

An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries

VOLUME I

On the Nature of the Divine

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1 Seeking the face of God

(Q. 2:115)

And to God belong the east and the west; so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God; God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing.

*Wa li'llāhi'l-mashriqu wa'l-maghrib; fa-aynamā tuwallū
fa-thamma wajhu'llāh; inna'llāha wāsi'un 'alim*

AS A TRIPARTITE affirmation of the omnipresence of God, this verse presents three central themes of theology in the Qur'ān and permits a variety of exegetical approaches to each theme. The commentaries range from discussions of the context, the *Sitz-im-Leben* or *sabab al-nuzūl* (lit. 'reason for its being sent down'), to the intertwined attributes of divine omnipresence and omniscience. Some of the commentaries inform us that the occasion for the revelation of the verse relates to rules concerning the canonical prayer (*ṣalāt*), be it the obligatory (*farḍ*) prayer or the supererogatory (*nāfila*) one, and the need for the praying individual to orient him/herself towards the sanctuary in Mecca. Other commentaries, particularly the later commentaries, focus more on the theological aspects of the verse and what it says about God, particularly since there is no explicit mention of prayer in it.

There are three key features to the verse, expressed by the three phrases which constitute verse 115. The first feature is the 'spatial' relationship between God and the cosmos; in other words, direction – represented in the verse by 'the east' and 'the west' – belongs to God, just as possession belongs to its owner (*al-mālik*) and creation belongs to its Creator (*al-khāliq*). Mawdūdī, for example, says: 'God [...] is the possessor of all places and directions'. The second feature is the attempt by the commentators to explain the significance of 'God's face', and consequently to address controversial notions of anthropomorphism. The third feature is a discussion of divine attributes, rising out of the question of why the verse concludes with the divine names All-embracing and All-knowing, and how these two attributes relate to one another.

Feature 1. The comprehensive spatial description implied by 'the east' and 'the west' is reaffirmed by the use of the verb *wallā* in the phrase *fa-aynamā tuwallū* (so whithersoever you turn). For more than one of our commentaries notes that *wallā* means both 'to turn towards' and also 'to turn away from', and so the verb

is effectively subsuming all the possibilities of spatial orientation available to an individual. If we add to this the fact that one signification of the term *wajh*, with which the second phrase concludes, is 'direction', the import underlying this polysemy is clear: wherever you may turn there will be the direction – the face – of God. Many of the commentaries, especially the earlier ones, relate the notion of 'direction' to the question of whither to face during the performance of the obligatory, or canonical, prayer. The main concern of these commentaries, then, is whether the *qibla*,¹ the direction of prayer, is always a necessary condition for the validity of prayers (*ṣalāt*): what happens if the *qibla* cannot be determined – is the prayer still valid?

In the Sufi commentaries the east and the west represent, respectively, the presential manifestation of God and its absence. Ultimately, however, orientation for prayer and 'turning towards' God become one and the same concern in the Sufi perception of this verse: although the praying individual seeks out God through a ritual and 'directional' orientation towards the Ka'ba in Mecca, the entire earth is in fact a sacred space, a location within which the believer is able to 'turn towards' God, regardless of a specific projection. Such a 'turning', as highlighted by the Sufi commentaries, evinces a spiritual orientation, a seeking of solace, refuge and comfort in the omnipresent Creator. Here, the orientation is in essence an intellectual one, insofar as it is contemplative, and not simply physical, since it is effected towards One who manifests Himself – as per the language of Sufi metaphysics – within the entire cosmos and within humanity itself, a notion encapsulated in the Qur'ānic verse: *We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves* (Q. 41:53).

Feature 2. The totality of the cosmos is expressed by the east and the west, while the totality of the divine presence is expressed through the phrase *whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*. The omnipresence of God is expressed through the term *wajh*. The word *wajh*, rendered throughout as 'face', means also 'direction' and, crucially, 'aspect' or 'core'. For the commentators these meanings are all interrelated. The face, or countenance, is the crucial visible part of the body, for it is the essential indication of the identity of a person; it *reveals* their identity. Hence in *whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*, the cosmos may be understood as a revelation, one that reveals signs of the divine identity. This echoes the Qur'ānic usage of the term *āyāt* to refer to creation (as 'signs' of God's power) – and *āyāt* is the same term

¹ The *qibla* is, essentially, the Ka'ba at Mecca, and hence denotes the direction to face when performing prayer, among other things (supplications, ritual slaughter of animals, reciting the Qur'ān etc.). The term derives from the third form (*qābala*) of the verbal root *q-b-l*, 'to stand exactly opposite' or 'to face', with the related preposition *qibāla* 'opposite'. For further references, see n. 6, this chapter.

used to denote the ‘verses’ of the Qur’anic text: thus creation is a book of *āyāt*.

Moreover, given that the word *wajh* also means ‘essence’, verse 115 literally means that in whichever direction you turn, you face that most subtle of all subtleties: the essence of God. This is why the Sufi commentaries discuss the earth – representing the whole physical realm – as a macrocosmic locus for the manifestation of God’s qualities in dense matter, just as the human being is a microcosmic locus for theophany. Kāshānī comments that ‘in whichever direction you turn, outwardly or inwardly, *there is the face of God*, that is, the essence (*dhāt*) of God self-disclosed through the entirety of His attributes.’

Ṭabarī, Abū Ḥayyān and Rāzī, among others, note the wide range of understandings and interpretations of the notion of the face or countenance of God (*wajh Allāh*). Ṭabarī glosses *wajh Allāh* as *qiblatuhu*, ‘His *qibla*’, while noting that ‘others have said that the meaning of God’s words *there is the face of God* is: there is God’; and ‘others have said that by *wajh* is meant the One Who has a face; those who make this statement say that God’s face is one of His attributes’. Zamakhsharī, for his part, relates among his citations that al-Ḥasan recited the verse with a *fatha* over the *tā*’ (*tawallū*), meaning [by this]: ‘In whichever direction you assign the *qibla* [there is the face of God]’. Rāzī typically notes several aspects pertinent to the phrase *wajh Allāh*. Abū Ḥayyān expresses an antipathy towards anthropomorphism in his discussion of this phrase, and cites Abū’l-‘Āliya as taking issue with the unequivocal affirmation of an equivocal term as a divine attribute.

Verse 115 is taken by some commentators – contrary to the *prima facie* meaning – as a key refutation of anthropomorphism. A number of commentaries on this verse stress the aspect of divine omnipresence, perhaps as a conscious discourse and argument against some anthropomorphists in early Islam who thought that God was confined to His heaven and only encompassed the cosmos through His knowledge, which was omnipresent. Parallel to the divine omnipresence, the second phrase of the verse is interpreted to indicate God’s transcendence over that which He possesses. He owns all directions but is contained or confined by none. To complete the citation from Mawdūdī’s *tafsīr* given earlier: ‘He is the possessor of all places and directions but He Himself is not limited to any particular place or direction.’

Burūsawī links this medial phrase of verse 115 (*fa-aynamā tuwallū fa-thamma wajhu’llāh*) to the final phrase of the divine names, with his citation: ‘[...] there is His essence [...]; in whatever place you make the orientation [for prayer] He is present in it and you can reach Him – since He is neither substance nor accident; for His being in one direction would mean another direction is empty of Him.’ Then, having explicitly affirmed the divine

omnipresence, in the very next sentence, in the same breath so to speak, the commentary goes on to qualify the omnipresence by relating it to omniscience: 'In as much as it is impossible for Him to be in a place, I mean His knowledge encompasses what is in all places and domains.' This, in effect, explains to the reader the reason for the Qur'ān's juxtaposition of these two particular divine attributes, All-embracing and All-knowing, in the third phrase of the verse.

Feature 3. The twin facets of His all-comprehensiveness and omniscience are expressed through the two divine attributes with which the verse concludes: *wāsi'un 'alīm*. Some of the commentaries relate these divine qualities specifically to God's care and compassion for His creation: God seeks to facilitate matters for His creatures, for instance, through the latitude that He has permitted in the discharge of their moral and religious duties.² Others, like Burūsawī, focus on the more ontological/theological aspects of God's absolute encompassment of all things and the presence of His all-encompassing knowledge. Most of the commentators prefer to say that God's omnipresence, indicated by *wāsi'un*, is through His omniscience; they do not go so far as to say the two attributes are inseparable – to say the two are inseparable is to say that where God is, there is His knowledge, and where His knowledge is, there is He. Such a phrase would be anathema to the commentators, for they steer clear from words that might seem to confine God to a spatial locus of any magnitude. Thus *inna'llāha wāsi'un 'alīm* is often interpreted de facto as *innā 'ilma'llāhi wāsi'un* (verily the knowledge of God is all-encompassing). It might be said that, despite equating the two attributes, the commentators actually do demarcate between presence and knowledge, even though the verse clearly links the two attributes *wāsi'un 'alīm* together with the one word *Allāh*.

In addition to these three features, the commentaries demonstrate an interest in the circumstances of the verse's revelation which directly relates to the legalistic problem of determining the correct orientation for prayer. There is, however, a shift of interest away from the strictly legalistic question towards the theological implications of the verse, most notably in the twentieth-century commentaries but also in some of the Sufi commentaries.

The earlier commentaries, from that of Muqātil up to Zamakhsharī, are particularly concerned with understanding the context of revelation of the verse. What sort of prayer does it refer to? Is it connected to the change of the direction of prayer (*qibla*)? Is it even connected to the context of the previous verse that for some denoted Byzantine obstruction to Muslim use of the holy places

² One of the implications is that it behoves the believers to turn their hearts to, and orient themselves towards, the divine in reciprocation of His care for them, His servants – reciprocation through worship (be that formal or existential) being implicit in the idea of humanity's turning towards God.

and their first *qibla* in Jerusalem?³ Muqātil, the earliest exegete, stresses the earnest religious intention and piety of the early community. If one was unsure of the direction of prayer, especially when the *qibla* was still Jerusalem, then any direction was valid since one oriented oneself towards the divine presence. Hūd and Ṭabarī reiterate this opinion.

These latter authors also raise another important issue relating to the interpretation of this verse: the change of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca. Such a geographical shift may have signalled a change in relationship between the early Muslim community and their fellow monotheists. Ṭabarī, Rāzī and Abū Ḥayyān hesitate to embrace the idea that this change of *qibla* denoted some sort of break with the wider Abrahamic community; they adduce a Prophetic narration in which the Muslim community was urged to pray for the recently departed soul of the Negus of Abyssinia, who had not prayed towards the same *qibla* – and had not therefore been of the *ahl al-qibla*, namely, a Muslim – but a fellow monotheist, who had moreover protected the Muslims at the time of their first emigration from Mecca.

One question that was asked by the early exegetical authorities was whether the latitude in determining one's direction in prayer related to compulsory ritual acts (*farḍ*, pl. *furūd*) or supererogatory ones (*nāfila*, pl. *nawāfil*); the Shī'ī commentaries are noteworthy here for their careful insistence that this dispensation did not apply to compulsory prayer. Rāzī draws attention to the choice and free will implicit in the option *whithersoever you turn*, but then proceeds to limit it to pertaining in only two cases: with regard to someone on a journey and with regard to a person who is performing voluntary prayers while mounted on a riding-animal. However, by the time of the commentaries of Ṭabrisī and even Rāzī, the possibility of the latitude for compulsory prayer is discarded as an option and one notices that the commentaries give greater priority to understanding the significance of 'the face of God' (*wajh Allāh*) as well as arguing against and dismissing any possible anthropomorphic conceptions.

The Sufi commentaries of Kāshānī and Burūsawī are concerned less with the occasion of revelation and more with the emphasis on the omnipresence of the divine. For these commentators the totality of existence constitutes the theophany of the divine, and the realisation of this crucial insight is the key to understanding one's place in existence. God is omnipresent and all-aware.

The concern with divine omnipresence and the realisation of the true oneness of God through His dominion and comprehension of the entirety of existence are the key concerns of the later commentaries of *al-Manār*, by Mawdūdī and Faḍl Allāh. The occasion of revelation and the connection of the verse to prayer are set aside in favour of a more theological reading of the verse,

³ For a discussion of this point, see Bashear 1989.

one that emphasises certain implications of the concept of ‘divine oneness’ (*tawḥīd*). According to these later commentators, one ought to engage with and meditate upon the verse as an expression of divine dominion over, and knowledge and comprehension of, the totality of existence.

