Article

Inspiration and Revelation of the Qur'an and Its Relation to the Bible

Abdulla Galadari

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khalifa University of Science and Technology, Abu Dhabi 127788, United Arab Emirates; abdulla.galadari@ku.ac.ae

Abstract: The Qur'an often compares its own inspiration and revelation with previous scriptures to its audience. However, the Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity had manifold understandings of the inspiration and revelation of scripture. The rabbinic tradition posits various degrees of inspiration behind canonical scriptures: the Torah was dictated by God to Moses, while other prophets had lesser degrees of divine inspiration. Many Christian churches typically held a dual authorship concept, where the human author wrote under the inspiration of a divine author. Many Muslim traditions held various understandings of the agency, or lack thereof, of Muḥammad in the utterances of the Qur'an. Nonetheless, the Qur'an claims that its own inspiration is no different from some biblical books. Since the rabbinic and Christian views differ, it is imperative to understand the Qur'anic concept of itself on inspiration and revelation (*waḥy* and *tanzīl*), especially since it compares itself with other scriptures. Additionally, it is argued that the Qur'an's self-referentiality as a "*kitāb*" that descends does not necessarily denote a "book" (neither heavenly nor earthly), but an order or commandment, which is more loyal to the root definition.

Keywords: book; comparative religion; inspiration; Late Antiquity; Qur'an; revelation; theology

1. Introduction

According to Muslim tradition, Muḥammad was dissatisfied with his society's belief system and distanced himself from much of their rites, making him part of a group that tradition calls the Ḥanīfiyyah, a group of people who allegedly remained loyal to the type of monotheism believed to have been handed down by Abraham.[1] Muslim tradition claims that Muḥammad received the inspiration of the Qur'an while isolating himself alone in a cave.[2] Isolation to seek some form of a mystical experience has always been very common across different cultures and traditions throughout human history and covering various geographies. Even individuals in indigenous societies whose general practices are not directly influenced by other communities also practiced isolation to seek a mystical experience, such as pursuing a vision or an inspiration. Therefore, the practice is likely of psychological origin rather than social or anthropological, though some societies can encourage this practice in some of its members. It is not necessarily a human instinct to isolate oneself to seek inspiration, but perhaps those who are more prone to altered states of consciousness during isolation, referred to as highly sensitive persons in modern psychology, use such methods to achieve what they might interpret as a mystical experience (Jonsson et al. 2014). While the experience might be psychological, how it is interpreted by the individual is heavily dependent on the person's socio-cultural environment (Kirmayer and Ramstead 2017), and Muḥammad is no different (Galadari 2019). Therefore, Muḥammad's interpretation of his experience would be borne out of his socio-cultural context, whether it is from his community that rejected him, the group of monotheists known as the Ḥanīfiyyah, the Jews and Christians, or any other group. Recognizing this socio-cultural context allows us to address the question of what the Qur'an understands as the mechanism of its own inspiration and revelation.

Several studies on the Qur'an's self-referentiality do not go beyond the Qur'an. The reason is simple. The Qur'an refers to itself, and to understand how the Qur'an refers to itself, one needs to look no further than the Qur'an. However, there is one gap in the study of the Qur'an's self-referentiality. When referring to its own revelation and inspiration, the Qur'an compares itself to other scriptures. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the historical context of what the Qur'an's audience understood of the revelation of those scriptures. There is a difference between the rabbinic understanding of the revelation of the Pentateuch, for example, and the inspiration of the remaining books of the Hebrew Bible. The difference is also prominent in the Christian understanding of the inspiration of scriptures. Yet, when the Qur'an compares its revelation and inspiration, it does not seem to make a distinction, nor does the text even suggest that there is an awareness of such distinctions among its audiences. This study navigates the Qur'an's self-referentiality not only in light of the philological terms for revelation and inspiration as used by the Qur'an, but more importantly how the Qur'an compares its own inspiration with other scriptures.

Away from the modern debate regarding the authorship of scripture, rabbis during Late Antiquity understood divine revelation to manifest through theophanies and visions. During Late Antiquity, the rabbis believed in the divine origin of the Torah (composed of both written scriptures and oral tradition, not only the Pentateuch), as is attested in the Talmud.[3] While scripture is understood by rabbis as the exclamation of the Holy Spirit, there are different degrees of inspiration. During Late Antiquity, rabbis considered the Pentateuch to have been divinely dictated to Moses,[4] while the Prophets and Hagiographa, which constitute the remainder of the Hebrew Bible, are inspired but not dictated. This background is important to understand what the Qur'an might have understood about the mechanism of revelation and inspiration when it compares itself with the Torah. While it is very difficult to determine the specific beliefs of the Qur'anic Jews, many studies have shown that the Qur'an is aware of much rabbinic literature and many traditions that were circulating during Late Antiquity, including the teachings found in the Talmud (Stillman 1974; Newby 1988, pp. 57–59; Galadari (2013a, 2021a, 2021b); Mazuz 2014; Heschel 2018). Therefore, there is a good likelihood that the Qur'an is aware of the rabbinic stance of scriptural revelation at the time.

The Qur'an historically emerged amongst an audience who were likely aware of various Christian churches, such as the Syriac (Griffith 2008; El-Badawi 2014), Ethiopic (Kropp 2008; Le Roux 2010), Alexandrian,[5] and Byzantine churches[6], amongst others (Reynolds 2019). Therefore, it would have been aware of the various tensions among different church doctrines, such as the Chalcedonian, non-Chalcedonian, and even Arian Christianity.[7] In Christian churches during Late Antiquity, many hypotheses were circulating in regard to what constitutes scripture (Reed 2008, pp. 467–90). Many early Church Fathers considered scriptures as the speech of the Holy Spirit.[8] Much of the early Christian churches' understanding of inspiration is that the Bible was God-breathed to the human author, but not necessarily dictated, which stands somewhat different from the rabbinic tenet on the Pentateuch.

Some of the early Church Fathers referred to the concept of inspiration, but it is difficult to fully recognize their definitions. In the *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, scriptures are described as the utterances of the Holy Spirit.[9] However, it cannot be inferred from this what or how he defined scriptures, let alone the mechanism of such inspiration. Additionally, in his *First Apology* addressed to the Roman Emperor, Antonius Pius (d. 161), Justin Martyr (d. 165) writes, "I think even you will concede that the Prophets are inspired by none other than the Divine Word".[10] Pius neither believed in Christianity nor Judaism. Therefore, Justin Martyr does not necessarily suggest that Pius would believe that the Hebrew prophets were inspired by the divine word, but that Pius might agree that, generally, prophets, even pagan ones, would be divinely inspired. Hence, Justin Martyr is making an analogy here. It does not tell us whether Justin Martyr considers how the Roman emperor understood about inspiration is necessarily equivalent to what Justin insinuates. Thus, even if we know what the Romans understood about the mechanism of inspiration, it

does not necessarily translate to what Justin understood as the inspiration of the Hebrew prophets. Though Justin later continues to elaborate that prophecies said by prophets are not something they say from themselves but by the divine word, it still does not clarify his thoughts of what comprises inspiration. His writing does not necessarily suggest that he believed that the prophets were dictated by God, only that they had foreknowledge from God and spoke of what they knew.[11]

Due to several ambiguities of what the Church Fathers understood about the doctrine of inspiration, different churches held different views of what constitutes scripture. The Coptic, Ethiopic, Syriac, and Byzantine churches debated as to what constitutes scripture. The debate even extended to who has the authority of interpreting scripture. However, they generally agree that the Bible is not the dictated word of God, but that God and the Holy Spirit inspired the human authors. In other words, the mechanism of inspiration was not usually a subject of debate amongst the various churches.

