The cover features a wide, intricate gold border with repeating floral and geometric patterns. In the center, there is a stylized gold dome or archway containing white and gold floral designs. Below the dome, the title is written in a large, elegant serif font. The word 'QUR'ĀN' is in gold, while 'THE DILEMMA' is in white. The subtitle and volume information are in a smaller, italicized serif font, with a thin horizontal line separating the subtitle from the volume title.

QUR'ĀN
THE DILEMMA

*Former Muslims Analyze
Islām's Holiest Book*

Volume ONE



QUR'ĀN

THE DILEMMA



*Former Muslims Analyze
Islām's Holiest Book*

Volume ONE

The Qur'an Dilemma

by

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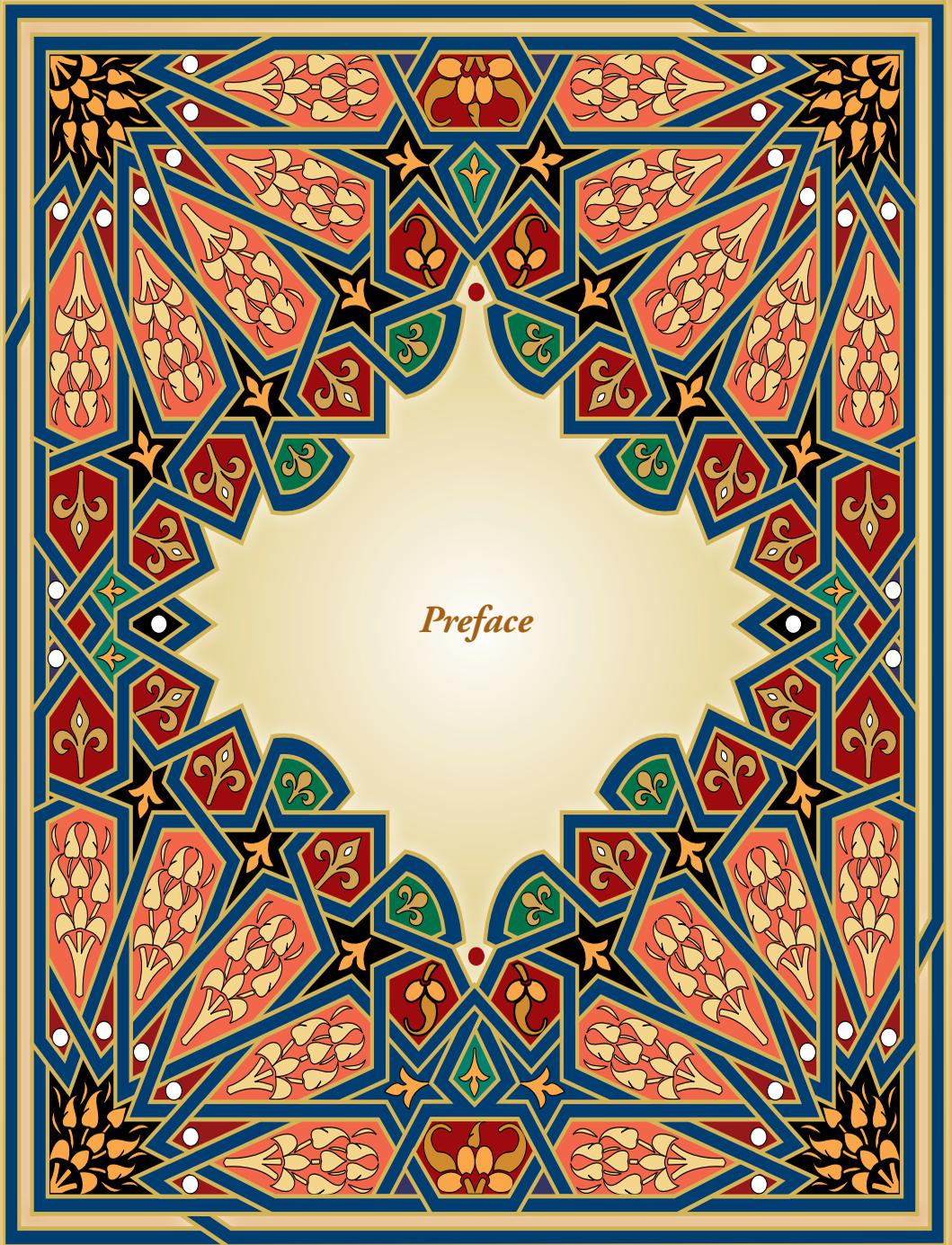
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Preface

Preface

A book of terror or a book of peace? An inspired text or a political agenda? How is one to know the truth about the Qur'ān? Where does one even begin? How can an English-speaking reader ever hope to wade through the history, the translations, the sects, and the commentaries to begin making sense of the issues?

As the interest in Islām and the teachings of the Qur'ān has grown globally, the need to provide an objective tool to investigate the truth about Islām has become crucial. This in-depth scholarly work is that instrument. Translated from the Arabic, it allows English-speaking readers to see and study the Qur'ān through clear lenses not obscured by propaganda or missionary zeal. It also presents the text of the Qur'ān with parallel commentary, addressing important issues that Muslim scholars have wrestled with throughout the centuries, shedding light on their attempts to solve them and giving a rounded view of the various schools of thought.

This book is the fruition of ten years of planning and preparation. The idea of the book originated ten years ago, though the actual work on the manuscript—first written in Arabic—started seven years later and was published in 2010, followed by its English counterpart in 2011.

Both the Arabic book and its English translation represent the effort and production of many former Muslim writers, Islamic specialists, scholars, editors, researchers, and translators. Some members of this writing team have revealed their association with



this project while others may publicize their participation after the publication of the book's second volume or other similar projects in the near future.

The critical methodology used in this book is inspired by the courageous tradition of those who dared to analyze the Qur'ān throughout history, while also incorporating the contemporary intellectual productions available in Arabic and foreign sources. The discoveries made through these scholarly critical methods are directed equally to non-Muslims and Muslims.

To non-Muslims who want to unravel the mysteries of Islām, this book presents information that Islāmic resources rarely disclose—to allow those seeking the truth to comprehend the full picture with all its outlines, colors, and dimensions.

To Muslims who seek genuine choices far from the culture of “indoctrination,” this book opens a world of understanding to them, so that they can decide for themselves their intellectual and spiritual paths.

Approach of this Book

The commentary provided in this book examines the Qur'ān from three distinct perspectives. First, it systematically investigates and critically analyzes the historical, factual, and linguistic difficulties that the text of the Qur'ān presents to its reader.

The book then investigates the annulment of certain verses. Although the text of the Qur'ān is said to have been in a Preserved Tablet from the beginning of time, some of its verses abrogate, or nullify, other verses and render them ineffectual, as evidenced in the following example:

Though it is popular in the West to highlight Allah's words in this verse, *“O ye folk! verily, we have created you of male and female, and made you races and tribes that ye may know each other. Verily, the most honourable of you in the sight of God is the most pious of you...”* (Q 49.13), the Qur'ān also instructs Muslims to persecute non-Muslims: *“But when the sacred months are passed away, kill the idolaters wherever ye may find them; and take them, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every place....”* (Q 9.5)

What is the Muslim to do? Have great relationships with the neighbors or kill them?

The answer to this dilemma is in the understanding of abrogation. For instance, the “peace” verses, such as Q 49.13 above, were given when early Muslims were still weak in their own tribal lands. After Muslims pacified the neighboring peoples, gaining followers and strength, they adopted Q 9.5, the Sword verse^d, as their modus operandi for forcibly spreading Islām and increasing their conquest of surrounding territories. To some exegetes, the Sword verse is viewed as an abrogator (nullifier) of all instructions for peace toward others in the rest of the verses in the Qur'ān.



The third issue that this book addresses is the problem of variant readings of the verses. There were many versions of the Qur'ān prior to the act by 'Uthmān Ibn 'Affān^N, the third caliph or successor after Muḥammad, to force a codified version—the 'Uthmānic codex—on Muslims and burn all the rest. In addition, this official Qur'ān (c. AH 34/AD 654) did not have dots and diacritical marks in a language that relies heavily on them. The lack of such markings led to a variety of ways to read and understand the Qur'ān in Arabic. Certain propagators of particular readings became authorities on the proper way to read the Qur'ān. These variations spread throughout the Islāmic territories, leading to further disputes among Muslims as to the correct words and phrases for many verses of the Qur'ān.

This book provides, though not exhaustively, examples of some of the variant versions and variant readings. These variant versions and readings present compelling evidence refuting the claim that the current Arabic Qur'ān is the same from its past to its present form—contrary to what the Muslim historical and exegetical records attest.

This book also contains several articles to help the reader weigh and understand the issues surrounding the Qur'ān. These articles deal with such important topics as the treatment of women, the compilation process of the Qur'ān, the chronological sequence of its sūras, and the treatment of people of other faiths, to name a few.

Throughout the commentary and the articles the aim of this book is to supply the reader with many original sources from respected Muslim exegetes and scholars, in order to maintain the focus on the issues that are troublesome in the Qur'ān, even to committed Muslim scholars. The citations for these sources will be handled as endnotes rather than as embedded parenthetical references to improve the readability of the text.

Guide to Reading this Book

Before reading the articles in Part I, the reader is strongly advised to read “Key to Reading Part II” on page 147. This article provides critical information regarding translations, special text and styles used throughout the book.