Muqātil

Muqātil’s main concern in understanding and explaining the verse lies in his exposition of the legal precept implicit therein. The narrative force of his commentary reflects the desire to explain and justify the trials of the nascent Muslim community as a group guided by a benevolent God who not only recognises them despite their mistakes, but indulges them and is merciful towards them through His revelation, a revelation which responds to their needs through the agency and instrument of the Prophet. The context of this verse as an articulation of the correct nature of belief (*īmān*) is stressed through the citation at the end of Muqātil’s commentary of another verse from the same *sūra* (Q. 2:177) in which *īmān* itself is defined. The use of narrative in the commentary, in the form of an anecdote, should not be overlooked, because it highlights the significance of salvation history, fundamental in any account of the origins of a religious movement. The trajectory of that religious movement is thus explained in soteriological terms: the early Muslims lived in the ‘shade of God’ as recipients of His mercy and revelation and through whose guidance, conveyed by the Prophet, they sought to achieve salvation. In order to achieve their own salvation and for God’s mercy to embrace them, it was necessary to ensure the correct performance of worship and orientation towards Him not just in prayer, but in their very existence. The narration also points to the oral nature of the early exegetical tradition, one in which the ‘Word of God’ was explained and articulated in a contextual manner. The commentary, as an oral gloss, interweaves the divine dimension, the revealed word, with the human dimension, namely that of ‘how it happened’.

*And to God belong the east and the west.*⁴ [It happened that] a group of believers were on a journey.⁵ On a cloudy day, when the time for the [dawn] prayer came, they were at a loss [as to the direction of the *qibla*]. Some of them prayed towards the east, while some of them prayed towards the west – this was before the *qibla*⁶

⁴ *Tafsīr*, I, 133.

⁵ It is, perhaps, no coincidence that in this early work, the Companions of the Prophet (members of the early community) are defined merely as ‘a group of believers’; after all, the commentary stresses the importance of belief that is expressed in the verse, and the nascent community needed to be defined as a religious entity engaged in the quest for salvation as a ‘community of belief’. It also seems that the technical definition of the early community around the Prophet Muḥammad as his ‘Companions’ (*ṣaḥāba*) was still in the process of being formulated while Muqātil composed his commentary. See Miklos Muranyi, ‘Ṣaḥāba’, *EI*², VIII, 827–9; Linda Kern, ‘Companions of the Prophet’, *EQ*, I, 386–90.

⁶ As mentioned, the *qibla* constitutes the direction in which Muslims pray, facing towards the Ka’ba in Mecca. In mosques this orientation is designated by a niche placed in the wall which the praying individual(s) face. See A. J. Wensinck - [David A. King], ‘Kibla’, *EI*², V, 82–3: ‘the adoption of a *qibla* is a necessary condition for the validity of a *ṣalāt*. Only in great danger and in a voluntary

had been changed [from Jerusalem] to the Ka'ba.⁷ When the sun rose, they realised that they had not prayed in the direction of the *qibla*. Upon their arrival in Medina, they informed the Prophet of this. God then sent down [the following verse]: *And to God belong the east and the west; so whithersoever you turn, [i.e. whithersoever] you turn your faces during prayer, there is the face of God, [i.e.] there is God. God is indeed All-embracing, in having given them the dispensation to abandon the qibla when they did not know which way it was; All-knowing, of what they had intended: [in this respect] God also sent down [the following] It is not piety that you turn your faces to the east and to the west [to the end of the verse, Q. 2:177].*⁸

Hūd

Hūd, like other early commentators, is interested in how narratives of the pre-*fitna* (the first Muslim civil war) community can construct an account of an ideal Muslim community as a paradigm for the believers. His Ibāḍī leanings are not explicit here because there

ṣalāt on a journey can it be neglected'. See also the important work by King 1999 on how the direction of Mecca was determined particularly in the medieval period from a number of locations.

⁷ The Ka'ba, also referred to as 'the House of God' (*bayt Allāh*) is a cuboid structure that stands in the middle of the Meccan sanctuary (*haram Makka*): see Oleg Grabar, 'al-Masjīd al-Ḥarām', *EI²*, VI, 708–9, i. On the Ka'ba itself, see Arent Jan Wensinck – [Jacques Jomier], 'Ka'ba', *EI²*, IV, 317–22; Gerald Hawting, 'Ka'ba', *EQ*, III, 75–80; and Rubin 1986. Located in the Ḥijāz in the Arabian Peninsula, Mecca was also the birthplace of Islam, being the hometown of the Prophet Muḥammad; see W. Montgomery Watt, *et al.*, 'Makka', *EI²*, VI, 144ff.; J. Chabbi, 'Mecca', *EQ*, III, 337–41. For a detailed Muslim medieval history focusing on the town and its surroundings from pre-Islamic times, see Azraqī, *Makka*; Peters 1994 is a useful secondary study of the literary material on the site. On the significance of the Arab sanctuary, see Serjeant 1962. The emergence of Islam, or at least of its key socio-ethical principles, has been linked by certain Islamicist scholarship (Watt 1953, 19f., 72ff.; Rodinson 1971, 36) to Mecca's economic position vis-à-vis the international trade at the time: the principles taught by the Qur'ān were a reaction to the growing socio-economic malaise. For a controversial re-evaluation of the importance of Mecca in the international trade of the period and, crucially, in the transit-trade of caravans travelling between Syria and Yemen along western Arabia, see Crone 1987, which was heavily criticised in Serjeant's review 1990. The arguments made by Crone 1987 are further reinforced in Crone 2005 and 2007, through elaborations on the real nature of Meccan trade as conducted by its principal tribe the Quraysh. An earlier study on the commercial activities of Quraysh by Rubin (1984) is also relevant, as is the brief entry by Uri Rubin, 'Caravan', *EQ*, I, 290–1, and Donner 1977. However, a very important reassessment by Heck (2003) of Hijāzī trade in the first/seventh century reveals not a primitive economy, as twentieth-century Islamicist scholarship has it, but a very sophisticated one in which a diverse range of commodities were consumed and exported in and around Mecca, with Quraysh at the head of this economic activity.

⁸ The rest of Q. 2:177 defines this 'true' piety: *[True] piety is that of the one who believes in God and the Last Day and the angels and the Book, and who gives of his substance, however cherished, to kinsmen and the orphans and the needy and the traveller and the beggars and for [the manumission of] slaves, and who observes prayer and pays the alm; and [true piety is that of] those who fulfil their covenant when they have engaged in a covenant, those who endure with fortitude misfortune, hardship and peril: these are the ones who are sincere [in their piety] and these are the ones who are God-wary.* In other words, the outward matter of the direction one faces in prayer is not a defining quality; it is inner piety that is of consequence.

is nothing in the verse that relates to issues on which the Ibādī school formed distinctive opinions, such as the nature of sin, its expiation or Hellfire. Nevertheless, we may attribute his exegesis to very moderate Khārijī circles, as highlighted by two facts: first, the ‘mistake’ of praying in the wrong direction in a situation where one cannot ascertain the correct *qibla* does not entail a grave sin (*kabīra*) that places one outside the community; second, some of the narratives explicitly derive from Basran circles, primarily those of al-Ḥasan (d. 110/728).⁹ A famous early ascetic, pietist, thinker and Qur’ān reader, al-Baṣrī frequently delegated the task of giving religious opinions to one Jābir b. Zayd al-Azdī (d. c. 102/720), the first true leader of Ibādism in Basra.¹⁰ ‘Islam’, as Ibādīs were concerned to point out, required a combination of ‘faith’ (*īmān*), the inner affirmation of belief in God, and works (*‘amal*): faith cannot be a mere affirmation of the heart. The significance of belief is central to Hūd’s understanding, as is clear from his quotation of the view that the issue of the *qibla*, whether one orients oneself to Jerusalem, the first *qibla*, or Mecca is irrelevant; what is important, is that one turns towards God in righteousness and correct belief.

His words,¹¹ *And to God belong the east and the west; so whithersoever you turn, that is, [turn] your faces in the prayer (ṣalāt), there is the face of God, that is to say, there is God. Some have said [that it means]: there is the qibla of God. God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing.*

Some of the commentators have said that when the Messenger of God was in Mecca, they [the Muslims] used to perform the canonical prayers [facing] towards the Holy House (*Bayt al-Maqdis*) [sc. Jerusalem].¹² After the Messenger of God emigrated to Medina, for sixteen months he performed the prayer [facing] towards the Holy House [of Jerusalem]. Then God directed him, after that [period of time], to [face towards] the Ka’ba, the Sacred House (*al-bayt al-ḥarām*). So He said in another verse [Q. 2:144], *Turn your face*

⁹ On the figure of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, see the monograph by Mourad 2005.

¹⁰ On Jābir b. Zayd, see Crone and Zimmermann 2001, 301f.

¹¹ *Tafsir*, I, 138–40.

¹² Jerusalem in the Muslim tradition is known as the Holy House (*Bayt al-Maqdis*) which denotes a temple or a sanctuary (*ḥaram*), derived from the Hebrew *beyt ha-miqdash*. The Hebrew term is cited in ch. 10 of *Midrāsh Tanhūmā: qedoshim*, in Buber 1913, I, 73, translated in Hertzberg 1961, 150. In this sense, Ṭabari uses the title in his *Ta’rikh*, I, 2360. Jerusalem was also the first *qibla* of Islam. The name *al-Quds* is a later appellation: see Shlomo Goitein, ‘al-Ḳuds’, *EI*², V, 322–39; Heribert Busse, ‘Jerusalem’, *EQ*, III, 2–7; Gil 1992, 65–9; van Ess 1992, 33–58; and see Elad 1995, 62–5, 147–59 on the sanctuary. The earliest attestation of the term *Bayt al-Maqdis* in the Arabic sources is in a poem of al-Mu’allā b. Ṭarīf, a *mawlā* of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Mahdī (r. 775–86), cited in Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Masālik*, VI, 79, and in Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, VI, 238. The best modern study of the early Muslim conception of Jerusalem and the temple is Busse 1991; a collection of articles focusing on *Bayt al-Maqdis* can be consulted in two volumes, Raby and Johns 1993, and Johns 1999; cf. also Neuwirth 2003. On the relationship of the two sanctuaries of Jerusalem and Mecca as directions of prayer, see the following works: Busse 1988, Kister 1969, Kister 1996 and Peters 1986. On the sanctity of Jerusalem, see the important *faḍā’il* (‘merits’ or ‘virtues’) literature that includes Ibn al-Jawzī, *Faḍā’il*; Mujir al-Dīn, *Uns*; Manīnī, *I’lām*; Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍā’il*; Wāsiṭī, *Faḍā’il*. For a discussion of this topic, see Goitein 1966; Meri 2002, ch. 1; Livne-Kafri 2000; Elad 1991.

towards the Holy Mosque (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it (*shaṭrahu*), [where] *shaṭrahu* means *tilqā'ahu* ('facing it'). So this verse abrogated what came before it concerning the matter of the *qibla*, according to the reports of some of them [the commentators].¹³ According to the account of others, however, there had never been a [specific] *qibla* before this.

They mention that the Messenger of God was on a journey. They [the travelling party] dismounted at a stopping place on a dark night and one of them set to collecting pebbles [to mark the direction of the *qibla*] and made a space in which to pray (*masjid*). They then prayed.¹⁴ When they woke up the [following] morning, [they realised that] they were [facing] towards a direction other than that of the *qibla*.¹⁵ Then God sent down this verse, *And to God belong the east and the west; so whithersoever you turn*, that is, [whithersoever you turn] your faces in the prayer, then *there is the face of God. God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing*.

Ibn 'Abbās¹⁶ said that the Prophet was on a journey on a cloudy day, and they performed the prayer; [but] some had prayed towards the east and some had prayed towards the west. They mentioned this to the Prophet, and God sent down this verse.

Some of them said that a band of companions of the Prophet set off on a journey, and that was before the *qibla* was changed to the Ka'ba. They became confused; at that time, the prayer direction had been towards the Holy House [sc. Jerusalem]. Some of them prayed towards the east and some of them prayed towards the west. When the sun rose, it became clear to them [what the correct direction of the *qibla* was]. When they went to the Messenger of God, they mentioned that to him. Then God sent down, *And to God belong the east and the west; so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God. God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing*.

