“Understanding” in Revelation: the root ‘-Q-L in the Qur’ān

Thesis

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Abstract

Western scholars and Muslim exegetes alike are of one voice in conceptualizing the Qur’ānic verb ‘aqala as “understand.” Noting an opportunity to pry at a rarely-questioned spot in the consensus of Qur’ānic studies, this thesis attempts -- following the methodologies of Richter (1971) and Isutzu (1995, 2002) and within the framework given by Nöldeke and Schwally (1909) -- to expose new semantic depths of the root ‘-q-l (occurring exclusively as the verb ‘aqala) as it appears in the Qur’ān. Using a diachronic literary, syntactic, semantic, and lexical approach, the depth of the field(s) occupied by ‘-q-l will be explored, providing insights potentially valuable to translators and students of the Qur’ān.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated with love to my Mom and Dad
Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the suggestion, guidance, mentorship, and constant encouragement of Professor Georges Tamer, my advisor, who receives my sincerest and life-long gratitude. I would also like to thank Professors Snjezana Buzov and Bruce Fudge for their assistance, patience, and insightful criticism. Particular gratitude belongs to my family and friends, especially Charlie Campbell, without whose moral support and friendship this work – and this author – would have no doubt disintegrated. Special thanks as well to all who contributed to this research, especially the staff of and my graduate colleagues in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Professors Asma Afsaruddin and Catherine Schlegel as well as Mrs. Joan Marie Florence “Flo” Van Dyke for their inspiring examples.
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INTRODUCTION AND PROLEGOMENA

Introduction

It is remarkable to consider the vast number of coherent theological, philosophical, and social constructs present in the Qur’ānic discourse. These elements – the symbolic bedrock forming the cornerstones of the Islamic belief system – find their expression in the array of textual and semiotic signs embodied in the received codex (muṣḥaf) of the Qur’ān itself.¹

Assuming the investigation of individual Qur’ānic concepts is of benefit to scholars and to the discipline of Qur’ānic Studies,² it is worthwhile to investigate the semantic depths proposed by erstwhile definitively defined words. The purpose of this preliminary investigation is not to usurp long-held traditional exegesis, but rather to begin, however haphazardly, the exploration of a never-before identified substratum of semantic value within a root – ʿ-q-l – whose meaning seems to have been exhausted long ago. Close philological examination, comparison of usage, and diachronic analysis of the various forms of the root can reveal a number of interesting insights: literary analysis implies that the verb ʿaqala has a connotation not only of ―understand‖ but ―convert‖; lexical research and irregular usage analysis reveal that it also may indicate a measure of

“restraint”; finally, analysis of the root and its use in certain parts of the mushaf will disclose existing semantic liabilities – related to sense, thinking, behavior, and God – that may aid more precise translation in the future.

Prolegomenon

No scholar, Muslim or otherwise, seems to have any serious concern with the root ‘-q-l as it appears in the Qur’ān. In the realm of Islam, a scan of commentaries and the exegetical tafsīr literature confirms this: at sūrah 3:65, for example – revealed, according to tradition, at the near midpoint of Muhammad’s Medinan output – it is argued that Abraham, the great patriarch, was neither a Christian nor a Jew on account of the fact that “the Torah was not sent down, neither the Gospel, but after him. Have you no understanding” (a-fa-lā ta‘qilūna).

On this assertion – clear to anyone even passably familiar with the Biblical Abraham narrative and its putative position in historical time – Ayoub, in his verse-by-verse collation of tafsīr from the most prominent Qur’ānic exegetes and commentators, records the fervent and passionate disputation of: ʿat-Ṭabarī; Ibn Kathīr; al-Qurṭubī reporting az-Zajjāj (“this verse constitutes the clearest argument against the Jews and Christians. This is because both the Torah and Gospel were sent down later”); az-Zamakhsharī (“how could Abraham be a follower of a religion which came into being long centuries after him?”); ar-Rāzī, who, as a scholastic theologian, takes pains to protect this logic from damaging Islam’s own claim on Abraham’s lineage, which he upholds (“Islam, in fact, came long after him … the fact that the Qur’ān was sent down
after him also does not preclude his having been a Muslim … the Qur’ān says that Abraham was a ḥanīf; [and therefore] a muslim”); at-Ṭabarsī, who takes a more nuanced view (“islām denotes faith and not the sanctions of the sharī’ah. We have, therefore, characterized Abraham with islām as God had characterized him … a person is Muslim, even if he does not fulfill all the precepts of the sharī’ah”); at-Ṭabāṭabā’ī; and, finally, Sayyid Qutb, who dismisses the contentions of the Jews and Christians as contradicting “reason, as may be clearly seen even by a cursory glance at history.”

Having eruditely and painstakingly taken care to point out what, objectively speaking, is a somewhat obvious and relatively unassailable observation, the commentators do not make any note regarding the use of ‘aqala. It seems that, for those intimately familiar with the Qur’ān, the significance and use of the root was a foregone conclusion. Its meaning was so clear and so well-known that it failed to merit even the briefest definition. Indeed, no synonyms for ‘aqala are given, even though many commentators, like al-Baghawī and al-Jalālayn, sometimes trouble themselves to clarify even the slightest of ambiguities by synonyms.

In the West, the situation is identical. Luxenberg, in his controversial and provocative exploration of the Qur’ān’s obscurities, reserves the root ‘-q-l in a direct quotation (of Q 12:1-2), and mentions a verse containing the root (regarding Q 16:12), but for the most part ‘aqala itself is spared his method (perhaps unfortunately). Likewise, the major translators of the Qur’ān into English are in a general agreement: from the Mid-Meccan period to the last place it is used according to Nöldeke and

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5 Ibid., p. 225.
Schwally’s chronology (5:103) the verb ‘aqala in all of its various forms is translated uniformly. To demonstrate this, verses with varying usages, chosen at random from the Middle Meccan, Late Meccan, and Medinan inventories were compared with their translations by Arberry,6 ‘Alī,7 and the German translator Elyas8 (see figure 1). The results expose an undeniable interpretative consistency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Qur’ānic Arabic</th>
<th>Arberry</th>
<th>‘Alī</th>
<th>Elyas (German)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37:138 (K2)</td>
<td><em>Wa-innaku</em> latamurrūna ‘ālayhim <em>muṣbiliṇa</em> wa-bi-layli a-fa-lā taʿqiłūna</td>
<td>... and you pass by them in the morning and in the night; will you not understand?</td>
<td>Verily, ye pass by their (sites), by day and by night: will ye not understand?</td>
<td>Und wahrlich, ihr geht an ihnen am Morgen vorüber und auch am Abend. Wollt ihr es da nicht begreifen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25:44 (K2)</td>
<td><em>Am talḥsabu anna aktharahum yasmaʿūna aw yaʾqiłūna</em></td>
<td>Or deemest thou that most of them her or understand?</td>
<td>Or thinkest thou that most of them listen or understand?</td>
<td>Meinst du etwa, daß die meisten von ihnen hörten oder verstanden?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30:28 (K3)</td>
<td><em>Daraba lakum mathalan ... kadḥālika nufassīlu l-āyīti li-qawmin yaʾqiłūna</em></td>
<td>He has struck for you a similitude ... so We distinguish the signs for a people who understand.</td>
<td>He does propound to you a similitude ... Thus do We explain the signs in detail to a people that understand.</td>
<td>Er prägt euch ein Gleichnis ... So machen Wir die Zeichen klar für ein Volk, das begreift.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:51 (K3)</td>
<td><em>In ajriya illā ʿalā lldhī faṭaranī, a-fa-lā taʾqiłūna</em></td>
<td>“My wage falls only upon Him who did originate me; will you not understand?”</td>
<td>“My reward is from none but Him who created me: will ye then not understand?”</td>
<td>“… seht, mein Lohn ist einzig bei Dem, Der mich erschuf. Wollt ihr es den nicht begreifen?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:118 (D)</td>
<td><em>Qad bayyannā lakum l-āyāti in kuntum taʾqiłūna</em></td>
<td>Now We have made clear to you the signs, if ye understand.</td>
<td>We have made plain to you the signs, if ye have wisdom.</td>
<td>Schon machten Wir euch die Zeichen klar, wenn ihr es begreift.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:44 (D)</td>
<td><em>Wa-tansawna onfusakum wa-antum tatliṇa l-kitāba a-fa-lā taʾqiłūna</em></td>
<td>... and forget yourselves while you recite the Book? Do you not understand?</td>
<td>... [you] forget (to practice it) yourselves, and yet ye study the Scripture? Will ye not understand?</td>
<td>... euch selbst vergessen, wo ihr doch das Buch lest! Habt ihr denn keinen Verstand?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59:14 (D)</td>
<td><em>Dḥālika bi-annahum qawmun lā yaʾqiłūna</em></td>
<td>That is because they are a people who have no sense.</td>
<td>This is because they are a people devoid of wisdom.</td>
<td>Dies (ist so), weil sie ein Volk sind, das keinen Verstand hat.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Comparison of Translations in English & German of the root ‘A-Q-L
The scholarly consensus is unanimous. As visible, the semantic field into which the root has been replanted by translation is at the same time monolithic, broad, imprecise, vague, and extremely limited; in the English, Arberry employs “understand,” which can, according to the World English dictionary, mean to “know and comprehend the meaning of,” to “realize or grasp,” to “assume., infer, or believe,” to “know how to translate or read,” to “accept as a condition or proviso,” and to “be sympathetic to or compatible with.” The German uses verstehen and begreifen, both synonyms. Clearly, in many or all of these cases the translation is not only reasonable but apparently very accurate. The topic of ‘-q-l seems, then, to be essentially a non-issue: why engage in a deeper philological, syntactical, lexical, and literary investigation of a root which, for the most part, barely registers the slightest fluctuation in the minds of the Qur’ān’s readers, translators, and students?

Yet, the concepts of “understanding” and “Verstehen,” related as they are to a kind of analogy of movement and constant presence (viz., having comprehended something, one is always “standing beneath” or “standing in front of” it), are only very distantly related to the concept of “grasping” contained in the subtext of ‘aql, and, in their etymological origin, probably insufficient to transfer the full concept of ‘aqala into English or German. This search for more precision is the impetus for this thesis, which represents the natural beginning – in all of its natural inelegancies – of a deeper investigation to be refined, expanded upon and improved. As will be seen, though, even a preliminary close look reveals a number of inconsistencies, patterns, and relationships that deserve scrutiny and promise to yield intriguing discoveries.
Prolegomenon: Warning Measures

Before embarking, some initial considerations should be addressed even at the cost of losing momentum. The first consideration is that this analysis implicitly assumes that the mushaf contains basically coherent semantic constructions which form – at least in apparently unified verse units – a consistent meaning that can be analyzed and which has some significance beyond cosmetic similarities. In truth, from the most traditional and inoffensive\(^9\) to the most radical\(^{10}\) accounts of the Qur’ān’s etiology, all agree that the Qur’ān – from whatever and by whoever its actual prominence – was disclosed in parts over time. As such, though the mushaf appears technically in a single bound volume, separated into sūrahs that imply a textual unity, the Qur’ān is essentially fragmentary by nature (to what degree it is fragmentary, of course, remains a matter of debate), and its assembled parts may only seem comparable. Rahman, in concord, confirms that “the Qur’an is not a ‘book’ but a collection of passages revealed to Muhammad over a period of about twenty-three years.”\(^{11}\) As such, the real unity of the recitation – that is, the unity intended by the revealer, in contrast to both the artistic or spiritual unity imputed by interpreters and the artificial unity (displayed by sūrahs and the mushaf itself) constructed by the Qur’ān’s compilers – will always remain a matter of some conjecture. As Rippin

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notes, “we do not know and probably never can know what really happened; all we can know is what later people believed happened.”

This quiet unmooring of tradition from the historiographical bedrock both exhilarates the scholar and serves as a ligature. As such, this thesis accepts the basic premises of the traditional account of the Qur’ān’s genesis, but, as in Bell (pace Wansbrough and Rippin), employs those assumptions to create a space in which to interpret certain philological facts as they rise from the text. Assumptions like these are necessary in order to build even the most juvenile of literary heuristic frameworks. Some scholars have warned that attempts to closely read the Qur’ān and evaluate its concepts from a literary standpoint, using its own contents as a medium for refinement, are naturally problematic due to the nature of the text itself. Nevertheless, Abu Zayd also affirms that this tactic – the “method of employing linguistics and literary criticism enriched with knowledge of [other disciplines] in Qur’ānic studies” – though the center of controversies in the Islamic world, has a real value for both scholars and believers.

Secondly, other fundamental assumptions about semantics made by this author may prove damaging to the argument comprehensively; lexically speaking, the arrangement of a dictionary into root patterns (wazn) seems to visually imply that words sharing a common trilateral root likewise occupy a relatively coterminous semantic field.

A cursory perusal of any dictionary entry from whatever time – from al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad

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16 Ibid., p. 33.
al-Farāhīdī (d. c. 791 CE) to Hans Wehr (d. 1981 CE) – seems to support this assumption. Yet, this notwithstanding, it is impossible to know with any certainty to what degree particular semantic values were prevalent, continuous, or implied each other to actual speakers or audiences. Though this thesis will in every instance attempt to make a strong case, the augmentation of a deeper meaning to established Qur’ānic concepts must be viewed as strictly conjectural.

Beyond this, the lexical approach proposed has various latent shortcomings. The most provocative and damaging consideration is the fact that many Qur’ānic concepts are not well-defined by the relatively contemporary lexica developed as exegetical tools – take, for example, al-Khalīl’s Kitab al-ʿAyn, one of the earliest complete extant dictionaries, whose many entries, lacking any apparent connection to the Qur’ānic usage, had to be islamized – so to speak – in the definitions and compilations of later lexicographers like Ibn Manẓūr (the compiler of Lisān al-ʿArab; d. c. 1312 CE) and al-Zabīdī (the compiler of Tāj al-ʿArūs; d. 1791 CE). These both, while drawing extensively on the work of others, were careful to add doctrinal content (cf., for example, the entry on dawla, which, while indicating a simple “turn” in al-Khalīl’s work, is explained almost exclusively by ḥadīth and tafsīr in al-Zabīdī’s17). In some cases, the definition provided in al-ʿAyn or, indeed, in any lexicon, fails to match a clearly documented semantic value (again, the definition of dawla, even as late as Tāj al-ʿArūs, is instructive in this regard; Lane finds it necessary to insert nearly a paragraph of gloss on the dichotomy between his lexical sources and the contemporary meaning, “a political state”). This lack of content implies that a separate, Islamic semantic cloud was

maintained outside the lexica which did not require elucidation by the dictionary; or that, controversially, the dictionary meanings may have developed much later as a support for politically useful *ahādīth* and doctrine\(^\text{18}\); as Arkoun notes, “the literary composition of [the Qur’ān]” – and, to wit, its interpretation – “has exerted a decisive semantic influence on Arabic vocabulary”\(^\text{19}\); it is possible that, in many cases, the content and exegesis of the Qur’ān have contributed to lexical definitions that refer back to the Qur’ān as evidence. As such, attempts to dissect terms in the Qur’ān by using a dictionary might be, in fact, circular.

Thirdly, this thesis relies heavily – most of all in its section discussing Form analysis – on Nöldeke and Schwally’s detailed chronology of Qur’ānic sūrahs, found in the first part of the second edition of Nöldeke’s *Geschichte des Qorans*.\(^\text{20}\) Having been incorporated at face-value and adapted into the most significant hermeneutic framework here employed, their work forms the springboard from which the semantic analyses carried out here proceed. It is acknowledged that, unfortunately, the sūrah-by-sūrah ordering is far from established; nothing can be known with absolute certainty, as noted above, regarding the actual sequence in which the revelation was disclosed. Nöldeke’s chronology, while providing an acceptable basic framework, nevertheless arrives with its own pitfalls: according to Beeston, “the weakness of the methods of Weil and Nöldeke is that where judgments have to be based solely on style and content, their criteria are fairly crude and involve little subjectivity. In addition, they follow the Muslim practice of

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\(^{20}\) Nöldeke, T., and Schwally, F., *Geschichte des Qorans* (2nd ed.), Dietrich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Leipzig, 1909. This thesis will also employ the commonly-accepted abbreviation *GdQ* to refer to their work and chronology.
treating Meccan sūrahs as if they were unified pieces unless passages that are clearly
Medinan are involved … it is far too ambitious to put the sūrahs, particularly the Meccan
sūrahs, into detailed order”: in this context, “definite lines of division between
groupings,” “criteria for divisions,” and “number of divisions” cannot be determined with
scientific reliability.21

Yet, these caveats, though formidable, are not enough to deter a preliminary
attempt at forming a tentative idea regarding the organic and chronological development
of the Qurʾān’s semantic values; Sinai22 and Welch,23 to some extent, uphold Nöldeke
and Schwally’s essential instincts, with Sinai, after his own analysis, asserting that
“Nöldeke’s chronology can be justified by and large through a convergence of formal,
lexical, and thematic considerations, interpreted against a background of a few general
assumptions about the life and times of Muhammad”24; Beeston concedes, too, that
though “the detailed order must be regarded as highly dubious … the division into groups
has some validity … the groupings do give us some indication of the general
development of the Meccan material and, provided that care is exercised, give us a
limited framework for the discussion of the Meccan material.”25 Noting this, this thesis
concedes the untenable state of the detailed chronology and employs it not for substantive
purposes, but rather to establish a more graduated framework for evaluating the
chronological development of the root ‘q-l. Indeed, the problems Beeston observes in
regards to the literary analysis of the Qurʾān belong appropriately to the entire discipline:

21 Beeston, A.F.L., “The Qurʾān – II,” in Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period (Beeston, A.
22 Sinai, N., “The Qurʾān as Process,” in The Qurʾān in Context: historical and literary investigation into
lost in the fog of history, the real etiologies of humanity’s sacred texts remain obscure, which, conditionally, demands caution from the analyst but does not bar all investigation entirely. For Welch, “diachronic [approaches] seek to trace the development of the language and teachings of the Qur’ān during Muhammad’s lifetime. Studies based on this diachronic approach have led to the conclusion that the sūras were fluid during Muhammad’s lifetime, [and] that he recited parts of some sūras differently on later occasions in response to the changing needs of his followers … this view is not inconsistent with some early Muslim traditions.”

