

CHAPTER SEVEN

INFLUENCE OF NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK ON EXEGESIS

The narrative elements described in the preceding chapter reveal the outlines of a narrative structure which looms over the process of interpretation in the commentaries. That narrative structure is concerned with claims of authority for the prophet of Islam and the responses to him from the People of the Book, primarily the Jews of Madīna. This narrative structure in turn exerts an influence on the way in which the exegetes interpret the tampering verses. An external structure brings meaning and coherence to the explanations of the disparate details of the tampering verses. An understanding of this influence makes possible a fuller perception of the development of the tampering motif in the commentaries.

Authority of Narrative Over Dogma

An important illustration of the influence of narrative structures on the development of exegetical themes was provided by Norman Calder in his article, “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr.” Calder demonstrated the authority of what he termed the “discipline” of narrative to determine exegetical decisions over theological dogma and even prophetic *ḥadīth*.¹ He pointed out the importance of narrative for Ṭabarī in particular, and gave examples from the *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān* of how the appeal of story tended to win out over theological considerations—at least those which were already circulating at the time of Ṭabarī. The subject of Calder’s exploration was exegetical treatments of Qur’ānic verses about Abraham. The “popular narrative” was that Abraham had lied, and this seemed to bear more weight for Ṭabarī than the doctrine of prophetic sinlessness.² The exegete was also familiar with many traditions which favoured Ishmael as the intended victim of Abraham’s sacrifice. But Ṭabarī himself preferred to recognize Isaac as the

¹ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 117–118, 108.

² “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 107–108.

victim—because this was the “established narrative” about Isaac and Jerusalem.³

In Ṭabarī’s mind, wrote Calder, popular narrative emerged historically prior to theological dogma, and therefore exerted greater authority for the exegete.⁴ In the two exegetical situations highlighted by Calder, Ṭabarī knew—and transmitted—a range of opinion which was diverse to the point of contradiction. Over against 17 statements which favored identification of the sacrifice victim as Isaac, Ṭabarī offered 24 statements from “authorities of similar weight and standing” in favor of Ishmael.⁵ He had to defend his position against three major rational objections which had arisen to the identification of Isaac.⁶ With time, of course, Muslim theological dogma favored the identification of Ishmael, and this view found vigorous exegetical expression in the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr.⁷ But even so, Ṭabarī allowed narrative to determine his exegetical decision.

With Calder’s analysis in view, and on the basis of the evidence of this study that the obstinacy of the Jews was a reigning narrative theme in the mind of the exegetes, the influence of narrative on the exegesis of the tampering verses can be envisioned. The Islamic doctrine of the corruption of the earlier scriptures had not emerged fully by the time of Muqātil or even Ṭabarī, but it was possibly in the process of development. In the absence of a reigning doctrine of the corruption of pre-Qur’ānic scriptures, what sort of shape might the narrative be expected to take?

The need in the narrative is to make a case for the truth of the claims of the prophet of Islam, and to show the Jews as brazenly refusing to acknowledge this truth. In discussing the former scriptures, the exegetes would want to show that the attestation of the prophetic status of Muḥammad can be found in the former scriptures. They will also want to amplify the Qur’ānic claim that the recitations which the Arabic messenger is making confirm what the People of the Book have with them. This would be consistent with Muḥammad’s claim in the commentaries that he is reviving the commandments of God. In treating the obstinacy of the Jews, the exegetes would want to show that

³ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 121–122.

⁴ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 108.

⁵ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 121.

⁶ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 122.

⁷ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 123–124.

the Jews were fully culpable because everything they needed to know in order to make an appropriate response to Muḥammad's claims was right in front of them.

This is indeed largely what happens in the commentaries. The dominant actions of tampering which the exegetes narrate are actions which depend for their narrative dynamic on the presence of an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews of Muḥammad's Madina.

The Narrative Dynamic of the Sira

As a test case for the claim of the influence of narrative on the exegetical development of the tampering verses, a survey of the treatment of the earlier scriptures in the *Sira* serves well. The similarity of the *Sira* to Muqātil's *Tafsīr*, as well as to the narrative exegesis contained in Ṭabari's commentary, was noted in chapter four.⁸ The presence or absence of the accusation of textual falsification in this early narrative work, and the narrative logic of its presence or absence, will shed light on the narrative dynamic in the commentaries.