Therefore, even though we do not know to which churches the Christian audience of the Qur'an belonged, it may be assumed that since the mechanism of inspiration was not a matter of contentious debate amongst the various churches during Late Antiquity, the Qur'anic Christians might not have had a significantly different conception. Though this cannot be asserted, it might be an interpolated assumption.

An understanding of the Jewish and Christian background during Late Antiquity is essential to better grasp the context of the Qur'an's claim of its own revelation and inspiration, as it compares itself to other scriptures. Unlike most Christians, most modern Muslims consider the Qur'an to be the very word of God dictated to Muḥammad, similar to the historical views of Rabbinic Judaism about the Pentateuch. However, even Muslims throughout history have debated the different possible mechanisms of the Qur'anic revelation.

The Qur'an seems to be explicit by self-identifying as being revealed no differently than the Torah and Gospel (e.g., Qur'an 3:3). It suggests that inspiration comes through the Holy Spirit (or spirit of holiness) (e.g., Qur'an 16:102) and that the recipient of the message is inspired no differently from previous prophets (e.g., Qur'an 4:163). In light of these ideas, this article delves into how the Qur'an views its revelation and inspiration, especially when contrasted against other acknowledged scriptures. The Qur'an is self-aware of its own revelation and has a highly developed concept of it (Blackhirst 1994). Stefan Wild states,

> The self-referentiality of the Qur'ān is increasingly viewed as one of its central features. Given the fact that the Qur'ān is primarily a text to be recited to an audience, this self-referentiality reflects a constant challenge in which the audience questions the qur'ānic recitation and that qur'ānic recitation, in turn, reacts. The audience is addressed directly and indirectly. The Qur'ān answers questions which were asked about it, about its origin, about its meaning, about its true aim. It describes itself by various generic terms, comments, explains, distinguishes, puts itself into perspective vis-à-vis other revelations, denies hostile interpretations, and so on (Wild 2003, p. 423).

The Qur'an's self-referentiality has been discussed by many modern scholars, such as Madigan (2001), who takes the scholarship of O'Shaughnessy (1948), Izutsu (1964), and Graham (1984, 1988) a step further in defining the meaning of "*kitāb*", when the Qur'an refers to itself. Other scholars who worked extensively on the Qur'an's self-referentiality include Sinai (2006, 2017) and Boisliveau (2014a, 2014b), who went further into the Qur'an's self-authority beyond the scholarship of Richard Bell (Bell 1934; Bell and Watt 1977; Jeffery 1950a, 1950b, 1950c, 1950d).

This article approaches the Qur'an's self-referentiality not simply from a philological perspective in an attempt to understand the Qur'an's two main concepts for its inspiration and revelation, "*waḥy*" (e.g., Qur'an 4:163, 35:31, 42:7) and "*tanzīl*" (e.g., Qur'an 2:176, 3:3, 17:106), but on the Qur'an's relationship with other scriptures in regard to its inspiration and revelation. Each of the terms is closely analyzed and compared with their Semitic cognates. Additionally, the article attempts to scrutinize the Qur'anic concept of "*kitāb*", further to the current scholarly debate. The purpose of this investigation is to understand,

from a Qur'anic perspective, what may be acknowledged about how the Qur'an views its revelation and inspiration relative to previous scriptures, especially as the Qur'an makes such comparison explicit.

The Qur'an is aware that its Jewish and Christian audiences have the Torah and the Gospel in some written format. While Goudarzi (2018, pp. 313–23) argued that the Qur'anic "*injīl*" (Gospel) is not referred to directly as a "*kitāb*", it does not mean that the Qur'an does not acknowledge the Gospel as a corpus in the hands of its Christian audience. For example, Qur'an 7:157 claims that the description of the messenger is "found written with them in the Torah and the Gospel". Here, the Qur'an makes an explicit reference that the Jews and Christians have the Torah and the Gospel preserved in some written format. The Qur'an stating "with them" does not assume that this information existed in some lost version of their scriptures or an abstract oral message, but in what is between their hands. However, as will be argued in this article, the Qur'an does not consider either the Torah or the Gospel to have descended as books, although the Qur'an does claim that the Torah was inscribed in tablets for Moses (i.e., Qur'an 7:145), which is a unique feature that the Qur'an neither ascribes to itself or the Gospel.

2. Inspiration and Revelation

The root "*w-ḥ-y*" means a sign, saying, or revelation (Ibn Manẓūr 1994, pp. 15: 379–82). The cognate root in Aramaic and Hebrew seems to be "*ḥ-w-y*", holding the same meanings and used accordingly in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Psalm 19:2, Job 15:17) (Brown et al. 2000, p. 296). The Hebrew Bible rarely uses this term and prefers to use the root "*n-g-d*" with the meaning of informing or instructing (Brown et al. 2000, pp. 616–17), whether in verbal or non-verbal communication. This is apparent in Psalm 19:1–3, which describes the heavens and the firmament being declared (*maggîd*), while speech and knowledge are nonverbally revealed (*yĕḥawwe*). The Septuagint (LXX)[12] translates both Hebrew terms as "*anaggellei*", which perhaps means the translators considered them synonymous or with a similar nuance in Hebrew and Greek, unless the non-Masoretic text that the LXX referred to also used the same Hebrew term. The Greek "*anaggellei*" is also used in John 16:13–15, describing how the Holy Spirit will reveal and declare the truth.

The term "*ḥawu*" is also found in Akkadian to mean growling or humming (Oppenheim 1965–1998, p. 6: 163). The Arabic term "*waḥy*" is typically understood as indirect communication (Ibn Manẓūr 1994, 15: 379–82). An example from the Qur'an is when Zechariah is told that he will have a son and is baffled by the news. When he asks for a sign, he is stricken with silence and only speaks with his people through signs (*waḥy*) (i.e., Qur'an 19:11). Understanding "*waḥy*" in this narrative as an indirect form of communication may be traced back to Mujāhid's (d. 104/722) exegesis (Mujāhid 1989, p. 454). The narrative of Zechariah speaking through signs is also repeated in another passage, where the term "*waḥy*" is substituted with "*ramz*", carrying the same meaning (i.e., Qur'an 3:41). The usage of the root "*r-m-z*" is a *hapax legomenon* in the Qur'an. Yet, it appears that the Qur'an considers those two terms to be synonymous, which al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1839) (Al-Shawkānī 1994, p. 3: 382) also claims. A parallel narrative is found in the Gospel of Luke (i.e., Luke 1:22) using the Greek "*dianeuōn*". The Peshitta uses the Aramaic root "*r-m-z*" in this narrative,[13] which Qur'an 3:41 appears to have selectively chosen instead of the root "*w-ḥ-y*" used in Qur'an 19:11.