Considering this, using the detailed chronology will allow for an initial set of findings to emerge; these findings, after discussion and analysis, can be used to reflexively re-evaluate what was found, or, possibly, to critique the timeline of the Geschichte des Qorans in some particulars. All in all, the analysis at hand, if careful, can proceed with these objectives in mind.

Prolegomenon: Methodology

Pagels\textsuperscript{27} has proven that dedicated textual analysis of concepts (even those previously thought fully explicated), paired with an objective and critical method, can reveal profound and meaningful insights that reflect the complex currents at the heart of the formation of any theological doctrine.

To begin, all instances of the root in question (‘ – q – l) occurring in the Qur’ān will be examined using the various transcribed, computerized and searchable Qur’ānic

\textsuperscript{26} Welch 2011, ibid.
databases available on the Internet; after all, as Caster\textsuperscript{28} so accurately points out, to do the work “manually would take too long and is subject to human error” – \textit{pace}, of course, Kassis, whose monumental \textit{Concordance} and life’s work was also employed.\textsuperscript{29} This analysis of deployment, however, is not sufficient alone to produce insights. In order to come to a more complete understanding of ‘\textit{-q}-l’, this thesis will utilize the methodology proposed by Richter\textsuperscript{30} to examine the Old Testament. This methodology is relayed by Neuwirth.\textsuperscript{31}

In any case, according to Neuwirth,\textsuperscript{32} Richter offers the following analytical framework:

1) Literary investigation, which examines the text according to its literary qualities; and

2) Investigation of form, which examines the text according to its use of sentences and of individual words, and its phonological and morphological strategies.

This approach certainly appears promising at face value. No concrete suggestions are explicitly given, however, as to how these steps should be completed in their entirety in regards to either the Qur‘ān or to a discreet concept within it. As such, the methodology will need to be modified to allow each phase to be carried out in a productive way. Fortunately, having been modified, this adaptation will also provide a practical organizational framework for the data itself.

\textsuperscript{29} Kassis, H. E., \textit{Concordance of the Quran}, University of California Press, 1983
\textsuperscript{30} Richter, W., \textit{Exegese als Literatur Wissenschaft}, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1971
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 254.
To satisfy Richter’s first step, the instances of the root ‘-q-l will be arrayed according to the chronology proposed in the *GdQ*; this will allow an elucidation of the diachronic development and transformation of the root within the Qur’ān, which will be simultaneously analyzed along with whatever literary interplay can be recognized within sūrās, between sūrās, and in the thematic fields. This will be carried out in chapter 1: Qur’ānic Deployment of ‘-q-l, which is divided into two sections: one each for the revelations at Mecca (comprising both Middle and Late periods) and at Medina.

As a continuation of Richter’s first step, chapter 2: Diachronic Literary Analysis of ‘-q-l in the Qur’ān, will discuss the diachronic refinement of the root’s literary use and thematic implications. As much as possible in locations where verses have a basically clear continuity with their surroundings, the root’s function within a sūrah as a whole – and its link to the whole revelation – will be analyzed.

Meeting Richter’s second measure will require analyzing how, and in what forms, the verb ‘aqala is utilized throughout the Qur’ān. As such, in chapter 3: Discussion of Form, the major syntactical usages of the root – *a-fa-lā [y/t a’qilūna]; la’allakum [t a’qilūna]; li-qawmin [y a’qilūna];* and, finally, irregular or remarkable forms of the root – will be examined. Isutzu’s method of analyzing usage to derive semantic continuity will be mimicked in order to reveal and recognize idiomatic and syntactic usage links between ‘aqala and other verbs, thus exposing semantic fields with which the Qur’ānic concept of ‘aqala overlaps or is coterminous. Though Isutzu’s approach is unimpeachable and explicitly avoided a chronological evaluation of the Qur’ān’s

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semantics, his method will be modified by applying it to Nöldeke and Schwally’s chronology. The use of quantifying tables, graphs, and diagrams will be added to Isutzu’s mostly literary approach in order to advance his method.

Pursuant to the investigation of form, in chapter 4: the case of 67:10, a specific irregular instance of the root ‘-q-l will be examined; further work in al-Khalil’s Kitāb al-‘Ayn and other primary texts will provide an opportunity to uncover semantic strata hinted at within the lexical categories. An overall operative function of ‘aqala will be examined in chapter 5: Discussion & Future Research. These analyses will reveal the semantic depth and variation latent in the verb ‘aqala.
CHAPTER I: QUR’ÂNIC DEPLOYMENT OF ‘-Q-L

As Kermani notes, “the cognitive process described by ‘aqala is based primarily on the human’s ability to perceive, to reflect and to evaluate obvious facts.”

The Qur’ânic speaker’s continuous appeal to this very process of discrimination occurs throughout the Qur’ân, from the Meccan period to the Medinan period. This section of the thesis will – as a methodological necessity and pursuant to Richter’s method – identify and discuss all forty-nine instances of the root, grouped according to the chronology found in GdQ of their appearance in the textus receptus or mushaf in common contemporary use.

To facilitate reference and to provide a visual framework as a basis for hermeneutics, tables have been provided (figures 3 and 4) to illustrate the periodic deployment of ‘-q-l. These tables are arranged into rows containing the cited chapter and verse number in the standard mushaf of Cairo (“A verse”), its number in Bell’s (1960a, &c.) translation and commentary (the column headed “B Verse”), the period, according

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (a-fa-lâ y/ta‘qilüna)</td>
<td>K1 (Early Meccan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E (y/ta‘qilüna)</td>
<td>K2 (Middle Meccan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L (la‘allakum)</td>
<td>K3 (Late Meccan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IK(E) (in kuntum ta‘qilüna)</td>
<td>M (Medinan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LQ(E) (li-qawmin ya‘qilüna)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2: Key to Tables 3 and 4**

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to the timeline found in *GdQ* (headed “period,” indicating K1, K2, and K3 for the Early, Middle, and Late Meccan periods, and M for the Medinan period), and the form of ‘*aqala* employed at that point in the text (“Form”). The column labeled “sub” indicates the further subdivision – whether early, middle, or late – of each of Nöldeke and Schwally’s revelatory periods; as such, for the purposes of this analysis, there is an early Early Meccan period, a middle Early Meccan period, a late Early Meccan period, and so forth. A key for these tables appears at the left (figure 2).

‘*-Q-L in the Meccan Period

The chronological deployment of ‘*q-l* in the Medinan period, following Nöldeke and Schwally, is given in a table (figure 3). Like many complex theological constructs – including, for example, the concepts of *umma*, “religious community,” or of *ash-shayṭān*, the “devil” – ‘*aql, “intellect,” appears for the first time (in its verbal form ‘*aqala*) in the Middle Meccan period; its first instance according to Nöldeke and Schwally’s reckoning is in sūrah 37, where it occurs as a rhetorical conclusion to the stories of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Aaron, and Lot (Lūṭ). These prophets, according to the Qur’ānic account, brought demonstrative warning signs to their respective publics; the population’s rejection of the prophetic signs matches the Meccan rejection, in “ridicule” and “mockery,” of Muhammad’s own ministry.¹

¹ Q 37:12, 14.
Indeed, pursuant to its location in the revelatory sequence, this surah provides a reflection of Muhammad’s experiences at that time:

Muhammad’s cry for supernatural assistance is mirrored by Noah’s own “cry” in verse 37:75; his struggle against idolatry and polytheism and his own frustration with the “stratagem”\(^2\) of his enemies is reflected in Abraham’s experience:

an implicit comparison is made between the mute, powerless idols and their senseless worshippers – over this dumb and uncomprehending crowd, God’s prophet (whether Abraham or Muhammad) rises in triumph, preserved by His saving power.\(^3\) A

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\(^2\) Q 37:98.

\(^3\) e.g., “O Fire, be coolness and safety for Abraham,” Q 21:69.
common revelatory stream, “the Book,” appears in the hands of Moses and Aaron⁴, and Muhammad’s long hoped-for deliverance by God from calamity is likewise demonstrated through the story of Lot⁵ – upon all these men, the prophet invokes “peace” (salām)⁶. Indeed, throughout the Mid- to Late Meccan periods, the verb ‘aqala is used intimately with the stories of the prophets: it appears with the great lineage of prophetic predecessors given in sūrah 37, reiterated in sūrah 29, and referenced in the story of Moses’ argument with Pharaoh,⁷ as well as that with “Qārūn and Hāmān,” the Egyptian sorcerers⁸; it appears in the account of Abraham’s sabotage of the idols⁹; the record of Lot’s dispute with his countrymen¹⁰; the extra-Biblical story of Hūd’s ministry to ‘Ād and Thamūd¹¹; the Joseph narrative¹²; and the career of Shu‘ayb in Midian.¹³

Yet, although this involvement with the heritage of prophets and their display of signs is the root’s earliest use, ‘-q-l is primarily employed in reference to God’s visible signs, the āyāt, which He physically displays throughout the world as a semiotic language logically leading one to a monotheistic worldview. Arkoun confirms that “the activity described in the Qur’ān as ‘aqala relates solely to signs from God”¹⁴; and, as Kermani correctly notes, ‘aqala appears intimately linked to “sensory perception”¹⁵ and particularly with the deployment of “signs” from God, divine demonstrations which, in the Qur’ānic mind, are unimpeachable evidence of God’s omnipotent power and His

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⁴ Q 37:117.
⁵ Q 37:133.
⁶ Q 37:130, etc.
⁷ Q 26:28.
⁸ Q 29:38.
⁹ Q 21:67.
¹⁰ Q 29:28.
¹¹ Q 11:50; cf. Q 29:38.
¹² Q 12:2 and following; also verse 109.
¹³ Q 29:36.
¹⁴ Arkoun 2011, ibid.
¹⁵ Kermani 2011, ibid.
solitude. In the Qur’ānic mind, then, the process of intellectation (‘aql) is linked indissolubly to the natural order which flows from God. At its initial deployment, the verb ‘aqala points directly to something which “you pass by day and by night”16: this is a physical structure, presumably a pre-existing wreckage or set of ruins – immediately invoking the typical opening trope of the pre-Islamic qaṣīda, the lamentation over the aṯlāl, or the abandoned encampment17 – described as the grisly remains of God’s vengeance on a former settlement.

Indeed, at many places within the text, ‘aqala yokes together sets of opposite visible signs – “heavens and the earth, and all between”; preceding, succeeding and distant generations; the east and west18; life and death; and all diametric pairs,19 including sweet and salt waters20 – as proof of God’s unilateral and complete dominion over all creation. Similar demonstrations of God’s power are found at Q 25:44 and the following verses, which note God’s possession of the robe of Night,21 His mastery over the “winds” and refreshing rain,22 and His agency that separates the sea from fresh rivers23 and brings forth fruit from the fields through the mystery of agriculture.24 God’s mastery of the lifespan of men is also noted as a sign; “it is He who created you of dust then of a sperm-drop, then of a blood-clot, then He delivers you as infants, then that you may come of age, then that you may be old men … haply you will understand” (laʿallakum

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18 Q 26:24, 26, 28.
19 Q 36:33-50.
20 Q 25:53.
21 Q 25:47.
23 Q 25:53.
Cragg, in his rambling and philosophical pipe dream of a work – clearly soaked as it is with the unique exhalation of a priest alive during the seventies – nevertheless gives keen insight and adds a nearly narcotic clarity to the discussion of signs:

“it is always nature which yields the material out of which symbols are drawn and sanctuaries are built. The visible, audible, tangible world is the ever fertile renewer of the will to wonder and the urge to adoration. By the standards and instincts of some religions, Islam has been severely Spartan and rigorous in its cultic engagement with the natural order. Yet within all its reservations …there is a characteristic ‘baptism’ of space, colour, pattern, line, and light, a geometrical expression one might almost say of ‘the signs of God.’”

Indeed, at the bridge of the Late Meccan period, the liturgical space in Cragg’s vision was taking shape around the viewers of these seemingly miraculous natural phenomena, who are identified for the first time more explicitly; these are a “people” or “tribe” to whom the various wonders of the natural world are presented as “signs for a people who understand” (li-qawmin ya‘qilūna). This will be a refrain repeated again in sūrah 16: “it is He who sends down rain from the sky … with it He produces for you corn, olives, date palms, grapes, and every kind of fruit … He has made subject to you the night and the day; the sun and the moon; and the stars are in subjection by His command: verily in this are signs for a people who understand” (li-qawmin ya‘qilūna).

The physical attributes of the world, therefore, present themselves as a series of “signs” (āyāt), a literal semiotic body, from which true “understanding” – viz., belief in God – is the only possible conclusion.

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25 Q 40:67.
27 Q 45:1-5.
The physical manifestation of this semiotic body of signs is the “book that makes things clear” (al-kitāb al-mubīn),

namely, the revelation itself. In a related fashion, the root ‘-q-l also has a strict comprehensive function, tied to people’s apprehension of language as such; it is for this reason, according to sūrah 43, that the Qur’ān has been composed “in Arabic, that you may be able to understand” (la ‘allakum ta’qilūna),

which is reiterated once again at the onset of sūrat Yūsuf; Muhammad’s first audience would have been, according to the traditional account, speakers of the Meccan variety of that language, residents of “the Mother of Cities and those who dwell about it” to whom the Arabic Qur’ān was dispatched as a warning. This usage is hinted at by Abraham’s condemnation of his people’s idols, who are not “able to speak” – the theme of speaking, not speaking, comprehending, and not comprehending is summed up neatly by Abraham’s curse on the idols which no doubt mirrored one pronounced by Muhammad on the cult images of Mecca: “fie upon you, and that you serve apart from God! Do you not understand” (a-fā-lā ta’qilūna). This semantic strain is confirmed by verse 39:43: Muhammad, shocked that “intercessors … besides God” – viz., other gods, – are being invoked in Mecca, openly declares that “[these intercessors] have no power whatever,” “wa-lā ya’qilūna,” “and they do not understand.” Though translated divergently by ‘Alī and others, this usage matches the usage in 43:3, and probably means that these figures “have no power whatever, and they do not understand [or have speech].” In the context of the Qur’ānic account of Abraham’s campaign against idolatry, the inability of these images to speak is linked to this semantic strand.

29 Q 43:2; Q 12:2; trans. ‘Alī.
30 Q 43:3; trans. ‘Alī.
31 Q 12:2.
32 Q 42:7.
33 Q 21:63, 67.
In the Meccan period, the Qur’ān asserts that both the proper course of nature—embodied in natural wonders such as the mountains, rivers, and the binaries of gender and celestial time; the ceaseless cycle of dynasties evidenced by abandoned ruins; the phases of life and the disruption of the natural order by divinely-ordained miracles, such as the resurrection—should lead the observer to profess faith in God; as Rahman reiterates, “nature is in fact so well-knit and works with such regularity that it is the prime miracle of God … this gigantic machine, the universe, with all its causal processes, is the prime ‘sign’ (āya) or proof of its Maker.” The “signs” themselves, discerned properly “if you understand” (in kuntum ta’qilūna), dispose one towards faith and deliver one from certain destruction in the “Fire.” Thus, the set of universal symbols exhibited as divine “signs” through natural phenomena are themselves a textual body, just as the Qur’ān and its divine “signs” — viz., its verses — demonstrate as a codex. As Cragg concurs:

“the confluence of terms is interesting and suggestive, allowing as it does the conviction that the external world is a kind of ‘scripture,’ imitating in its own realm and within its own order that divine knowledge which, in history and prophecy, in word and action, speaks Quranically to mankind, so that the one is not unworthy to be denominated in the same term with the other … they invite men to a religious response to the world of everyday phenomena … there is deep point and eloquence in having the same name for the verses of the Scripture and the phenomena of the world. These two realms of the āyāt illuminate each other.”