They mention that al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] was asked about a man who performs the prayer and then, upon finishing the prayer, [realises] that he was not facing

¹³ *Naskh* or abrogation is the concept that a certain Qur'ānic verse's period of applicability or relevance (particularly relating to the Law) is rescinded and replaced by another verse or, in some cases, a *ḥadīth*. See John Burton, 'Abrogation', *EQ*, I, 11–19; John Burton, 'Naskh' in *EIF*, VII, 1009–12.

¹⁴ The pebbles were used to demarcate the sacred space of the mosque as the ground for the worship of, and prostration (lit. *masjid*) to, God. See the report in Ṭabarī, this chapter, that clarifies this.

¹⁵ The point being made is that since God is everywhere, then to orient oneself towards Him does not require a specific prayer direction, especially when the physical conditions and climate do not allow one to ascertain what the correct prayer direction [towards Mecca] may be. This is not the juridical position as such on ascertaining the prayer direction, which is one of the preparatory conditions of prayer. Mystical commentaries, as we shall see, take the issue further.

¹⁶ Hūd quotes this report from Ibn 'Abbās on the authority of al-Kalbī.

the [direction of the] *qibla*. He [al-Ḥasan] said: 'His prayer is valid, for, God says, *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*'.¹⁷

They [also] mention [on the authority of] some of the [pious] predecessors (*salaf*) that he [the Prophet] said that if a person performs the prayer and then it becomes clear to him that he had prayed [facing in a direction] other than towards the *qibla*, his prayer will have been fulfilled [and he need not repeat it]; but if it were to become clear to him after he has prayed one unit (*rak'a*),¹⁸ he should turn [his body] to face the [correct] *qibla* [for the remainder of the prayer].

Qummi

Qummi's commentary on this verse is a very brief consideration of the early debate on how the verse concerns the conditions of prayer, and whether the apparent dispensation to pray in any direction applies to compulsory or supererogatory prayer. He sides with the view that it only applies to supererogatory or recommended non-compulsory prayer and not to the compulsory prayer, thus signaling his dissociation from what he perceived to be the normative Sunnī interpretation.

[As regards] His saying *And to God belong the east and the west; so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*, this [verse] was sent down concerning the supererogatory prayer (*nāfila*): pray it in whichever direction you face when you are travelling. As for the obligatory prayers (*farā'id*), His saying [Q. 2:144, 150] *And wherever you may be, turn your faces towards it* [applies]. In other words, you may not perform the obligatory prayers except in the direction of the *qibla*.¹⁹

¹⁷ Hūd quotes extensively from al-Ḥasan through the *riwāya* of his *tafsīr* 'an 'Amr b. 'Ubayd al-Baṣrī (d. c. 759) available to him in the recension of Yaḥyā b. Sallām al-Baṣrī (d. 200/815). On the former, see Gilliot 1997, 182, and *TG* II, 45–6, 298–300; on the latter, see the editor's introduction to Hūd, *Tafsīr*, I, 27–31, where the editor also refers to a manuscript of this *tafsīr* in the Qarawīyyīn Library in Fez, Morocco. The Basran context of his sources is significant given that the first centre of Ibāḍism was second-/eighth-century Basra.

¹⁸ Literally, 'genuflexion'. The ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) follows a more or less fixed sequence of movements. Prayers are performed in units (usually 2, 3, 4 or more) and since each unit consists of only one genuflexion (*rak'a*) – as opposed to two prostrations, amongst other movements – a unit of prayer is equated with a *rak'a*, 'a genuflexion', and is called by that term. The five canonical prayers involve 2 units (dawn), 3 (after sunset) or 4 (noon, mid- to late afternoon, and after dark). All supererogatory (*nāfila*) or recommended (*sunna*) prayers involve an unlimited number of 2 units (minimum 2, or 4, 6, 8 etc.). There are some exceptions, of course, such as the *witr* prayer, which consists of only 1 unit (thus, one *rak'a*), and the prayer for the dead (*janāza*), which involves no genuflexion or prostration and is performed entirely in a standing position; for further details, see Guy Monnot, 'Ṣalāt', *EP*², VIII, 925–34.

¹⁹ *Tafsīr*, I, 68.

‘Ayyāshī

‘Ayyāshī generally concurs with Qummi’s comments. However, consistent with his own traditionist method, he adduces evidence and authority for these views by quoting the words of the imams. The commentary demonstrates the recourse to the legal authority of the imams and represents the key invocation of the authority of the imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq for correct conformity to the divine law.

[*Hadīth* no. 185/84]²⁰ Ḥarīz ← Abū Ja‘far [Muḥammad al-Bāqir] said: God sent down this verse specifically concerning voluntary worship (*taṭawwu‘*).²¹ So whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God; God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing. The Messenger of God prayed while riding on his camel by making the gestures [of the prayer] in whichever direction his camel happened to point as he went out to Khaybar;²² and [he also did this] when returning from Mecca, [even] leaving the Ka‘ba to his back.

[*Hadīth* no. 186/85] Zurāra said: I asked Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq], ‘Is the [canonical] prayer (*ṣalāt*) during travel [to be performed] the same whether one is on a ship or in a camel-borne litter?’ He said,

Supererogatory prayer (*nāfila*) is all the same [wherever you happen to be]; you make the gestures in whichever direction your mount, or your ship, happens to point. However, you should dismount for the obligatory prayer (*farīda*), unless there is fear [of imminent danger]; if you are in fear, then you make the gestures [while remaining mounted]. On a ship, you should pray upright [as normal] trying as best as you can to seek [by ascertaining] the direction of the *qibla*. Noah performed the obligatory prayers while on it [i.e. the Ark] upright, facing the direction of the *qibla*, even though it was obscured for them.

I asked, ‘How would he have known the direction of the *qibla* in order to face it if it was obscured for them?’ He replied, ‘Gabriel used to set him towards it.’ I asked, ‘Should I then [try to] face it every time I make the call [to prayer] with *Allāhu akbar* (God is Great)?’²³ He said,

²⁰ *Tafsīr*, I, 151–2.

²¹ *Al-taṭawwu‘* (voluntary acts of worship) encompass all acts of worship that one might perform in addition to the obligatory duties (*farā’id*) of the daily canonical prayers, fasting, alms-giving etc. Any such supererogatory deed is commonly referred to as *nāfila* (pl. *nawāfil*), cf. Arent Jan Wensinck, ‘Nāfila’, *IE*², VII, 878–9. Indeed, supererogatory prayer, *ṣalāt al-nāfila*, is sometimes called *ṣalāt al-taṭawwu‘*: cf. Hindī, *Kanz*, VII, 771ff. and VIII, 383ff.

²² The site of a Jewish-owned oasis and fortress complex around 150 km from Medina, the Muslims besieged and captured Khaybar in 7/628. See Laura Veccia Vaglieri, ‘Khaybar’, *IE*², IV, 1137–41; and Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 755–81 (for an English translation see Guillaume 1978, 510–26). See also Lings 1991, 263–9 *et passim*; Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 25–29; Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, I, 1575–91 (for an English translation see Fishbein 1997, 116–30).

²³ This question seeks to ascertain what should be done if the direction of the camel or ship

Not in the case of supererogatory prayer, since it is more common [in the *nawāfil*] that [this call of] *takbīr* be made facing [a direction] other than [that of] the *qibla*. For the person performing the supererogatory prayer (*mutanaffil*), all those [directions] are a [valid] *qibla*, because He [God] has said: *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God; God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing.*

[*Ḥadīth* no. 187/86:] ← Ḥammād b. ‘Uthmān ← Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq] said:

I [Ḥammād] asked him [al-Ṣādiq] about a person who, whilst mounted on his riding-animal, recites a [verse at which he is required to make a] prostration.²⁴ He [al-Ṣādiq] said, ‘He should perform the prostration in whichever direction it [his ride] is turned towards, for the Messenger of God used to perform supererogatory prayers on his she-camel, facing towards Medina: God says, *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God; God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing*’.

Ṭabarī

Ṭabarī provides a compendium of accounts about the context and meaning of the verse, representing the wide range of narratives available to him. While he considers a range of opinions about the legal and narrative aspects of the verse, his own view is expressed quite clearly at the outset: the verse affirms the central significance in Islam of the absolute and complete sovereignty and dominion of God over His creation. His main legal concern lies in the context of the revelation of the verse and its association with the change of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca, an act that is located within a polemic against the Jews who were rivals, theologically speaking, of the early Muslims. The verse thus signals the abrogation of the *qibla* of Jerusalem in favour of the *qibla* of Mecca, an expression of the increasingly unique cultic practice of early Islam. However, he also considers the opinion that the context of the verse was a Prophetic endorsement of the validity of the monotheistic practice of the Negus of Abyssinia, a Christian ruler. The subtext suggested is that the Muslims should not associate themselves with the Jews but should emphasise their commonality with the Christians [cf. Q. 5:82]. Ṭabarī concludes his commentary with the divine names to the effect that God encompasses His creation through His compassion and beneficence; He is All-knowing of, and watchful over, the actions of His creatures.

changes once the *takbīr* (*Allāhu akbar*), denoting the commencement of the prayer, has been made. The response is that one should not be too concerned about any change in direction when performing the supererogatory prayer (*nāfila*); one should, however, make all possible effort to face the direction of the *qibla* in the case of obligatory (*farīda*) prayers; cf. Majlisī, *Biḥār*, LXXXIV, 90–100.

²⁴ This is a reference to the *sajdat al-tilāwa* (‘the recital prostration’), a prostration that is performed when the person reciting the Qur’ān happens to recite any one of now fifteen verses where that prostration is required. These ‘prostration verses’ are usually indicated in modern-day copies of the Qur’ān using distinct symbols. The verses are Q. 7:206; 13:15; 16:50; 17:109; 19:58; 22:18,77; 25:60; 27:26; 32:15; 38:24; 41:38; 53:62; 84:21 and 96:19.

And to God belong the east and the west means ‘to God belong the dominion and management of these two’,²⁵ in the same way that it is possible to say, ‘To so-and-so belongs this house’, by which is meant that it is that person’s possession; likewise His words: *And to God belong the east and the west* mean that they are His possession and creation.²⁶

If someone were to say, ‘What, is it only the one east and the one west that belong to God, such that it needs then to be [explicitly] stated *And to God belong the east and the west*?’ One would reply,

The meaning of this [phrase] is other than the one you have come to. Rather, the meaning is that to God belongs the east from which the sun rises every day and the west in which it sets every day. In that case, the [correct] interpretation would be that it means: to God belongs that which is between the two regions (*qitray*) of the east and the west. For the rising of the sun each day is from a [specific] place there, one to which it does not return to rise from [again] until the following year, and the same applies for its setting every day.²⁷

And if he were then to say, ‘Even if the [correct] interpretation of that [verse] is what you have mentioned, is it not the case that to God belongs everything other than Him of [all] creation created by Him?’, one would say, ‘Yes, indeed.’ If he were then to say, ‘So why, in this place, does He single out the easts²⁸ and the wests to the exclusion of all other things, by [giving] information about them, [namely] that they belong to Him?’, one would state that the commentators have disagreed about the reason why God has singled out the mention of this in the way that He has in this instance.

We shall clarify what the more appropriate interpretation of the verse is after we have cited their [the scholars’] reports on this [issue].

Some say: God singles out that [east and west] for information [explicitly] because the Jews in their prayers used to turn their faces towards the Holy House [of Jerusalem]. The Messenger of God [also] used to do this for a time; but then they [the early Muslims] turned towards the Ka’ba. The Jews disapproved of this deed of the Prophet and said, *What has turned them from the direction which they used to face in their prayers previously?* [Q. 2:142]. God thus said to them: ‘To Me belong all the easts and the wests, I direct the faces of My

²⁵ *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, I, 501–6.

²⁶ In the next two lines Ṭabarī makes a brief grammatical point about the *maf’ il* pattern, on which the term *mashriq*, as the place from which the sun ‘rises’ (*shurūq*) and ‘comes into view’ (*maṭli’*), is based; he draws an analogy with the term *maṣjid*, pointing to his discussion of the latter in the previous verse.

²⁷ The implication being that as the sun rises and sets in different places every day throughout the year, the verse does not refer to a specific geographical location and that thus there is no boundary to God’s dominion.