The "*waḥy*" being some sort of communication through signs is not unusual for the Qur'an's self-description, as it describes itself frequently as containing signs (*āyāt*) (e.g., Qur'an 2:99, 2:151). Pre-Islamic poetry sometimes use the root "*w-ḥ-y*" to mean inscribing on stones, and specifically the poems of the *Mu'allaqah*[14] of Labīd b. Rabīʿah and the poem of Zuhayr b. Abī Salamā (Al-Asad 1988, p. 87). However, it has been argued that the original term for "inscribed on stones" is not "*waḥy*", but the participle "*mawḥuww*" (that which was inspired).[15] In other words, it is not that "*waḥy*" is the inscription itself necessarily, but that which is inscribed was inspired. As per Al-Farāhīdī (d. 170/386), (Al-Farāhīdī 1989, p. 3: 320), "*w-ḥ-y*" could mean writing or inspiration.

Nonetheless, even if the definition of *inscription* is accepted, the inscription itself is symbolic. The standard of writing and, in particular, Arabic in this context, is using symbols (alphabets) that denote sounds. It is not the sound or communication itself, but the symbolic form (the writing) of such communication. As such, the root "*w-ḥ-y*" retains its definition as a symbol that is synonymous with the root "*r-m-z* (Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1992, p. 858; Qāḍī ʿAyyāḍ 1998, p. 1: 139; Al-Ṭībī 2013, p. 9: 582)". In other words, each alphabet is a symbol (*ramz*). Thus, "*w-ḥ-y*" is attested to have its root meaning as an indirect (or symbolic) form of communication, because writing itself is not a direct communication as it uses signifiers for a signified. Since the Qurʾan does not describe itself as having descended as an inscription, then the Qurʾanic "*waḥy*" is not communication through writing alphabetical symbols, though the Qurʾan is self-aware that it is a "*kitāb*" communicated through "*waḥy*" (e.g., Qurʾan 18:27).

The Qurʾan shows that divine "*waḥy*" is not solely reserved for prophets or humans, but also for animals (e.g., bees, Qurʾan 16:68) and objects (e.g., heavens, Qurʾan 41:12). This further emphasizes that "*waḥy*" is not necessarily something in written format. It does not even have to be of divine origin necessarily, according to the Qurʾan, as even *satans* (*shayāṭīn*) are capable of it (e.g., Qurʾan 6:112, 6:121).

Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), (Al-Zamakhsharī 1987, p. 4: 233–34) considered "*waḥy*" as a form of inspiration (*ilhām*) that would enter a person's heart or a vision. Al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), (Al-Rāzī 2000, p. 27: 611–15) reported differing opinions that existed in his time amongst scholars concerning the nature of "*waḥy*". Similar to al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī also understood "*waḥy*" as an inspiration that is sent to a person's heart or a vision. Al-Rāzī (2000, p. 27: 612) reported that some Muslim theologians, such as the Ḥanbalīs, believe that God uses the same kind of speech that humans do, with the same alphabets and sounds, while others, such as the Ashʿarīs, believe that God's speech is ancient and that the alphabets and sounds are only symbols translating God's speech. Al-Rāzī (2000, p. 27: 612) considers the Ḥanbalīs to be the least convincing. He argues that if God is to speak in the same alphabets and sounds, then it can either be done all at once or in a sequence and order. However, since it is impossible to speak in these alphabets and sounds wholly concurrently, it can only mean that God would utter them in a sequence and order. Therefore, if God utters them in a sequence and order, it can only mean that the Qurʾan is created, which itself would negate the Ḥanbalīs position that the Qurʾan is uncreated, resulting in a paradox in their own logic. The Muʿtazilah had no issue accepting that the Qurʾan was inspired using alphabets and sounds, since they affirmed that the Qurʾan is created anyway. Even so, Al-Zamakhsharī (1987, p. 4: 233–34), who was himself a Muʿtazilī, still understood "*waḥy*" as a form of inspiration (*ilhām*), which would be symbolic (non-verbal). On the other hand, Al-Rāzī (2000, p. 27: 612) says that the Ashʿarīs consider God's speech as beyond alphabets and sounds, in that they cannot be contained in any symbol. Thus, the angel and the messenger would hear (al-Rāzī considers this hearing metaphorically) this spiritual speech and translate them into symbols, such as alphabets and sounds.

The Qurʾan frequently describes its descent by God and that the instrument of its descent is occasionally described by the Spirit, perhaps the Holy Spirit (or spirit of holiness) or the trustworthy spirit (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) (e.g., Qurʾan 26:192–5).[16] Traditional Muslim exegetes, such as Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), (Al-Ṭabarī 2000, pp. 24: 531–32), Al-Zamakhsharī (1987, p. 4: 780), Al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153) (Al-Ṭabarsī 2006, p. 10: 311), and Al-Rāzī (2000, pp. 32: 228–29), consider the descent of the Qurʾan to have occurred on Laylah al-Qadr (sometimes translated as the Night of Power) from the upper to the lower heaven. Thereafter, it descended from the lower heaven to Muḥammad in stages.

Similar to how the Qurʾan frequently states that earlier prophets were given some sort of "*waḥy*", it also states that the descent of the Qurʾan is similar to the descent of previous scriptures (e.g., Qurʾan 2:4, 2:91). Therefore, it appears that the Qurʾan does not view itself either in its descent (*tanzīl*) or revelation and inspiration (*waḥy*) any differently from previous scriptures.

3. The Arabic Qur'an as a Language of Signs

As mentioned, the terms "*waḥy*" and "*tanzīl*" are used to describe Qur'anic descent and revelation but are not necessarily synonymous. Each could describe a separate form of event. While "*tanzīl*" is used to describe the descent of the Qur'an, "*waḥy*" is used to describe its indirect or nonverbal communication. In other words, the Qur'an describes its descent (*tanzīl*) through sign communication (*waḥy*). The question is whether the Qur'an describes itself as descending through signs or if its Arabic vocalization is that sign language, since all language is a sign where each word is a signifier for a signified.

Early and contemporary Muslim scholars debate the language format of the Qur'an. Many Muslim traditions suggest that the Qur'an was written in heaven in the Preserved Tablet (*al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*) (Rahman 1988). Although the Preserved Tablet is mentioned in the Qur'an (i.e., Qur'an 85:21-22), it does not describe what or where the Preserved Tablet is. A scripture or divine wisdom existing in a spiritual realm is not foreign to other Near Eastern religions (Graham 1988, pp. 50–1), such as Judaism (Jeffery 1950c; Peters 1990, pp. 2: 72–80; van Ess 1991–1997, p. 4: 626). The Qur'an's description of the Preserved Tablet as a tablet (*lawḥ*) resonates with some ancient traditions as well. For example, Jubilees 4:5 refers to some writing in the heavenly tablets, which is not only the law but the destiny of the world. This also reverberates with how later Muslim exegetes, such as al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), understood the Preserved Tablet, which not only contains the Qur'an but the whole world's destiny (Al-Qurṭubī 1964, pp. 19: 298–99).

Midrash Tanḥuma, a Jewish *midrash* (commentary) on the Pentateuch, makes explicit mention of a pre-existing Torah with the entire world's destiny in heaven.[17] There is a scholarly debate on the dating of *Midrash Tanḥuma* (Zunz 1954, pp. 108–17; Rabinowitz 1963, pp. 207–9; Chernus 1980; Strack and Stemberger 1996, pp. 302–6; Rubenstein 1996; Bregman 2003, pp. 1–5; Bregman 2007, pp. 19: 503–4). Some recent scholars divide the Midrash into different editing strata ranging between the fifth and ninth centuries (Bregman 2003, pp. 4–5; Weiss 2015, pp. 72–4). It is, therefore, uncertain whether Jewish notions of the world's destiny written in heaven impacted the Muslim ideas or vice versa.