The reader should also review the nine articles in Part I before reading the translated sūras with their corresponding commentary in Part II. These articles will provide the reader with the necessary background to understand the issues addressed in the commentary. The articles will also introduce the Islāmic scholars and authoritative readers who wrote down Muḥammad's “revelations,” helped to compile the Qur'ān, issued rulings, presented their opinions, and offered variant readings so that the reader can become familiar with the names of the important Muslim leaders involved in these matters.

In addition, the following articles provide the reader with helpful information to better understand the ramifications of Islām and the teachings of the Qur'ān on specific groups. It is recommended to read these particular articles *before* reading the sūra listed



next to them: “Women in the Qur’ān” (Sūra 4) and “The Qur’ān and People of Other Faiths” (Sūra 9).

The reader of this book is also supported with helpful resources at the back of the book (Part III):

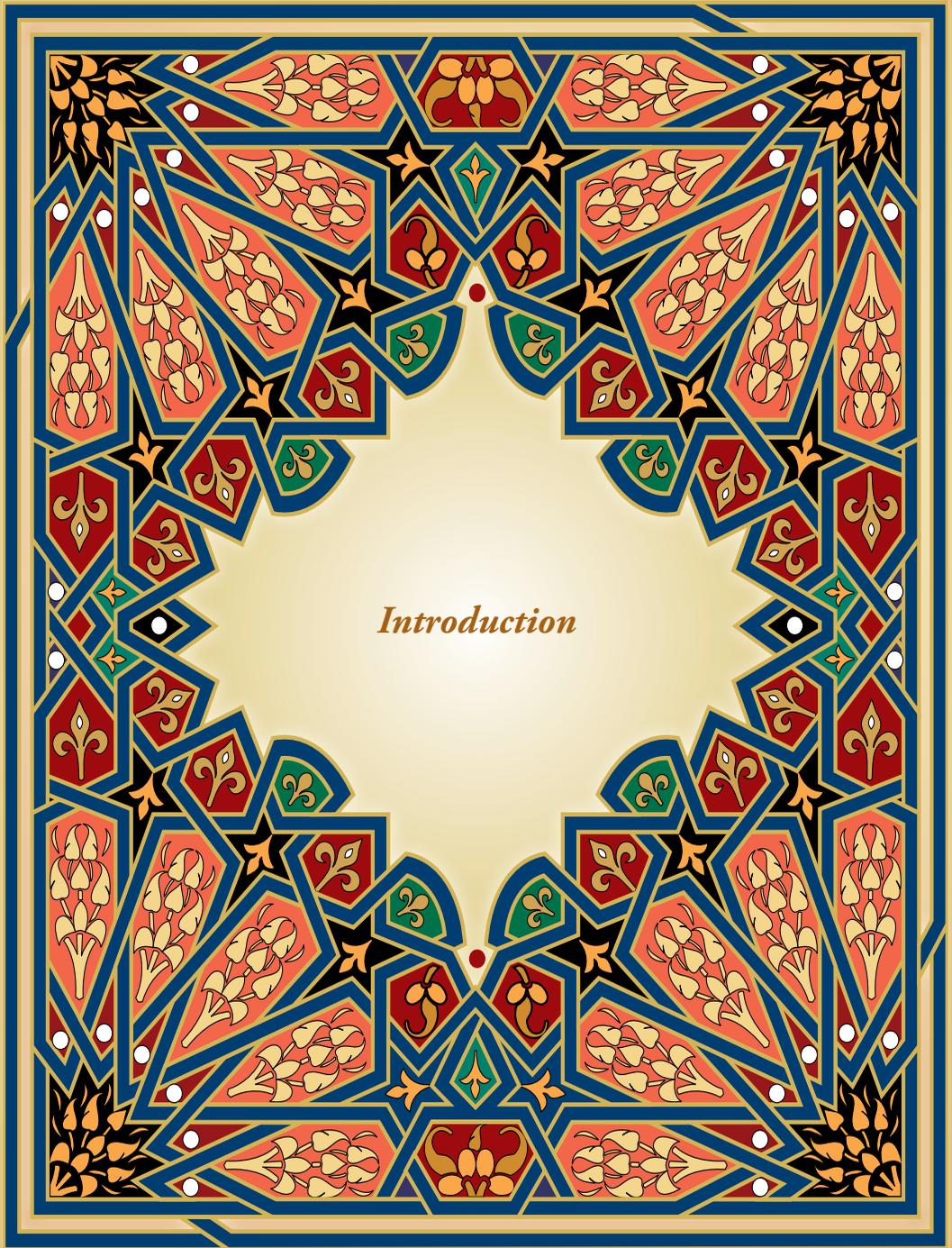
- Suggested Readings, a list of references that offer more information on selected topics discussed in this book;
- Selected Proper Names, an annotated list of important people (^N) mentioned in the articles and sūras;
- Selected Definitions, a glossary of unfamiliar or complex terms (^D) used throughout the book;
- Timeline, a graphic illustration noting important dates, leaders, and events in the early history of Islam and the Qur’ān;
- Maps, a series of geographical and political representations of the Arabian Peninsula, including the expansion of Islam into the surrounding territories (c. seventh century AD).

A Subject Index is also provided to assist the reader in topic searches.

In conclusion, the reader is strongly encouraged to investigate different translations while reading this work, keeping in mind the following questions: Who is the author of the Qur’ān? And, is the Qur’ān in its current form without errors?



PART I
*Background
of the Qur'ān*



Introduction

Introduction

Religion is man's systematic search for God and truth. It is a collection of beliefs and thoughts regarding the deity of God and his relationship to man. When one is considering the claims of a religion, one must consider the source of the authority upon which that religion bases its claims.

According to Islāmic doctrine, Muḥammad is the messenger^D of Allah^D (examples: Q 2.101, 279; Q 3.32) and the “*Seal of the Prophets*” (Q 33.40) on whom the Qur’ān was revealed through a heavenly intermediary. This intermediary is called “*the Faithful Spirit*” (Q 26.193) and other times “*Holy Spirit*” (Q 16.102). After Muḥammad’s migration to Medina, this intermediary became known as “Gabriel” (Q 2.97-98). (See the article “Muḥammad’s Jibrīl” on page 39.)

The Qur’ān was revealed to Muḥammad in the Arabic language (Q 12.2, Q 13.37, Q 20.113). Muḥammad gave this revelation to a people group that, previous to this time in history, had no heavenly revealed books, and had never had a prophet sent to them (Q 34.44). The Qur’ān makes the claim within its verses that it is part of the series of the holy books, e.g., the Torah^D, the Gospel (Q 2.41, 91, 97; Q 3.3, 50).

This period of revelation took place over the course of twenty-three years (AD 610-632), during which Muḥammad declared himself a prophet. After the death of Muḥammad, his Companions^D gathered the Qur’ān into a book. (See the article “Compilation of the Qur’ān” on page 49.)



Names of the Qur'ān

Muslims have called their most holy book several different names, each with its own origin and meaning.

The Qur'ān

The common name for the holy book of Islām is *the Qur'ān* (Q 2.185). The name *Qur'ān* appears about seventy times in the Qur'ān. The opinions of scholars vary regarding the origin and meaning of the word *Qur'ān*:

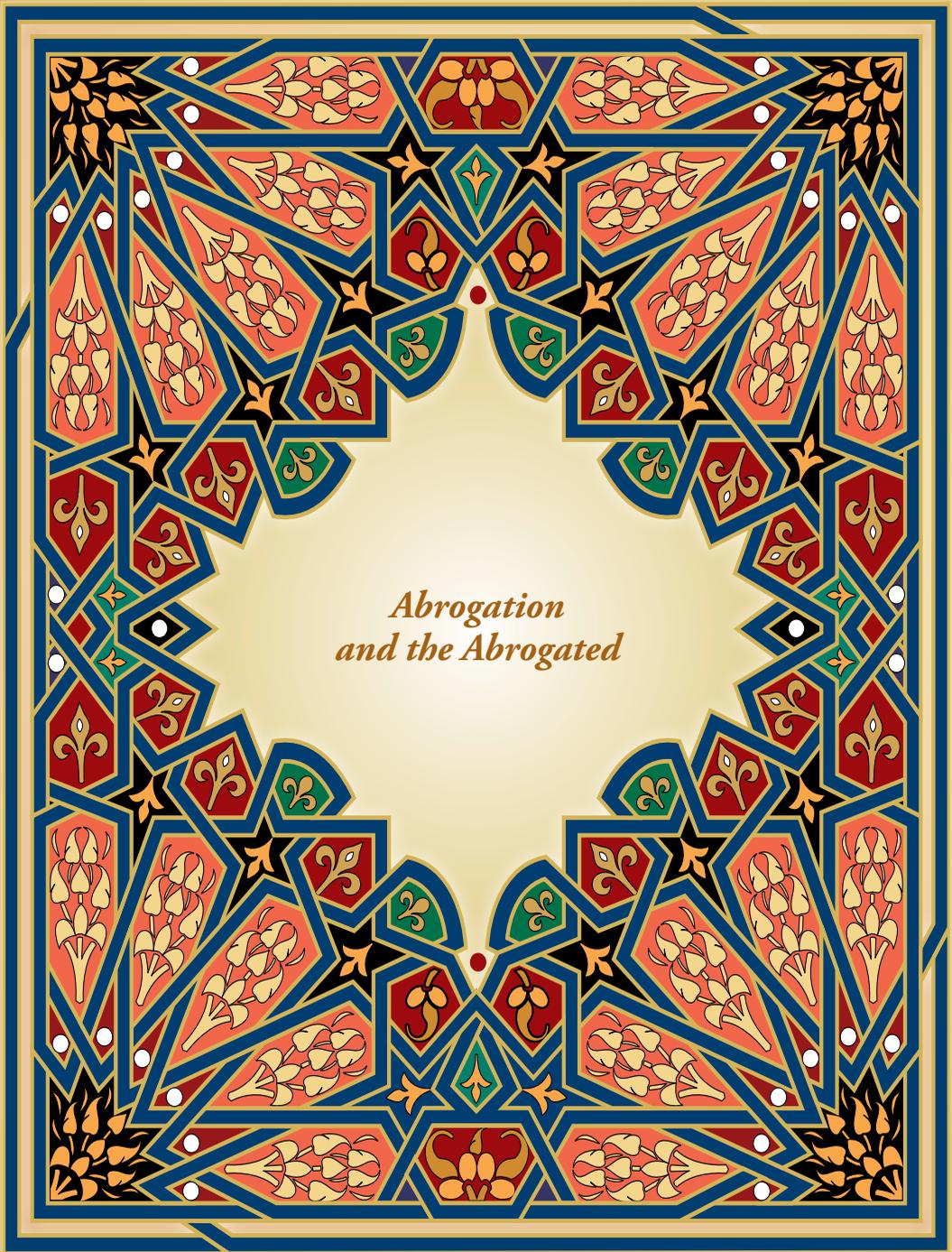
1. *Qur'ān* comes from the word *qara'a*, meaning “to recite.” Those who hold this view say that the expression *the Qur'ān* appears with this meaning in Q 75.17-18, where the Arabic reads with the word *Qur'ān* and its derivatives: “*It is for us to collect it and to read it; and when we read it then follow its reading.*”¹
2. *Qur'ān* is a description following the Arabic grammatical form *fu'lān*. *Qur'ān* then is considered a derivative of the word *qar'i*, meaning “to gather.” It is similar to the saying “*qarā'ta al-mā'a fī al-hawḍ*,” which means “you gathered the water in the tub.”²
3. *Qur'ān* is derived from *qarantu*, meaning “to pair one thing to another” or “to merge them together.” The Qur'ān received this name because of the manner in which its sūras, verses, and letters were merged together to form the whole.³
4. *Qur'ān* “is derived from *qarā'in* because its verses confirm one another and, in many ways, look the same; hence, they are similar.”⁴
5. *Qur'ān* is a unique proper noun, not borrowed from other known sources. It is applied to the words revealed to Muḥammad.⁵

