and readers. He also suggests that the Qur'an gains its power not only through its stylistic elegance but through its prosody when it is heard. He thus offers an early Western reflection on the double facet of the Qur'an as both oral and written scripture that is so central to Islamic theology and culture.⁵³

Acoluthus, like most of his predecessors and contemporaries, did not deviate from a traditional polemical intent, but rather sought to fortify it. His insight into the rhetorical power of the Qur'an supported the traditional idea of Muḥammad's deception, seduction, and imposture: 'This is the enticing Siren who soothes the souls of the Muhammadans with her pleasant speech and persuades them of the divine origin

of the book itself. If this deceptive make-up were wiped off the Koran's ugly cheeks, nobody would dare to kiss them.'⁵⁴ Yet Acoluthus' case illustrates the diverse trajectories of early modern European ideas about the Qur'an. For, with variations, the argument about the book's rhetorical effects began to dominate European scholarly explanations of its appeal, and, more broadly, of the rapid spread of Islam.

Literary approaches to the Qur'an helped to make sense of the rise of Islam as an historical event, enriching and complicating the interpretation of Muḥammad as a legislator that was first elaborated in the Italian Renaissance. The historical and rhetorical approaches to the Qur'an and its origin became intertwined with the view of Muḥammad as a legislator. Scholars of our time have often read the tradition of the legislator purely as a chapter in political thought, in isolation from the literary and scriptural reinterpretation of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an reconstructed here. We would like to suggest that these strands make greater sense taken together: the concepts of Moses and Muḥammad as orators and as legislators were often interwoven, as they emphasised different but related aspects of the prophets' achievements.

In 1734, George Sale, the English Qur'an translator, interpreted Muḥammad as both orator and legislator in the 'Preliminary Discourse' to his *Koran*.⁵⁵ Coming as it did at the outset of a major translation, this dual interpretation was both prominent and influential, read by the many who approached the Qur'an with Sale's guidance. Sale depicted Muḥammad as someone who had 'a very piercing and sagacious wit, and was thoroughly versed in all the arts of insinuation'.⁵⁶ As for the Qur'an, he was emphatic that all Arabic writers celebrated its beauty: 'The *Korân* is universally allowed to be written with the utmost elegance and purity of language ... it is confessedly the standard of the *Arabic* tongue.'⁵⁷ Nor did he consider this Muslim opinion to be specious: 'this book was really admired for the beauty of its composure by those who must be allowed to have been competent judges.'⁵⁸ He associated its style with that of the Hebrew Bible (which he believed it imitated) and with what had come to be the hallmarks of the 'Oriental style', at once florid and sublime.⁵⁹

In turn, this aesthetic appraisal underpinned Sale's explanation of Muḥammad's efficacy.⁶⁰

It is probable the harmony of expression which the *Arabians* find in the *Korân*, might contribute not a little to make them relish the doctrine therein taught, and give an efficacy to arguments which had they been nakedly proposed without this rhetorical dress, might not have so easily prevailed.

The literary treatment of the Qur'an, including the aesthetic experience which Sale the translator could not hope to convey to his reader ('he must not imagine the translation comes up to the original, notwithstanding my endeavours to do it justice'), supported

Sale's analysis of Muḥammad's political success.⁶¹ Sale reminded his readers that 'very extraordinary effects are related of the power of words well chosen and artfully placed, which are no less powerful either to ravish or amaze than music itself'.⁶² To support this point he cited Meric Casaubon's *Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (1655) from which he borrowed the analytical vocabulary of rapture and amazement. 'Enthusiasm' is a complex concept that since the seventeenth century was used to denounce heretical or sectarian religious forms, usually ones with a claim to revelatory spiritual experiences.⁶³ Casaubon's *Treatise* and Henry More's *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1656) offered a natural explanation for events of 'divine inspiration' and 'supernatural' encounters. They argued that diseases and conditions such as melancholy and epilepsy most often lay behind alleged divine or demonic manifestations.⁶⁴

Yet Sale did not see Muḥammad as an epileptic in the way that a lengthy medieval Christian polemical tradition had done.⁶⁵ Indeed, the chapter of Casaubon's *Treatise* on which he draws is not the one in which the 'enthusiastic' effects of natural diseases are discussed and in which Casaubon actually refers to Muḥammad. Rather, Sale references the chapter on the connections of rhetoric and enthusiasm: Muḥammad has been reclassified.⁶⁶ For Sale, the Muslim prophet must have deliberately sought rhetorical effects:

Mohammed seems not to have been ignorant of the enthusiastic operation of rhetoric on the minds of men; for which reason he has not only employed his utmost skill in these his pretended revelations, to preserve that dignity and sublimity of style, which might seem not unworthy of the majesty of that Being, whom he gave out to be the author of them; and to imitate the prophetic manner of the *Old Testament*; but he has not neglected even the other arts of oratory; wherein he succeeded so well, and so strangely captivated the minds of his audience, that several of his opponents thought it the effect of witchcraft and enchantment, as he sometimes complains.

Sale argues that Muḥammad deliberately manipulated his audience not merely through skillful use of the musical cadences of language, but through a subtle understanding of human psychology. The comparison with Casaubon is clarifying: Sale's Muḥammad is a canny political operator, not a victim of physical illness mistaken as divine inspiration.

Sale's treatment of the Qur'an's rhetoric agrees with his sanguine and even-handed portrayal of Muḥammad as a political actor.⁶⁷ He rejects the polemical representation of Muḥammad as a 'monster of wickedness' and seeks to replace it with a plausible portrait of such a successful founder, the 'sincerity' of whose 'intentions [he]

pretend[s] not to inquire into'.⁶⁸ Only on one issue does Sale's charity falter: how did a man of 'at least tolerable morals' turn to aggressive violence? Machiavelli's analysis of armed and unarmed prophets in *Il principe* comes to the rescue. Sale writes that Muḥammad must have found 'by experience, that his designs would otherwise proceed very slowly, if they were not utterly overthrown; and knowing on the other hand that innovators, when they depend solely on their own strength, and can compel, seldom run any risque'. In other words, he credits Muḥammad with the insights of politics, those elaborated most famously in his own time by 'the politician', Machiavelli, who 'observes ... that all armed prophets have succeeded, and the unarmed ones have failed'.⁶⁹

Sale does not himself endorse this—he elaborates on the topic with a judicious discussion of the role of violence in establishing religions both true and false. He declares himself agnostic on whether Muḥammad was justified in waging offensive warfare, but goes on to note that it seems a proof of Islam's human invention that it was advanced by the 'sword', and of Christianity's truth that it was not.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the insights from Machiavelli help to make sense of Muḥammad's actions, which are thereby placed within the canon of classical legislators established by the Florentine humanist.