The Torah is personified by 1 Baruch 3:9–4:4 as a book that came down from heaven and lived among people. The passage describes the Torah as incarnated heavenly wisdom similar to the incarnation of the Johannine Logos in his Gospel (Reese 1981), and early Christian typological interpretations used this passage in 1 Baruch as an archetype for Christ (Adams 2014, p. 114). Some scholars, however, suggest that certain phrases, such as in 1 Baruch 3:37, are Christianized interpolations signifying some Christian influence on some passages (Steck 1998, pp. 11–68, esp. 53–4; Salvesen 2001, pp. 699–703, esp. 702).

In the Babylonian Talmud, R. Joshua b. Levi says that when Moses went up to heaven to receive the Torah, the ministering angels described the Torah as a treasure hidden by God for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the creation of the world.[18] Generally, the concept of a celestial book was common in several Near Eastern traditions, as Graham (1988, pp. 50–51) illustrates.

Within medieval Muslim tradition, al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) reports three theories on Qur'anic revelation (*waḥy*): (1) the angel Gabriel memorized it from the Preserved Tablet, where it was written in huge alphabets, individually containing various esoteric meanings; (2) Gabriel conveyed to Muḥammad the Qur'an in special meanings and Muḥammad subsequently deciphered it into Arabic; and (3) Gabriel translated the original Qur'anic meanings into the Arabic language before conveying it to Muḥammad (Al-Zarkashī 1957, pp. 1: 229–30).

Muslims throughout history have not reached a consensus on how the Qur'an was conveyed to Muḥammad. The Ismāʿīlīs, for example, believe that the Qur'an was the spiritual light that beheld Muḥammad, and he interpreted the spiritual message into the Arabic language (Andani 2019, pp. 489–724). Hence, the Imam would be able to decipher the Arabic language of the Qur'an back to its original spiritual message (Steigerwald 2006). This concept is similar to the second opinion reported by al-Zarkashī. Therefore, it is not to be dismissed as an extremely marginal opinion.

Izutsu (1962) considered revelation to be through a sign code, which the revealer and receiver share, and in the case of the Qur'an, the Arabic language is the vehicle of this communication. According to him, God speaks to Muḥammad in Muḥammad's language (Izutsu 1962, pp. 136–37) and it is verbatim (Izutsu 1962, p. 152). However, even if Muḥammad is in the passive role, there is also a likelihood that God spoke to Muḥammad in a code to which both of them are privy that is different from the Arabic language.[19] Muḥammad could have understood the symbolic code of abstract ideas as a mental image. After all, Aristotle (d. 322 BCE) defined language as a mental image.[20]

Some modern Muslim scholars support the second opinion indicated by al-Zarkashī. For example, when citing the possibility that the Spirit itself is the content of revelation, Rahman (1980, pp. 96–100) hypothesizes that the Qur'an might be describing the spirit as an agent of revelation that develops within Muḥammad's heart. He explains that though the revelation descends, the Spirit in Muḥammad's heart produces the necessary verbal passages in light of circumstances. He provides three possibilities of the Spirit's agency in Muḥammad's heart: (1) it allows Muḥammad to see the truth and vocalizes it; (2) it produces a mental image rather than a physical sound; or (3) it takes the shape of a messenger agent, such as an angel, that gives the revelation to Muḥammad (Rahman 1980, p. 99). Abu Zayd [1998] (Abu Zayd [1998] 2014, pp. 42–52, 55–7)) considers Qur'anic revelation (*waḥy*) to be a special code used between God and the angel Gabriel through the Preserved Tablet and then between Gabriel and Muḥammad. Soroush (2009, pp. 332–26) states that Muḥammad had to translate the spiritual code into a language to be understood by people.

Nonetheless, the Qur'an frequently states that it is revealed in Arabic using the terms "*tanzīl*" (e.g., Qur'an 17:106) and "*waḥy*" (e.g., Qur'an 42:7). This carries two meanings, each with challenges.

First, if the Qur'an descended (*unzil*) in Arabic and was dictated accordingly to Muḥammad, but also employed an indirect form of communication through symbols (*waḥy*), it would explain that its Arabic language is this symbolic communication. Yet, the Qur'an states several times that its Arabic is clear (*mubīn*) (e.g., Qur'an 16:103, 26:195). If the Arabic Qur'an is in itself symbolic yet clear, then it might mean that the Arabic that constitutes the words of the Qur'an are clear, but their meaning is symbolic. In other words, it is the symbol (Arabic) that is clear, but not necessarily its meaning. This might give sense to the contradiction in which the meanings of the Qur'an are obscure or veiled (e.g., Qur'an 17:46), but that the symbols used are clear (the Arabic language) (Galadari 2018a, pp. 32–36).

Second, if the Qur'an descended in a spiritual language (non-verbal) which was translated into Arabic, then Muḥammad becomes an agent in the authorship of the Qur'an through its translation into Arabic. According to the Qur'an, God speaks to humans in three modes:

> [51] It is not for any human being that God should speak unto him, save by revelation (*waḥy*), or from behind a veil (*ḥijāb*), or that He should send a messenger in order to reveal (*fa-yūḥī*) what He will by His Leave. Truly He is Exalted, Wise. [52] Thus have We revealed (*awḥaynā*) unto you a Spirit from Our Command. You knew not what scripture was, nor faith. But We made it a light whereby We guide whomsoever We will among Our servants. Truly you do guide unto a straight path [Qur'an 42:51–52][21].

The passage shows that revelation (*waḥy*) is not necessarily through the Spirit from God, but that the Spirit itself is perhaps the content of inspiration (Rahman 1980, pp. 96–97). In comparison with some notions in the New Testament, 2 Timothy 3:16 states, "All Scripture is breathed out by God (*theopneustos*)". As such, this breath might also be understood as the content of inspiration.

Qur'an 42:51 clearly shows that when God speaks to some humans, it is either through "*waḥy*" or from behind a veil, which means those two methods are not necessarily synonymous. This could mean that the Qur'an, if an indirect communication (*waḥy*), would

not have been given behind a veil. As such, these signs must be clear to the receiver of the sign code but remain no more than signs. If the Qur'an was revealed as an indirect communication, then it was not dictated. Yet, the Qur'an states that the disbelievers claim that its speech was recited by people to Muḥammad, who then wrote it down:

> ⁴ And the disbelievers say, "This is nothing but a lie that he has fabricated, and another people have helped him in it". They have indeed produced a wrongdoing and a calumny. ⁵ And they say, "They are fables of those of old which he has had written down (*iktatabhā*), and they are recited (*tumlā*) to him morning and evening". ⁶ Say, "He has sent it down (*anzalah*) Who knows what is secret in the heavens and on the earth. Truly He is Forgiving, Merciful" [Qur'an 25:5].

The Qur'an responds that it descended instead of being dictated by people. It is unclear from the language of this passage if, indeed, the Qur'an descended and was dictated to Muḥammad, as it only responds against being dictated by people.

