

# The *sabab-khāṣṣ*—*‘āmm* Process as an Instructional Technique within Qur’anic Rhetoric

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The Qur’an as revealed scripture exists within the contours of history yet lays claim to timeless guidance that transcends it. This tension has often been expressed within premodern Muslim scholarship through the distinction between *‘āmm* (‘general’) and *khāṣṣ* (‘specific’) meaning. While the *‘āmm* takes a given word as inclusive of a class of at least two things, and often as a general term, the *khāṣṣ* treats it as a single specified, or more specific, thing.<sup>1</sup> These categories within the text are pegged to the flow of time by the concept of the *sabab al-nuzūl* (‘occasion of revelation’, henceforth *sabab*). An event concerning the Prophet Muḥammad, his supporters, or adversaries, that is judged to have led to the descent of revelation is termed its *sabab*. This article is concerned with a particular Qur’anic rhetorical device discussed in passing within Muslim scholarship that unites the three concepts: the process by which (1) an extra-scriptural occasion of revelation is said to cause the placement of (2) a specific, or semi-specific, verse that shifts the composition to (3) a general verse on a related theme.

In the first part of the article, I will excavate this discussion from its limited appearance in the genres of *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *tafsīr*, engaging especially with the analysis of Andrew Rippin, who seems to have been the first to identify it within academic discourse in English. As well as providing a detailed account of how this device was framed within previous Muslim scholarship, this section will illustrate the porous and interdependent nature of Islamic scholarly genres. In the second half of the article, I will provide case studies applying these ideas to other material within *Sūrat al-Nisā’* and thereby assess to what extent it can be considered a valid identification of an instructional technique in Qur’anic rhetoric.

## The Rhetorical Relationship Between the *sabab* and *‘āmm* Verses in Premodern Muslim Scholarship

Andrew Rippin came across this discussion through his research on *asbāb al-nuzūl* (‘occasions of revelation’) within the *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* literature. In an article entitled ‘Al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī on the “Occasion of Revelation” Material’, Rippin comments on the treatment given by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) in chapter nine of his *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, which he identifies as largely dependent on chapter 1 of *al-Burhān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* by his predecessor al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392),<sup>2</sup> as is often the case for this text.<sup>3</sup> Before discussing Rippin’s analysis, it is useful to translate al-Zarkashī’s section in its entirety, as his formulation can fulfil three functions: a presentation of the basic idea; a bridge back to the earlier traditions from which he draws; and a basis for the further constructive work that I will add to the topic:<sup>4</sup>

Verses may be revealed according to specific occasions (*‘alā al-asbāb al-khāṣṣa*)<sup>5</sup> and each one of them placed together with verses that cohere with it out of due regard for the composition (*naẓm*) of the Qur’an and appropriate context (*ḥusn al-siyāq*). That coherently placed [verse] is put together with a verse revealed on a specific occasion when there is a context that pertains to a revealed meaning included within a general expression (*al-lafẓ al-‘āmm*), or there are a number of individual [meanings] coming under that general expression.

So what is the import of the [general] expression [in the verse revealed on a specific occasion]? Is it like [its] *sabab* such that it cannot be further restricted and its intent is definitive? Or does it not reach that degree of force, since it might have some other intent, whereby the coherence would be due to similarity with it? This is a subject of debate.

Some have chosen to consider it an intermediate degree (*rutba mutawassita*), less [definite] than a *sabab* but more than the *‘āmm* alone. An example of this [phenomenon] is His statement, Most High, *God orders you that you return trusts to their people* [Q. 4:58].<sup>6</sup> It coheres with the verse that is before it, His statement, Most High, *Do you not see those who were given a portion from the Scripture believing in false idols and devils and saying to those who disbelieve, ‘These are better guided than the believers’* [Q. 4:51]. This alludes to Ka’b b. al-Ashraf who travelled to Mecca and bore witness for the slain of Badr, urging the disbelievers to take revenge and to attack the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace). They asked him who was the better guided, the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) or them. He said, ‘You’, deceiving and misguiding [them], may God curse him! This verse is about [Ka’b b. al-Ashraf] and anyone who joins him in

