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From Dawn to Dusk

Studying the origin of the Islamic fivefold daily liturgy in the Qur'ān

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Summary

Despite prayer being one of the most central tenets of Islam, this subject has drawn the attention of surprisingly little scholarship, especially when it comes to studying its origin against pre-Islamic analogues. Thus, this thesis proposes a reconstruction of the very early history of the fivefold daily Islamic liturgy, attempting also to weigh the extent of the influence that pre-Islamic religions, primarily Middle Eastern Christianity and Judaism, might have had in its development. To do so, the thesis engages with the Qur'ānic verses disciplining the number and times dedicated to worship, arranges them following Theodor Nöldeke's chronological framework, and closely interprets them in conversation with both modern scholarship and Classical Islamic traditional, exegetical, and lexicographical sources. The information retrieved in the Qur'ān is subsequently contextualized with historical information on the socio-religious environment of VII century Arabia as it transpires from the Qur'ān through polemics, but also relevant scholarship in the fields of history, liturgical and Qur'ānic studies, and material culture.

The thesis concludes that it is possible to identify and analyze four different stages of liturgical development during the formative years of Islam, where Eastern Christian and Jewish influence on *ṣalāt* came into play and overlapped to varying degrees as the early Muslim community structured their changeful relations with the monotheistic communities of their time and place. This process, here analyzed in its entirety, reached its culmination during the Medinan period of revelation (622-632), where the institution of the fivefold daily liturgy, seemingly adopting the Eastern Christian Liturgy of the Hours as a model, finally took place. The establishment of the five daily prayers thus mirrors analogous ritual changes (such as the fixation of the prayer direction from Jerusalem to Mecca and the institution of Ramaḍān's fasting supplanting that of Yom Kippur) that can be read as part of the early Islamic community's attempt to articulate a distinct socio-religious identity from the other monotheistic, and specifically Jewish, communities of Medina.

Table of Contents

Chapter I - Introduction **1-23**

1.1 ***The five Islamic daily prayers: a foundational narrative*** **1**

1.2 ***Aims and research questions*** **3**

1.3 ***Research overview*** **5**

1.4 ***The source material: a discussion*** **9**

1.4.1 *The Qur'ān* 9

1.4.2 *The* ḥadīth-*based literature* 14

1.4.3 *Number and times of ṣalāt in the* ḥadīth-*based literature* 20

1.5 ***Method of analysis*** **23**

Chapter II - Analyzing the number and times of prayers in the Qur'ān **24-54**

2.1 ***Theodore Nöldeke's chronology of revelation*** **24**

2.1.1 *Arranging the Qur'ānic verses on prayer according to Nöldeke's chronology* 28

2.2 ***The origin of the fivefold* ṣalāt: *the textual analysis of the Qur'ān*** **29**

2.2.1 Number and times of prayer in the I Meccan Period 30

Sūrat al-Muzzammil (73:1-9) 30

2.2.2 Number and times of prayer in the II Meccan Period 34

Sūrat Ṭaha (20:130) 34

Sūrat Qāf (50:39-40) 37

Sūrat al-Ṭūr (52:48-9) 39

2.2.3 Number and times of prayer in the III Meccan Period 40

Sūrat Hūd (11:114) 40

Sūrat al-Rūm (30:17-8) 42

2.2.4 Number and times of prayer in the Medinan period 43

Sūrat al-Baqara (2:238) 44

Sūrat al-'Isrā' (17:78-9) 46

Sūrat al-Nūr (24:36) 48

Sūrat al-Muzzammil (73:20) 49

2.2.5 Conclusion 51

Chapter III - Investigating the liturgical development of *ṣalāt* **55-72**

3.1 ***Liturgical developments in the I and II Meccan periods*** **55**

3.2 ***Liturgical developments in the III Meccan period*** **60**

3.3 ***Liturgical developments in the Medinan period*** **65**

Chapter IV - Conclusions **73-78**

4.1 ***Study findings*** **74**
4.2 ***Suggestions for further research*** **77**

Bibliography **79-84**

Primary sources in Arabic **79**
Primary sources in Arabic with parallel translation in English **79**
Primary sources in English translation **79**
Lexicographical resources **80**
Secondary sources **80**

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 *The five Islamic daily prayers: a foundational narrative*

In the opening *ḥadīth*[1] of the *Book of Prayer*, a subsection of his enormous collection of traditions, the great IX-century traditionist Muḥammad ibn ’Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (d. 870) recounts one prodigious event: the nightly journey to heaven of the Prophet Muḥammad, known as *mi‘rāj*. According to al-Bukhārī, one night, while the Prophet was in Mecca, the angel Gabriel came to visit the Messenger of God, opened his chest, washed it with the water flowing from the miraculous *Zam Zam* spring, and poured inside of it wisdom and faith out of a golden trail. Then, the angel took his hand, and together they ascended to heaven. After announcing himself and the Prophet to the warden of paradise, Gabriel ordered him to open the gates: from that moment, Muḥammad and the angel ascended to numerous heavens, meeting several major prophets along the way including Adam, Enoch, Moses, Jesus, and Abraham. Once they ascended to the place where Muḥammad could hear the “cracking of the pens”, God ordered his Messenger to establish fifty daily prayers for his community. Muḥammad, having received this divine decree, attempted to come back when he came across Moses who inquired about God’s command. As soon as he heard about the fifty prayers, Moses compelled Muḥammad to come back to God and ask for a reduction, as his followers would have never been able to comply with them. Thus, Muḥammad returned to God and asked for a reduction, which He granted: now the Prophet’s believers would have had to pray twenty-five times. Muḥammad came back to Moses and told him about the reduction but he convinced the Messenger of God that albeit reduced, the new number was still too heavy a burden to carry for his followers. Thus, the Prophet came back to his Lord and asked for a further reduction: God welcomed his request and halved again the number of prayers. Once Muḥammad informed again Moses of this new halving, he told the Prophet to ask for yet another reduction: Muḥammad obeyed, and God established the number of five daily prayers which would have been rewarded as they were fifty. One last time, the Prophet came

[1] A report concerning a deed or a saying of the Prophet Muḥammad, consisting in a *isnād*, namely a chain of oral transmitters of the report (often tracing back to the Prophet himself or his Companions and ending to the compiler), and a written text, called *matn*. Cf. with the definition provided below in 1.4.

to Moses who still told Muḥammad to bargain more, but the Messenger of God refused to do so as he felt ashamed to face again his Lord.[2]

The story reported above is one of the most crucial foundational narratives of Islam, which can be found, with slight variations of wording and overall length, across the immense corpus of classical Islamic traditional, hagiographic, and exegetical literature.[3] Its importance can be fully grasped if read in tandem with the story of the *'isrā'*, the night journey from Mecca to the Temple Mount[4] in Jerusalem, where Muḥammad led the prayer with Moses, Jesus, Abraham, and other prophets, to which the *mi'rāj* is almost always paired: traditionally dated to 621,[5] the *'isrā'/mi'rāj* took place during a period of the Prophet's revelation where references to biblical figures and stories played a central role for the identity formation of the early Islamic community, explicitly connecting the prophethood of Muḥammad with the salvific past of the Israelites.[6] It follows that a story such as the *'isrā'/mi'rāj* epitomizes the attempt to present the Prophet as the last link of a chain of revelations that began with Abraham, but there is more to it. As a matter of fact, the *'isrā'* and above all the *mi'rāj* offer also a mythical and supernatural explanation for two of the most underresearched questions that one might ask about the Islamic religion, which we will attempt to answer here: *why do Muslims pray five times? When did Islam begin enjoining five daily prayers on its believers?*

Naturally, a narrative such as the *mi'rāj*, if taken alone (as al-Bukhārī does in his *Book of Prayer*), seems to set the origin of the fivefold Islamic daily worship outside human agency. That is to say that Islamic tradition does not contemplate the possibility that the fixation of the number and times of prayer is the result of a process of ritual development shaped by human factors such as variations of piety and scriptural interpretation or societal changes. This perspective, absolutely legitimate from the viewpoint of the pious believer, cannot align itself well with the outlook of the historian, who understands religion as essentially a human phenomenon with an

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[2] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhāri Arabic-English*, trans. Muḥammad Muḥsin Khān (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Maktaba Dar-us-salam, 1994), 156-158.

[3] For example, one interesting, albeit slighty lengthier version of the *'Isrā'* story can be found in the biography of the Prophet by Ibn Isḥāq: Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad: A Translation of Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [first edition 1954]), 184-186.

[4] Mentioned also in sura 17:1.

[5] According to the historian and biographer of the Prophet Muḥammad ibn Sa'd (d. 845), the night journey and the ascension happened the night of Saturday 27th of Ramaḍān, eighteen months before the *hijra* of 622. See: Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd az-Zuhri, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, I, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umār (al-Qāhirat: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 2001), 181.

[6] Angelika Neuwirth has researched extensively on this issue. See, for example: Angelika Newirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity - A shared heritage,* Trans. Samuel Wilder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019),220; 286.

inception and a history of developments to trace to understand and make sense of them. Hence, though extremely interesting, the traditional Islamic foundational narrative on prayer, in Arabic *ṣalāt*, cannot be welcomed as a suitable explanation for the questions outlined above, which has to be found somewhere else, namely, as we will attempt to show, in the Qur'ān. This means that, in this work, the Qur'ānic text will be analyzed and interpreted when it refers specifically to the number and times of daily *ṣalawāt* (pl. of *ṣalāt*) and compared with preexisting pre-Islamic prayer traditions to assess the extent of their influence in the fixation of this distinctive feature of Islamic ritual. It follows that this work points at inconsistencies, contradictions, developments of ideas and concepts related to the number and times of prayers within the Qur'ān, but also patterns of continuity and innovations with respect to Christian and Jewish prayer. Naturally, this implies that this work aligns itself with the understanding of the Qur'ān as a scripture whose development left detectable traces in its content and in its form, following in so doing the path initiated by Theodore Nöldeke and continued, above all and with the most significant results, by Angelika Neuwirth in more recent times.

1.2 *Aims and research questions*

According to Marion Katz, who arguably authored some of the most important studies on Islamic prayer, there is a surprising lack of scholarly attention on *ṣalāt*, as a result of "an unfortunate disciplinary cleavage in Islamic studies."[7] This fracture, as the American scholar puts it, resides in the tendency of anthropologists, on the one hand, to focus mainly on local non-normative aspects of Islamic rituals and, on the other, the belated scholarly efforts of Islamicists to reconstruct their pre-Islamic precursors.[8] On a similar note, A. Kevin Reinhart lamented that the study of Islamic ritual moves on two tracks, the observation-based and decidedly particularistic of the ethnographer, and the heavily focused on primary sources proper of the textualist.[9] However, this work is admittedly non-anthropological as it is strongly textualist, and it aims to heed

[7] Marion Holmes Katz, "The Ḥajj and the Study of Islamic Ritual," *Studia Islamica* 98/99 (2004): 95.
[8] *Ivi*.
[9] A. Kevin Reinhart, "What to Do with Ritual Texts: Islamic *Fiqh* Texts and the Study of Islamic Ritual", in *Islamic Studies of the Twenty-First Century: Transformations and Continuities*, ed. Léon Buskens & Annemarie Sandwijk (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016.

specifically Katz's request to study the origin of Islamic ritual against the historical backdrop of its pre-Islamic roots. In particular, here we will focus on the case study of the number of daily prayers and investigate whether, during the early formative years of Islam, traditionally identified with Muḥammad's Qur'ānic revelation and the time immediately following it, the establishment of *five* moments of worship might be the result of the adoption, adaptation, and synthesis of analogous practices tracing back to Christian and Jewish origin, and whether the Qur'ān bear the traces of these processes. Carrying out this study should, thus, provide us with the answer to the two questions as to why and when did Islam introduce a five-fold daily worship for its adherents.

There is a reason behind the choice to investigate the origin of the five Muslim prayers in the Qur'ān and in the preexisting religious practices of VII century Middle-eastern Jews and Christians, and it can be found in the tendency of Islamic Studies to understand Islam as part and parcel of the cultural matrix that was the Middle East during Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages. In other words, borrowing the terminology from John Wansbrough, Islam came about as a full participant in the *sectarian milieu* of VII century Middle East and, as such, it took part into the cultural and religious cross-fertilization that involved the several societal groups of that time and place.[10] This means that Islam took on the heritage and followed in the footsteps of the diverse theological, exegetical, philosophical, and legal movements that came into being in the Mediterranean basin, and in its turn it dramatically influenced them;[11] the extent of this cross-fertilization was extremely broad, and it even touched areas as far afield as, for example, the understanding and enunciation of political power and its intertwining with religious undertones.[12] Therefore, it seems reasonable enough to attempt to understand whether this mutual influence between Islam and its direct sectarian competitors, namely Christianity and Judaism, affected practical areas of Islamic devotion as well at the time of its founder Muḥammad in the VII century. In this sense, studying the origin of the five-fold daily Muslim prayer against the backdrop of Christian and Jewish daily worship traditions might at the same time shed light on very early developments of Islamic religious practices and provide us with

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[10] See Wansbrough, John. *The Sectarian Milieu - Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

[11] When it comes to analyzing the extant of Islam's participation into the cultural milieu of Late Antiquity, two seminal works cannot be overlooked: Fowden, Garth. *Before and After Muḥammad - The First Millennium Refocused*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014 and Stroumsa, Guy G. *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

[12] Al-Azmeh, Aziz. Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities. London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1997.

further compelling proof of the Islamic participation in the aforementioned sectarian milieu of the Middle East in Late Antiquity.

1.3 *Research overview*

The scant scholarship on Muslim prayer understood Islam as a synthesis of Jewish and Christian religious elements that must have been reflected in *ṣalāt*. Such a stance would in some cases be strong enough to polarize the historical reconstruction of *ṣalāt*'s development, leading scholars to advocate in favor of either its sole Jewish or Christian origin. For example, Abraham I. Katsh claimed that the very institution of a fivefold *ṣalāt* mirrors a purported native Arabian Jewish prayer tradition. In particular, Katsh describes how the two prayers constituting rabbinic liturgy, *shema'* (based principally on Deuteronomy 6:4, and containing several blessings) and *amidah* (also known as *ha-tefillah*, "the prayer," and constituted of eighteen blessings) would not be recited in tandem in the *shacharit* (morning) and *ma'arib* (evening) services in Arabia, as it was common in post-II-Temple Judaism, but in two separate moments of worship which, if one adds the recitation of the *amidah* of the *minchah* (afternoon) service, return the total of five daily prayers.[13] Conversely, Martin Lüstraeten has claimed that the origin of Islamic prayer traces back to the fivefold daily office of Egyptian Pachomian[14] monks.[15] The same concept of Muslim indebtedness to Christianity is mirrored in C.H. Becker's research on the history of the Islamic communal service of the Friday, where it is hypothesized that the adoption of a Mass-like structure for the Friday service took place during the Umayyad caliphate as an imitation of the splendor of Syriac services.[16] Much more cautious is the aforementioned Marion Katz who limits herself to posit a strong resemblance

[13] See Abraham I. Katsh, *Judaism and the Koran: Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Koran and its Commentaries* (New York: Perpetua, 1962); for a comprehensive description of *shema'* and *amidah* see: Kimelman, Reuven. "The Shema and Amidah: Rabbinic Prayer."In *Prayer From Alexander to Constantine - A critical anthology*, edited by Mark Kiley et al. London and New York: Routledge.
[14] Namely, following the rule of Pachomius the Great, d. 348
[15] Martin Lüstraeten, 'On Early Egyptian Monastic Prayer and the Islamic Salāt', from the *Proceedings. North American Academy of Liturgy Annual Meeting,* ed. by Stephanie Perdew Vanslyke, Washington DC, 5-7 January 2017, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2017, 113-129.
[16] C.H. Becker, "On the History of Muslim Worship", in *The Development of Islamic Ritual*, ed. Gerald Hawting(New York: Routledge, 2016), 71 (Originally published in 1912).

between the characteristics of *ṣalāt* and the practices of Eastern Christians,[17] while Ira M. Lapidus, in his magisterial book on the history of Islamic societies, vaguely states that the Islamic prayer tradition bears some resemblances with the Syriac one, though without ruling out the potential influence of Ethiopic Christianity.[18] An interesting position is held by Shelomo Dov Goitein, who understood the five *ṣalawāt* (pl. of *ṣalāt*) as a sort of 'middle way' between the post-II-Temple Jewish three daily prayers and the analogous seven Syriac Christian hours. What makes Dov Goitein's claim compelling is its realization that the establishment of five daily prayers was a conscious act on the part of Muḥammad, based on his probable knowledge of the prayer tradition of both Arabian Jews and Christians.[19] However invaluable and compelling these examples might be, the above-mentioned scholarship on *ṣalāt* is not exempt from shortcomings. Hence, it is possible to identify three such caveats which are to varying degrees common to the historiography of Islamic daily prayer.

Firstly, by claiming that the Islamic daily prayers trace their origin to either exclusively Jewish or Christian services, there is the risk of neglecting the possibility that the institution of *ṣalāt* was a much more dynamic process than it is thought. In other words, it is very well possible that the Prophet, in his quest to establish a new religious tradition, could substantially modify the way he prayed according to the varying societal solicitations he had to face during his prophethood, consciously welcoming and adjusting Jewish and Christian influences (not necessarily restricted solely to ritual aspects) as he structured the way his *umma* could relate and interact with the other monotheistic communities. This would mirror several analogous instances reported in Muslim tradition according to which Muḥammad changed ritual aspects of Islam in conjunction with societal and political issues arising in the aftermath of his *hijra* of 622: two cases in point are the institution of Ramaḍān's fasting, supplanting the fasting on Yom Kippur, and the change of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca. In both cases, what caused such changes was the deteriorating relationship between Muḥammad's community and the Jewish tribes of Medina, probably following the latter's insurmountable resistance to assimilation with the former, as well as the will to synthesize elements of the pre-Islamic religious past

[17] Marion Holmes Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press,2013),14.
[18] Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 122.
[19] Shelomo Dov Goitein, 'Prayer in Islam', in *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 85.

(such as recognizing the *ḥarām* of Mecca as a most sacred sanctuary) with Biblical narratives (such as the story of Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael in Genesis 16 and 21). Consequently, an attempt to reconstruct the history of *ṣalāt*, and thence appreciate the extent of Jewish/Christian influence on it, should take into account the whole socio-religious context that the Prophet might have faced during his career, something that only Dov Goitein attempted to do with his "middle way" theory: the other works hitherto cited, focused as they are to identify a sole Christian or Jewish origin to *ṣalāt*, only looked at it partly, without trying to understand the contribution that *both* monotheistic traditions might have had in shaping the fundamentals of Islamic ritual. Understanding the socio-religious environment of VII century Arabia is no easy task, however, primarily because of the problematic sources available to us. To illustrate that, it is paramount to spell out a central premise of this work, namely our acceptance of the notion that Muḥammad lived in the VII century and was responsible for the composition of the Qur'ān within the timeframe of his prophetic mission, traditionally identified between 609/10 and 632, the year of his death. This stance, shared with the due differences by, among others, Theodor Nöldeke, Angelika Neuwirth, and Sean Anthony (and rejected by several scholars as well, as we will see below),[20] allows us to note how the most important sources on the Prophet, his life, the early Muslim community, and VII century Arabia, were produced after his death (for example, Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, one of the earliest biography of the Prophet, dates to the VIII century) by mainly Muslim authors and almost all figure within the genre of *ḥadīth* which has attracted much criticism in Western academia.[21] For now, suffice it to say that from the XIX and XX century onwards, the works of scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher, Joseph Schacht, Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, and John Wansbrough have drastically redesigned the way scholarship approaches the traditional account of the life and deeds of Muḥammad.[22] Simply put, this *revisionist*[23] approach rejected altogether every claim of the historicity of the classical Islamic

[20] Cfr. Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'ān*, trans. Wolfgang H. Behn (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 1-15; Neuwirth, Angelika "Qur'an and History — a Disputed Relationship: Some Reflections on Qur'anic History and History in the Qur'an." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2003): 1–18. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25728090; For Anthony's take on the subject of Muḥammad's authorship on the Qur'ān in the VII century, see Sean Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), "Epilogue."

[21] For example, see: Stephen J. Shoemaker, 'Muḥammad and the Qur'ān', in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1079-1108.

[22] See for example Patricia Crone & Michael Cook, *Hagarism, The Making of the Islamic World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[23] I borrow the term from Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith - Muhammad Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009).

legal-exegetical-hagiographic literature based on the criticalities outlined above. However, this extremely skeptical view of Muslim tradition has been challenged and adjusted only from the 1980s until today.[24]

Secondly, much scholarship does not treat *ṣalāt* as extensively and thoroughly as it deserves. As a matter of fact, this subject is either cited *en passant* as a part of wider dissertations on the origin of Islam as a whole (as in Katsh, Dov Goiten, and Lapidus' works) or has been produced at the beginning of the 1900s and therefore misses more recent developments in the field of Islamic Studies (as in the case of C.H. Becker's article) and reflecting Katz's claim that a better understanding of *ṣalāt*'s origins is a recent academic concern.

Eventually, the lack of specific works on *ṣalāt* leads us to the last caveat to address, which is incidentally linked with the previous one: the lack of thorough comparativist analysis of Muslim prayer with its pre-Islamic analogues. The combination of these three criticalities, as we have seen, makes the scholarly discourse on *ṣalāt* either espouse reductionist views or formulate hypotheses with weak historical contextualization: an example of this might be Lüstraeten's aforementioned article, where the Pachomian origin of *ṣalāt* is traced back to "close contacts between these two groups" referring to early Muslims and Pachomian monks.[25] Lüstraeten derives the Pachomian influence on *ṣalāt* by his assessment of various *ḥadīth*s which point to the establishment of the Islamic fivefold daily prayer as late as the VIII century,[26] almost a hundred years after the Arab conquest of Egypt when these purported "close contacts" took place.[27] However, Lüstraeten does not provide the reader with more evidence on these "contacts" other than his analysis of *ḥadīth*s which, as said above, are not necessarily historically reliable sources. Nor does he explain why would the expanding VIII century Islamic society prefer this specific Christian tradition over others, such as the Syriac, for example, claiming a historically documented stable presence in Arabia even before the lifetime of Muḥammad.

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[24] An outstading example of such contemporary approach on the *sīra* corpus is without doubt Sean W. Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith - The Making of the Prophet of Islam* (Oakland, Cal.,University of California Press, 2020); when it comes to *ḥadīth* studies, two other important re-evaluationist and relatively recent contributions are Wael B. Hallaq, "The Authenticity of Prophetic Ḥadîth: A Pseudo-Problem", *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 75-90 and Harald Motzki, "Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey", *Arabica* 52, no. 2 (2005): 204-253.

[25] Martin Lüstraeten, 'On Early Egyptian Monastic Prayer and the Islamic Salāt', 20.

[26] *Ibid.*, 14.

[27] *Ibid.*, 20.