The Qur'an's disjointed letters (*muqaṭṭaʿāt*) are sometimes called signs of the book (*āyāt al-kitāb*) (e.g., Qur'an 10:1, 12:1). In one instance of the disjointed letters (*muqaṭṭaʿ*), it is called signs of the clear book (*āyāt al-kitāb al-mubīn*) (i.e., Qur'an 12:1) using the same term the Qur'an refers to itself to have been revealed in clear (*mubīn*) Arabic (e.g., Qur'an 16:103, 26:195). However, the interpretation of these disjointed letters (*muqaṭṭaʿāt*) is anything but clear. Nonetheless, the Qur'an describes them as "*āyāt*", which means signs and symbols. Is it perhaps to be understood that these disjointed letters are clear symbols (*āyāt*) or that Muḥammad received certain signs that he was unable to translate into Arabic beyond these letters? In either case, it is essential to understand that when the Qur'an uses the term "*mubīn*", it does not always denote that its interpretation is clear, as with how the disjointed letters (*muqaṭṭaʿāt*) are sometimes explicitly described.[22]

Claude Gilliot and Pierre Larcher argue that the term "*mubīn*" in the context of the Arabic Qur'an should not be understood to be in a clear Arabic language, but that it is in the Arabic language that clarifies (*mubayyin*) (Gilliot and Larcher 2005; Gilliot 2008, pp. 89–90, 94–95). If that is the case, then does it mean that the Qur'an is in Arabic to clarify a symbolic revelation, whether it is to clarify the revelation to Muḥammad or to clarify previous scriptures? In any way that one attempts to understand this, it does not preclude that no differently than the disjointed letters (*muqaṭṭaʿāt*), the Qur'an's use of the term "*mubīn*" does not necessarily denote that the meanings contained within it are clear. As discussed, the Arabic words (the signifier) might be clear, but their meanings (the signified) might not be clear.

4. The Qur'an as a "*kitāb*"

Daniel Madigan researched the root "*k-t-b*" and how the Qur'an appears to be self-referential in its description as a "*kitāb*", typically understood as a book, but at the same time, the Qur'an was mainly an oral recitation and not a written piece of literature (Madigan 2001). Madigan concludes that when the Qur'an describes itself as a "*kitāb*", it is not portraying itself as a book.

According to some Muslim traditions, the Qur'an was compiled into a single corpus after the death of Muḥammad.[23] Some traditions narrate that after many Muslims, who had the Qur'an memorized, were killed during the battle of Yamamah, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, one of Muḥammad's companions, compelled the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, to start a project of compiling the Qur'an into a single manuscript. Initially, Abu Bakr was against the idea, as he could not find himself doing something pertaining to the Qur'an that Muḥammad had not done himself. However, Abu Bakr later found the idea acceptable and started the compilation project. In some Shīʿī traditions, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib had also compiled the Qur'an into a single manuscript.[24] Nonetheless, it is not believed to contain anything different from that compiled by the committee appointed by Abu Bakr, except for the arrangement of the Qur'anic chapters (Modarressi 1993).

Yet, according to some Muslim traditions, as Muslims spread throughout different lands with diverse dialects, the Qur'an had a variety of readings. One of the most prominent

variants that have been described mostly in the Muslim tradition is ʿAbdullāh b. Masʿūd's reading that included some distinct differences from the later standard text (Gilliot 2006, pp. 46–50). The third Caliph, ʿUthmān, felt the need to standardize the text. This resulted in the ʿUthmanic codex, in which other versions of the Qurʾan were reportedly burnt and only copies of the ʿUthmanic codex were allowed. Hence, historically, the Qurʾan was not perceived as an actual book, and its collection and canonization were an attempt by the Muslim community to preserve it after the death of Muḥammad (Neuwirth 2010). After all, the Qurʾan rejects the notion that it is descended as a "*kitāb*" in pieces of paper:

> Had We sent down (*nazzalnā*) unto you a Book (*kitāban*) inscribed on paper (*qirṭās*),[25] such that they could touch it with their hands, those who do not believe would have said, "This is naught but manifest sorcery" [Qurʾan 6:7].

Although the Qurʾan describes itself as a "*kitāb*", it insists that it did not descend as paper, using the term "*qirṭās*", which is a loanword used to describe a papyrus or cartouche (Al-Farāhīdī 1989, p. 5: 250; Ibn Manẓūr 1994, pp. 6: 172–73). The term "*qirṭās*" has a Greek origin (*khartēs*) (Sokoloff 2002, p. 269) from the term, "*kharassō*", meaning to engrave.[26] The Greek term "*khartēs*" and its morphological permutations are used in the New Testament, but only once in the sense of papyrus in 2 John 1:12, which in this case is translated into "*krṭys*" in Aramaic in the Peshitta. The same term also occurs in the Talmud Yerushalmi to describe a note, "*qrṭys*".[27] The LXX uses the Greek term "*khartēs*" to translate the Hebrew term "*megillah*" (scroll).

In the same Qurʾanic chapter as Qurʾan 6:7, the Qurʾan admonishes making the "*kitāb*" of Moses (the Torah) onto papers that are displayed, while hiding more knowledge:

> [91] They did not measure God with His true measure when they said, "God has not sent down anything to any human being". Say, "Who sent down the Book (*al-kitāb*) that Moses brought as a light and a guidance for humankind,[28] which you make into papers (*qarāṭīs*)[29] that you display, while hiding much? And you were taught that which you knew not, neither you nor your fathers". Say, "*Allāh*", then leave them to play at their vain discourse. [92] And this is a blessed Book (*kitāb*) that We have sent down (*anzalnāh*), confirming that which came before it, that you may warn the Mother of Cities and those around her. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it, and they are mindful of their prayers. [93] Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God, or says, "It has been revealed (*ūḥiya*) unto me", though nothing has been revealed (*yūḥa*) unto him, and one who says, "I will send down (*saʾunzil*) the like of what God has sent down (*anzal*)"? If you could see when the wrongdoers are in the throes of death, and the angels stretch forth their hands, "Yield up your souls! This day shall you be recompensed with the punishment of humiliation for having spoken untruth against God, and for waxing arrogant against His signs" [Qurʾan 6:91–93].

This Qurʾanic chapter is the only one that uses the term "*qirṭās*" in singular and plural forms. It claims that though the Qurʾan is a "*kitāb*", it did not descend on paper, while the Torah, also a "*kitāb*", has been made into papers. If the Qurʾan considers itself a "*kitāb*" that descended, but not on paper, and seemingly making it into papers is diminutive to the rank of heavenly scriptures, then what kind of "*kitāb*" is it? The Qurʾan does give a hint that though it is a "*kitāb*", it is veiled:

> [75] I swear by the places where the stars descend! [76] And truly it is a magnificent oath, if you but knew. [77] Truly it is a Noble Quran [78] in a Book concealed (*kitāb maknūn*). [79] None touch it, save those made pure, [80] a revelation (*tanzīl*) from the Lord of the worlds [Qurʾan 56:75–80].

Here, though the Qurʾan is, in fact, a "*kitāb*", it is veiled (*maknūn*), which emphasizes that it did not descend on paper. This passage speaks of the stars descending, which in itself appears to be an inner-Qurʾanic allusion about the star that descends in sūrah al-Najm, which, according to Muslim tradition, discusses the Qurʾan's inspiration (*waḥy*) (i.e., Qurʾan 53:1–18) (Al-Ṭabarī 2000, pp. 22: 495–522).