According to tradition, Muhammad’s ministry did not proceed smoothly: assailed by detractors, maligned as a “poet or soothsayer,” and pigeonholed as the merest of

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34 Q 13:3.
35 Q 22:45-46.
36 Q 40:67.
37 Q 30:26.
38 Rahman 1994, p. 68.
39 e.g. at Q 3:118.
40 Q 3:116.
42 e.g. at 69:38, among many others.
balladeers with a repertoire of traditional folk songs and stories, Muhammad nevertheless continues to assert the signs against and despite Meccan ignorance. This riposte also continues, presumably, as a form of polemic against the pre-Islamic pagan paradigm, which held that the objects of the natural world were under the influence of nature spirits, demigods, or pagan deities; clearly, what Cragg calls the “sacramental earth” is in full testimony not, as he notes, to the various dominions of the pagan gods but rather to one supreme God. The constant accusation that Muhammad is inventing the revelation is met with vehement negation: “if they charge thee with falsehood, say: ‘my work to me, and yours to you! You are free from responsibility for what I do and I for what you do!’ Among them are some who (pretend to) listen to you: but can you make a deaf person to – even though they are without understanding” (lā yaʾqīlūna); this complete separation of beliefs and ethical liabilities echoes an earlier declaration to the polytheists: “neither do I worship what you worship, nor do you worship Whom I worship. And neither will I ever worship what you worship. Nor will you worship Whom I worship. For you is your religion, and for me is mine.” Exasperated at constant betrayals, pretense, and continuous hypocrisy, the Qurʾān makes clear that their rejection of the “signs,” and their constant clamoring for a different version is symptomatic not only of their future destruction, but of a curse of ignorance laid upon their heads by God Himself: “when Our clear signs are rehearsed to them, [they] say: ‘bring us a reading other than this, or change this … say: ‘If God had willed, I would not

43 Q 26:16.
44 Cragg 1973, p. 146.
45 Q 10:42; trans. ‘Alī.
have recited it to you, nor would He have taught you it—“it is not for any soul to save by the leave of God, and He lays abomination upon those who have no understanding.”

In contrast to the fate of Muhammad’s adversaries, his supporters, rising above the “sport and [d]iversion” of worldly strife and altercation, find their final abode in heaven, for “the Last Abode is better for those that are godfearing. What, do you not understand” (a-fa-lā ta‘qīlūna). This refrain, culminating a long criticism of the Jews and a brief retelling of a legend where some Jews were transformed into apes, is repeated at verse 7:169. A similar exhortation occurs in sūrah 28: “whatever thing you have been given is the enjoyment of the present life and its adornment; and what is with God is better and more enduring” (a-fa-lā ta‘qīlūna).

To conclude, the verb ‘aqala, as deployed throughout the Meccan sūrahs, was used primarily to indicate physical signs – that is, physical evidence of God’s unity that could be grasped through direct sensation and perception. Muhammad’s mission in the Meccan period, aimed primarily at his polytheist neighbors in the city of Mecca, was an invitation to consciousness of these signs and thus an invitation to the metaphysical logic – displayed clearly in the physical world – that would lead pagans to monotheism. Muhammad’s message was embodied in al-kitāb al-mubīn, in “the clarifying book,” in “Arabic, that you may be able to understand” (la’allakum ta‘qīlūna). Above all, the verb and its literary usage within the Meccan period demonstrate the Prophet’s pitched combat – with Jews, Christians, and pagans – to assert the revealed worldview, its language of signs, and the power of his revelation over his opponents.

47 Q 10:16.
48 Q 10:100.
50 Q 28:60-61.
51 Q 43:3.
The emigration to Medina would mark, as will be seen, a shift in the usage of the root. As established previously, the purpose of the root ‘-q-l is to highlight the āyāt, the signs, displayed by God as evidence of His existence to all mankind. This application persists in the Medinan sūrah; at verse 2:164, ‘aqala occurs as part of a standard construction citing natural wonders and the cyclical, reliable operation of nature as signs (ayāt) proving God’s sole jurisdiction over the universe in its physical and invisible parts; God’s dominion over these cycles – and, ultimately, the mystery of death and life, which God can reverse at His pleasure – is cited again at sūrah 57:17: “know you that God gives life to the earth after its death! Already have We shown the Signs plainly to you, that you may have wisdom” (la‘allakum ta’qilūna).

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Figure 4: ‘-Q-L according to Nöldeke and Schwally’s Chronology of the Medinan Period
Yet, where previously these signs were mostly natural and related to physical, visible emblems on earth or in the sky, the emigration to Medina refocuses the verb ‘aqala onto a wider variety of objects, including human behavior, particularly the on-going rancorous conflict with non-believers. The chronological deployment of ‘-q-’l in the Medinan period, following GdQ, is given in a table to the left (figure 4). Indeed, a great deal of the Medinan Qur’ān focuses on upbraiding the Jews – both throughout the world and those who specifically competed with Muhammad in Medina – for their laxity in observing their own religious laws, especially in their context of their knowledge of the “Scripture” (kitāb, presumably in this case the Torah), of which they claimed to be experts. Indeed, a great deal of sūrah 2 and 5 consists of polemic against the Jews, who – being a population of concern and power in Yathrib – increasingly begin to occupy the revelation’s attention as Muhammad and Jewish leaders embark on their progressively complex relationship. The root ‘-q-’l consistently appears in the context of religious disputation with Jews and with Christians, both of whom, according to sūrah 3, are involved in a “dispute” as to whether Abraham belongs properly to the heritage of Judaism or was an ancestor of the followers of Christ. The great patriarch, father of both Ishmael and Isaac, the Qur’ān states, was “not a Jew nor yet a Christian, but a ḥanīf muslim.”52 This is the opening salvo in a long condemnation of the “people of the Book”53 which takes the form of a list of grievances and accusations: these people – presumably Christians and “the Jews of Medinah,” as Bell notes54 – are denounced as

53 cf. Q 3:65, 72, etc.
54 Bell, A Commentary on the Qurʾān (Bosworth, C. E. & Richardson, M.E.J., eds.), volume 1, University of Manchester, 1991, p. 88.
duplicitous,\textsuperscript{55} stingy and untrustworthy,\textsuperscript{56} and as meddling in the affairs of the Islamic community.\textsuperscript{57}

Pursuant to this bitter debate, Muslims are enjoined to avoid the friendship of such people: “take not intimacy those outside your ranks,” the Qur’ān instructs, for “they will not fail to corrupt you … they only desire your ruin.”\textsuperscript{58} These historical “signs” of disloyalty are presented as evidence, “if you understand” (\textit{ya’qilūna}).\textsuperscript{59} A similar exhortation is repeated in sūrah 5: “O ye who believe, take not for friends and protectors those who take your religion for a mockery or sport – whether among those who received the Scripture before you, or among those who reject faith”\textsuperscript{60}; likewise, the Qur’ān enjoins the believers to avoid all hypocrites and cosmetic converts: “do not be like those who say ‘we hear,’ and they hear not; surely the worst of beasts in God’s sight are those that are deaf and the dumb and do not understand” (\textit{lā ya’qilūna}).\textsuperscript{61} This thematic and metaphorical chorus is repeated at verse 8:22, where the revelation, though addressing the believers, excoriates Islam’s opponents as “deaf and dumb” and slated for damnation by God, whose power pre-ordained their hard-heartedness and the “blind … hearts within the breasts.”\textsuperscript{62} These revelatory exhortations commemorate a time when the distinction between Jews, Christians, and Muslims was becoming much more pronounced than it had been both in the Early Medinan phase and in the Meccan phase, and acrimony between Muhammad and the Jewish community was at its zenith. It is into the context of this complex relationship that the Qur’ānic voice asserts itself over the Jews of Yathrib by

\textsuperscript{55} Q 3:72.  
\textsuperscript{56} Q 3:75.  
\textsuperscript{57} Q 3:99.  
\textsuperscript{58} Q 3:118; trans. ‘Alī.  
\textsuperscript{59} Also Q 3:118.  
\textsuperscript{60} Q 5:57-58; trans. ‘Alī.  
\textsuperscript{61} Q 8:21.  
\textsuperscript{62} cf. also Q 22:46.
recounting various episodes from the legendary Exodus\textsuperscript{63} where Moses, identified as a prophet sent by God to the proto-Jews, forebears the weakness of the Israelites, especially during their apostasy to the golden calf,\textsuperscript{64} their lack of gratitude for God’s gifts of sustenance,\textsuperscript{65} their whining for tastier foods,\textsuperscript{66} and their disregard for the Sabbath observances.\textsuperscript{67}

The eschatological fate of beings, and with it the ultimate punishment of Islam’s foes, especially those in Medina, is seen as a demonstrative proof of God’s penetrating knowledge of the inner thoughts of men, as is pointed out in sūrah 57. Thematically, the chapter begins with a vivid declaration of God’s superlative rule over the entire universe: “to Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: it is He Who gives life and death; and He has power over all things,”\textsuperscript{68} echoed again in an almost hymn-like way at verses 5 and 6. This power over opposites – over life and death, night and day, and form and chaos – is exemplified in His casual view of the most covert motives of all mankind: “He makes the night to enter into the day and makes the day to enter into the night. He knows the thoughts within the breasts”\textsuperscript{69}; the text develops this theme by describing the abundant betrayal, opposition, and deceit Muhammad has encountered in Medina, then promising the punishment of a vengeful God who will torment his foes ceaselessly in “the Fire, that is your master – an evil homecoming!”\textsuperscript{70} In this context, God’s power to

\textsuperscript{63} cf. Exodus 13 – 18, etc.
\textsuperscript{64} Q 2:51-54; cf. Exodus 32:4.
\textsuperscript{65} Q 2:57; cf. Exodus 16:14.
\textsuperscript{66} Q 2:61; cf. Exodus 16:3.
\textsuperscript{67} Q 2:65; cf. Exodus 31:14.
\textsuperscript{68} Q 57:2 ; trans. Ali.
\textsuperscript{69} Q 57:6.
\textsuperscript{70} Q 57:15.
avenge is submitted as a sign akin to His maintenance of life and death – this sign has been “made clear,” “that haply you will understand” (*la'allakum ta'qilīna*).  

As if citing demonstrative proof, verses 75 and 76 of sūrah 2 again employ the verb ‘*agala* to address the community of believers, but only in a rhetorical fashion; while taking the form of an aside, these āyāt are actually aimed laterally at the Jews. This assault is, naturally, part of a Late Meccan to Medinan process where, having fallen afoul of the Jewish community in both cities, Muhammad began to fundamentally change his previously ambiguous orientation towards Judaism into open hostility. The key element of this process is portraying the Jews as intellectually, spiritually, and ethically bankrupt; this is carried out primarily vis-à-vis the Jewish revelation, which the Prophet accuses them unceasingly of corrupting, ignoring, and adulterating. The sycophantic cunning of the Jews is displayed as an object for reflection: ‘Alī (2006) confirms that “the immediate argument applies to the Jews of Madīnah,” which Bell echoes: “[these verses] are addressed to believers, but are directed against the Jews.” The Qur’ānic invective would culminate in the accusations recorded at verse 62:5, wherein the voice of the Qur’ān lampoons the feckless Jews for resembling “an ass [viz., a donkey] carrying books” – that is, for resembling mute beasts possessing the occasion of knowledge but the utter lack of capacity to intellectually acquire it. As Tamer notes, “the donkey is for the Arabs the best example of ignorance and inability of understanding … nothing is more ignorant than a donkey that carries knowledge, without being able to recognize the

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71 Q 57:17.
72 Note 82, p. 186.
value or the contents of its load.”

Mocked as the stupidest of animals, the very opposite of any kind of ‘āqil, the Jews are also, later in the revelation, exposed for their traitorous breach of alliance and for their cowardice: “why, you arouse greater fear in their hearts than God … they will not fight you all together except in fortified cities, or from behind walls. Their valor is great, among themselves; you think of them as a host; but their hearts are scattered.” This lapse of character, according to the Qur’ān, is “because they are a people who do not understand” (dhālika bi-annahum qawmun lā ya‘qilūna, repeated at the termination of both verses).

The Qur’ānic voice scoffs at the fortifications behind which these enemies have concealed themselves, boasting “how many wells are lying idle and neglected, and castles lofty and well-built”: such ruins are submitted as a vivid, forensic affirmation of God’s teleological and military agency, which – according to the revelation – He will imminently deploy against Muhammad’s adversaries. The Prophet’s opponents, though they have “journeyed in the land” in full view of the wreckage of God’s wrath, do not accept Muhammad on account that their “hearts” do not lead them to sense (lā ya‘qilūna bihā). “It is not the eyes that are blind, but the hearts within the breasts”; yet, even under the influence of the devil, deceiver of men, the errors of the nonbelievers are ultimately imputed to their inexhaustible wickedness, for which they must suffer in the “Fire.” These sins contrast directly with God’s continuous display of “the signs,”

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75 Q 59:13-14.
76 Q 22:45; trans. ‘Alī.
77 Q 22:46.
78 Q 22:46.
79 cf. Q 59.16, 17.
80 cf. Q 2:221.
which are again submitted for review at verse 2:242 (la‘allakum ta‘qilūna) and in other places.

   Tangential to its polemical employment against the Jews and Christians, it is apparent that ‘aqala serves a demonstrative function that distinguishes between the righteous law promulgated and sanctioned by Muhammad, on the one hand, and false observances like the bizarre set of camel-raising rituals, such as that of a “she-camel let loose for free pasture, or idol sacrifices for twin-births in animals”81 – observed by the Jews, Christians, and pagans who “have no understanding” (lā ya‘qilūna)82 – in which these populations find themselves ineluctably and ancestrally entangled. Here, at verses 2:170 and 171, the enmity of the devil – “an avowed enemy” of mankind who is in full control of Muhammad’s opponents through their personal demons (shayātīn)83 – is met by literary placement and poetic emphasis with “lack of knowledge,”84 the ignorance of the ancestors who “had no understanding” (lā ya‘qilūna),85 and those who commit kufr, the “blasphemers,” who are “deaf, dumb, and blind; they do not understand” (lā ya‘qilūna).86

   In contrast to these expired and empty ancestral ceremonies, the Qur’ān submits its own corrections. The Qur’ānic speaker presents the rectified ordinance of the Red Heifer as a religious sign,87 employing the root ‘-q-l at verse 2:73; yet, while this demonstration shows a remarkably intimate familiarity with Jewish ceremonial law, the

81 Q 5:103, trans. ‘Alī.
82 Q 5:103.
83 Q 2:14.
84 Q 2:169.
85 Q 2:170.
86 Q 2:171.
Rabbinic tradition,\(^88\) and scholastic debate regarding the ordinance’s Divine origin, the ritual is misconstrued as somehow resulting in the resurrection of a murder victim – as Ayoub clarifies, many Qur’ānic exegetes go to some length to explain what was intended (a matching story cannot be located within the Rabbinic tradition).\(^89\)

Likewise, surah 2, verse 44, the linear first occurrence of the root ‘-q-l in the Medinan revelations, lies at the formal beginning of a sequence of addresses to the “Children of Israel”\(^90\) intended to describe the proper dispensation of religious duties (i.e., a “Covenant”) according to prescribed sacred rituals (“prayer,” “charity,” “right conduct,” etc.\(^91\)\). A similar declaration of sacred law is found in surah 6; “come, I will rehearse what God has prohibited you from: join not anything as equal with Him; be good to your parents; kill not your children on a plea of want … come not night to shameful deeds, whether open or secret; take not life, which God has made sacred, except by way of justice\(^92\) … that then He has charged you with; haply you will understand” (la’ allakum ta’qilūna).\(^93\) Indeed, the establishment of religious observances, juridical law, and social conventions is the evidentiary body – that is, the corpus of God’s “signs” – for the believers, who, through the patterns and habits of daily life, bear testament to God’s will: a long series of household rules and marriage stipulations, seemingly begun in the Late Meccan period at in surah 30, is concluded by the phrase “thus does God make clear the signs to you: that you may understand” (la’ allakum ta’qilūna).\(^94\) Similar prohibitions establish social etiquette, especially that related to shouting; “O ye who

\(^{88}\) Cf. Mishnah Parah 3:5.
\(^{90}\) Q 2:40.
\(^{91}\) Q 2:43-44.
\(^{92}\) This part of the verse is ‘Alī’s translation.
\(^{93}\) Q 6:151.
\(^{94}\) Q 24:61; cf. 30:24, 28; trans. ‘Alī.
believe! Raise not your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud to him in talk.”

Members of the community that do not observe this stricture, that is, “those who shout out to thee from without the inner apartments,” have no manners – “most of them do not understand” (*aktharuhum lā ya‘qilūna*).

In summation, just as the Meccan period sees the verb ‘*aqala* employed in a passionate dispute with Mecca’s pagans, likewise the Medinan period sees the verb utilized in the contentious ideological and rhetorical crossfire between Muhammad and the Jews. It becomes clear upon analysis of ‘*aqala* that the verb has shifted from reference to the natural signs of God; in the Medinan period, these signs are the social, scriptural, and juridical signs of the Prophet embodied in the community in Medina. Here, as the pagans skulked away into a relative abeyance – left, as they were, in Mecca – ideological and textual battle nevertheless resumed against the Jews and Christians of Yathrib, with whom Muhammad found himself in constant disputation. The old inventory of natural wonders – rain and river, sun and moon, night and day, death and life – was abandoned (save for a sequence at 2:164) in favor of the usage of ‘*aqala* that indicated a new set of signs, *a-fa-lā ta‘qilūna* – “have you no understanding?”