[agreeing with his] statement, despite the fact they are scriptuaries who have discerned [proof of] the Prophet's mission and description in their scripture. Covenants had been taken from them that they would not hide that [scriptural proof] and they would support him—it was a binding trust upon them. Yet, they did not fulfil it but betrayed it. That is the coherence with His statement, *God orders you that you return trusts to their people* [Q. 4:58].<sup>7</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī says in his *tafsīr*: ‘The aspect of composition (*al-naẓm*) is that He makes known the scriptuaries' concealment of the description of Muḥammad (may God bless him and grant him peace), and their statement, “the pagans are better guided.” As that was a betrayal from them, it shifts the discourse forward to mention all trusts.’ [The quote ends].

The preceding is not refuted by the fact that the story of Kaʿb b. al-Ashraf took place after Badr and that the revelation of *God orders you ...* was at the time of the conquest [of Mecca], or close to it, with a gap of six years between them. This is because time is only a condition for the occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) and is not a condition for coherence (*al-munāsaba*), as its objective is the placement of a verse in a position that is coherent for it. Verses are revealed according to their occasions and the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace), orders their placement in the positions that God, Most High, knows are set for them.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Zarkashī thus presents a theoretically open version of this particular compositional insight. In his account there are two verses, both of which are linguistically *ʿāmm* and linked by a coherence relation. The verse that is later in the composition is treated as entirely *ʿāmm*. It may have a *sabab*, but this is ignored as it does not have a bearing on the subject under discussion.<sup>9</sup> The questions that he poses are as follows: what effect, if any, does the revelation of the earlier verse according to a *sabab* have on the possibility of limiting its general language? And how does this relate to the coherence between it and the later verse?

To the first question he gives three potential answers. Perhaps the presence of the *sabab* gives the verse a *khāṣṣ* intent (*murād*), despite it being linguistically *ʿāmm*. This would mean it could not be restricted further and must be treated as definitively referring to its *sabab*. In this case, the composition is led from the effectively *khāṣṣ* verse referring to a specific event to the general meaning in the later verse. Or, perhaps the first verse's *sabab* is also irrelevant and both verses are entirely *ʿāmm*. This would mean that they are only placed together due to a similarity in their language and the first *sabab* adds no rhetorical force to the composition. Al-Zarkashī indicates that a third option, a compromise position between the two, is preferred by some scholars. The first verse is

considered less definite than the *ṣabab* and more than the second *‘āmm* verse alone. Al-Suyūṭī provides a clearer description of what is meant by this formulation, which he traces back to al-Subkī.<sup>10</sup> He states, ‘So that *khāṣṣ* [intent] is close to the form of the *sabab* in its inclusion within the *‘āmm*’, referring to a discussion at the beginning of his own section on *asbāb al-nuzūl*.<sup>11</sup> There he proposes that if an expression is *‘āmm* but the *sabab* is known, limiting its meaning cannot be done to such an extent that it excludes the *sabab* itself, as it is definitive (*qaṭ‘ī*).<sup>12</sup> Thus, the general wording can be limited but not beyond the events that occasioned it in the first place. This allows it to retain the rhetorical force of shifting the composition to the general meaning of the case at hand. Putting this into the chosen example, the general wording of Q. 4:51 may undergo restriction, but not to the extent that those scriptuaries who betrayed their trust to recognise the Prophet are not included within it, as this is what leads to the coherence of mentioning trusts in general in Q. 4:58.