1.4 *The source material: a discussion*

As stated above, the aim of this work is to study the origin of the fivefold daily Muslim worship within the Qur'ān, and its relationship with the analogous Middle Eastern Jewish and Christian prayer traditions of Late Antiquity. Given these premises, the Qur'ān will naturally be our primary source material to analyze. As we will have the opportunity to show later on, the Qur'ān does not clearly state how to pray, but it does hint to some moments of the day where believers are expected to worship God: these allusions are in some cases particularly cryptic and require careful philological interpretation. In addition, this study will also feature excerpts from the aforementioned traditional legal-exegetical-hagiographic literature, whose post-Qur'ānic reduction, oral origin, and risk of fabrication call, however, for a careful approach. Nonetheless, this wealth of traditions can be used fruitfully to address an issue central to our inquiry. That is, it can help justify the claim that the notion of a fivefold daily service can be identified within the Qur'ān by understanding how far back in time traditions mentioning explicitly the five *ṣalawāt* can be dated: if these reports trace back to the VII century, and thus to the time when the Qur'ān was composed and canonized, then it becomes reasonable enough to ask if these traditions arose as a Qur'ānic *haggadah* complementing and building upon the scriptural text. Hence, in this section we will present all these sources and elucidate their relevance to our study.

1.4.1 *The Qur'ān*

Regarded as the *ipsissima verba* that God bestowed upon Muḥammad on several occasions between 610 and 632, the Qur'ān ("recitation" but also "reading") is Islam's holy scripture. In its actual form, the Qur'ān is divided into 114 chapters (*suwar*, sing. *sūra*) ordered roughly from the longest to the shortest, except for the first *sūra*, named *al-Fātiḥa* ("The Opener"). Interestingly enough, this order does not reflect the actual chronology of revelation, whose study and establishment have been the subject of much of the early Muslim scholarship. Broadly speaking, however, the Qur'ānic chapters are divided into two main categories: the Meccan *suwar*, namely

the verses revealed in the city of Mecca roughly between 610 and 622, and the Medinan *suwar*, revealed in the city of Medina (known as Yathrib at the time of the Prophet) between 622 and 632, the year of Muḥammad's death. This division also reflects a difference in style and content between the earlier *suwar* and the late ones. Thus, the Meccan chapters tend to be shorter, hortatory, and markedly eschatological,[28] with a style reminiscing the oaths and *saj'* (poetic rhythmic and rhymed prose) of pre-Islamic *kuhhān* ("soothsayers"); as a contrast, the Medinan *suwar* are longer, more narrative, and slightly more legal in character.[29] The reason behind these differences, according to Muslim tradition, lies in the very biography of the Prophet: in Mecca, Muḥammad essentially acted as a preacher, while in Medina he had to organize a community he led.

In our context, there are two issues related to the Qur'ān that are particularly compelling for the history of *ṣalāt*: the authorship and collection of the text, and its liturgical function. According to Muslim tradition, the Prophet, and he alone, served as a conduit for the divine revelation that ultimately became the Qur'ān: Muḥammad did not compose its text, he only transmitted it *verbatim*. The transmission mostly took place orally, and eventually, the Qur'ānic text was committed to memory by the first Muslim believers. This, however, does not mean that the text had not been written down: Aziz al-Azmeh refers to the probable existence of early autograph copies of the Qur'ān already during the lifetime of the Prophet, such as the edition of Zayd ibn Thābit (d. 662/3 or 675/6), Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 652), and so on.[30] However, in most cases, it appears that only small parts of the Qur'ānic text would have been written down, usually on very simple materials, and in a highly defective orthography which, according to Alberto Ventura, betrays their function as *aide-mémoire*.[31] In any case, after the death of the Prophet, these early copies of the Qur'ān, which apparently diverged with varying degrees, started to gain an authoritative status in specific regions of the expanding Islamic empire of the late VII century: according to Ventura, the tradition speaks about divergent traditions in the cities of Kufa and Basra in Iraq or Homs and Damascus in Syria.[32] This prompted the third caliph, 'Uthmān ibn

[28] See for example sura LXXXV ("al-Burūj").
[29] As, for example, in sura IV ("al-Nisā'").
[30] Aziz Al-Azmeh, 'Canon and Canonisation of the Qurʾān'. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Devin J. Stewart. Accessed March 8, 2023. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24606.
[31] Alberto Ventura, "L'islām sunnita nel periodo classico (VII-XVI secolo)", in *Islam* ed. Giovanni Filoramo (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2018), 89.
[32] *Ivi*.

ʻAffān (d. 656) to produce a "canonical" edition of the Qur'ān, based on several folios (*ṣuḥūf*) that were in the custody of Ḥafṣa bint ʻUmar (d. 665), the daughter of the caliph ʻUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644) and one of the wives of the Prophet: according to al-Azme, it is not implausible that such folios existed.[33] Later on, under the Umayyad caliphate, a similar project was undertaken by several scholars under the guidance of the at-the-time governor of Iraq al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī (d. 713), who was also responsible for the standardization of Qur'ānic orthography.[34]

In the West, the traditional account of the Qur'ān's collection and the role of Muḥammad in its composition has generated strong criticism, championed by the late 1970s Revisionist school. For example, the aforementioned Patricia Crone and Michael Cook claimed that "there is no hard evidence of the Koran in any form before the last decade of the seventh century"[35] and that its composition is not the work of one author, but rather the collection of several "Hagarene writings" reworked with the aim of "composing an actual sacred book for their prophet" who, based on the characterization that Crone and Cook made of the early Jewish-Arab Hagarene movement, had clear Mosaic features.[36] A similar, but somewhat less speculative conclusion was reached by John Wansbrough, who posited that the Qur'ān, as we know it today, could not be put into circulation before the VII/IX century Abbasid Iraq, hence challenging the traditional account of the ʻUthmānic vulgate and even of the Hijāzī origin of Islam.[37] As recently as 2021, Stephen Shoemaker further challenged Muḥammad's authorship of the Qur'ān by understanding it as a collection of religious traditions belonging to a wide array of genres, from liturgy to homily and hortatory material, related to ideas and concepts originated at first in the Late Antique Near East, specifically within the Jewish and Christian traditions. The Qur'ān, thus, adopted and adapted such concepts and further expanded on them by asserting its authority: this, according to Shoemaker, makes the Qur'ān a biblical Apocryphon.[38]

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[33] Aziz Al-Azmeh, 'Canon and Canonisation of the Qurʾān'.
[34] For more information on this under-studied and fascinating edition of the Qur'ān, see: Hamdan, Omar. "The Second Maṣāḥif Project, A Step Towards The Canonization of The Qur'anic Text". In *The Qur'ān in Context - Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu*, edited by Angelika Neuwirth et al. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010, 795-835.
[35] Patricia Crone & Michael Cook, *Hagarism*, 3
[36] *Ibid.*, 17-8.
[37] Fred M. Donner, "The Qur'ān in Recent Scholarship - Challenges and Desiderata", in *The Qur'ān and its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2008), 11.
[38] See: Stephen J. Shoemaker, "A New Arabic Apocryphon from Late Antiquity: The Qurʾān", in *The Study of Islamic Origins - New Perspectives and Contexts*, ed. Mette Bjerregaard Mortensen et al. (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 29-42.

It is undoubtedly true that if the fundamental tenet of the biography of Muḥammad is challenged, then the traditional account of the composition and collection of the Qur'ān cannot be taken at face value. However, compelling historical evidence suggests that the Qur'ānic text, although with a degree of instability, did coalesce at least in the immediate decades following Muḥammad's death in 632 and, probably, even during his lifetime. Stanford University, for example, has carried out the radiocarbon dating of the so-called Stanford 2007, a palimpsest discovered in Ṣan'ā' in 1972, which positions its production *before* 671 with a degree of certainty of the 99% and before 661 with the 95.5% of accuracy.[39] Similarly, Oxford University conducted the radiocarbon dating of a Qur'ānic manuscript kept in the Mingana Collection at the University of Birmingham's library, situating its probable composition sometime between 548 and 645 with 95.4% of accuracy.[40]

The Stanford 2007 and the Birmingham Qur'ān appear written in the defective calligraphy mentioned above, and all present textual variants. However, as Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi have shown, the entity of the textual variation in the Ṣan'ā' manuscript is surprisingly minimal,[41] and the same could be said about the Birmingham text, which largely conforms to the historically later "standardized" 'Uthmānic edition.[42] This reflects Fred Donner's claim that under the most overt instability dealing with these small textual variants, the Qur'ān did retain a "deep" stability that can testify to its very early coalescence.[43] As to the authorship issue, it is indeed impossible to provide direct proof of the involvement of Muḥammad in the composition of the Qur'ān. However, there are some considerations to be made. In several Muslim and non-Muslim VII-century sources that witnessed the very early expansion of the nascent Islamic polity, the Prophet is a recurrent character: for example, the chronicle of the Armenian bishop Sebeos, dated to the 660s does recount the deeds of the Ishamelites led by a preaching merchant named *Mahmet*;[44] at the same time, numismatics provided us with the earliest attestation of an Arabian

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[39] Behnam Sadeghi & Mohsen Goudarzi, "Ṣanʿāʾ 1 and the Origins of the Qurʾān", *Der Islam* 87 (2010): 8-9.
[40] "What is the Birmingham Qur'an?", University of Birmingham, accessed May 21, 2023, https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/facilities/cadbury/birmingham-quran-mingana-collection/birmingham-quran/what-is.aspx; for the whole history of the Birmingham Qur'ān, see: Fedeli, Alba. "Early qur'ānic manuscripts, their text, and the Alphonse Mingana papers held in the department of special collections of the University of Birmingham." PhD diss., (University of Birmingham, 2014).
[41] *Ibid.*, 21.
[42] As Gabriel Said Reynolds notes in his article "Variant Readings - The Birmingham Qur'an in the context of debate on Islamic origins", *Times Literary Supplement*, August 7, 2015: 14-5.
[43] Fred M. Donner, "The Qur'ān in Recent Scholarship," 43.
[44] Ps.-Sebeos, *The Armenian History According to Sebeos*, trans. R.W. Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 95.

prophet (*rasūl*) named Muḥammad already during the late 680s, when the claimant to the caliphate Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 692) first minted them.[45] Furthermore, there are documentary proofs of the very early usage of the *hijrī* calendar (that is, the calendar that adopts as *anno zero* the emigration of the Prophet to Medina).[46] These and several other sources all seem to advocate in favor of the historical existence of Muḥammad and his activity of preaching of some sort. In this connection, Sean Anthony has cogently shown that these early sources demonstrate beyond doubt that the Prophet existed in the VII century and that his preaching eventually became the Qur'ān.[47]

However, if we can safely assume that Muḥammad did exist and that his preaching ultimately generated the Qur'ān, then we might ask what was its role in the early Muslim liturgy. Angelika Neuwirth has sought to provide us with an answer, based on a compelling textual analysis of the Qur'ānic text carried out by applying the theory of communication.[48] According to Neuwirth, the oldest *suwar* (datable to 610-5) betray their embeddedness to the religious framework of pre-Islamic Mecca. Thus, they refer to ritual practices of the Meccan *ḥaram*, depicting the Ka'ba as a place of social aggregation and piety; in terms of style, they either open or close with oaths associated with cultic duties to fulfill at specific times of the day (mostly morning and evening), and the very use of *saj'*, with its rhythmic and repetitive quality, suggest a liturgical purpose. Later on (in II and III Meccan periods, ca. 616-622), Neuwirth continues, the center of religious attention would shift from Mecca to Jerusalem as Muḥammad and his followers started to look at their revelation as a "book" in line with the previous monotheistic traditions: this originated what Neuwirth calls the "historic suras" retelling the history of Israel, and in particular the story of Moses, and, since they reflect the spoken part of the Judeo-Christian services, they appear in the styles of sermons to be recited in their entirety. Eventually, Neuwirth argues, in Medina, the very long *suwar* lost their liturgical function as they detached themselves from the Meccan format of the older ones, which in turn became the standard pericope for recitation.

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[45] "Silver drahm of `Abd al-Malik b. `Abd Allah, BYSh, 67 H. 1975.238.12." MANTIS, accessed 08 March 8, 2023, http://numismatics.org/collection/1975.238.12.
[46] See Rāġib, Yūsuf. "Un papyrus arabe de l'an 22 de l'hégire." in In Histoire, archéologies et littératures du monde musulman: Mélanges en l'honneur d'André Raymond, ed. Ghislaine Alleaume, Sylvie Denoix, and Michel Tuchscherer, 363–72. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale.
[47] Sean Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, "Epilogue."
[48] Angelika Neuwirth, "Du texte de récitation au canon en passant par la liturgie", *Arabica* 47, no. 2 (2000): 194-229.

Neuwirth's analysis creates a dependence of *ṣalāt* on the very text of the Qur'ān. Following her reasoning, the daily liturgy changed as the stylistic quality of the Qur'ānic text developed through the various stages of revelation. However, such an intimate connection between scripture and service in Islamic tradition has not been unanimously accepted in scholarship. A notable example is Fred Donner, who instead claims that *ṣalāt* and Qur'ān developed along independent trajectories: he notices how little recitation of Qur'ānic verses is required during prayer, where only *sūrat al-fātiḥa* retains a prominent and obligatory role (a handful of other verses are left to the personal choice of the worshipper), which, incidentally, was not considered unanimously as part of the Qur'ān by Western and Muslim scholars.[49] Hence, Donner concludes, there is evidence that indicates how the Qur'ān did not initially have liturgical purposes, and only later on in its process of collection, liturgical features were superimposed upon it as a sort of embellishment.[50]

Donner's argument of the parallel development of Qur'ān and *ṣalāt* is very convincing and might risk disqualifying the use of the former as a primary source for retrieving information about the latter. However, if it might be true that the Qur'ān was not born as a liturgical text and does not provide the worshipper with clear information on how to pray, it is also arguably true that the Qur'ān bore witness to the establishment and development of prayer, as the many instances it mentions *ṣalāt* seem to suggest, as Neuwirth points out. It follows that an analysis of how the Qur'ān relates to the theme of prayer in the various Meccan and Medinan stages of revelation should provide us with precious insight into *ṣalāt*'s origin, evolution, and how the early Muslim community related to it: this will be the underlying assumption that will inform our analysis of the Qur'ān, whose methodological premises will be addressed below.

1.4.2 *The* ḥadīth-*based literature*

The *mi'rāj* foundational narrative opening this introductory chapter highlights the aforementioned problematical nature of the sources that can be utilized to study the history of *ṣalāt* and, thus, the early development of its characteristics (such as its

[49] Fred M. Donner, "The Qur'ān in Recent Scholarship", 35.
[50] *Ivi*.

number and times of recitation). For example, besides the supernatural theme, the story of the *mi'rāj* has an arguably weak textual correspondence with the Qur'ānic text. The first verse of *sūra* 17 mentions a night journey from the *masjid al-ḥarām*, "the holy mosque," to the *masjid al-'aqṣā*, "the farthest mosque," whereupon God showed Muḥammad *'āyātinā*, "our signs": the verse might be referring to the aforementioned *'isrā'* from Mecca to Jerusalem and the showing of "signs" to the miraculous ascension of the *mi'rāj*. However, this Qur'ānic verse is so vague that it seems more probable that the *'isrā'/mi'rāj* is a later explanation superimposed upon the text to make sense of it, and the same could be said for the other references of Muḥammad's ascension (cf. for example *sūra* 53: 1-12).[51] In addition to that, it should not be forgotten that the written sources containing the *mi'rāj* date, at best, to the VIII century (as in the case of the prophetic biography of Ibn Isḥāq), and have a more or less long history of oral transmission before their written fixation, which does not necessarily advocate for their authenticity.

The issues relative to the *mi'rāj* narrative apply to almost all of the classical Islamic literature based on the literary device called *ḥadīth.* More in detail, a *ḥadīth* can be defined as a textual unit in the form of a report consisting of a saying or the description of a deed attributed to the Prophet (and, to a lesser extent, his Companions). These reports originated in the edifying stories bequeathed by storytellers, in Arabic *quṣṣāṣ*, who might have played a central role in shaping the early Qur'ānic exegetical tradition and, according to some more critical Western scholars, also determined the insurgence of hagiographic embellishments to the biographic account of Muḥammad.[52] The cause for the existence of these stories about the Prophet has to be found in the very form of the Qur'ānic revelation: according to Alberto Ventura, being the Prophet the only qualified interpreter of the divine message, he was regarded as a living commentary to and a natural extension of revelation.[53] Consequently, when Muḥammad died in 632, the early Islamic

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[51] On the exegetical origin of Islamic traditions, see: Burton, John. *Introduction to the Ḥadīth*. Edimburgh: Edimburgh University Press, 1994; *'Isrā'* as the journey from Mecca to Jerusalem is not the only interpretation given by traditionists and exegetes: other versions are all built around different understadings of *masjid al-ḥarām* and *masjid al-'aqṣā*. See: Schrieke, B., Horovitz, J., Bencheikh, J.E., Knappert, J. and Robinson, B.W. "Miʿrād̲j̲." in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 21 May 2023 <http://dx.doi.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0746>

[52] For example, see Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade And the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 215-18; also, see the definition of *qaṣṣ* in Ch. Pellat, "Ḳaṣṣ", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., consulted online on 22 February, 2023 <http://dx.doi.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4002>.

[53] Alberto Ventura, "L'islām sunnita nel periodo classico (VII-XVI secolo)," 100.

community lost its only access to infallible interpretation of the Qur'ān, and therefore it became paramount to salvage as much knowledge about his deeds, words, and biographical details as possible, as it could help to determine legal norms or regulating social/religious behaviors,[54] such as the correct performance of prayer at its appropriate and fixed times. The first transmitters of traditions appear to be the Companions of the Prophet, and in particular Anas ibn Mālik (d. 712), Ibn ʻAbbās (d. 687) and Abū Hurayra (d. 681). The *ḥadīth* systematization work took time, and these reports did not constitute the source of law until the end of the Umayyad Caliphate in 750.[55] In this connection, the presence of a caliphal court, such as the Umayyad, gave a strong impulse to *ḥadīth*s systematization and dissemination thanks to its patronage, for which early scholars of traditions could bequeath their knowledge in a formal setting. A notable example of this phenomenon is the scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 742) who was responsible of teaching traditions about the life and deeds of the Prophet at first in Medina, and then in the Umayyad court of Ruṣāfa, near Damascus: many of his students became later on prominent *ḥadīth* scholars as well, such as Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795), Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767), and Maʻmar ibn Rāshid (d. 770)[56]. The years elapsing from 632 and 750 witnessed also the establishment of a precise format for the transmission of *ḥadīth*s. As the wealth of traditions collected by Muslim scholars kept on growing, the need to ascertain their reliability became central, which prompted the fixation of *ḥadīth* in its two "canonical" sections: a supporting chronological list of tradition transmitters called *isnād*, vouchsafing the truthfulness of the *ḥadīth,* often starting from the Prophet himself or one of his Companions and ending with the compiler, and the actual content of the report, called *matn*.

According to Anthony, the systematic fixation in writing of *ḥadīth*s begun sometime around the first half of VIII century, when an initial and widespread skepticism about transmitting this traditional *'ilm* ("learning," as tradition was initially referred to) in written form started to fade.[57] In effect, according to Anthony, writing down traditions was never understood as a forbidden practice *per se* as long as the written form only served as an aid for memorizing *ḥadīth*s:[58] Chase Robinson as

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[54] Alberto Ventura, "L'islām sunnita nel periodo classico (VII-XVI secolo)," 101.

[55] Pavel Pavlovitch, "Ḥadīth", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam , THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet et al. Consulted online 30 January 2023, <http://dx.doi.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30163>.

[56] Harald Motzki, "The Jurisprudence of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī. A Source-critical Study.", in *Analysing Muslim Traditions, Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghāzī Ḥadīth* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), 1-46.

[57] Sean Anthony, "The Beginnings of the Corpus" and "The Court Impulse," in *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith - The Making of the Prophet of Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).

[58] *Ibid*

well notes this favorable stance towards orality explaining it as a heritage of pre-Islamic culture.[59] The VIII century shift, however, coincided with the admissibility of transmitting traditions in written form as well, without supplanting the more traditional forms of mnemonic learning.

The process of written fixation was followed also by the the first attempts to arrange traditions into compilations: the earliest written *ḥadīth*s were initially organized according to the Companion who first began transmitting them, as the compilations of al-Ṭayālisī (d. 818) and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855) exemplify.[60] This method, however, was short-lived, as it was deemed much more practical to have traditions arranged by subject, an early example being the *Muwaṭṭa* of Mālik ibn Anas. Another method for organizing traditions consisted in an arrangement reflecting how the events of the life of the Prophet might have taken place, which originated the biographical works of Ibn Isḥāq, Maʻmar ibn Rāshid, and Ibn Saʻd (d. 845).

Eventually, by the end of the VIII and IX century, *ḥadīth* compilations specialized in correct ritual practice (*sunna*), hagiography and historiography (*sīra/maghāzī*), and Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and obtained an authoritative status: it is the case of the six jurisprudential *ḥadīth* collections (*muṣannaf*) of the aforementioned al-Bukhārī, Muslim (d. 875), Abū Da'ūd (d. 888), al-Tirmidhī (d. 892), Nasā'ī (d. 915), and Ibn Māja (d. 886, although its presence in this list is debated as many prefer Mālik ibn Anas' *Muwaṭṭa*), but also the Biography of the Prophet of the aforementioned Ibn Isḥāq; a different discourse should be made for the exegetical literature, as in its early formative years (ca. until the IX century), it relied more on paraphrastic interpretation and *Isra'īliyyāt* (namely Jewish biblical lore) rather than *ḥadīth*s to understand the Qur'ānic text:[61] however, from the IX and X century onward, the shift from the early *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y* (exegesis based on personal opinion, which included the usage of the *isra'īliyyāt*) to *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr* (exegesis based on tradition) made possible the production of the most important commentaries of the Qur'ān, such as the *tafsīr* of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd al-

[59] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 15.
[60] J. Robson, ""Ḥadīth", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 30 September 2022. <http://dx.doi.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0248>.
[61] Claude Gillot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval", *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 2 (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001), 107.