²⁸ *Mashāriq* (east), i.e. all the points of sunrise; and further on in the sentence, *maghārib* (wests) indicates all the points of sunset.

servants in it [the earth] as I wish. So, wherever you turn, there is the face of God’.

An account of those who said this:

Ibn ‘Abbās said,²⁹

The direction of prayer (*qibla*) was the first thing to be abrogated (*nusikha*) from the Qur’ān. It was such that when the Messenger of God emigrated to Medina, where the majority of people were Jews, God commanded him [the Prophet] to turn towards the Holy House [during prayer]. The Jews were delighted. The Messenger of God thus turned towards it [during prayer] for some thirteen months or more.³⁰ The Messenger of God loved the *qibla* of Abraham,³¹ and he would make supplications looking up towards heaven. God then sent down [the verses]: *We have seen you turning your face about in the heaven* [Q. 2:144] up to where He says, *turn your faces towards it* [Q. 2:150].³² The Jews were disquieted by this and

²⁹ This report bears the following *isnād*: Muthannā [al-Āmulī] ← Abū Šāliḥ ← Mu’āwiya b. Šāliḥ ← ‘Alī [b. Abī Ṭalḥa] ← Ibn ‘Abbās. An *isnād* is often taken to be the chain of authoritative transmission, or the guarantee of the reliability and authenticity, of a report from its source. As a literary device, it may have been borrowed from the rabbinical model of providing chains of authority: see Aḥmad Pākatchī, ‘Isnād’, *DMI*, VI, 709–11, and Horowitz 1918. This guarantee is based on the notion of the oral transmission of knowledge, and a perceived hostility, which is debatable, towards written transmission in early Islam. Of course the question of oral and written transmission in early Islam is critical for the authenticity, and thus reliability, of texts which are preserved, in many cases, only in later compilations: see Vajda 1975, 2–8, Vajda 1983, I, and for the debate, see Cook 1997. Important contributions to this debate have been made by Schoeler 1989 and 1997, who has nuanced the issue by pointing to the necessary distinction between final form authored works (*syn-gramma*) and notes (*hypomnēma*) made by the author/lecturer as aide-memoires in order to impart the contents orally to students who would in turn make their own notes (Heck 2002). From a traditional Sunni position, it has been argued that *isnāds*, as guarantees of reliable transmission, are not retrojections in the manner argued by Schacht (1950, 163) and Cook (1981, 106–17), but that they existed at the time of the Prophet and became increasingly important as the issue of fabrication arose in the light of the political dissension of the early community: see for example Azami 1978, 212–47; Azami 1977, 32–45; Azami 1996; and Siddiqi 1993, 76–84. Traditional Muslim scholarship was attuned to the problem of authenticity and various genres of *ḥadīth* criticism existed, such as *al-jarḥ wa’l-ta’dīl*: see Hallaq 1999 and Dickinson 2001. For arguments favouring written transmission, with *isnāds* constituting a sort of ‘critical apparatus’ for the *ḥadīth* reports, see GAS, I, 53, 60, and Abbott 1972, II, 53, 80ff. In the Shi’i context, written transmission was acceptable and a recent work argues that written transmission was essential for the codification of the Prophetic tradition: see Jalāli 1413/1992. Another work, Shahrastāni 1997, lays out the opposition to writing down the Prophetic tradition in Sunni circles. One further caveat to keep in mind is that, even if the chain is plausible in terms of space and time and opportunity, this still does not guarantee its reliability. It was quite possible for the chains to be fabricated, even when the *isnād* seemed ‘sound’; hence the whole classical discussion of *mawḍū’āt*, namely, fabricated narrations. ‘Askarī 1969 in a famous (and polemical) study argued about the fabrication of the names of Companions at the head of *isnāds* in many narrations of a historical and political nature.

³⁰ The word *bīd’* is usually taken to mean ‘between three and nine’.

³¹ The normative example of Abraham played an important theological role in the early Muslim consciousness. See Firestone 1990; Reuven Firestone, ‘Abraham’, *EQ*, I, 5–11; Rubin 1990; Rudi Paret, ‘Ibrāhīm’, *EP*, III, 980–1; Geiger 1898, 95ff.; Moubarac 1958; Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, I, 252–319, for the English translation, see Brinner 1987, 48–131; Tha’labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 51–75.

³² This phrase is repeated three times in the *sūra*: first in verse 144, then in 149 and finally in 150.

said, *What has turned them from the direction which they used to face in their prayers previously?* [Q. 2:142]. God then sent down, *Say: to God belong the east and the west* [Q. 2:142] and He also said: *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* [Q. 2:115].

Al-Suddī reported something similar [to that].³³

Others have said, however, that God sent down this verse before making it incumbent upon His Prophet and the believers to turn and face the Sacred Mosque (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*), and that He only sent it down to inform His Prophet and his Companions that they could turn their faces in prayer towards whichever aspect of the east or west they wished. For whichever direction or aspect they turned their faces towards, God would be in that direction or aspect, because the easts and the wests belong to Him, and there is not a [single] place that is devoid of Him [sc. of His presence]. As God says, *nor [are there] fewer than that or more but He is with them wherever they may be* [Q. 58:7]. They said, ‘Then He abrogated this with the injunction which He placed upon them to face the direction of the Sacred Mosque.’

An account of those who said this:

Sa‘īd [b. Jubayr] reported from Qatāda [the following about] God’s words: *And to God belong the east and the west; so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*, [that] these were later abrogated when He said *From whatever place you issue, turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque* [Q. 2:149, 150].³⁴

Ma‘mar [b. Rāshid] reported from Qatāda [the following] about God’s words, *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*. He [Qatāda] said: ‘That was the *qibla*, which was then abrogated by the *qibla* of the Sacred Mosque.’³⁵ Yahyā [b. Kathīr] said,³⁶

I heard Qatāda [say] regarding the words of God *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*, ‘They used to pray towards the Holy House [sc. Jerusalem] when the Messenger of God was in Mecca, before the Emigration (*hijra*),³⁷ and follow-

³³ Mūsā [b. Hārūn] ← ‘Amr [b. Ḥammād] ← Asbāt [b. Naṣr] ← al-Suddī.

³⁴ Bishr b. Mu‘ādh ← Yazīd b. Zuray‘ ← Sa‘īd ← Qatāda.

³⁵ [Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī] ← al-Ḥasan ← ‘Abd al-Razzāq ← Ma‘mar [b. Rāshid] ← Qatāda.

³⁶ Muthannā ← al-Ḥajjāj b. al-Minhāl ← Hammām [b. Yahyā] ← Yahyā [b. Abī Kathīr].

³⁷ According to Muslim tradition, in the period following the deaths of his wife Khadija and his uncle Abū Ṭālib, the Prophet’s life and the lives of members of the nascent Muslim community were under threat from the hostile Meccans. Following an invitation to emigrate to Yathrib, the Prophet left his hometown with his Companions. Yathrib was renamed as ‘the city of the Prophet’ (*madīnat al-nabī* or just *al-Madīna*, Medina). This event is known in Muslim history as the Emigration (*al-hijra*) and was later adopted as the point from which the Muslim calendar, known as the *hijrī* calendar, is calculated. See W. Montgomery Watt, ‘Hijra’, *EP*², III, 366–7; M. al-Faruque, ‘Emigration’, *EQ*, II, 18–23; Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, I, 1199–55 (for an English translation see Watt and McDonald 1988, 115–61); W. Montgomery Watt, ‘al-Madīna: History to 1926’, *EP*², V, 994–1000. For an equivalent of Azraqī’s history of Mecca, there is the Muslim historical work on Medina by Ibn Shabba, *Madīna*.

ing the Emigration of the Messenger of God [to Medina], he prayed towards the Holy House [sc. Jerusalem] for sixteen months. After this, he turned towards the Ka'ba, the Sacred Mosque, as God made the abrogation [concerning praying towards Jerusalem] in another verse: [from] now We will surely turn you to a direction that shall satisfy you [Q. 2:144] until From whatever place you issue, turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque [Q. 2:150]. He [Qatāda] said: "This verse thus abrogated the direction of prayer that was before."³⁸

Ibn Wahb said,

I heard him [Zayd?]³⁹ saying, 'God said to His Prophet, *So whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God; God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing* [Q. 2:115]: He continued, 'And so the Messenger of God said: "These Jews turn their faces towards one of God's Houses, so let us turn to face it." And the Prophet turned to face it [in prayer] for sixteen months. Then it reached him [the Prophet] that some Jews were saying, "By God, Muḥammad and his companions knew not their direction of prayer until we guided them." The Prophet hated this and raised his head to the sky [in supplication to God], whereupon God said, *We have seen you turning your face about in the heaven* [to the end of the verse Q. 2:144].'

Others have said that this verse [Q. 2:115] was sent down to the Prophet as permission from God for him to perform the voluntary [or supererogatory] prayer in whichever direction of the east or the west he happened to face, [whether] departing on a journey, in battle, during intense fear, or when [enemy] armies happen to be advancing [to battle] during the times of obligatory prayer.⁴⁰ He [God] made it known to him [Muḥammad] that wherever he turned his face [in prayer] He [God] would be there, by saying, *And to God belong the east and the west; so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God.*

An account of those who said this:

It was reported from Sa'īd b. Jubayr from ['Abd Allāh] Ibn 'Umar that he [Ibn 'Umar] used to pray in whichever direction his riding-animal happened to face, mentioning that the Messenger of God used to do this too, using the interpretation of this verse, *whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* [as justification of his practice].⁴¹

³⁸ The grammar indicates that Ṭabari is not only referring to earlier verses on the subject, but also to previous general practice with regard to prayer.

³⁹ There seems to be a missing link in the line of transmission here, and it is most likely Zayd's son transmitting to Ibn Wahb, thus: Yūnus [b. 'Abd al-A'lā] ← ['Abd Allāh] Ibn Wahb [b. Muslim al-Qurashī] ← ['Abd Al-Raḥmān b. Zayd b. Aslam] ← Zayd [b. Aslam].

⁴⁰ The prayer 'during intense fear', called *ṣalāt al-khawf* in the legal manuals, refers to a shortened form of the usual prayer, performed when there is an imminent threat to human life (cf. Q. 2:239) or in time of war (cf. Q. 4:102); see Guy Monnot, 'Ṣalāt al-khawf', *EF*, VIII, 934-5.

⁴¹ Abū Kurayb ← Ibn Idrīs ← 'Abd al-Malik b. Abī Sulaymān ← Sa'īd b. Jubayr ← Ibn 'Umar.

It is [also] reported from Sa'īd b. Jubayr from [‘Abd Allāh] Ibn ‘Umar that he [Ibn ‘Umar] said:⁴²

This verse, *whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* was sent down so that you may perform voluntary prayer in whichever direction your riding-animal happens to face on a journey. On his return from Mecca the Messenger of God used to perform voluntary prayers mounted on his riding-animal, making the gestures [of prayer] with his head towards Medina.

Others have said, on the other hand, that this verse was sent down regarding a group of people to whom [the direction of] the *qibla* had become obscured. They did not know its orientation and so they prayed in different directions. God then said to them, ‘The easts and the wests belong to Me; whichever way you turn your faces, My face is there, and that is your *qibla*’, informing them thereby that their prayers had been completed [correctly].

An account of those who said this:

‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Āmir b. Rabī‘a reported from his father that he [his father] said,⁴³

We were [travelling] with the Messenger of God on a dark and overcast night and we pitched camp at a stopping place. Each man began collecting stones and making a place of prayer (*masjid*) in which to pray. When we awoke the next day, lo! [we discovered that] we had prayed towards other than the *qibla*. We then said, ‘O Messenger of God, last night we prayed in a direction other than that of the *qibla*.’ God thereupon sent down, *And to God belong the east and the west; so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God; God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing.*

Ḥammad said,⁴⁴

I said to [Ibrāhīm] al-Nakha‘ī, ‘I woke up once’ – or he said, ‘I was woken up’; Ṭabarī is not sure [about the precise words] – and there were clouds in the sky. I prayed towards other than the *qibla*. He [Ibrāhīm] said, ‘Your prayer was completed [correctly], for God says, *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God.*’

Others have said, on the other hand, that this verse was sent down because of the Negus (*al-Najāshī*).⁴⁵ The Companions of the Messenger of God had been

⁴² Abū'l-Sā'ib ← Ibn Fuḍayl ← ‘Abd al-Malik b. Abī Sulaymān ← Sa'īd b. Jubayr ← Ibn ‘Umar.