According to Rippin, al-Suyūṭī’s discussion of general and specific verses is part of an unenunciated theory of ‘plain meaning’. While a text’s meaning is subject to the particular hermeneutic of any given exegete, the working assumption is to ensure maximum flexibility in interpretation.<sup>13</sup> As Rippin argues, ‘the desire is to use a given Qur’anic passage to support an already existing law; the result is a possible rupture of the context of the Qur’anic passage in question’.<sup>14</sup> With respect to the example given by al-Suyūṭī and al-Zarkashī, Rippin takes a position that neither scholar envisages, suggesting that Q. 4:58 has a specific context and should not be taken as a general statement about trusts. Needless to say, he does not think insight into scriptural rhetoric can be gleaned from a relationship between the *sabab* of Q. 4:51 and the two verses. In a recent treatment of the same topic, Hans-Thomas Tillschneider echoes Rippin when criticising al-Suyūṭī for placing his agenda of legal hermeneutics ahead of propriety with the Qur’anic text. Significantly, Tillschneider argues that a problem for al-Suyūṭī’s theory is generated by the fact that internal Qur’anic dynamics often provide a more suitable context for a given verse than that furnished by a *sabab al-nuzūl* report.<sup>15</sup>

In the second part of this article, I will present three additional examples from *Sūrat al-Nisā’* that, I argue, can be profitably understood by taking al-Zarkashī’s first construal of the relationship, in which Qur’anic rhetoric places verses with a *khāṣṣ* intent due to their *sabab* before those with a related *‘āmm* meaning. It is interesting in the light of Tillschneider’s comments that these examples are not based on *sabab al-nuzūl* reports with a possibly tenuous connection to the text but on extra-Qur’anic contexts that are derived implicitly from the scripture’s discourse.

Rippin’s focus was on the genre of *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, so he did not venture far beyond al-Zarkashī in tracing the roots of the discussion in Muslim intellectual history. However, al-Suyūṭī’s reference to al-Subkī suggests that this topic migrated to *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* from *uṣūl al-fiqh*. This is substantiated by al-Zarkashī’s *Tashnīf al-masāmi‘*,

a commentary on Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī's (d. 771/1370) well-known manual *Jam' al-jawāmi'*, which contains a similar treatment.<sup>16</sup> Al-Zarkashī explains the following expression: 'The specific in the Qur'an is close to [the form of the cause of revelation]; the general follows it in the text for the purpose of coherence (*wa-yaqrubu minhā khāṣṣ fi al-Qur'ān talāhu fi al-rasm 'amm li'l-munāsaba*)'.<sup>17</sup> His analysis of this point is lifted nearly word for word from Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī's (d. 756/1355) and Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī's own *al-Ibhāj fi sharḥ al-minhāj*, itself a work commenting on the *Minhāj* of al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286).<sup>18</sup> The version in *al-Burhān fi 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* is adapted slightly for its transplantation within a text dealing with the Qur'an and not legal theory, so may have been written later. In terms of the *uṣūl al-fiqh* line of inquiry, the trail goes cold at the *Ibhāj*. I can find no discussion of this specific issue in the *Minhāj* nor in earlier works such as *Muntahā al-wuṣūl wa'l-amal fi 'ilmay al-uṣūl wa'l-jadal* of Ibn al-Ḥājjib (d. 646/1249); *al-Iḥkām fi uṣūl al-aḥkām* of al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233); and *al-Maḥṣūl fi 'ilm uṣūl al-fiqh* of al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209). It seems, therefore, that it originated as a side point in the *uṣūl* work of Taqī al-Dīn and Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī before being transferred by al-Zarkashī into his encyclopaedic work of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*.

There is one further thread to trace in the search for the genealogy of the purported rhetorical relationship between *sabab* and *'amm* verses. This is the reference to the *tafsīr* of Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148), which is quoted by both al-Suyūṭī and al-Zarkashī but does not appear in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* texts. Rippin caught the reference and notes a point on Q. 4:58 from his *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*.<sup>19</sup> The key sentence reads, 'Though we presume it was revealed according to a *sabab*, it is *'amm* by its wording, encompassing with its *naẓm* every trust'.<sup>20</sup> Most of the theoretical terminology is present here, but the relationship to the earlier verse and its rhetorical force in shifting the composition forward is not. *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* does not discuss the passage quoted by al-Zarkashī in his commentary on Q. 4:51 as the verse has no legal bearing, so it obviously comes from another work of *tafsīr* by Ibn al-ʿArabī.