To understand what the Qur'an means by self-identifying as a veiled "*kitāb*", not having come down on paper, it is essential to understand the root meaning of "*k-t-b*". It has been argued that the root meaning of "*k-t-b*" is to put things in order.[30] Putting things in order is the earliest definition of "*k-t-b*" found in, arguably, one of the earliest extant Arabic lexicons by Al-Farāhīdī (1989, p. 5: 341). Its meaning of writing is not the standard definition of this root, but only by extension, as writing is to put words and letters in order. Madigan (2001, p. 191) concludes that the term "*kitāb*" in the Qur'an is a symbol of God's knowledge and authority. According to Madigan (2001, p. 191), it is a dynamic formulation of God's guidance. As such, it is a continuing process, and not a bounded text (Madigan 2001, p. 191). However, the Qur'anic self-description as a "*kitāb*" could simply mean that it is in a certain order that descended and was revealed, and this order (*kitāb*) is what is veiled. As such, the Qur'an rejects that its order (*kitāb*) descended on paper because it is not a book per se. Perhaps this ordering that makes up the Qur'an is what was descended and revealed.

However, one might also look at it from a different perspective. The Greek root "*tassō*" is closest in meaning to the Arabic root "*k-t-b*" as arranging things in order. The Greek root means to arrange in order or to designate and is used accordingly in biblical and non-biblical ancient Greek writings (Kittel and Friedrich 1964, 8: 27–48). It also means to appoint, assign, command, instruct, direct orders (e.g., *prostassō*, *diatassō*), to prescribe (e.g., *syntassō*), authority or injunction (e.g., *epitagē*), ordinance (e.g., *prostagma*), or even an army battalion (e.g., *parataxis*). Similarly, the Arabic "*kitāb*" has a similar semantic range, including an army battalion (e.g., *katībah*), as they are arranged in an orderly fashion.

The New Testament, such as in 1 Corinthians 9:14, uses the Greek root "*tassō*" to refer to God's commandments. Some extrabiblical texts also use the Greek root to refer to God's commandments and decrees (e.g., 1 Baruch 2:10). 1 Baruch 4:1 portrays the Torah as wisdom and a book of commandments (orders) using this Greek root: "She is the book (*biblos*) of the commandments (*prostagmatōn*) of God, the law (*nomos*) that endures forever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die". The Arabic root for wisdom (*ḥ-k-m*) is itself used to describe commandments and decrees. The Qur'an also refers to itself with this root (e.g., Qur'an 36:2). The Qur'an frequently conjoins the terms "*kitāb*" with "*ḥikmah*" (e.g., Qur'an 2:129) and that God reveals (*anzal*) both together (e.g., Qur'an 2:231, 4:113). The Qur'an also sometimes mentions both "*kitāb*" and "*ḥikmah*" when also referring to previous scriptures, such as the Torah and Gospel (e.g., Qur'an 3:48, 5:110). Goudarzi (2018, pp. 225–29) suggests that the descent of the "*ḥikmah*" is not something separate from the "*kitāb*", but only an attribute of it. It might even be different words describing the same concept of decrees and commandments just as I am using here two different English words for the same idea. The LXX uses the Greek root "*tassō*" in its "*diatagmatos*" form to translate the Aramaic "*ništĕwān*" meaning a "letter" (a written message), for example in Ezra 7:11. This Aramaic term also holds the meaning of ordinance or edict. The meaning of a written message that has edicts within it would correspond to the semantic range also found in the Arabic "*kitāb*". The LXX uses the Greek root "*tassō*" to translate various words of the Hebrew Bible with roots including "'-m-r" (to say or command), "*d-b-r*" (to speak), and "*ḥ-q-q*" (to decree).

The Greek term "*upotassō*" is from the same root "*tassō*", which means to put something under and by extension includes the meanings to write or inscribe (Kittel and Friedrich 1964, pp. 8: 39–40). Therefore, "*kitāb*" may not be simply a book, but orders and decrees with a semantic range that is comparable to the Greek "*tassō*".

Though the Qur'an rejects its descent on paper, using the term "*qirṭās*", it does claim that it is written on sheets by scribes, using the term "*ṣuḥuf*":

> [11] Nay! Truly it is a reminder—[12] so let whosoever will, remember it—[13] on pages (*ṣuḥuf*) honored, [14] exalted and purified, [15] in the hands of scribes (*safarah*), [16] noble and pious [Qur'an 80:11–16].

> [1] Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolaters will not desist until the clear proof comes unto them, [2] a messenger from God reciting

scriptures (*ṣuḥufan*) purified, [3] wherein are books (*kutub*) upright. [4] Those who were given the Book (*al-kitāb*) did not become divided until after the clear proof had come unto them [Qur'an 98:1–4].

In these two passages, scripture is described as written on some kind of purified sheets (*ṣuḥuf*), which parallels with how the Qur'an is described as a "*kitāb*" that only the purified may touch (i.e., Qur'an 56:79). The term "*ṣuḥuf*" means sheets (Al-Farāhīdī 1989, p. 3: 120; Ibn Manẓūr 1994, pp. 9: 186–87). However, neither Qur'an 80:11–16 nor Qur'an 98:1–4 explicitly speaks of these sheets (*ṣuḥuf*) as a reference to the Qur'an. Yet, even if we are to assume that it is describing the Qur'an, neither passage claims that it descended in sheets (*ṣuḥuf*), but that it was written as such by scribes. Therefore, the Qur'an never claims that it is a book (*muṣḥaf*) descended by God, but that it is a "*kitāb*" descended by God. Qur'an 98:2–3 hints that the sheets (*ṣuḥuf*) contain within it "*kutub*". In other words, the sheets (*ṣuḥuf*) are not themselves the "*kutub*", but that they contain within them "*kutub*". This could mean that the sheets (*ṣuḥuf*) are just papers and the "*kutub*" are the writings, but it might seem also likely that the "*kutub*" are the orders or commandments contained within these sheets (*ṣuḥuf*).

As described earlier, the concept of the Qur'an as a canonical codex (*muṣḥaf*) is a post-Qur'anic construction (Neuwirth 2010). Though the Qur'an alludes to itself, sometimes, as being written or read from sheets (*ṣuḥuf*), it is written by scribes (*safarah*) and not descended as such. The term "*safarah*" (scribes) is rooted in "*s-f-r*", which is how the Hebrew Bible describes a book, as the Hebrew Bible never uses the root "*k-t-b*" to refer to a book, per se, but only uses this root to refer to writing. The Qur'an does refer to the Torah using the plural term "*asfār*", albeit in a diminutive manner, perhaps in the same sense when it states that the "*kitāb*" of Moses have been made into papers (*qarāṭīs*):

> The parable of those [who were] made to bear the Torah, then did not bear it, is that of a donkey bearing books (*asfārā*). How evil is the likeness of the people who denied God's signs! And God guides not wrongdoing people [Qur'an 62:5].