The thrust of the extended account of the prophet of Islam in the *Sira* is that Muḥammad is essentially linked with the line of earlier prophets;⁹ indeed, the *Sira* openly asserts that the coming of Muḥammad is predicted in the earlier scriptures.¹⁰

There are a number of stories about anticipation of the coming of Muḥammad among various groups of people. According to Ibn Ishāq, the expectation among the People of the Book comes from having read descriptions of Muḥammad in the previous scriptures.¹¹ For example, Jewish rabbis and Christian monks had spoken about the prophet of Islam as the time of his appearance drew near. They reported "his description (*ṣifa*) and the description of his time which they found in their scriptures and what their prophets had enjoined upon them."¹² Regarding the Jews, the *Sira* presents a trio of stories which portray

⁸ Above pp. 72–73, 72 (nt. 23). Cf. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 127.

⁹ W. Raven, "Sira," *EI2* (1997), Vol. 9, 661–2.

¹⁰ Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 21–23, 217–218.

¹¹ Wensinck observed this expectation not only in Ibn Ishāq, but in other early writers such as Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845) and al-Wāqidi (d. 207/823). *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina*, 39–43. cf. Raven, "Sira and the Qur'an," 41.

¹² *Sirat al-Nabi*, Vol. I, 132. English translations from the *Sira* are frequently indebted to Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*.

Jews predicting the coming of a prophet.¹³ The Arabs are inclined to listen, because, “We were polytheists worshipping idols, while they were people of the scriptures with knowledge which we do not possess.”¹⁴ Ibn Ishāq writes that God told Muḥammad that he had made a covenant with the earlier prophets that a messenger would come confirming what they knew.¹⁵ When Christians from Abyssinia came to meet Muḥammad in Makka, they heard him recite the Qurʾān and promptly believed in him. “They recognized (*ʿarafa*) in him the things which had been said of him in their scriptures about his matter (*amr*).”¹⁶ Indeed, the *Sīra* contains one of the earliest Muslim quotations of a text from the Gospel.¹⁷ Ibn Ishāq quotes a version of the passage John 15:23–16:1, then adds that the Syriac “*munaḥamannā*” (which he says is equivalent to the Greek “*al-baraq̄līs*”) “is Muḥammad.”¹⁸ Use of this passage from the Gospel shows a concern for an essential con-

¹³ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 137–139. Wasserstrom refers to “larger cycles of tales” in which non-Muslims prophesy Muḥammad, exemplified in the *Sīra*. *Between Muslim and Jew*, 176.

¹⁴ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 137. In two of the stories, the Arabs are predisposed to accept Islam by the prophecies of the Jews. However, the Jews deny Muḥammad when he appears, in one case out of “wickedness (*baghy*) and envy (*ḥasad*).” *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 138. In the third story, the Banū Qurayza are warned about the coming of a prophet who “will be sent to shed blood and to take captive the women and children of those who oppose him.” *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 139.

¹⁵ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 153, quoting Q 3:81.

¹⁶ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 263, connecting it with Q 28:53–55. In the famous story of Bahīrā, which is found in the *Sīra* at Vol. I, 116–119, the Syrian monk recognizes the prophet of Islam from his description in a book that was in his cell. Ibn Ishāq does not specify the Gospel, but rather variously describes this source as “his books” and “the Christian books.” When other ‘People of the Book’ also recognize Muḥammad and want to ‘get at him,’ Bahīrā warns them off, reminding them of “his mention (*dhikr*) and his description (*ṣifa*) which they would find in the *kitāb*.” *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 118. A. Abel describes Ibn Sa’d’s version of this story in which “the monk knew Muhammad because he had found the announcement of his coming in the unadulterated (*tabdīl*) Christian books, which he possessed.” “Bahīrā,” *EI2* (1960), Vol. 1, 922. However, there is no hint of such a distinction in Ibn Ishāq.

¹⁷ Wansbrough called it the “earliest attestation in Muslim literature” of the technique of citing proof-texts from the earlier scriptures. *Quranic Studies*, 63.