Several manuscript sections of a *tafsīr* ascribed to Ibn al-ʿArabī are extant in libraries in Fes and Alexandria, in which it is titled *Wādiḥ al-sabīl ilā ma'rifat qānūn al-ta'wīl bi-fawā'id al-tanzīl*, and two parts in Cairo that name it as *Qānūn al-ta'wīl fi al-tafsīr*, as does *Kashf al-zunūn*.<sup>21</sup> What survives of this work does not cover the entire Qur'an: the Alexandria manuscript contains the first volume, up to Q. 2:248,<sup>22</sup> with a methodological introduction that has been badly eaten away;<sup>23</sup> the Fes manuscript contains exegesis of Q. 5:4 to Q. 7:27; the Cairo manuscript covers Q. 5:107 to the final quarter of *Sūrat al-A'raf* and the beginning of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* to the end of *Sūrat al-Ḥajj*.<sup>24</sup> As a verse-by-verse *tafsīr*, this is a distinct text from the published *Qānūn al-ta'wīl*, which is sometimes known as *Fawā'id al-riḥla* or *Kitāb al-riḥla*,<sup>25</sup> and takes a mixed thematic approach to spiritual and Qur'anic topics. Overall, then, it is likely

that al-Zarkashī is quoting from the *tafsīr* of Ibn al-‘Arabī, though the original discussion of Q. 4:51 and 4:58 does not seem to have survived in manuscript form to the present day.

The question of the source of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s analysis is an open one. Al-Wāhidī (d. 468/1075–1076) reports on the authority of several early figures that despite the existence of a *sabab*, Q. 4:58 is general (*‘āmmatun*) for all trusts. However, this commentary lacks any rhetorical link to Q. 4:51.<sup>26</sup> Earlier still, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922–923) argues that various interpretations of the verse, such as an instruction to political leaders, are included within (*fa-dakhala fīhi*) the idea of returning trusts.<sup>27</sup> In turn, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s expression of the relationship holding between the two verses in his quoted *tafsīr*, and the terminology within his *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, makes him an obvious inspiration for the technical discussion within the *Ibhāj*.

The reconstructed historical story thus shifts through three genres, from *tafsīr* to *uṣūl al-fiqh*, then *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*. The contours of the discussion remained fairly constant in the two latter fields, with *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* compendia mainly summarising what had already been articulated in *uṣūl al-fiqh* manuals. This pattern has remained until the modern period: the prominent twentieth-century scholar Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Zurqānī in his *Manāhil al-‘irfān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, the inspiration for many modern Arabic language textbooks on the subject, adds nothing of substance to the discussion and still quotes Q. 4:51 and Q. 4:58 as his sole examples.<sup>28</sup> An exception is Naṣr Abū Zayd who makes a similar point as part of an original discussion on the interrelationship of social context and scriptural form in the derivation of legal rules:<sup>29</sup>

Part of knowing the wisdom (*al-ḥikma*) or cause (*‘illa*) is that it assists the jurist to transition the ruling from the particular events—or the specific occasion (*ṣabab khāṣṣ*)—to the generality of the events and conditions that resemble it according to analogy (*al-qiyās*). However, we must grasp that this transition from the occasion to the form of the occasion (*ṣūrat al-sabab*), or from the specific event to what resembles it, must rely on the functions (*dawāl*) of the construction of the text itself (*binyat al-naṣṣ dhātihi*) that assist the transition of the implication (*al-dalāla*) from the specific and particular to the general and universal.