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95 Q 49:2.
96 Q 49:4.
CHAPTER 2: DIACHRONIC LITERARY ANALYSIS OF ‘Q-L IN THE QUR’ĀN

The Qurʾān does not aim, El-Awa notes, to merely appear aesthetically pleasing, even though “highly literary” elements are certainly present and the Qurʾānic voice identifies itself as separate from and superior to the Arab poets. Rather, the Qurʾān’s primary objective is to communicate a particular spiritual message: “it is a text that has been revealed to guide humanity to what the Qurʾān describes as ‘the right path’ … it is a message to mankind.”¹ In the midst of being intimately linked to and affected by the life of its revealer, the Qurʾān was involved in changing more than the passing semantic values of various phonemes: with its transformative worldview, the Qurʾān’s reshaping of the Arab cosmos had ethical, social, and psychological consequences.

This transformation was mediated primarily through the revelation, whose main object was the disclosure of “signs,” “miracles,” “verses” (āyāt), intended to sway the hearts of the unbelievers by bathing their imaginations in scenes of rich pastoral imagery. These signs were variegated but visible; for the Qurʾān, proof of God’s unity is, therefore, sensory in nature and is not to be derived from an abstract principle, but “grasped” (‘aqala) by sensory observation. Those who “reflect” on God’s “signs”² and who “hearken” to their semiotic content,³ are led, seamlessly, to “have knowledge”⁴ to

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¹ El-Awa, S. M. S., Textual Relations in the Qurʾān, Routledge, New York, 2006, p. 36.
² Q 30:21.
³ Q 30:23.
become a “people who understand” (qawmūn ya‘qilūna)\(^5\), and, ultimately, to “come forth” from their graves on the Day of Resurrection.\(^6\) The poetic finality of this particular segment, verbally underscored and orally stressed by the rhyming endings of each lengthy verse, creates a linguistic chain that encapsulates the Qur’ānic logic: those who heed the divine signs are assured of their fate in the Hereafter.

As noted, these signs could take many forms, including the retelling of the experiences of previous prophets. In the Qur’ān, the stories recounted of the lives of the prophets did not occur in a distant, inaccessible mythological terrain. Rather, the heritage of these tales was embodied in the very landscape within which the Arabs moved, had commerce, and worshipped: the blasted ruins of the civilization ministered to by Lot were easy to visit, “passed” with frequency,\(^7\) as well as the derelict “castles lofty and well-built” previously inhabited by populations eradicated by divine wrath.\(^8\) Most importantly of all, Abraham’s Ka‘aba, built with Ishmael his son, stood eternally at the heart of Mecca.\(^9\)

God Himself being the source of the Qur’ānic text and the mouth of the stream of revelation, the Qur’ān makes clear that, by logical progression, God is the source and preserver not only of the Preserved Tablet (al-lawh al-mahfūz),\(^10\) but of all categorical knowledge (embodied in “the names”).\(^11\) It is Adam’s possession of these “names” and his access to God’s knowledge that stupefies the angels, forcing them to acknowledge

\(^4\) Q 30:22.
\(^5\) Q 30:24.
\(^6\) Q 30:25.
\(^7\) Q 37:137.
\(^8\) Q 22:45-46.
\(^9\) cf. Q 2:127.
\(^10\) cf. Q 85.22.
both his superiority and God’s. God tells Adam to speak the names (or, in a certain way of thinking, to “recite” these “signs”), just as Muhammad recited to his followers; at Adam’s declaration, the angels abase themselves. Those who fail to yield, like Iblīs and the other residents of Medina and Mecca who disbelieved, will be rebuked and cast out. Thus, knowledge and the ability to correctly react to the visible “signs” are gifts from God; all knowledge, all reason, and all rational activity must return to their source in the form of reverent monotheism. Muhammad – as Adam – hearing God’s voice and speaking His words, is present to act as God’s regent. In surah 3, the community of those “bowing to God’s will” (muslimūn), as the angels did, is set in direct opposition to those “People of the Book” who “have no understanding” (lā ta‘qilūna), thus implying mathematically that those who self-identify as “submitting” Muslims exclusively possess ‘aql.

Muhammad’s argument in favor of those who possess ‘aql, that is, those who heed and “comprehend” God’s brilliant display of signs, creates a dichotomy between those individuals who follow the correct lineage of prophets and those who do not: the first class of people are Muslims and enter salvation at God’s will; on the other hand are those who lack ‘aql, who lā ya‘qilūna, who “don’t understand” and never will, and who fall without failing into eternal punishment. This end is native to their own character which, until it yields to the prophetic logic, remains intractable, confused, and in spiritual darkness. Those who cannot understand are “senseless,” without reason.

Such an assertion inverts the social order: in the Middle- and Late-Meccan periods, so full of trial and resistance from polytheists, Muhammad found himself...
socially outcast; oppressed by those outside his circle of adherents, he also was bound to his community, whose political identity was growing more and more complex. Just as in the stories of the prophets retold by him, Muhammad endures the sequence of his persecutions. Though his foes are powerful, he remains able to do so, the revelation confidently states, for God is behind all things, ceaselessly driving the natural universal cycles which reverse opposites, create unpredictable variations, and – as when bringing the dead to life – effortlessly execute what was thought impossible. The series of revelations from this period, reinforcing Muhammad’s affiliation with and inheritance of the Biblical lineage of prophets, creates an elite class of “those who understand” – whose lot is Heaven and whose doctrine is Muhammad’s – and an underclass of hollow polytheists, inextricably recalcitrant, whose ignorance will be annealed by eternal hellfire. A spiritual hierarchy is thereby established which is an exactly inverted mirror-image of the real social hierarchy in Mecca at that time.

This concept of the spiritual classes by necessity had profound ramifications for the emerging body politic of the Muslims. A literary analysis of the use of the verb ‘aqala in all of its many forms reveals a dividing line: the verb ‘aqala creates two social bodies – those who believe and have ‘aql and those who disbelieve and lack it. A comparative reading demonstrates that those who “have no understanding” (lā ya‘qilūna) likewise have no basis for existence; indeed, the deployment of the term ‘aqala implies a compulsory conversion, in the face of utter destruction, to the doctrine promulgated by Muhammad. According to sūrah 6 – falling for both tradition and Nöldeke and Schwally in the mid- to late-Meccan period – Muhammad is told to identify himself as “first of
those who bow to His will” (awwal al-muslimin), for “thus am I commanded.” The
textual trajectory of the root ‘-q-l can be evaluated in this context. Those individuals who
accept the natural signs as evidence for Islamic monotheism must then accept the
ministry and leadership of Muhammad, and are therefore compelled to shift their
semitic framework to the written and oral signs displayed through the Qur’an. For the
Qur’anic mind, then, the Qur’an and the visible universe form a kind of symbolic-textual
continuum that professes to those “who understand” (alladhīna yaʾqilūna) – i.e., to
Muhammad and his followers – a consistent derivative thesis whose object is God and
His will. This is not to imply that the purpose of the natural signs diminishes for those
who have converted – rather, these wonders continue to magnify the praise-worthy
activity of God and place the faithful Muslim in a world which, given the example of
Adam and the “names,”16 was created expressly to disclose God’s knowledge to men.

Insofar as true “reason” or “understanding” in the Qur’an simply signifies
accordance with the promulgation of Muhammad’s ministry, the phrase “that you might
understand” or can be interpreted, in some sense, to mean “that you might be converted,”
or “that you might accept my teaching.” Indeed, in direct opposition to that species of
“people having understanding” (qawmīn yaʾqilūna),17 who naturally marvel at the “signs”
of human commerce, organic life, and physical laws epitomized by the buoyancy of
boats, the water cycle, the wonders – like clouds and wind – of the atmosphere, and the
general distribution of wild animals all over the world18 are those who lack ‘aql. These
men are those very individuals who “follow the ways of our fathers … even though their

16 Q 2:31.
17 Q 2:164.
18 Q 2:164.
fathers had no understanding” (lā ya‘qilūna)¹⁹ – namely, the polytheists, Jews, and Christians, “those who reject faith,” who are “deaf, dumb, and blind … they do not understand” (lā ta‘qilūna)²⁰ as goats who remain ignorant of their herder.

This position is reiterated by Abraham himself – the very mirror of Muhammad in the Qur’ān – in sūrah 21; turning upon his polytheistic people, he curses their idols and rails, “do you not understand” (a-fa-lā ta‘qilūna),²¹ i.e., sufficient rationality to follow the example provided by Abraham (viz., Muhammad). It is Abraham, indeed, who establishes the primordial model of proper empirical observation of the natural signs; by noting the circuit of the sun, moon, and stars, he arrives inductively at the truth of monotheism²² and becomes the patriarch whose milla consists of all those identified as hanīf and whose “Way that is straight” Muhammad declares – to the peril of the Jews and Christians – to profess exclusively.²³ The Qur’ān therefore exalts this “Abrahamic knowledge” and posits Muhammad – who verbally reiterates both Abraham’s story and Abraham’s observational data (“so do I call to witness the ruddy glow of sunset; the night and its homing; and the moon in her fullness”)²⁴ – as both its restorer and its direct heir. As Smith notes, “the faith of the hanīf served as a precursor of the īmān which was to emerge as the essential characteristic of those who became part of the religion of Islam.”²⁵ Rosenthal echoes, “all human knowledge that has any real value and truly deserves to be called ‘knowledge’ is religious knowledge. Moreover, it is not just

¹⁹ Q 2:170.
²⁰ Q 2:171.
²¹ Q 21:67.
²² Q 6:75-77.
²⁴ Q 84:16-19, etc.; trans. ‘Alī.
vaguely some general religious information, but is specifically identical with the contents of the divine message transmitted by the Prophet.”

In its excoriation of the cowardice of those “devoid of wisdom” (lā yaʼqilūna), the text repeats that a deficiency of ‘aql is tantamount to damnation; those who do not rationally grasp Muhammad’s ministry are doomed to lament, later, “if we had only heard, or had understood (naʼqilu), we would not have been of the inhabitants of the Blaze.” This lack of understanding is caused by an “obstinate and lofty” character which directly interferes with the establishment of belief. Furthermore, those called “hypocrites,” who profess by mouth but not by heart, are associated with their “unbelieving brethren” (alladhīna kafarū) among Christians and Jews, all of whom are described as “a people who understand not” (lā yaʼqilūna). These rejecters are devoid of any latent goodness, for “if God had found in them any good, He would indeed have made them listen.” One cannot reject these signs and retain even a shred of righteousness. As such, proper intellectation – for the Qur’ānic mind – requires concord with Muhammad’s message. Those whose minds cannot accept this and who reject the semiotic evidence of nature have no worth either now or in the next world.

Existential value, then, is predicated overwhelmingly on acceptance of Muhammad’s message. Those who cannot or who refuse to do this risk ontological bankruptcy. Islam’s peace, therefore, is predicated on an unconditional acceptance of a pre-established semiotic body leading to conclusions determined a priori: those who have

27 Q 59:13.
28 Q 67:10.
29 Q 45:8; trans. ‘Alī.
30 Q 59:11.
31 Q 59:13; trans. ‘Alī.
32 Q 8:23; trans. ‘Alī.
intellect (‘aql) naturally interpret the signs in favor of Islamic doctrine, whereas those who reject this interpretation earn their eternal condemnation as the worst of beings—who, after all, “who does greater evil than he who cries lies to God’s signs, and turns away from them?”

Correspondingly, in sūrah 21, Sūrat al-Anbiyā’ (that of “the prophets”) the revelation begins by brooding over the murmuring unbelievers, condemning their clandestine mocking and denial of Muhammad’s message: “never comes (aught) to them of a renewed Message from their Lord, but they listen to it as in jest … the wrongdoers conceal their private councils, (saying), ‘Is this aught but a mortal like to yourselves.’” As a response to their conspiracies, Muhammad refers not to the Afterlife, as might be expected, but rather to the crushing death awaiting unbelievers—the proper consequence, in this case, of dissembling before God’s message is not eternal hellfire, but extermination from the earth: “(As to those) before [the deniers], not one of the populations which We destroyed believed: will these believe? … in the end We fulfilled to them Our promise, and … We destroyed those who transgressed beyond bounds” (al-musrifīn).

Such deniers naturally deserve persecution, combat, and expulsion; this notwithstanding, they are promised a horrific spectacle on the Day of Judgment, and the Qurʾān makes clear that abundant torment awaits them in the Hereafter.

As Muhammad emigrated to Medina, these apocalyptic threats were moderated by a change in environment. This predicated a semiotic shift in the concept of ‘aql. Indeed, in the latest sūrahs, the concept is linked intimately to the proper fulfillment of religious duties; in fact, it is in sūrah 2, the first Medinan sūrah according to both the

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33 Q 6:157.  
34 Q 21:2-3.  
35 Q 21:6, 9; trans. ‘Alī.
traditional account and Nöldeke and Schwally, that the root ‘-q-l occurs with the most frequency. For the most part, these occurrences fall directly into an extended invective against the “Children of Israel” – presumably the Jews – and those who incorrigibly “follow the ways of our fathers” – that is, polytheists, and, possibly, Christians following the patristic way of the apostles. These are enjoined, as usual, to open their intellects to the signs of God as they are being pointed out by Muhammad; but, most importantly, the revelation enumerates a number of precise juridical procedures and religious obligations, specifically regarding combat during the month-long truce,\textsuperscript{36} “wine and gambling,”\textsuperscript{37} the proper care of orphans,\textsuperscript{38} marriage with non-Muslims,\textsuperscript{39} the quarantine on menstruating women,\textsuperscript{40} taking oaths in the name of God,\textsuperscript{41} divorce and the rights of divorcees,\textsuperscript{42} inheritance,\textsuperscript{43} and prayer.\textsuperscript{44} This sequence terminates, however, by declaring that these religious proscriptions are “His signs for you: in order that you may understand” (\textit{la’allakum ta’qīlūna})\textsuperscript{45}; that is, the body politic itself has become a demonstrative sign, a “miracle”; religious perfection stemming from the complete observance of spiritual duties is the goal of those who aim to correctly employ their ‘\textit{aql}.

In counterpoint are those who, abrogating their religious duties and avoiding proper worship, take orthodoxy “as mockery and sport” due to their status as a “people who have no understanding.”\textsuperscript{46} It must be noted here that these individuals who lack ‘\textit{aql

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Q 2:217.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Q 2:219.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Q 2:220.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Q 2:221.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Q 2:222.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Q 2:224.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Q 2:227-233, 236-237.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Q 2:234, 240-241.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Q 2:238.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Q 2:242; trans. ‘Alî.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Q 5:58.
\end{itemize}
are not now, as in earlier sūrahs, criticized or singled out for their ignorance or denial of the natural signs; rather, they are presumably Muslims, who, despite their seeming profession of faith, nevertheless skirt their spiritual obligations. This instance reveals clearly that lacking ‘āql is a state that cannot be limited to those outside the Muslim circle: rather, both insiders and outsiders, converts and infidels, are all in a quest to perfect their ‘āql. Only those in perfect concord with Muhammad, who receives the revelation and leads the umma predicated on divine positive law, “have understanding,” have ‘āql in a complete sense.

Yet, this merits more examination. Of course, that the verb ‘aqala should occur in the Late Meccan period, when Muhammad’s message flowed primarily to the polytheists of Mecca, is no surprise; as Kermani observes, Muhammad’s repeated citation of the physical laws, of natural wonders, and of the stories of the prophets is “intended to elicit … praise of God and belief in him [sic; Muhammad?]” — his main goal during the period was to evangelize the message of monotheism, which the Quraysh and others openly rejected due to their stewardship of the pantheon housed within the Ka‘aba shrine. Later, however, after Muhammad’s emigration to Yathrib, the verb ‘aqala persists — and, most interestingly, persists in direct speeches to the body of believers: for example, “O you who believe … we have made plain to you the Signs, if you have wisdom” (in kuntum t’aqiůna), or “this is a duty on the righteous … thus God makes His signs clear to you: in order that you may understand.” Indeed, those who are already in full possession of belief (alladhīna ‘āmanū) are nevertheless conjoined to persist in their

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47 Kermani 2011, ibid.
48 Q 3:118; trans. ‘Alī.
49 Q 2:242; trans. ‘Alī.
50 Q 3:118.
observance and affirmation of the signs, which “We have made clear to you”⁵¹; yet, indeed, what use, after all, does a converted body have for more signs, given that they have already understood and grasped them as was previously demanded in earlier sūrahs? Isn’t the task of ‘aql exhausted upon conversion to Islam – upon taking up the mantle of īmān?

A possible solution is the identification of two distinct bodies of “signs”: there are physical signs, embodied in the natural order, which call polytheists, Jews and Christians to Islamic monotheism; in counterpoint, there are juridical laws, embodied in the divinely-ordained social order and its statutes, which call Muslims to deeper internal conversion. Both semiotic corpora are legal, demonstrating at once God’s limitless supernatural energy – through those eternal rules which manifest His supreme control of the universe – and His transformative social power, which He asserts in the Medinan period through the administration of the prophet. God’s power to sustain the universal engines, His power to chastise, and his power to bless are therefore mirrored by the prophet’s maintenance of a stable society, his arbitration of its punitive laws, and his establishment of positive rights and privileges. Like the differentiation between Abrahamic islām, the islām of duties and dedication, and the islām of doctrinal rectitude,⁵² there is a similar calibration between the ‘aql of the natural signs and the ‘aql of religious duties. Even after proper religious duties have been established, the process of attending the “signs” must continue; the “way of justice and law” has been formally promulgated “that you may learn wisdom.”⁵³ As such, life in Islamic society can be construed, further, as an embodied spiritual method whose strictures are religious.