It is interesting to note that many Muslim commentators and exegetes have disregarded the Semitic root of *qur'ān*, which is קרא (qara'a), meaning “to recite.” This root word, *qara'a*, is likely to have come from the Aramaic-Canaanite region. The word *qur'ān* is present in Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, and Syriac.⁶

One opinion maintains that the origin of the word *qur'ān* was influenced by the Hebrew expression קִרְיָן , which later came to mean “recitation, reading” according to the Old Testament (Neh. 8.8). This expression קִרְיָן is also repeated in rabbinical writings several times. However, most researchers lean toward the idea that *qur'ān* comes from the Syriac ܩܪܝܢܐ, which means “reading, recitation” and is used in connection to the study of the Bible.

The similarity between the Arabic and the Syriac words is clear. The Syriacs called the books, or chapters, of the Bible that are read in church ܩܪܝܢܐ, or lectionaries. Thus Muḥammad chose for his book the name that was familiar to him then. Without a doubt, the word *qur'ān* reached Muḥammad from Christian sources.⁷

In the Qur'ān the verb *qara'a* appears whenever Muḥammad shares a revelation—with the exception of four locations. Two of these exceptions refer to the other holy books (Q 10.94; Q 17.93). The other two refer to the “*Book*” (Record of Deeds) that are



*Abrogation
and the Abrogated*

Abrogation and the Abrogated

In the fifth year of Muḥammad's call in Mecca, where the people of the Quraysh, pagans and Muslims were gathered, Muḥammad came and joined their gathering. Shortly thereafter, he recited to them the first verses of sūra al-Najm, "*Have ye considered Allat and Al'Huzza, and Manat the other third?*" (Q 53.19-20), adding, "These are the idols of superior status; their intercession is expected."¹

In this phrase, Muḥammad admitted that the Quraysh idols had the power to intercede. He did this, no doubt, to receive the approval of his audience. Immediately, everyone in the council, Muslim and idolater, including Muḥammad, rushed to prostrate themselves before heaven. It seemed to the Quraysh that a new era had begun, during which the factions of Mecca would grow closer.²

But just days later, Muḥammad retracted what he had proclaimed, stating that what he had said was a slip of the tongue, an intrusion by Satan, and that Allah had abrogated the words of Satan. Then he recited, "*We have not sent before thee any apostle or prophet, but that when he wished, Satan threw not something into his wish; but God annuls what Satan throws; then does God confirm his signs, and God is knowing, wise...*" (Q 22.52).

This verse (Q 22.52) contains one of the earliest allusions to abrogation^d in the Qur'ān. Later, abrogation would occupy a crucial role in the science of interpretation.



Abrogation in the Qur'ān

The Arabic word for *abrogation* is *naskh*, which means “to copy.” To *naskh* a book means “to copy the book and write it, word for word.” The word *abrogation* also means “to annul.” For example, when one says the legislator *naskh* a law, it means he annulled it.

Abrogation in the Qur'ān means the annulment of the authority or ruling of a verse. It also means substituting one verse for another. The term *abrogation* in the Qur'ān includes the following cases:³

- **Removing** the verse from the Qur'ān. This removal is readily visible in the verse pertaining to the incident of the omitted “Satanic verses” mentioned above: “*but God annuls what Satan throws; then does God confirm his signs...*” (Q 22.52).
- **Substituting** one verse with another. This case is alluded to in the following verse: “*And whenever we change one verse for another...*” (Q 16.101).
- **Altering** the ruling of a verse, where one position is transferred to another (e.g., the right to inherit was transferred from one group to another regarding inheritances).

Abrogation is one of the scientific branches of the Qur'ān. Islamic scholars require knowledge of the principles and incidents of abrogation as a precondition before practicing the interpretation of the Qur'ān. It has been said, “[N]o one is allowed to interpret the [Qur'ān], until he knows the abrogating [verses] and the abrogated [verses] of it.”⁴ Books of Qur'ānic science abound with recommendations stressing the necessity of comprehending abrogation.⁵

The domain of abrogation is the jurisprudential system wherein abrogation makes “the permitted forbidden, and the forbidden permitted. It made the permissible unlawful and unlawful permissible.”⁶

Abrogation also includes sociopolitical issues. For instance, every tendency towards peace in the Qur'ān is abrogated. The most famous abrogating verse is the Sword (*al-Sayf*) verse: “*But when the sacred months^D are passed away, kill the idolaters wherever ye may find them...*” (Q 9.5). This particular verse abrogates 114 other verses that call for peace with and tolerance for non-Muslims.⁷

Modes of Abrogation

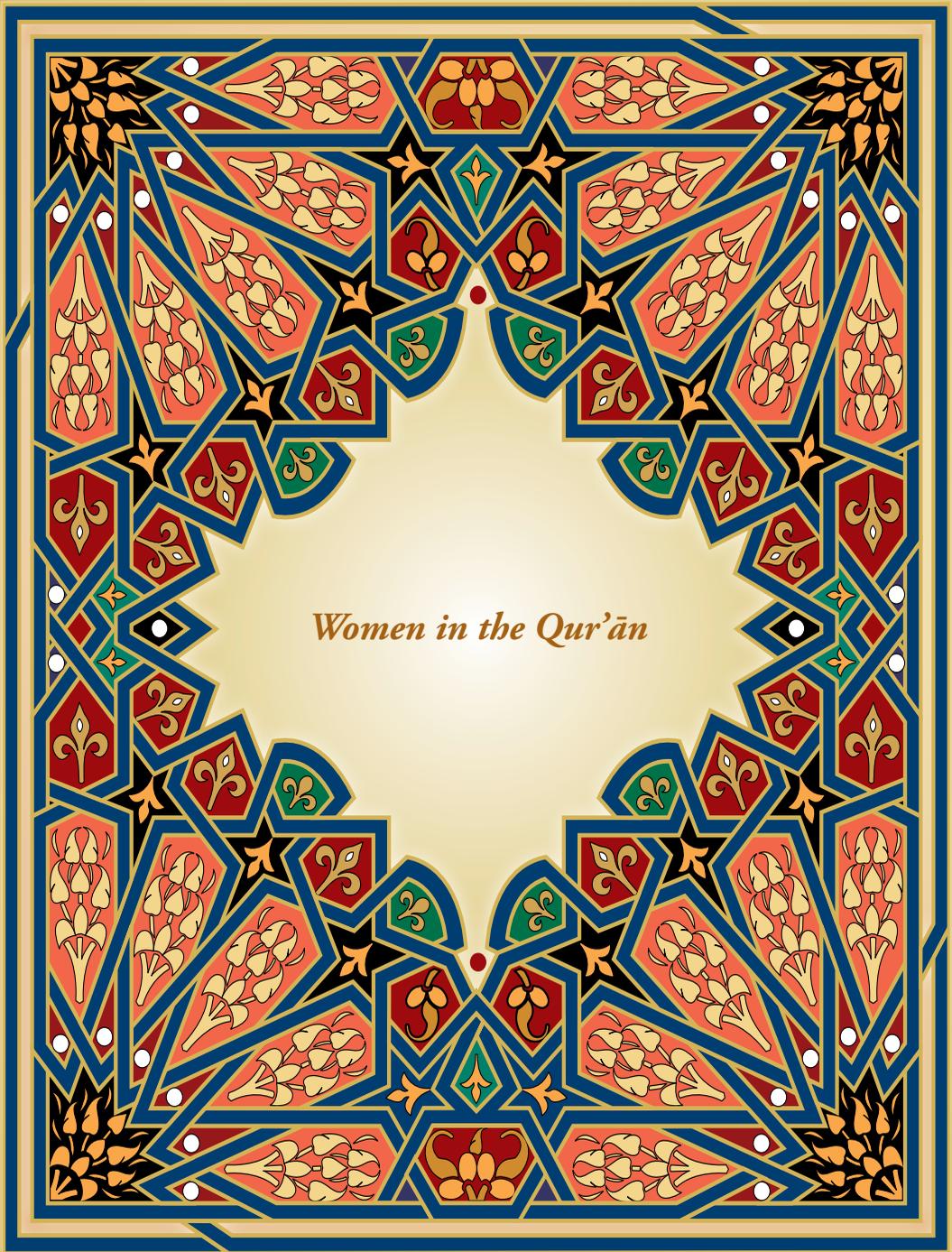
Abrogation divides verses into the following modes:

1. **The verses whose recitations are abrogated but whose rulings remain in effect.** An example is the stoning verse^D (*al-rajm*): “If an elderly man and an elderly woman committed adultery, stone them. Certainly it’s a punishment from Allah.”⁸ It is told that the verse of *al-rajm* was part of the sūra al-Aḥzāb (Q 33).⁹ Muslim scholars assert that the reason here for cancelling the reading of such verses (by removing them from the Qur'ān—when the ruling is still in effect) to test the obedience of Muslims.

The truth is that the existence of this sort of abrogation stems from the dubious nature of the compilation of the Qur'ān. (See the article "Compilation of the Qur'ān" on page 49.) Dr. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd^N believes that the reason for not including the verse of *al-rajm* in the Qur'ān is due to the prevalence of adultery "in society, as if not writing down the text [according to one account] was so as to not cause people to be repelled from coming to Islām."¹⁰

2. **The verses whose ruling was abrogated but whose recitation remains in effect.** This mode is the sort found in the writings on "the abrogating and the abrogated."¹¹ Al-Zarkashī says that this kind of abrogation is found in sixty-three sūras.¹² One example is this verse: "...but pardon and shun them till God brings His command..." (Q 2.109). This verse commands Muslims to be kind to the People of the Book, but its ruling is abrogated by the texts that command them to fight (Q 9.5, 29).¹³
3. **The verses whose readings and rulings are abrogated.** An example of this mode has been described by 'Ā'isha. She said that there are in the Qur'ān "ten known suckles [breast feedings]. Then they are abrogated by five known ones. Then he [Muḥammad] died and they are among what is read in the Qur'ān."¹⁴ Muslim scholars explained, saying, "and they [verses] are what is read" does not mean their recitation was still taking place when Muḥammad died, but that their recitation was abrogated just before his death. It can also mean that their recitation was abrogated before his death, but the news did not reach all Muslims. Therefore, some of these unaware Muslims continued to use it. About these verses, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī said, "They were sent down[,] then taken back up."¹⁵

Another case, "the forgotten verses," can also be perceived as a mode of abrogation. These "forgotten verses" are referred to in Q 2.106: "...or cause thee to forget..." In this situation, Muḥammad's forgetfulness is considered a sort of abrogation.¹⁶ In some of the readings of the Qur'ān, the word *forgetfulness* is mentioned. The phrase, "Whatever verse we may annul or cause thee to forget," is read in the codex of Ibn Mas'ūd as "We do not make you forget a verse nor abrogate it." On the other hand, Sa'd Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ^N has a variant reading of the verse that reads, "None of our revelations do we abrogate or you forget it," where Sa'd's reading means "or you forget it, O Muḥammad."¹⁷



Women in the Qur'ān

Women in the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān is the source of all personal status laws in Islāmic countries. Therefore, the rules of religious jurisprudence concerning the position and treatment of women are also based on the Qur'ān. In order to fully understand the position of women in Islām, one must first examine the Qur'ānic rules concerning them.

The Qur'ānic Image of Women

The Qur'ān provides many provocative descriptions regarding the nature of women and their intrinsic value in comparison to men:

A. Evil Beings

The Qur'ān treats women with an attitude of suspicion. It presents them as a source of danger to men. In the story of Joseph, the Qur'ān describes women as possessing great maliciousness or *kayd* ("tricks"): "...*verily, your tricks are mighty!*" (Q 12.28). On the other hand, the Qur'ān uses similar language to describe Satan: "...*verily, Satan's tricks are weak*" (Q 4.76).

It is important to note that the word *kayd* is not always used as an insult. However, the description of women in Q 12, portraying them as possessing *kayd*, is clearly used in the context of an insult. This word appears three times (verses 33, 34, and 50). Based on these three verses, one may conclude that the innate, malicious *kayd* of women comes out of their "nature and temperament." Thus their innocence is a façade that



hides the evil or cunning that is within them. Furthermore, this *kayd* keeps them busy contriving plots.¹

B. Incomplete Beings

According to the Qur'an, a woman is an incomplete being. This depiction is illustrated by the following laws:

First, the Qur'an dictates that a woman's portion of an inheritance should be only half of what a male receives: "*God instructs you concerning your children; for a male the like of the portion of two females....*" (Q 4.11, 176)

Second, the testimony in a court of law by a woman does not carry as much weight as it does by a man. Instead, her testimony is valued at half a man's testimony. In fact, her legal statements cannot even be accepted as true unless there are two women testifying. Furthermore, the Qur'an dictates that when a business transaction takes place between two people, two men must witness it, or one man and two women. That way, if one woman forgets what transpired, "*the second of the two may remind the other...*" (Q 2.282).

Not only is a woman's mental capacities considered weak, but the Qur'an compares her to a man with weak reasoning and an inability to argue his case: "*What! one brought up amongst ornaments, and who is always in contention without obvious cause?*" (Q 43.18).

The commentators on the Qur'an see these verses as proof of "the mental weakness of women and of their deficiencies, as compared to the instincts of men. It is said that when a woman spoke to present her cause, she presented the cause against herself."² They feel that women are incapable of engaging in reasonable discussion. If a woman "needed to argue and fight, she would be unable [to do so], and would not prevail. This is due to her weakness of tongue, mental deficiency, and dullness of temperament."³

Moreover, the Muslim commentators state that a woman understands she is an incomplete being. Hence, she tries to build her self-confidence "by adorning herself with trinkets and such, to compensate for what is deficient in her."⁴

In addition, the commentators state that men outperform women even in duties that "are exclusively carried out by women, [even though] her share of them has been greater and began much earlier than a man." Therefore, even though women have been busy since the beginning of history learning how to prepare food properly, a woman can never hope to reach the skill of a man "who dedicates only a few years to it."⁵ Men are even better than women in designing and embroidering fabrics. In the field of dancing, men are considered to be professional in it, whereas women's dancing tends to be based on performance rather than originality.⁶ Women who are geniuses in any given field and those who were queens throughout history are exceptional cases that do not change this rule.⁷

The Qur'an's Ruling on the Veil

The wearing of a veil has been widely practiced by women in the Arabian Peninsula since before Islām. Women wore scarves and left the upper part of their chests, as well as their necks and ears, uncovered.⁸ Such was the appearance of a woman when she was out in public before men, including the Muslim women who initially kept their traditional clothing.⁹

However, social changes in Medina convinced Muḥammad that he should mandate the wearing of a veil. When women, including Muḥammad's wives, went out at night to relieve themselves between the palm trees and the fields, "the youth and those who were opportunistic" used to harass female slaves who were going out to answer the call of nature. Sometimes they would even approach and harass a free woman, claiming that they could not differentiate between her and a slave. So the women went to Muḥammad to complain about the matter.¹⁰ And thus, he ordered the free women to wear a veil, which would distinguish them from slaves: "*O thou prophet! tell thy wives and thy daughters, and the women of the believers, to let down over them their outer wrappers; that is nearer for them to be known and that they should not be annoyed...*" (Q 33.59).¹¹

Based on the commentary of Ibn Kathīr, this effort was very successful. He states that some of "the fornicators of the people of Medina" who used to roam at night to accost women were no longer bothering the free ones. In fact, "if they saw a woman wearing a full *ḥijāb* [head covering], they would say, 'This is a free one,' and would not harass her. But if they saw a woman not wearing one, they would say, 'This is a female slave,' and they would pounce on her."¹²

