QS 11 Q 8:1–19

8.1 They ask you about booty.
Say: "Booty belongs to God and His Messenger. So fear God, settle your disputes, and obey God and His Messenger if you are true believers."
8.2 The true believers are those who, when God is mentioned, their hearts grow fearful; and if you recite to them His revelations, they increase them in faith; they are those who place their trust in their Lord;
8.3 who perform the prayer and spend from Our bounty.
8.4 They are the true believers. High in rank they stand with their Lord, and they shall enjoy His forgiveness and glorious provisions.
8.5 Just as it was in truth your Lord who drove you out of your home, though a group of believers were most reluctant,
8.6 so also they dispute with you regarding the Truth after it has become evident, as if they are being led to death with their eyes open.
8.7 Remember when God promised that one of the two caravans shall be yours whereas you had wanted the unarmed one to be yours. But God wishes to vindicate the truth with His words, and utterly to uproot the unbelievers,
8.8 in order to vindicate the truth and nullify falsehood, even if the wicked should hate it.
8.9 Remember when you prayed fervently to your Lord and He answered you: "I shall reinforce you with a thousand angels, coming in waves."
8.10 God did not bring this about except as glad tidings, and so that your hearts might be calmed thereby. Victory comes only from God; God is Almighty, All-Wise.
8.11 Remember when He brought drowsiness upon you in order to reassure you, and made water to descend upon you from the sky in order to purify you, to rid you of Satan's enticement, to brace your hearts and make firm your feet.
8.12 Remember when God revealed to the angels: "I am with you, so grant the believers resolve. I shall cast terror in the hearts of the unbelievers. So strike above the necks, and strike their every finger!"

8.1 Ils t'interrogent au sujet du butin. Dis: «Le butin est à Allah et à Son messager.» Craignez Allah, maintenez la concorde entre vous et obéissez à Allah et à Son messager, si vous êtes croyants.
8.2 Les vrais croyants sont ceux dont les cours frémissent quand on mentionne Allah. Et quand Ses versets leur sont récités, cela fait augmenter leur foi. Et ils placent leur confiance en leur Seigneur.
8.3 Ceux qui accomplissent la Salât et qui dépensent [dans le sentier d'Allah] de ce que Nous leur avons attribué.
8.4 Ceux-là sont, en toute vérité les croyants: à eux des degrés (élevés) auprès de leur Seigneur, ainsi qu'un pardon et une dotation généreuse.
8.5 De même, c'est au nom de la vérité que ton Seigneur t'a fait sortir de ta demeure, malgré la répulsion d'une partie des croyants.
8.6 Ils discutent avec toi au sujet de la vérité après qu'elle fut clairement apparue; comme si on les poussait vers la mort et qu'ils (la) voyaient.
8.7 (Rappelez-vous), quand Allah vous promettait qu'une des deux bandes sera à vous. Vous désiriez vous emparer de celle qui était sans armes, alors qu'Allah voulait par Ses paroles faire triompher la vérité et anéantir les mécréants jusqu'au dernier.
8.8 afin qu'Il fasse triompher la vérité et anéantir le faux, en dépit de la répulsion qu'en avaient les criminels.
8.9 (Et rappelez-vous) le moment où vous imploriez le secours de votre Seigneur et qu'Il vous exauça aussitôt: «Je vais vous aider d'un millier d'Anges déferlant les uns à la suite des autres.»
8.10 Allah ne fit cela que pour (vous) apporter une bonne nouvelle et pour qu'avec cela vos cours se tranquillisent. Il n'y a de victoire que de la part d'Allah. Allah est Puissant et Sage.
8.11 Et quand Il vous enveloppa de sommeil comme d'une sécurité de Sa part, et du ciel Il fit descendre de l'eau sur vous afin de vous en purifier, d'écarter de vous la souillure du Diable, de renforcer les cours et d'en raffermir les pas! [vos pas].

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8.13 For they defied God and His messenger, and whoso defies God and His messenger, God is severe in retribution.
8.14 Here it is: so taste it! For the unbelievers the torment of the Fire!
8.15 O believers, when you meet the unbelievers in combat, turn not your backs to them.
8.16 Whoso turns his back upon them that day, except to retreat and re-attack, or to join another troop, suffers the burden of God's anger and his refuge is hell– a wretched fate indeed.
8.17 You did not slay them; it was God who slew them. It was not you who flung when you flung, but God it was who flung, in order to bestow upon the believers, from His grace, a fine achievement. God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.
8.18 That is so, and God shall subvert the cunning of the unbelievers.
8.19 If you desire a verdict, the verdict has already come to you; and if you desist, it would be best for you. But if you resume your enmity, We too shall resume it, and your army, though numerous, will be of no avail. God stands with the believers.