¹⁸ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 152–153. Guillaume makes the case that Ibn Ishāq’s citation is from the Palestinian Syriac Lectionary. “The Version of the Gospels Used in Medina circa 700 A.D.,” *Al-Andalus* 15 (1950), 289–296. Sidney H. Griffith notes that Ibn Ishāq took the freedom to alter the text of John in accordance with Islamic sensibilities. “The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century,” *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985), 138. Interestingly, Ibn Ishāq does not connect the Syriac *munḥemana* of John 15:26 with the *aḥmad* of Q 61:6, a common practice of Muslim polemical writers. Cf. Watt, “The Early Development,” 58; and A. Guthrie and E.F.F. Bishop, “The Paraclete, Almunhamanna and Aḥmad,” *The Muslim World* 41 (1951), 252f.

nection between Jesus and Muḥammad which can be found written in the Injil itself.¹⁹

When Muḥammad begins his preaching in Makka, the leaders of the Quraysh send two representatives to Madīna to ask the Jewish rabbis about him, explaining, “for they are the first people of the scriptures and have knowledge which we do not possess about the prophets.”²⁰ Later in Madīna, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām accepts Islam.²¹ He is introduced as the rabbi of Banū Qaynuqā’ and their “most learned man.” ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām designs a ruse with Muḥammad in order to demonstrate his high standing among the Jews of Madīna as well as the deceitfulness and treachery of the Jews. When the Jews affirm the good reputation of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām, he challenges them to accept the prophet of Islam. “By God you certainly know that he is the apostle of God. You find him written with you in the Torah by his name and his characteristics. I testify that he is the apostle of God, I believe in him, I hold him to be true, and I acknowledge him.”²² This story assumes a Torah in the possession of the Jews of Madīna in which the description of Muḥammad could be found. It also initiates Ibn Ishāq’s personification of the appropriate Jewish response to Muḥammad in the person of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām.²³

¹⁹ In Ibn Ishāq’s account of Salman the Farsi, Salman travels to a location in Syria to meet an ascetic healer. In this strange story, the healer turns out to be Jesus, who promptly sends Salman to the Arabian prophet. *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 145–146.

²⁰ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. I, 195. Wansbrough pointed out that the version of this story in Muqātil’s *Tafsīr*, at Q 18:9, includes the prediction of Muḥammad in Jewish scripture (*Tafsīr Muqātil*, II, 574–576). The Quraysh say, “Tell us whether you find any mention of him in your scriptures.” The Jews reply, “We do find him described (*na’ī*) as you say.” *Quranic Studies*, 122 (*Tafsīr Muqātil*, II, 575).

²¹ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 360–361.

²² *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 361. Ibn Hishām’s version of the *Sīra* does not suggest a Torah prophecy of Muḥammad’s coming as it does with the passage from the Gospel. However, Yūnus ibn Bukayr’s record of Ibn Ishāq’s lectures contains just such a suggestion. Yūnus transmits a tradition that Umm al-Dardā’ asked Ka’b al-Ḥibr (*ḥibr* means something like ‘Jewish scholar’) what reference he found to the prophet of Islam in the Torah. Ka’b al-Ḥibr answered, “We find Muhammad the apostle of God. His name is al-Mutawwakil. He is not harsh or rough; nor does he walk proudly in the streets. He is given the keys that by him God may make blind eyes see, and deaf ears hear, and set straight crooked tongues so that they bear witness that there is no god but God alone without associate. He will help and defend the oppressed.” Guillaume provides this translation then characterizes it as a “garbled version” of Isaiah 42:2–7. “New Light on the Life of Muhammad,” *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Monograph No. 1 (Manchester University Press, n.d.), 32.

²³ The process of personification continues in *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 397–8, where ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām is presented along with three others as Jews who submitted,

An extended passage in the *Sīra* about Muḥammad and the Jews of Madīna offers a narrative framework for Sūra 2 as well as for many other passages in Sūras 3–5. In this section a large number of verses of tampering are touched on. How does the *Sīra*'s confidence in the earlier scriptures and the theme of a correspondence between those scriptures and the coming of Muḥammad relate to the *Sīra*'s treatment of the Qur'ānic verses of tampering?

On Q 2:75 Ibn Ishāq relates basically the same story which Muqātil and Ṭabarī offer in their explanations of the verse.²⁴ The Jewish leaders hear the commands and prohibitions from God and understand them. But when they return with Moses to the people, a group of these leaders “changed (*ḥarrafā*) the commandments they had been given” by contradicting Moses and claiming that God had commanded something different. Ibn Ishāq here glosses “the word of God” as “the Torah.” However, the narrative he offers does not concern a text and its falsification, but rather only an audition of the voice of God and the verbal alteration of God's commandments when reporting them to the people.

In relation to Q 4:44–46 Ibn Ishāq gives a very short narrative about a Jew who “twisted his tongue” when he spoke to the prophet of Islam.²⁵ He names the particular Jew as Rifā'a ibn Zayd. Rifā'a said, “give us your attention, Muḥammad, so that we can make you understand.” Then he slandered (*ta'ana*) and dishonored (*'āba*) Islam. The focus of this story is on a verbal act of attacking Islam in the presence of Muḥammad.²⁶ There is no suggestion here of a text and its physical alteration.