Although the Qur'an gives the Torah the title of "*kitāb*" and sometimes even "*ṣuḥuf*" (e.g., Qur'an 53:36, 87:18–19), it seems not to positively view the Torah as a "*sifr*" or a "*qirṭās*", even though they may hold similar semantic meanings respectively. It is as if the Qur'an is differentiating between such terms in that the "*kitāb*" is not equivalent to "*sifr*", and "*qarāṭīs*" is not equivalent to "*ṣuḥuf*". This suggests that Daniel Madigan's understanding of "*kitāb*" not as a book (*sifr*) in the Qur'an is more likely. Neuwirth (2010) follows Daniel Madigan in that the written text of the Qur'an was not necessary during the time of Muḥammad because the Word of God may only be accessed by humans and communicated orally. Though not necessarily disagreeing with such a notion, given how the Qur'an seems to mock the use of physical books (*asfārā*) and papers (*qarāṭīs*), as a designation of what eventually was done to the Torah, I continue to emphasize that the "*kitāb*" perhaps stems from its etymology as putting things in order and by extension the "*kitāb*" is an order, a commandment, or an instruction, and it is not necessarily defined as writing. Early Muslims debated the nature of the Qur'an and its physicality, which Zadeh (2009) has summarized to illustrate how there was no consensus on the matter.

Arkoun (1988) identifies previous revelations (books) in two levels, a heavenly book and a physical book, with the physical corresponding to the Torah, Gospel, and Qur'an. Nicolai Sinai similarly states two levels of "*kitāb*" and also argues that the Qur'an is asserting itself as some form of authoritative scripture that would directly equate it with Jewish and Christian ones (Sinai 2006). However, these hypotheses do not appear to indicate that either Jewish or Christian scriptures are physical books, according to the Qur'an, which would have essentially negated Abdullah Saeed's thesis that the Qur'an refers to itself as a scriptural book (Saeed 1999). According to the Qur'an, the Torah of Moses is not in papers (*qarāṭīs*). Moreover, the Gospel revealed to Jesus is not a book, but an oral message that was later put into a literary form by the Evangelists. Yet, the divine revelation of the Gospel, according to the Qur'an, remains a revelation to Jesus alone, and the divine inspiration to his disciples was for them to understand Jesus's message

(e.g., Qur'an 5:111). As such, the Qur'an is not asserting itself as a book made of papers, just like it appears to claim that other scriptures should not be viewed as such either.

5. Qur'anic Revelation and the Revelation of Previous Scripture

As mentioned, the Qur'an frequently claims that its revelation is no different than previous scripture (e.g., Qur'an 3:3), particularly the Torah (Pentateuch), the Gospel, the Psalms, and others. Within the Qur'anic milieu, the Jews that the Qur'an mostly addresses were likely Jews who appear to be familiar with some rabbinic interpretations,[31] which, therefore, might have held the doctrine of the Torah being dictated to Moses. However, the Qur'an claims that it was revealed no differently than the Gospel was revealed to Jesus (e.g., Qur'an 5:46, 57:27), even though Muḥammad would have known from the Christians he engaged with that they considered the written Gospels to have been inspired to Jesus's Apostles.

First, it is interesting that the Qur'an always uses the Gospel in a singular form, though it must have known the existence of at least four canonical Gospels. Second, the Qur'an ascribes the Gospel to Jesus, and not the actual authors of the Gospels. One hypothesis on the reason behind the Qur'an using it in a singular form is its reference to Tatian's Syriac Diatessaron,[32] which was widely used in the Qur'anic milieu.[33] However, such a hypothesis would further emphasize that the Qur'an knew about the four Gospels because Tatian's Diatessaron presents itself as harmonizing the four. One could even imagine that the Christians of the Qur'anic milieu would have immediately corrected the Qur'an about there being at least four canonical Gospels and not just a single one.

However, it seems more likely that the Qur'an uses the singular form of the Gospel (*injīl*) without the objection of the Christians for two simple reasons: (1) the Gospels, when referring to the *gospel*, always use the singular Greek "*euangelion*"; and (2) at least two Evangelists never considered their Gospels as theirs, but as that of Jesus Christ (e.g., Matthew 26:13, Mark 16:15), while Luke hinted of that, not in his Gospel, but his Acts (e.g., Acts 20:24), and it is something seen in many of the Epistles in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Corinthians 9:12, Philippians 1:27). Moreover, in 1 Peter 4:17, the Gospel is not simply ascribed to Jesus Christ but to God.

Therefore, it would seem natural for Christians at the time not to object that the Gospel mentioned in the Qur'an is singular because the New Testament never uses it in plural form. It would also seem natural for them not to object to the Qur'anic concept that the Gospel is God-given to Christ, and not ascribed to his Apostles, who eventually wrote them in a textual format. This means that the Qur'an understands that the Gospel, even if not written down by Jesus Christ nor even dictated directly by him to the Evangelists, was still his Gospel from God.

The Qur'an refers to the Gospel that descended unto Jesus as "*al-injīl*". It also refers to the scripture in the hands of the Christians as "*al-injīl*" (e.g., Qur'an 7:157, 48:29). The Qur'an acknowledges that Jesus's disciples received revelation "*waḥy*" from God (i.e., Qur'an 5:111), yet it also does not ascribe "*al-injīl*" to them, which neither the Evangelists nor the Apostles of the New Testament considered them as their own anyway. Yet, according to the Qur'an, though "*al-injīl*" descended to Jesus Christ who spoke in Aramaic, it was not dictated to the Evangelists, who ended up writing the Gospel mostly in Greek. This suggests that the Qur'an does not consider the language of revelation from God to Jesus significant to how it ended up being transmitted by the Evangelists. In other words, "*al-injīl*" is the message's spiritual content and not its language.

Since the Qur'an does not consider the Gospel in the hands of Christians necessarily different from Jesus's message, the language of how it ended up being either vocalized or written is not an issue. The Gospel that descended unto Jesus could have been a spiritual message relayed in an indirect form of communication between God and Jesus, with Jesus translating the message into Aramaic, while the Evangelists understood the spiritual message and translated it mostly into Greek. According to Acts 2:1–13, the Apostles started speaking different languages to deliver the Gospel to the world, each in their native tongue.

This further supports the notion that the Apostles translated a spiritual message. After all, according to the New Testament, many of the Apostles were Jesus's disciples, but they did not always understand Jesus's words. Only when they received revelation through the Holy Spirit, according to the Gospels and Acts, or through "*waḥy*", according to Qur'an 5:111, did they start to understand Jesus's message. Therefore, even when Jesus spoke the Gospel in Aramaic to individuals who speak Aramaic, they did not understand it. It took "*waḥy*" to come to them to understand what he was talking about. Perhaps this "*waḥy*" allowed them to go beyond the vocalized language and return it (*taʾwīl*) to its original spiritual or symbolic conversation to understand the order, commandment, or message (*kitāb*) it intends to convey.

Unlike the Qur'an, the Gospels lack God's commands to Jesus to inform his disciples of certain things. Such a language is found in the Torah and the Qur'an. Perhaps the reason is that the human agents in the Torah and the Qur'an either vocalized, wrote, or dictated the revelation, giving them a personal touch. This is different from the Gospels. So, unlike statements in the Torah or the Qur'an, "Tell the Children of Israel . . . " or "Say . . . ", Jesus just said it, and the Evangelists later reported what was said. This does hint that the Gospels were not dictated word-for-word. As such, it does bring about the possibility that the Qur'an was not dictated either if it considers itself no different from the Gospel. The various possible options remain open.