Ṭabarī (d. 923), Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nīsābūrī al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035), and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328).[62]

Despite the claim of authenticity of the aforementioned (and many more) *ḥadīth* collections, skepticism about this kind of literature is as old as these traditions themselves. For example, Charles Pellat reports how, in the late IX century, official authorities would prevent *quṣṣāṣ* from preaching due to their tendency to alter religious concepts by accommodating stories from Judeo-Christian, Arabian pre-Islamic, and Iranian lore in their speech to maximize their appeal to listeners.[63] Moreover, jurists often questioned the reliability of traditions, which led them to the establishment of methodologies of inquiry based on the perusal of *isnād*s such as the *'ilm al-rijāl* (lit. "the science of men") and *'usūl al-fiqh* (lit. "the sources of jurisprudence"). The first is the biographical and historical study of the people listed in the chains of transmission to verify the likelihood that two connecting links of an *isnād* could have met and transmitted/received the information. In addition, the *'ilm al-rijāl* assessed the moral soundness of the transmitters to detect potentially unreliable links. The second refers to the wealth of theoretical and methodological reflections in the field of jurisprudence, focused on defining the sources from which legal reasoning derives. These sources, ultimately systematized in the X century, were arranged from the most to least relevant, although with the progressive development of juridical schools (*madhāhib*, sing. *madhhab*) from the VII century, the importance attached to some of them could vary to some degree. Broadly speaking, the sources of jurisprudence are the following: Qur'ān, *sunna*, *ijmā'* (namely the consensus of the community on a given ruling), and *qiyās* (analogical reasoning). As it can be noted, the *sunna* is second only to the Qur'ān in terms of importance, which testifies to the centrality of the issue of orthopraxis: this meant engaging with the *ḥadīth*s ascribed to the Prophet and determining a procedure that could help skimming unreliable traditions from those deemed authentic. Hence, *'usūl al-fiqh* divided *ḥadīth*s into two main categories, the *āḥād* (unique) and the *mutawātir* (recurrent): the latter was defined as a tradition transmitted by a great number of sources with the same text so that it is safe ruling out the possibility of forgery; the former instead as any tradition

[62] For more information on the importance of these three exegetes, see: Carol Bakhos, "Interpreters of Scripture", in *The Oxford Handbook of Abrahamic Religions*, ed. by Adam Silverstein and Guy Stroumsa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 242-249.
[63] Ch. Pellat, "Ḳaṣṣ."

which does not uphold the necessary conditions for being counted as *mutawātir*.[64] The application of these theoretical and methodological frameworks could in some cases lead to unexpected results: based on the recurrent/non-recurrent *ḥadīth*s dichotomy, jurist Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 1245) would eventually come up with the conclusion that *ḥadīth*s of the *mutawātir* type are extremely rare and useless for the derivation of law (if not completely non-existent) since they comprised a minimal fraction of prophetic material.[65]

Based on *ʻilm al-rijāl* and *usūl al-fiqh*, jurists often looked down on the hagiographic literature on the Prophet, judging the traditions reported by Muḥammad's biographers unreliable.[66] However, the most comprehensive critique of *ḥadīth*s came from modern Western scholarship which often questioned the authenticity of the traditions of the vast traditional Islamic literature by applying the so-called historical-critical method:[67] according to the Orientalist Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921), *ḥadīth*s were essentially fabrications dictated by political propaganda, and his conclusions were further expanded by Joseph Schacht (d. 1969) who claimed that traditions attributed to Muḥammad were manufactured by jurists who sought to provide authoritative support for the rulings of their schools of law in the mid-VIII century.[68] In the 1970s, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook argued in favor of the total unreliability of Islamic traditions in their book *Hagarism* based on their study of non-Muslim sources dating to the VII century,[69] while John Wansbrough understood *ḥadīth* literature as an attempt on the part of exegetes to superimpose their interpretation on the Qur'ānic text.[70] More recently, scholars such as Fred Donner and Sean Anthony have instead tried to approach *ḥadīth*s with a more benevolent eye, essentially claiming that if it is true that traditions cannot be taken at face value, discarding this vast literature would be a mistake as the truth on the historical Muḥammad must lie somewhere in between.[71] In this connection, Harald Motzki deserves a special mention, inasmuch as his methodological approach, named *isnād-*

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[64] Wael B. Hallaq, "The Authenticity of Prophetic Ḥadîth: A Pseudo-Problem", Studia Islamica 89 (1999), 78.
[65] Ibid., 88-90.
[66] Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16.
[67] Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith - Muhammad Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 204.
[68] *Ibid.*, 205-211.
[69] See: Crone, Patricia & Cook,Michael. *Hagarism - The Making of the Islamic World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
[70] Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith*, 223.
[71] Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers - At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 53; Anthony, Sean. *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith - The Making of the Prophet of Islam.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2020.

cum-matn, that is, the simultaneous assessment of both the chain of transmission and the report related to a large corpus of *ḥadīth*s, has made possible the dating of numerous traditions to the generation of the Companions of the Prophet, (mid-late VII century).[72] Motzki's research highlights more recent tendencies within Western scholarship that are not preoccupied with proving or disproving the authenticity of tradition, but rather understanding when concepts and beliefs within Islam, registered in *ḥadīth*s, first made their appearance.

In any case, the impossibility to determine beyond doubt the truthfulness of the traditions regarding the Prophet makes the *ḥadīth*-based literature an unreliable tool to extract precise information on the development of the earliest Islam, let alone its daily worship. However, it is still worth examining how biographers, jurists, and exegetes talked about prayer, as it can help to assess how far back in time it is possible to trace references to a five-fold daily worship in written sources, regardless of the authenticity of the *isnād*s they provide: this can be helpful especially if we accept the view for which traditions reflect the political and theological preoccupations of the compilers.

1.4.3 *Number and times of ṣalāt in the* ḥadīth-*based literature*

According to Guy Monnot, the *ḥadīth*-based literature presents an "entirely ritual" *ṣalāt*, to observe five times during the day.[73] Interestingly enough, and this is specifically true for the IX century jurisprudential collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, there are two different narratives explaining the number of daily prayers: one is the aforementioned *mi'rāj*, sometimes attributed by Anas b. Mālik (d. 712, but al-Bukhārī quotes the Companion Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, d. 652), while the other narrates how the angel Gabriel would visit Muḥammad in five different moments of the day to pray with him, transmitted on the authority of the aforementioned Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī.[74] Both versions of the foundational narrative, with only slight textual variations, are present in Ibn Isḥāq's Biography of the Prophet: the *mi'rāj*, attributed to 'Abd

[72] For an exhaustive exposition of Motzki's criticism of the Orientalist/Revisionist schools and his methodology of inquiry, see: Motzki, Harald. "Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey." *Arabica* 52, no. 2 (2005): 204–53.

[73] Guy Monnot, , "Ṣalāt", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman *et al.* Consulted online on 3 March 2023 <http://dx.doi.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0983>.

[74] *Ibid*., cfr. with Imam Mālik ibn Anas, *Al-Muwaṭṭa - A translation of the royal Moroccan edition*, trans. Mohammed Fadel & Connel Monette (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 73-4.

Allah b. Mas'ūd (d. 653),[75] and the visiting-Gabriel one, attributed to Ibn 'Abbās (d. 687).[76] As regards the actual times of prayer, they are clearly stated (with their relative names) in the six canonical *ḥadīth* compilations of the IX century mentioned above. By way of example, in the collection of Muslim, a *ḥadīth* transmitted by 'Abd Allah b. 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ (d. 664), the Prophet, answering a direct question on their times, named all the prayers and how to understand when it is time to perform them:

> "The time for the Fajr prayer is so long as the first part of the sun has not risen. The time for the Zuhr prayer is from when the sun passes the middle of the sky, so long as 'Asr has not come. The time for the 'Asr prayer is so long as the sun has not turned yellow and the first part of it has not disappeared. The time for the Maghrib prayer is when the sun sets, so long as the twilight has not disappeared. The time for 'Ishâ' prayer is until halfway through the night."[77]

This reflects the purpose of these compendia: being arranged thematically and used also for legal purposes, the six IX century collections provide clear and thorough ritual indications from trustworthy (at least from the compilers' standpoint) sources.

The biographical literature on Muḥammad mentions the five-fold composition of daily worship as well, however, without illustrating in detail the relative ritual behaviors: in the vising-Gabriel tradition, Ibn Isḥāq names all the five prayers and only describes when, during the day, the Angel and Muḥammad prayed together; in another source contemporary to Ibn Isḥāq's *sīra*, the *kitāb al-maghāzī* ("Book of expeditions") by Ma'mar ibn Rāshid, all but the *maghrib* ("sunset") and the *'ishā'* (late evening) prayers are mentioned.[78] This prophetic biography contains also a very short and streamlined version of the *'isrā'/mi'rāj* narrative, where Moses is absent, but God enjoins fifty prayers at first on the Prophet only to reduce them to five: interestingly enough, despite being Ma'mar ibn Rāshid's *kitāb al-maghāzī* heavily based upon the *ḥadīth*s of his teacher al-Zuhrī, the visiting-Gabriel tradition, which we have seen Muslim attributes precisely to al-Zuhrī, is absent. It is present, however, in Mālik b. Anas' *Muwaṭṭa.*[79]

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[75] Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad*, 186-7.
[76] *Ibid.* 112.
[77] Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *English Translation of Sahîh Muslim*,Vol. 2, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh, KSA: Darussalam, 2007), 112-3.
[78] Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions - An Early Biography of Muḥammad*, ed. and trans. By Sean Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 97 (morning *subḥ* prayer), 87 (for the afternoon *'aṣr* prayer), 251 (for the noon *ẓuhr* prayer).
[79] Mālik ibn Anas, *Al-Muwaṭṭa*, 74.

This continuity from hagiographic literature of the VIII century and IX/X century *ḥadīth* compilations is worth focusing on: according to Monnot, when the six *muṣannaf*s were compiled, prayers, their number, and their times, were also fixed.[80] This implies that, prior to that time, *ṣalāt* was in a more fluid state and its scheduled times, and consequently its daily number, could have been different. It stands to reason then, that this instability should have been recorded in the earliest stages of tradition retrieval (or, for that matter, fabrication): however, the presence of narratives such as the *'isrā'/mi'rāj* and the visiting-Gabriel tradition in the hagiographic literature of the VIII century testifies for the presence at least conceptually, if not practically, of a *ṣalāt* whose recitation is due five times in five different moments of the day as early as one hundred years after Muḥammad's death.[81] This leaves the door open to wonder if *ṣalāt* in its five-fold configuration has more ancient roots in the VII century, when the Prophet Muḥammad lived and received his revelation. Naturally, answering this question requires the analysis of the oldest source at our disposal that can offer insights into Muḥammad's preaching and ritual behaviors, and this source is nonother than the Qur'ān itself.

Before focusing on the Qur'ān, however, it is worth delving briefly into how *ṣalāt* is addressed in exegesis. We have already seen that commentaries based upon traditions trace their origin in the IX/X century when the shift from opinionated exegesis was supplanted by exegesis based on tradition. Incidentally, it should be remembered that during the same period, the fundamental tenets of *ṣalāt*, and thus its number and times, were fixed; hence, in Qur'ānic commentaries, vague and obscure references to prayer in the Qur'ān are always interpreted according the established orthopraxis: it is the case, for example, of al-Ṭabarī's exegesis of *sūra* 20:130, where the Qur'ān seemingly refers to the recitation of three or four daily prayers (depending on the reading of the verse) instead of five: al-Ṭabarī first explains why it should be interpreted as five, and then proceeds with listing numerous traditions supporting his claim.[82] We will address this, and other instances of Qur'ānic exegesis on prayer, more in detail in chapter two.

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[80] Guy Monnot, , "Ṣalāt".

[81] A much more precise estimate could be obtained by applying the *isnād-cum-matn* method established by Harald Motzki. However, this requires a broad comparison of a high number of traditions, which would call for a specifically dedicated study to successfully carry it out.

[82] Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī - Jām'u al-Bayāni 'an Ta'wīili 'āy al-Qur'āni*, vol. 16 (Cairo: Markaz al-Baḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-'Arabiyya wa al-'Islāmiyya, 2001), 211.

1.5 *Method of analysis*

As the Qur'ān represents the main object of this work, we devised a method of analysis that we believe can efficiently help us track the development of Islamic liturgy throughout the whole scripture. In essence, we attempted a very close textual analysis of the Qur'ān, carried out with a diachronic approach.

More in detail, we selected all the verses we could identify within the Qur'ān that rule when Muḥammad and his followers are expected to pray during the day. In order to follow how these times of prayer changed during the Qur'ān's composition, we arranged them chronologically. Our model is based on Theodore Nöldeke's chronology of revelation, with some modifications we made whenever we thought that his dating could be rejected. We will introduce Nöldeke's chronological framework and our adjustments in the next chapter.

Once having chronologically arranged the Qur'ān's verses on prayer times, we began closely reading them in an attempt to interpret their rulings. Much importance has been given to Arabic and specifically Qur'ānic lexicography, both Medieval Islamic and contemporary, as the understanding of expressions of time played a central role in our reading of the Qur'ān. In this connection, we also extensively consulted the traditional *ḥadīth*-based literature and specifically exegesis. However, these subsidiary sources did not inform our overall interpretation, as we employed them mainly to highlight the discrepancies between what we believe the Qur'ān says and their explanation, which, we will see, often results in a back-projection of the established orthopraxis onto the text.

Subsequently, we have confronted the various rulings with one another and accounted for their discrepancies based on the contemporary historical reconstruction of the socio-religious milieu of the Late Antique Arabian peninsula. This meant also comparing the number and times of prayer as the Qur'ān fixes them in its various stages of revelation with Jewish, Christian, and pre-Islamic polytheist prayer traditions. That enabled us to trace the whole developmental arch of Islamic liturgy throughout the earliest Islamic history and weigh the possible influence that other religious traditions, in particular the monotheistic ones, had on the establishment of a fivefold daily Islamic liturgy.

Chapter Two - Analyzing the number and times of prayers in the Qur'ān

2.1 *Theodore Nöldeke's chronology of revelation*

Upon a careful perusal, we established that the Qur'ān regulates the times of prayer a total of eight times: in *sūrat al-Baqara* (2:238), *sūrat Hūd* (11:114), *sūrat al-'Isrā'* (17:78-9), *sūrat Ṭaha* (20:130), *sūrat al-Nūr* (24:36), *sūrat al-Rūm* (30:17-8), *sūrat Qaf* (50:39-40), *sūrat al-Ṭūr* (52:48-9), and *sūrat al-Muzzamil* (73:1-9, 20). The order in which these verses are reported here reflects their position within the established arrangement of Qur'ānic *sūra*s which, as said above, is based roughly on their length and not on their chronology of revelation. In this connection, it is worth remembering that Islamic exegetical traditions divide the Qur'ānic chapters into two main categories, namely Meccan and Medinan *sūra*s, based on the assumption that the Prophet experienced at least two main periods of revelation separated by a fundamental watershed, namely the *hijra* of 622. However, this traditional division is much more articulated than it might seem. The need to establish an exact chronology of revelation was a paramount concern for early Islamic jurisprudence as the discipline of *nāsikh wa l-mansūkh* ("abrogating and abrogated") began to gain consensus among early scholars.[83] Identifying which verses of the Qur'ān were abrogated by subsequent revelations entailed engaging with the text with a historical - if not historicizing- approach. This very same approach also characterized the literature called *asbāb al-nuzūl* ("the occasions/causes of revelation"), which investigated the traditionally-reported historical circumstances of the Qur'ānic revelation. This historical-philological endeavor, which according to Ventura can be seen as something in between scriptural exegesis and chronological inquiry,[84] aimed at providing the exegete with the necessary background to better understand the meaning of *specific* verses. Thus, the exegetical genre of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, which saw in al-Waḥidī (d. 1075), Nīsābūrī (d. 1075), and al-Suyūtī (d. 1505) some of its most notable authors, was not preoccupied with establishing a thorough and complete

[83] See Welch, A.T., Paret, R. and Pearson, J.D., "al-Ḳurʾān", in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 23 March 2023 <http://dx.doi.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0543>.
[84] Alberto Ventura, "L'islām sunnita nel periodo classico (VII-XVI secolo)", 98.

chronology of revelation. In addition to that, it was also characterized by interpretive inconsistencies (for example, the determination of the first ever revealed verse in the Qur'ān).[85] The determination of the exact sequence of revelations was further complicated by the assumption that Qur'ānic *sūra*s did not come about by accretion of distinctively revealed verses but the result of discrete *tanzīl*s of whole chapters with the except for a few verses. This view met in XIX and early XX century Western scholarship significant skepticism.[86]

The Western critique of the traditional Islamic chronological arrangement of *sūra*s developed parallel to -if not as part and parcel of- the rise of the early Orientalist school with which it shared the general distrust of the traditional account of the origin of Islam and the application of the historical-critical method on the primary sources. Scholars of the likes of Gustav Weil (d. 1889) sought out to date Muḥammad's revelations not on what the *sīra* can tell us, but rather on internal characteristics of the Qur'ānic text itself. Hence, Weil proposed to divide the prophetic career of Muḥammad into four stages, three Meccan and one Medinan, based on textual references to historical events that can be identified in other sources, the understanding that style modifications mirror developments in the social status of the Prophet and the very form of revelation.[87] Weil's conclusions were subsequently adopted, adapted, and further expanded in Theodor Nöldeke's (d. 1930) monumental work *Geschichte des Qorans*, where the four-fold division of Qur'ānic revelation was accompanied by a thorough stylistic analysis of the relative *sūra*s. Interestingly enough, Nöldeke did not attempt to provide a full chronological order of the revelations as he was aware of the impossibility to accomplish said end. Instead, he produced what appears to be only an approximate dating.[88] Moreover, in his approach, Nöldeke did not abide by the traditional Islamic retelling of the monolithic *tanzīl* of Qur'ānic *sūra*s, but posited the possibility that phenomena of textual interpolation could have interested the Qur'ān already while the Prophet was still alive and that he might have been responsible for some additions to the established text.[89] This

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[85] Welch, A.T., Paret, R. and Pearson, J.D., "al-Ḳurʾān."
[86] *Ibid.*
[87] *Ibid.*
[88] Commenting the chronological order proposed by William Muir (d. 1905), Nöldeke states "The main error of Muir's classification consists in his attempt to arrange the sūras in a strict, chronological order in every respect. Although he is sufficiently modest to admit that he has not quite reached his goal, *in fact his goal is itself unattainable*", see: Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'ān*, trans. Wolfgang H. Behn (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 61, emphasis added.
[89] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'ān*, 38.

translates into the probability that, in a single *sūra* belonging to a specific period of revelation, one or more verses may have been revealed in other moments of Muḥammad's career based on their style and content. Nöldeke's *Geschichte* was, and it still is to this day, an extremely influential study that retains scholarly consensus as to the soundness of its approach,[90] and its most general chronological assumptions will provide us with a fundamental reference for studying how the Qur'ānic text developed its understanding of *ṣalāt*.

Nöldeke's broad dating expands upon the traditional division of the Qur'ān into Meccan and Medinan periods of revelation. In addition, Nöldeke divided, following Weil's framework, the Meccan period into three sub-periods characterized by an inherent and almost insurmountable difficulty when it comes to its chronological dating since Meccan *sūra*s contain only sparse references to major historical events.[91] Nonetheless, Nöldeke identified in *sūrat al-Najm* (LIII), *sūrat Ṭaha* (XX), and *sūrat al-Rūm* (XXX) links to three historical events that can serve as historical references, respectively the flight to Abyssinia in the fifth year of Muḥammad's prophethood, the conversion of 'Umar ibn al-Kaṭṭāb dated to six years before the *hijra*, and allusions to events of the Byzantine-Sasanian war which took place in the seventh or eighth year after the Prophet's call.[92] Nöldeke, however, warned about the uncertainty surrounding these dates and the concrete impossibility to establish a rigorous chronology of the Meccan period.[93] In this context, the only historical coordinate that can be safely assumed to bear some historical reliability is 622, the year of the *hijra*.[94] Other dates that might prove useful to establish a rigorous chronology of Muḥammad's revelation, such as the Prophet's birth, call to prophethood, and death, can only be retrieved via Islamic tradition, which presents us with diverging opinions that cannot be corroborated by epigraphic or contemporary non-Muslim sources, or the Qur'ānic text.

For example, as regards Muḥammad's birth, the *sīra-maghāzī* literature features two disagreeing versions of the story: one holds that the Prophet was born during the so-called "Year of the Elephant" (*'Ām al-Fīl*), and reported in Ibn Isḥāq's

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[90] For one of the latest assessments of Nöldeke's study, see: Nicolai Sinai, "The Qur'an as a Process", in *The Qur'ān in Context - Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 407-439.
[91] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'ān*, 58.
[92] *Ivi*.
[93] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'ān*, 58.
[94] See Chapter I.

Sīra,[95] which is usually dated to 570,[96] although other datings tend to place it between 530 and 547;[97] the other version is contained in Maʻmar ibn Rāshid's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* which limits itself to describe the nativity of the Prophet sometimes *after* the "Year of the Elephant" but without providing more precise information;[98] interestingly enough, Maʻmar ibn Rāshid reports his version on the authority of his master al-Zuhrī, which suggests that it might be older, although not necessarily more historically reliable, than the one contained in the *Sīra*.

These disagreeing views on Muḥammad's nativity confirm Nöldeke's skepticism about traditional sources, especially when they do not find confirmation in the Qur'ān or other sources. However, the four-fold division of Qur'ānic revelation, and specifically the determination of the Meccan periods, although resting necessarily upon unfirm historiographical ground, is, according to Nöldeke, "[...] quite appropriate for the internal character of the individual periods."[99] This means that the partitioning of the Qur'ānic text into four temporal subdivisions, of which three refer to Muḥammad's preaching in Mecca, follows a stylistic and content development that suggests, on the one hand, that the prophetic career of Muḥammad went indeed through several different stages, while, on the other, it points to the existence of an internal chronology of the Qur'ān: the above-mentioned three historical events upon which Nöldeke builds the partitioning of the Meccan periods are given as probable and rough time-references without pretending them to be historically binding or infallibly accurate. Thus, keeping what it has been hitherto said in mind, Nöldeke's four periods of Qur'ānic revelation are the following:

- I Meccan period: from Muḥammad's call to prophethood, traditionally held to be sometime around 609/610, until the fifth year of his career, ca. 615; the *sūra*s belonging to this period are: 1, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 68, 69, 70, 73, 74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 113, 114;

[95] Ibn Isḥāq, *as-Sīra an-Nabawiyya*, 99; cfr. with al-Ṭabarī, *History of Prophets and Kings*, vol. V, trans. C. E. Bosworth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 268 (al-Ṭabarī mentiones precisely Ibn Isḥāq in his *isnad*); the Prophet's birth is also reported, although with a different *ḥadīth* narrated on the authority of Wāqidi (d. 823), by the historian Ibn Saʻd (d. 845), see: Muḥammad Ibn Saʻd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), 81.

[96] For example, see Claudio Lo Jacono, "Le religioni dell'Arabia preislamica e Muḥammad," in *Islam* ed. Giovanni Filoramo (Bari: Editori Laterza 2018), 42.

[97] Rubin, Uri, "Abraha", in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart. Consulted online on 26 March 2023 <http://dx.doi.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_22605>.

[98] Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 3-7.

[99] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'ān*, 58-9

- II Meccan period: from the fifth year until the sixth, ca. 616; the *sūra*s belonging to this period are: 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 26, 27, 36, 37, 38, 43, 44, 50, 54, 67, 71, 72, 76;
- III Meccan period: from Muḥammad's eighth year of prophethood, ca. 618 until the *hijra* of 622; the *sūra*s belonging to this period are: 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 39, 40, 41, 42, 45, 46.
- Medinan period: from 622 until Muḥammad's death, dated traditionally to ca. 632; the *sūra*s belonging to this period are: 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 22, 24, 33, 47, 48, 49, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 98, 110.

2.1.1 *Arranging the Qur'ānic verses on prayer according to Nöldeke's chronology*

Following the chronological arrangement of Nöldeke, our data *set* could be grouped as Table 1 shows.