⁵¹ Q 3:118.
⁵³ Q 6:151; trans. ‘Alī.
obligations – both law and ritual – whose sign is the harmonious community, and whose masters, in the stead of Muhammad, are the jurists and imāms. Their teaching, modeled on Muhammad’s teaching to the first Muslims and on Adam’s instruction of the angels\textsuperscript{54} – indeed, modeled therefore on God’s tutorship of Adam – is the means by which the Islamic semiotic corpora are identified, translated, and perpetuated. By derivation, God has instructed the prophets, whose word and ministry have ordained God’s desired social order among men and, by so doing, have established and regenerated proper worship on earth.

These concentric circles (human, society, and world) described by the Qur’ān and revealed by the verb ‘āqala, then, move an individual, by means of the signs, from an observance of God’s cosmic order to faith in God as such, and from there to membership in God’s community, captained by the Prophet: the magnificent and grand order of the physical world demonstrates God’s serene dominion over the universe, which is a metaphor of and allegorized by the Prophet’s umma. Just as mountains, rivers, and celestial time\textsuperscript{55} follow God’s decree, so does the umma.\textsuperscript{56} As these follow His will, so does the believer; the metaphorical and metaphysical link between the universe and the body politic also extends in perfect proportion to the muslim’s harmonious relationship with the umma itself. The internal faith of the Muslim affiliates him or her by nature to the Islamic social organism, which itself mirrors God’s œrgon, His “work” – the world. Noting the signs, a believer is at peace – salām – with the surrounding world and with God, to whom he has submitted (islām).

\textsuperscript{54} cf. Q 2:33: “O Adam! Tell them their names,” i.e., teach them.
\textsuperscript{55} Q 13:3.
\textsuperscript{56} Q 6:151.
In this, it is possible to detect the faint hint of the macrocosm-microcosm unity described at first by Plato, who noted the “physical resemblance between the anthropon [i.e., the human being] and the kosmos [viz., the “order” of the universal system] … attested to in the motion of the human soul (psuche) [sic], which carries a constitutional potential of emulating the motion of the universe when aided by reason.”\textsuperscript{57} This concept – what El-Bizri later calls “analogical cosmology”\textsuperscript{58} – was common among the Classical philosophers following the intellectual heritage of Plato, including Democritus of Abdera, Philo of Alexandria, and Porphyry, who saw “that self-knowledge was inherently a cosmic endeavor, in the sense that it led to knowing the universe.”\textsuperscript{59} From the use of ‘āqala and its relationship to the āyāt, the Qur’ānic voice seems to make analogous claims about knowledge, the universe, and truth: whereas Porphyry viewed self-knowledge as the window to universal understanding, the Qur’ān advocates examination and knowledge of the universal “signs” – through these signs, an individual is guided to knowledge of God and, in the context of this data, knowledge of mankind’s proper place in the kosmos. Even though it would be difficult to prove that Muhammad was explicitly familiar with Greek philosophy, this dialectic nevertheless discloses the Qur’ān’s identity as a product of the Late Antique and Hellenistic contexts.\textsuperscript{60}

Interestingly, the essentially Greek philosophical concept underlying ‘aql is hinted at by al-Iṣḥānī (d. 1109 CE), a medieval scholar. For him, there are “two kinds of

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 6.
‘aql: the faculty which is prepared to receive knowledge, and the knowledge thus received by men”\textsuperscript{61}; furthermore, al-Iṣfāhānī clarifies that “each place in which God reproaches the unbelievers as ‘without ‘aql” indicate received knowledge [not the faculty of knowledge].”\textsuperscript{62} This concept of cognition closely mirrors that of Aristotle, as received and developed by Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), which, unfortunately, cannot be further elaborated in this content. who held that “the agent intellect [viz., ‘aql] is required to abstract the intelligible forms from the images that result from sensation [to wit, also ‘aql, according to al-Iṣfāhānī].”\textsuperscript{63} This link also provocatively suggests the continuity between Greek philosophical and Qur’ānic concepts of ‘aql.

In summation, a literary and thematic analysis of the verb ‘aqala as it is used through the revelation can expose not only new semantic depths for the verb – which means, by implication, “conversion” – but also a whisper of the analogical cosmos proposed by Late Antiquity’s philosophers.

\textsuperscript{62} Al-Aṣfāhānī, p. 362.
CHAPTER 3: DISCUSSION OF FORM

Literary and thematic analysis is only one way of approaching the *muṣḥaf*. Following the method of Isutzu, semantic unities can be identified in the Qurʾān both according to appositional placement and according to syntactic usage: “when a word X is substituted for a word Y in the same passage or in exactly the same verbal context, whether its range of application be wider or narrower than that of Y, the substitution is helpful to us in investigating the semantic category of either word.”¹ This is possible because “as a unique text, the Qurʾān employs some special linguistic encoding dynamics in order to convey its specific message.”² Following Richter’s direction, this section will fulfill the second stage of his methodology by completing a contextual philological analysis of the verb ‘*aqala* according to form. Analysis of similar idiomatic deployment can disclose hidden points of overlap in the semantic fields of Qurʾānic concepts; investigation of this sort will help to make translations of ‘*aqala* more precise.

The idiomatic delivery of the verb ‘*aqala* has a limited inventory: appearance of the verb is constrained to several fixed expressions, listed here in descending order of frequency: *a-fa-lā* (y/t)*aʾqilūna*, “have they no sense,” “can you not understand,” etc.

² Abu Zayd 2003, p. 38.
(occurring fourteen times, e.g., Q 21:67); *li-qawmin ya‘qilūna,* “for a people who have understanding” (repeated eight times, e.g., Q 5:58); *la‘allakum ta‘qilūna,* “in order that you might have understanding” (eight times; e.g., Q 12:1); *lā ya‘qilūna,* “they do not understand” (occurring seven times; e.g., Q 2:171); and the construction *in kuntum ta‘qilūna,* “if you do indeed understand,” which only occurs twice in the *musḥaf,* at 26:28 and 3:118.

As this is a preliminary excursion, examination and analysis of ‘*aqala* and its interaction with related semantic fields will only be carried out on the most frequently appearing syntactic usages; these are *a-fa-lā* + imperfect verb, *li-qawmin* + imperfect verb, and *la‘allakum* + imperfect verb.

Irregular conjugations and idiomatic usages that occur singly in the Qur‘ān (*na‘qilu; a-fa-lam takūnū ta‘qilūna; mā ya‘qiluhā; min ba‘dimā aqalūhu; ya‘qilūna bihā; and aktharahum yasma‘ūna aw ya‘qilūna)* is will be treated in the section on Irregular Forms. In all cases, identification of the semantic continua implied by the varied usages of ‘*aqala* will be made possible by comparison; *GdQ*’s chronological framework, employed so heavily in the last section, will not be disposed of; rather, noting how syntactic and idiomatic usage of ‘*q-l* develops diachronically over time, the chronology will be used to show the breaking, merging, and reforming of the verb’s semantic planes as the revelation proceeds. Throughout, tables, figures and graphs will provide a common reference point as well as visual expression of the semantic mutation of ‘*aqala* and its related radix values over the course of revelation.

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1 These single instances occur at Q 67:10, Q 36:62, QQ 29:43, Q 2:75, Q 22:46, and Q 25:44, respectively.
It seems most profitable to begin by examining the most frequent construction – the most common of usages is *a-fa-lā* [t/y]aʿqilūna. The term *a-fa-lā* (used idiomatically in a complete phrase, *a-fa-lā* + imperfect verb) usually occurs at the end of a verse and is translated to be a particle indicative of an imporing question (*a-fa-lā* tubṣirūna, “do you not see?”)\(^2\) or a rhetorical interjection (*a-fa-lā* yubṣirūna ilā l-ilibi, “What, do they not consider how the camel was created?”);\(^3\) this phrase is used with frequency in the Qurʾān, with a variety of other verbs in the second- or third-person imperfect active plural form: these are yatadabbarūna (consider; Q 47:24, 4:82); yatūbūna (repent; Q 5:74,); tatafakkarūna (contemplate; Q 6:50); tatadhakkarūna (be admonished; Q 6:80, 10:03, 11:24)
11:30, 16:17, 23:85, 32:04, 37:155, 45:23), tattaqūna (fear God; Q 7:65, 10:31, 23:23, 23:25, 23:27); yuʾminūna (believe; Q 21:30); tasmaʾūna (listen; Q 28:71, 32:26); tubṣirūna (see; Q 28:72, 32:27, 43:51, 51:21); yashkurūna (be grateful; Q 36:35, 36:73); yanzūrūna (see; Q 88:017); and, finally, yaʾlamu (has knowledge; Q 100:9).

In the context of Isutzu’s method, such verbs, enjoying a similar syntax and usage, must be linked semantically. As such, at the most basic level of acknowledgement, there is a semantic continuity in the Qurʾān between the concepts of consideration, repenting, contemplation, being admonished, fearing (God), being faithful, listening, seeing, having knowledge, and possessing ‘aql. The roots, verse numbers, and revelatory periods of these instances are given in a table (figure 5: radix values of a-fa-lā + imperfect verb). It should be noted, however, that this collation is slightly misleading; though all of the aforementioned roots meet the requirements for form, not all meet the requirement for function – universally, the a-fa-lā + imperfect phrase appears at the end of a verse for rhyming purposes. As such, the last instances (for the roots n-ẓ-r and ‘l-m), while sharing a similar syntactic structure with the rest of the verbs and with ‘aqala, do not satisfy the identical poetic function of the construction. They have been stricken with an asterisk (*) to indicate their questionable semantic continuity. The roots d-b-r at Q 4:82, t-w-b at 5:74, and r-ʾy at Q 20:89 and 21:44 have been treated similarly for identical reasons.
Such an inelegant pile of data, while true, is of use to no one without a higher framework for reference. The relationships between the Qur’ānic concepts can be better discerned if graphed over revelatory time, which will highlight the changing relationship between roots. This specialization of meaning, by which individual radix concepts – like, for example, ‘aql and jahl – were refined and made more precise, can be demonstrated by a diachronic examination. The occurrence of different verbs with a syntactically identical construction has been plotted on a diachronic grid according to Nöldeke and Schwally’s reckoning; the results are displayed in a graph given above (figure 6). Here, the radix values have already been basically translated; ‘aql, due to its being the object of the investigation, has been left in its radix form. Syntactically similar but functionally diverse roots noted previously have been lightly colored to indicate their status.

As can be seen, the construction a-fa-lā from the viewpoint of form was, at its earliest, allied to, used for, or a derivative of verbs of sight or insight. Indeed, verse Q 100:9, which was revealed in the Early Meccan period, asks “does he not know” (a-fa-lā
ya’lamu, which, in the context of this very visual sequence, appears to indicate sight instead of knowledge), and, likewise, at Q 88:17, during the latter third of the Early Meccan period, a-fa-lā appears with the root n-ẓ-r: “do they not look at the camels” (a-fa-lā yanzurūna ilā l-ibīli). The first appearance of this phrase, proper in form and function, would fall in the same period, at Q 51:21, with the root b-ṣ-r, also implying sight.

The root ‘-q-l did not enter use in the Qur’ān until the Middle Meccan period; it would, however, remain in play until the midway of the Medinan period. Examining table 5, it becomes clear that ‘-q-l, as revelation went on, was joined semantically with different types of verbs, and, alternately, departed from partnership with other roots as they were superseded by yet others more relevant to the passing period of revelation. Upon entry into the Middle Meccan period, a-fa-lā ya’qilūna shared an identical poetic, syntactic, and stylistic usage with the roots b-ṣ-r, dh-k-r, and sh-k-r (and, upon extension, to r ‘-y). This indicates, it seems, that during this period the verb ‘-q-l had enough semantic latitude to be employed with the particle a-fa-lā even though previously the particle had been associated exclusively with b-ṣ-r and loosely with other verbs of sight. It is safe, therefore, to surmise by this that one of the earliest semantic values implied by ‘-q-l involved sight or perception. Interestingly, ‘-q-l would remain coupled to this idiomatic usage of a-fa-lā while b-ṣ-r would fade out in the late Meccan period as God’s “signs” changed from visual marvels to textual and juridical ordinances.

A-fa-lā also, at this point in the revelation, was associated with verbs of proper behavior – i.e., dh-k-r, “remembrance,” particularly of God, and sh-k-r, “gratitude”, both of which were enjoined upon the faithful and used as a way to reprove the unbelievers.
The root ‘-q-l may, then, share something in continuity with these roots. Noting this, it is possible to postulate a semantic aspect of ‘aqala that involves optimal conduct. This aspect of ‘aqala will be discussed in greater detail later in this section, in the discussion of verse Q 67:10.

It is interesting to note what could be termed the “spiritualization” of this particular usage of ‘aqala, mediated through the particle a-fa-lā; whereas in the Early to Late Meccan periods usage implies simple sensational or physical perception, whether hearing on seeing, of a fixed body of physical data (the “signs”), in the Late Meccan a new semantic field is introduced wherein a-fa-lā ya‘qilūna shares semantic space both with verbs of perception and verbs of behavior. Moving into the Medinan period, a-fa-lā is espoused to terms that disclose Islam’s unique religious terminology: these roots are dh-k-r, sh-k-r, t-q-w, f-k-r, d-b-r, and t-w-b, all roots whose discrete concepts – dhikr, shukr, taqwā, fikr, tadabbur, and tawbah – describe, succinctly, the appropriate relationship between a believer and God: indeed, the inventory indicates a semantic shift, according to this particular idiomatic usage, from mere perception to intellectual and spiritual contemplation. The verb ‘aqala, remaining constant throughout this transition, must likewise partake in the same shift: while ‘aqala is easily translated to “perceive” or “sense” in the early Middle to middle Late Meccan periods, it deepens to inhabit a more profound semantic field, with mental, spiritual, and intellectual connotations, overlapping the previous and endowing the construction with a religious orientation.

In summation, analysis of the idiomatic usage of the phrase a-fa-lā + imperfect verb reveals that the root ‘-q-l was, at the onset of revelation, allied to roots dealing with the senses and perception, particularly sight (b-ṣ-r, n-ẓ-r, and r-‘-y). This visual semantic
value remained linked to the particle *a-fa-lā* until the Late Meccan Period, where it was superseded by the root *s-m-‘a*, “hearing or listening,” in concord with the shift from the visible signs of Mecca to the proclaimed juridical and social signs of Medina. Besides this, in the Middle Meccan period and onward, the particle *a-fa-lā* would be allied to concepts of proper behavior, especially towards God (*dh-k-r, sh-k-r, and t-q-w*; that is, recalling God, thanking Him, and fearing Him). A semantic fissure occurs in the later Late Meccan period; there, the verb *f-k-r*, to ‘think,’’ modulates a transition begun with the roots *dh-k-r* and *t-q-w* into a more intellectual or mental usage of both *a-fa-lā* and ‘*aqala;* deviating usages of the particle *a-fa-lā* reveal, in the Medinan period, its continuing cohesion with concepts of primarily mental, decidedly spiritual activity (*d-b-r* and *t-w-b*, reflecting on God and repenting to Him).
A standard methodology thus established, it is possible to move with rapidity to the next construction, *li-qawmin yaʾqilūna*, “for a people who understand,” which appears first in the revelation at the onset of the Late Meccan phase; here, the proving signs are the “alteration of Night and Day, and the fact that God sends down sustenance from the sky, and revives therewith the earth after its death, and the change of the winds,”\(^4\) a sequence echoing and nearly identical to a previous passage, Q 25:44-53. This construction appears eight times\(^5\); of these occasions, half occur in close proximity during the Late Meccan period.

The base structure itself, *li-qawmin* + imperfect verb, is used with some frequency in the Qurʾān, appearing in forty-nine discrete verses and with a variety of verbs in the third person imperfect active plural form; these are *yūqinūna* (be certain or sure; Q 2:118, 5:50, 45:5, 16:12, 16:67, 30:24, 30:28, 29:35, 13:4, and 2:164.

\(^4\) Q 45:5
45:4, 45:20); yaʿlamūna (know; Q 2:230, 6:97, 6:105, 7:32, 9:11, 10:5, 17:52, 41:3); yafqahūna (think; Q 6:98); yuʾminūna (believe; Q 6:99, 7:52, 7:188, 7:203, 12:111, 16:64, 16:79, 23:44, 27:86, 28:3, 29:24, 29:51, 30:37, 39:52); yadhdhakkarūna (remember; Q 6:126, 16:13); yashkurūna (be grateful; Q 7:58); yattaqūna (fear God; Q 10:6); yatafakkarūna (ideate; Q 10:24, 13:3, 16:11, 16:69, 30:21, 30:42, 45:13); and yasmaʿūna (listen; Q 10:67, 16:65, 30:23). The roots, verse numbers, and revelatory period of these instances (according to GdQ) are given in a table (figure 7). A variant usage, li-qawmin lā yaʿqilūna, is actually the earliest usage at verse 23:44; due to its slight irregularity, it has been stricken with an asterisk (*).