8.12 Et ton Seigneur révéla aux Anges: «Je suis avec vous: affermissez donc les croyants. Je vais jeter l'effroi dans les cours des mécréants. Frappez donc au-dessus des cous et frappez-les sur tous les bouts des doigts.
8.13 Ce, parce qu'ils ont désobéi à Allah et à Son messager.» Et quiconque désobéit à Allah et à Son messager... Allah est certainement dur en punition!
8.14 Voilà (votre sort); goûtez-le donc! Et aux mécréants le châtiment du Feu (sera réservé).
8.15 O vous qui croyez quand vous rencontrez (l'armée) des mécréants en marche, ne leur tournez point le dos.
8.16 Quiconque, ce jour-là, leur tourne le dos, – à moins que ce soit par tactique de combat, ou pour rallier un autre groupe, – celui-là encourt la colère d'Allah et son refuge sera l'Enfer. Et quelle mauvaise destination!
8.17 Ce n'est pas vous qui les avez tués: mais c'est Allah qui les a tués. Et lorsque tu lançais (une poignée de terre), ce n'est pas toi qui lançais: mais c'est Allah qui lançait, et ce pour éprouver les croyants d'une belle épreuve de Sa part! Allah est Audient et Omniscient.
8.18 Voilà! Allah réduit à rien la ruse des mécréants.
8.19 Si vous avez imploré l'arbitrage d'Allah vous connaissez maintenant la sentence [d'Allah] Et si vous cessez [la mécréance et l'hostilité contre le Prophète..], c'est mieux pour vous. Mais si vous revenez, Nous reviendrons, et votre masse, même nombreuse, ne vous sera d'aucune utilité. Car Allah est vraiment avec les croyants.

سورة الأنفال
يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَنْفَالِ قُلِ الْأَنْفَالُ لِلَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَصْلِحُوا ذَاتَ بَيْنِكُمْ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ (1) إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَى رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ (2) الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ (3) أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ حَقًّا لَهُمْ دَرَجَاتٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ (4) كَمَا أَخْرَجَكَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَيْتِكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّ فَرِيقًا مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ لَكَارِهُونَ (5) يُجَادِلُونَكَ فِي الْحَقِّ بَعْدَمَا تَبَيَّنَ كَأَنَّمَا يُسَاقُونَ إِلَى الْمَوْتِ وَهُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ (6) وَإِذْ يَعِدُكُمُ اللَّهُ إِحْدَى الطَّائِفَتَيْنِ أَنَّهَا لَكُمْ وَتَوَدُّونَ أَنَّ غَيْرَ ذَاتِ الشَّوْكَةِ تَكُونُ لَكُمْ وَيُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُحِقَّ الْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَيَقْطَعَ دَابِرَ الْكَافِرِينَ (7) لِيُحِقَّ الْحَقَّ وَيُبْطِلَ الْبَاطِلَ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُجْرِمُونَ (8) إِذْ تَسْتَغِيثُونَ رَبَّكُمْ فَاسْتَجَابَ لَكُمْ أَنِّي مُمِدُّكُمْ بِأَلْفٍ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُرْدِفِينَ (9) وَمَا جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بُشْرَى وَلِتَطْمَئِنَّ بِهِ قُلُوبُكُمْ وَمَا النَّصْرُ إِلَّا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ (10) إِذْ يُغَشِّيكُمُ النُّعَاسَ أَمَنَةً مِنْهُ وَيُنَزِّلُ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً لِيُطَهِّرَكُمْ بِهِ وَيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمْ رِجْزَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَلِيَرْبِطَ عَلَى قُلُوبِكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتَ بِهِ الْأَقْدَامَ (11) إِذْ يُوحِي رَبُّكَ إِلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ أَنِّي مَعَكُمْ فَثَبِّتُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا سَأُلْقِي فِي قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الرُّعْبَ فَاضْرِبُوا فَوْقَ الْأَعْنَاقِ وَاضْرِبُوا مِنْهُمْ كُلَّ بَنَانٍ (12) ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ شَاقُّوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَمَنْ يُشَاقِقِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ (13) ذَلِكُمْ فَذُوقُوهُ وَأَنَّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابَ النَّارِ (14) يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا لَقِيتُمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا

زَحْفًا فَلَا تُوَلُّوهُمُ الْأَدْبَارَ (15) وَمَنْ يُوَلِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ دُبُرَهُ إِلَّا مُتَحَرِّفًا لِقِتَالٍ أَوْ مُتَحَيِّزًا إِلَى فِئَةٍ فَقَدْ بَاءَ بِغَضَبٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَأْوَاهُ جَهَنَّمُ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ (16) فَلَمْ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ قَتَلَهُمْ وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ رَمَى وَلِيُبْلِيَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْهُ بَلَاءً حَسَنًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ (17) ذَلِكُمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ مُوهِنُ كَيْدِ الْكَافِرِينَ (18) إِنْ تَسْتَفْتِحُوا فَقَدْ جَاءَكُمُ الْفَتْحُ وَإِنْ تَنْتَهُوا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَإِنْ تَعُودُوا نَعُدْ وَلَنْ تُغْنِيَ عَنْكُمْ فِئَتُكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَوْ كَثُرَتْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (19)

Grodzki

A question that arises from this Qurʾānic passage is what can we actually understand and extrapolate from it without clinging to interpretations by the *tafsīr?* Are there any reminiscences of the ongoings/events or topoi/mythemes to which this passage makes its allusions to sources of the Jewish-Christian traditions? There seems to be an anachronic (dis)order of verses relating to a battle (vv. 7–9 with a suggestion indirectly that the clash may have already ended; then later vv. 15 and 16 chronologically seem to precede the battle, giving guidance to the believer before it started; then later v. 17 speaks of the fight again in the past tense). May it suggest that this passage contains a collection of fragments from some variant reports (coming from more than one oral source of transmission) corroborated together into the *corpus coranicum* to describe the same given event? Or, as the passage does not mention any specific context, neither names, places, may it be a collection of verses referring in general (with some guidance, rules etc.) to the spoils of war, fighting unbelievers, conduct at warfare etc.? If so, according to which assumptions, premises and logic?

Kropp

This illustrative example leads to a general remark on Qurʾānic style. There are abrupt changes in God's speech. He speaks of himself in the third person; then in the first person, changing from singular to plural. The messenger or the medium speaks in the first or the third person. The addressee is changed in the same abrupt manner; it can be the messenger or his public. All this in a few lines; cf. Robinson (1996: 254): "Sudden pronominal shifts are characteristic of the Qurʾānic discourse." Rippin (2000: 307) speaks of "rushed composition." One of the best and most concise analysis of this Qurʾānic style is to be found in Richter 1940: 78 and passim. But Richter does not go beyond literary and functional description.

An attempt to explain these facts is recently made by Pohlmann (2012: 61 ff. and passim). He sees different layers of composition, compilation and redaction. The principle of the redactors and/or authors was to change the Prophetic word from indirect divine speech in the third person to direct and thus more authoritative speech in the first person. This is a parallel to the text history of prophetic books in the OT. Thus far the diachronic view.

One can have a look at the result – the canonical text as we have it now – and try to give a synchronic analysis – not properly "canonical approach" in the sense of OT-studies. Even when there are different layers the final result should have its logical

and intended structure of its own. Looking for linguistic parallels in the modern ideological and political style, analysed by speech act theory, one finds the same phenomena: obfuscation of the actants (*Aktantenverschleierung*), be it speaker or addressee – double or multiple addressed speech (*Mehrfachadressierung*; cf. Kühn, 1995.) In short, we are before highly sophisticated ideological texts parallel to what totalitarian movements in the last two centuries produced. Maxime Rodinson already drew this parallel – applied to the origins of Islam in general. I made an attempt to analyse Qurʾānic speech in this direction (Kropp 2008: 795–98). Reading through Klemperer (1975) and having in mind Qurʾānic passages, one cannot but be shaken by the effect.

Diachronic and synchronic analyses are complementary. While the first can elucidate the history of the text – and the Qurʾān has a history – the second may elucidate the intentions and goals of the ones who ordered or directly executed the final composition.