This reinterpretation of Muḥammad was by no means restricted to those professionally concerned with the Qur'an. As many studies have reminded us, the Enlightenment was the golden age of the figure of the legislator in European thought.⁷¹ Muḥammad too took his place among these emblematic founders. If the Muslim prophet was not an example that Machiavelli thought to include in *Il principe*, by the time of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the most influential eighteenth-century theorist of the legislator, he had firmly joined the pantheon of world-historical legislators alongside classical and Biblical examples.⁷²

Rousseau considered Muḥammad in two separate works, spanning the historical-legal and the rhetorical-poetic angles that this essay has sketched out. In his *Essai sur l'origine des langues* ('Essay on the Origin of Languages', written around 1754 but only published posthumously in 1781), insight into the Qur'an's oral power underpins Rousseau's comments on the persuasive and seductive power of Qur'anic recitation. Rousseau writes that Northern languages are better written than spoken, while Southern languages would lose their life and their warmth when written. The meaning would transcend the words and is completely materialised only in the accents. Hence, 'to judge the genius of Orientals by their books, is to want to paint a man's likeness from his corpse'.⁷³ To support this point, Rousseau contrasts the experience of non-native reader of the Qur'an to Muḥammad's listeners:⁷⁴

Someone who can read a little Arabic smiles when leafing through the Alcoran, who, had he heard Mahomet in person proclaim it in that

eloquent and rhythmic language, with that sonorous and persuasive voice which seduced the ear before it touched the heart, and constantly animating his aphorisms with the accent of enthusiasm, would have prostrated himself on the ground while crying out: Great prophet, messenger of God, lead us to glory, to martyrdom; we want to conquer or to die for you.

This description celebrates the beauty and power of Qur'anic recitation, though it is written by a non-Arabic speaker. It also reveals Rousseau's understanding of Muḥammad as someone who prevailed not merely because he threatened people to convert on pain of death. This traditional polemical interpretation was compatible with Machiavelli's words about armed prophets. Rousseau instead stressed the persuasive power of Arabic and of its rhythmic effects.

In *Du contrat social ou principes du droit politique* ('The Social Contract', 1762), Rousseau offered the most influential version not only of his theory of the 'Legislator' (the capitalisation is Rousseau's), but also of the Qur'an as a book of law and of Muḥammad as a legislator.⁷⁵ For Rousseau, the revelation to Muḥammad was a foundational moment of politics, the act of a lawgiver akin to Moses, Lycurgus, or Numa. In Book 2, ch. 7, which owes a clear debt to Machiavelli, Rousseau wrote:⁷⁶

The Jewish law which still endures, that of Ishmael's child [Muḥammad] which has ruled half the world for ten centuries, still bespeak (*annoncent*) today the great men who dictated them. While prideful philosophy or blind party spirit regards them as nothing but lucky impostors, the true politician admires in their institutions that great and powerful genius (*génie*) which presides over enduring establishments.

This passage treats Moses and Muḥammad as equivalent, at least for the purposes of the 'true politician'. The comparison should come as no surprise. The endurance of Muḥammad's religion, and of the political communities it underpinned, bespoke the greatness of its founder, as Moses's did of his. The origin of Islam served Rousseau as a classic example for his theory of successful state formation. Muḥammad was not the sole example; he took his place alongside others like Lycurgus and Moses.

In one respect, however, Muḥammad served a unique and specific role in *The Social Contract*: as an example of a state which united religion and politics. In Book 4, ch. 8, Rousseau praised Muḥammad for having conceived a religion that overcame the conflicts that had bedeviled the history of Christianity:⁷⁷

Mahomet had very wise views, he shaped his political system well, and as long as the form of his Government survived under his successors

the Caliphs, that Government was perfectly unified, and good in that respect.

Rousseau thought that this unity had been lost in later times, when the Arabs were conquered by ‘barbarians’ and ‘the division between the two powers began anew’.⁷⁸ This aspect of Islamic politics appealed to Rousseau, who in the rest of the chapter went on to imagine the civil religion that would support the political institutions of his republic, and which would hold priority over established religions, whose dogmas could not be permitted to undermine the political order.

By the mid-eighteenth century the dual interpretation of Muḥammad as both legislator and orator had become a commonplace. Almost two decades after Sale, in 1752, the German scholar Johann David Michaelis called the Qur’an a ‘fraudulent, but stylistically beautiful and sublime revelation’; he argued that Muḥammad was lucky enough ‘to proselytise his followers through the beauty of his poems’.⁷⁹ In 1775, the Lutheran pastor Friedrich Eberhard Boysen prefaced the second edition of his German translation, *Der Koran oder das Gesetz für die Muselmänner* (‘The Koran or the Law of Muslims’), not only with reflections on ‘the vivid spirit’ of Muḥammad, and ‘the sublime and fervid swing he creates’. He also presented a Machiavellian interpretation of Muḥammad as the founder of a state.⁸⁰ He described an armed prophet, who had to ‘carry the divine book in one hand, and the sword in the other’, and compared him to Lycurgus and Numa in having used religion to establish his laws.⁸¹

The year before, the British scholar William Jones had concisely encapsulated both the rhetorical and the legal interpretations of the Qur’an. He stressed the rhetorical power of Qur’anic speech and its emotional impact on its first listeners: ‘Whoever composed the Alcoran was not only gifted with admirable ingenuity, but was also a sharp witted artist of speech and persuasion.’⁸² Muḥammad was a ‘subtle legislator’ who adopted an ‘eloquent, charming, flowery, elegant, melodious, passionate style of speech’. Jones added, ‘he didn’t compose his book for the sober discernment of judgments, but for the delight of the ears and the pleasure of the senses.’⁸³ This brief characterisation captures how the two interpretations of Muḥammad, both as a legislator and armed prophet, as well as as a gifted orator, had become associated and indeed mutually reinforcing ideas in the eighteenth century.