Ibn Ishāq does not link a narrative with Q 5:13, though he provides details of the “treachery” of the Jews against Muḥammad in relation to Q 5:11.²⁷ However, he provides a long narrative passage as the occasion of revelation of Q 5:41.²⁸ The story is substantially the same as the verse of stoning story found in Muqātil, 'Abd al-Razzāq and Ṭabarī. 'Abd Allāh ibn Šūriyā, introduced as “the most learned man living in the Torah,” affirms that the Torah prescribes stoning for adulterers.

believed, and were earnest (*raghiba*) and firm (*rasakha*) in Islam. The disbelieving rabbis say that the converts are the very worst Jews because they have given up their ancestral religion. Ibn Ishāq finds this to be the *sabab al-nuzūl* of Q 3:113: “Yet they are not all alike; some of the People of the Book are a nation upstanding, that recite God's signs in the watches of the night, bowing themselves.” *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 398.

²⁴ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 379.

²⁵ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 400–401.

²⁶ Cf. Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 19.

²⁷ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 403.

²⁸ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 404–406.

He says that the Jews know that Muḥammad is a prophet sent by God, but don't want to acknowledge the truth because of envy. Here Ibn Ishāq also attaches the story of a rabbi concealing the verse of stoning with his hand.²⁹ The prophet of Islam calls for a Torah to be brought out. When 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām removes the rabbi's hand from the page, the 'verse of stoning' is revealed.³⁰ Muḥammad says, "Woe to you Jews! What has induced you to abandon (*taraka*) the judgment of God which you hold in your hands (*bi-aydikum*)?" The Jews explain how they agreed to "adjust" (*aṣlahā*) the punishment to flogging. The prophet of Islam then proclaims, "I am the first to revive the command (*amr*) of God and his book and its practice."³¹ All of the parts of Ibn Ishāq's narrative envision an intact Torah which can be produced and read aloud by Jewish Torah experts. Muḥammad's proclamation that he revives God's book appears to come out of a concept that the book is authentic and reliable—whether the book's custodians are trustworthy or not.

At several other points in his narratives about the response of the Jews of Madīna to Muḥammad, Ibn Ishāq appears to be working from a concept of an intact and sound Torah. For example, he glosses Q 2:42, "do not conceal the knowledge which you have about my apostle and what he has brought when you will find it with you in what you know of the books which are in your hands."³² The three Jewish tribes of Madīna shed each other's blood, "while the Torah was in their hands by which they knew what was allowed and what was forbidden."³³ In relation to Q 2:89–90, God's anger against the Jews is at "what they have disregarded of the Torah which they had" by disbelieving in the prophet of Islam.³⁴ The prophet wrote to the Jews of Khaybar that God has revealed the words of Q 48:29, "and you will find it in your scripture."³⁵ Here Ibn Ishāq includes a rather remarkable

²⁹ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 406. Bukhārī attaches the same story to Q 3:93: "Bring the the Torah now and recite it, if you are truthful." *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. V, 170 (*kitāb Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*, bāb 58).

³⁰ The role of 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām as the one who caused the reader of the Torah to lift his hand from the stoning verse is discussed by Vajda in "Juifs et Musulmans selon le Ḥadīṡ," 95.

³¹ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 406.

³² *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 376–377.

³³ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 382 (in explanation of Q 2:84–85).

³⁴ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 384.

³⁵ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 386. Wansbrough describes this as "a challenge to the addressees to acknowledge that Muhammad's prognosis was contained in Jewish scripture." *Sectarian Milieu*, 15.

challenge in Muḥammad's letter: "Do you find in what he has sent down to you that you should believe in Muḥammad? If you do not find that in your scripture then there is no compulsion (*kurh*) upon you."³⁶ In another story, the prophet of Islam enters a Jewish school and calls the Jews to God. In the ensuing exchange they disagree about the identity of Abraham, so Muḥammad says to the Jews, "Then let the Torah judge between us."³⁷ Ibn Ishāq claims that this was the occasion of revelation of Q 3:23: "Hast thou not regarded those who were given a portion of the book, being called to the book of God, that it might decide between them, and then a party of them turned away, swerving aside?"³⁸ Abū Bakr invites a learned rabbi named Finḥās to Islam because the Jew "knew that Muḥammad was the apostle of God who had brought the truth from Him and that they would find it written in the Torah and the Gospel."³⁹ Near the end of this *Sīra* section on the Jews, a group of Jews puts the question to Muḥammad directly: "Is it true, Muḥammad, that what you have brought is the truth from God?" The prophet responds, "You know quite well that it is from God; you will find it written in the Torah which you have. . . . You know well that it is from God and that I am the apostle of God. You will find it written in the Torah you have."⁴⁰ The claim in all of these examples is that the Torah which is in the possession of the Jews of Madīna during the rule of Muḥammad there will confirm his status as a prophet of God and the divine origin of the recitations which he is giving.