Pregill

A classic example of a *sūra* so embedded in the traditional interpretation provided by the *sīra* literature that it is extremely difficult to extricate ourselves and attain an objective reading of it. The idea that this refers to Badr is deeply entrenched in scholarly consciousness, and so it is almost impossible to correlate these references with any other context.

Those of us who might wish to discard the *sīra* tradition as the dominant interpretive frame, reading the homiletic-parenetic, eschatological, and liturgical material in the Qurʾān as reflecting an ongoing confrontation between monotheist religious groups – the oft-mentioned "sectarian milieu" –might be able to make a compelling argument for an alternative understanding of the context that generated that material. But what do we do with the other material in the Qurʾān, that which is much more closely tied up with Muḥammad's career as statesman, and thus with the foundation of the early Islamic state? If these passages are not linked to a context in which a fledgling community takes up arms under prophetic leadership and establishes itself against not just religious but political rivals – the context described in the portions of Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīra* relating to the Hijra and *maġāzī*, emphasizing above all else *ǧihād fī sabīl Allāh* – then what other plausible context could possibly give them meaning? The most thorough attempt at constructing an alternative explanation of the jihad material in the Qurʾān, one that not only takes the problem of the diversity of attitudes towards outsiders in this material seriously but actually makes deciphering the reasons behind the Qurʾān's inconsistencies and contradictions the very foundation of its approach, is Firestone 1999, which has not received the attention it deserves.

Vv. 5–9 are the most critical ones here. Following Wansbrough et al., we may skeptically reject the traditional understanding of these verses as allusions to the Hijra and the seemingly hopeless odds faced by the *umma* at Badr as mythology.

Perhaps this does not really mean that sometime after the Hijra the Believers were confronted with two groups affiliated with the Qurayš, a caravan and a war-band, and were forced to take on the stronger one rather than the weaker one (*ġayr ḏāt al-šawka*, assuming that the *hapax legomenon šawka* is really to be read as "might, valor"), eventually triumphing with the help of divine intervention (*alfin min al-malāʾika murdifīna*). Is it possible to link these two groups with another context instead, namely the confrontation between the Romans and their enemies alluded to in Q 30:1–7? The providential and eschatological ambience of both passages is striking. (See my comments on QS 29 below.)

Rippin

The challenge of this passage is nicely summed up by the heading "contemporary events." How can this be interpreted outside the Muslim tradition? The reference in v. 7 to "two groups" is totally context-less. Perhaps this is where we need to resist the desire to "interpret" and just leave it that this refers to events for which we have no information by which to fully understand its referent and emphasize the religious message of the passage of reflecting on God's control and power.

V. 3 is also worth study in terms of the developing vocabulary that becomes associated with *ṣalāt* – often *zakāt* (a word that is complex when considered alongside *ṣadaqa*) but not here, where we have *yunfiqu* ("spend"?) rather than *atā* ("give") as with *zakāt* elsewhere.

Stefanidis

The first verse mentions *allāh wa-l-rasūl*. At the risk of stating the obvious, I would like to ask: who is this "messenger"? Can we agree that this character is also the implied addressee of much of the Qurʾānic material (addressed for example in *yasʾalūnaka*)? Can we reach this conclusion by studying the text alone, or does this understanding rely on "Muslim tradition"?

Considering the fact that a skeptic reception of "traditional material" seems to have become the hallmark of Western studies of the Qurʾān, it might be useful to reflect on what we actually include in the category "Muslim tradition." This expression appears to be a catch-all notion. Sometimes it is used to refer specifically to *ḫabar* types of material which display an *isnād* (chain of transmitters) and a *matn* (the anecdote or teaching transmitted). Those self-contained transmissions which constitute the bulk of *tafsīr* works have been shown to often be of limited use to a modern historian of early Islam. However, the expression "Muslim Tradition" sometimes seems to be extended so as to include all information pertaining to early Islam recorded by medieval Muslim authors, including the basic understanding that Islam emerged in seventh-century Arabia and that its early struggles are reflected in the Qurʾānic material.

I would like to ask: what are the reasons, if any, for rejecting the "traditional" view that this passage refers to violent confrontations between the emerging religious community led by the *rasūl* and its opponents? We may not be able to specify in which exact year this battle took place and whether or not it was at Badr, but it seems to me that as long as we hold the usual framework to be reliable this passage is rather clear in its general lines.