### Case Studies of the *sabab-khāṣṣ*—*‘āmm* Process in *Sūrat al-Nisā’*

With its *locus classicus* in Q. 4:51 and Q. 4:58, the *sabab-khāṣṣ*—*‘āmm* process is the perfect illustration of the tendency of the *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* literature to ground theoretical principles in single exemplary cases rather than recurrent textual examples. I am interested in developing the identified principle as a robust tool with implications for the Qur’anic instructive style. Therefore, I will discuss three case

studies within *Sūrat al-Nisā'* that I argue can reasonably be interpreted as instances of this process and will allow a tentative theoretical conclusion about which of al-Zarkashī's options may be most appropriate for further research.<sup>30</sup> These are a discussion of inheritance in Q. 4:2–3 and Q. 4:11–12; dower for marriage in Q. 4:4 and Q. 4:24; and issues of marriage and divorce settlement in Q. 4:127–128. Including the Q. 4:51 and Q. 4:58 pairing, this covers three of the five distinct sura sections identified by Mathias Zahniser.<sup>31</sup>

Going in chronological order through the sura, the first case concerns the question of inheritance, an important theme in its opening section. Q. 4:2–3 reads as follows:

*Give the orphans their property, do not replace [their] good things with bad, and do not consume their property with your own—a great sin. If you fear that you will not deal fairly with the orphans, you may marry whichever women seem good to you, two, three, or four. If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one, or your bondswomen: that is more likely to make you avoid bias.*

These verses orbit around the treatment of orphans, specifically the usurping of their property by unscrupulous guardians, and connect it to the issue of marriage. Unlike Meccan verses of the Qur'an, which discuss the orphan (*yaṭīm*) as a general category, Medinan mention of orphans (*yatāmā*) seems to refer to a practical social issue to be negotiated by the community.<sup>32</sup> Linguistically, Q. 4:3 can potentially be read as either *khāṣṣ* or *āmm*, depending on whether the *alif lām* of the key terms 'the orphans (*al-yatāmā*)' and 'the women (*al-nisā'*)' is read as *ma<sup>c</sup>hūd li'l-dhīhn* ('specific') or *ta<sup>c</sup>rīf al-jīns* ('general').<sup>33</sup> Whichever is the case, it is obvious that the verse has a specific *sabab*, which makes it eligible for consideration under the *sabab-khāṣṣ—āmm* process. Traditional reports give various opinions on the *sabab* of Q. 4:3. One view is that it refers to orphan girls whom guardians were tempted to marry without dower, ruling that they should marry other women instead, while another is that the guardians wanted to marry the orphans to retain access to their inheritances.<sup>34</sup>

My preferred option is developed from an analysis of Mustansir Mir, who reads *al-yatāmā* as referring to the orphans of the Battle of Uḥud and *al-nisā'* as their mothers.<sup>35</sup> The context of the verse could then be that their inheritances would go to their guardians to be safeguarded until they came of age and that there was a danger that this could be usurped. The meaning of Q. 4:3 would be an instruction for such men to marry the mothers of the orphans under their care to ensure that the inheritances remain secure.<sup>36</sup>

Q. 4:11–12 are the two lengthy and detailed verses regarding inheritance that became the basis for the Islamic law on this issue. I will only quote the beginning of

this passage as all of its details are not relevant to my argument. Q. 4:11 starts as follows:

*Concerning your children, God commands you that a son should have the equivalent share of two daughters. If there are only daughters, two or more should share two-thirds of the inheritance, if one, she should have half ...*

Irrespective of any revelation according to a specific *sabab*, verses Q. 4:11–12 are paradigm cases of entirely *‘āmm* verses, which are addressed in general to the entire community. The *sabab-khāṣṣ*—*‘āmm* process would therefore be that Q. 4:2–3 introduces into the sura the specific situation of safeguarding orphan inheritances in the wake of losses to the community through battle. This readies the audience for the shift of the Qur’anic composition to the theme of inheritance in general in Q. 4:11–12. In the rhetorical terms of Aristotle, this can be considered as an intellectual appeal to *logos* through a kind of inductive reasoning: from the specific to the general.<sup>37</sup>