I Meccan Period (609/10 - 615)	*II Meccan Period (615-6)*	*III Meccan Period (618 - 622)*	*Medinan Period (622 - 632)*
73:1-9	50:39-40	30:17-8	2:238
73:20	17:78-9	11:114	24:36
52:48-9	20:130		

Table 1 - Preliminary chronological arrangement of the data set

However, this distribution does not take into account the phenomenon of textual interpolation mentioned above. As regards our data, Nöldeke noticed some stylistic inconsistencies across them that can be helpful with adjusting our chronological arrangement.

More into detail, Nöldeke notices the substantial difference in terms of style between 73:20 and the other verses belonging to the same *sūra*. In effect, the verse is considerably longer than the others and in a much less poetic style; content-wise, 73:20 abrogates the nighttime prayers established in 73:1-3 (addressed in detail in the

next section). Thus, Nöldeke rightfully suspects its Medinan origin.[100] As far as *sūra* 52 is concerned, Nöldeke notices how some of its verses seem to belong to the II Meccan period, namely verses 21, 43, and, most importantly for us, verse 48. In particular, verse 48 opens with an expression, *wa-ṣbir li-ḥukmi rabbi-ka* (translatable with “wait patiently your Lord’s decision”), which is not featured in other *sūra*s of the same period.[101] In addition to this, we would argue that verse 49 might also fall in the II Meccan period, as it appears as a continuation of verse 48, without which the *sūra* would end with an abrupt change of subject (namely, from the punishment of wrong-doers in the day of judgment in verse 46 and 47 to praising the Lord at night in verse 49). Verses 78-9 of *sūra* 17 are thought by many to have originated in Medina, Nöldeke reports, although there is no definitive proof for this interpolation despite being skeptical regarding these verses (and, in general, the coherence of the whole *sūra*) justified.[102] *Sūra* 11 is, on the other hand, particularly coherent, although verse 114 (together with verses 15 and 20) is held to be Medinan,[103] although we will challenge and refute this claim below. The final chronological arrangement of our data *set*, taking into account the interpolations discussed above, is shown in Table 2.

I Meccan Period (609/10 - 615)	*II Meccan Period (615-6)*	*III Meccan Period (618 - 622)*	*Medinan Period (622 - 632)*
73:1-9	20:130	30:17-8	17:78-9
	50:39-40	11:114	73:20
	52:48-9		2:238
			24:36

Table 2 - Final chronological arrangement of the data set

2.2 *The origin of the fivefold* ṣalāt: *the textual analysis of the Qur’ān*

The reconstructed chronological order obtained by applying Nöldeke’s framework gives us the necessary starting point for our textual analysis of the Qur’ān. Thus, in this section, we will address how the Qur’ān disciplines the times dedicated to prayer.

[100] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur’ān*, 81.
[101] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur’ān*, 86-7.
[102] *Ibid.* 112-4.
[103] *Ibid.* 123.

2.2.1 Number and times of prayer in the I Meccan Period

According to Nöldeke, the earliest *sūra*s of the Qur'ān reflect the power of Muḥammad's enthusiastic commitment to his mission. Consequently, the style is grandiose, rhythmic, and harmonious; the Prophet does not appear as an interlocutor with God but is concealed in the background.[104] Neuwirth, expanding on Nöldeke's comments, notices how the early Meccan *sūra*s are stylistically reminiscent of the Psalms, and that they retain a central role in the *qirā'at*, the reading/recitation part of *ṣalāt*.[105]

Sūrat al-Muzzammil reflects Nöldeke and Neuwirth's descriptions, since it features a remarkable stylistic coherence, as the overall length, rhythm, and recurring rhyme, build upon the nunation -*an* of the accusative, show.

Sūrat al-Muzzammil (73:1-9)

Yā-'ayyuhā l-muzzammilu 1
Qumi l-layla 'illa qalīlan 2
Nniṣfahu 'awi nquṣ minhu qalīlan 3
'Aw zid 'alay-hi wa-rattili l-qur'āna tartīlan 4
'Innā sanulqī 'alay-ka qawlan thaqīlan 5
'Inna nāshi'ata l-layli hiya 'ashaddu waṭ'a wa-'aqwamu qīlan 6
'Inna la-ka fī n-nahāri sabḥan ṭawīlan 7
Wa-dhkuri sma rabbi-ka wa-tabattal 'ilay-hi tabtīlan 8

The excerpt opens with an expression that seems directed at the Prophet himself, as the vocative *yā-'ayyuhā* suggests. Hence, Muḥammad is referred to as *al-muzzammil*, a term that can be translated as "wrapped"[106] or "enshrouded" and occurs only once in the Qur'ān: Badawy and Abdel Haleem point out that, from the viewpoint of grammar, *muzzammil* is an assimilated active participle of *tazammala*, the fifth form of the *z-m-l* (ز-م-ل) root. The reason why the Prophet is addressed in this way is rather obscure. Both Ṭabarī and Ma'mar ibn Rāshid report the story of the first encounter between Muḥammad and the angel Gabriel, describing how the Prophet asked his wife Khadīja to cover him with garments, as the memory of that supernatural encounter would

[104] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'ān*, 63.
[105] Angelika Newirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 166.
[106] *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Use,* s.v. m-z-l.

make him tremble with fear.[107] Should this be true, then the claims regarding the very early origin of this *sūra*, noted by Nöldeke,[108] might be legitimate. In any case, the verb *tazammala* does not seem to imply being wrapped necessarily with a cloak or a robe,[109] and the hagiographic story of the encounter between Muḥammad and Gabriel might well be the attempt to make sense of this Qur'ānic *hapax legomenon*. However, it is worth remembering that wrapping of some sort is not an alien ritual practice in the other Abrahamic religions. For example, the Jewish practice to wrap around an arm and the forehead the so-called *tefillin* (small boxes containing Pentateuchal texts) while praying is particularly old as the excavations in Qumran demonstrate,[110] while on the Christian side, in *De Institutis Coenobiorum*, the Desert Father John Cassian (d. 435) briefly describes how monks should gird themselves with "dead skins" (most likely leather) around their loins as a symbol of abstinence: once they are wrapped in this belt, they can undertake their pious endeavors, among which the nightly recitation of Psalms.[111] Although this cannot be proven with a definitive argument, the similarity between the Desert Fathers' nightly prayer and Muḥammad's devotion in the I Meccan Period becomes even more relevant if one looks at the subsequent verses.

Verse 2 opens with *qum*, imperative of *qāma*, a hollow verb that takes a wide spectrum of meanings, the most common of them being to stand up or to undertake a task. *Qāma* is strongly associated with *ṣalāt* in the form of a recurrent collocation between the verb, usually in the imperative or imperfect tense, and the substantive.[112] In the case of verse 2, however, *qum* is not followed by *ṣalāt*, but by the substantive for "night" declined in the accusative of time. This might suggest a reading of the verse for which *qum* not only refers to the performance of prayer but also to stand up while doing it. The Prophet, thus, is expected to engage in these spiritual exercises for some parts of the night, although the Qur'ān here is vague and does not clearly state for how long: it can be the whole night except a little part or, as we see in verse 3 and 4, alternatively a half, a little less than a half or a little more of it. What is of particular

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[107] Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 15; the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq does not mention the covering of the Prophet after the revelation of the first *sūra.* Interestingly enough, al-Ṭabarī reports this episode supported by an *isnad* whose *common link* is al-Zuhrī and, similarly to Ma'mar ibn Rāshid's *isnad*, it is traced back to 'Ā'isha: see al-Ṭabarī, *History of Prophets and Kings*, vol. VI, transl. W.Montgomery Watt & M.V. Macdonald, 68.
[108] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'ān*, 81.
[109] For example, see: *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 3, William Lane Edwards (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), s.v. z-m-l.
[110] James J. Watts, "Ritualizing Iconic Jewish Texts", in *The Oxford Handbook of Ritual and Worship in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. By Samuel E. Balentine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 246.
[111] John Cassian, *De Institutis*, I.11.1-2; II.1.1.
[112] For example, in 98:5, 2:3, 4:77, and so on.

interest, however, is the presence of the word *al-qur'ān* in verse 4, which calls for some reflections.

The most commonly used English translations of the Qur'ān all understand verse 4 with broadly the same terms: A. J. Arberry proposes "[...] and chant the Koran very distinctively",[113] while Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall and Ahmed Ali respectively write "chant the Qur'an in measure"[114] and "recite the Qur'an slowly and distinctively".[115] Hence, these translations understand *al-qur'ān* as referring to the whole scriptural canon of the Qur'ān. However, as we have seen above, *sūrat al-Muzzammil* is often thought to be one of the very earliest *sūra*s of the Qur'ān, and indeed both Nöldeke and the Islamic tradition understand it as belonging to the Meccan period. Should the very early origin of this *sūra* be true, then *al-qur'ān* might not necessarily be a reference to the recitation from the Qur'ānic canon, simply because said canon was yet to be formed as revelation was still in its embryonic state. In this connection, it is worth noticing that according to Arthur Jeffery, the very word *qur'ān* might be a borrowing: the root ق - ر - أ (q-r-'), and consequently the verb *qara'a*, is not attested with the meaning "to recite" in Semitic languages other than the Hebrew-Canaanite ones, and the Syriac *qeryānā*, identifying selected readings from the Bible, seems to be the most likely source for *qur'ān*.[116] If Jeffery is right, and *qur'ān* comes from a Christian environment, then the first four verses are describing Muḥammad as engaging in some sort of distinct scripture-like recitation, while standing, at night, wrapped up in some non-specified garment: the similarity with the spiritual practices of the Desert Fathers, and particularly the cenobitic role of John Cassian, is staggering. As a matter of fact, Cassian's *De Institutis*, after mentioning the girding with leather, describes the method for the nocturnal recitation of Psalms: without hasting, and spending most of the time standing in supplication with arms outstretched.[117] In addition, Newirth has found specifically in the first verses of *sūrat al-Muzzammil* compelling references to the Psalms: verse 2 seems to paraphrase Psalm 119:62 ("at midnight, I stand to praise you"), while verse 8, commanding the Prophet to remember the name of God, seems to refer to Psalm 113:1 ("Praise the name of the Lord"), and in general, most of the earliest *sūra*s seem to be the first

[113] A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, Vol II (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 308.
[114] Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *Roman Transliteration of the Holy Qur'ān* (Lahore: Qudrat Ullah Co.), 657.
[115] Ahmed Ali, *Al-Qur'ān: A Contemporary Translation by Ahmed Ali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 508.
[116] Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007), 233.
[117] John Cassian, *De Institutis*, II.7.1-2.

Arabic contribution to "Late Antique psalmic piety", as Neuwirth calls it.[118] But how can we interpret these similarities? Naturally, affirming that Muḥammad began his Prophetic career as a Desert Father would be erroneous at best. However, the similitude between the rule of John Cassian, the Psalms, and the first verses of *al-Muzzammil* might inform us of how certain devotional practices of Late Antiquity were not geographically circumscribed but were enough widespread in Arabia to influence the way personal piety was carried out. In other words, the first 4 verses of *al-Muzzammil* seem to tell us that Muḥammad possessed some form of knowledge on the praying habits of the Desert Fathers, and that, at this early stage of his prophetic career, his personal spiritual exercises were conforming, to some extent, to them.

Verse 5 might illuminate us on the purpose of these nightly prayers. Muḥammad is warned that a heavy pronouncement (*qawlan thaqīlan*) will be sent upon him by God, thus suggesting that his nocturnal worship might be necessary to predispose the Prophet to receive the Word. This point seems to find confirmation in verse 6, although it presents us with some lexical issues. Badawy and Abdel Haleem report how the word *nāshi'at* cannot find a univocal explanation, which determined the insurgence of several different readings of the verse.[119] However, being *nāshi'at* a I form feminine active participle, the corresponding verb *nasha'a* seems to take also the meaning of rise and to elevate:[120] this seems to suggest that *nāshi'ata l-layli* might refer to the act of standing up (as we have seen, suggested also by *qum* in verse 2) in vigil. This standing vigil is thus described as the most "conducive for concentration"[121] as well as the time when the speech (*qīlan*) is most upright (*'aqwamu*). Hence, it seems that according to verses 5 and 6, the night vigil is a sort of obligatory passage to clear the mind of the Prophet of any distractions and prepare it for the incoming revelation.

Verse 7 builds on verse 6, as it points out how Muḥammad, during the day (*fī n-nahāri*) is busy with time-consuming (*ṭawīl*, lit. "long") activities (*sabḥ*). Verse 8, concluding our excerpt, enjoins upon the Prophet the duty to remember the name of his Lord (*wa-dhkuri sma rabbika*) and to fully commit to devotion to God (*wa-tabattal 'ilayhi tabtīlan*).

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[118] Angelika Newirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 72-3.
[119] *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Use,* s.v. n-sh-'.
[120] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 8, s.v. *nasha'a*; cfr. *Vocabolario Arabo-Italiano*, Renato Traini (Roma: Pontificio Istituto per L'Oriente C.A. Nallino, 2018), s.v. *nasha'a.*
[121] Mustansir Mir, *Verbal Idioms of the Qur'ān* (Center for Near Eastern and North African Study, The University of Michigan, 1989), 365.

2.2.2 Number and times of prayer in the II Meccan Period

According to Nöldeke, during the II Meccan Period the Prophet begins to trade the elegance in the exposition with a more pragmatic language that could better suit his young community's needs. Hence, Muḥammad often resorts to examples from nature and history to contextualize or explain his words: naturally, the history Muḥammad refers to is *salvation* history, and biblical prophets are prominent and recurrent in the *sūra*s of this period, in particular Moses.[122] Neuwirth calls them *history suras*, and most of them share the opening oaths centered around the notion of a heavenly and transcendental *book* revealed in parts to the proclaimer. This divine writing, which does not belong to the physical world, cannot be directly known by the Prophet through reading, but instead from an orally transmitted divine pericopization that, Neuwirth points out, reflects similar phenomena that took place for Jewish and Christian scriptures. Hence, the central parts of these *sūra*s, namely the historical narratives, surrounded as they are by hymns and polemics, are modeled on the spoken part of Jewish and Christian liturgies where recitations from Torah and Gospel are the protagonists, and signify the attempt to make the early Islamic community a chosen people related to the Israelites. In other words, II Meccan *sūra*s see the adoption of the cultural memory of the Israelites by Muḥammad and his early community.[123]

Sūrat Ṭaha (20:130)

Fa-ṣbir ʿalā mā yaqūlūna wa sabbiḥ bi-ḥamdi rabbi-ka qabla ṭulūʿi sh-shamsi wa qabla ghurūbi-hā wa min ʾanāʾi l-layli fa-sabbiḥ wa ʾaṭrāfa n-nahāri laʿalla-ka tarḍā 130

If the chronological arrangement of our data *set* is correct, then the II Meccan period represents the first time in which diurnal prayers are enjoined upon Muḥammad and his followers. A clear example of this is verse 130 of *sūrat Ṭaha*.

The verse opens with God exhorting his Prophet to bear patience over what *they* say (*fa-ṣbir ʿalā mā yaqūlūna*). It is likely that the implicit subject *they* is referring to the disbelievers mentioned in previous verses. More in detail, verses 126-

[122] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qurʾān*, 97-8.
[123] Angelika Newirth, *The Qurʾan and Late Antiquity*, 218-220.

129 reproach those who do not believe in the *’ayāt*, the proofs of Divine revelation descended upon them, declaring that they will be repaid with torment in the Hereafter. The reference to disbelievers in conjunction with verse 130 is telling, as it shows us that Muḥammad already faced some sort of opposition in Mecca during this period of revelation, in relation to which the Prophet is exhorted to patiently persevere in his mission. The verse continues by decreeing the times dedicated to worship. Muḥammad is thus commanded to exalt God before sunrise (*qabla ṭulū‘i sh-shamsi*), before sunset (*qabla ghurūbi-hā*), at nighttime (*min ’anā’i l-layli*), and at the (two) ends of the day (*’aṭrāfa n-nahāri*). Upon a first superficial glance, 20:130 seems to prescribe five moments of prayer in total. However, upon a more thorough look, the verse seems to point toward a different *ordo*.

Before sunrise	Sunrise (end 1 of the day)	-	Before sunset	Sunset (end 2 of the day)	-	Night vigil
fajr prayer (before sunrise/sunrise)	-	*ẓuhr* (midday prayer)	*‘aṣr* (mid-afternoon prayer)	*maghrib* (sunset prayer)	*‘ishā’* (evening prayer)	

Table 3 - *times of prayer in 20:130 vs Muslim’s* ṣaḥīḥ

If we follow the canonical times of prayer reported by Muslim,[124] it is possible to notice that they do not perfectly match the description featured in 20:130, with the exception of the very early dawn recitation, namely *fajr*, which according to Muslim should be recited before the sun’s upper portion has risen above the horizon. Similarly, the description of *‘aṣr* prayer, which is due before the lower portion of the sun has disappeared, seems to match with the command to pray before sunset. As regards the prayer during nighttime, it is unlikely that the Qur’ān here refers to *‘ishā’* as the vigils lost their compulsory status only in Medina.

A more difficult assessment is required for the expression *’aṭrāfa n-nahāri*. Ali and Pickthall agree with the rendition “the two ends of the day,"[125] while Arberry opted to avoid the numeral adjective, perhaps to produce a translation adhering more strictly to the Qur’ānic text. As a matter of fact, *’aṭrāfa* is a broken plural (the singular form being *ṭaraf*, “extremity”, “end”) and one is tempted to argue that if the Qur’ān wanted to specify the *two* ends of the day, it could have chosen the dual form in the

[124] See page 22.
[125] Ahmed Ali, *Al-Qur’ān*, 273; Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *Roman Transliteration of the Holy Qur’ān*, 357

oblique case, *ṭarafay n-nahāri.* Hence, the word *’aṭrāf* creates an ambiguity that has led some commentators to divide the day into three ends rather than two. Ṭabarī and Tha‘alabī are two notable examples, who with two almost identical argumentations explain that the “ends of the day” mentioned in 20:130 refer to *ṣalāt al-ẓuhr* and *ṣalāt al-maghrib.* For instance, according to Ṭabarī:

> “*’Aṭrāfa n-nahāri* means *ṣalāt al-ẓuhr* and *ṣalāt al-maghrib*. The expression *’aṭrāfa n-nahāri* refers to the time elapsing between the two prayers we mentioned, as the *ẓuhr* prayer falls in the latter part of the first end of the day [*ākhir ṭaraf an-nahār al-awwal*] as well as in the first part of the other end [*wa fī awwal ṭaraf an-nahār al-ākhar*]; while during the third end, sunset, the *maghrib* prayer is recited, hence the meaning of *’aṭrāf*.”[126]

Thus, the day is to be divided into two distinct moments identified by three ends: one presumably beginning at dawn, when *fajr* is recited, and ending at midday, the time of *ẓuhr*, and from midday until sunset, the time of *maghrib*. In addition, Ṭabarī understands *qabla ghurūbihā* as referring to the *‘aṣr* prayer and *’anā’i l-layli* as referring to the *‘ishā’*, hence claiming that the verse mentions all of the five canonical times of prayer.[127]

Contemporary readings of verse 130 disagree with the explanation of Ṭabarī. Besides the aforementioned translations of Ali and Pickthall, Badawy and Abdel Haleem, who understand *’aṭrāfa n-nahāri* with “the [two] ends, or the extremities, of the day,”[128] and Guy Monnot are noteworthy examples. In particular, Monnot not only translates 20:130 with “the two extremities of the day”, but explicitly claims that the expressions “before the rising of the sun” and “before the setting of the sun”, which we have seen both appear in verse 130, are synonymous with *’aṭrāfa n-nahāri*.[129] If Monnot is right, then *qabla ṭulū‘i sh-shamsi* and *qabla ghurūbihā* stand in a synecdochal relation with *’aṭrāfa n-nahāri*, implying that the Qur’ān is not referring to five times of prayer, but instead to three: two diurnal prayers at early dawn and sunset, and the night vigil. However, in the impossibility to produce a definitive

[126] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl ’Āy al-Qur’ān*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Mu’assasa al-Risala, 1991), 234, translation mine; cfr with: al-Tha‘labī, *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayān ‘an Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 18 (Geddah: Dār al-Tafsīr, 2014), 83-4.
[127] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 234.
[128] *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Use,* s.v. ṭ-r-f.
[129] Guy Monnot, , “Ṣalāt”.

argument in favor of Ṭabarī or Monnot at this stage, it is paramount to turn towards the other *sūra*s of the same period of revelation.

Sūrat Qāf (50:39-40)

Fa-ṣbir ʻalā mā yaqūlūna wa sabbiḥ bi-ḥamdi rabbi-ka qabla ṭulūʻi sh-shamsi wa qabla l-ghurūbi 39

Wa mina l-layli fa-sabbiḥ-hu wa ʻadbāra s-sujūdi 40

Verses 39-40 of *sūrat Qāf* are strikingly similar to 20:130, although here the times for worship seem better defined. More in detail, verse 39 is practically identical to the first part of 20:130, as the Prophet is exhorted to be patient about what *they* say and to glorify God before sunrise and before sunset. However, as opposed to *sūrat Ṭaha*, *sūrat Qāf* offers a better contextualization of Muḥammad's opponents, symbolized in the implicit pronoun *they*. Verses 36-37, similarly to 20:126-9, describe the proofs of Divine intervention in the history of humankind, which are called reminders (*dhikrā*) for those who can understand them, but it is verse 38 of particular concern to us. As a matter of fact, verse 38 is aimed at Jews and Christians, as it states that God created the heavens and the earth in six days without needing to rest on the seventh. It follows that the *they* implicit in verse 39 not only refers to those who do not believe in God's *ʼayāt* but also the other monotheists who corrupted the meaning of Genesis 1: this might mean that the Prophet was already engaging in theological disputations with Jews and Christians in Mecca, so much so that their probable resistance to Muḥammad's preaching justified their inclusion in the slightly polemic *fa-ṣbir ʻalā mā yaqūlūna*.

Verse 40 of *sūrat Qāf* presents us with an interesting issue as regards nighttime worship. The Prophet is commanded to glorify God at night (*wa mina l-layli fa sabbiḥ-hu*) and at the "ends of prostrations" (*ʻadbāra s-sujūdi*), and it is worth wondering what the status of these prostrations was or if they were part of the nighttime prayer. This issue appears to have been rather divise, as even the traditional and exegetic literature provides us with different interpretations. For example, both Ṭabarī and Thaʻalabī identify *ʻadbāra s-sujūdi* as the two *rakʻa*s (namely the cycles of

ritual gestures composing *ṣalāt*) of the *maghrib* prayer.[130] The two exegetes, however, seem to force the interpretation of verse 40 to prove that the Qur'ān mentions the canonical five times of prayer. They both understand the expression *qabla ṭulūʻi sh-shamsi* ("before sunrise") as referring to the *fajr* prayer and *qabla l-ghurūbi* ("before sunset") as referring to the *ʻaṣr*, but Thaʻalabī also reports a tradition on the authority of the Companion Ibn ʻAbbās interpreting the expression *qabla l-ghurūbi* as referring to *both* the *ẓuhr* and *ʻaṣr* prayer.[131] Then, the exegetes claim that the wording *mina l-layli fa sabbiḥhu* ("praise the Lord at night") identifies *ṣalāt al-ʻishā'*. It follows that the "ends of prostrations" in verse 40 appears as the only possible way to refer to *ṣalāt al-maghrib* and consequently mention all of the canonical five prayers. At odds with Ṭabarī and Thaʻalabī, the traditionist al-Bukhārī reports a *ḥadīth*, again attributed to Ibn ʻAbbās, commenting specifically verse 40: according to this tradition, ʻAbbās explained the meaning of *adbāra s-sujūdi* by recalling how Muḥammad was ordered to glorify God *after ṣalāt* was complete. Consequently, al-Bukhārī understands the "ends of prostrations" as a devotional practice separated from the actual prayer.[132] In light of these discording takes on verse 40, some considerations ought to be made.