Stewart

The joining together of God and the Messenger in the command "Obey God and the Messenger" in v. 1 and elsewhere and the joining together of God and the Messenger in other phrases serve to establish the authority of the Prophet. From the top-down perspective, it indicates that the Prophet's authority is dependent on and sanctioned by God. From the bottom-up perspective, God is in the realm of the supernatural, so obeying God and the Messenger is in practical terms accomplished by obeying the Messenger tout court. Related to these phrases is 4:53, where *wa-ulī l-amri minkum* is appended to this dual command, and this becomes one of the main verses cited in attempts to justify the religious authority of any particular claimants after the Prophet.

V. 19 is interesting in its use of the first person plural in the phrase *in taʿūdū naʿud* "If you return, so shall We." This strikingly succinct statement puts God in the midst of the fray, so to speak, going along with the statements above that God was the one who slew them in v. 17. The cognate paronomasia—which appears in many other passages in a variety of forms—suggests here one-upmanship: God will best you at your own game.

The term *fiʾah* in modern Arabic is used mainly for technical classes, like percentiles, quartiles, or the denominations of banknotes. Here, however (*fiʾatukum* in v. 19) and perhaps elsewhere in the Qurʾān, has a quite different sense. Used to refer to the enemy host, it suggests both that they are the enemy and therefore probably evil or dangerous and that they are numerous. It thus may have a pejorative sense like "horde." When the Qurʾān describes the good guys, "our" host, it is often *ǧamʿ*, and *ǧamʿ* would also be the neutral term, for outbreak of war is described in several passages as *yawma ltaqā l-ǧamʿāni* "the day when the two hosts met."

Toorawa

Given my interest in hapaxes, the words *al-šawka* (v. 7, "arms"), *zaḥf* (v. 15, "marching") and *mutahayyiz* (v. 16, "turning away") should attract the bulk of my attention. But instead it is the word *anfāl* ("spoils [of war?]") that does so. I did not list *anfāl* in my article on hapaxes (Toorawa 2011a) even though it is clearly a "form-hapax," i.e. a word the root of which may occur elsewhere, but which only occurs rarely in that morphological shape. I see now that the omission from my hapax list was a significant oversight as it occurs only twice (in exactly the same context—what

I term an "isolate"), and in an opening verse too. And although the root *N-F-L* is attested elsewhere (Q 17:79, Q 21:72), the meaning there is different... or is it? Might we be able to set aside the context of battle imputed to the opening verses and now read *anfāl* in light of the other attestations? One justification for doing so is that the first few verses are rhetorically linked and linkable to other Qurʾānic passages (e. g. in Āl ʿImrān), as others have noted.

The expression *yasʾalūnaka* (ʿ*an*) ("they ask you [about]"), is very interesting in this regard. It occurs as an expression fifteen times, and always with a following *qul*, "respond," (except in Q 79:42, but the *qul* is not needed there). What does/can the deployment of this rhetorical device tell us? What is more, only in Anfāl is this expression the opening of a *sūra*. This and other openings are worth studying. End-words and end-rhymes are beginning to get a little attention; openings (besides the *fawātiḥ* letters) deserve attention too. Such attention will allow us to answer questions such as: Is the opening of Anfāl in fact an opening? Might the *sūra* have "started" differently?

Younes

The general theme of these verses seems to center around a battle and the spoils of war. However, there is no coherent narrative running through the whole passage. Some verses seem to be unrelated to the general theme.

While v. 1 discusses the spoils of war, vv. 2–4 give a definition of who the believers are. V. 5 seems to stand on its own, with no clear connection to the previous or following verses. The main idea of v. 6 concerns those who argue with the Prophet because they do not want to go to war. Vv. 7–14 seem to be related to the theme of the opening verse, the spoils of war, but logically they should come before it, since they include God's promise of victory over the unbelievers, an account of a battle and God's assistance to the believers. While v. 14 suggests that the battle has ended and the defeated unbelievers will meet their punishment, vv. 15–16 suggest that the battle has not yet begun and includes a strong warning to those who turn their backs and run away (in defeat). V. 17 clearly states that the battle has ended and the enemy has been defeated and God was instrumental in this defeat.

Zellentin

What strikes me as important about the *yasʾalūnaka ... qul*, "they ask you... say" (see also Azaiez) construction in v. 1 and throughout the Qurʾān, usually followed by a narrative or legal clarification, is that no matter how common the juncture of the verbs "ask" and "tell" may be, there are not many clear Jewish post-biblical precedents to the Qurʾān's precise usage. This fact may point to the prominence of Christian narrative matrixes for our understanding of the Qurʾān's rhetoric.