The second example I will treat starts at Q. 4:4, building on the institution of marriage introduced in the previous verse, *Give the women their dower upon marriage, though if they are happy to give up some of it for you, you may enjoy it with a clear conscience*. Based on the considerations discussed previously, this seems to refer to the same context in which male guardians are enjoined to provide a full dower to their new wives. A plausible interpretation is that because of the burden of looking after orphans, husbands may have felt the obligation to provide a dower was waived.<sup>38</sup> The verse reminds them that it is the wife who is in a vulnerable position and should get a unilateral decision on the matter.<sup>39</sup> This leads to Q. 4:24, which lays out the general principle to be followed:

*If you wish to enjoy women through marriage, give them their dower—this is obligatory—though if you should choose mutually (tarāḍaytum), after fulfilling this obligation, to do otherwise, you will not be blamed: God is all knowing and all wise.*

Q. 4:24 expresses the general state of affairs to be upheld in marriage and makes partial remission of the dower a mutual decision between the parties with the verb *tarāḍaytum* (‘choose mutually’). Again, there is movement from a verse dealing with a specific situation to a general one on the same theme. Also, the overall composition of this section of the sura tackles the more pressing case for marriage—fulfilling the needs of specific orphans—before turning to marriage as an institution.<sup>40</sup>

My final case study starts with Q. 4:127:

*They ask you to provide a ruling for the women. Say, ‘God gives you a ruling for them: what is recited to you in the Writ regarding the orphans*

*of the women (yatāmā al-nisāʾ)—[they are women] to whom you do not give what was obligated (mā kutiba lahunna), yet you desire to marry them—and also about helpless children. God instructs you to treat orphans fairly: He is well aware of whatever good you do.'*

This has an internal relationship to Q. 4:3 and Q. 4:4, as it explicitly refers back to the previous rules provided for the women discussed in those verses. The interpretation of Q. 4:127 is therefore dependent on the one taken for Q. 4:3. I understand this as a rebuke for men who, despite warning, did not pay the proper dower to their wives, or safeguard inheritances for their children. Some interpreters explain *yatāmā al-nisāʾ* as orphan girls who were married and *mā kutiba lahunna* as their usurped inheritances.<sup>41</sup> I argue the more plausible rendering is that this phrase leads to a relative clause in which it is the women, their mothers, who are desired in marriage and are not given what was obligated for them in the sense of dower.<sup>42</sup> Again, under either interpretation the link to an extra-scriptural *sabab* with a specific objective is clear. In this case the sequence is completed in the very next verse, Q. 4:128:

*If a wife fears high-handedness or alienation from her husband, neither of them will be blamed if they come to a peaceful settlement (ṣulḥ), for peace is best. Although human souls are prone to selfishness, if you do good and are mindful of God, He is well aware of all that you do.*

This verse turns to the situation of the mistreated wife and provides the option of a peaceful settlement as a solution to marital problems.<sup>43</sup> Its language allows it to transcend the particularity of the situation envisaged in the previous verse to become a general principle to guide troubled spouses. The mutual decision could be to adjust the circumstances of the marriage in some way, or even for the wife to seek a compensatory divorce, which is one way to read the word *ṣulḥ*.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

The *sabab-khāṣṣ—ʿāmm* process articulated within this article provokes reflection on several levels. As a study in intellectual history it demonstrates that the transferral of concepts within the genres of *tafsīr*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* deserves greater attention than it has generally received. Meanwhile, the case studies of *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* that I have presented show that the hypothesis that the Qurʾan addresses specific extra-textual contexts to rhetorically shift sura composition to more general lessons at the very least deserves consideration as an aspect of the Qurʾanic instructive style.