4. The Birth of ‘scriptures’

The historical trajectory of Biblical studies in the eighteenth century has recently been described as the ‘death of Scripture’.⁸⁴ At this time, the increasing refinement of Biblical scholarship came to undermine the very possibility of establishing a definitive text of the Bible.⁸⁵ As late as the turn of the eighteenth century, a theologian such as Henry Dodwell could still believe in good faith that philological and theological soundness were reconcilable.⁸⁶ But in the course of the eighteenth century, these commitments—to philology and to theology—pulled in decidedly different directions.

If the early modern European reception of the Qur'an had merely rehearsed that of the Bible, it would not be especially interesting. Yet, as an alien community's holy book, the Qur'an offered intellectual opportunities that Christian Scripture could not. Above all, the Qur'an aided the development of the comparative notion of 'scriptures', plural and lowercase, by which we mean the idea of a common category of documents to be found in multiple religious traditions, including Christianity.

By contrast, the Hebrew and Christian sacred texts did not advance a comparative notion of scripture. The Hebrew Bible's third, miscellaneous section, after the Torah and the Prophets, is known simply as *Ketuvim* (Writings), in Greek *hagiographa*, but this term is not a designation for the Hebrew Bible as a whole. The New Testament, by contrast, uses the word '*grapha*' to refer not just to the third section of the Hebrew Bible, but to the holy books as a whole, as in John 5:39, 'Search the scriptures (τὰς γραφάς); for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.' Following this usage, the Church Fathers used the terms *grapha/scripturas* to refer to both Hebrew Bible and New Testament. To be sure, the referent of this 'theological'/uppercase concept of scripture was never stable. In the early modern period, Catholics and Protestants disagreed about the canonicity of various books of the Bible. Nevertheless, the usage of 'Scripture' or 'Scriptures' in this tradition referred to that which is canonical and part of the Judeo-Christian revelation. It was not a generic or comparative term.⁸⁷

The emergence of a comparative notion of 'scriptures', what Wilfred Cantwell Smith called an 'intellectual', as opposed to a 'theological', concept of scripture, was both novel and transformative.⁸⁸ It formed one part of the early modern transition from the study of sacred history to the study of the history of religion.⁸⁹

Concepts, it is known, can exist without a word to capture them.⁹⁰ So the comparative idea of scriptures as something that every religious tradition might possess could have preexisted the coinage of 'scriptures' in this sense. Yet the English coinage 'scriptures' reveals a story worth telling, and one which intersects directly with our present concerns, for it is part of the history of Qur'an translation. This should not come entirely as a surprise. For one thing, the Qur'an held the propitious position of being related to the Judeo-Christian holy books yet not recognised as sacred by Christians. But the Qur'an was a good tool for working out the concept of 'scriptures' for another reason: it advances a generic notion of scripture itself.

The Qur'an does not merely distinguish between true believers and everybody else, but rather between true believers (*mu'minūn*), pagans or idolaters (*mushrikūn*), and a third group, the *ahl al-kitāb*. The *ahl al-kitāb*, whose most common English translation today is 'People of the Book', occupy an intermediate status between Muslims and idolaters: they hold many doctrinal points in common with Islam but have not

embraced Muḥammad’s revelation. Yet the original referent of the phrase *ahl al-kitāb* is not clear.⁹¹ Even so, the Qur’an’s distinction—between those with scripture and those without—has served in Islamic history to give legitimacy to Jews and Christians, and to make their religions permissible in a way that, for example, polytheism was not. At different places and times, moreover, *ahl al-kitāb* has been understood to include different groups including the Sabians, a people of antiquity whose identity has been the subject of much debate, as well as, in some historical circumstances, Zoroastrians, Mandeans, and even Hindus. In short, the Qur’an’s concept of *kitāb* offers a comparative notion that reaches beyond the Qur’an, and even beyond the sacred texts of the Abrahamic faiths.⁹²

The phrase *ahl al-kitāb*, understandably, presents a challenge to translators. The Italian clergyman Lodovico Marracci, who published his influential *Alcorani textus universus* (‘The Full Text of the Qur’an’), an Arabic edition and Latin translation, in 1698, renders it with two equivalent expressions.⁹³ One is the literal ‘familia Libri’ (‘the family of the Book’); Marracci’s choice of *familia* captures that *ahl* is used with a proper name to refer to blood relatives or a kinship group. The other is ‘Scripturales’ (those with Scripture). As Marracci explains in his note on Q. 2:105, ‘In the Alcoran, *ahl al-kitāb*, “the family of the Book” is the same as *Scripturales*, or those who profess the Sacred Scriptures: and is always said of Jews and Christians.’⁹⁴ In other words, for Marracci ‘Scripture’ is not a comparative category: there is only one Sacred Scripture, the Judeo-Christian one. Tellingly, he does not acknowledge here that the phrase traditionally also refers to Sabians, let alone other groups.⁹⁵ This reduces the comparative import of the phrase; the *Scripturales* are the Jews and Christians.

George Sale made a dramatically different decision in his English *Koran*, which appeared at the end of 1733 (but is dated 1734). In the ‘Preliminary Discourse’, he translates *ahl al-kitāb* as ‘those to whom the scriptures have been given, or literally, people of the book’.⁹⁶ The latter, literal translation, while more popular in our day, does not bring out the full meaning of *ahl al-kitāb* as does Sale’s first, more periphrastic but also more precise choice, ‘those to whom the scriptures have been given’. Indeed, when *ahl al-kitāb* appears in Sale’s translation proper, in Q. 2:105, he renders it as ‘those to whom the scriptures have been given’, or else, as at Q. 2:109, ‘those unto whom the scriptures have been given’.⁹⁷ Unlike Marracci, Sale does not restrict the sense here to a capitalised Scripture—the Mosaic and Christian revelations—but leaves the term open-ended. When he wishes to express the theological concept of (capital-s) scripture, he writes ‘true scripture’.⁹⁸ Sale, moreover, was well aware that *ahl al-kitāb* did not just refer to Jews, Christians, and Muslims:⁹⁹

[Sabianism] is one of the religions, the practice of which Mohammed tolerated (on paying tribute), and the professors of it are often included in that expression of the *Korân*, *those to whom the scriptures have been given*, or literally, *people of the book*.