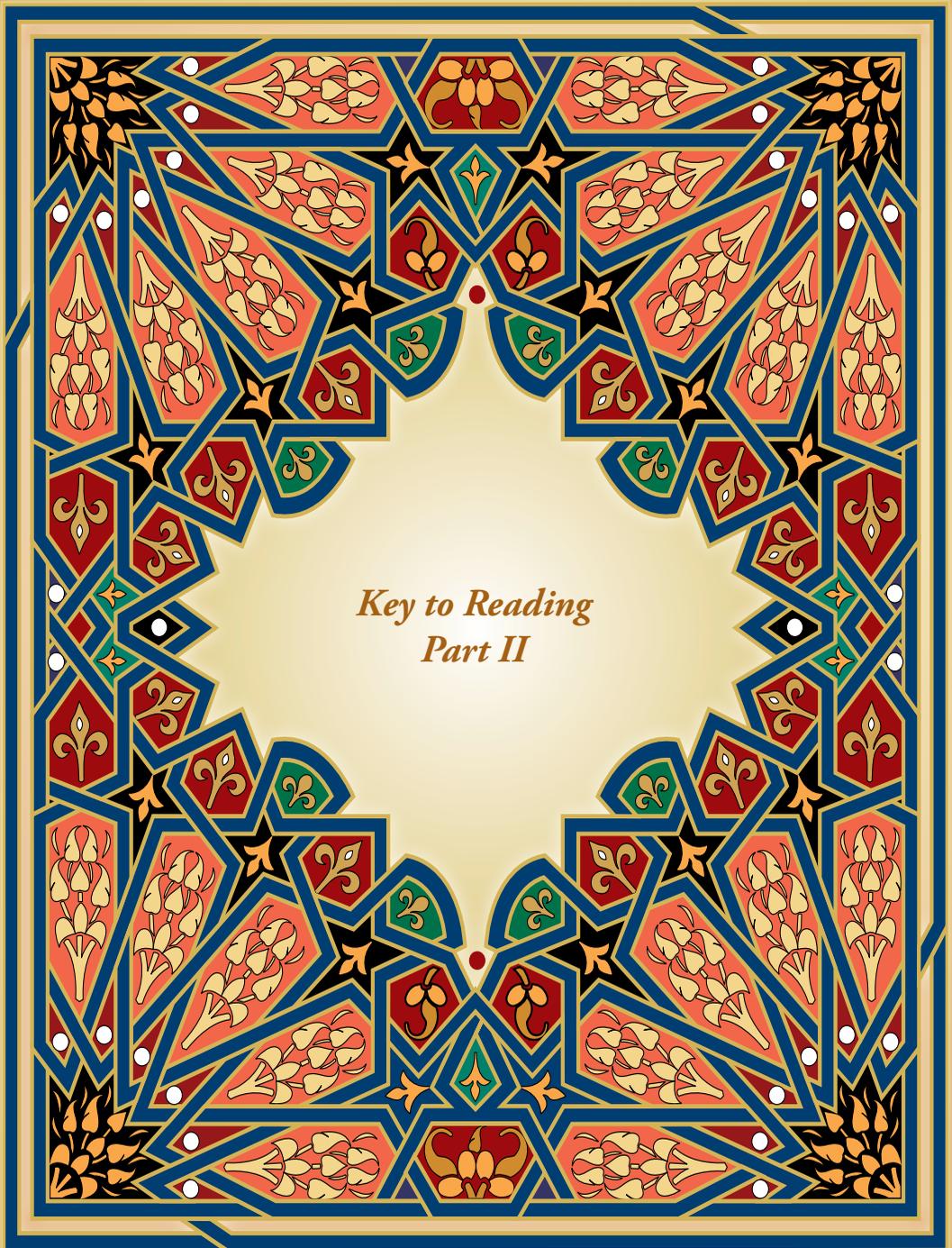
Therefore, Muḥammad declared in Q 33.59 that a distinction could be made between a free woman and a female slave. This distinction would stop those who might accidentally harass free women.¹³ Because being unveiled became one of the characteristics of a female slave, 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb forbade them from wearing a veil: "[I]f he saw a female slave veiled, he would beat her with a whip to preserve the apparel of the free ones."¹⁴

The Qur'an's Rules on Marriage

The Qur'an uses the term *al-nikāḥ* for marriage (Q 33.49). While the Qur'an does not put a minimum limit on the marriageable age for women, it clearly states that it is permissible for a young girl to be given in marriage before she reaches adulthood. This ruling is evidenced by the verse discussing the prescribed waiting period, or *'idda*^D, of a young female divorcee who has not yet begun menstruation. Her waiting period is set at three months (Q 65.4). The following text provides further understanding of the marital relationship in Islām and the tenets upon which it is based.



PART II
The Qur'ānic Text



*Key to Reading
Part II*

Key to Reading Part II

Each chapter (sūra) will be preceded by a short introduction that will summarize the main topics addressed in that sūra and alert the reader to related historical, linguistical, exegetical and other important issues.

Each sūra (as translated by Palmer) will be presented in its original form, ornately boxed, as is customary to see the Qur’ān in an Arabic text. Generally, these decorative text boxes will be placed at the top of the pages (though some will span several full pages) with the related commentary placed below these boxes.

Qur’ānic Text and Citations

When the word “Qur’ān” is used in this book without further explanation, it refers to the ‘Uthmānic codex because this reading is the official version of the Qur’ān in circulation today. Throughout this book, the readings of the official Qur’ān (‘Uthmānic codex) and the Palmer English translation will be italicized; the other readings, or codices, will use normal text.

For all Qur’ānic citations, the letter “Q” refers to the Qur’ān. In the example Q 4.3, the number 4 refers to sūra 4 and the number 3 refers to the verse.

Note: ‘Uthmānic Codex

Sometimes this book will mention that a reading of a particular verse is attributed to the “codex of ‘Uthmān.” How can there be a reading from the codex of ‘Uthmān

when the official Qur'ān is the 'Uthmānic codex? The answer is that several readings of the Companions of Muḥammad have been transmitted to us, including one from 'Uthmān Ibn 'Affān, the third successor or caliph after Muḥammad's death. These readings were not included in the official Qur'ān because the official version was a development of an earlier copy.

This earlier copy was prepared on the orders of Abū Bakr, the first caliph, and 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph, and kept with Ḥafṣa, 'Umar's daughter and one of Muḥammad's wives. When 'Uthmān formed his committee to transcribe the official Qur'ān, the committee took the copy from Ḥafṣa and created a text based on it that was acceptable to all. Therefore, many individual readings of the Qur'ān were left out of the official copy. Some of these ignored readings belonged to Abū Bakr, 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb—and 'Uthmān—themselves. (See the article "Compilation of the Qur'ān" on page 49.)

Reliability of non-Arabic Qur'āns

The Qur'ān states in verses such as Q 16.103 and Q 26.195 that it is an Arabic book that was revealed to Arabs in their own language. However, in order for Islām to grow beyond the limitations of time and space, the Muslims had to translate the Qur'ān and propagate it in a way that would attract the target cultures.

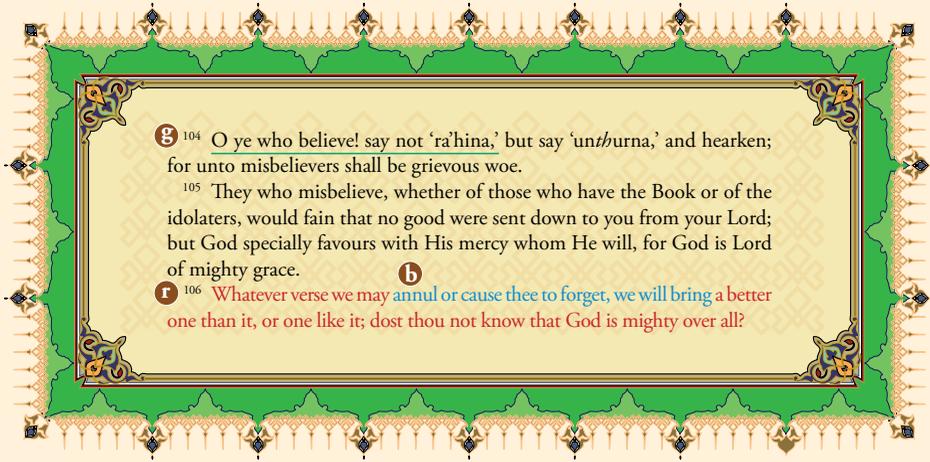
A reader might approach any translation of the Qur'ān with the assumption that it is an honest rendering of the original and, thus, might not be aware of the many differences that might exist between the original and the translation.

The Arabic and English languages are very different, which opens the door for several reasons behind inaccurate translations:

1. The translator's pursuit of an equivalent word in another language might prove difficult. Therefore, the translator may choose, out of preference, one word over another based on the translator's knowledge or linguistic taste. For example, the Arabic word *fitna* (found in Q 2.191) has several English translations:
 - "persecution" by Pickthall
 - "tumult and oppression" by Yusuf Ali
 - "sedition" by Palmer

Another example, with possible serious theological ramifications upon translation, is found in Q 33.56. The verse, presented here in three English translations, literally states that Allah and his angels pray upon (*yuṣallūna 'ala*) Muḥammad:

PICKTHALL: "Lo! Allah and His angels **shower blessings** on the Prophet. O ye who believe! **Ask blessings** on him and salute him with a worthy salutation."



G Q.2.104

It is recorded that the Anṣār said to Muḥammad, “*ra'inā*,” which meant they wanted him to explain more to them. However, in this verse, Muḥammad commanded them to use the word *unzurnā* in its place, because he considered *ra'inā* to be Jewish slang for an expletive....

B Q.2.106

The text of this verse is mentioned in different forms:

- In the codex of Ibn Mas'ūd it is read as “we do not hold back a verse or abrogate it, but we come with one better than it or similar to it.”
- It is also told that Ibn Mas'ūd read it as “we do not make you forget a verse or abrogate it”....

R Q.2.106

In the midst of the doctrinal controversy between Muḥammad and the Jews in Medina, the Jews noticed that Muḥammad was annulling, time and again, rulings that he had enacted....

Color-coded Sections

As exemplified in the above illustration, three colors are used to help the reader identify and understand the three main sections:

- Sections with a green motif introduce commentary regarding the abrogation of the verse. (See G.) The text of the corresponding Qur'ānic verse (in the decorated box) will be underlined in green. (See S.)
- Sections with a blue motif introduce commentary that discuss the variant readings of the verse. (See B.) The text of the corresponding Qur'ānic verse will be colored blue. (See b.)
- Sections with a red motif introduce the critical analysis of the verse. (See R.) The text of the corresponding Qur'ānic verse will also be colored red. (See r.)