It is unlikely that *adbāra s-sujūdi* refers to the last two *rakʻa*s of the *maghrib* prayer. As we have seen, this interpretation of verse 40 is an expedient forcing the text to mention all of the established five prayers. Similarly, when the text commands Muḥammad to worship at night (*mina l-layli fa sabbiḥhu*), it is improbable that it is referring to the *ʻishā'* prayer: as we have already said above, the night vigils established in *sūrat al-Muzzammil* would not lose their compulsory nature until the Medinan period. Thus, it is much more probable that *mina l-layli fa-sabbiḥhu* is ordering the Prophet to carry on with his night vigils. On the other hand, Ibn ʻAbbās' tradition reported by Thaʻalabī is highly suspicious: it is unlikely that the expression *qabla l-ghurūbi* refers to two distinct prayers as the identical expression found in 20:130 (*qabla ghurūbi-hā*) is commonly understood as referring to *ʻaṣr* specifically. Much more complicated is understanding whether the *sujūd* of verse 40 is a separate devotion or part of the night vigil. However, a tentative argument could be built based on our comment on *sūrat al-Muzzammil*.

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[130] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʻ al-Bayān ʻan Ta'wīl 'Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5, 106; al-Thaʻlabī, *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*, vol. 24, 495

[131] al-Thaʻlabī, *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*, vol. 24, 494.

[132] al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhāri*, vol. 6, 319.

As we have seen above, Muḥammad's personal worship in 73:1-9 bears some interesting similarities with the prayer of the Desert Fathers described in John Cassian's coenobitic role. This nightly *qur'ān* of Psalm-like prayers appears to be carried out while standing, in a distinct manner, and while being wrapped in some sort of garment. If the influence, direct or indirect cannot be ascertained, of the Desert Fathers on these nightly spiritual exercises is plausible, then it is not improbable that this kind of worship would entail some sort of prostrations as well. John Cassian, when describing how Egyptian monks pray at night, mentions that after the recitation of Psalms, they shortly prostrate themselves on the ground in adoration of the Divine mercy.[133] In light of Cassian's description, verse 40 seems to take a peculiar meaning for which the prostrations might be a part of the night vigil, and the expression *wa 'adbāra s-sujūdi* is an attempt to specify that God must be praised *even after* them. In light of this reading, then, we might conclude that *sūrat Qāf* refers to three daily prayers: one to be recited before sunrise, one before sunset, and the night vigil.

Sūrat al-Ṭūr (52:48-9)

Wa ṣbir li-ḥukmi rabbi-ka fa-'inna-ka bi-'a'yuninā wa sabbiḥ bi-ḥamdi rabbi-ka ḥina taqūmu 48

Wa mina l-layli fa-sabbiḥ-hu wa 'idbāra n-nujūmi 49

This excerpt from *sūrat al-Ṭūr* features once again a similar wording to what we read in 20:130 and 50:39-40, and thus we will focus directly on how it disciplines the times dedicated to prayer. Verse 48 enjoins upon Muḥammad the duty to pray when he gets up (*ḥina taqūmu*), most likely from sleep, while verse 49, instead, orders him to do it at night (*wa mina l-layli fa-sabbiḥhu*). As with 50:40, the expression *'idbāra n-nujūmi* is worth commenting upon. According to William Lane Edwards, Arab medieval lexicographers understood it as meaning "the setting of the stars,"[134] a reading confirmed also by Badawy and Abdel Haleem.[135] For a better definition of *'idbāra n-nujūmi*, one might turn to Ṭabarī 's *tafsīr*:

[133] John Cassian, *De Institutis*, II.7.2.
[134] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 3, s.v. dubur.
[135] *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Use,* s.v. d-b-r.

> “*wa ‘idbāra n-nujūmi*. Namely, when the stars recede [*tadbar*] due to [their] setting [*’ufūl*] at dawn [*‘inda ’iqbāl an-nujūm*, lit. “near the arrival of the day”].”[136]

In this connection, it should be remembered that Ṭabarī also understands *‘idbāra n-nujūmi* as referring to the last two *rak‘a*s before daybreak, as Edwards duly notes.[137] However, this interpretation, as we have seen for *‘adbāra s-sujūdi* in 50:40, is not convincing.

Ṭabarī’s definition points us towards the understanding that *‘idbāra n-nujūmi* is equivalent with the *ṭulū‘i sh-shamsi* we have encountered in 50:39 and 20:130. This means that Muḥammad is commanded to pray before, or at least in the very first part of, sunrise. If this is true, then the command to pray when getting up would necessarily entail that it would happen sometime *after* sunrise. It is possible to conclude that *sūrat al-Ṭūr* refers to three daily prayers: two diurnal plus the night vigil.

2.2.3 Number and times of prayer in the III Meccan Period

Nöldeke’s take on the III Meccan *sūra*s is overall negative. He recognizes that Muḥammad’s style and language, as well as the themes he touched, reached their maturity. However, this happened at the expense of the poetical quality of his expressions, as the verses became increasingly longer and more prosaic. This is reflected also in the general length of the *sūra*s, whose numerous sub-sections are often seamed together without joining verses.[138]

Sūrat Hūd (11:114)

Wa ’aqimi ṣ-ṣalāta ṭarafay n-nahāri wa zulaf[an] *mmina l-layli ’inna l-ḥasanāti yudhhibna s-say’ati dhālika dhikrā li-dh-dhākirīna* 114

[136] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 139. Translation mine.
[137] See note 161.
[138] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur’ān*, 117.

As we have seen above, verse 114 of *sūrat Hūd* is thought to be Medinan by several exegetes (such Ṭabarī, al-Wāḥidī, al-Suyūtī, and so on) because it deals with the issue of the times of prayer, as Nöldeke reports.[139] However, this claim is debatable.

More in detail, the verse begins with the already discussed idiom between the verb *'aqāma* and the substantive *ṣalāt*, after which it follows the determination of the times of prayer. Hence, Muḥammad and his followers are commanded to pray during the *ṭarafay n-nahāri*, an expression translatable with "the two ends of the day." This wording seems a direct reprisal of the wording *'aṭrāfa n-nahāri* we have seen in 20:130: the difference between these two expressions lies in their grammatical number, inasmuch as *'aṭrāfa* is a broken plural, while *ṭarafay* is in the dual in *status constructus* (*iḍāfat*). This variation is important, as it can also inform our reading of 20:130: the *'aṭrāfa n-nahāri* was in all likelihood referring to *two* ends of the day instead of three, as traditional exegesis proposed. Thus, it seems reasonable enough to conclude that *ṭarafay n-nahāri* is referring to sunrise and sunset prayers.

Furthermore, the verse also commands to perform prayer during the night. The verse uses the term *zulaf*, namely the broken plural of the feminine noun *zulfat* which identifies the idea of physical nearness, if applied to places, and of a period of time when understood temporally.[140] The latter definition is interesting as medieval lexicographers understood it as referring specifically to night: according to the grammarians Abū al-ʿAbbās Tha'lab (d. 904) and al-'Akhfash al-'Akbar (d. 793), *zulaf* defines the hours of the night beginning from daytime as well as the hours of the day beginning from nighttime;[141] in a similar fashion, Ṭabarī defines it as "the hours of the night."[142] Tha'labī's definition of *zulaf* follows al-'Akhfash's and Ṭabarī's, but he also gives some further information about four divergent readings of the word, suggesting that the determination of the orthography, grammar, and meaning of *zulaf* was, in and of itself, a small lexicographic problem.[143] Indeed, variant readings and understandings of *zulaf* can be traced even in modern translations: Pickthall understood it as "some watches of the night,"[144] Ali as "the first watch of the night"[145], while Arberry as "[the] nigh of the night."[146] The translations of Ali and Pickthall are

[139] *Ibid*., 123.
[140] *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Use,* s.v. z-l-f.
[141] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 3, s.v. *zulfa.*
[142] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 318.
[143] al-Tha'labī, *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*, vol. 14, 466.
[144] Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *Roman Transliteration of the Holy Qur'ān*, 259.
[145] Ahmed Ali, *Al-Qur'ān*,198.
[146] A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, Vol I, 252.

interesting, as they refer to *zulaf* with the night vigil (as their choice to translate it with "watch" suggests), while Arberry opted for a rendition that more closely resembles Tha'alab's and Akhshaf's definitions.

Based on the information discussed above, it is worthwhile making some considerations. The Medinan origin of 11:114 seems unlikely. Stylistically, *ṭarafay n-nahāri*, a variant wording of 20:130, strongly advocates in favor of its Meccan origin; in addition, the traditional claim that verse 114 originated in Medina just because it disciplines the times of prayer is too weak an argument, since the duty to pray at night was rendered supererogatory precisely in Medina, as we will see below. One might also argue that the command to pray during the incipient hours of the night does not depart too much from what is disciplined in *sūrat al-Muzzammil*, where the night vigil could last less than half of the night or even one-third of it. Hence, if we can safely assume that 11:114 has a Meccan origin, the times of prayer it sanctions seems to be the following: at sunrise, at sunset, and at night.

Sūrat al-Rūm (30:17-8)

Fa-subḥāna l-lāhi ḥīna tumsūna wa ḥīna tuṣbiḥūna 17
Wa la-hu l-ḥamdu fī s-samawāti wa l-'arḍi wa 'ashīy^{an} wa ḥīna tuẓhirūna 18

Sūrat al-Rūm seems to increase the number of prayers from the initial three to four. Verse 17, in particular, urges the believers to worship in two moments defined by the verbs *tumsūna* and *tuṣbiḥūna.* Particularly interesting are the definitions reported by Edward regarding these two verbs based on medieval lexicography. *Tumsūna*, imperfect of *'amsā*, takes on the meaning of "to enter upon *masā'*"[147], while the second, imperfect of *'aṣbaḥa*, "to enter upon *ṣabāḥ.*"[148] *Masā'* and *ṣabāḥ* are commonly understood as respectively referring to evening and morning, but Edwards provides us with some more information regarding these two words: *masā'* refers to either "afternoon, counted from noon to sunset," "evening, after sunset," or, according to some lexicographers, "midnight";[149] while *ṣabāḥ* means either "dawn" or "forenoon."[150]

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[147] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 7, s.v. 'amsā.
[148] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 4, s.v. aṣbaḥa.
[149] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 7, s.v. masā'.
[150] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 4, s.v. aṣbaḥa.

Verse 18 opens by affirming that praise belongs to God in the heavens (*as-samawāti*) and on Earth (*wa al-'arḍi*), but also during *'ashiyy*, identifying alternatively the late part of the evening, but also the evening more in general, or the afternoon.[151] The verb *tuẓhirūna* takes on the meaning of "to enter upon the time of *ẓuhr*", that is, noon.[152] It is noteworthy that Badawy and Abdel Haleem understand verse 18 as composed of two idioms: *fī s-samawāti wa l-'arḍi* ought to be read as "everywhere", and *wa 'ashīy^an wa ḥīna tuẓhirūna* as "all the time;"[153] however, this interpretation, albeit plausible, does not find correspondences in any of the major translations of the Qur'ān, nor it appears to be found in *tafsīr*s, which instead understand the time references in verses 17 and 18 as defining discrete moments of prayer. For example, Ṭabarī related *tumsūna* to the prayer of *maghrib*, *tuṣbiḥūna* with *fajr*,*'ashīy^an* with *'aṣr*, and *tuẓhirūna* with *ẓuhr*, but surprisingly, he did not mention the *'ishā'* prayer.[154]

If we follow the definition of reported by Edwards, the command to pray when entering *ṣabāḥ* (*tuṣbiḥūna*) relates to a prayer whose time of recitation begins upon entering dawn until noon. Assessing the part of the day implied in *tumsūna* is slightly more problematic, as we have seen *masā'* can cover a wide array of meanings, some of them overlapping with the notion of *'ashiyy*. However, it seems reasonable enough to follow Edward's first definition of *masā'*, the most common in classical Arabic lexicography, and thus understanding *tumsūna* as pointing toward an afternoon prayer, probably during sunset. Consequently, *'ashiyy* would refer to an evening prayer and, finally, *tuẓhirūna* cannot but refer to the noon prayer. The absence of a specific mention of a prayer to offer at night is striking and will be addressed in the next chapter.

2.2.4 Number and times of prayer in the Medinan period

As we have seen in Chapter I, the *hijra* of 622 marks a watershed in Muḥammad's prophetical career. The flight from Mecca to Medina signified not only a geographical change but also a substantial modification of his social status. The traditional

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[151] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 5, s.v. 'ashiyy.
[152] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 5, s.v. 'aẓhara;
[153] *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Use,* s.v. ẓ-h-r.
[154] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 139.

biography of the Prophet claims that he was invited to Medina to act as an arbiter to settle several tribal disputes, in particular the one between the tribes of *'Aws* and *Khazraj*. This more politically prominent role is, according to Nöldeke, reflected in the very character of the Medinan *sūra*s, featuring small units dealing with legal pronouncements and rulings of various kinds which are, in and of themselves, considerably smaller than the Meccan revelations, but once joined together they make up the lengthiest *sūra*s in the Qur'ān.[155] From the rhetorical standpoint, Medinan *sūra*s do not feature particular textual embellishments besides rhyme.[156] Interestingly enough, Neuwirth as well notes, in her study on the liturgical use of the Qur'ān, that Medinan *sūra*s are not always composed artfully, but in general the language (especially in the so-called "oratory" *sūra*s) approximates the style of sermons.[157]

Sūrat al-Baqara (2:238)

ḥāfiẓū 'alā ṣ-ṣalawāti wa ṣ-ṣalāti l-wusṭā wa qūmū li-l-lahi qānitīna 238

Verse 238 of *sūrat al-Baqara* is as short as it is interesting. The verb *ḥāfiẓū*, imperative of *ḥāfaẓa*, when followed by the preposition *'alā*, takes on the meaning of being constant, keeping up, and being mindful.[158] Hence, Muḥammad and the believers are called upon to consistently respect the recitation of the daily prayers, which are here interestingly referred to in the plural as *ṣalawāt*. Afterward, the verse continues with a rather mysterious expression, as it describes the duty to pray the *ṣalāt al-wusṭā*, which could be translated as "middle prayer." However, the verse does not feature further information about this new prayer, and the understanding of what it is referring to is left to interpretation.

Traditional Islamic literature presents particularly discording views on what *ṣalāt al-wusṭā* could mean. For example, Mālik ibn Anas, in his *Muwaṭṭa*, dedicates four *ḥadīth*s to the subject, of which two deal specifically with the elucidation of the middle prayer's recitation time. The first view holds that Zayid ibn Thābit (d. 660) understood *ṣalāt al-wusṭā* as the noon prayer (*ẓuhr*), while the second claims that 'Alī ibn 'Abī Ṭālib (d. 661) and Ibn 'Abbās identified the middle prayer with the morning

[155] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'ān*, 140.
[156] *Ivi*.
[157] Angelika Newirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 230-1.
[158] *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Use,* s.v. ḥ-f-ẓ.

prayer, which they called *ṣalāt al-ṣubḥ* and deemed it the best of prayers: interestingly enough, Mālik deems ‘Alī’s take as more trustworthy.[159] ‘Alī appears as the transmitter of another *ḥadīth* on the middle prayer reported by al-Bukhārī, albeit featuring information contrasting what was mentioned by Mālik. As a matter of fact, the Prophet’s cousin is reported saying that during the Battle of the Trench (627), Muḥammad lamented that their opponents (the Quraysh) prevented them to perform the *ṣalāt al-wusṭā* until sunset (*ḥattā ghābiti sh-shāms*): this would make the middle prayer fall sometime around the afternoon *‘aṣr* prayer.[160] The identification between the middle prayer and the *‘aṣr* is present in Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*, who first claims that openly, only to report afterward numerous traditions (citing, among others Ibn Isḥāq) supporting his claims.[161] Finally, Tha‘alabi’s take is worth mentioning, as he argues that the Qur’ān links the usage of the adjective in the elative form *’awsaṭ* (“middlemost” of which *wusṭā* is the feminine analogous) to the notion of being “the best:”

> “*Al-wusṭā* is the feminine of *al-’awsaṭ*, and [it is the] center of the object: [it is] its good part, the most uniform and balanced: because the good of [all] matters is in their center. God said *And thus we made you a community in the middle*[162] which means: chosen, upright. Also, the Almighty said *And thus said those in their midst* [lit. In the middle of them],[163] meaning the best among them, those superior among them”[164]

This led Tha‘abī to list several different views on what the best prayer is. He reports several *ḥadīth*s mentioning that the best prayer, and thus the middle prayer, is the early dawn *fajr/ṣubḥ* because, according to Tha‘alabī (citing Ibn ‘Abbas), the early dawn prayer lies exactly between the darkness of the night and the brightness of the day.[165]

Understanding what prayer the *ṣalāt al-wusṭā* is referring to is admittedly complicated. However, it might be useful to look at this middle prayer against the background of the times of prayer we have addressed in the previously analyzed

[159] Mālik ibn Anas, *Al-Muwaṭṭa*, 155.
[160] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhāri*, vol. 6, 56.
[161] Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī - Jām‘u al-Bayāni ‘an Ta’wīili ‘āy al-Qur’āni*, vol. 5, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir & Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif li-Miṣr, 1954), 167
[162] See Qur’ān 2:143
[163] See Qur’ān 68: 27
[164] al-Tha‘labī, *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 348. Translation of this passage and the Qur’ānic citations mine.
[165] *Ibid.*, 348-353.

verses. Although this will be the subject of the next section, it is safe to say that, broadly speaking, the Qur'ān tends to identify prayer as a diurnal service. This tendency becomes explicit starting from the III Meccan period onward, as the night vigil becomes a voluntary duty and the number of diurnal prayers begin to increase. The focus on the day is important because it gives a temporal framework for which a middle point can be identified. In this connection, the Qur'ān itself talks about *ṭarafā n-nahār*, the two ends of the day associated with sunrise and sunset, which, if one attempts logical reasoning, automatically invalidate Mālik and Tha'alabī's identification of *ṣalāt al-wusṭā* with *fajr*. Consequently, the most reasonable times for the recitation of this middle prayer might be during noon or the afternoon. However, we have seen in *sūra* 30:17-8 that the number of prayers increased to four: at forenoon, at noon, in the late afternoon, and evening: the only temporal slot available for the *ṣalāt al-wusṭā* would be between noon and the late afternoon, resembling Bukhārī and Ṭabarī's identification with the *'aṣr*.

Sūrat al-'Isrā' (17:78-9)

'aqimi ṣ-ṣalāta li-dulūki sh-shamsi 'ilā ghasaqi l-layli wa qur'āna l-fajri 'inna qur'āna l-fajri kāna mashhūd[an] 78

Wa mina l-layli fa-tahajjad bi-hi nāfilat[an] *la-ka 'asā 'an yab'atha-ka rabbu-ka maqām*[an] *mmaḥmūd*[an] 79

Sūrat al-'Isrā' is commonly held to be Meccan, but, as we have seen above, Nöldeke claims that verses 78 and 79 have been revealed in Medina. The reason behind this claim lies in the abolition of the compulsory status of the night vigil, in a similar fashion to what it can be read in 73:20. However, verses 78 and 79 present us with several interesting issues that need to be broken down and carefully assessed.

Verse 78 opens with the collocation between the verb *qāma*, in the imperative tense of its IV form *'aqāma*, and the substantive *ṣalāt* discussed above. Muḥammad and his believers are thus commanded to keep on reciting their prayers, whose dedicated times are referred to with the expression *li-dulūki sh-shamsi 'ilā ghasaqi l-layli*. More in detail, according to al-Zamakhshārī (d. 1143), the verb *dalaka* (to rub, press, squeeze), stemming from the same root of *dulūk* (ك - ل - د), appears in a verbal idiom with the substantive *shams* (sun), namely *dalakati sh-shams*, meaning "the sun

set” as those who look at it would be forced to rub their eyes.[166] A more specific definition of *dalakati sh-shams* comes from the Baṣran grammarian Abū Isḥāq al-Zajjāj (d. 922), who understood it as referring to the sun’s passing of the meridian at noon.[167] It follows that *dulūk ash-shams* featured in verse 78 refers to the sun going past its zenith as it approaches the setting phase. Consequently, *ghasaq al-layl* can be understood as “the first part of the night/evening”, as Arab lexicographers describe it as the time when the red halo of the setting sun has disappeared, and the evening/night becomes completely dark.[168] Hence, *li-dulūki sh-shamsi ’ilā ghasaqi l-layli* can be read as “at the sun’s passing of the zenith until (*’ilā*) the night/evening is completely dark.” The presence of the preposition *’ilā* gives a sense of a temporal continuity between *dulūk* and *ghasaq*, which suggests that, unless the Qur’ān is explicitly ordering Muḥammad to incessantly pray during the daytime, the verse is referring to at least three times of prayer: one at noon, one in the evening immediately after sunset, and one or more prayers due sometimes in between them. Ṭabarī follows a similar line of reasoning, relating *li-dulūki sh-shamsi* to *ẓuhr* and *‘aṣr* prayers, and *ghasaqi l-layli*, which he understands as *’iqbāl al-layl wa ẓalāmihi* (“beginning of the night and its darkness”), to *maghrib*.[169]

Verse 78 continues by mentioning that the recitation (*qur’ān*) of early dawn (*fajr*) is witnessed (*mashhūd*^an^). The idea that the *fajr* recitation is somehow witnessed finds an echo in a tradition reported by al-Bukhārī (reported by Tha‘alabī and Ṭabarī as well) on the authority of the Companion Abū Hurayra (d. 681), according to which the angels of the night and those of the day assemble at early dawn: this makes the *fajr* prayer, if recited in congregation, twenty-five times superior to its recitation while being alone.[170] In any case, the presence of the word *qur’ān* in verse 78 is particularly interesting because it is utilized as a technical term, perfectly reflecting the meaning of its Syriac analogous *qeryānā*. The usage of the term *qur’ān* in Medinan *sūra*s is discussed below in our comment to *sūra* 73:20.