In the lengthy ‘Preliminary Discourse’ to his translation, Sale uses ‘scriptures’ in the lowercase sense to refer to the Qur’an itself. For example, ‘The *Mohammedans* far from thinking the *Korân* to be profaned by a translation, as some authors have written, have taken care to have their scriptures translated ...’.¹⁰⁰ Sale further classes the Qur’an together with ‘other books of scripture’, a category which most immediately refers to the Jewish and (Greek) Christian texts.¹⁰¹ He also notes that ‘the Korân is also honoured with several appellations common to other books of scripture’. The intended meaning of lowercase scripture is apparent here, and the comparisons that follow draw on both Greek and Hebrew examples. This lowercase use of ‘scriptures’ is the earliest in the English language that we know. William A. Graham identified this as the earliest use in English of ‘scripture’ as a generic term—in other words, as Cantwell Smith’s ‘intellectual’ concept of scripture.¹⁰² Puzzlingly, Graham also asserts that there ‘seems ... to be no evidence of direct influence of the Muslim use of *kutub* [scriptures] on modern Western generic usage’. We disagree, and submit that George Sale encountered this concept during the process of translating the Qur’an.

Sale’s comparative concept of ‘scripture’ is just one aspect of his remarkably inclusive comparative approach to the history of ancient Near Eastern religion. He reconstructs a chain of influences that connects the monotheisms of the ancient Near East, from Zoroastrianism through Judaism and Christianity to Islam. The purpose of these comparisons is not so much to expose the forgery of Islam as to explain how it emerged out of this sequence of imitation and influence.¹⁰³ By making his comparisons Sale was not undermining the Church of England or sowing unbelief; his comparative understanding was sufficiently capacious to generate a generic term for scriptural equivalents.¹⁰⁴

The use of the comparative concept of ‘scriptures’ eventually gained traction as European scholars ranged beyond the Abrahamic religious traditions and discovered—or invented—sacred texts that were (or claimed to be) older than the Hebrew Bible. A case in point is the study of sacred Indian literature by William Jones, Anquetil-Duperron, John Zephaiah Holwell and others. In his *Interesting Historical Events Relative to the Provinces of Bengal* of 1766 Holwell, whom Urs App has called the ‘inventor of Hinduism’, translated fragments of alleged ancient Hindu texts which he labeled ‘scriptures’.¹⁰⁵

To be clear, the introduction of the category of ‘scriptures’ was not a simple tale of secularisation. Creating a non-polemical space for thinking about the Qur’an or other sacred texts as a constitution and scripture did not mean taking a secular perspective on religion in general. Sale performed his comparative inquiry from a place of orthodoxy and Holwell intended to reform Christianity by presenting an authentic ur-scripture, ‘the first divine revelation that had been graciously delivered to man’.¹⁰⁶

5. Coda: The Qur'an in Comparison

Through this process of reinterpretation, the Qur'an became available as an intellectual resource for a wide variety of comparisons. Sale's intellectually ambitious successor Johann David Michaelis, a professor of theology at Göttingen, sought to combine comparative Semitic studies with a 'philosophical' approach inspired by Montesquieu.¹⁰⁷ In *De l'esprit des lois* ('The Spirit of the Laws', 1748), Montesquieu had occasionally drawn on the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an as the records of ancient societies, works that revealed the customs of peoples of antiquity as well as the laws that Moses and Muḥammad had dictated.¹⁰⁸ In the footsteps of his father, the Halle professor Christian Benedikt, Michaelis pursued a comparative interest in 'Mosaic law'.¹⁰⁹

In his monumental six-volume *Mosaisches Recht* (1770–1775), Michaelis, acknowledging a debt to Montesquieu, treats Judaism essentially as a legal system, promising a 'philosophical study' of its 'spirit'.¹¹⁰ He argues that Old Testament law was designed for a particular people in a particular time and space and thus has no normative claim on the modern age. As an object of study, however, it is of value 'to the theologian, the lawyer, and the man who philosophises on legislative policy'.¹¹¹ In this approach, Michaelis's study of Mosaic law resembles Sale's of Qur'anic law: both aimed to elucidate chapters in the political and legal history of humankind.

Michaelis' attitude to Islam and the Qur'an was ambivalent and changed over the course of his career. In 1771, he described the Qur'an not only as a linguistically significant book, on which the study of Arabic should be based, but also as a source of great historical value, the 'fount of knowledge' (*Erkenntnisquelle*) of many millions of people. In addition, it is an historical archive: 'one can encounter in it so many customs and customary laws of the old Arabs, which Muḥammad transformed into written laws.'¹¹² Knowledge of ancient customary laws of the Near East was useful for an adequate historical understanding of the laws of Moses. Likewise, the Qur'an mattered as the source of 'the only false religion that deserves a certain respect, because it is grounded in the principles of natural religion'.¹¹³ Of interest to the philosopher, the Qur'an was 'much more reasonable [*vernünftiger*] than what its explainers make of it, especially those of that superstitious sect, to which the Turks belong'.¹¹⁴

Michaelis' later writings on Islam are instead underpinned by the idea of a contest between Bible and Qur'an. Responding to the rise of the generic concept of scriptures, Michaelis aimed to prove the divinity of Biblical Scripture. He sought to demonstrate the reasonableness and adequacy of the Bible by comparing it to other 'angebliche Offenbarungen' ('supposed revelations'), particularly the Qur'an. In his writings on Mosaic law, he tries to measure legal and religious systems according to criteria such as rationality, social and cultural appropriateness, and political effectiveness. In his

analysis, Mosaic law is distinguished for its political utility and for providing stability and happiness to ancient Israel. Moses' successful state formation is proof of his divine legation.¹¹⁵ In his review of Friedrich Eberhard Boysen's Qur'an translation, he interpreted the success of Prussia under Frederick the Great as a sign of the Judeo-Christian tradition's divine legitimacy. On all these counts, he thought that the Qur'an came up short in comparison with the Bible and the political institutions based on it. In particular, the contemporary condition of Muslim states proved that the Qur'an was not of divine origin:¹¹⁶

This religion [i.e. Islam] has had such detrimental political effects: eternal revolutions of states, always connected to misfortune of peoples, and nowhere the stability that we in Europe experience. Nowhere is there actual freedom and happiness of peoples, in spite of all the unhindered ferocity and lawlessness, nowadays we do not see a single Mohammedan state happy, indeed, not even powerful, even though they encompass wide lands which used to encompass all the power of the world.