⁴³ Aḥmad b. Ishāq ← Abū Aḥmad ← Abū'l-Rabī' al-Sammān ← ‘Āṣim b. ‘Ubayd Allāh ← ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Āmir b. Rabī‘a ← his father. Ṭabarī gives an almost identical report from ‘Āmir b. Rabī‘a, but with a slightly different *isnād*: Sufyān b. Waki' ← his father [Waki' b. al-Jarrāḥ] ← [Abū'l-Rabī'] Ash'ath al-Sammān ← ‘Āṣim b. ‘Ubayd Allāh ← ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Āmir b. Rabī‘a ← his father.

⁴⁴ Muthannā ← al-Ḥajjāj ← Ḥammād ← [Ibrāhīm] al-Nakha‘ī.

⁴⁵ The Negus, al-Najāshī, was the name given to the ruler of Abyssinia, being a loan name from Ethiopic. The incident indicated relates to the news of his death and the Prophet's instructions to mourn him as a faithful believer. See E. van Donzel, ‘al-Nad̄jāshī’, *EP*², VII, 862–4.

in dispute over his status, as he had died before praying towards the [Meccan] *qibla*. God then said, 'All the easts and the wests belong to Me. Whoever turns his face towards any part thereof, desiring Me thereby and seeking through it obedience to Me, will find me there', meaning by this that the Negus, although he had not prayed towards the [Meccan] *qibla*, used to turn his face towards certain directions of the east or the west in some way, seeking thereby to please God in his prayers.

An account of those who said this:

Qatāda⁴⁶ reported that the Prophet said, 'Your brother the Negus has died, so pray for him'. They [the Companions] said, 'Are we to pray for a man who was not a Muslim?' He [Qatāda] said that [the following verse] *And some there are of the People of the Book who believe in God, and what has been sent down to you, and what has been sent down to them, men humble to God* [Q. 3:199] was then sent down. Qatāda said: 'They [the Companions] then said that he [the Negus] had not prayed towards the [Meccan] *qibla*,' whereupon God sent down, *And to God belong the east and the west; so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God; God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing*.

Abū Ja'far [al-Ṭabarī] says that the correct opinion in this [matter] is that God, exalted is His mention, singles out the east and the west for mention in this verse in so far as they are both His possession (*mulk*) – even though there is nothing that is not His possession – as a way of informing His believing servants that He has possession of these two [the east and the west] and possession of all creation that lies between them; and that it is incumbent upon all of them, given that they [humankind] are His possession, to obey Him in what He commands and forbids them, in the obligations which He has imposed on them and in turning to face the direction they have been directed to, since obedience to one's owner is what it means to be owned (*mamālik*). Thus, He has expressed the message through [reference to] the east and the west, intending by it all creatures who are between them, in the way that I have explained, so that one should [simply] be satisfied with the information [given], avoiding [delving unnecessarily into] the reports about the cause of the thing, just as is stated [in the Qur'ān] *And they were made to drink of the calf in their hearts* [Q. 2:93] – and how similar is [such delving] to [what] this [verse says]!⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibn Bashshār ← Mu'ādh b. Hishām [incorrectly given in the edition as Hishām b. Mu'ādh] ← his father [Hishām b. Abī 'Abd Allāh] ← Qatāda.

⁴⁷ Ṭabarī's point here is that one should not be overly concerned with the particular way in which certain messages are expressed in the Qur'ān and their exact historical context. Rather the focus should be on the information and general guidance being given by God through such verses. The verse he cites (Q. 2:93) is another example of an unexpected choice of graphic words – the Calf being imbibed by their hearts [sc. the Children of Israel] – and where the literal expression should not detract from the main point being made, which is that unbelief had completely permeated their hearts.

The meaning of the verse [Q. 2:115] is therefore: To God belongs [all] creation that is between the east and the west, subjecting them [as He does] to His service with what He will, and He ordains what He wills concerning them and they have to obey Him. [He is saying] ‘So turn your faces, O believers, towards My face, because wherever you turn your faces, My face is there’.

As for statements regarding whether this verse abrogates [another] or is [itself] abrogated, or whether it neither abrogates nor is abrogated, the correct opinion is the one that has it thus: this [verse] has come [down] in general terms, but with a specific intention, and that is that His words *whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* may imply: ‘Wherever you turn in the course of your journey, be it in your voluntary prayer, in the course of fighting your enemy, in your supererogatory prayer or in your prescribed (*maktūb*) prayer, there is the face of God.’⁴⁸ Ibn ‘Umar and Nakha‘ī said likewise, in addition to those who also say this from among those whom we have mentioned already.

It is also possible that this [verse] may imply: Wherever you may be turning your faces on God’s earth, there is God’s *qibla* to which you turn your faces, because it is possible for you to turn your face towards the Ka‘ba from [anywhere] there. As reported by Mujāhid regarding the words of God *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*, he [Mujāhid] said, ‘[This means] the *qibla* of God, so wherever you might be in the east or the west, then face it’; and [according to Mujāhid] ‘Wherever you may be, you have a *qibla* to face’; he also said, ‘[That *qibla* is] the Ka‘ba.’⁴⁹

It could also imply: ‘Wherever you turn your faces in your supplications, there is My face and I will answer your supplications,’ as is reported from Mujāhid who said, ‘When [the verse] *Call upon Me and I will respond to you* [Q. 40:60] was sent down, they said “To where [shall we face to make that call]?”, whereupon *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* was sent down [in response].’⁵⁰

If God’s saying *whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* has the various implications we have mentioned, it is not for anyone to claim that it abrogates or is abrogated – except by an argument to which one would be obliged to concede – since an abrogating [verse] cannot exist without something having been abrogated, and no [such] definitive argument has been put forth to the effect that His words *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* would

⁴⁸ The question of the abrogation of this verse only becomes acute if one holds that it refers to turning towards the *qibla* (or not) for the obligatory prayers. Ṭabarī argues that since this is not the case, the issue is not particularly significant; though as an expert, he does express his opinion.

⁴⁹ The two reports from Mujāhid have the following *isnāds* respectively: Abū Kurayb ← Waki’ ← Abū Sinān ← al-Ḍahḥāk and al-Naḍr b. ‘Arabī ← Mujāhid; and al-Qāsim [b. Bishr] ← al-Ḥusayn [b. ‘Alī] ← al-Ḥajjāj ← Ibn Jurayj ← Ibrāhīm ← Ibn Abī Bakr ← Mujāhid.

⁵⁰ The *isnād* for this report follows the same line of transmission as the previous one, except that Ibn Jurayj now has it directly from Mujāhid (missing out Ibrāhīm and Ibn Abī Bakr).

then mean, 'Wherever you turn your faces in your prayers, there is your *qibla*'; nor [such] that [it could then be said that] these [words] were sent down when the Messenger of God and his Companions were performing their prayers towards the Holy House [of Jerusalem], as a command from God to them that they should turn [in prayer] towards the Ka'ba, such that it would be possible therefore to say that this [verse] had abrogated prayer towards the Holy House [of Jerusalem]: knowledgeable Companions of the Messenger of God and leading Successors have denied that it was sent down with that meaning; nor are there any reports from the Messenger of God establishing that it was sent down concerning this [matter]. Disagreement over this question exists, in the way that I have described. Nor is it the case that, since it does not abrogate for the reasons we have described, an argument is established [thereby] that it is abrogated. For it [the verse] may imply what we have described: that is to say, it has come for a general [purpose]; or that its import [applies] in one case to the exclusion of another, where it is taken to be referring to orientation for the [canonical] prayer (*ṣalāt*); or [that it applies] in all cases, where it is taken to be referring to supplication or to other meanings we have mentioned.

We have indicated in our book *Kitāb al-Bayān 'an uṣūl al-aḥkām* that no verse of the Qur'ān or report from the Messenger of God can be abrogative, except one that nullifies an established rule (*ḥukm thābit*),⁵¹ and imposes upon people a legal obligation while not being susceptible to any other meaning, either explicitly or implicitly. But where it may contain another [meaning], be it a proviso, a specification or a general [statement], a summary or an explanation, then it can have nothing to do with the issue of abrogation (*nāsikh wa mansūkh*). There can be no abrogation except that [verse or *ḥadīth*] which has been nullified, that of which the rule and legal obligation had previously been imposed. Neither one of the implications can be validated in the case of His words *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* with an argument to which one would be obliged to concede, such that it could then be said [of this Qur'ānic statement]: it is abrogative or abrogated.

With regard to His saying *fa-aynamā*, this means *ḥaythumā* (wherever). As for His word *tuwallū*, the most appropriate interpretation of this is [that it be understood as] 'you turn towards it' (*tuwallūna nahwahu*) or 'to it' (*ilayhi*), as when one says, 'I turned my face towards it' (*shaṭrahu*), or 'I turned it [my face]

⁵¹ This short and introductory treatise on legal principles is often cited in Ṭabari's commentary as it elucidates legal principles through an explanation of some of the key verses of the Qur'ān and an explication of Qur'ānic phenomena such as 'abrogation' (*naskh*). The text was often subsumed as the introduction to a larger, detailed work known as *al-Laṭīf min al-bayān 'an aḥkām sharā'i' al-Islām* (The Subtle Exposition of the Legal Precepts of Islam) that represents the doctrine of the school of law established by Ṭabari. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 234; Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, III, 121; Rosenthal 1989, 113–17; Gilliot 1990, 39–40. The established rule or precept refers to an established *sunna* or 'amal (practice) of the community: see Dutton 1999, ch. 1.

to it' (*ilayhi*), meaning, 'I stood facing it' (*qābaltuhu*), or 'face to face with it' (*wājahtuhu*). We only say that this is more appropriate as the [correct] interpretation of the verse because there is a unanimous argument in favour of this interpretation; the interpretation of those who take it to mean 'you turn away from it and turn your backs to it' is a deviant one. For that to which you turn is God's face, meaning God's *qibla*.

As regards His saying *thamma*, this means *hunālika* (there is). Disagreement exists [among the commentators] regarding the interpretation of His saying *fa-thamma*. Some have said that the interpretation of this is *fa-thamma qiblatu'llāh* (there is God's *qibla*), meaning by that His face, towards which He directs them.

An account of those who said this:

Mujāhid is reported to have said that *there is the face of God* [means] the *qibla* of God; he is also reported to have said that [it means], 'Wherever you may be, you have a *qibla* to face.'⁵²

Others have said that the meaning of God's saying *there is the face of God* is: there is God.

Others have said that the meaning of His saying *there is the face of God* is: there, by orienting yourself to Him, you will attain the pleasure of God, [Him] whose is the noble face.

Others have said that by 'face' (*wajh*) is meant 'the One who has a face' (*dhū'l-wajh*); those who make this statement say that God's face is one of His attributes (*ṣifa*).

If someone were to say, 'What is [the relation of] this verse to the one before it?', one would say it is a continuation of it. The meaning of this is: who does greater evil than the Christians who have barred God's servants from His mosques lest His name be mentioned in them and have striven to ruin them? To God belong the east and the west, so wherever you turn your faces, remember Him. For His face will be there, His grace, His earth and His lands will embrace you. He knows what you do. The destruction of those who have destroyed the mosque of the Holy House [of Jerusalem], and their prevention of those whom they have prevented from mentioning God therein, should not prevent you from remembering God wherever you may be on God's earth, seeking His face thereby.

Reports on the interpretation of His words *God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing.*

By saying *All-embracing*, God means that He embraces the whole of His creation with sufficiency, bounties, generosity and management. As for His saying

⁵² The two reports from Mujāhid have the following *isnāds* respectively: Abū Kurayb ← Waki' ← al-Nadr b. 'Arabi ← Mujāhid; and al-Qāsim ← al-Ḥusayn ← Ḥajjāj ← Ibn Jurayj ← Ibrāhīm ← Mujāhid.

All-knowing, this means that He has knowledge of their deeds, not one of which is hidden from Him or escapes His knowledge; indeed He has knowledge of them all.