Verse 79, as we have already mentioned, sanctions the end of the compulsory status of night vigils, which are here explicitly identified with the verb *tahajjada*. As a

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[166] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 3, s.v. dalaka.
[167] *Ivi*; Badawy and Abdel Haleem report a similar reading, see: *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Use,* s.v. d-l-k.
[168] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 6, s.v. dalaka.
[169] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 57.
[170] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhāri*, vol. 6, 193; cfr, Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 57; al-Tha‘labī, *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*, vol. 16, 427.

matter of fact, the verse states that night vigils should be carried out as a supererogatory duty (*nāfilat*^{an}) in order to obtain spiritual benefits: as the verse states, Muḥammad should do it “so that your Lord can raise you to a station of praise” (*‘asā ’an yab‘atha-ka rabbu-ka maqām*^{an} *mmaḥmūd*^{an}). It is worth noting that Islamic tradition understands this latter hemstitch as specifically pertaining to the Prophet: for example, according to al-Bukhārī, who reports a tradition on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar (d. 693), the “station of praise” identifies the role that Muḥammad will have during Judgment Day as intercessor to God for the sake of believers.[171] The supererogatory status of the night vigil is further reinforced in the last verse of *sūrat al-Muzzammil*, which we will analyze below.

Sūrat al-Nūr (24:36)

fī buyūt^{in} *’adhina l-lahu ’an turfa‘a wa yudhkara fī-hā smu-hu yusabbiḥu la-hu fī-hā bi-l-ghuduwwi wa l-’aṣāli* 36

Coming right after the famous “light-verse,” featuring one of the most beautiful and potent similes of the Qur’ān, verse 36 of *sūrat al-Nūr* sanctions two times of prayer, in what appears as a further confirmation of the idea that the day is delimited by two ends.

More in detail, the light of God mentioned in verse 35 is presented here as dwelling, or shining, in specific houses (*buyūt*) which God gave the order to build (*’adhina l-lahu ’an turfa‘a*) and in which his name ([*’i*]*smu-hu*) is remembered (*yudhkara fī-hā*). The most common explanation of this hemstitch holds that *buyūt* actually refers to mosques, although Edwards reports how the Baṣran grammarian Abū al-Ḥasan al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 835) understood *buyūt* as identifying Jerusalem (*bayt al-muqaddis*), with the plural as a mark of honor.[172] Hence, verse 36 claims that God is exalted in these *buyūt* during the early hours of the day (as *ghuduww* identifies the time between daybreak and sunrise)[173] and in the evening (*’aṣāl*).[174]

[171] al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhāri*, vol. 6, 193-4.
[172] *Arabic - English Lexicon*, Part 1, s.v. bayt.
[173] *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Use,* s.v. gh-d-w.
[174] *Ibid*., s.v. ’-ṣ-l.

Sūrat al-Muzzammil (73:20)

’inna rabba-ka ya‘lamu ’anna-ka taqūmu ’adnā min thuluthayi l-layli wa niṣfahu wa thuluthahu wa ṭā’ifat^{un} *mmina l-ladhīna ma‘-ka wa allahu yuqaddiru l-layla wa n-nahāra ‘alima ’an llan tuḥṣū-hu fa-tāba ‘alay-kum fā-qra’ū mā tayassara mina l-qur’āni ‘alima ’an sa-yakūnu min-kum mmarḍā wa ’akharūna yaḍribūna fī l-’arḍi yabtaghūna min faḍli l-lahi wa ’akharūna yuqātilūna fī sabīli l-lahi fā-qra’ū mā tayassara min-hu wa ’aqīmu ṣ-ṣalāta wa ’atū z-zakāta wa ’aqriḍū l-laha qarḍ*^{an} *ḥasan*^{an} *wa mā tuqaddimū li-’anfusi-kum min khayr*^{in} *tajidū-hu ‘inda l-lahi huwa khayr*^{an} *wa ’a‘ẓama ’ajr*^{an} *wa staghfirū l-laha ’inna l-laha ghafūr*^{un} *rraḥīm*^{un} 20

The last verse of *sūrat al-Muzzammil* is particularly interesting to read against the background of the verses that precede it. It is much longer than the other verses making up the *sūra*, in its formulation it is much closer to a prosaic hortatory sermon (to put it in Neuwirth’s terms) rather than a Psalmic or *saj‘*-like injunction, and it also slightly breaks the rhyming pattern of the *sūra*, as verse 20 ends with the nunation -*un* of the indefinite nominative case while the rest of the *sūra*, with the exception of the first verse, features a consistent rhyme built on the nunation of the indefinite accusative -*an.*[175] These features all point to the concrete possibility that it is a Medinan addition, which is further reinforced by the nature of its content.

The verse opens with an explicit mention of the night vigil. God is portrayed as aware of the effort that Muḥammad and his followers (*wa ṭā’ifat*^{un} *mmina l-ladhīna ma‘-ka*) make while carrying out the vigil: the Prophet is described as standing (*taqūmu*) alternatively for almost two-thirds of the night, half, or one-third of it (*thuluthayi l-layli wa niṣfahu wa thuluthahu*), a reprisal of night vigils’ duration theme featured in verse 2, 3, and 4. Evidently, the varying length of the vigils is due to the inability on the part of Muḥammad and the believers to keep track of the time spent in prayer during the night (*llan tuḥṣū-hu*) whose real duration, together with the real duration of the day, is a measure known to God alone (*wa allahu yuqaddiru l-layla wa n-nahāra*). Nonetheless, the believers repent for this (*fa-tāba ‘alay-kum*), prompting in so doing the mitigating intervention of God. In fact, the verse states that the believers may perform their ritual recitations for as long as they deem it bearable (*fā-qra’ū mā tayassara mina l-qur’āni*). This divine decision is presented here as

[175] Albeit short and long vowels, as well as nunations, rhyme in classical poetry , the break from a very specific and consistent pattern in 73:20 seems arguably suspicious.

springing out of God's mercy, as among the believers there might be those who are sick (*marḍā*), those who roam the earth in search of God's bounty (*'akharūna yaḍribūna fī l-'arḍi yabtaghūna min faḍli l-lahi*), and those who struggle for God's cause (*'akharūna yuqātilūna fī sabīli l-lahi*) who because of their predicaments would not be able to comply with long nightly recitations. After reiterating the command to perform recitations as long as the believers see it fit, verse 20 reminds the faithful of the duty to perform prayer (*'aqīmu ṣ-ṣalāta*) and comply with almsgiving (*wa 'atū z-zakāta*). The character of the night vigils, now a supererogatory duty, is presented as an edifying action to the benefit of one's soul, as the good deeds done during one's lifetime (*mā tuqaddimū li-'anfusi-kum min khayr^in^*) will be ultimately found back in God's reward (*wa mā tuqaddimū li-'anfusi-kum min khayr^in^ tajidū-hu 'inda l-lahi*).

It is worth commenting on the several interesting points that this verse touches upon. The expression *fā-qra'ū mā tayassara mina l-qur'āni* is particularly ambiguous, as alongside the substantive *qur'ān*, it uses the verb *qara'a* which takes both the meaning of "recite" and "read." This leaves the door open to wonder whether the verse is referring to the Qur'ān as a fully-fledged written scripture (and thus understanding *qara'a* as "reading") or as a mnemonic recitation of Psalm-like prayers, as we have discussed in our comment to verses 1-9 of *al-Muzzammil*. Answering this question is arguably difficult, however, it might not be improbable that at this stage of revelation, ritual recitations composing prayer moved gradually from being centered on Bible-inspired Psalm-like texts, as we have seen in *al-Muzzammil*, to gravitating specifically towards Qur'ānic *sūra*s. This claim might find support in the history of the early redaction of the Qur'ān. As we have seen above, Aziz al-Azmeh has talked about the existence of numerous traditions regarding folios (*ṣuḥuf*) containing *sūra*s excerpts written down by Muḥammad's Companions or even dictated by the Prophet himself[176] which eventually made up the basis of the 'Uthmanic vulgate. The truthfulness of these traditions might rightfully arouse skepticism, but the existence of the Stanford and, above all, the Birmingham manuscripts of the Qur'ān (dated respectively to 670 and 540-645) strongly suggest that portions of the Qur'ān were already fixed in writing in all likelihood before the end of Muḥammad's Prophetic career. However, we know that these *ṣuḥuf*, and probably even the first "complete" editions of the Qur'ān dating before the standardization of orthography operated by

[176] Aziz Al-Azmeh, 'Canon and Canonisation of the Qurʾān'.

al-Ḥajjāj in the VIII century (as the Stanford and Birmingham manuscripts show), were written in a defective style as their role was to aid the memorization of the Qur'ān: this is particularly telling, as it highlights a recurrent theme in early Arabic Islamic literature, that is, the tension between memorization and written fixation. This tension is perfectly summarized by the verb *qara'a*, which might well take on both the meanings of "reading" and "reciting" in a verse that purposely aims at this ambiguity. Consequently, the word *qur'ān* featured in *fā-qra'ū mā tayassara mina l-qur'āni* might well refer to the Qur'ānic corpus that in the Medinan period started to take form, both in its written and mnemonic fixation.

Another point worth commenting on is the wording *fā-qra'ū mā tayassara min-hu wa 'aqīmu ṣ-ṣalāta* which appears at the end of the verse. The juxtaposition between the command to recite from the *qur'ān*, which is here characterized as part of night vigils, and the injunction to carry out *ṣalāt* creates a dialectic tension between prayer and vigil and presents the former as a distinct form of worship to the latter. This distinction between *ṣalāt* and *tahajjud* (the Arabic name for night vigil) could be the result of a ritual development whose beginning might be traced already during the III Meccan period, as *sūra* 30:17-8 commands the believers to pray during the day (*latu sensu*, including evening) without mentioning prayers to offer specifically at night.

2.2.5 Conclusion

In this section, we will attempt to summarize the findings of our reading of the Qur'ānic verses regulating the times of prayer. The set relative to the I Meccan period is the smallest, as it is composed of only *sūra* 73:1-9. It is one of the longest Qur'ānic excerpts regarding prayer and among the most interesting to analyze. As regards how it disciplines the times of prayer, *sūra* 73:1-9 mentions only the so-called night vigil.

	Before Sunrise	*Sunrise*	*Noon*	*Afternoon*	*Before Sunset*	*Sunset*	*Evening*	*Night vigil*
I Meccan Period								**73:1-9**

Table 4 - *Times of Prayer in the I Meccan Period*

The set relative to the II Meccan period is the second largest we analyzed, which posed numerous challenges during the interpretation of the Qur'ānic text. Across the three Qur'ān's excerpts constituting the set, there seems to be a tendency to sanction three moments for worship, namely the night vigil plus two diurnal prayers. In particular, identifying the times of the two diurnal prayers has been complex, but the three texts in our set feature broadly the same wording pointing towards two key moments of the day located sometime before or around sunrise and sunset. These moments are either overtly specified as in *sūra* 20:130 and 52:48-9 (*qabla ṭulūʿi sh-shamsi wa qabla ghurūbi-hā*, *qabla ṭulūʿi sh-shamsi wa qabla l-ghurūbi*) or indirectly by mentioning the act of awakening or the astronomical notion of the setting of the stars, as in 52:48-9 (*ḥina taqūmu*, *ʿidbāra n-nujūmi*). These two moments seem to be particularly relevant, as the Qur'ān needs to specify that they are the "ends of the day."

	Before Sunrise	*Sunrise*	*Noon*	*Afternoon*	*Before Sunset*	*Sunset*	*Evening*	*Night vigil*
II Meccan Period	**20:130 50:39-40 52:48-9**	(20:130) (50:39-40) **52:48-9**			**20:130 50:39-40**	(20:130) (50:39-40)		**20:130 50:39-40 52:48-9**

Table 5 - *Times of Prayer in the II Meccan period*

The theme of the "ends of the day" is reiterated also in the subset pertaining to the III Meccan *sūra*s, and specifically in 11:114. However, in the two excerpts composing the subset, the only common theme found regards the night vigil. If 11:114 features three times of prayer, in what seems a continuation of the II Meccan themes, then 30:17-8 brings about a radical liturgical change which strongly suggests the establishment of four daily prayers (*ḥīna tumsūna wa ḥīna tuṣbiḥūna*, *fī* [...] *ʿashīy^{an} wa ḥīna tuẓhirūna*), in which the night prayer time is shifted towards the time immediately following sunset, similarly to what 11:114 states (*zulaf^{an} mmina l-layli*).

	Before Sunrise	*Sunrise*	*Noon*	*Afternoon*	*Before Sunset*	*Sunset*	*Evening*	*Night vigil*
III Meccan Period	**11:114 30:17-8**	(30:17-8)	**30:17-8**	(30:17-18)	**11:114** (30:17-8)	**30:17-8**	**11:114 30:17-8**	

Table 6 - *Times of prayer in the III Meccan period*

The largest set analyzed pertains to the Medinan verses. As with the III Meccan *sūra*s, these verses do not share a single ubiquitous theme when it comes to disciplining the times of prayer. *Sūra* 24:36 is a clear reprisal of the "[two] ends of the day" theme (*bi-l-ghuduwwi wa l-'aṣāli*), featured in 17:78-9 as well (*li-dulūki sh-shamsi 'ilā ghasaqi l-layli*) and probably expanded to cover the times featured in 30:17-18. 17:78-9 however, brings about another radical change regarding the night vigil, which from its original compulsory status sanctioned in the I and II Meccan period, it is here described as supererogatory (*nāfilat*^{an}). The theme of the voluntary night vigils is shared in 73:20. *Sūra* 2:238 stands out not for sharing themes with the other excerpts, but for introducing the "middle prayer," to be offered probably during the afternoon.

	Before Sunrise	*Sunrise*	*Noon*	*Afternoon*	*Before Sunset*	*Sunset*	*Evening*	*Night vigil*
Medinan period	**17:78-9** **24:36**	(24:36)	**17:78-9**	**2:238** **17:78-9**	(17:78-9)	**17:78-9**	**24:36** **17:78-9**	73:20

Table 7 - *Times of prayer in the Medinan period*

When compared with one another, the several prayer time indications featured in our data *set* delineate a clear developmental arch, as Table 8 shows:

	Before Sunrise	*Sunrise*	*Noon*	*Afternoon*	*Before Sunset*	*Sunset*	*Evening*	*Night vigil*
I Meccan Period								**73:1-9**
II Meccan Period	**20:130** **50:39-40** **52:48-9**	(20:130) (50:39-40) **52:48-9**			**20:130** **50:39-40**	(20:130) (50:39-40)		**20:130** **50:39-40** **52:48-9**
III Meccan Period	**11:114** **30:17-8**	(30:17-8)	**30:17-8**	(30:17-18)	**11:114** (30:17-8)	**30:17-8**	**11:114** **30:17-8**	
Medinan period	**17:78-9** **24:36**	(24:36)	**17:78-9**	**2:238** **17:78-9**	(17:78-9)	**17:78-9**	**24:36** **17:78-9**	**73:20** **(voluntary)**

Table 8 - *Times of prayer compared*

As it can be noted from the data reported in Table 8, the origin of a five-fold daily service in early Islam can be traced in the Qur'ān, and specifically, it appears to have originated in Medina as the final byproduct of a process of liturgical development that

started in Mecca. The forces that shaped this developmental arch can be many and traceable within the complex socio-religious environment that the Prophet Muḥammad and his early community of believers encountered during the formative years of Islam. In other words, the presence of Jewish and Christian groups mentioned oft-times polemically in the Qur'ān, and their changeful relationship with the early Muslim community, might have been one of the most decisive influences in the establishment of the Islamic prayer. This will be the subject of the next Chapter.

Chapter III - Investigating the liturgical development of *ṣalāt*

In Chapter II we have seen how Qur'ānic references to times of prayer indicate that the Islamic daily liturgy, composed of five prayers, came about as the byproduct of a process of ritual development that spanned across the various stages of revelation. In this chapter, we will attempt to analyze some causes that might have informed Muḥammad's introduction of this ritual system, namely the influence deriving from Jewish and Christian liturgies adopted in Arabia predating the very birth of Islam.

3.1 *Liturgical developments in the I and II Meccan periods*

We have seen above that the I Meccan period describes only one prayer, the night vigil called *tahajjud*. The first nine verses of *sūrat al-Muzzammil* describe Muḥammad engaging in some sort of spiritual exercises which entailed recitations (*qur'ān*), arguably from some sort of lectionary. We have then compared these verses with the coenobitic rule of John Cassian, highlighting the strong similarity between them. In light of this, it is worth wondering how plausible is a connection between Muḥammad's vigils and the Desert Fathers' worship. This, in turn, means addressing how present was the monastic movement in Arabia, and if the existence of an Arabic Bible is plausible.

According to Irfan Shahid, the IV and especially the V century saw a substantial spread of monasticism in Arabia. The Arabs, who considered the desert their natural homeland, were starkly impressed by monks and their willingness to live their ascetic life there.[177] A clear example of this reverence can be found in the *Life of St. Hilarion* (written in 390 by St. Jerome), depicting numerous Arab people welcoming the saint and asking him to bless them during his visit to Elusa, the at-the-time capital city of the Roman province of *Palaestina Tertia* located in northern

[177] Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006 [first edition 1989]), 529.

Negev.[178] According to Shahid, the monastic movement was much more effective in penetrating Arabia than the organized Church, and the few surviving sources that mention monasteries outside the *limes* of the Byzantine Empire locate them in strategic places along the caravan routes connecting the Mediterranean with Southern Arabia. This, according to Shahid, had a clear implication: the spread of Christian ideals in Central Arabia either directly, as a consequence of the monastic activity in the region, or indirectly thanks to caravaneers who would sojourn in monasteries during their travels and engage with monks.[179] Specifically, Shahid mentions that in the region of Wādī al-Qurā located north of Medina in the Ḥijāz, the monastic presence was attested.[180] In addition, it should be remembered how after the Byzantium-sponsored Ethiopian invasion of the Ḥimiyarite Kingdom in the 520s, South Arabia experienced an intense Christianizing effort, and the town of Najrān became an important Christian center in the Peninsula.[181] In this connection, Barbara Finster reports how the Tihāmat coastal plain and the mountainous formations bordering it were largely Christian, and the presence of the word *dayr* ("monastery") in numerous toponyms north of the port of al-Ḥudayda, might indicate the presence of monasteries in the Arabian South.[182] Shahid and Finster's overview of the monastic presence in Arabia is extremely informative, especially if seen against the backdrop of what we can muster of the historical Muḥammad's biography. As Sean Anthony notes, both the Qur'ān (as in *sūra* 106; 16:7,80; 30:9, 25:20, and so on) and contemporary non-Muslim sources (above all the chronicles of Jacob of Edessa, d. 708) convincingly depict Muḥammad as a merchant, a claim confirmed, albeit partly, by the hagiographic retelling of the Prophet's life.[183] Should this be true, then it would not be too far-fetched to posit that Muḥammad could have met the monks living along the caravan routes he frequented, from whom he could acquire notions of the monastic prayer habits that are hinted at in *sūrat al-Muzzammil*.

[178] Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006 [first edition 1984]), 288-9.
[179] Irfan Shahid, *Fifth Century,* 525-6
[180] *Ibid*., 526
[181] Irfan Shahid, "Byzantium in South Arabia," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 33 (1979): 25; See also Irfan Shahid, "Islam and *Oriens Christianus*: Makka 610-622", in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity With Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 18-24.
[182] Barbara Finster, "Arabia in Late Antiquity: An Outline of the Cultural Situaiton in the Peninsula at the Time of Muhammad," in *The Qur'ān in Context - Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Max Marx (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 70.
[183] Sean Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, "Muḥammad the merchant."

A different and somewhat more difficult task is to ascertain whether the recitations Muḥammad performed during the vigils were based on an Arabic lectionary. In this connection, Shahid has argued that, since the chances to find a full-fledged translation of the whole Bible in the three centuries before the rise of Islam are next to nil, the Arabic rendition of *parts* of the Bible must have been part of the creation of an Arab liturgy in the IV century, when the tribe of *banū Tanūkh* first became federate[184] with the Byzantine Empire.[185] Shahid derives the existence of this liturgy, of which there is however no direct proof, based on several arguments on the linguistic maturity of the Arabic language, its usage by federate Arabic tribes in the IV century onwards (which ultimately witnessed the establishment of a federate Arabic Church) and the growing presence of a simple yet substantial Arab ecclesiastic hierarchy within those tribes. If such a liturgy existed, then portions of the Bible such as psalms, prayers, lessons, and all the scriptural material which would appear in a liturgical setting, could have been translated into Arabic and appear in the form of a lectionary.[186] The places candidate as probable Bible translation centers are three according to Shahid: Syria, Mesopotamia (especially the city of Ḥīra), and above all Najrān in Yemen, where the earliest mention of an Arabic gospel appeared in the V century:[187] these are all places that Muḥammad could have visited because of his occupation as a merchant, although Najrān seems particularly relevant, as Muḥammad demonstrates to know about its martyrological history in the Qur'ān.[188] Shahid's claims, should they turn out to be true, would have a tremendous impact on the reconstruction of the Qur'ān's intellectual history. The presence of an Arabic lectionary based on the Bible could in fact provide Muḥammad with the necessary material to inform the composition of the earliest *sūra*s, which amply paraphrase the Psalms (as Neuwirth has proven)[189] and inspire the usage of the word *qur'ān* as a technical term for lectionary, mirroring the meaning of the Syriac *qeryānā*.

The introduction of two diurnal prayers around 615-616, which we identify with the II Meccan period, instead, might have two possible explanations. The first, and more probable, deals with the cults of the Meccan *ḥarām*, while the second is

[184] Namely, allied with the Roman Empire. The Roman juridical institute called *foedus* was essentially a treaty formally regulating the relations between the Empire and external populations.
[185] Irfan Shahid, *Fourth Century*, 435-6.
[186] *Ibid.*, 438-442
[187] *Ibid.*, 442; see also Irfan Shahid, *Fifth Century*, 427.
[188] Specifically in Qur'ān 85:4-8, recalling the martyr of Christian belivers ordered by the Jewish Ḥimiyarite king Dhū Nuwās.
[189] Angelika Newirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 72-3.

linked with Christian Late Antique Arab liturgy. Angelika Neuwirth, as we have seen in Chapter I, has sought to show how the origin of the early Islamic prayer has to be found in the cults of the Kaʿaba, which entailed the performance of sacrifices.[190] Among the many Qur'ānic passages that seem to hint at these practices, 108:2 seems particularly compelling, as it orders to "pray and sacrifice to your Lord" (*fa-ṣalli li-rabbi-ka wa nḥār*). That the combination of sacrifices and prayer in pre-Islamic religion was a widespread practice is widely confirmed both in literary sources, such as the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq and the *Kitāb al-'aṣnām* ("Book of the Idols") of Hishām ibn al-Kalbī (d. 819/821),[191] as well as in recent scholarship on material culture.[192] What these sources do not, or cannot, tell us is whether these rites were performed daily, and, if so, when. However, an argument by analogy can be built based on what we know about ancient Near Eastern religions in general. Broadly speaking, in these religions, the performance of sacrifice and recitation of prayer could be associated with the regular care of deities, as the sacrifice in particular accounted for their daily nourishment: this means that such ritual offerings were meant twice a day.[193] We find this kind of practice in the Hittite as well as in Mesopotamian cults, and, of course, in the Hebrew Bible.[194] Naturally, in Near Eastern religions, sacrificial rites were centered on two main elements, a temple and a priestly caste (as in the case of the Temple worship in Jerusalem), and interestingly enough, when it comes to pre-Islamic Arabian religion, the former ceased to be used around the III/IV century,[195] while the latter, according to what we can grasp from Safaitic inscriptions,[196] never appears.[197] However, this does not imply that a form of daily, perhaps private, combination of prayer and sacrifice to offer at dawn and dusk, in line with the other Near Eastern traditions, did not exist in Arabia, *a fortiori* in Mecca where the Kaʿaba was an important shrine and pilgrimage destination.[198] If this argument bears some

[190] See page 14-5; see also Angelika Newirth, "The Liturgical Qur'an," 213-4.
[191] See: Hishām ibn al-Kalbī*, Kitāb al-'aṣnām*, translated by Faris, Nabih Amin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952.
[192] See: al-Jallad, Ahmad. *The Religion and Rituals of the Nomads of Pre-Islamic Arabia - A Reconstruction Based on the Safaitic Inscriptions*. Leiden: Brill, 2022.
[193] Roy E. Gane, "Ritual and Religious Practices", in *The Oxford Handbook of Ritual and Worship in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Samuel E. Ballentine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 227-8.
[194] See Exodus 29:38-42 and Numbers 28:1-8.
[195] Barbara Finster, "Arabia in Late Antiquity," 66-7.
[196] Safaitic is a particular form of south-Semitic script used roughly around the II and III century in lithic inscriptions scattered across Northern Arabia, Jordan, and Southern Syria.
[197] Ahmad al-Jallad, *The Religion and Rituals*, 19.
[198] Al-Jallad noticed how prayer, intended as a spontaneous plea or request, appears often on Safaitic inscriptions as accompanying the memorial of sacrifice. In addition, in these inscriptions, sacrifice was coupled with the erection of a "ritual shelter", which finds typological parallels in the Jewish Tabernacles -later supplanted by

truth, then Muḥammad's command to pray around sunrise and sunset would reflect the ritual times that were already in place in the environs of Mecca during the early stages of revelation. The reason why the Prophet would do that is simpler than one might expect: his, and his earliest followers' familiarity with these ritual duties. In other words, it stands to reason that Muḥammad, in an attempt to win over new followers at the beginning of revelation, set up a ritual system that would resonate with the people of Mecca, who were already accustomed to the specific ritual times of Mecca.