Verse Q 23:44 is the only negative instance of this idiom in the Qurʿān, and it is the first instance of this usage of li-qawmin with a third-person imperfect active plural; the verb is āmana, and it occurs in the context of the tales of the prophets, offered up as proof of God’s ability to destroy those who “do not believe” (li-qawmin lā yuʾminūna), to wit, His enemies. Usage of this phrase in the Middle Meccan period is very sparse, and limited to the verbs āmana and ʿalima: that is, to believe and to know. In terms of meaning, the two usages indicate two different populations, which the construction li-qawmin + imperfect verb helps to distinguish: at Q 23:44, there is a tribe which “does not believe,” that is, the cluster of unbelievers in all their cumulative clans; contrastingly, at 41:3, the Qurʿānic voice reveals that the revelation and its “signs have been distinguished as an Arabic Koran for a people having knowledge” (li-qawmin yaʿlamūna) – this group is the community of those who definitively “know,” accepting the Qurʿān and Muhammad, its prophet; this usage confirms the conjecture made above that ʿ-q-l, from a literary standpoint, had strong connotations of “conversion.” After this instace,
throughout all periods of revelation, the phrase *li-qawmin* + imperfect verb is used only in a positive sense; the semantic field inhabited by *‘aqala* and the verbs affiliated with it through this usage clearly reveal the common properties of those who hearken to the signs: conceptually, they are certain, knowing, comprehending, believing, remembering, grateful, God-fearing, contemplative, listening, and possessing *‘aql*.

As was done with the construction *a-fā-lā* + imperfect verb above, the occurrence of different verbs with a syntactically identical construction has been plotted on a diachronic grid according to Nöldeke and Schwally’s reckoning; the results are displayed in a graph (figure 8). Here, the radix values, again, have already been basically translated; *‘aql* remains in its radix form. The syntactically similar but functionally diverse instance at Q 23:44, noted previously, has been lightly colored to indicate its status.

Visually, it is not difficult to see the relatively close semantic and revelatory space occupied by this usage; with its first instance in the Middle Meccan period, the final usage occurs in the Medinan period, thus showing activity over mostly the Late Meccan period. This activity, however, is both acute and intense. From a basic meaning
describing “people who know and believe” (‘-m-n and ‘-l-m) in the Middle Meccan period, the semantic field explodes exponentially during the Late Meccan: whereas only two radix values in three instances are deployed in the earliest instances of the usage of li-qawmin, seven radix values – represented by nineteen instances – are deployed in the Middle Meccan period, and nine radix values over twenty-one verses appear in the latest Middle Mecan sūrahs. The popularity of the phrase, however, would decline precipitously; later usage of li-qawmin undergoes specialization and atrophy in the Medinan sūrahs, retaining only affiliation with y-q-n, ‘a-q-l, and ‘-l-m – here, the syntactic construction of li-qawmin is used only five times.

Interestingly, the basic semantic value of ‘aqala as “perceiving by the senses” is maintained through this semantic edifice, but exclusively in the auditory realm; here, in contrast to the particle a-fa-lā, verbs of sight (e.g., r- ‘y, b-ṣ-r, n-ẓ-r, etc.) have not deployed to the field – instead, a verb of “listening,” sami ‘a, enters employment in the semantic structure, contemporaneously with ‘aqala, in the Late Meccan period. Upon entry, ‘aqala is paired not only with the radix concept of “listening” but also the mental processes of knowing (‘-l-m), ideation (f-k-r), and recalling (dh-k-r); furthermore, it shares semantic space with religious concepts related to certainty (y-q-n) and belief (‘-m-n). Indeed, one notices immediately that the external perception/internal contemplation duality, identified through the particle a-fa-lā in the previous section, is very much at work here; the semantic fields joined by the phrase li-qawmin labor under this semantic upheaval which, in a fissure between the Late Meccan and the Medinan periods, shifts ‘aqala from visual to auditory and then into mental realms of comprehension (‘-l-m and y-q-n). As such, the semantic valence of ‘aqala before this fissure – that is, in the Early
Meccan to Late Meccan periods – as “perceive by senses” is confirmed, along with its post-fissure valence of “intellectual consideration.”

Yet, comparison with the particle a-fa-lā makes it difficult to claim that the phrase li-qawmin mediated or demonstrated any kind of semantic growth, transformation, or flux in the verb ‘aqala; what is hinted at by this general expansion and cohesion of semantic fields is the utilization of li-qawmin + imperfect verb as a stock phrase, a refrain, into which many different verbs – all associated with positive religious qualities expected from the nascent Muslim community – could be installed for purposes both stylistic and semantic. Having become a frequently used catchphrase in the Late Meccan period, its usage dwindles.

In summary, examination of the semantic array of the phrase li-qawmin and its allied verbs demonstrates a relatively brief period of usage that, nevertheless, displays the influence of semantic “spiritualizing” discovered in the operation of the particle a-fa-lā vis-à-vis diverse fields of meaning. The acute introduction of multiple semantic continua discloses the employment of the construction as a stock phrase – a refrain of exhortation – that would reach its peak in the Late Meccan period and then disappear almost completely in the Medinan period.

- La’allakum + imperfect verb

Of la’alla Cragg notes, “the particle la’alla occurs with impressive reiteration throughout the book, followed almost always by verbs having to do with intelligence [viz., ‘aqala], recognition, understanding, thankfulness, and reverence. ‘Perhaps you may
come to your senses,’ ‘peradventure you may realize …,’ ‘it may be that you will be grateful …,’ ‘if perchance you may know that mercy is being done to you.’ The phrases occur … with verbs and pronouns in the second person, fifty times in the third, in either case in conjunction with the āyāt or ‘signs’ of God … always there is the double association of idea – significance attaches to the natural event and it needs the attentive recognition of the perceptive soul.”

The particle la‘alla, alone (Q 33:63, 42:17, 65:1) or conjoined with either the second person singular (yielding la‘allaka; Q 20:130, 26:3) or the third person singular (producing la‘allahu; Q 20:44, 21:111, 80:3) pronouns, finds its strength and most common usage when united to the second and third person plurals: while the aforementioned limited singular pronoun and isolated-particle cases number a total of eight verses, the plural forms – la‘allahum and la‘allakum – are represented by over a hundred total instances in the mushaf. Interestingly, la‘allahum and la‘allakum seem to occupy entirely different semantic fields despite their cosmetic similarity; though these two particles share some common radicals (t-q-w, dh-k-r, ’-m-n, etc.), the semantic field occupied by la‘allahum juts out into a completely different region: linked in usage to la‘allahum are radix concepts like r-j-‘, “return [to God]” (e.g., Q 7:168), ḍ-r-‘, “be humbled” (e.g., Q 7:94), and r-sh-d, “to be rightly led” (e.g., 2:186). Most importantly here, the root ‘-q-l does not occur in conjunction with la‘allahum, and as such the forty occurrences of this construction throughout the Qur‘ān will not be compiled into the present semantic bundle based on ‘aqala.

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6 Cragg 1973, p. 147.
To wit, the particle

la‘allakum – translated variously in verse 2:21 as “haply you should,”\(^7\)

[in order] that you [may or] might\(^8\)

and “that you may have the chance”\(^9\)

– appears in sixty-eight discrete instances from the Early Meccan period to the Medinan period; as such, among the idiomatic particles attached to ‘aqala, it the most long-lived, being in continuous usage through nearly the entire revelatory sequence. Being enduring and of broad usage, la‘allakum occupies a large body of semantic implications and shares borders of meaning with many radix concepts. Of these nearly seventy instances, the root ‘-q-l is paired with la‘allakum eight times: this construction can be found at verses Q 43:3, 6:151, 12:2, 40:67, 2:73, 2:252, 57:17, and 24:61.

\(^7\) Arberry.


\(^9\) ‘Alī.
"La’allakum is also paired with other imperfect verbs, holding consistency with the attached pronoun (-kum) by conjugation in the second person plural, in the imperfect tense, and in the active mood; these are tadhakkarūna (remember; Q 51:49, 16:90, 6:152, 7:57, 24:1, and 24:7); tatafakkarūna (think or consider; Q 2:219, 2:266); tuflīhūna (thrive; Q 7:69, 2:189, 62:10, 8:45, 3:130, 3:200, 22:77, 5:35, 5:90, 5:100, and 24:31); taghlibūna (win; Q 41:26); tahtadūna (be guided; Q 43:10, 16:15, 7:158, 2:53, 2:150, and 3:103); takhludūna (live long, last; Q 26:129); turhamūna (to receive mercy; Q 27:46, 36:45, 7:204, 6:155, 7:63, 3:132, 49:10, and 24:56); taṣṭalūna (to be warmed; Q 27:7, 28:29); tashkurūna (be grateful; Q 16:14, 16:78, 30:46, 35:12, 45:12, 28:73, 2:52, 2:56, 2:185, 8:26, 3:123, 22:36, 5:6, and 5:89); tusʿalūna (be asked; Q 21:13); tuslimūna (submit or surrender; Q 16:81); tattaqūna (fear God; Q 6:153, 7:171, 2:21, 2:63, 2:179, 2:183); and, finally, tūqinūna (be sure; Q 13:2). The roots, verse numbers, and revelatory period of these instances (according to GdQ) are given in a pair of table (figures 9 & 10).

Observing these commonalities, it can be noted that, on the most basic level on analysis, there is a semantic link between the concepts of remembering, thinking, thriving, winning, being guided, having a long life span, receiving mercy, being warmed, being grateful, being sure, fearing God, surrendering to Him, and possessing ‘aql.
Universally, this construction occurs at the end of a
verse and functions both as a closer
of lists of “signs” (āyāt) and as a
formulaic refrain to continue or
conclude the –ūna rhyme of
previous verses. The –kum suffix
in this syntactic package refers,
without variation, to believers;
these believers are the body of
witnesses to which the semiotic
corpora – physical or literal – are
being clarified by God, “in order
that you may understand”
(laʿallakum taʿqilūna, Q 2:242).
Unique constructions that do not
adhere to this function have been
reckoned as irregular occurrences;
for example, verse 41:26 seems to
be a functionally analogous
construction: “the unbelievers say,
talk idly about it; haply you will overcome”” (laʿallakum taghlibūna) – yet, the addressed
plural is not the body of believers, but rather Muhammad’s opponents. As such, functional demands have not been met, and the appearance of the root gh-l-b has been stricken with an asterisk (*). Similar considerations have also disqualified the root s-l in verse 21:13 (a taunt against unbelievers who take too much stock in their fortifications) and y-q-n in verse 13:2, which interpolates a qualifying phrase – bi-liqā‘i rabbikum – between the particle la‘allakum and its imperfect verb, tūqinūna.

Likewise, wherever the particle la‘allakum + imperfect verb appears within the mouth of a Qur’ānic prophet, it has been starred with an asterisk (*), as above, to distinguish a syntactic peer with a very slight semantic deviation; for example, verse Q 26:129, la‘allakum takhludūna, spoken from the mouth of Hūd in his ministry to the people of ‘Ād, fulfills the syntactic usage requirement but not the functional requirement; here it is used to mockingly address unbelievers. The root s-l-y, to “warm,” spoken by Moses to his family (li-ahlihi), has been correspondingly marked.

As was done with the construction a-fā-lā + imperfect verb above, the occurrence of different verbs with a syntactically identical construction has been plotted on a diachronic grid according to Nöldeke and Schwally’s reckoning; the results are displayed in a graph (figure 11). Here, the radix values, again, have already been basically translated; ‘aql remains in its radix form. All functionally diverse instances noted previously have been lightly colored to indicate their status.
Noting figures 9, 10 and 11, it is clear that the particle *la'allakum* inhabits a markedly different set of semantic fields: newly added as coterminous with ‘-*q-l*’ are the concepts of *f-l-h*, “flourishing,” *r-h-m*, “having mercy,” and *h-d-y*, “to be guided.” It is noted that, in contrast to *a-fa-lā* and *li-qawmin*, which exclusively highlighted the virtues of the *umma* – that is, of human beings – the particle *la'allakum* uniquely introduces the actions of God in His capacity to bless: in the Qur’ān, God alone is the one who guides, who has mercy, and who causes His people to flourish. The appearance of this last radix concept in the Medinan period seems to support the traditional account of Muhammad’s ministry; finally relatively secure in Yathrib, the nascent Islamic community could, at last, feel secure enough to express their hopes of success beyond mere survival.

In contrast as well to *a-fa-lā* and *li-qawmin* is the revelatory timeframe in which the particle *la'allakum* enters its maximum semantic array; whereas *a-fa-lā* experienced a semantic bloom in the Middle Meccan period (cf. figure 6) and *li-qawmin* in the Late Meccan period (cf. figure 8), the syntactic construction involving *la'allakum* experiences
an explosion of semantic linkages in the Medinan period, just as *a-fā-lā* and *li-qawmin* are dwindling in importance.

This late blossoming can be seen, in literary terms, as the cap of a natural progression, embodied in semantic mutation, which mirrors synchronic developments in the traditional account of the Prophet’s life; in the Middle Meccan period, Muhammad presented the “signs” to his polytheist opponents, imploring them – *a-fā-lā* ta‘*qilūna*, “will you not see?” – to heed his message before the revenge of God were to descend, fiery and inexorable, on His foes; later, in Mecca, the enlargement of the Prophet’s community and his combat against the polytheist jāhiliyyah paradigm occasioned a beginning of the Qur’ānic enjoining of mental attitudes for the upright (and, perhaps, for the Prophet himself): think, recall, fear, believe. This marked a shift in semantic value from the visual and auditory signs to mental activity, perpetuated in the semantic values indicated by the phrase *li-qawmin*: know, believe, be sure, recall, and so forth, thought processes “for a people who understand,” *li-qawmin ya‘*qilūma. As the community and its Prophet moved to Medina, the respite long hoped-for came at last, as well as repeated vindication from God; here, the semantic field links ‘*aql* with God’s mercy, God’s guidance, and the prosperity (*f-l-h*) of God’s people – the traditional time of the Prophet’s triumph, prophesied continuously throughout the Qur’ān, had finally come.

As a summation, the broad usage of the particle *la’allakum* throughout the *mushaf* nevertheless implies a relatively cohesive semantic field: used sparsely in the Late Meccan period, the usage of *la’allakum* increases exponentially in the Medinan, indicating a complete system: that is, the proper attitude of believers represented by recollection of, fear of, gratitude for, and submission to God is rewarded by Him in turn
with mercy, guidance, and prosperity. The root ‘-q-’, as the appropriate “understanding” of God’s new juridical signs, likewise participates in this exchange.
Irregular Forms

Though the root is remarkably consistent in deployment and syntactic usage throughout the Qur’ānic text, there are, nevertheless, a few divergences from the standard, formulaic idioms. These deserve special attention, inasmuch as they may uncover, most importantly for this thesis, more nuanced semantic values for the root. There are a number of irregular conjugations and idiomatic usages occurring in sole instances in the Qur’ān; these are na‘qīlū¹; a-fa-lam takānū ta‘qīlūnā²; mā ya‘qīlūhā³; mā ‘aqālūhu⁴; ya‘qīlūnā bihā⁵; and aktharahum yasma‘ūna aw ya‘qīlūna.⁶

Special attention should be paid to irregular instances because, from a certain perspective, they represent “freer” versions of ‘aqala, unfettered by the formulaic application of the syntactic structures which became the Qur‘ān’s standard literary topography. These may hint, in theory, at either new or original meanings coming into play or returning to usage after a period in semantic retirement. At verse Q 2:75, the root takes one of the few remarkable forms of the verb; whereas the root ‘-q-’l mostly appears in the second- or third-person active imperfect plural (ya‘qīlūnā, ta‘qīlūnā), it appears

¹ Q 67:10.
² Q 36:62.
³ Q 29:43.
⁴ Q 2:75.
⁵ Q 22:46.
⁶ Q 25:44.
here in the third person active perfect plural (‘aqalū), demonstrating a transitive function to its pronoun (hu) which presumably refers to the “Word of God” (kalām Allāh).

Similarly, the form found at verse 22:46 is irregular, being the only instance in which the verb ‘aqala appears with a preposition, in this case bi, indicating “hearts by means of which wisdom is gained,” paired with “ears by which to listen.”

The third irregular conjugation of of ‘aqala occurs at Q 29:43, where, it is asserted, the secret lessons of religious allegories belong exclusively to those who have knowledge: “such are the parables we set forth for mankind, but only those understand them (ya‘qiluhā) who are knowers” (al-‘ālimūna). This is the only instance in the Qur’ān where the verb ‘aqala is conjugated in the third person imperfect active singular; furthermore, it takes a direct object, ḥā, presumably the “parables,” amthāl, previously mentioned.

Of the ten instances of ‘aqala in the Mid-Meccan period, two are of irregular usage: these are Q 36:62 and 67:10. Though conjugated in a standard way – i.e., in the second person active imperfect plural – the usage at verse 36:62 is not standard: the text has a-fā-lam takānnū ta‘qīlūna. The word a-fā-lam is a relatively rare one in the Qur’ān; occurring only twelve times throughout the revelation,¹ it is a prefix of rhetorical rebukes, and indicates a kind of astonishment that obvious data has not been comprehended (“have they not journeyed,” “did not the believers know,” “is it not a guidance,” etc.). This relatively early occurrence of ‘-q-l, in the Middle Meccan period, attests – as mentioned previously – to the elasticity of the root and its ability to adhere to any number of semantic fields.