Ibn Ishāq also links narrative with several of the *katama* verses, and the theme of concealing seems to be an important part of his characterization of the Jews. Besides Q 2:42, mentioned earlier, he treats Q 2:159, 3:71, 3:187, and 4:37. As *sabab al-nuzūl* for Q 2:159, he tells a simple story about Arabs asking the Jewish rabbis about a matter contained in the Torah. The rabbis respond by concealing it from them and refusing (*abā*) to tell them anything about it.⁴¹ Ibn Ishāq's *asbāb* for the other three *katama* verses similarly appeal to the Jews to be

³⁶ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 387. This statement seems to combine a confidence in the scripture of the Jews with a candid uncertainty about its contents.

³⁷ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 394.

³⁸ Cf. Hirschfeld, "Historical and legendary controversies," 105–106. This story appears frequently in works of both *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *tafsīr*. See for example Wāḥidī, *Asbab al-Nusūl*, 51–52.

³⁹ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 399.

⁴⁰ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 410.

⁴¹ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 393.

honest about what they find in the Torah.⁴² The most logical conclusion from these stories is that the Torah which the Jews are encouraged to consult is understood by Ibn Ishāq to be the book which they have in their hands.⁴³

A striking fact about the narratives Ibn Ishāq offers about the Ahl al-Kitāb in the *Sīra* is the absence of any accusation of the falsification of the previous scriptures. In his section on references to the Jews in *Sūrat al-Baqara*, he offers no comments on Q 2:79, 3:78 or 5:13—which as we have seen seemed to trigger an accusation of falsification in Muqātil and Ṭabarī. This raises the question as to why the author of the *Sīra* did not use these verses in his narrative. If he had heard the accusation of falsification, why did he not include it in his characterization of the Jews of Madīna? There is little doubt that in this salvation history the Jews emerge as a deceitful, obstinate, indeed treacherous people. Did Ibn Ishāq not consider the accusation of their falsification of the Torah helpful for his portrayal? Was he possibly not familiar with the accusation?

In this regard, Wansbrough's comment about the development of the theme of tampering in the *Sīra* is curious. He wrote, "One topos emerges as dominant: the Muslim charge of scriptural falsification (*tahrīf*) and its corollary, supersession (*naskh*) by Islam of the Biblical dispensation granted to Israel... The accusation is usually made *in foro externo* in circumstances calculated to reveal Jewish perfidy in failing to preserve the original of their own scriptures, because these had (!) contained prognosis of the Arabian prophet."⁴⁴ But where is the evidence in the *Sīra* for this remark? Wansbrough cited Ibn Ishāq's treatment of Q 2:42 (*kitmān*), 2:59 (*tabdīl*) and 2:75 (*tahrīf*). As has been shown above, Q 2:75 was connected in the *Sīra*—as in the commentaries—to the story of the Jewish leaders verbally contradicting Moses' report of the commands of God. The gloss of Q 2:42, mentioned earlier, seems to make the point that the Jews are concealing information about the prophet of Islam which they can readily find in the books which are in their own hands. Ibn Ishāq treats Q 2:59 in the

⁴² *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 394, 400.

⁴³ On the *sabab al-nuzūl* in the *Sīra* for Q 2:159, Wansbrough wrote, "The 'concealment' (*kitmān*) topos became an important component of the Muslim charge that God's word had been distorted and abused in the hands of faithless custodians." *Sectarian Milieu*, 17. However, there is no indication of this in Ibn Ishāq's treatment of the verse, nor elsewhere in the context of this passage in the *Sīra*.