In Michaelis's analysis, certain 'birth defects' of Qur'anic law have prevented Muslims from bringing forth free, happy, and stable nations. The flaws and shortcomings that he sees in Muhammad's political and religious legacy read like a reverse mirror image of basic Enlightened maxims: the prevention of any critical-historical approach to religion and the Qur'an, a fatalistic theology that limited human initiative and scientific curiosity, the union of church and state (the very point that Rousseau had so enthusiastically endorsed) and the idea that Muhammad tailored the legal system only to one nation, the Arabs, and thus did not design it for a more universal reach.¹¹⁷

As a historical archive of legislation, the Qur'an once again resembled the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, the two books were sometimes explicitly compared in terms of the rationality of their laws and their political effectiveness. At the same time, these newly 'political' and 'secular' analytical treatments coexisted with continued claims for the divine inspiration of the Hebrew Bible, and with polemical critiques of Islamic law. Whether praised or blamed, the Qur'an, conceived as the scripture of Muslim peoples, had entered a new phase of its intellectual career in Christian Europe.

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In the late eighteenth century, recognition of the originally oral character of the Qur'an prompted a novel comparison. The French scholar Jean-Baptiste Gaspard d'Ansse de Villoison, who edited the Iliad in 1788, noted that the textual history of Homer's epic bore a resemblance to that of the Qur'an: 'neither that work [the Qur'an], nor this one were possibly written down by their authors.'¹¹⁸ The comparison between the Qur'an

and Homer's works, then, was historical: what interested the French scholar was how ancient oral compositions had transformed into textual traditions.

But d'Ansse de Villoison also endowed the Iliad and the Odyssey with scriptural qualities: he referred to 'the poems of Homer, in which was contained the entire fabulous Theology of the Heathens'.¹¹⁹ We might think, then, that a lowercase notion of 'scriptures' subtended and made possible his comparison between Homer's works and the Qur'an. Nor did this particular comparison end with him: the German scholar F.A. Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, published in 1795, repeated this idea.¹²⁰

So too the Arabs began only in the seventh century to gather into collections (*Divans*) the disorganised poetry of earlier ages which had been transmitted by memory, and the diversity of early texts of the Koran itself shows that it had a fate similar to Homer's.

For classical scholars such as d'Ansse de Villoison and Wolf, the early history of the Qur'an revealed some broader insights into how ancient poetry was first transmitted orally, and only later recorded in writing. This interaction of Homer and the Qur'an took place in the margins of a broader cross-pollination between the Biblical and Homeric traditions, as Anthony Grafton has shown: Wolf's work on Homer was modeled on Johann Gottfried Eichhorn's study of the Hebrew Bible.¹²¹

The analogy between the Qur'an and Homeric poetry made sense beyond the rarefied world of classical scholarship. In a letter of 1774 to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the poet Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim wrote, 'I heard [Johann David] Michaelis in Göttingen and [Friedrich Eberhard] Boysen in Quedlinburg speak of the divine Muḥammad in the same terms as my dear Lessing speaks of the divine Homer'.¹²² Gleim's use of the epithet 'divine' for both Homer and Muḥammad reveals the blurring of boundaries that once separated the sacred texts of the Bible from literatures that originated outside the Judeo-Christian tradition.¹²³

The comparison between the Iliad and the Qur'an as scriptures can serve as an endpoint for this discussion, as it points toward the comparative study of literature, and therefore beyond the present bounds. To summarise, early modern European scholars demoted the Bible from Scripture—a divinely inspired revelation—to one of many scriptures, or historical products of human origins. By contrast, the Qur'an instead came to enjoy novel prestige. From being considered merely an unoriginal pastiche of other writings, it became a signal instance of a new category of document: a scripture. This elevation was supported by the Qur'an's generic use of *kitāb*, which referred to the Qur'an itself as well as to earlier (Christian and Jewish and other) scriptures. As such it could be considered under the rubrics of anthropology, comparative politics, history, and literature. The scholars of the early modern era bequeathed this reclassification to their European successors: the comparative notion of scripture provided the basis for the many nineteenth-century comparative studies

of the ‘sacred books’ of all religions. The fifty-volume publication project directed by Max Müller, *The Sacred Books of the East* (1879–1910), for example, which included translations of Hindu, Buddhist, and many other sacred texts of Asia, is impossible to imagine without the generic concept of scripture that emerged from the early modern European study of the Qur’an.¹²⁴

NOTES

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1 This is the title in the oldest surviving manuscript of Robert’s translation, preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Arsenal 1162, fol. 26. For a detailed description of this manuscript see Martin, *Catalogue des manuscrits*, vol. 2, pp. 315–317 and Burman, *Reading the Qur’an*, ch. 3.

2 See the subtitle of Bibliander’s edition: ‘Quo velut authentico legum divinarum codice Agareni et Turcae, aliique Christo adversantes populi reguntur’.

3 Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, 2:2, Q. 91, art. 5.

4 See Daniel, *Islam and the West*, chs 4 and 5.

5 ‘Si ce qui est contenu dans ses commandemens, est appuyé des poincts de leur loy, des sentences, des passages et des exemples de l’Alcoran, les Magistrats n’oseroient y contrevenir, soit qu’ils en usent ainsi par hypocrisie ou par veneration’ (du Ryer, *L’Alcoran*, sig. *2v).

6 ‘La façon la plus avantageuse de traiter avec eux, et de vaincre l’aversion qu’ils ont souvent pour nous, est de les battre de leurs armes, et d’employer leur doctrine contre la malice de ceux qui veulent troubler le repos des negotians’ (du Ryer, *L’Alcoran*, sig. *2v).