The search for the internal nuances of an implicit Qurʾanic rhetorical system requires both the recognition of formal features, and the awareness that it is we as readers who must find and appreciate them. Even as we take pains to enter the imaginal world of seventh-century Arabia, we remain bound to our own concerns and assumptions, just as

we are limited by the surviving oral reports, texts, and material artefacts. Rippin argued that, for a figure such as al-Suyūṭī, the boundary between general and specific meaning was formed according to whatever seemed most convincing to him at the time. Is the same not true for Rippin in the mid-1980s? For myself three decades on? This tension between formalism and anti-formalism is arguably present in any interpretive approach.

The premodern scholars that identified the *sabab-khāṣṣ*—*‘āmm* process did not utilise it for anything. It became an accidental curiosity, passed through genre and text as a side note. Perhaps it can, after all, be a useful tool in the quest for the rhetoric of Qur’anic instruction and even for identifying general verses that comprise ethical principles of the scripture’s moral message. If so, it will be because it is for us and our ongoing exploration of the Qur’an.

## NOTES

1 al-Jurjānī, *Mu‘jam al-ta‘rīfāt*, pp. 87, 132–133. Zysow provides a useful comment on the significance of the distinction (Zysow, *The Economy of Certainty*, p. 78). For discussion of more technical definitions, see Weiss, *The Search for God’s Law*, pp. 390–393.

2 Rippin, ‘Al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī’, p. 253 n. 53.

3 McAuliffe, ‘Exegetical Sciences’, p. 404.

4 The first half of this quotation is dense and tricky to translate, yet central to the arguments made in this article. I have attempted to render it as clearly as possible, using square brackets to clarify my interpretation of its sense, before commenting on it in the main text. I would like to thank an anonymous *JQS* peer reviewer and Sohaib Saeed for critique of my translations and valuable suggestions for improvement.

5 Printed editions of *al-Burhān* read ‘according to occasions definitively (*‘alā al-asbāb khāṣṣatan*)’ (al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, p. 30). However, al-Zarkashī is quoting from *al-Ibhāj*, ascribed to Tāqī al-Dīn and Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, which has the reading used in the text above. See al-Subkī & al-Subkī, *al-Ibhāj*, vol. 2, p. 204.

6 Qur’anic quotations in this article follow the translation of M.A.S. Abdel Haleem with some adjustments according to the interpretations taken.

7 This coherence may hold on the level of generality even if it is plausibly argued that the word ‘trusts’ (*al-amānāt*) in Q. 4:58 has no connection with Biblical covenants. A possible interpretation of the verse is an address to political leaders with the next verse, Q. 4:59, directed to those over whom they are in authority. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, vol. 7, pp. 173, 184; Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Siyāsa al-shar‘iyya*, p. 4. Cf. Harvey, *The Qur’an and the Just Society*, p. 95.

8 al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, p. 30. See also al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 113. For the relevant section, the modern edition of *al-Itqān* consulted has no significant differences with the 1852–1854 edition of Bashīr al-Dīn and Sprenger (see pp. 68–70). A translation of the first part of *al-Itqān*, including this chapter, has been published. However, it has been so widely criticised for its inaccuracy, unevenness, and lack of useful notes that I have not consulted it. See Andrew Rippin and Hina Azam’s respective reviews of Algar et al., *The Perfect Guide*.

9 The usual *sabab* given for Q. 4:58 is the Prophet’s return of the keys to the Ka’ba back to ‘Uthmān b. Ṭalḥa b. ‘Abd al-Dār, the individual who held the right to this traditional office (al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, vol. 7, pp. 170–171).

10 He does not specify whether he means the father or son (al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 113; see also al-Subkī & al-Subkī, *al-Ibhāj*, vol. 2, p. 204).