The first thing that comes to mind is of course the often-repeated scenes between God and Moses in the Hebrew Bible, and Moses' actions as judge before the people are of course a valid model for Muḥammad.

"God also said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites," followed by an instruction (e.g., Exod 3:15). This scenario is prominently re-enacted in the Palestinian Midrashic tradition, which several times states that "God said to Moses: 'Tell them...,'" i.e., tell the Israelites (see e.g., *Exodus Rabbah* III.6 and 8, *Numbers Rabbah* II.6, *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* IX.4). By attributing itself to divine authorship, the Qurʾānic formulation hence evokes the language as well as the scenario of the Biblical and Midrashic tradition without fully spelling it out. The Qurʾān, rather than reporting what God told the Prophet to say, has God *say* to Muḥammad in His own words: "tell," i.e., tell the people; the "sons of Israel" are often one of the main inscribed and intended audiences of the Qurʾān. However, "asking" hardly ever occurs in the Biblical-Midrashic tradition of the scenario, and if it does, as in the (very late Midrash) *Numbers Rabbah* 7:4, the question is not for information, but for food, and they do not ask, but demand ("God said to Moses: What do they demand (*mbqšym*)? Flesh? Tell (*ʾmwr*) them that I will give them flesh ...," cf. Num 11 and Exod 16). Yet in light of the many instances in which the Qurʾān associates Muḥammad with Moses, this evidence still may explain the background against which part of the Qurʾān's audience may have perceived the Biblical stage on which the Prophet addresses the people. In one instance in the Bible the people do ask, though the answer is disheartening: when God says to Jeremiah, evoking the example of Moses, that "when [the Israelites] say (*ymrw*) to you, 'Where shall we go?' you shall say (*wʾmrtʾ*) to them..." followed by a condemnation of the people (Jer 15:2). The Qurʾān's usage of the "they ask-tell them" scenario is thus closer to the Pentateuch than to the Prophetical book.

Part of the audience, however, may well have heard an echo of Jesus, and it seems to me that this is a more prominent context for the Qurʾān's usage of the scenario. The *Coptic Gospel of Thomas*, for example, portrays Jesus three times in a row as stating "if people ask you: .... "tell them..." followed by a theological explanation (*Gospel of Thomas* 50). The most important stylistic precedent, also evoking Jesus, may be the Gospel of Matthew. Here, the people or Pharisees many times "ask," whereupon "he said to them," followed by a legal or narrative explanation, often very detailed, as in our passage. The Gospel's style and scenario therefore seems closest to that of the Qurʾānic passage at hand. The scene, in many variations, is very central in Matthew (see 12:10 – 11, 16:1 – 2, 17:10 – 11, 22.35 – 37, always using the terms *šʾl* and *ʿmr* in the Syriac), and the tradition of Matthew in turn is central in the Qurʾān.

The same depiction of Jesus (as well as of "the Prophet (*nbyʾ*) John," i.e., the Baptist), is also used several times in a similar role in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* ("as our Saviour said (*dʾmr*) when we asked (*šʾlhnyh*) Him," (XI, Vööbus 1979:130), "as our Lord and Teacher said (*dʾmr*) when they asked (*šʾlwhy*) Him," (XXI, ibid:205); and "when they asked (*šʾlywhy*, i.e., John) for an answer, he said (*ʾmr*) to them...," (X,

ibid:119). While the *Didascalia*'s ensuing Gospel quotes are all ethical, it is paramount to consider the context in which they are employed. For the Didacalia uses Jesus' response to those who ask him as its blueprint for the authority of its own "bishop and the presbyters" (see also my comments on QS 12) to take legal cases, and to "judge circumspectly," (11, ibid. 130). Most centrally, the *Didascalia* reminds its audience how much Jesus detested that "men should have lawsuits with one another" (ibid.). Hence, I would suggest hearing the Qurʾān's "they ask you—tell them" as a stylistically precise re-enactment of the Gospel and the *Didascalia* in the context of the Qurʾān's self-depiction as direct divine speech. Muḥammad, as he does so often, takes on the role of Jesus as well as that of Moses, combining the Evangel and the Torah, and judges, like the Bishops and the elders judge, proposing a very similar message: "be wary of God and settle your differences, and obey God and his Apostle, should you be faithful" (v. 1).