7 Hamilton and Richard, *André Du Ryer*, pp. 91–118.

8 Sale, *The Koran*, ‘To the Right Honourable John Lord Carteret’, n.p.

9 Sale, *The Koran*, ‘To the Right Honourable John Lord Carteret’, n.p.

10 For a brief survey, see Wisner, *The Cult of the Legislator in France*, ch. 1 (pp. 11–38) and references there.

11 Machiavelli, *The Chief Works*, vol. 1, pp. 125–126.

12 Tommasino, *The Venetian Qur’an*; Biasiori and Marcocci, *Machiavelli, Islam, and the East*; and especially Tommasino, ‘Roman Prophet or Muslim Caesar’.

13 See Berti, Charles-Daubert, and Popkin, *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought*; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 702–703; Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, p. 616.

14 As quoted in Tommasino, *The Venetian Qur’an*, p. 154.

15 Matar, *Henry Stubbe and the Beginnings of Islam*, pp. 192–193.

16 de Boulainvilliers, *La vie*, p. 225: ‘un Législateur supérieur à tous ceux que l’ancienne Grece avoit produits.’

17 Nerreter, *Neu eröffnete*, p. 429. On Nerreter’s work as a ‘Markstein für eine theologisch-kritische und zugleich um Objektivität bemühte Auseinandersetzung mit dem Islam’, see Saviello, *Imaginationen des Islam*, pp. 145–157.

18 Sale, *Koran*, ‘Dedication’, f. A1r.

- 19 The classic example is Nicholas of Cusas' method of 'sifting' the Qur'an against the Bible in his *Cribratio Alcorani*. Systematic comparison of the Qur'an with the Bible was particularly prominent among Reformed writers interested in Islam. See Burman, *Reading the Qur'an*, p. 255 n. 206.
- 20 See Ben-Tov, 'The Academic Study of Arabic'.
- 21 See Loop, 'Die Bedeutung arabischer Manuskripte'.
- 22 See Lewalski, '*Paradise Lost*', p. 547, and Norton, *A History of the Bible*.
- 23 Tommasino, *The Venetian Qur'an*, chs 4 and 5.
- 24 See Hamilton and Richard, *André Du Ryer*, p. 101.
- 25 For the influential case of John Spencer's historical interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, see Levitin, 'John Spencer's *De Legibus Hebraeorum*'. On the origin and development of the 'literary Bible' in the eighteenth century see Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, pp. 148–181. See also Gutzen, *Poesie der Bibel*.
- 26 A case in point is Johann David Michaelis' multi-volume endeavour *Mosaïsches Recht*, discussed below.
- 27 Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, p. 152.
- 28 Scaliger, 'Animadversiones', p. 7. See Haugen, 'Hebrew Poetry Transformed', pp. 7–9, and Loop, 'Divine Poetry?', pp. 464–465. On the *Thesaurus Temporum* more broadly, see Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger*. Jerome's claim can be found in *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 7, pp. 3–4.
- 29 'La Poësie des Hebreux consiste uniquement en des vers rimez & fort irréguliers.' (Le Clerc, 'Essai de Critique', p. 230). Cf. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, pp. 247–251, and Haugen, 'Hebrew Poetry', pp. 21–22.
- 30 'Tout ce livre [the Qur'an] est presque composé de rimes, quoi que les périodes soient fort inégales: & il parut dès lors si bien écrit, que Mahomet lui-même se vante en plusieurs endroits que ni les anges, ni les Démons ne auroient égaler l'élégance de son style. On peu conclurre de là que ce style étoit établi depuis long-temps parmi les Arabes, autrement cet imposteur ne l'auroit pas choisi, ou il ne leur auroit pas plu, comme il a fait [...]' (Le Clerc, 'Essai de Critique', p. 17).
- 31 Loop, 'Divine Poetry?', and Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 75.
- 32 See, for example, Q. 21:5, Q. 36:69, Q. 37:36, etc.
- 33 'l'art de mentir agréablement' (see Huet, 'Traité de l'origine', p. 16).
- 34 Saumaise, *Erōtikōn Achilleōs*, p. *9r. See Doody, *The True Story*, p. 260. Doody also makes the reference to Cervantes' suggestion of an Arabic origin of Western fiction.
- 35 See Loop, '„Von dem Geschmack der morgenländischen Dichtkunst“'.
- 36 Huet, 'Traité', pp. 12–13.
- 37 Huet, 'Traité', pp. 11–13.
- 38 'Leur Alcoran est de cette sorte [...] Les vies de leur Patriarches, de leurs Prophetes, & de leurs Apostres sont toutes fabuleuses' (Huet, 'Traité', pp. 14–15).
- 39 'Aussi à peine est-il croyable combien tous ces peuples ont l'esprit poétique, inventif, et amateur des fictions' (Huet, 'Traité', p. 12).
- 40 Huet, *Alnetanae quaestiones*, p. 77. See Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 455.
- 41 Huet, 'Traité', pp. 27–28.
- 42 'Que diroit le bon M. Perraut, s'il lisoit le Poëme de Tograï, si estimé parmi les Arabes, qu'il trouveroit incomparablement plus figuré que Pindare? Que diroit-il des auteurs Japonois, qui s'expriment en des termes si relevez, qu'on a beaucoup de peine à les entendre? Les Pseaumes même & les Cantiques sacrez, combien ont-ils de grandeur, de force, & d'élévation? Tel est le

genie des Orientaux, qui ne se croiront pas moins bien fondez à donner leur goût pour la règle du bon goût, que M. Perraut à donner le sien.' (Huet, *Défense des Anciens*, pp. 27–28).

43 See Loop, 'Divine Poetry?', pp. 471–474.

44 Zelle, *Die doppelte Ästhetik der Moderne*, pp. 49–53.

45 Boileau, 'Traité du sublime', p. 5.

46 'Ainsi le législateur des Juifs, qui n'était pas un homme ordinaire, ayant fort bien conçu la grandeur & la puissance de Dieu, l'a exprimée dans toute & dignité y au commencement de ses lois, par ces paroles. "Dieu dit : *Que la lumière se fasse & la lumière se fit. Que la Terre si fasse, Terre fut faite.*" (Boileau, 'Traité du sublime', pp. 21–22). We use the English translation by William Smith, *Dionysius Longinus on the Sublime*, p. 41.

47 Lowth, *De sacra poesi*, p. 352.

48 Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, p. 159.