¹⁰² And they follow that which **the devils** recited against Solomon's kingdom;—it was not Solomon who misbelieved, **but the devils** who misbelieved, teaching men sorcery,—and what has been revealed to the two angels at Babylon, Harut and Marut; yet these taught no one until they said, 'We are but a temptation, so do not misbelieve.' Men learn from them only that by which they may part man and wife; but they can harm no one therewith, unless with the permission of God, and they learn what hurts them and profits them not. And yet they knew that he who

Q.2.102

Most readers read it as rendered above, where the word *al-shayāṭinu* (“the devils”) is in the Arabic irregular (broken) plural form. However, there is a reading that says *al-shayāṭīn*. They read it as *wa lakin al-shayāṭīn*—using the weaker *lakin* (“but”) instead of the stronger *lakinna* (“but”), which is what the current Arabic Qurʾān reads—and keeping *al-shayāṭīn* according to the previous reading. This substitution of words presents a great grammatical difference in parsing words.

Special Text

In the above illustration, the blue, italicized, and bold-faced text represents the reading in the current Arabic Qurʾān (see ①); its Palmer English translation is blue, bold faced, but not italicized (see ②). Variant readings (with their English translations) will also be blue and italicized but not bold-faced (see ③).

Superscripts

The insertion of the superscripts ^D and ^N after words or phrases will be used as references for entries in the Selected Definitions (page 567) and Selected Proper Names (page 555), respectively.

Conclusion

While reading, the reader is strongly encouraged to investigate different translations, keeping in mind the following questions: Who is the author of the Qurʾān? And, is the Qurʾān in its current form without errors?

Introduction

This sūra's name, al-Nisā', means "The Women."

The name comes from its many rulings about women, particularly in the initial verses (up to Q 4.34). Muslim scholars disagree about the date of this sūra. The majority believes that it was revealed after Q 3 and so dated it after the third year of the *Hijra* (AH 3/AD 622). Others suggest it was revealed in the fourth or the beginning of the fifth year of the *Hijra*, AH 4-5.¹ The scholar Wherry leans towards adopting this date because he considers that its revelation occurred the beginning of AH 4 to the middle or end of AH 5.² Still others date it between the end of the third and fifth year of the *Hijra*, AH 3-5, between the Battle of Uḥud^D and the Battle of the Trench^D.³

Some parts of this sūra clearly do not belong to the aforementioned time period, AH 3-5. For instance, we find the phrase, "*O ye folk!*" (Q 4.1, 133), which is considered a Meccan expression. It is probable, however, that this was indeed an early Medinan expression used by Muḥammad before he coined his new terms. The use here of "*O ye folk!*" leads some Muslims to say that this is a Meccan sūra (revealed in Mecca).⁴ However, most Muslim scholars reject this position, as the sūra deals with events that occurred in Medina. Therefore, verses 1 and 133 are thought to have been added to the sūra at a later date.

We also find that some verses in this sūra belong to a period beyond the fifth year of the *Hijra*, AH 5. For example, Q 4.43—the verse mandating *al-tayamum* (performing the ritual washing with sand when no water is available)—came during the Raid of al-Muraysī', which occurred in AH 5 or 6. Verse 176, also known as the *kalāla* verse (governing the rules of inheritance), comes at the end of this sūra and is considered by some as the last verse of the Qur'ān to be revealed.⁵ This chronology indicates that the sūra was not revealed at one time as a complete sūra but was instead patched together with verses from different time periods.

Overall, this sūra is concerned with three main issues:

- Rules concerning women
- Aftereffects of the defeat at the Battle of Uḥud
- Laws regarding inheritance and the care of orphans

The sūra also provides various admonitions to Muslims.

In dealing with the political situation after the Battle of Uḥud, verses 44-55 and 155-158 introduce anti-Jewish rhetoric. Then verses 60-68, 81-83, 138, and 141-143 severely criticize Muḥammad's opponents (*al-munāfiqūn*, or "the hypocrites"). We also find that verses 74-78 and 84 encourage fighting. Moreover, verses 171-172 insult Christians. However, since the Qur'ān had not yet begun its campaign of accusations against Christians, these verses must have been added to the sūra at a later time.

IN the name of the merciful and compassionate God.

¹ O ye folk! fear your Lord, who created you from one soul, and created therefrom its mate, and diffused from them twain many men and women. And fear God, in whose name ye beg of one another, and the wombs; verily, God over you doth watch.

² And give unto the orphans their property, and give them not the vile in exchange for the good, and devour not their property to your own property; verily, that were a great sin.

³ But if ye fear that ye cannot do justice between orphans, then marry what seems good to you of women, by twos, or threes, or fours; and if ye fear that ye cannot be equitable, then only one, or what your right hands possess. That keeps you nearer to not being partial.

⁴ And give women their dowries freely; and if they are good enough to remit any of it of themselves, then devour it with good digestion and appetite.

⁵ But do not give up to fools their property which God has made you to stand by; but maintain them from it, and clothe them, and speak to them with a reasonable speech.

§ Q 4.2-3 §

In the first verse, the Qur'an warns Muslims against seizing the money of orphans, considering it a great sin (Q 4.2). In the next verse, it tells Muslim men "*if ye fear*" that they shall not be able to deal justly with orphans, then "*marry what seems good to you of women, by twos, or threes, or fours...*" (Q 4.3).

So, what is the connection between being afraid of dealing unjustly with orphans and choosing to marry any number of women?

According to the Arabic grammar, "*if ye fear that ye cannot do justice* [act equitably]" is a condition and "*marry*" is the result or reply. Therefore, how can this reply be connected to that condition?



Muslim scholars have expressed their opinions on this verse:

- **The first opinion:** According to 'Ā'isha, this verse refers to the orphans' custodians. They were infatuated with the beauty of the orphan girls in their care and married them at a reduced dowry. The verse directs these men to pay the girls a fair dowry. However, if they feared that they would not be able to act equitably in this regard, then they should marry foreign women.⁶
- **The second opinion:** After the Qur'ān demanded the just dealing of orphans (Q 4.2), men felt intense pressure lest they failed to be equitable. Therefore, the following verse tells them, "[I]f you were afraid to neglect justice to orphans' rights and are in distress over it, then also be afraid to neglect justice to women, and so reduce the number of women you marry."⁷ It was mentioned by Sa'īd Ibn Jubayr^N, al-Sadī, Qatāda, and Ibn 'Abbās that as far as the orphans' money was concerned, Arab men felt pressured to act responsibly, but they did not feel that same responsibility when it came to women, even if they married ten or more women. Therefore, the verse directs men, "[A]s you fear being unjust with orphans, likewise feel an obligation towards women and marry only up to the limit that would avoid injustice."⁸

"If You Fear...Marry"!

This verse [Q 4.3]...is a wonder of wonders. It gathered two matters that could not be joined together unless it was possible to mix oil with water. In spite of all my readings in the commentaries of things that are acceptable, or rejectable; of nonsensical chatter, or forced meanings; I am still unable to understand the relationship between injustice with orphans' money and marriage.

Between the condition "*if ye fear*" and the response "*then marry*" in the verse... there most likely had to be a third verse that was either missing, abrogated, or intentionally or unintentionally dismissed; unless there was "infinite wisdom" or a "rhetorical joke" that the talkative scholars have gotten us used to! Otherwise, all their trials to rescue this verse remain futile.

This verse, in its current written form, is meaningless. The rigid stance [in this matter] has led to a refusal to contemplate the exclusion of this verse. A refusal to accept anything other than keeping it—in the same way it came down—for fear of distortion and attribution to Allah's word of something he did not say.

(Abd al-Nūr, *Miḥnatī ma'a al-Qur'ān wa ma'a Allah fī al-Qur'ān* 130)



- **The third opinion:** Muslim men felt hard-pressed to take care of orphans, so they were told, if they feared for the rights of orphans, so be afraid of adultery, and, thus, marry only the number of women allowed and try not to circumvent what is prohibited.
- **The fourth opinion:** It was said that married men with several wives were taking care of orphan girls and when they spent money on their wives, the money came from the orphans' allotment. As a result, the verse came to warn against this shameful conduct and request that men be satisfied with a maximum of four wives as a way to eliminate the cause of this misbehavior. If they were worried that they would be unjust to even four wives, then they were instructed to marry just one.⁹ Explains the commentary found in *al-Muḥarir al-Wajīz*: "If you feared the lack of money as to do injustice to orphans, then be limited."¹⁰

Notice the contradiction. One suggestion declares that Arabs were accustomed to seizing the money of orphans for personal gain, either through reducing the dowry (the first opinion) or through direct misappropriation of orphans' money for personal reasons, such as spending it on their wives (the fourth opinion).

Meanwhile, the second opinion states that men were trying to be fair to orphans and that was why the Qur'ān asks the man to deal justly with his wife (or wives) in a way similar to his conduct with orphans. However, this opinion does not agree with the context of the verse, because the preceding verse warns men against robbing the orphans of their money, a statement that insinuates they are guilty of robbing orphans. Notice the verse does not tell Muslims, "*as you fear being unjust with orphans, so fear similarly with women,*" but uses the phrasing, "if...then." In other words, it shows a relationship between the two.