⁴⁴ *Sectarian Milieu*, 109.

context of God's dealings with the Children of Israel.⁴⁵ The Israelites said verbally something other than the *'ḥittā'* which God commanded them to say. None of these cases could be called a charge of scriptural falsification. There does not appear to be any hint in the *Sīra* section on the Jews of Madīna—the focus of Wansbrough's exploration—that the Jews possessed a corrupted scripture and that the claims that Ibn Ishāq is making could only therefore be confirmed through access to some other "original" scriptures. "Jewish perfidy" is certainly a major theme in the *Sīra*, but Ibn Ishāq does not demonstrate this by telling stories about the Jews' failure to preserve their scriptures. Rather, he portrays it by offering a narrative about Jewish obstinacy to acknowledge the truth about Muḥammad and what God revealed through him—which is clear from their own scriptures. Wansbrough added, "The use and abuse of 'scripture' was thus a polemical concept, adduced in support of the Muslim claim that God's salvific design had been achieved only with the revelation granted Muhammad."⁴⁶ Again, this is not the case in the *Sīra*. On the contrary, Ibn Ishāq makes the claim that Muḥammad and the Qur'ān are part of God's salvific design on the basis of the attestation of Muḥammad in the early scriptures and the relationship of correspondence between the earlier scriptures and the new recitations. Wansbrough seemed to support Ibn Ishāq's approach elsewhere when he wrote, "By its own express testimony, the Islamic kerygma was an articulation... of the Biblical dispensation, and can only thus be assessed."⁴⁷

Conclusions

The *Sīra* treats a remarkable number of the same verses of tampering which were identified through scholarly indication and through the semantic field of tampering. Ibn Ishāq provides a story of God's actions in history through the Arabian prophet, into which he inserts Qur'ānic verses of interaction and controversy with the People of the Book. From the other direction Muqātil, and to a certain extent Ṭabarī, provide interpretation for the vague and contextless verses of the Qur'ān by constructing above them a looming narrative frame-

⁴⁵ *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. II, 377.

⁴⁶ *Sectarian Milieu*, 109.

⁴⁷ *Sectarian Milieu*, 45.

work. In both cases, the narrative favors the scenario of a variety of tampering actions revolving around an intact Torah.

In setting out to write salvation history for the Muslim community, Ibn Ishāq was looking to portray continuity with the prophets of the Jewish and Christian communities and to demonstrate attestation from the scriptures of those communities. Continuity and attestation are elements of a narrative framework which works against the concept of a corrupted scripture in the hands of the Jews of Muḥammad's Madīna. In fact, Ibn Ishāq claims repeatedly that the book in the hands of the Jews will attest to the prophet of Islam. The narrative framework of the *Sīra* excludes not only traditions of textual falsification, but also the Qur'ānic verses which seem to trigger the accusation in Muqātil's and Ṭabarī's commentaries.

Exegetes of scripture do not have the option to exclude verses from their works of *tafsīr*. However, they interpret the verses according to independent structures—some internal and some external. In explaining the tampering verses, two internal structures which guide the exegete are the material in the Qur'ān on the earlier scriptures and the constraints of the *tafsīr* genre. For Muqātil and Ṭabarī, an important external structure was the narrative framework of Jewish resistance to the authority of the prophet of Islam. The examination of the 25 tampering passages plus many other passages in the commentaries has provided many glimpses of the outlines of this narrative structure. Calder's insight into the power of narrative in Ṭabarī's exegetical method is supported by an abundance of material in the commentaries. The narrative framework influences the two exegetes to interpret the tampering verses mainly in the direction of actions of tampering which assume an intact Torah in the hands of the Jews.

The influence of the narrative structure suggests a reason for why, though Muqātil and Ṭabarī cite a number of falsification traditions, these traditions remain isolated in the commentaries; and why the treatment of the falsification accusation by Ṭabarī and his forebears has been characterized by scholars as reluctant,⁴⁸ cautious,⁴⁹ guarded,⁵⁰ careful,⁵¹ and gentle.⁵²

⁴⁸ Burton, "The Corruption of the Scriptures," 105.

⁴⁹ Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion," 419.

⁵⁰ Houry, *Polemique byzantine contre l'Islam*, 210.

⁵¹ Hermann Stieglecker, "Die muhammedanische Pentateuchkritik zu Beginn des 2. Jahrtausends," *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift* 88 (1935), 75.

⁵² Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, 57.

On the other hand, by contrast, Muqātil and Ṭabarī narrated a wide variety of stories of tampering by the People of the Book with creativity and great abandon. Most of the members of these communities of the earlier scriptures are found to be deceptive and obstinate. The negative qualities of Jews and Christians are highlighted in the commentaries by actions of inappropriate response to the prophet of Islam despite the clear information about him in the books in their possession.