49 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 61. Sale's aesthetic appraisal of the Qur'an is discussed further in the next section.

50 Goethe, 'Noten und Abhandlungen' vol. 2, pp. 144–145.

51 See Nerreter, *Der Wunderwürdige Juden- und Heiden-Tempel*, and Daniel, *Islam and the West*, especially chs 4 and 5.

52 Acoluthus, *Tetrapla Alcoranica*, p. 15.

53 See Graham, 'Scripture and the Qur'an', and Madigan, 'Book'.

54 Acoluthus, *Tetrapla Alcorani*, pp. 15–16.

55 Sale is not the only writer in the early eighteenth century who merges the two concepts. The Count of Boulainvilliers offered a similar interpretation in his *La vie de Mahomet*, pp. 133–134.

56 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 41.

57 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 60.

58 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 61.

59 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 61.

60 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 62.

61 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 61.

62 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 62.

63 See Taves, *Fits, Trances and Visions*.

64 Loop, 'Divine Poetry', pp. 477–478. On Casaubon's text, see Levitin, 'John Spencer's *De Legibus Hebraeorum*', p. 76. See also Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable*, ch. 3, and Stark, *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic*.

65 See Saviello, *Imaginationen*, p. 30ff.

66 Casaubon, *Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme*, ch. 3, 'Of Contemplative and Philosophicall Enthusiasme' discusses Muhammad. Sale cites instead ch. 4, 'Of Rhetoricall Enthusiasme'.

67 The depiction of Muḥammad as a historical figure and politician appears in the 'Preliminary Discourse', section 2.

68 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 41.

69 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 49.

70 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', pp. 49–50.

71 For example, Wisner, *The Cult of the Legislator*.

72 See also Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an*, pp. 121–142.

73 'juger du génie des Orientaux par leurs livres, c'est vouloir peindre un homme sur son cadavre'.

74 'Tel pour savoir lire un peu d'Arabe sourit en feuilletant l'Alcoran, qui, s'il eut entendu Mahomet l'annoncer en personne dans cette langue éloquent et cadencée, avec cette voix sonore et persuasive qui séduisoit l'oreille avant le coeur, et sans cesse animant ses sentences de l'accent de l'enthousiasme, se fut prosterné contre terre en criant: grand Prophète, Envoyé de Dieu, menez-nous à la gloire, au martire; nous voulons vaincre ou mourir pour vous.' (Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 5, pp. 409–410). Translation (revised) from *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, tr. Scott, p. 317.

75 While the *Essay on the Origin of Languages* was written at the time of the *Discourse on Inequality* (published in 1755), the *Social Contract* is of slightly later vintage, and appeared in print in 1762. For these details of composition, see Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, pp. xci–cxv

76 'La loi judaïque toujours subsistante, celle de l'enfant d'Ismaël qui depuis dix siècles régit la moitié du monde, annoncent encore aujourd'hui les grands hommes qui les ont dictées; et tandis que l'orgueilleuse philosophie ou l'aveugle esprit de parti ne voit en eux que d'heureux imposteurs, le vrai politique admire dans leurs institutions ce grand et puissant génie qui préside aux établissemens durables.' (Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, p. 384)

77 'Mahomet eut des vues très saines, il lia bien son système politique, et tant que la forme de son Gouvernement subsista sous les Caliphes ses successeurs, ce Gouvernement fut exactement un, et bon en cela.' (Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, pp. 462–463).

78 'barbares ... la division entre les deux puissances recommença.' (Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 5, p. 463).

79 Michaelis, 'Von dem Geschmack', p. xiv.

80 The translation appeared in two editions with different titles: *Der Koran, oder das Gesetz für Muselmänner, durch Muhammed den Sohn Abdall. Nebst einigen feyerlichen koranischen Gebeten unmittelbar aus dem Arabischen übersetzt* (Halle, 1773), and *Der Koran, oder Das Gesetz für die Moslemer, durch Muhammed den Sohn Abdall Zweyte verbesserte Auflage* (Halle, 1775). In 1828 the orientalist Samuel Friedrich Günther Wahl published a new translation based on Boysen's work: *Der Koran oder das Gesetz der Moslemen durch Muhammed den Sohn Abdallahs*.

81 'In der einen Hand mußte er ein göttliches Buch, und in der andern ein Schwert führen' (Boysen, *Der Koran ... Zweyte verbesserte Auflage*, p. 23; see also p. 24).

82 Most prominently in ch. 10, *De Elato dicendi genere*, and in ch. 20, *De Asiaticâ Dictione*. 'Fuit certe quisquis Alcoranum contextuit, cum admirabili praeditus ingenio, tum acutissimus et dicendi et persuadendi artifex' (Jones, *Poeseos Asiaticae libri*, p. 442).

83 'Itaque sagax ille morum observator, & legislator subtilis, dicendi genus sumpsit argutum, venustum, floridum, concinnum, concinnum, incitatum; splendidissimis collustratum verborum luminibus, & cum ad persuadendos animos, tum ad commovendos affectus accommodatissimum. Non ille ad sedatum judiciorum discrimen librum suum comparabat, sed ad aurium delectationem, & voluptatem sensuum' (Jones, *Poeseos Asiaticae libri*, p. 443).

84 Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture*.

85 Cf. Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*. The unsettling power of Biblical philology had been exposed at the outset of the modern effort to produce a critical edition of the Biblical text, when Erasmus of Rotterdam wavered over whether to include the so-called Johannine Comma—the best textual support for the doctrine of the Trinity in the Vulgate—in his edition of the Greek New Testament. See, for example, Levine, 'Erasmus and the Problem', and McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe*.