- 11 al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 113.
- 12 al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 108.
- 13 Rippin, 'Al-Zarkashī and al-Suyutī', pp. 253–254. Cf. Vishanoff, *The Formation*, pp. 184–185.
- 14 Rippin, 'Al-Zarkashī and al-Suyutī', p. 254.
- 15 Tillschneider, *Typen historisch-exegetischer*, p. 376.
- 16 al-Zarkashī, *Tashnīf al-masāmiʿ*, vol. 2, pp. 804–806.
- 17 al-Zarkashī, *Tashnīf al-masāmiʿ*, vol. 2, p. 804.
- 18 al-Subkī & al-Subkī, *al-Ibhāj*, vol. 2, pp. 204–205.
- 19 Rippin, 'Al-Zarkashī and al-Suyutī', p. 254, n. 55.
- 20 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1, p. 450.
- 21 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Qānūn al-taʾwīl*, p. 124; Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, *Fihrist*, vol. 1, p. 188; Ḥājji Khalīfa, *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, vol. 2, p. 1,310.
- 22 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Qānūn al-taʾwīl*, p. 125.
- 23 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Qānūn al-taʾwīl*, pp. 126–127.
- 24 This is stated by Muḥammad al-Sulaymānī, apparently based on his personal inspection. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Qānūn al-taʾwīl*, p. 125. The manuscript catalogue for the two Cairo sections records their starting points as Q. 5:105, *yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū ʿalaykum anfusakum* and the end of *Sūrat al-Hijr*. Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, *Fihrist*, vol. 1, p. 188.
- 25 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Qānūn al-taʾwīl*, pp. 387–388.
- 26 See al-Wāḥidī, *al-Taḥfīr al-basīṭ*, vol. 6, pp. 537–538.
- 27 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 7, p. 172.
- 28 al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-ʿirfān*, vol. 1, pp. 113–115. A recent Arabic book (al-Wahbī, *al-Masāʾil al-mushtaraka*) that compares shared concepts within *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* does not mention the phenomenon at all.
- 29 Abū Zayd, *Maḥmūm al-naṣṣ*, pp. 102–103.
- 30 The fact that all of these examples are to be found within *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* is not an intentional aspect of the research design, but a byproduct of my previous research on the theme of social justice in the Qurʾan that ranged across the whole text. This points to the possibility of a localised rhetorical strategy within the sura, rather than one for the entire Qurʾan. I here summarise my prior analyses of the various verses and refer readers to the full discussions in *The Qurʾan and the Just Society*. I should also mention that in building upon my earlier monograph this article shares its constructive theological and ethical perspective.
- 31 Zahniser, 'Sūra as Guidance and Exhortation', p. 77.
- 32 Harvey, *The Qurʾan and the Just Society*, p. 160.
- 33 I have previously argued for the former case; see Harvey, *The Qurʾan and the Just Society*, p. 162.
- 34 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, p. 1,062; vol. 2, p. 924. See Harvey, *The Qurʾan and the Just Society*, p. 162.
- 35 Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture*, p. 100.
- 36 For a more detailed defence of this point see Harvey, *The Qurʾan and the Just Society*, pp. 162–163.
- 37 Aristotle, *The 'Art' of Rhetoric*, pp. 19, 21. These verses certainly also appeal to Aristotle's other main modes of persuasion, *ethos*, the authority of the speaker, God, as delivered through the

Prophet, and *pathos*, an appeal to the emotions of the audience. However, the present focus is on the *logos*-centric aspect of generality and specificity.

38 Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture*, p. 109.

39 Harvey, *The Qur’an and the Just Society*, p. 163.

40 Harvey, *The Qur’an and the Just Society*, p. 163.

41 See Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an*, p. 99.

42 Harvey, *The Qur’an and the Just Society*, p. 164.

43 There is an obvious contrast with the more stringent remedy for the husband with a high-handed wife presented in Q. 4:34. Interpreters, including the present author, have often sought to soften the apparent meaning of this through a variety of hermeneutic techniques. See the discussion in Harvey, *The Qur’an and the Just Society*, pp. 150–152.

44 Harvey, *The Qur’an and the Just Society*, pp. 149–150.

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