6. Conclusions

From a Qur'anic perspective in regard to its own self-referentiality and how it understands its own revelatory mechanism, if Muḥammad heard the Qur'an in Arabic in his mind, then the Arabic of the Qur'an is itself a "*waḥy*", which means it is a symbolic (*ramz*) or hidden conversation that only he had heard. Particularly because no one else heard this conversation, it can be correctly described as "*waḥy*". Otherwise, if Muḥammad received the Qur'an in a sort of symbolic form (*waḥy*) that is not in a vocalized Arabic language, and he recited (interpreted) it in Arabic, then the Arabic of the Qur'an is a translation of that symbolism (spiritual language), similar to what some aforementioned Muslim traditions accept, such as some Ashʿarī or Ismāʿīlī views. It is inconclusive within the Qur'an itself if and how Muḥammad was an agent in the formulation of the Qur'an. Most Christians understood the Gospels as attributed to a person (Jesus) who neither wrote nor dictated it, but spoke its message in a language, after which the Evangelists translated it mostly into a different language. It seems highly likely that Muḥammad understood the Christian concept of the Gospels' authorship, yet the Qur'an does not consider it different from itself. Therefore, the Qur'anic use for the term "gospel" becomes no different from its use in the Gospels or generally in the New Testament, and for that reason, its use of the term in a singular form becomes obvious, just like how the New Testament uses it by not referring to a certain version written by any specific Evangelist, but by the message of Jesus.

Anthropologically, the systems of writing and language are human inventions. However, natural signs pre-exist humans and their inventions. Although I do not disagree that the Qur'an figuratively alludes to a heavenly book, I do not think this is the essence of the Qur'an's self-referentiality. The natural signs (*āyāt*), according to the Qur'an, are not human inventions, but God's, and an order (*kitāb*) that God created. Perhaps the Qur'an is calling for this order of natural signs that descended to be recited. The Qur'an views itself as the cosmic order (*kitāb*), no different than previous revelations, in which none is truly understood as a book made of paper. Madigan's hypothesis would, thus, be perhaps in some ways the closest definition propounded here. Madigan suggests that the "*kitāb*" symbolizes divine will and authority, which may be seen as a metaphor to the signs (*āyāt*) of the cosmic order (*kitāb*).

The Qur'an might view itself as a code in need of decoding. Even if it were descended in a clear Arabic language, then the words of the language are perhaps the clear signs, the signifiers. However, what they signify might not necessarily be clear.

There are two possibilities in understanding how the Qur'an views itself as an inspiration (*waḥy*) that are not necessarily mutually exclusive: (1) the Arabic language in its letter and sound forms are only signs (signifiers) for a more spiritual meaning (the signified); or (2) the Qur'an is a cosmic order that descends in need of decoding.

The nature of "*waḥy*" and "*tanzīl*" (*inspiration* and *revelation*) according to the Qur'an, remain a mystery. The Qur'an states that it is the Spirit that brings it forth to the heart of the receiver (e.g., Qur'an 26:192–194), which is no different from the Jewish and Christian concept of inspiration. Due to the apparently contradictory views of inspiration and revelation held by different Qur'anic audiences, the Qur'an's self-referentiality pertaining to such concepts remains inconclusive.

Notes

1. See Ibn Isḥāq (d. 151/768) (Ibn Isḥāq 1978, pp. 92; 115–20).
2. See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* ((Al-Bukhārī 2002, pp. 1: 7 (#3)); 6: 173 (#4953); 9: 29 (#6982)).
3. b. Shabbat 31a; b. Shabbat 90a.
4. b. Baba Batra 15a. For details on Moses's authorship of the Pentateuch, see Viezel (2014).
5. Muslim tradition reports that Muḥammad sent a letter to Alexandria and that Muḥammad married a Copt. (See Ibn Saʿd 2001, p. 2: 607; Ibn Hishām 1955, p. 1: 111).
6. Muslim tradition reports that Muḥammad sent a letter to the Byzantine emperor and sent armies to fight some battles against them. For example, see *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (#1773) (Muslim 2001, p. 3: 1393). Additionally, see Al-Wāqidī (1989, pp. 2: 755–69).
7. According to Muslim tradition, the letter Muḥammad sent to Byzantium mentions the Arians (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (#1773), Muslim 2001, p. 3: 1393).
8. For a brief description of early Church Fathers' views on the inspiration of scriptures, see Graves (2014, pp. 12–16).
9. Clement (d. 99), *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, 45.
10. Justin Martyr (d. 165), *First Apology*, 33. Translation from Falls (1948, p. 71)
11. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 36.
12. The Septuagint is an early Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible along with some apocrypha and deuterocanonical books.
13. The Peshitta is a version of the Aramaic Bible.
14. The "*muʿallaqāt*" are pre-Islamic poetry that were hung on the Kaʿbah in Makkah, according to Muslim sources.
15. Attributed to Al-Shaybānī (2001, p. 265). Although the book is attributed to Abī 'Amr al-Shaybānī, it appears to be a later work; see Al-Asad (1988, pp. 1–16).
16. The root "*a-m-n*" means to "trust", "believe", and "truth".
17. *Midrash Tanḥuma*, Vayeshev 4.
18. b. Shabbat 88b.
19. Robert D. Bergen illustrates language as a code understood by those who are privy to it. See Bergen (1987).
20. Aristotle (d. 322 BCE), *De Interpretatione*; also see Larkin (1971, p. 34) and Derrida (1974, esp. p. 131).
21. Unless otherwise noted, all Qur'anic quotations are taken from Nasr (2015), with modernizing some of the archaic English terms therein.
22. There have been theories that the disjointed letters may be related to the Hebrew/Aramaic alphabets, which have meaning on their own. Other theories are that since Arabic letters have numerical values, that it is possibly part of some numerical code, as promulgated by Rashad Khalifa. For more on the traditional Muslim stance of the disjointed letters, see Kenawy (1998).
23. See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* ((Al-Bukhārī 2002, pp. 6: 71 (#4679)); 6: 183 (#4986, #4987, #4988); 9: 74 (#7191)).
24. For more details on ʿAlī's codex, see Kara (2018).
25. *TSQ* translates "*qirṭās*" as parchment. However, a parchment is typically understood to be made from animal skin, which the term "*qirṭās*" does not necessarily denote. As such, its translation has been changed to paper.
26. Kittel and Friedrich (1964); henceforth, *TDNT*.

27   y. Qiddushin 64a.

28   *TSQ* translates "*nās*" as mankind.

29   *TSQ* translates "*qarāṭīs*" as parchments. However, a parchment is typically understood to be made from animal skin, which the term "*qirṭās*" does not necessarily denote. As such, its translation has been changed to papers.

30   On the definition of "*k-t-b*", refer to al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1790) (Al-Zabīdī n.d., pp. 4: 100–7). For details of this analysis, see Galadari (2013b); also see Galadari (2013a); also see Galadari (2018a).

31   For the various arguments in support of this notion, see Newby (1988); also see Mazuz (2014); also see Galadari (2013a, 2021a, 2021b).

32   Tatian's Diatessaron is a harmony of the four Gospels thought to have originally been written in either Greek or Syriac, but its Syriac version was widely used by the Syriac Church during the Qurʾanic milieu.

33   For Tatian's Diatessaron significance in the Syriac Church, see Petersen (1994). For the possibility of the Qurʾanic engagement with Tatian's Diatessaron, see Galadari (2018b).

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