Considering the preliminary nature of this thesis, lexical investigation has been limited to a single irregular instance: that of verse 67:10. Such a probationary exercise will be instructive and will, furthermore, reveal additional semantic depth in the verb ‘aqala that is not disclosed in the idiomatic usages explored previously.

Q 67:10

Wa-qālū law kunnā nasma’u aw na’qilu
mā kunnā fī aṣḥābi s-sa’īri

At verse 67:10, the verb ‘aqala again deviates from its usual form; whereas throughout the revelation it mostly appears in the second- or third-person imperfect active plural (ya‘qilūna, ta‘qilūna), here the verb appears in the first-person plural – those speaking it are the unbelievers, lamenting their grim fate in the Hereafter and ablaze with remorse in the inextinguishable flames of Hell: “if we had only heard, or had understood (na’qilu), we would not have been of the inhabitants of the Blaze.” This statement from the tormented is unique in the Qur’ān, along with its usage of sami’a, appearing here as nasma’u (listen). Though the translation “used our intelligence” seems acceptable in the context, the root ‘aqala – as previously demonstrated by “irregularities” occurring earliest in the revelation – had a broader usage in the Middle Meccan period, before it became a part of a number of Qur’ānic formulae. Its unique usage here should be examined.
Lexical Inventory of ‘-Q-L in Kitāb al-‘Ayn and Elsewhere

As Kermani notes, “… the noun ‘aql occurs in a somewhat different guise from its Qur’ānic one in numerous hadiths, particularly in some which are not regarded as canonical. There it is used in a general sense that does not refer to God’s relationship to humankind. Hence a general evaluation of ‘aql in Islam can only be established from post-Qur’ānic sources.”

Here, Kermani openly admits that there is a fundamental discontinuity between the Qur’ānic concept of ‘aql (concealed in its deployment of the verb ‘aqala) and the concept as it is employed commonly (that is, defined as “intellectual discernment,” “reasoning,” &c.). It is this common definition which seems to have concealed the root’s original semantic depth, whatever it was.

How can this depth be reclaimed? Recourse to the lexical corpus and other bodies of linguistic science may be fruitful. Reference to Semitic relatives of the Arabic language, unfortunately, yields no additional data; according to Zammit, the verb ‘aqala has an attested cognate in the Ge’ez dialect, ‘aql, which, coming through Arabic, is rendered as Latin “ingeniun, prudentia”; viz., “nature, innate talent, disposition, intelligence” and “acquaintance, knowledge, sagacity, discretion, and foresight.” Other contentious cognates with South Semitic ‘lq and ḡlq, meaning “to see,” are attested by Cohen but not by Conti Rossini, Biella, or Beeston et al. Zammit continues on to further classify ‘-q-l as belonging exclusively to the semantic category related to

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2 Kermani 2011, ibid.
5 Conti Rossini, K., Chrestomathia Arabica meridionalis epigraphica. Edita et glossario instructa. Instituto per l’Oriente, Rome, 1931
6 Biella, J. C., Dictionary of Old South Arabic, Sabaean Dialect, Scholars Press, Chico, California, 1982
“intelligence, perception, conscience, memory, imagination, thought,” that is, “reasoning and judgments.”  

The heavy hand of scholarly consensus discussed in the Introduction of this thesis is, no doubt, apparent here, making Zammit’s otherwise useful and very erudite work somewhat irrelevant to the task at hand. To arrive at a sense of the original semantic value of ‘aqala, lexica should be examined. Though Arkoun decries this kind of philological investigation as nothing “more than the satisfaction of a scientific curiosity,” the usefulness and interest, notwithstanding, of such an approach will hopefully remain undiminished. Indeed, Arkoun goes on to concede, “investigation of the etymologies of a semantically rich vocabulary is very useful as long as one does not content oneself with deceptive substrata.”  

With this in mind, the oldest and simplest of the extant Arabic lexica was selected for definition. Al-Khalîl’s Kitâb al-‘Ayn was compiled near the end of the eighth century, thus distancing it from the compilation of the Qur’ān by more than a hundred years. Nevertheless, considering that the Arabic lexical sciences emerged with philologists paying strong attention to the language of the Qur’ān, it seems reasonable to cautiously assert that the semantic values recorded in al-‘Ayn remain an accurate reflection of the meanings intended by the Qur’ānic voice.  

Al-Khalîl’s definition of ‘aql has some expected contamination by the preconceived value of “intellect”; he notes that “al-maʾqūl is what is understood (taʾqīluhu) in the mind.”  

That which is understood (mā yufhamu), al-Khalîl notes, falls into the realm of the intellect (‘aql); as such, it appears the verb ‘aqala is synonymous

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8 Zammit 2002, p. 48; 487.
9 Arkoun 2011, ibid.
with the verb *fahima*, to comprehend or understand. Yet, unlike *fahama*, the semantic field of the verb *‘aqala* includes concepts like “grasping,” “binding” or “restraint”; for example, al-Khalīl notes that “the bowels of a sick person ‘clench’ or ‘grasp’ (*‘aqala*) whenever he has a bowel movement: [that is,] they seize or cling together” – likewise, one can “grasp” or “bind” (*‘aqala*) a camel by means of a “binding” (*‘aqlan*), constraining its limbs with a “ligature” or “rope” (*al-‘iqāl*). Similarly, *al-aqīlah* is a woman who is “restrained” “behind a screen or curtain, held in custody within her own home.” Derivatively, one can conclude that the semantic cloud of *‘aql* includes senses of “binding,” “restraining,” and “grasping,” the last of which carries the same intellectual connotations as “understanding” in English as well as those present in the German concept of “greifen/begreifen.”

Most important and remarkable, however, is al-Khalīl’s definition of *‘aqla* at the beginning of the entry, where al-Khalīl immediately and unambiguously establishes his primary definition: i.e., that “*al-‘aql naqīḍ al-jahl*,” – “‘aql is the opposite of *jahl*.” For scholars willing to accept the conventional signification of these words, this definition (viz., “intellectual discernment is the opposite of ignorance”) could not be more straightforward, more clear or more in concord with the usual interpretation of *‘aqala*.

Yet, this simple definition seems precocious – according to recent scholarship, the root *j-h-l*, like many Arabic trilateral roots, inhabits a very complex semantic field that has very little at all to do with “ignorance” as such; indeed, Khatab notes – in *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb: The Theory of Jahiliyyah*, an instrumental work for the discussion at hand – that “the Qur’an has never defined *jahiliyyah* as a lack of knowledge
of the sciences. The Qur’an presents the idea of *jahiliyyah* in contrast to the idea of Islam.”

The root *j-h-l*, and its attendant first form verb, *jahala*, had a deep series of connotations which correlated more closely to hedonistic abandon and wildness than to the oafish stupidity, obliviousness, or denseness implied by opposition with the usual translation of *‘aql* as “understanding.” Indeed, the age now referred to as the *jāhiliyyah*, the putative “Age of Ignorance,” was characterized not so much by intellectual backwardness but by a social context that encouraged “open hearts and boiling passions, with no law to control, and little religion to restrain them.”

Goldziher clarifies, introducing *jahl*’s natural opposition to *ḥilm* (mildness) in pre-Islamic poetry and society:

“*jahl* was neither a virtue to the Arabs of an older time – it was appropriate to a young and impetuous character – nor was it entirely condemned. Part of the *murwwa* was knowing when mildness was not befitting the character of a hero and when *jahl* was indicated: ‘I am ferocious (*jahul*) where mildness (*tahallum*) would make the hero despicable, meek (*halim*) when ferocity (*jahl*) would be unfitting to the noble,’ or as is said in the spirit of paganism.” [transcriptions sic]

Reacting to Goldziher, Khatab asserts that “this suggests that tribal pride, tribal conflict and sociopolitical and economic factors influenced the pre-Islamic understanding of the terms *ḥilm* and *jahl* in Arabia”: the concept of *jahl* was, therefore, a broad one that indicated a whole spectrum of activity in relation to power, excess strength, appropriate wildness, and open ferocity. It also “encompassed the capacity to oppress others or mount violent revenge.”

Al-Khalīl could not have been unaware of this

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12 Khatab 2006, p. 28.
14 Khatab, 2006, p. 29.
15 Ibid., p. 23.
16 Ibid., p. 30.
contrast, a rich and full one, containing all the variety and depth of two social orders – the pre-Islamic view and the view promulgated by the Prophet Muhammad – encountering one another in a zero-sum battle for existence: “the Arabs have no ‘authentic’ documentation of the concept of *jahiliyyah* other than the Qur’an” (Khatab 2006, p. 23).

Indeed, the first Muslims called their ardent Qurayshite persecutor, ‘Amr ibn Hishâm, by the sobriquet “Abū Jahl,” usually rendered “father of ignorance” – as seen here, though, this impoverishes the expansiveness of the term *jahl*: his name might be more accurately translated as “father of cruelty,” “father of ferocity,” “father of violent revenge” “father of outbursts,” and so on.¹⁷

Examples from the corpus of pre-Islamic poetry can shed further light on the matter. Of the seven lyrical *mu‘allaqāt* “suspended,” according to legend, on the walls of the Ka‘aba, the ode of ‘Amr ibn Kulthūm is one of the most memorable and, to this day, one of the most well-known (its elegant meter is certainly a help). ‘Amr’s *qaṣīda* is a typical catechesis in the values of the pagan society into which Muhammad was born and against which he found himself constantly engaged:

*Alā hubbī biṣaḥniki fa-ṣbaḥīnā*  
*Wa-lā tubqī khumūra l-Andarīnā* ...  

*Tarā l-ḥizza sh-shaḥīha idhā*  
*Umīrrat ‘alayhi li-mālihi fīhā muḥīnā* ...  

*Wa-innā sawfa tudrikūn l-manāyah*  
*Muqaddaratan lanā wa-muqaddarīnā* ...  

*Alā lā yajhalan aḥadun ‘alaynā*  

Now, then, cup-bearer, awake, and give us our morning draught from your goblet, and do not keep the wines of Andarīnā …

You see the miserly avaricious one, when the cup is passed round to him, despise his property for it …

And surely death will overtake us, For it is fated us, and we are fated to it …

Beware violence against us!

¹⁷ cf. Khatab, p. 29.
Fa-najhala fawqa jahlī l-jāhilīnā  For our revenge will surpass the folly of the foolish\textsuperscript{18}

The last line clearly paints the semantic field available in Muhammad’s vicinity when considering the root $j\text{-}h\text{-}l$: the concept diagrammatically occupies a space ranging from rash action to berserk foolishness to brash bravery and righteous revenge. Underlying all of this is the idea that, in some sense, $jahl$ means acting unreservedly: the two final hemistiches, with this idea superimposed, are not unclear in this regard: “Make sure that not one of you [fails to reserve himself from acting] against us! For we (will) [act unreservedly in return], more than [the most unreserved] [of those who are unreserved].” In confirmation, Goldziher renders these verses as “may no one act wildly against us because we then would exceed the wildness of those acting wildly.”\textsuperscript{19}

The Qur’ānic usage of $j\text{-}h\text{-}l$ is remarkably small: only fifteen instances of the root occur, either as an active verb or an active participle. Isutzu expands on the Qur’ānic concept of $jahl$: Muhammad did not conceive of the $jāhilīyah$ as “a period of time that had now passed away, but rather as something dynamic, a certain psychological state apparently driven away by the new force of Islām … [it] had practically nothing to do with ‘ignorance’; [it] meant in reality the keenest sense of … the unyielding spirit of rivalry and arrogance, and all the rough and rude practices coming from an extremely passionate temper.”\textsuperscript{20} The ethical vision of Islam, Isutzu goes on to note, was to eradicate this paradigm from the world completely: in its place, Islam proposed $ḥilm$, mildness for the pre-Islamic Arabs, or “the act of reigning one’s soul and holding back one’s nature

\textsuperscript{18} Verses 1, 4, 8, and 57 found in both English translation and Arabic in Johnson, F. E.,\textit{ The Seven Poems Suspended in the Temple at Mecca}, Bombay, 1893, p. 128ff.
\textsuperscript{19} Goldziher 1967, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{20} Isutzu 2002, p. 29.
from the violent emotion of anger.\footnote{Isutzu 2002, p. 30.} As confirmation, Kitāb al-‘Ayn defines ḥilm as “al-anāh,” or “equanimity,” “moderation,” “gentleness,” making it a clear antonym of jahl, as indicated.

Can two antonyms of jahl – that is, ‘aql and ḥilm, be somehow proven to be semantically coterminous synonyms? Intriguingly, Lane records with some skepticism that an entry in Tāj al-‘Arūs indicates the root ḥ-l-m as also inhabiting the semantic field of “intelligence”: ḥilm was attributed this meaning, along with its plural aḥlām; Q 52:32, \textit{am ta’muruhum aḥlāmuhum}, or “do their faculties of understandings urge them,” is given as an example.\footnote{Lane 1863, book I, p. 632.} A consultation of Tāj al-‘Arūs yields the following in the entry under ḥ-l-m:

\begin{quote}
… (Wa-minhu) qawluhu taʿālā: \textit{am ta’muruhum aḥlāmuhum bihādhā. Qīla: ma’anāhu ‘uqūlhum wa-laysa l-ḥilmu fī l-haǧīqati l-‘aqīla, lākin fassarūhu bi-dhālika li-kawnihi min musabbabātī l-‘aqīli, wa-fī l-hadīth: la-yaliyannī minkum ulū l-aḥlāmī wa-n-nuhā, ay: dhū l-albābi wa-l-‘uqūl.}
\end{quote}

“[Given as] an example [of this usage],” begins az-Zabīdī, “is the Word of God Most High: ‘or does their aḥlām bid them do this?’” At this juncture, the lexicographer demurs: “actually, ḥilm cannot mean the same as ‘aql,” he insists, “but [the exegetes] explained it this way because ḥilm is among the effects of ‘aql. [This usage is corroborated] in the hadīth: [Muhammad said:] ‘among you, those who succeed me are those who possess aḥlām and nuhā.” Az-Zabīdī glosses this by noting that the possessors of aḥlām are the same ones “who have ‘aql.” It is from this series of tautologies that Lane concludes above that these are “persons of understanding,” allowing
the entry to stand as it is, in concord with scholarly consensus and with what appear to be his personal notes: the synonymity of \('aql\) and \(\text{hilm}\), he says, “requires consideration.”

Nevertheless, \(\text{az-Zabidhi’s dissimilation reveals his lexical entrapment. In refusing to concede al-Baydawi’s assertion that \(\text{hilm}\) is a synonym for \('aql, az-Zabidhi exposes at once, through his citations, the neglected inner depths of the semantic continuum occupied by \('q-l\) and \(h-l-m\) in their coterminous field, perpendicular in meaning to \(j-h-l\): as such, using al-Khalil’s lexical equivalencies and al-Zabidhi’s observations in a mathematical equation, it can be derived that \(j-h-l \neq h-l-m = 'q-l\). Given that sūrah 52 is classified by \(GdQ\) as Early Meccan, it can be derived that these two roots, common foes of \(jahl\), were used interchangeably at an early stage of the Qur’an’s development of vocabulary.

As such, the “grasping” or “binding” connotation of \('q-l\) noted by al-Khalil and Lane was softened, in the early period of revelation, by the “moderation” and “restraint” implied by \(\text{hilm}\). To “restrain one’s self,” to “withhold one’s impulses,” in the context of increasing one’s “equanimity,” seems to be an acceptable semantic value for \('aqala\) occurring in the Middle Meccan revelation. That verse 67:10 originated in the Middle Meccan revelation was discussed previously, and, thematically, the broader context of the sūrah forms a diatribe against “sins,” \(^{24}\) the “secrets of (all) hearts,” \(^{25}\) and persistence in “insolent impiety” \(^{26}\) and “manifest error” \(^{27}\); topically, then, the theme of proper, virtuous action in contrast to acts repugnant to God is highlighted. That \('aqala\) in Q 67:10 might imply self-restraint is supported by the literal apposition found in sūrah 25, another

\(^{23}\) cf. also Lane’s (1863) translation; book I, p. 632.
\(^{24}\) Q 67:11.
\(^{25}\) Q 67:13.
\(^{26}\) Q 67:21.
\(^{27}\) Q 67:30.
irregularity; “such a one as takes for his god his own passion” is “like cattle,” possessing no understanding (lā ya‘gilūna)\textsuperscript{28}; that is, one who lets his pleasure run free and does not inhibit or control himself is truly without ‘aql. As Bamyeh ultimately confirms, “jahl had the dual meaning of ‘ignorance’ and ‘temperamental insensibility,’”\textsuperscript{29} ‘aql being its opposite.

In the context of all these considerations, it is submitted – noting: the more extensive bonds between concepts revealed by Isutzu’s method; the broad semantic parity between ‘aql, hilm, and jahl in the early revelation, uncovered by the lexica; and, the thematic and literary properties of sūrah 67 – that the verb na‘qilu at verse 10, instead of “we understand,” should be translated to “we restrain our [hedonistic, jāhil] behavior.” This translation most accurately fits the sense of ‘aqala at this point in the revelation.