As for the third opinion stating that the verse pertains to adultery, it is a weak opinion because the verse is speaking of marriage. Even if we accept the third opinion, the conditional connection "if...then" remains incomprehensible. Nevertheless, none of these four opinions gives the reader a clear reason to link the fear of being unjust with orphans' money and the solution, marrying multiple women of their choice.

Notes:

- **Allowing marriage to more than four women**
According to the fourth opinion, if a man does not confiscate the orphans' money to cover his own expenses, then he has the right to marry as many women as he pleases. Muslim scholars support lawful marriage to more than four women, basing this judgment on Q 4.3.¹¹
- **Allowing marriage to female orphans before puberty**
Basing his opinion upon Q 4.3, Abū Ḥanīfa^N said it was permissible to marry an orphan girl before she reached the age of puberty.¹²

6 Prove orphans until they reach a marriageable age, and if ye perceive in them right management, then hand over to them their property, and do not devour it extravagantly in anticipation of their growing up. And he who is rich, let him abstain; but he who is poor, let him devour in reason, and when ye hand over to them their property, then take witnesses against them; but God sufficeth for taking account.

Q 4.6

This verse prohibits the rich (well-off) guardian of an orphan's money from benefiting from it in any way. However, if the guardian is poor, then he is allowed to benefit by it: "*let him devour in reason,*" meaning let him have what is just and reasonable. Moreover, the scholars say "*devour in reason*" means one of the following intentions:

- A. It is permissible to borrow from the orphan's money.¹³
- B. "It is permissible to consume ("*devour*") but one should avoid being wasteful."¹⁴ Another scholar says, "[Use] just enough to stave off hunger and hide private parts." Yet another says, "Eating using the fingertips [i.e., a small portion], without excessiveness in food consumption. He should not be buying clothes from the money."¹⁵
- C. It is permissible for the poor guardian to take only what is necessary from the orphan's funds. Then, if he can, he ought to pay back what he took. If he cannot afford to pay it back, then he is released from having to return it.¹⁶
- D. The poor guardian is permitted to take as much as is needed for his necessary expenditures.¹⁷

Therefore, according to these views, the verse is considered to be conserved. However, other scholars say the verse is abrogated by the following two verses:

- A. Q 4.29: "...*devour not your property amongst yourselves vainly...*"¹⁸
- B. Q 4.10: "*Verily, those who devour the property of orphans unjustly, only devour into their bellies fire, and they shall broil in flames....*"¹⁹

⁷ Men should have a portion of what their parents and kindred leave, and women should have a portion of what their parents and kindred leave, whether it be little or much, a determined portion.

⁸ And when the next of kin and the orphans and the poor are present at the division, then maintain them out of it, and speak to them a reasonable speech.

⁹ And let these fear lest they leave behind them a weak seed, for whom they would be afraid; and let them fear God, and speak a straightforward speech.

¹⁰ Verily, those who devour the property of orphans unjustly,

Q 4.7

Some scholars believe that verse 7 refers to the requirement of giving an inheritance to women without specifying the amount but is abrogated with the inheritance verse, Q 4.11: “God instructs you concerning your children; for a male the like of the portion of two females....”²⁰

However, Ibn al-Jawzī does not agree. He considers that verse 7 establishes the principle of women’s inheritance, while the inheritance verse came to specify the portion.²¹

Q 4.8

It is told that during the distribution of an inheritance, various people (such as the neighbor, the poor, and the orphan) attended the proceedings to receive charity from the heirs.²² There are two differing beliefs concerning this practice:

- A. Some scholars believe the verse is abrogated with the inheritance verse, Q 4.11: “God instructs you concerning your children; for a male the like of the portion of two females....”²³
- B. Others believe the verse is conserved. One story recounts that Ibn ‘Abbās said the verse is not abrogated, “but it is what people took lightly.” Another scholar has said, “[I]t is not abrogated. It is the one that stands. However, the people were stingy and miserly.”²⁴ Yet others say the verse urges and entices but contains no specific command.²⁵



Q 4.9



There are several differing scholarly opinions about whom this verse addresses.

The first opinion states that the verse addresses the attendants present with the testator (the one making the will):

- A. The verse warns those who are in attendance while the testator is allocating his money not to order him to designate it to anyone other than the legal heirs. According to this explanation, the attendants ought to persuade him to reserve his money for the legitimate heirs.²⁶
- B. In contrast to the above, the verse prohibits those present from forbidding the testator from bequeathing his money to his relatives.²⁷

The second opinion holds that the verse is an address to the guardians of orphans to do their duty with sincerity and honesty.²⁸

The third opinion states that this verse is an address to the guardians to execute the bequest according to the testator's orders. It is abrogated with verse Q 2.182: *"And he who fears from the testator a wrong intention, or a crime, and doth make up the matter between the parties, it is no sin to him."* Here, Q 2.182 allows the guardian to amend the bequest if he sees in it a deviation from what is right. According to this viewpoint, the verse is considered abrogated, whereas in the first two opinions, the verse is conserved.²⁹



Q 4.10



It is said that because the verse warns of consuming the money of orphans some guardians set the orphan's food and drink apart from food given to others. But some believed that dividing up the food and drink made the guardianship too complicated. Therefore, verse Q 2.220 came to abrogate this part of Q 4.10, disposing of the necessity to set apart the orphan's food and drink: *"But if ye interfere with them [mix their affairs with yours]—they are your brethren...."*³⁰

Yet there are those who say the verse is abrogated with verse Q 4.6: *"...but he who is poor, let him devour in reason."* However, this view is rejected by Ibn al-Jawzī, who believes that the two verses do not cancel each other out.³¹ Thus, he declared that the verse is conserved.



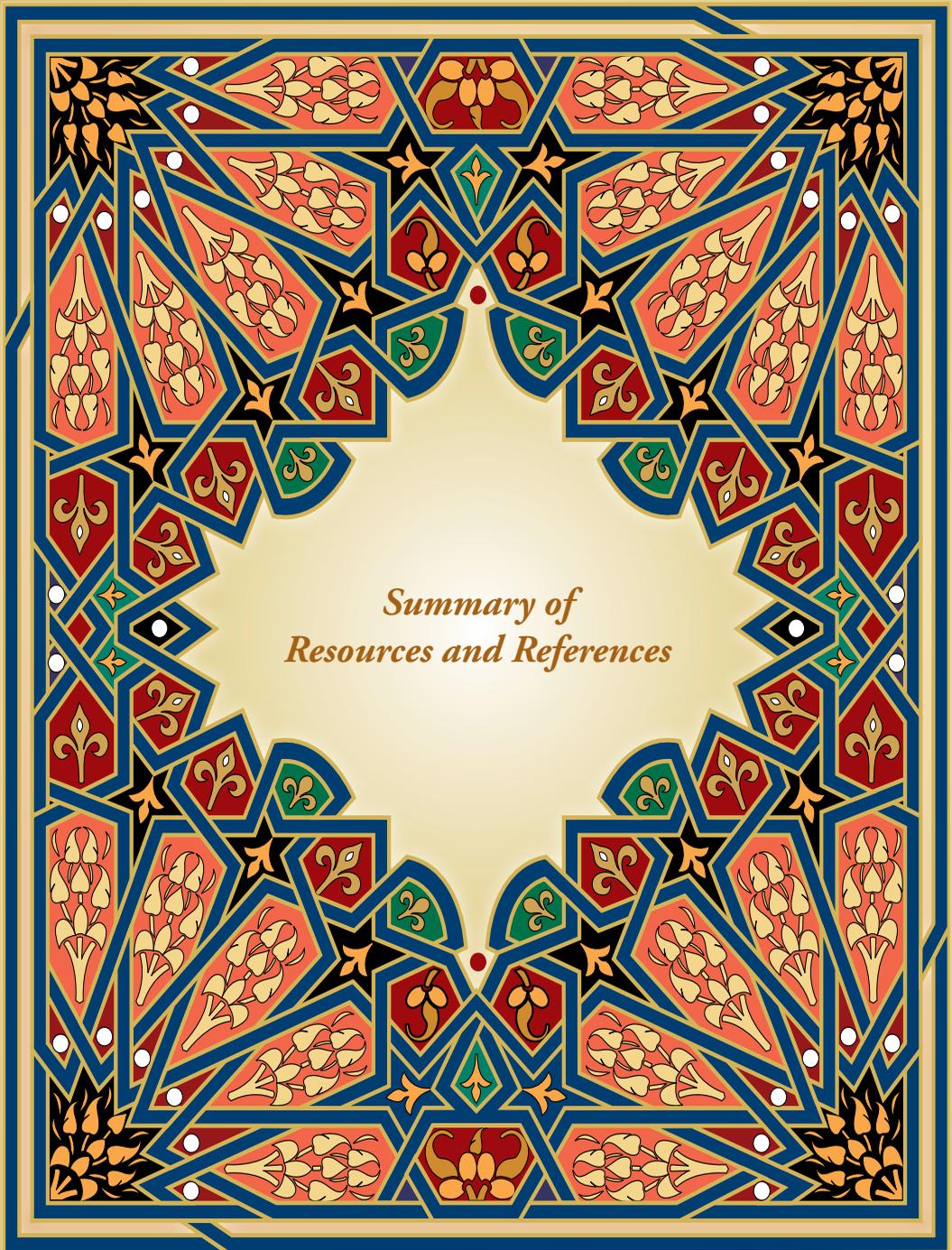
Q 4.10



The verse appears in a different form in the codex of Ibn Mas'ūd. He substitutes the singular for the plural throughout the verse: *"Whoever unjustly eats up the property of orphans, eats up a fire into his own belly, and he will be broiling in flames."*³²



PART III
*Resources
and References*



*Summary of
Resources and References*

Summary of Resources and References

The third part of this book contains traditional references as well as other resources to assist the reader in understanding various aspects of the book. All the resources will better familiarize the reader with important concepts particular to the Qur'ān, help the reader in topic searches and related information, and enhance the reader's contextual understanding and knowledge concerning the beginnings and spread of Islām.