- 86 Quantin, 'Anglican Scholarship Gone Mad?', and Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity*.
- 87 See Graham, 'Scripture', pp. 135-6.
- 88 Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture?*, p. 69.
- 89 Stroumsa, *A New Science*, and Levitin, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religion'.
- 90 See Quentin Skinner on this point in *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1, ch. 'The Idea of a Cultural Lexicon', pp. 158-174.
- 91 On the following see Sharon, 'People of the Book', and Wilde and Dammen McAuliffe, 'Religious Pluralism and the Qur'an'.
- 92 Graham, 'Scripture and the Qur'an', pp. 558-561.
- 93 On Marracci, see Bevilacqua, *Republic of Arabic Letters*, ch. 2, and references there.
- 94 'In Alcorano *ahl al-kitab familia Libri idem est ac Scripturales, seu Sacrarum Scripturarum professores: semperque dicitur de Judaeis, et Christianis.*' (Marracci, *Alcorani Textus Universus*, vol. 2 (*Refutatio*), p. 44).
- 95 On the Sabians, see de Blois, 'Sabians'.
- 96 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 15.
- 97 Sale, *Koran*, 'Koran', p. 14.
- 98 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 15.
- 99 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 15.
- 100 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 69.
- 101 Sale, *Koran*, 'Preliminary Discourse', p. 57.
- 102 Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, p. 57.
- 103 For a more in-depth discussion of Sale's treatment of Islam, see Bevilacqua, *Republic of Arabic Letters*, ch. 3, and esp. pp. 85-89.
- 104 On Sale's orthodoxy, see Bevilacqua, *Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 105 n. 183.
- 105 See e.g. Holwell, *Interesting Historical Events*, vol. 2, pp. 5, 12, 22 etc. See App, *Birth of Orientalism*, ch. 6.
- 106 Holwell, *Interesting Historical Events*, vol. 3, p. 143.
- 107 See Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture* and Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment*.
- 108 To name a couple of examples, Montesquieu cites the Hebrew Bible on family law, slavery, and worship (Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, bk. 5, chap. 5, p. 45; book 14, chap. 18, p. 261; book 25, ch. 4, p. 484). He cites the Qur'an on incest prohibition and the law of retaliation (Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, bk. 6, chap. 19, p. 93; bk. 24, chap. 17, p. 471; bk. 26, chap. 14, p. 508).
- 109 At the very beginning of his academic career Michaelis published *Commentatio de mente et ratione legis mosaicae usuram prohibentis* (1746), *Commentatio prior ad leges divinas de poena homicidii* (1747), *Commentatio posterior* (1750); *Abhandlung von den Ehegesetzen Mosis, welche die Heyrathen in die nahe Freundschaft untersagen* (1755), etc.
- 110 These were translated in 1814 by Alexander Smith under the title *Commentaries on the Laws of Moses*. For a general assessment of the work see Smend, 'Aufgeklärte Bemühungen', pp. 63-73, esp. 66.
- 111 'Ob uns gleich die Mosaischen Rechte nicht verbinden, so verdienen sie doch eine genauere Untersuchung, als bisher auf sie gewandt ist, oder vielmehr, sie verdienen in ihrem ganzen Zusammenhange nicht blos dem Philologen bekannt zu seyn, der sich mit den

morgenländischen Sprachen beschäftigt, und sie nur wie einen Theil der Hebräischen Alterthümer betrachtet; sondern auch andern, dem Gottesgelehrten, dem Juristen, und demjenigen, der über die gesetzgebende Klugheit philosophiret, nicht so fremde und Asiatisch zu bleiben, als sie ihm bisher gewesen sind.’ (Michaelis, *Mosaisches Recht*, vol. 1, p. 1). The translation follows Alexander Smith’s.

112 ‘Auch das macht den Coran interessant, daß man in ihm so viele Sitten und Herkommensrechte der alten Araber antrifft, die Muhammed in geschriebene Gesetze verwandelte.’ (Michaelis, *Vorrede zur Arabischen Grammatik und Chrestomathie*, pp. xii–xiii)

113 The full passage reads: ‘[der Koran] ist interessant, weil er die Erkenntnißquelle einer von so viel Millionen Menschen angenommenen Religion ist, und noch dazu der einzigen unter allen falschen, die einen gewissen Respekt verdient, weil sie die Hauptsätze der natürlichen Religion zum Grunde legt’ (Michaelis, *Vorrede zur Arabischen Grammatik und Chrestomathie*, p. xi).

114 ‘viel vernünftiger, als was seine Erklärer, sonderlich die von derjenigen abergläubischen Secte, zu der sich die Türken bekennen, aus ihm machen’ (Michaelis, *Vorrede zur Arabischen Grammatik und Chrestomathie*, p. xii).

115 See also Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture*, p. 144.

116 ‘Den Türkischen Staat, der noch immer der mächtigste unter ihnen allen ist, vergleiche man einmahl mit dem Preußischen, und das nach den drey von der Bevölkerung unabhängigen politischen Dimensionen der blossen Länder, Quadratmeilen, Lage und Fruchtbarkeit, und denn ihre Macht, wiederum nicht die in der Qualität der Armeen, sondern nur die in ihrer Grösse, und in den Einkünften des Staates bestehende; so wird man doch merken, daß etwas in der Muhammedanischen Religion seyn müße, daß den Staaten zuletzt nachtheilig wird.’ (Michaelis, *Orientalische und Exegetische*, pp. 33–34). The original text of the translated passage below is as follows: ‘Aber eben, diese Religion hatte auch so schädliche politische Folgen: ewige Umstürze von Staaten, und die immer mit Unglück der Völker verbunden, nichts so bleibendes, als wir in Europa kennen, nirgends eigentliche Freyheit und Glück der Völker, ungeachtet viel ungebundene Frechheit und Gesetzlosigkeit war, jetzt sehen wir keinen einzigen Muhammedanischen Staat glücklich, ja nicht einmahl mächtig, ungeachtet sie die weiten Länder in sich fassen, in denen sonst alle Macht der Welt beysammen war.’

117 Michaelis, *Orientalische und Exegetische*, pp. 34–35.

118 d’Ansse de Villoison, *Homeri Ilias*, p. xxxiii n.1: ‘Nec illa, neque hic fortasse a suis auctoribus scripto consignati sunt.’

119 d’Ansse de Villoison, *Homeri Ilias*, ‘Prolegomena’, p. xxiii n1: ‘Homeri scilicet poemata, quibus tota Ethnicorum fabulosa Theologia comprehendebatur.’

120 Wolf, *Prolegomena*, Part 1, ch. 35, p. 146.

121 Grafton, ‘Prolegomena’.

122 Johann Wilhelm Gleim to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 8 February 1774, in Lessing, *Briefe von und an Lessing*, p. 621.

123 Loop, ‘Divine Poetry’.

124 See, among others, Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.