Another explanation for the introduction of two diurnal prayers in the II Meccan period might be built on Shahid's argument on the existence of an Arab liturgy and lectionary. We have seen above that Shahid identifies South Arabia as the place where Bible translations into Arabic, and consequently the formation of an Arab liturgy, were more probable to happen. What remains to determine is what kind of liturgy that might have been. We know that the Ethiopian invasion of Ḥimyar in the 520s was conducted under Byzantine assent and determined the Christianization of South Arabia.[199] The strong alliance between the two powers of Byzantium and Ethiopia in the VI century thus made possible not only that the Red Sea became "virtually a Christian lake," as Shahid puts it, but also that the area could be put under Byzantine influence.[200] This state of affairs remained in place until 572 when the Persian Empire invaded South Arabia.[201] As a consequence, this region was put under the Eastern Christian/Nestorian influence, similar to what already happened before in the Arabian East Coast and the Persian Gulf.[202] Interestingly enough, the Eastern Church was liturgically tied to what the historian Stig Frøyshov calls the "Antiochian sphere," which means that it shared many core features with the West Syrian, Jerusalemite, and Armenian liturgies.[203] These liturgies, in particular after the IV century, were centered on two major daily offices, namely Matin and Vespers, which in turn found their Biblical justification in Psalms 62 and 50, as regards the former,

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Jerusalem's Temple- and, strikingly, in the earliest depictions of the Meccan Ka'aba's origins. See Ahmad al-Jallad, *The Religion and Rituals*, 19-20; 40.

[199] Irfan Shahid, "Byzantium in South Arabia," 25.

[200] *Ivi.*

[201] *Ivi.*

[202] Barbara Finster, "Arabia in Late Antiquity,"70.

[203] Stig R. Frøyshov, "The Book of Hours of Armenia and Jerusalem: An Examination of the Relationship Between the *Žamagirk'*and the *Horologion*.", in *Studies in Oriental Liturgy - Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress of the Society of Oriental Liturgy, New York, 10-15 June 2014*, ed. Bert Groen, Daniel Galadza, Nina Glibetic and Gabriel Radle (Leuven, Paris, Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2019), 111.

and Psalm 140, as regards the latter.[204] Hence, if the Persian, and consequently Eastern Christian, influence in Yemen lingered on to the time of Muḥammad's revelation, it would not be unreasonable to imagine that he could be exposed to the Eastern Christian liturgy, and thus to the Matin and Vesper offices, for the same reasons he could attain knowledge of the monastic vigils and the Psalms in the first place: his travels as a merchant. Qur'ān 106:1-4 mentions two annual expeditions, one held in winter and one during summer, and very early Muslim historiography tells us that the former usually headed to Yemen, while the latter to Syria: Najrān, the most important Christian settlement of the South, was located precisely on the caravan route that linked the northern outskirts of Arabia with Yemen, and it was also its hub.[205] This means that the probability that Muḥammad could enter into direct contact with the Christianity in Yemen, their liturgy, and their scripturalistic material could be rather high. It follows that Muḥammad could have introduced this twofold diurnal liturgy out of his prior knowledge of Christian worship in Arabia, as he could have done with the night vigils.

3.2 *Liturgical developments in the III Meccan period*

The III Meccan period is a rather peculiar stage of the development of a daily liturgy in Early Islam, as it appears as a transitional moment between the II Meccan 2+1 liturgy (meaning two diurnal prayers plus night vigil) and the Medinan five prayers. This transitional nature is expressed clearly in the difference in content between 11:114, sanctioning three moments of prayer in line with II Meccan dispositions, and 30:17-8, which instead fixes four times dedicated to worship. Accounting for this cleavage is admittedly difficult, but a tentative argument is not impossible to build. However, to do so, it is necessary a brief digression on the II and III Meccan *sūra*s' contents.

One of the most interesting features of II and III Meccan *sūra*s is polemics, as they testify to Muḥammad's engagement with his opposers on matters of faith. The

[204] Stig R. Frøyshov, "The Formation of a Fivefold Cursus of Daily Prayer in Pre-Constantinian Christianity: Backward Inferences from Later Periods", In *TOXOTÊS. Studies for Stefano Parenti*, ed. Daniel Galadza, Nina Glibetić & Gabriel Radle (Grottaferrata, 2010), 126-8.

[205] Mikhail D. Bukharin, "Mecca on the Caravan Routes in pre-Islamic Antiquity", in *The Qur'ān in Context - Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Max Marx (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 118; 127.

principal addressees of Muḥammad's polemics are polytheists, or in Qur'ānic parlance "associators" (*al-mushrikūn*). Verses 59 and 60 of *sūra* 27 perfectly summarize Muḥammad's stance towards them:

> "Say: praise be to God and peace be upon His chosen servants. Is God better or what they associate to Him? (59) Or He who created the heavens and the earth and made water pour from the sky so that we made gardens of delight grow with it, whose trees you would never be able to grow? Is there a god with God? No, but they are a people who assign equals to Him (60)."[206]

Knowledge of God is fundamental to counter any tendency toward associationism or disbelieving, and, in this, the concept of scripture is central, as only those who believe in a revealed sacred Book can save themselves from disbelieving, as *sūra* 31 states:

> "Have you not seen that God subjected to you all that is in the heavens and the earth, and lavishly bestowed upon you His bounties, manifest and unmanifest? But among the people there are those who dispute God without knowledge, or guidance, or an enlightening scripture. (20)"

Thus, Muḥammad draws a clear line between those who, out of ignorance, refute cognition of God through the revealed Word he is bringing them and those who instead have been the recipients of a *kitāb munīr*, an enlightening script, which are arguably identifiable with his Jews and Christian peers. However, receiving a holy scripture is not enough to avoid straying from the right path, as II and III Meccan *sūra*s depict also a Muḥammad vigorously engaging in debate with the other monotheistic religions. These disputations must have been bitter to endure for the Prophet, as the numerous exhortations asking him to be *patient* show. For example, the already analyzed II Meccan *sūra*s 20:130 and 50:39-40 explicitly tell Muḥammad to resort to his patience against the arguments of his Meccan opposers, while 52:48-9 exhorts the Prophet to steadfastly endure his Lord's decrees. But it is in the III Meccan period where Muḥammad's disputations with monotheists reached their highest magnitude and gravity: *sūra* 11 depicts an embattled Prophet who is also tempted to keep part of his revealed knowledge hidden as his very prophethood is challenged by his peers, causing him anxiety and distress:

[206] In this Chapter, all translations from the Qur'ān are mine.

> “Perhaps you are abandoning part of what has been revealed to you, and you feel apprehensive because of that, as they say ‘why has not a treasure sent down on him or an angel not come with him?’ Indeed, you are but a warner, and God, over everything, is a Guardian. (12)”

This excerpt summarizes one of the many possible points of contention between Muḥammad and the other monotheistic groups which accused him of false prophecy because he, unlike Moses in Exodus 31:18, did not possess a physical manifestation of God’s Word, the “treasure” featured in the verse above. In this connection, the juxtaposition between Muḥammad and Moses is central in the earliest stages of Qur’ānic revelation, where the former’s prophetic mission is presented as a continuation of that of the latter. Perhaps, verses 2 and 9 of *sūra* 17 are the best at representing this image when read together:

> “And We gave Moses the Book and made it a guidance to the Children of Israel so that they shall not take any Guardian other than Me. (2) Verily, this Qur’ān guides to that which is the most upright and gives good tidings to the believers who do deeds of righteousness, as a great reward awaits them. (9)”

These two verses create a direct dialectical connection between the Book of Moses, by recalling the first commandment, and the Qur’ān through the idea of *guidance*. Once again, the holy revealed scriptures, and the divine knowledge therein is depicted as the only antidote to the deviations from the straight path of absolute monotheism. The consequence of this rhetoric in 17:2 and 9 is clear: the equation between the Children of Israel, their salvation history, and Muḥammad’s followers, the *mu’minūn*. This implies that the Covenant of Moses, once an exclusive prerogative of Israel and *mutatis mutandis* the Jewish people of Arabia, is here reaffirmed and extended to those who accept the revelation of Muḥammad. It is not far-fetched to imagine that the Arabian Jews in particular would negatively react and dismiss these claims by challenging the Prophet to provide them with an unquestionable proof of his legitimacy: a physical scripture.

The point of the digression above is to understand Muḥammad’s stance towards the Jewish and Christian groups of his time and place, as this can inform us of his choices as regards liturgy. In the Qur’ān, polemics is not necessarily tied to a

solely repulsive movement or the attempt to entirely disassociate the Prophet from his peers. In its quest to purge the precedent divine revelations of their corruptions, Muḥammad's prophecy, almost counter-intuitively, can also take him closer to them: it is the case of the identification of the early Islamic community with the Israelites, and consequently with Arabian Jews, which we know had also some important consequences on the Prophet's adoption of some collateral Jewish ritual elements. Neuwirth has argued that the proof of the orientation of prayer (the *qibla*) toward Jerusalem, a Jewish ritual habit, can be found already in the II and III Meccan *sūra*s, in particular in 17:1,[207] while we know from tradition that the Prophet, again, similarly to the Jews, used to fast during 'Āshūrā', identified with the Day of Atonement.[208] This might be telling, especially if read in tandem with how II and III Meccan *sūra*s structure their discourse on Christian doctrinal elements. Particularly cogent is Neuwirth's assessment of how *sūrat Maryam* (19), by reshaping the story of Mary and Zachariah, essentially "corrects" its Christian interpretation that depicts the Church's inheritance of the Temple service. Consequently, Jerusalem's Temple is never understood as a Church (*miḥrāb*) but always as a place of worship (*masjid*) reflecting the "original" Israelite-Jewish tradition.[209] It seems reasonable enough to posit, then, that in II and III Meccan *sūra*s we see two opposed tendencies as regards the relationship between the early Islamic community and the other monotheistic religions: a tendency towards getting closer to Israelite-Jewish history and practices on the one hand and a moderate distancing from Christian doctrines on the other.

In this connection, the cleavage we mentioned above between the three times of prayer of *sūra* 11:114 and the four times of 30:17-8 might be the liturgical reflection of these opposing tendencies we have just discussed. Muḥammad, as it transpires from the earliest dispositions on prayer, was likely to have a clear knowledge of Christian prayer habits whether or not he structured the two diurnal prayers of the II Meccan period on the Matin and Vespers services of the Eastern Church. However, if we assume that the night vigils were abolished not only formally but also substantially in Medina, the other three times of prayers sanctioned in 30:17-8, namely in the morning, at noon, and upon sunset seem to align with the usual times

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[207] Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 286-288.
[208]For example, see: Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhāri*, vol. 3, 132; see also: Wensinck, A.J. and Marçais, Ph., "ʿĀshūrāʾ", in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 11 July 2023 <http://dx.doi.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0068>.
[209] Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 289-290.

for the recitation of the *shema* and/or the *amidah* of the post-II-Temple rabbinic liturgy, namely sunrise/morning (*shacharit*), noon/afternoon (*minchah*), and sunset/evening (*ma'arib*). In particular, it is worth noting that *minchah* is reminiscent of the afternoon sacrifice at the Temple, which was in turn subdivided into two services: the "great *minchah*", due at the sixth and one-half hour (that is, a half-hour past noon), and a "lesser *minchah*" due at the ninth and one-half hour (thus well into the afternoon).[210] Interestingly enough, the Jewish communities in the Middle East (as well as in Rome) seem to have preferred the recitation of the "great *minchah*."[211] In general, it appears that the Jewish fixed times of prayer find their scriptural justification in Psalm 55:17: "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice."[212] This liturgy, it should be recalled, saw the beginning of its fixation in its three-fold configuration already in the II and III centuries.[213] But even if Judaism in the Middle East upheld the recitation of the "great *minchah*" how plausible is it that the rabbinic liturgy was widespread in Arabia at the time of the Prophet? According to Reuven Firestone, it is unlikely that rabbinic Judaism (and consequently its liturgy), which was yet to be fixed in its most distinctive features in the VII century, was present in Arabia at the time of the Prophet. Instead, Firestone claims that the Arabian Peninsula, "largely desolate" and "not a regular stop for travellers moving within the 'Fertile Crescent,'" probably housed non-rabbinic Jews for the most part.[214] Firestone's considerations seem to have been built upon a debatable assessment of Arabia's peripherality in the Late Antique Jewish world, as both material culture and Mishnaic literature depict an Arabian Jewry that erected synagogues (especially in Yemen) closely resembling in their style those of other lands of the Diaspora and was preoccupied with following rabbis' take on halachic matters (such as food, clothing, and so on).[215] Hence, if it may well be true that non-rabbinic Judaism found a safe haven in Arabia after the fall of the

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[210] Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy. A Comprehensive History* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 84.
[211] Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, 84.
[212] Shelomo Dov Goitein, 'Prayer in Islam', 85.
[213] Tzvee Zahavy, "Political and Social Dimensions in the Formation of Early Jewish Prayer: the Case of the Shema`," from the *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem, Division C, Vol. 1, pp. 33-40, Jerusalem, 1990.
[214] Reuven Firestone, "Jewish Culture in the Formative Period of Islam," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*. Ed by D. Biale (New York: Schocken, 2002), 280.
[215] For a comprehensive history of Arabian Judaism, see Newby, Gordon Darrel. *A History of the Jews of Arabia - From Ancient Times to Their Eclipse Under Islam*. Columbia: South Carolina University Press, 1988; as regards material culture, see Tobi, Yosef. "The Jews of Yemen in Light of the Excavation of the Jewish Synagogue in Qanī' (Poster)." *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 43* (2013): 349–56. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43782890; lastly, see *Mishnah Shabbat* 6:6; *Ketubot* 67a:9; *Rosh Hashannah* 26a:17.

Temple, it is equally true that the presence of its rabbinic counterpart was substantial. This, in turn, means that realistically the rabbinic liturgy was practiced in Arabia as well. In this connection, J. Spencer Trimingham reports that the Jewish presence was also attested in Yathrib (then known as Medina), and in the already mentioned Wādī al-Qūra.[216]

All the information discussed above points toward a rather peculiar conclusion. To summarize, II and III Meccan *sūra*s betray somewhat of a "Judaizing" tendency, as the progressive identification of the early Islamic community with the Children of Israel and the adoption of some Jewish ritual customs suggest; at the same time, they also depict a moderate distancing from specific doctrinal elements of Christianity. This seems to support the idea for which the introduction of four times of prayer in 30:17-8 might be somewhat of a 3+1 system, where three diurnal prayers are fixed alongside the night vigil, which we know from *al-Muzzammil* was essential for the descent of revelation. These three prayers, then, because of Muḥammad's progressive interest in Jewish history and customs, might have been structured to somehow recall the tripartite rabbinic liturgy featuring a morning, noon (as in the Middle Eastern Jewish tradition), and afternoon service. This claim is further supported by the substantial attestation of rabbinic Judaism in Arabia in both literary sources and archaeological findings.

	Before sunset	*Sunset*	*Forenoon*	*Noon*	*Afternoon*	*Sunset*	*Evening*	*Night*
Rabbinic liturgy (Middle East)	*Shacharit*	(*Shacharit)*		*Great Minchah*	*(Lesser Minchah)*	*Ma'arib*		
30:17-8	**30:17-8**			**30:17-8**		**30:17-8**	**30:17-8**	

Table 9 - *The rabbinic times of prayer vs. Qur'ān 30:17-8; in brackets the alternative times of recitation of Shacharit and Minchah.*[217]

3.3 *Liturgical developments in the Medinan period*

[216] J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London, New York: Longman, 1979), 283.
[217] Cfr. With *Mishna Berakhot* 4; Isaak Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979), 13.

The last liturgical developments in Mecca were, however, short-lived, as in Medina two major changes occurred: the abolition of the night vigil and the addition of the "middle prayer" to the others established in Mecca. Here the Qur'ān is once again crucial to retrieve the necessary information to contextualize these developments.

The introduction of a five-fold daily liturgy in Islam was accompanied by one of the most crucial changes in terms of ritual behavior, namely the fixation of the prayer direction to Mecca. As we have seen above, there is evidence in II and III Meccan *sūra*s of the adoption of Jerusalem as the place to which early Muslims could direct their prayers, following, in so doing, an analogous ritual habit of their Jewish peers. The change of the *qibla* is reported in verses 142 to 145 of *sūrat al-Baqarat*, the second and longest chapter of the Qur'ān:

> "The foolish among the people will say: ' What made them turn from the direction of prayer they used to face?' Say: 'East and West belong to God, He guides whom He wills to a straight path.' (142) Thus, we have made you a community in the middle, so that you may be witnesses to the people, and the Messenger a witness to you. We have not appointed the direction of prayer you used to face except to distinguish who follows the Messenger from whom that turns on his heels. Indeed, it was a grievous matter except to those guided by God: He does not leave your faith unrewarded. Verily, to the People, God is the all-Kind, the Merciful. (143) We have seen you turning your face towards the sky, so we will now make you turn to a direction of prayer you will be satisfied with. Thus, turn your face towards the Holy Mosque; wherever you are, turn your faces towards it. Those we have given the Book surely know that this is the truth from their Lord, and God is never unaware of their deeds. (144) And even if you provided those whom we gave the Book with every proof, they would not follow your direction of prayer, nor are you to be a follower of theirs, nor are some of them to be followers of each other's direction. Should you follow their capricious desires after the knowledge we have bestowed upon you, then, verily, you will be among the wrongdoers. (145)"

There is reason to believe that, given the natural connection between prayer and its direction, the change of *qibla* and the sanctioning of five daily prayers have a common cause, which is worth examining. In this connection, much scholarship has sought to interpret why would Muḥammad direct the prayers of his community toward Mecca (identified above by the wording Holy Mosque). Angelika Neuwirth has drawn an interesting parallel between 2:142-5 and 1 King 8:23-53, essentially underlying how, just as the exiled Jewish community in Babylon in the VI century

BCE reflected on their exile through Solomon's establishment of the Jewish *qibla* towards the Temple Mount, the Meccan direction of prayer was a Muslim coping mechanism, based on a Biblical blueprint, for their own Medinan exile. This reflection must have been all the more important as Neuwirth recalls, the Qur'ānic regulation of the *qibla* can be dated to 624, the year of the Battle of Badr.[218] The consequence of Neuwirth's reasoning is that the *qibla* change was likely not a move signaling Muḥammad's ill will towards the Medinan Jews. Similarly, Shelomo Dov Goitein excluded the idea that the initial Muslim *qibla* toward Jerusalem was a political move aimed at winning over the Jews in Medina, and instead understands the changes in 2:142-5 as the final stage of a specific process of ritual development, for which at first any direction was licit, then Muḥammad would adopt Jerusalem, only to later try other directions (here Dov Goitein references 2:139 and 144) before finally sanctioning Mecca.[219]

Other scholars, instead, opted for a different interpretation of the *qibla* change, framing it within the Medinan political context where the powerful Jewish tribes, the strongest political actors in the city, would ultimately collide with the newly established Muslim community.[220] According to Claudio Lo Jacono and Ira M. Lapidus, the Muslim-Jewish relations in Medina became increasingly strained because of the Jewish resistance to accept Muḥammad as a prophet in line with the Biblical tradition, and thus betraying the Prophet's expectations of a mass conversion upon his arrival in Medina. Consequently, the change in the direction of prayer should be read as a reflection of this conflictual state of affairs.[221]

Whatever the real motives behind the fixation of the Meccan *qibla* in Medina might be, a common denominator of all the scholarly takes on this subject is understanding it as an identitarian claim. In effect, this is reflected in the Qur'ān, as Medinan *sūra*s feature numerous passages operating clear divides between Muḥammad's community and the People of the Book and describing the firm opposition that the Prophet faced,[222] unambiguously suggesting that Muḥammad's reflections on his role and mission reached the point in which he could define himself

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[218] Angelika Newirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 334-5.
[219] Shelomo Dov Goitein, 'Prayer in Islam', 85-6.
[220] For a comprehensive assessment of the political clash between Muḥammad's community and the Jewish tribes in Medina, see: Firestone, "Jewish Culture in the Formative Period of Islam," 282-291.
[221] Claudio Lo Jacono, "Le religioni dell'Arabia preislamica e Muḥammad,"61; Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 117.
[222] For example, see: 4:151-3; 2:135-7, 142-144.

and his community with clear terms against the other socio-religious groups of Medina.[223] Therefore, it is not unreasonable to posit that the institution of a five-fold daily liturgy in Medina might have taken place for the same reason for the change of *qibla*: the affirmation of a distinct religious identity. In effect, The addition of the afternoon "middle prayer" and the formalization of the evening prayer signal a departure from the typical times of prayer of the rabbinic liturgy, which we have seen above could have informed the 3+1 liturgical system sanctioned in Mecca. But if we can conclude that the fivefold liturgical system in Islam could have been established for identitarian reasons, then *why* would Muḥammad introduce precisely *five ṣalawāt*?