Suggested Readings

This section contains annotated lists of both print and online readings to extend the discussion on selected topics mentioned in this book.

Selected Proper Names

This section contains additional information about individuals mentioned in this book who impacted—or were affected by—Islām or the Qur'ān, particularly during the early centuries.

Selected Definitions

Brief definitions for important Islāmic subjects and other related terms are presented in this section.

Controversial Qur'ānic Texts

Three suras—al-Khal', al-Ḥafd, and al-Nūrayn—that are not included in the current Arabic Qur'ān are presented in this section in Arabic and paired with an adjacent English translation.

Timeline

The vertical graphic with accompanying captions notes important leaders and identifies major dates in the early history of Islām and the Qur'ān from 54 BH/AD 570 to AH 1342/AD 1925.

Maps

Four maps are included to provide a visual geographical and political representation of the Arabian Peninsula during the early history of Islām. The first two maps show major cities and tribes in the area and the last two illustrate major raids and the expansion of Islām into the Mediterranean region (sixth to seventh century AD):

- Cities and Tribes of Arabia
- Yathrib (Medina) Tribes
- Major Raids of Arabia
- The Spread of Islām

Endnotes

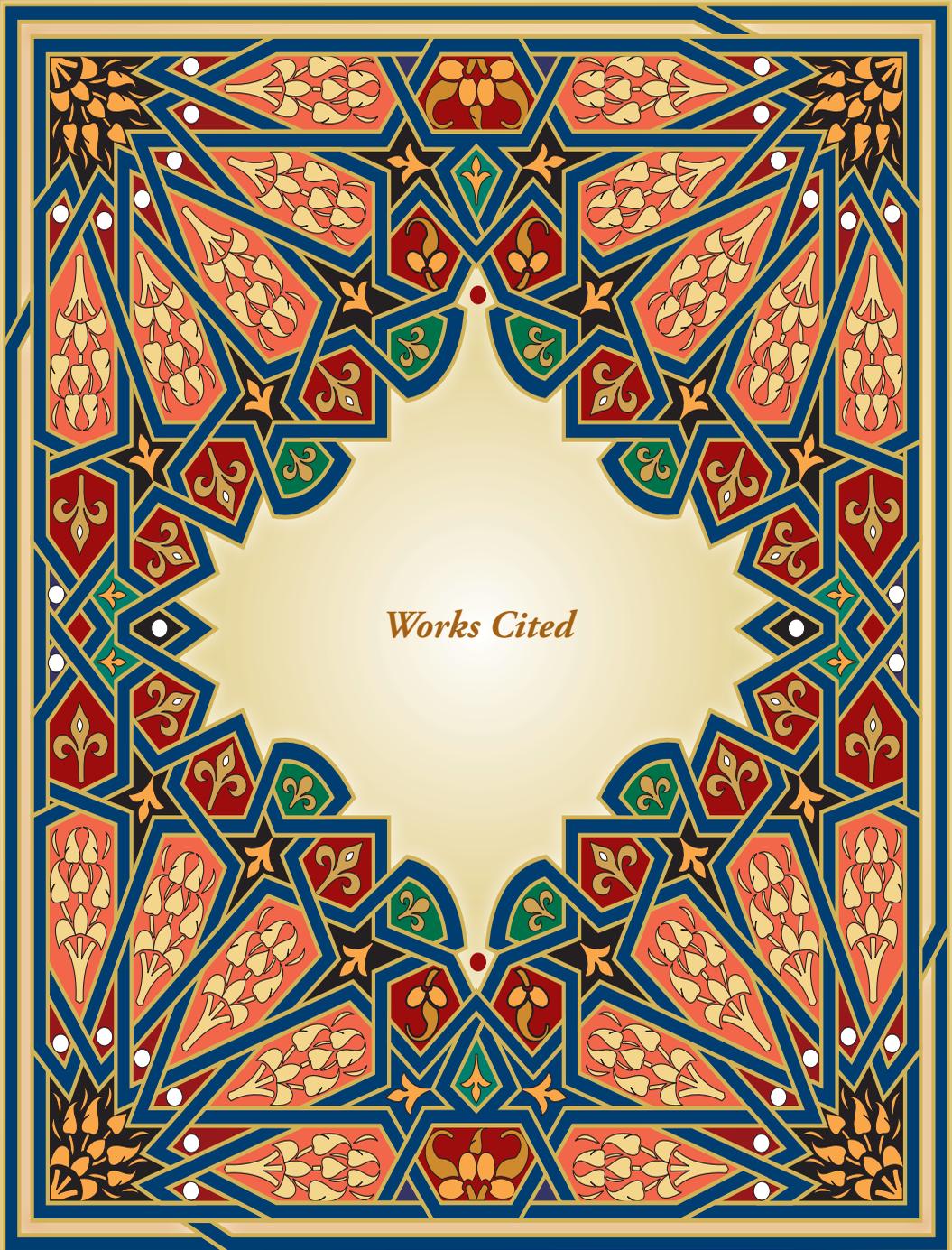
Because of the extensive research contained in this book, endnotes (rather than parenthetical documentation) were used to cite the textual references. Each set of endnotes is organized sequentially by chapter—articles first, followed by the suras.

**Works Cited**

All references cited in this book are contained in this section and are divided into three sections: Arabic Commentaries, Arabic Sources, and Non-Arabic Sources.

Subject Index

Major topics discussed in this book are alphabetically arranged and linked with corresponding page numbers to enhance and expedite reader access to the content.



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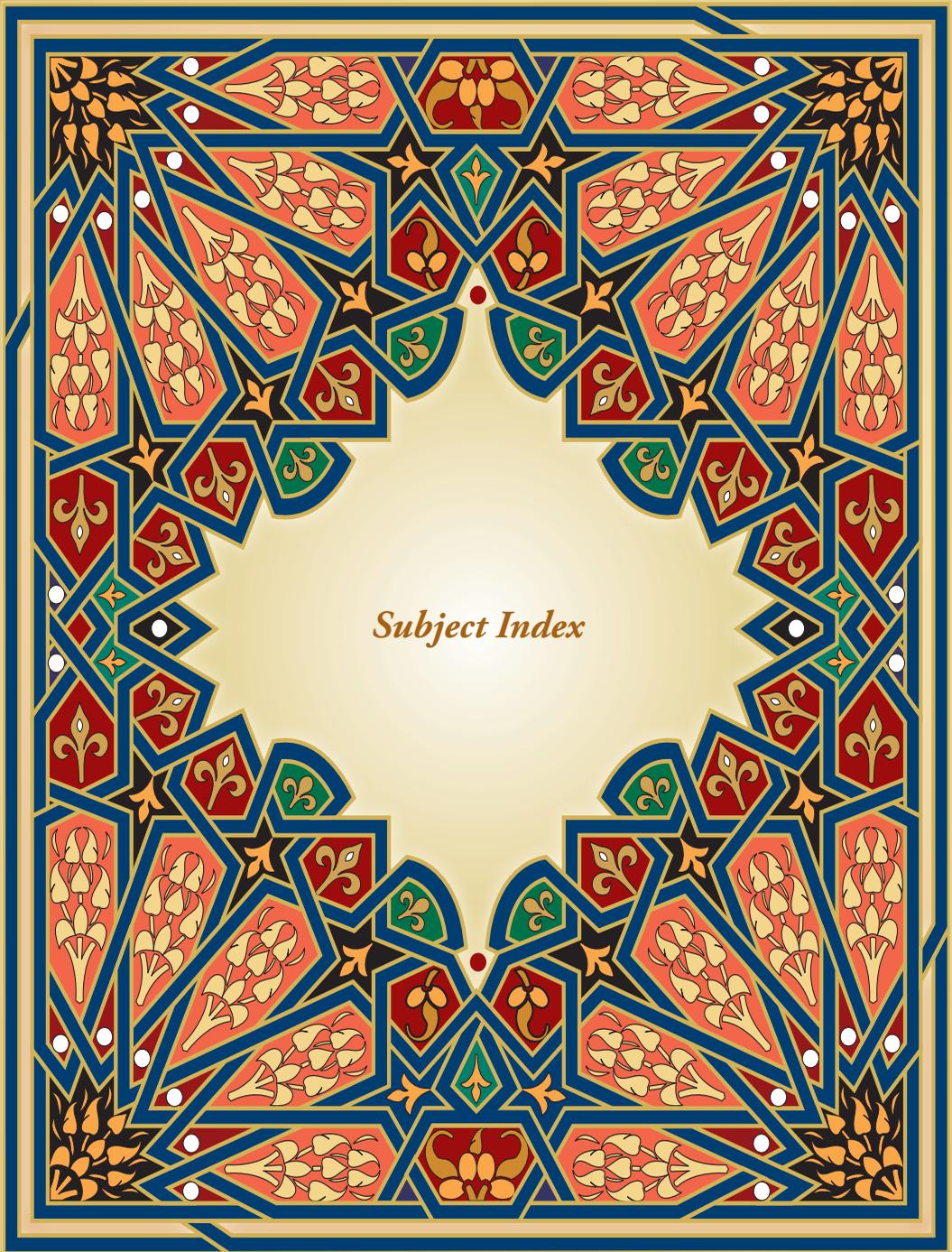
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