Zamakhshari

Zamakhshari's commentary on this verse combines a grammatical explication with a (Mu'tazili) concern to preserve God's transcendence and alterity through a metaphorical understanding of the 'face' of God. The dominion and comprehension of the earth belongs to God and the fact that the whole cosmos manifests the face of God indicates this. Consonant with other commentators, he considers the context of this verse to be a concern about determining the *qibla* in times of confusion about its direction. Thus, the second part of the verse is about the canonical prayer: how it may be performed and in which direction?

And to God belong the east and the west,⁵³ that is, the lands of the east and of the west, and the entire earth belong to God. He is their owner and ruler (*mutawalli*). *So whithersoever you turn* [means] in whichever place you perform the act of turning towards (*tawliya*), meaning the turning of your faces in the direction of the *qibla*,⁵⁴ as indicated by the words of God: *Turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it* [Q. 2:144, 149, 150] – *there is the face of God*, that is, His direction, the one that He has ordained and with which He is pleased.⁵⁵ The meaning [of this] is: if you are prevented from praying in the Sacred Mosque [of Mecca] or in the Holy House [of Jerusalem], then the earth [itself] has been appointed for you as a place for prayer, so pray in whichever of its spots you want, and perform the act of turning [towards the *qibla*] in that place, because the act of turning is possible in every place [on earth]; the possibility [of performing it] is not exclusively assigned to any one mosque over [another] mosque, nor to any one place over [another] place. *God is indeed All-embracing* in [His] mercy, desiring to grant latitude to His servants and make

⁵³ *Kashshāf*, I, 306–7.

⁵⁴ On *qibla*, see nn. 1 and 6, this chapter.

⁵⁵ Zamakhshari's metaphorical interpretation of the phrase '*face of God*' demonstrates the Mu'tazili doctrine of *tanzih*, which is critical of an anthropomorphic understanding of God. According to the Mu'tazila, God's transcendence entails that He is pure, invisible, intangible and cannot have human attributes; thus any reference to Him having human attributes must be read as metaphor and interpreted accordingly. For a general introduction to Mu'tazili beliefs in English, see Daniel Gimaret 'Mu'tazila', *EP*, VII, 783–93; Sabine Schmidtke, 'Mu'tazila', *EQ*, III, 466–71; Josef van Ess, 'Mu'tazilah', *ER*, X, 220–9; *TG*, II, 233–342 (on the early Mu'tazila); *TG*, III, 31–92, 209–445 (on systematic Mu'tazili thought); and *TG*, IV, 1–121 (on the Mu'tazila and the imposition of the doctrine of the created Qur'ān); also Pines 1970, II, 787–94.

[matters] easy for them,⁵⁶ *All-knowing* as to [what constitutes] their welfare.

[It is related] from [‘Abd Allāh] Ibn ‘Umar that this [verse] was sent down with regard to the prayer of one travelling on camel-back, [permitting him to pray] in whichever direction [his mount] faced.

[It is related] from ‘Atā’ that [this verse was revealed because] the *qibla* had become obscured for [a group of] people and, consequently, they prayed [the dawn prayer] in different directions. When they entered the [light of] morning, they realised their mistake. They were [thus] absolved [from it].

It is [also] said that the meaning [of this verse] is ‘whithersoever you turn for [the purposes of] supplication and remembrance [of God]’, and that He does not mean, ‘[whithersoever you turn for] canonical prayer’. Al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] read [the verse] *fa-aynamā tawallū* with a *fatha* on the *tā’* from *al-tawallī*, meaning [by this], ‘in whichever direction you assign the *qibla* [there is the face of God]’.⁵⁷

Ṭabrisī

Ṭabrisī’s commentary is the first detailed interpretation in this volume. His exhaustive consideration of the verse includes the meaning of its language, its syntactical arrangement, its grammar, the question of the context and event of its revelation, and finally what it means in theological terms. He also makes a key link with the previous verse, as one aspect of his method is to indicate how a verse fits within its immediate textual context. Since the preceding verse concerns the attempt of the unbelievers to impede devotion to God by destroying designated places of worship, the injunction to turn in any direction to seek God and not to require any specific locale is presented as a response to such impediment.

Language (*lugha*)⁵⁸

The nouns *mashriq* and *sharq* both refer to the rising of the sun and the moon: *sharaqat al-shams* is used to mean that ‘it [the sun] has come up, it has risen and given light’. There is also a popular expression that says *lā af’alu dhālika mā dharra shāriq*, which means ‘I shall not do that while the sun rises [i.e. never]’.

⁵⁶ This interpretation reflects the Mu‘tazilī doctrine that God is subject to the same boundaries of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as His creation, and that because He is just, He only does that which is good and in the best interests of His creation. Zamakhsharī’s commentary also touches on the concept of human free will and responsibility for actions when he writes that God ‘desires’ or ‘intends’ reprieve and facilitation for His creation – the implication being that He has their best interests at heart, but the individual is in control of choosing the path they take through life. In this comment, Zamakhsharī combines two Mu‘tazilī concerns: the rational justice of God, and man’s responsibility and control over his actions. See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, VI, i, 3–7.

⁵⁷ In other words, Hasan is reading the fifth form (*tawallā*) of the verb *w-l-y* as opposed to the more common reading of the second form (*wallā*).

⁵⁸ *Majma’ al-bayān*, I, 190–2.

Ayyām al-tashrīq are the days on which meat is dried out in the sun.⁵⁹ In the *ḥadīth* it is said: 'It is forbidden to perform *tashrīq* except in a garrison town (*miṣr*)⁶⁰ or in a great mosque (*masjid jāmi'*); that is to say, there can be no 'īd prayer because the time [to pray it] is after sunrise.⁶¹ *Al-maghrib* and *al-maghīb* are synonyms, denoting the place where it [the sun] sets. One says *gharabat*, or *taghrubu*, *al-shams* to mean that it has become absent (*ghābat*). The original sense of [the word] *gharb* is *ḥadd* (extremity) or *tabā'ud* (mutual remoteness); *gharbat al-nawā* is the distance of the place that is far;⁶² *gharb al-sayf* is the 'cutting edge (*ḥadd*) of a sword'; it is thus called on account of it going forth and not returning and [this sense] is derived from [that of] distances (*ab'ād*); *al-wāsi'* (the All-embracing) is *al-ghanī* (the All-sufficient); [He] is thus called on account of the extent of His powers and also, it is said, because He is most merciful; *al-sa'a* and *al-fuṣḥa* (ample space) correspond in this sense and the opposite of *al-sa'a* is *al-ḍiq* (narrowness). One says *wasi'a* and *yasa'u sa'atan* and *awsa'a al-rajul* to mean 'he has acquired ample means.'

Syntax (*i'rāb*)

The *lām* where He says *wa-li'llāh al-mashriq wa'l-maghrib* is the *lām* of possession. He uses the singular *mashriq* and *maghrib* respectively because He is using them in the generic sense, through which is indicated the plural, like when they say *ahlaka'l-nāsa al-dīnāru wa'l-dirhamu* (The dinar and the dirham have brought perdition upon men).⁶³ *Ayna* (where, whither) is invariable because it is a particle, and it ends in a *fatha* because of the confluence of two unvowelled consonants (*sākinayn*); moreover, it contains a conditional meaning, and so *tuwallū* (you turn your faces) is apocopated (*majzūm*) because of that conditional (*sharṭ*), and the apodosis (*jawāb*) is *fa-thamma wajhu'llāh* (there is the face of God). The absence of the [final] *nūn* from *tuwallū* (-n) indicates the apocopation; *ayna* occupies an accusative (*naṣb*) position because it is the adverb of place (*ẓarf*) for *tuwallū*; the *mā* of *ayna-mā* is [the particle] that requires the apocopation (*jazm*) of the verb [that follows]. That is why *idh* or *ḥayth* cannot be used [in a conditional] unless *mā* is added to them, so that one would say *ḥaythumā takun akun* (wherever you may be I will be) or *idh-mā*

⁵⁹ The term *tashrīq* was a special name for the last three days of the Muslim *ḥajj*, during which the pilgrims have to throw the seven stones at Mīna. In pre-Islamic times, the name was given to a *ṣalāt*, which was performed on the morning of the tenth day of Dhū'l-Hijja. The reference to 'meat-drying' is doubtful, and it is more likely to be a survival from the pre-Islamic period referring to ritualistic practices around the sanctuary: see Rudi Paret- [William A. Graham], 'Tashrīq', *EP²*, X, 356-7.

⁶⁰ On the garrison town in early Islam, see Clifford E. Bosworth, 'Miṣr', *EP²*, VII, 146.

⁶¹ On these festivals, see Eugen Mittwoch, 'Id', *EP²*, III, 1007; von Grunebaum 1951, chs. 2, 3.

⁶² See *Lex*. VI, 2241(col. b).

⁶³ In other words, the pursuit of 'dirhams and dinars' (sc. money) ruins people.

taf al af al (as soon as you act, I act); one cannot say *haythu takun akun* or *idh taf al af al*. In the case of *ayna*, however, apocopation is possible without the *mā*, as the poet says:

ayna taḍrib binā'l-udāta tajidnā
naṣrifu'l-īsa naḥwahā li'l-talāqī

Wherever the enemy strikes at us, you will find us directing
 Our white camels towards them for the encounter.

Thamma (there) occupies the accusative (*naṣb*) position because it is an adverb of place (*zarf makān*), and it ends in *fatha* because of the confluence of two unvowelled consonants (*sākinayn*). It has an invariable ending (*mabnī*) because it is in fact a definite noun (*ma'rifa*) and the definite noun should be identifiable by means of a particle, and so it became invariable because it implicitly contains that particle, through which definition and familiarity is indicated. Have you not noticed that in speech *thamma* is only used when the person you are using it with knows, and is familiar with, the place you are referring to?

The [occasions of] revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*)

There is disagreement as to the circumstances in which this verse was sent down. It is said by some that the Jews rejected [the validity of] the change of *qibla* from the Holy House [of Jerusalem] to the Ka'ba, and so the verse was sent down in response to them, [as reported] from Ibn 'Abbās, and this was the preferred [opinion] of al-Jubbā'ī who adds: 'God thus made it clear that He is not in any direction to the exclusion of another, as the corporealists (*mujassima*) are wont to assert.'⁶⁴

It is also said that the Muslims were free to face any direction they chose in prayer, and it was regarding this that the verse was sent down; but that this was later abrogated by His saying, *Turn your face toward the Sacred Mosque* [Q. 2:149, 150], [as reported] from Qatāda, who also said: 'The Prophet had chosen to face the Holy House [of Jerusalem] even though he was free to face any direction he wished.'

It is also said that it [the verse] was sent down concerning voluntary prayers on animal-back, [prayer] which you may perform in whatever direction you

⁶⁴ See Josef van Ess, 'Tashbih wa-tanzih', *EP*, X, 341–4; Richard C. Martin, 'Anthropomorphism', *EQ*, I, 103–7. These two terms of Islamic theology are used in reference to different discourses about God: *tashbih* denotes 'anthropomorphism', and usually has negative connotations, as it was used to refer to those who attributed human-like aspects to God; *tanzih*, denoting God's transcendentalism, was a positive term; *ta'fil* referred to divesting God of His attributes; *jism*, denoting 'body', was used to describe God in different ways. Some insisted that He had a body (*mujassima*), most famously the early theologian Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795), a Kufan Shī'ī, on whom see *TG*, I, 349–76; *TG*, V, 70–100. Other Muslim thinkers asserted that He was a sort of perfect form of light: cf. *TG*, III, 143ff.

happen to face while you are on a journey. As for obligatory prayers, however, then His saying [applies]: *And wherever you may be turn your faces towards it* [sc. the Sacred Mosque], which means that you can only [validly] perform the obligatory prayers facing the *qibla*. That is what has been related to us from our imams, who state that the Messenger of God performed the gestures of prayer while riding his animal, facing whichever way it happened to point him; [such was the case] when he went out to Khaybar and when he returned from Mecca, [even] leaving the Ka'ba to his back.⁶⁵ It is reported from Jābir [b. 'Abd Allāh] that:

The Messenger of God sent out a raiding party, and I was among them. Darkness fell upon us and we did not know [the direction of] the *qibla*. Some of us said: 'We know where the *qibla* is, it is right here towards the north', so they prayed and marked out the lines [for prayer]. Others said, '[No], the *qibla* is over here towards the south', so then they [prayed and] marked out the lines. When they woke up the [following] morning, and the sun had risen, it turned out that the lines were not [pointing] towards the *qibla*. When we returned from our journey, we asked the Prophet about this matter, and he was silent. God then sent down this verse.