This question, which has occupied the mind of many a scholar (as we have seen in Chapter I),[224] could arguably have two possible explanations: either Muḥammad fixed that number without a precise reason out of his own ingenuity, or it was a conscious choice informed by his knowledge of the prayer traditions hosted in Arabia. Let us focus here on the second hypothesis. By process of elimination, it is unlikely that the Prophet would inform his liturgical developments in Medina on Jewish ritual habits for the matters of identity discussed above; in addition, it should be noted that Abraham I. Katsh's claim about the native Arabian Jewish tradition to pray five times instead of three[225] seems at this point rather weak: we have seen above that the rabbinic liturgy began its fixation process in the II/III century and that Arabian Jews were concerned with correct ritual practice. *Mishnah Shabbat* 6:6 (regulating the veiling of Jewish Arab women), *Ketubot* 67a:9 (mentioning marriage settlements of Arab women), and *Rosh Hashanah* 26a:17 (mentioning Rabbi Akiva's travels in Arabia) contain rulings and pronouncements by rabbis that explicitly address Arabian Jews as early as the I century. This advocate in favor of the Arabian participation in the developing rabbinic movement during Late Antiquity. Furthermore, it is also unlikely that the number of five prayers comes from native

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[223] Perhaps, the source that best represents this is the Constitution of Medina, a pact signed by Muḥammad and the Medinan Jews and polytheists, produced sometime around 624 -the year of the *qibla* change- although the original document has been lost. Nonetheless, its text has been preserved by early Muslim traditionists, in particular Ibn Isḥāq and Abū 'Ubayd (d. 838), and modern scholarship (even 1970s revisionists) generally hold these reported versions as reliable. Hence, the twenty-eighth article of the Constitution, introducing the chapter formalizing the relations between Muḥammad's community and the Jewish tribes, states *li-yahūd dīnuhum wa li-l-muslimīna dīnuhum*, namely "To the Jews their religion and to the Muslim their religion," suggesting that even if Muḥammad might have expected Jews to follow him *en masse* when he first arrived in Medina in 622, this hope was ultimately abandoned by 624: hence, the *qibla* change followed, as well as the need for a clear and formal separation between the two religions. The text of the Constitution of Medina can be found (in Arabic) here: Lecker, Michael. *The "Constitution of Medina," Muḥammad's First Legal Document*. Princeton: Darwin Press, 2004.

[224] See Chapter I, 4-9.

[225] See page 6.

Arabian polytheist cults, because, even though we do not have direct proof of the number of their daily prayers, information about ancient Near Eastern religions seems to pivot around sacrifices offered twice a day.

Consequently, if Muḥammad based his liturgical changes in Medina upon a pre-existing model, its source must have come from a Christian environment. In his reconstruction of the IV century daily Christian service, Frøyshov provides us with a possible path to follow: he noticed how the aforementioned John Cassian, in his *Institutions*, claimed that in the monasteries of the Middle East, the canonical times of prayer were the following: Matin, Third hour, Sixth hour, Ninth hour, and Vesper.[226] This fivefold daily liturgy, according to Frøyshov, originated sometime around the IV century, when two different liturgies, one celebrating the two Major Hours (Matin and Vesper) and one celebrating the so-called Minor Hours (Third, Sixth, and Ninth) progressively conflated.[227] The implications of Frøyshov's research are crucial in our context. We have already seen the striking similarities between the way Muḥammad carried out his nightly vigils in Mecca and the nighttime monastic prayers described by Cassian, which led us to assume that the Prophet had some direct knowledge of the prayer habits of Christian monks thanks to his trading expeditions throughout Arabia. Hence, it is not that far-fetched to hypothesize that Muḥammad, given his deteriorating relations with the Jews of Medina, who firmly opposed his claim to prophethood, decided to abandon the rabbinic-like liturgical dispositions he laid out earlier in Mecca in favor of the adaptation of a system he already knew. This hypothesis is supported by the way the Qur'ān frames the relationship between Muḥammad and Christian monks as it appears from Medinan polemics.

As Sidney H. Griffith reports, in most of the Qur'ānic passages of concern for Christians, they are usually not explicitly referred to as such, as the Qur'ān opts for the wording *ahl al-kitāb*, People of the Book, including the Jews as well.[228] This might be telling, especially if taken *vis-a-vis* the notion that most of the instances where *ahl al-kitāb* appears in the Qur'ān belong to the Medinan period. Specifically, this suggests that, in Medina, Muḥammad purposefully attempted to distance himself and his community from Jews (as we have seen above) *and* Christians at the same

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[226] Stig R. Frøyshov, "The Formation of a Fivefold Cursus of Daily Prayer in Pre-Constantinian Christianity,"122.
[227] *Ibid*., 134.
[228] The Qur'ānic term for Christian is *naṣārā*, "Nazarenites;" Sidney H. Griffith, "Christians and Christianity", in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, Vol. I., 2001, Brill.

time, which is compatible with the identitarian claims that characterized his prophetic activity during this period. *Sūra* 3 illustrates this tendency particularly well:

> "Abraham was neither a Jew, nor a Christian; instead, he was one who submitted to the One God [*ḥanīf^{an} mmuslim^{an}*] and not one of the associators (67)"

In this verse, Griffith notes how the claim that Abraham was somewhat of a proto-Muslim reflects Muḥammad's view that Jews and Christians fell away from the primeval Abrahamic faith.[229] In so doing, Islam is contrastively defined against both the precedent monotheistic religions, which are equally framed as a deviation from the right path of Muḥammad's absolute monotheism. However, despite placing Christianity and Judaism on the same doctrinal level, Muḥammad did not proceed to frame his relationship with both religions on the same terms. In this regard, there are two Qur'ānic verses revealed in Medina suggesting that Muḥammad's stance towards Christians was not necessarily as confrontational as with the Medinan Jews.

In particular, *sūra* 3, again, claims that among the People of the Book, there are some who manage to live uprightly. It is worth looking at how these individuals are characterized:

> "They are not all the same: among the People of the Book there is an upright community; they recite the revelations of God during the watches of the night and prostrate themselves. (113)"

This verse is particularly interesting to read against our study of the first eight verses of *sūrat al-muzzammil*. If our interpretation is correct, and thus *al-muzzammil* shows that Muḥammad knew about monastic prayer traditions already in Mecca, then 3:113 can be read as an indirect reference to the monks' vigil. In this connection, Griffith reports how the Qur'ān sometimes describes Christian monks with rather amicable terms,[230] citing the second Qur'ānic passage worth focusing on, namely *sūra* 5:82:

> "Indeed, you will find that, among the people, the strongest opposers of those who believe are the Jews and the associators; instead, you will find in those saying 'I am a Christian' the closest friends of those who believe. That is because among them there are priests and monks, and they are not prone to arrogance. (82)"

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[229] Sidney H. Griffith, "Christians and Christianity."
[230] *Ibid.*

Here, the Qur'ān makes a clear-cut division between Jews and Christians based on Muḥammad's assessment of their behavior towards his followers. The key element for this assessment is the concept of *arrogance* expressed with the verb *istakbara*, whose semantic field conjures up the idea of someone considering themselves great or significant.[231] By negatively applying *istakbara* to monks, the Qur'ān creates a subtle rhetoric play, for which the Medinan Jews are ultimately depicted as the arrogant ones, in all likelihood because of their opposition to Muḥammad's prophetical claims, and the monks, despite being doctrinally wrong as Christians, are instead worthy of praise because they, as 3:113 states, prostrate (and submit) themselves and recite the revelations of God at night. Hence, it appears that Muḥammad retained some sort of sympathy for the monastic liturgy throughout his entire prophetic career and even considered it a prerequisite for being morally upright: the long survival of the night vigils in the three Meccan periods is clear evidence of this, while we have seen how in Medina only their compulsive nature changed, but were still held in high esteem. Given these premises, it is reasonable that the Prophet's sympathy towards the Christian monastic liturgy, the basis of the only constant liturgical element during his Meccan days, would naturally draw him towards the adoption of a fivefold worship resembling that of the Middle Eastern monasteries as a reaction to the deteriorating relations between him and the Medinan Jews. However, there is still one last key element to factor in our discussion: Muḥammad's identitarian claims.

As a matter of fact, we have said above that the establishment of five daily prayers in Medina can be read as the articulation of the Prophet's reflections on his and his community's religious identity, similar to the *qibla* change to Mecca and the institution of Ramaḍān's fasting. This means that Muḥammad could not just copy the liturgical habits of monks, as it would defeat his purpose of establishing clear boundaries between his and the other religious communities. Hence, the fivefold monastic liturgy necessarily had to undergo a process of adaptation, whose result is shown below.

	Before sunrise	*Sunrise*	*Forenoon*	*Noon*	*Afternoon*	*Before sunset*	*Sunset*	*Evening*	*Night vigil*

[231] More in detail, *istakbara* is the tenth form of the root *k-b-r*, related to the concept of being *big*, not only in the physical sense, but also metaphorically. In the Arabic language, the tenth form, characterized by the prefix *ista-*, describes, instead, the act of seeking, or thinking, to be something in relation to the concept expressed by the triconsonantal root, in our case *k-b-r*. Hence, *istakbara* describes an individual who consider themselves *big* (*latu sensu*), which is the definition of arrogance.

Christian Liturgy of the Hours	Matin		Third Hour	Sixth Hour	Ninth Hour		Vesper	**Compline**	**Nocturn**
Prayer in 30:17-8 and Medinan Period	**17:78-9** **24:36** **30:17-8**			**17:78-9** **30:17-8**	**2:238** **17:78-9**		**17:78-9** **30:17-8**	**24:36** **17:78-9** **30:17-8**	**73:20** **(voluntary)**

Table 10 - *Christian Liturgy of the Hours vs. Qur'ānic five prayers*

Table 10 shows exactly the discrepancy between the five prayers retrieved in Medina and the daily Christian Liturgy of the Hours as reported by Cassian. We have decided to show also the times reported by 30:17-8, as with the exclusion of 2:238 (sanctioning the "middle prayer"), it conforms with the other times listed in 17:78-9 and 24:36. The essential noticeable discrepancies are two, as the Qur'ān does not sanction a prayer for the forenoon,[232] when the Liturgy of the Hours would officiate the Third Hour service, while it appoints a prayer during the evening, roughly around the time of Compline: this is a central point, as the Liturgy of the Hours that Cassian reports is a *diurnal* (*stricto senso*, daytime from sunrise to sunset) system, as the Compline, Midnight, and Nocturnal services are a separate *nocturnal* cycle.[233] This leads us to conclude that the Medinan liturgical developments find a reasonable explanation only if they are read as Muḥammad's attempt to adapt this liturgy to his identitarian needs, creating, in so doing, a distinct daily service.

[232] It should be remembered that in 30:17-8, the prayer indicated with the verb *tuṣbiḥūna* can be offered *as dawn enters* until noon. Since the other prayer time indications more or less explicitly call for a prayer due before sunrise/as dawn enters, we will understand 30:17-8 in such fashion.
[233] Stig R. Frøyshov, "The Formation of a Fivefold Cursus of Daily Prayer in Pre-Constantinian Christianity,"122.

Chapter IV - Conclusions

The subject of *ṣalāt*, despite its crucial relevance in the lived experience of millions of Muslims around the world, has surprisingly drawn the attention of very few scholars of Islam. In the attempt to cover this research gap, the present work tried to understand *why* Muslim believers pray five times every day and *when* this ritual obligation was enjoined upon them. The Introduction has presented the scant scholarship dealing with the same questions, highlighting as well its shortcomings. In essence, there are three such caveats: 1) a tendency towards reductionism, explaining the origin of the Islamic fivefold daily liturgy as nothing more than offshoots of either exclusively Christians or Jewish analogues. In contrast to this view, we have posited the possibility of a much more complex history of Islamic prayer, where the influence of Christianity and Judaism could simultaneously be at play in very nuanced ways and on various levels already at the time of the Prophet; 2) the lack of research focused specifically on the history of *ṣalāt*; 3) the lack of rigorous comparative research on prayer with pre-Islamic analogues, which we have understood as a consequence of the previous two points. To avoid falling into these pitfalls, this study has sought to approach the history of Islamic liturgy with a twofold approach.

First of all, this work has been highly *scripturalist*. The decision to focus on how the Qur'ān disciplines the times of prayer has been informed by some considerations we have made on how the *ḥadīth*-based literature deals with this subject. In particular, we have roughly estimated that the notion of five daily prayers, featured in the *'isrā'/mi'rāj* and visiting-Gabriel traditions, can be dated in this literature already in the early VIII century, which led us to wonder if the Qur'ān could have been its ultimate source. Naturally, working with the Qur'ān meant also addressing the various scholarly takes on its history, challenging Muḥmmad's authorship and its composition in the VII century. In the evident impossibility to prove beyond doubt that Muḥammad is responsible for the Qur'ān's composition, we pointed out that research on the earliest known manuscripts of the Qur'ān, the Stanford and the Birmingham exemplars, have proven their exceptionally early origin, which is compatible with the commonly accepted time-frame of the Prophet's life (570-632). Subsequently, we identified in Chapter II the Qur'ānic verses dealing specifically with the times of prayer, and then we arranged them according to Theodore Nöldeke's

chronology of revelation, with small adjustments proposed by us. In so doing, we aimed to trace the fivefold liturgy's developmental arch throughout the four stages of revelation identified by Nöldeke. Then, we attempted a thorough word-by-word reading of the verses in conversation with classical Islamic and also modern exegetical and lexicographic scholarship.

The data extracted from our reading of the Qur'ān has been subsequently interpreted in Chapter III against what modern scholarship has accomplished to reconstruct of the the socio-religious environment of pre-Islamic Arabia. When possible, our interpretation has been markedly *comparativist*, as we sought to link the liturgical developments of early Islam during the various stages of revelation with pre-existing Jewish, Christian, or native Arabian/Middle Eastern polytheistic rituals. In particular, we compared the liturgical developments in the Qur'ān with the monastic tradition of the Desert Fathers (as reported by John Cassian), the Christian liturgy of the Hours, the rabbinic Jewish daily liturgy, and the Ancient Near Eastern cults centered on sacrifice offering. The cornerstone of our comparativist approach is the contemporary theoretical framework in Islamic studies that understands Islam as a full participant in the Middle Eastern *sectarian milieu* of Late Antiquity.

4.1 *Study findings*

Our textual analysis of the Qur'ān has produced several results that we will now attempt to summarize.

First of all, the Qur'ān did not sanction five times of prayer right at the onset of Muḥammad's prophetic career. Instead, upon establishing a chronological order of the verses dealing with the number of prayers, it is possible to notice that the Qur'ān refers to a fivefold liturgy only in Medina. In addition, the Qur'ān never refers, in any of its *sūra*s, to five daily prayers explicitly. Instead, it either mentions specific times of prayer, with expressions such as "at sunrise," "at noon" etc., or intervals of time, with expressions such as "from noon to dusk." This means that the number *five* is achieved by adding (as in the case of the "middle prayer" of 2:238 or the noon prayer in 30:17-8) or subtracting (as with the abolition of the night vigil in 73:20) times of prayer. This introduction and abolition of times of prayer may have been the

consequence of Muḥmmad’s rational choices based on the socio-political challenges he faced during his prophetic career and his reflections on identity. This seems even more plausible if one looks at liturgical development against the modality in which polemics is carried out in the Qur’ān throughout the stages of revelation, the litmus test of Muḥammad’s engagement or disenfranchising with the socio-religious groups of his time and place.

In the I Meccan period (609/10-615), the first and only mention of prayer is in *sūrat al-Muzzammil* (73) which fixes it at night, and its description is strikingly similar to the nightly monastic prayer reported by John Cassian in his *Institutions*. Given the substantial presence of monasteries in Northern Ḥijāz and Southern Arabia, attested from the IV century onwards, it is not improbable that Muḥammad could be exposed to monastic ritual practices. This is even more realistic in light of the various sources that tell us that the Prophet was a caravaneer, as monasteries were located on strategic points along trade routes and often welcomed merchants stopping by. This would also explain why *al-Muzzammil* calls upon Muḥammad to recite from the *qur’ān*, recalling in so doing the Syriac word for Biblical lectionary (*qeryānā*), and also why the I Meccan *sūra*s paraphrase extensively the Psalms. In fact, Najrān in South Arabia seems to be the most likely candidate for the translation of the Bible (or parts of it) into Arabic, which could have taken place as early as the IV century. In addition, Najrān was located along the route linking Syria with South Arabia and served as its hub. If Muḥammad was a merchant, then he would most likely have visited it for his trades.

In the II Meccan period (615-6), the daily liturgy was composed of two diurnal prayers (dawn and sunset) plus the night vigil. The daytime prayers are explainable in two possible ways. For example, they might reflect the times of sacrifice offerings at Mecca: although there is no direct proof of a twofold sacrificial liturgy in pre-Islamic religion, temples ceased to be used in the III/IV century, and a priestly caste was nonexistent, in all ancient Middle Eastern religions sacrifices were offered at dawn and sunset as it accounted for the Gods’ nourishment. Consequently, by analogy, it would not be far-fetched to imagine a twofold sacrificial liturgy taking place at Mecca, whose dedicated times could inspire Muḥammad’s liturgical choices in this period. The reason why he would fix prayer times according to Mecca’s times for sacrifice is rather straightforward: it could help him win over new converts among Meccans. Alternatively, they could also come from the Christian liturgy of the Hours,

specifically of the Syriac Church. We know that from the 570s onwards Southern Arabia was under Persian influence, which made possible the spread of the Nestorian/Eastern Church in the region. This Church largely conformed to the Antiochean sphere of influence liturgically-wise, which means it celebrated the so-called two Major Hours, Matin and Vespers, officiated respectively at sunrise and sunset. The Prophet could have attained this knowledge thanks again to his trading expeditions.

In the III Meccan period (618-622), the two *sūra*s fixing the number of prayers present us with contrasting rulings: *sūrat Hūd* (11) sanctioning three times, two diurnal (dawn and daybreak) plus evening prayer, and *sūrat al-Rūm* (30) fixing four, three diurnal (dawn, noon, and sunset) plus evening prayer. Since we know that the night vigil would be abolished in Medina, we assumed that the evening prayer might still be the vigil, whose time would be anticipated in a probable foretelling of its future abolishment. The addition of the noon prayer in *al-Rūm* might find an explanation in the progressive identification of the Islamic community with the Israelites through the adoption of several ritual habits (such as the Jerusalemite *qibla* and the fasting during the Day of Atonement), the appropriation of Biblical salvation history, and Muḥammad's equation with Moses. Thus, the Prophet structured his liturgy in this period to resemble the Middle Eastern threefold rabbinic system (*shacharit, greater minchah, ma'arib*). The presence of rabbinic Judaism (and consequently its liturgy) in Arabia at the time of the Prophet can be inferred by material culture as well as the embeddedness of Arab Jews in the rabbinic movement hinted at in Mishnaic sources.

In the Medinan period (622-632) we finally see a liturgical system comprising five prayers in total, thanks to the abolishment of the night vigil and the addition of the "middle prayer" which we understood as referring to an afternoon service. This development followed, of has been followed by, the abandonment of the Judaizing practices hitherto adopted by Muḥammad, namely fasting during Yom Kippur (replaced by the month of Ramaḍān) and the change of the *qibla* from Jerusalem back to Mecca. These changes aimed to affirm the early Islamic movement's matured identity against the Jews of Medina, who strongly opposed Muḥammad's prophethood, as suggested in 2:142-5. Hence, there is no reason to doubt that the fivefold daily service sanctioned in Medina was established for the same reason. The number of *five* prayers might again be a Christian influence, as John Cassian

explained that, already in the IV century, monasteries in the Middle East prayed five times daily: at the two aforementioned Major Hours and the three Minor Hours (Third, Sixth, and Ninth). Since Muḥammad already structured his vigils on a monastic model, and Qur'ānic polemics in Medina shows his appreciation for monks and their prayers, it is plausible that the Prophet would introduce the fivefold daily service adapting the Liturgy of the Hours to complete his total disenfranchisement from Jewish ritual practices. However, the discrepancy between the liturgy of the Hours and the five daily prayers of the Qur'ān suggests that Muḥmmad did not just copy Christian habits, as it would have run counter to his identitarian needs, but ingenuously adapted it in an independent Muslim liturgical system.

4.2 *Suggestions for further research*

Despite the effort of tracing a plausible and rigorous historical reconstruction of the Islamic fivefold liturgy's origins, any such study tends to contain conjectural elements and, arguably, it could not be otherwise given the evident limitations that the sources we interrogated presented us. For example, we have touched upon in Chapters I and II how the Qur'ān provides us with only vague insights on prayer and, although an internal subdivision of its chapters is indeed possible, linking them to identifiable historical events, which would help establish a clear chronology of revelation (and thus the history of prayer), is, as Nöldeke conceded, problematic. A similar discourse could be made for the *ḥadīth*-based literature, characterized by many issues as regards its reliability as a primary source unless dedicated methods of inquiry, such as Motzki's *isnad-cum-matn,* are applied. This means that every attempt to trace the development of the Islamic fivefold liturgy *vis-a-vis* the socio-religious environment of Arabia during Late Antiquity (whose reconstruction is itself highly conjectural, as Shahid's research on the Arabic Bible has shown) will necessarily leave some margins of uncertainty. However, we believe this should not be treated as a weakness or a symptom of the impossibility to extract valuable historical data on Muslim rituals (or, for that matter, every subject dealing with the earliest Islamic history). Rather, we believe this uncertainty should be regarded as a point of departure and an invitation for further study. In this connection, there are some possible lines of research that

might use the conclusions of this study as a starting point that can reduce said uncertainty whilst deepening our understanding of early Islamic ritual.

In the Introduction, we have estimated that the earliest mention of five daily prayers in extra-Qur'ānic sources can be dated to the early VIII century. However, our dating is admittedly rough and calls for substantial refinement, as the *'isrā'/mi'rāj* and visiting-Gabriel traditions in particular might be much older. In this sense, the above-mentioned *isnad-cum-matn* methodology introduced by Harald Motzki could be the best tool for accomplishing this end. Naturally, this would imply the simultaneous assessment of a large corpus of *ḥadīth*s, which is, in and of itself, a complex but necessary task for better understanding the genesis of these exegetical stories. In addition, a study such as this would also provide further decisive proof that the establishment of Islam's fivefold liturgy took place during Muḥammad's lifetime.

The strong similarity between the description of Muḥammad's night vigil and the analogous monastic prayer of John Cassian might also represent a suitable line of research. In this study, the comparison between the two services has been only superficially sketched, but we believe a much more in-depth contrastive reading of the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*s, and Cassian's *Institutions* might shed considerable light on the genesis and early developments of Islamic prayer. If a link between Muḥammad's night vigil and monastic prayer could be established, an analysis such as this one could also further our understanding of the monastic presence in VII century Arabia as well as indirectly provide strong signs for the existence of a Christian Arabic liturgy/Bible at the time of the Prophet.

Lastly, the findings of this study might be useful to undertake a detailed comparative analysis of Islamic prayer with Christian and Jewish worship that goes *beyond* the history of their number. This means carrying out a side-by-side study where the single ritual behaviors (such as recitations from scripture, their position within the liturgy, and body movements during prayer) in Islam are assessed against the Jewish and Christian analogues. Should strong similarities emerge together with plausible explanations, then such a study would undeniably prove that Jewish and Christian traditions did play a crucial role in the development of *ṣalāt.*

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