\textsuperscript{28} Q 25:44.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION & FUTURE RESEARCH

After a close study of the semantic alliances – revealed through syntactical usage – it is clear that the verb ‘aqala in the Qur’ān has a precise function according to both its usage and the period of revelation in which it appears. These considerations in mind, translation of the verb can be calibrated beyond the blanket term “understand” to more closely correspond to the connotations hinted at in the Qur’ānic text. Further, beyond the most common syntactic usages, the verb ‘aqala may imply extremely precise semantic values; this has been demonstrated through the case of verse 67:10.
To more clearly illustrate the development of the verb throughout the course of revelation, all affiliated roots have been collated into a comprehensive graph of chronological usage; this graph is, in essence, a combination of figures 6, 8, and 11 in Chapter 4 (figure 12). As can be seen, the root ‘-q-l occupies semantic fields, according to revelatory period, that can be clearly categorized: in the Early Meccan to Middle Meccan periods, ‘aqala is linked to perceiving by sight, which transforms into perceiving by ear throughout the Late Meccan period. This category of meaning is related to “sense” and has been labeled as such in the diagram; also labeled is the semantic category “thinking,” which, along with the category of semantic value linked to proper “behavior,” dominate the late Middle Meccan to the Medinan period. A fourth semantic category
related to the blessings of “God” has putative beginnings in the Middle Meccan period, but enters true strength throughout the revelation in Medina. As mentioned previously, this confirms the literary reading of the signs: taken comprehensively over the entire mushaf, the root ‘-q-l tells the story of conversion by sensation and perception, to mental contemplation and its contingent changes in behavior, to blessings and rewards from God.

Pursuant to these categories, one can move towards a more precise understanding and thus a more adequate translation of ‘aqala. Though this does not bear out in every case, it is worthwhile to note that, at verse 67:10, the translation proposed above – i.e., “restrain behavior” – fits into the general subtext of “thinking” and “behavior” that underscores the Middle Meccan to Medinan periods. Indeed, it would be useful to proceed verse by verse wherever ‘aqala appears, titrating the translation of the verb according to its semantic liabilities at that point of revelation. Figure 13 provides a demonstration of this titration in action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Arberry</th>
<th>Titrated translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37:137-138 (K2)</td>
<td>Wa-innakum latamurrūnā ‘alayhim musbihīn wa-bi-l-layli a-fa-lā ta’qilūna</td>
<td>And you pass by them in the morning and in the night: will ye not understand?</td>
<td>And you pass by them in the morning and in the night: won’t you reflect on them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67:10 (K2)</td>
<td>Wa qālū law kunnā nasma‘u aw na‘qilu, mā kunnā fī aṣḥābī s-sa‘īr</td>
<td>They also say, “if we had only heard, or had understood, we would not have been the inhabitants of the Blaze.”</td>
<td>They also say, “if we had only heard, or had restrained our behavior, we would not have been the inhabitants of the Blaze”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25:44 (K2)</td>
<td>Am taḥsabu anna aktharahum yasma‘ūna aw ya‘qilūna in hum illā ka-l-an‘āmī bal hum aḍallu sabīlan</td>
<td>Or deemest thou that most of them hear or understand? They are but as the cattle; nay, they are further astray from the way.</td>
<td>Or deemest thou that most of them hear or see? They are but as the cattle; nay, they are further astray from the way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13: Possible Titration of Irregular Forms of ‘aqala
Returning to figure 12, one could not wish for a nicer, smoother, or more mathematical progression; the movement of 'aqala through various semantic fields according to its alliance with diverse usages is clean, showing clear detachments into solid conceptual categories. These categories are cleaner than expected, given the consensus that Nöldeke and Schwally’s model is conjectural and unreliably precise. Indeed, having examined the semantic data for this particular root, it appears that – based on the deployment of the root 'aqala and its affiliated verbs throughout the Qurʾān in their most significant usages – semantic and syntactic activity affirms certain aspects of the traditional account of the Qurʾān’s genesis.

The traditional account of the historical context of the Qurʾān itself must be considered. Indeed, the matter of the Qurʾān’s cradle and its compilation – at least according to the traditional version – has already been discussed; by all accounts, that literary womb involved, for Prophet and followers, social upheaval and ascent, movements of location, and vast changes in what was relevant and important to both the Prophet and the first Muslims.

As older frames of reference faded and habitual challenges were resolved, new concerns spun towards the core of the nascent umma. Yet, in order to remain an effective communicator, and before the body of sharīʿa was developed as a discreet corpus, Muhammad’s revelation needed to remain both relevant and alive to his followers. The Qurʾānic text bears witness to this force; indeed, that the Qurʾānic voice responded frequently to the contemporary affairs of Muhammad is not really a matter of controversy\(^1\) – a famous ḥadīth related by al-Bukhārī records ‘Āʾisha’s somewhat snide

\(^1\) cf. Q 33:37; 33:50, etc.
This observation, however, has always been made in regards to the content of the revelation, not its syntactical and semantic strategies. Conjecturally, this thesis shows that usage of certain particles also transformed over the course of revelation, within certain semantic categories, to more closely fit the rhetorical needs of a changing audience. Indeed, the revelation directly addresses concerns that, presumably, were of prime consideration for both the Prophet and his community. As the Islamic community grew larger, the faith needed to be able to respond to rising issues – during the lifetime of the Prophet, the mechanism of adaptation was the revelation itself.

One can see this process attested according to the framework of linguistic Relevance Theory. According to El-Awa’s paraphrase,

“as a communicator, I should produce only the utterances that I think are relevant to my recipients. My recipients in turn assume that I am being relevant in anything I say. Therefore, they would safely pick up the contextual assumptions that cost them the minimum of time and effort, considering the amount of contextual effect achieved … the speaker’s intended meaning is not a matter of knowing the semantics and grammar of the sentence uttered, but adding to these the pragmatic elements of context, contextual effect and relevance.”

The Qur’ān was not a series of letters, as the Epistles of the Apostles were; nor, on the other hand, was the Qur’ān a reference work for elite clergy, as the Pentateuch was. More uniquely than perhaps any other scripture, the Qur’ān – according to the traditional account – was shaped by the day-to-day lives of Muhammad and his followers and their constant endeavor to preserve the revelatory dialogue. As such, Relevance

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2 This hadith is recorded in Volume 6, Book 60, number 311 of Sahih al-Bukhari (Khan, M. M., trans.), available online from the University of Southern California’s Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement (http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/hadith/bukhari/).

3 El-Awa 2006, p. 31.
Theory is a plausible framework for explaining the rapid semantic shifts found in the Qur’ān and attested by this investigation of 'aql.

Furthermore, figure 12 demonstrates a massive explosion of semantic value in the Middle to Late Meccan periods; whereas at the beginning of the Middle Meccan period only four roots are allied with 'aqala through usage (n-ẓ-r, r-‘y, dh-k-r, and sh-k-r), by the Late Meccan period the number of affiliated roots has jumped to twelve (s-m-‘, y-q-n, ‘-m-n, ‘-l-m, f-k-r, f-q-h, dh-k-r, t-q-w, sh-k-r, r-h-m, h-d-y, and f-l-h). It would be difficult to explain this sudden geometric elaboration of usage and semantic depth if only one local vocabulary were allowed – that is, it is doubtful that the Qur’ānic vocabulary would be so rich so suddenly if Muhammad was the sole revealer. Interestingly, however, Welch notes the traditional account admitting Muhammad’s employment of a number of secretaries. Conjecturally, the rapid profusion of usage noted in this thesis may attest to the shared composition and revision of this committee.

Finally, bearing in mind how well GdQ’s chronology has served in this regard, it is interesting to consider that a methodology based on the one employed by this thesis – that is, an investigation of Qur’ānic semantics and syntax instead of themes and style – may be used to dismantle, revise, or vindicate their Qur’ānic timeline or, indeed, those submitted by others (Bell, etc.).

Future Research: Bell

As tradition attests, the mushaf or Qur’ānic manuscript was birthed first as Muhammad’s recitation of God’s word, then as a child of memory, and finally as a mass

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4 Welch, 2011, ibid.
of written fragments. This thesis and its analysis depend on – and are essentially faulted by – Nöldeke and Schwally’s assumption that the sūrah, in their received order and form, can be considered discreet units. Unfortunately, as Bell points out, even a first-time reader of the Qur’ān will note how verses within the same sūrah – and sometimes even within the same verse! – can appear disjointed from the surrounding text; at times, the Qur’ānic text is challenging to read on account of these apparent confusions. Considering that many verses appear dislocated and unrelated to their surrounding content, to propose the sūrah as the comprehensive primary unit of examination – a “legitimate” approach which Neuwirth condemns Bell and Nöldeke for ignoring on account of their “brusque rejection of the Islamic tradition” can hardly be conclusive unless some basic form of unity is established. Obviously, analyzing a chapter would be fruitless if certain verses in question clearly do not interconnect with the sūrah as a whole; besides this, some Medinan sūarahs are so massive and variegated as to make absurd any consideration of these chapters as literary “units."

Noting this, Bell completed an exhaustive analysis of the Qur’ān and its editorial seams; his method views the primary object of scrutiny as the verse (āya) and the chapter, or sūrah, as the secondary unit. Given that this thesis has similarly focused on the verse placement of ‘aqala, it would be fruitful, in the next stage, to compare Bell’s revisions to verses related to ‘-q-l and other semantically allied terms. It may be that the outliers in the “God” and “thinking” categories noted in figure 12 were added after their original

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7 Bell 1991.
revelation by the alleged committee of the Qurʾān’s editors, Muhammad’s secretaries, who, according to Welsh, were continuously engaged in revising the Qurʾān.⁸

Future Research and Excursus: ‘-q-l & Biblical Parabolic Dialogues

Consideration of the root ‘-q-l, additionally, has uncovered what appears to be a parabolic structure in the Qurʾān (centered on the *amthāl*) that recalls parables attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. This similarity cannot be imputed to the fact that both Jesus and Muhammad were religious preachers; rather, there are thematic, stylistic, and literary links that imply that the Qurʾān was, in some parts, adapting what it knew of Jesus’ teaching style (i.e., that of inquiry/parable/exhortation/private instruction/eschatological discourse) and, insofar as Jesus resembled Isaiah, the style of the Old Testament prophets as well.

That the Qurʾānic speaker was aware of Christian scripture in some relative detail can be proved by glimpses of images that can be unmistakably identified within the Gospel context; take, for example, the assertion at verse Q 7:40 that “those who reject Our Signs” will be barred from heaven until such time as “the camel can pass through the eye of a needle,” a familiar and absurd image well-represented in the synoptic Gospels.⁹ In the Qurʾānic utilization of this simile, it is the unbelievers – not the rich, as in the Gospels – who will find their way to heaven impossibly constricted.

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⁸ Ibid.
Yet, the account of Jesus’ life contained in the Qur’ān – adorned as it is with certain non-canonical details\textsuperscript{10} and what appears to be a perplexingly misconstrued account of the Last Supper and Eucharist\textsuperscript{11} – invite speculation as to what material, if any, from the Gospels is adapted in the Qur’ān. Nevertheless, glimpses of Biblical images and passages seem to hint persistently that Muhammad was keenly aware of a “prophetic” style – namely, that one should preach in parables whose obtuseness concealed their didactic value unless explained, closing them with eschatological and prophetic threats. The starting point of this tentative line of investigation is a simple observation: the phrase \textit{a-fa-lā ta'qilūnā}, the final trope of many stories of the prophets recounted in the Qur’ān and translated usually to “if you indeed understand” or something like it, bears a remarkable similarity in narrative and thematic function to a phrase uttered by Jesus, “whoever has ears, let them hear,” in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke – in Mark it occurs at 4:9; in Matthew at 11:15, 13:9, and 13:43; and in Luke at 8:8, 14:35. At Mark 4:9, Matthew 13:9, and Luke 8:8, the utterance “whoever has ears, let them hear” occurs within the context of each author’s account of the so-called Parable of the Sower, in which Jesus, near the beginning of his ministry, tells a metaphorical parable – of a man casting seeds on a variety of growing media, either on “the path,” “rocky places,” “among thorns,” or “on good soil”\textsuperscript{12}; these images established, Jesus ends the story with an exhortation to “let them hear.”

The role of this peculiar statement, strangely provocative yet well-attested by three synoptic gospels, is rooted, first, in the explication of obtuse metaphors by private religious instruction. Presumably after the crowd disperses, the apostles come to Jesus in

\textsuperscript{10} cf. Q 5:110.
\textsuperscript{11} Q 5:112-115.
\textsuperscript{12} Matthew 13:3-8.
secret, according to the Gospel account, and inquire as to why his teachings are given in allegorical tales instead of openly. To this, Jesus replies: “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, ‘though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’”\textsuperscript{13} The Gospel of Mark renders the phrase “... to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven’”\textsuperscript{14}; finally, Matthew gives Jesus’ reply in this manner: “... the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them ... this is why I speak to them in parables: ‘though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.’”\textsuperscript{15}

All these iterations point explicitly to a singular instance in the Book of Isaiah; there, the prophet Isaiah, experiencing a glorious vision of God inhabiting His temple and surrounded by the holiest angels, is cleansed of his sins by a burning coal which is touched to his lips by “one of the seraphim ... ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’”\textsuperscript{16} Upon volunteering, the purified Isaiah is told to proclaim to his people: “’Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed’”\textsuperscript{17}; here, Isaiah’s beatific vision of the divine presence contrasts sharply with the recalcitrance of the Jews, who despite possessing the faculties of perception nevertheless remain blind and deaf to spiritual truths. In Isaiah’s

\textsuperscript{13} Luke 8:10.  
\textsuperscript{14} Mark 4:12.  
\textsuperscript{15} Matthew 13:13.  
\textsuperscript{16} Isaiah 6:6.  
\textsuperscript{17} Isaiah 6:9-10.
mouth, God’s prophetic dispensation takes the form of a curse condemning Israel to complete ignorance.

This was not an isolated incident, however; Isaiah recalls the theme of active senses not perceiving later (“lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf”\(^{18}\)). The idea that those who reject the prophetic message are “sealed off” by God in their very spiritual essence is echoed from Isaiah in Q 2:7 and 171; it occurs again at Q 8:22-23, where Muhammad harangues his opponents as “the worst of beasts in the sight of God … deaf, dumb, those who understand not. If God had found in them any good, He would indeed have made them listen.” This argument is reiterated at Q 6:25, where the revelation ascribes the obstinacy of Muhammad’s audience to God Himself: “We have thrown veils on their hearts, so they understand it not, and deafness in their ears; if they saw every one of the signs, they will not believe in them.” Comparable verses are at Q 10:42 and 10:100, where the Qur’ānic speaker asserts that “no soul can believe, except by the will of God, and He will place doubt on those who will not understand”; in sūrah 29, the Qur’ān once again that “only those understand (ya’gīlu) the parables (al-amthāl) who have knowledge.”\(^{19}\) Thus, the Isaiac and Matthian theme of a people cut off from goodness according to nature and according to God’s will – being reduced, by this exclusion, to the ontological rank of the meanest of beasts – continues to be developed and employed. Its natural culmination occurs at Q 65:2, where the Jews are mocked as “donkeys” loaded with books but prohibited, on account of their stupidity, from learning a thing.

\(^{18}\) Isaiah 43:8.

\(^{19}\) Q 29:43.
Of further note is Q 6:111: here, Muhammad decries the cynicism of his critics who, always suffocating him with demands for a supernatural miracle, would not believe “even if We did send unto them angels, and the dead did speak unto them, and We gathered together all thing before their very eyes”; most of them are “ignorant” (aktharuhum yajhalūna). This closely echoes the closing remarks of Abraham, recorded in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, exculpating himself from manifesting the phantoms of the dead to convert the living: the rich man pleads, “‘I ask you therefore, father [Abraham], that you would send him to my father’s house; for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them … if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ [Abraham] said to him, ‘if they don’t listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rises from the dead.’”

Indeed, shreds of this narrative can be retrieved as far as sūrah 7; in Luke’s version, the rich man pleads with Abraham, begging him to “have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue! For I am in anguish in this flame” – unmoved, Abraham justifies the rich man’s punishment and notes, further, that “between us and between you there is a great gulf fixed … none may cross over from there to us.” Similarly, the “inhabitants of the Fire” beg their counterparts in Paradise to “pour on us water, or of that God has provided you!” – the Saved demur, noting that such things are “forbidden to the unbelievers.” Similar themes are developed elsewhere.

As a termination to this excursus, it is enough to say that, keeping in mind that this framework is hinted at through ‘-q-l and through the body of amthāl, future research

22 Q 7:50.
23 Cf. Q 7:44; 40:49; 25:22, etc.
may – using Bell’s framework or another – be able to more deeply explore the Qur’ān’s relationship to the Gospels and to the Bible at large.

Conclusion

Western scholars and Muslim exegetes alike are of one voice in translating the Qur’ānic verb ‘aqala as “understand.” Noting an opportunity to pry at a rarely-questioned spot in the consensus of Qur’ānic studies, this thesis has attempted, following the methodologies of Richter and Isutzu, within the framework given by GdQ, to expose new semantic depths of the root ‘-q-l as it appears in the Qur’ān using diachronic philological strategies. Again, the intention of this thesis is not to overthrow old systems of definition and meaning, but, instead, to expose new opportunities for a more precise understanding of the Qur’ānic use of ‘aqala which, as has been discussed, has a connotation not only of “understand” but “convert”, “restraint,” and finally, semantic liabilities related to sense, thinking, behavior, and God.
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