Meaning (*ma'na*)

By *And to God belong the east and the west*, He means that the east and west are God's [in terms of] possession; but it is also said that He means 'He is their creator and maker'; or it is said to mean that He takes charge of the rising of the sun from its rising-place (*mashriq*) and its setting in its setting-place (*maghrib*). *So whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* means whithersoever you turn 'your faces', the said direct object [*wujūhākum* of the verb *tuwallū*] having been omitted; *fa-thamma*, that is, *fa-hunāk* (there) is the face of God, in other words, the *qibla* of God, as reported by al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī], Mujāhid and Qatāda; *wajh*, *jiha*, similar [in paradigm] to *wazn*, *zina* and *wijha*, [all] mean *qibla*. The Arabs call a 'goal' (*qaṣd*), that to which they may be heading, a *wajh*. The poet says:

astaghfiru'llāha dhanban lastu muḥṣiyahu
rabba'l-'ibādi ilayhi'l-wajhu wa'l-'amalu

I ask God forgiveness for sins that I cannot count,
[God] the Lord of servants, to Him is the orienting
And [for His sake] the deeds [are performed].

The meaning [of these lines] is that He is the object of worship.

It is also said that it [*fa-thamma wajhu'llāh*, *there is the face of God*] means 'there is God, knowing and seeing [all]', so supplicate to Him in whichever

⁶⁵ Cf. the reports in Qummī and 'Ayyāshī, this chapter.

direction you happen to face; similar to where God says, *They desire His face* (*yuṛidūna wajhahu*) [in Q. 6:52 and Q. 18:28], that is to say, they have Him in mind when supplicating. One says *hunā* to denote a place that is near, and *thamma* or *hunāk* for that which is at a distance. As regards His saying *All things perish except His face* [Q. 28:88], this means ‘except Him’; *yet there will remain the face of your Lord* [*wa-yabqā wajhu rabbik*, Q. 55:27] means that ‘your Lord shall remain’, [as reported] from al-Kalbī. It is also said that the meaning [of *wajhu’llāh*, *the face of God*] is ‘there is the satisfaction of God’ (*riḍwān Allāh*), that is, the way (*wajh*) that leads to His satisfaction, similar to when it is said ‘this is the right way’ (*wajh al-ṣawāb*), [as reported] from Abū ‘Alī [al-Fārisī] and al-Rummānī. *God is indeed All-embracing* (*wāsi’*) means [that He is] All-sufficient (*ghanī*), [as reported] from Abū ‘Ubayda, the implied meaning being that He has no need of (*ghanī ‘an*) your obedience, but desires it for your own benefit. It is also said to mean that He is All-embracing in mercy, which is why He has granted dispensations in the Law (*sharī‘a*), [as reported] from al-Zajjāj;⁶⁶ it [the phrase *inna’llāha wāsi’un*, *God is indeed All-embracing*] is also said to mean that He is of all-embracing power (*wāsi’ al-maḳdūr*), doing what He wills; *All-knowing* means that He has knowledge of all aspects of [true] wisdom, so apply yourselves to what He has commanded of you; it is also said that He is ‘All-knowing’ of where to deposit His mercy in accordance with the exigencies of wisdom; it is also said that He is ‘All-knowing’ of your intentions whenever you pray or supplicate.

Arrangement (*naẓm*)

This verse is [coherently] connected to the preceding one by the [following] implied meaning: The actions of those who have destroyed mosques should not prevent you from remembering Him wherever you might be upon His earth, for to God belong the east and the west and all directions, as reported by ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā [al-Rummānī]. It is also said that having already mentioned prayers and mosques, God followed it by mentioning and clarifying [the matter of] the *qibla*.

Rāzī

Rāzī’s commentary signals the shift away from interpreting the verse purely in the context of whether it relates to commands concerning prayer. He divides his scholastic glosses upon the verse by considering two opinions: first, that it relates to prayer, and second, that it does not, which requires that the scholar search for an alternative theological explana-

⁶⁶ Zajjāj, *Ma‘ānī*, I, 198.

tion. On the first point, he asserts that the significance of the *qibla* lies in the fact that it is the orientation appointed by God; in itself, the *qibla* has no significance. The cosmos is 'annexed' to God, and divine wisdom and concern for creation suggest that God's choice, reflected in the command for human beings, is the best course for humanity to follow. On the second point, he provides theological and rational arguments for the omnipresence of God, and for the refutation of anthropomorphists and those who insist that God is a body (*jism*). The divine names, thus, are not ascriptions of human attributes to the divine but are familiar names ascribed to God in a sense that utterly transcends any human notion of that name or attribute. So God's encompassing creation is not a physical 'covering' of the cosmos, nor is His knowledge like that of humans, such that He 'rationally' knows creation. Rāzī, however, does not repeat the standard Ash'arī notion that one ought to understand the names and attributes of God on their own terms without asking or reflecting upon how they are meant to be understood; he asks, in what sense can one understand God as encompassing the cosmos or knowing everything? The fact that God encompasses everything means that He knows everything in the individuality and particularity of each entity, which is an implicit criticism of the perceived philosophical doctrine that God only knows particular entities 'in a universal sense'.

Know that there are several issues in this verse.⁶⁷

I. **First issue.** They [the commentators] differed about the reason for the revelation of this verse. Generally, most [commentators] claimed that it was sent down concerning a matter specifically to do with prayer (*ṣalāt*). Some of them, however, claimed that it was sent down concerning a matter not to do with prayer.

As for the first opinion [in this first issue], it is stronger for two reasons.⁶⁸ First of all, it is that [opinion] which is transmitted on the authority of all the Companions and the Successors; and their opinions constitute an authoritative proof (*ḥujja*). Second, the apparent meaning of His words *fa-aynamā tuwallū* suggests the turning to the *qibla* for [the performance of] prayer, which is why no other meaning can be understood from His words *fa-wallū wujūhakum*, *turn your faces towards* [Q. 2:144, 150]. If this is established, then we [may] say that those who hold such an opinion disagree in several respects:

- a) The first [respect]: that God intended by it [the verse] to make the believers turn from facing Jerusalem to the Ka'ba. Thus God made it clear that the east, the west and all directions and regions belong to Him and are created by Him. Thus, whichever place God orders you to turn your faces towards, then that is the *qibla*; for the *qibla* is not a *qibla* of itself but because God has made it a *qibla*. And so if God makes the Ka'ba a *qibla* then do not deny it, for God manages (*tadbīr*) His servants however He will. He is All-

⁶⁷ *Mafātiḥ al-ghayb*, IV, 18–22.

⁶⁸ The second opinion in this first issue is dealt with after a lengthy discussion of the first opinion, and appears on p. 98.

embracing and All-knowing of their best welfare. It is as though God mentioned this to make clear the possibility of abrogating (*naskh*)⁶⁹ the *qibla*, [changing it] from one side to another [direction]. Thus, this would become a prelude to the abrogation of the *qibla* intended by God.

- b) The second [respect]: that when the *qibla* was changed from Jerusalem, the Jews rejected this and so the verse was sent down in response to them; this [last] is the opinion of Ibn ‘Abbās and it [Q. 2:115] is analogous to His saying *Say: God’s is the east and the west; He guides whom He wills onto a straight path* [Q. 2:142].
- c) The third [respect]: this is the opinion of Abū Muslim, that each of the Jews and the Christians said that Paradise belonged to them to the exclusion of any other. God then refuted them with this verse. For the Jews used to face Jerusalem, because they believed that God had ascended to the heaven from the Rock.⁷⁰ The Christians faced the east because Jesus was born there, in accordance with what God recounts in His saying, *and mention in the Book Mary, when she withdrew from her people to an eastern place* [Q. 19:16]. Each of these two groups described the One they worshipped as inhering in places (*ḥulūl*);⁷¹ and [yet] one who is like this is a creature, not a Creator. So how can Paradise be purely for them alone when they cannot even distinguish between creature and Creator?⁷²
- d) The fourth [respect]: some [scholars] said that in this verse God replaced Jerusalem [as the *qibla*], by the choice of [facing] whichever direction one wished. Thus the Muslims had the free choice to turn towards whichever direction they wished during the *ṣalāt*. The Prophet, however, chose to face towards Jerusalem, even though he was free to turn towards whichever direction he wanted. But then God abrogated that by designating the Ka‘ba [as the *qibla*]; this is the opinion of Qatāda and Ibn Zayd.
- e) The fifth [respect]: that what is meant by this verse is that whoever is actually looking at the Ka‘ba [by virtue of being present at the Ka‘ba] has the choice to turn towards it from any direction he desires or wills.

⁶⁹ On *naskh*, see n. 13, this chapter.

⁷⁰ The Rock slightly protrudes from the ground and is directly below the Dome, inside the Dome of the Rock building, which was commissioned in 72/691–2 by the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 65–86/685–705). On the building, see Oleg Grabar, ‘Kubbat al-sakhrā’, *EP*, V, 298–9; Blair 1993; Raby and Johns 1993; Nuseibeh and Grabar 1996.

⁷¹ *Ḥulūl*, ‘inherence’: a term used in philosophy in different senses: (1) the substantial union of the body and soul; (2) the indwelling of the divine spirit in man; (3) the inherence of an accident in its substance; (4) hylomorphism, i.e. the union of form (*ṣūra*) with matter (*hayūla*); (5) the relation between a body and its place; see Louis Massignon-[Georges C. Anawati], ‘Hulūl’, *EP*, III, 570–1; Tahānawī, *Iṣtilāḥāt*, I, 706–9 (s.v. *ḥ-l-l*); Jurjānī, *Ta‘rīfāt*, 105–6.

⁷² The polemical context of this verse is significant and reveals the development of commentary within the framework of inter-religious debate and polemic. For related discussions see the work of Rubin 1999.

- f) The sixth [respect]: that which ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Āmir b. Rabī‘a narrated. He said:

We were with the Messenger of God among a raiding party on a pitch-black night. We did not know [which way was] the *qibla* and so each one of us marked his place of prostration with some stones positioned in front of him. We then prayed. In the morning, we realised that we had been facing [a direction] other than [that of] the *qibla*. We mentioned this to the Messenger of God and God sent down this verse.

This [last] *ḥadīth* indicates that they [the Muslims] had by that time been turning [in prayer] towards the Ka‘ba, for, fighting was prescribed after the *hijra*, after the abrogation of the *qibla* of the Holy House in Jerusalem.

- g) The seventh [respect]: that the verse was sent down concerning a travelling person, who may perform the supererogatory prayers (*nawāfil*) in whichever direction his riding-animal happens to face when he is riding it. [It is reported] on the authority of Sa‘īd b. Jubayr from [‘Abd Allāh] Ibn ‘Umar that he said, ‘This verse was sent down so that the person on a journey may pray in whichever direction his riding-animal happens to face. Whenever he [the Prophet] returned from Mecca, he would perform voluntary prayers (*taṭawwu‘an*) while on his riding-animal, motioning with his head towards Medina.’ Thus the meaning of the verse is: *whithersoever you turn for your supererogatory prayers during your travels, there is the face of God, you will have accomplished what is required. God is indeed All-embracing in grace and All-sufficient; it is from the abundance of His grace and His all-sufficiency that He has granted you latitude in this [matter]. For, had He required of you to turn towards the qibla in such circumstances, then one of two kinds of detriment would necessarily have ensued: either the abandoning of the supererogatory prayers, or the dismounting from the riding-animal and remaining behind the company [of other travellers]. In contrast, the obligatory prayers are prayers of a set number and are delimited [by specific times of the day], and so imposing the legal obligation (taklīf)⁷³ to dismount from the riding-animal when performing these [obligatory prayers] and to turn towards the qibla would not lead to any difficulty; that is in contrast to the supererogatory prayers, which are not*

⁷³ *Taklīf* is a requirement or constraint that is held to be a legal necessity. In the Qur‘ān, the verb is used seven times in several forms to express the concept that God does not require of a person what is beyond their capacity [cf. Q. 2:286]. Technically, it indicates that God’s creatures must act according to what He has revealed to them. It is therefore defined legally (by the majority of authorities) as the requiring (*ilzām*) of an action which is intrinsically difficult and troublesome. By this definition, it applies only to those things which are necessary requisites or outright prohibitions of the Law. See Daniel Gimaret, ‘Taklīf, *EJ*², X, 138–9; Schacht 1964, 124.

confined [to any specific time of the day] and so the imposition [in this case] of an obligation to turn towards [the Ka'ba] would lead to some difficulty.

If it is said: which of these opinions is closest to what is correct? We say: His saying *whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* suggests freedom of choice, and freedom of choice can only be established in two cases. One is when [performing] voluntary prayers while mounted on a riding-animal, and the other is when on a journey, where it is difficult to make an independent judgement [to ascertain the direction of the *qibla*] either because it is dark or for some other reason. In both of these two cases, the person performing prayer has freedom of choice; in other than these two cases, there is no choice. As for the opinion of those who say that in this verse God has given freedom of choice to those legally competent (*mukallaḥūn*)⁷⁴ to turn towards any direction they wish, and that they used to choose Jerusalem not because it was a requirement, but because of its greater merit and its being worthier, this [opinion] is far removed [from correctness]. For there is no disagreement over the fact that Jerusalem, even before the change [of *qibla*] to the Ka'ba, had a special status within the Law (*sharī'a*). If the case were as they say, then this special status could not have been established. In addition, it should have been said that Jerusalem had been abrogated by the Ka'ba. Such an indication (*dalāla*) requires that the verse be understood in the third or fourth respects [mentioned previously].

As for those who understand the verse in the first respect, they may rightly say that when the *qibla* was changed [from Jerusalem to the Ka'ba], the Jews spoke [raising the issue] about the prayers of the Messenger of God, and the prayers of the believers, towards Jerusalem. Thus, in this verse, God clarified that turning towards that *qibla* [the Holy House in Jerusalem] was right at that time and that turning now towards the Ka'ba is right at this time. He [God] also clarified that whichever of these two *qiblas* they turned to [in prayer] in the way permitted, then *there is the face of God*. They said: understanding the words [of the verse] in this respect is more appropriate as it would include every praying individual. But, if it is understood in the first respect, it would not include everyone, because it would then be taken as referring to voluntary prayer to the exclusion of the obligatory one, and [to be referring] to travel under particular circumstances, to the exclusion of staying put. When it is possible to apply a generally worded phrase in accordance with its general [principle] then this is more appropriate than [to follow] a restricted application.⁷⁵ The most that can be said on this subject is that such an interpretation also necessarily requires a

⁷⁴ *Mukallaḥūn* are those subject to the religious law, being of legal age and in full mental health.

⁷⁵ *Takhṣīs*: the juristic method of applying a legal rule or requirement in a restricted capacity; for instance, confining its application to a particular historical event or to a particular group rather than applying it universally.

kind of limitative qualification. That is to say, *whithersoever you turn*, 'of the directions [Muslims are] commanded [to turn to]', then *there is the face of God*. Such an ellipsis (*iḍmār*) is necessary here in any case because it is inconceivable that God would say *whithersoever you turn*, 'according to the inclinations of your selves', then *there is the face of God*. There is no avoiding the ellipsis we have mentioned; if this is so, then the [option entailing the possibility of] freedom of choice no longer exists. An analogy for it is [the following situation]: if one of us approached his son and commanded him to do a number of assigned things and then said to him, whichever way you act you will have abided by what contents me. This must be understood [as meaning that the son will act] according to what he [the father] commanded him, in the way that he [the father] ordered concerning restriction or choice [i.e. the son will act within the bounds set by the father], and must not be understood as absolute freedom of choice. The same applies here [in the previous case].

The second opinion [in this first issue] is that of those who claim that this verse was sent down concerning a matter other than prayer. They also have several points of view:

a) The first of these [views] is that the meaning would be that

those who did wrong by preventing the mention of My name in My mosques and sought to destroy them, they will get such and such [in requital]. Moreover, whithersoever they turn fleeing from Me and from My authority (*sulṭān*), My authority will pursue them closely and My power (*qudra*) will overtake them; I am All-knowing of them and their whereabouts cannot be hidden from Me.

Herein is a warning against acts of disobedience and a rebuke against committing them. God's saying, *God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing* is similar to His saying, *If you are able to pass through the confines of heaven and earth, pass through them! You shall not pass through, except with an authority* [Q. 55:33]. On the basis of that, its intended import would be the [infinite] extent of [God's] knowledge, this being analogous to [God's saying], *He is with you wherever you may be* [Q. 57:4], and to His saying, *Three men conspire not secretly together, but He is the fourth of them* [Q. 58:7], and [similar] to His saying, 'Our Lord, You embrace every thing in mercy and knowledge' [Q. 40:7], and His saying, [He] *Who in His knowledge embraces every thing* [Q. 20:98]; that is to say, He subsumes every thing in His knowledge and His management [of that thing], and by His encompassing it, and His being exalted above it.

b) The second [view]: Qatāda said that the Prophet said, 'Your brother, the Negus⁷⁶ has died, so do the prayer for him'. They then said, 'Should we

⁷⁶ On the Negus, see n. 45, this chapter.

perform prayers for a man who is not a Muslim?' God's words were then sent down *And there are some from among the People of the Book who believe in God, and what has been sent down to you, and what has been sent down to them, men humble to God, not selling the signs of God for a small price; those – their wage is with their Lord; God is swift at the reckoning* [Q. 3:199]. They then said, 'But he used to pray towards other than the *qibla*!' Whereupon God sent down, *And to God belong the east and the west; so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God:* this means that 'all the directions, whether east, west or what is between them, towards which the people of the different religious communities turn to [in prayer] are all for Me. Thus, whoever turns his face towards any of these [directions] regarding a matter, having Me in mind, seeking to obey Me, he will find Me there, i.e., he will find My reward'. In this [last] then there was an absolution for the Negus and his companions who had died having always faced towards the east;⁷⁷ and this is similar to His saying, *But God would never leave your faith to waste* [Q. 2:143].

- c) The third [view]: when God sent down His words, *Call upon Me and I will respond to you* [Q. 40:60], they asked, 'In which direction should we make our supplication to Him?' Whereupon this verse was sent down; and this is the opinion of al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī], Mujāhid and al-Ḍaḥḥāk.
- d) The fourth [view] is that this was an address for the Muslims, meaning that the act of those who destroyed God's mosques should not prevent you from remembering His name wherever you may be upon His earth. Thus, *To God belong the east and the west* and all directions; this is the opinion of 'Alī b. 'Īsā [al-Rummānī].
- e) The fifth [view]: some people claim that it was sent down concerning people who exercise their personal judgement [in legal matters] (*mujtahidūn*) and who fulfil the conditions for such personal judgement (*ijtihād*), whether it be with regard to prayer or other [matters]. The intended meaning then is that if the *mujtahid* reaches a judgement in accordance with the conditions of *ijtihād*, then he is right.

II. Second issue. If we interpret this verse as indicating that it is permissible to turn towards any direction desired, then the verse is abrogated. However, if we interpret it as indicating the abrogation of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to the Ka'ba then the verse abrogates [the turning towards Jerusalem]. But if we interpret it in any of the other respects [mentioned previously], then it neither abrogates nor is abrogated.

⁷⁷ As opposed to the north, which is roughly the direction in which Mecca lies in relation to Abyssinia.

III. **Third issue.** In God's saying *li'llāhi'l-mashriqu wa'l-maghrib*, the *lām* [of *li* in *li'llāhi*] denotes exclusivity (*ikhtiṣāṣ*); that is to say, He is [exclusively] their Creator and Owner, which is like His saying *Lord of the two easts, Lord of the two wests* [Q. 55:17], His saying *by the Lord of the easts and the wests* [Q. 70:40], [and like His saying] *Lord of the east and the west* [Q. 73:9]. Moreover, God, by mentioning them, refers to all the creatures that exist between them, as He says, *Then He turned to the heaven when it was smoke and said to it and to the earth, 'Come, willingly or unwillingly!' They said, 'We come willingly'* [Q. 41:11].

IV. **Fourth issue.** The verse is one of the strongest proofs for refuting corporealism (*tajsīm*)⁷⁸ and affirming [God's] transcendence (*tanzīh*).⁷⁹ This is made clear in two ways:

- a) First: God says *And to God belong the east and the west*. He makes it clear that these two directions belong to Him. This is so because direction is something that in the imagination (*wahm*)⁸⁰ extends in length, width and depth. Everything that is so consists of divided parts and everything that is divided is composite and compound, and everything that is so must necessarily have a creator and an originator. This proof is a general one concerning all directions, [by which] I mean, what is above and what is beneath; by this, it is proved that God is the Creator (*khāliq*) of all directions and a creator necessarily precedes creation. The Creator (*bāri'*) therefore, before the creation of the world, transcended (*kāna munazzahan*) all direction and [spatial] spheres (*aḥyāz*); and it is inevitably necessary that He remain thus after the creation of the world, since it is impossible for realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) and essences (*māhiyyāt*) to change.⁸¹
- b) Second: God says *whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*. If God were a physical body and had a corporeal face, then His face would have been specified by a certain side and a certain direction, in which case His saying *whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* would not have been true.

⁷⁸ See n. 64 on *tajsīm*.

⁷⁹ On *tashbīh wa tanzīh*, see n. 64, this chapter.

⁸⁰ *Wahm*, 'imagination': this refers to the estimation of the meanings of sensible objects, a kind of cognitive experience which is also available to animals, and one on the basis of which they are enabled to draw inferences for their physical well-being and safety: see Ian R. Netton, 'Wahm', *EP*, XI, 98–9.

⁸¹ The *māhiyya* is the essence of a thing or its 'quiddity', as opposed to its *anniyya* (or *inniyya*) which is its actual existence (*anna* or *inna*, 'that [it is]'); its *'ayniyya* is its specific identity as an individual existent ('*ayn*). The essence of a thing is the reason why it is or what it is; existence is the actualisation of essence. According to Avicenna, there is one Being alone whose essence is His very existence and that is God, the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*). The essence of beings does not necessarily imply their existence, for it is possible to think of the essence of a (created) thing without knowing whether it exists or not: see Roger Arnaldez, 'Māhiyya', *EP*, V, 1261–3.

And as God specifies this [by explicitly mentioning it], we know that He transcends corporeality.

Opponents use the verse as an argument [for corporeality] in two ways:

- i) First: the verse indicates that God has a [corporeal] face, and a face can only belong to one that has a body (*jism*).⁸²
- ii) Second: God describes Himself as being All-embracing (*wāsi'*) and 'embracing' is an attribute of bodies.

The answer to the first (i) is that even though 'face' properly speaking denotes a specific part [of the body], we have already explained that if we understood it [the face] here to mean the bodily part, then it would belie God's saying *whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*. Because if a face were facing the east then it would be impossible for it to face the west at the same time. Therefore, interpretation [in the case of this verse] is necessary, and [such interpretation] has different aspects.

- a) First aspect: the genitive annexation [*iḍāfa* construction] *wajh Allāh* (God's face) is similar to that of *bayt Allāh* (God's house) and *nāqat Allāh* (God's she-camel). What is meant by these [constructions] is annexation [to God] through [being His] creation and being brought into existence [by Him], as a way of conferring honour [upon these things]. Thus, His saying *There is the face of God* means, there is His face, the one to which He has directed you, for, both the east and the west belong to Him in their aspects. Thus, that which is meant by the *qibla* is a *qibla* only because God has appointed it [to be that]. Thus any aspect of the world annexed to Him through [being His] creation and being brought into existence [by Him], and which He has appointed [as such] and specified [to be so] is a *qibla*.
- b) Second aspect: what is meant by 'face' (*wajh*) is purpose and intention, as the poet says [...].⁸³ Analogous to that are God's words, *I have turned my face to Him Who originated the heavens and the earth* [Q. 6:79].

⁸² *Jism*: a body composed of the four elements (*al-'anāšir al-arba'a*) in various proportions; a body therefore is composite and divisible. According to the philosophers, a body is composed essentially of matter (*hayūlā*) and form (*šūra*) both of which, in themselves, are imperceptible and indivisible, following Aristotelian natural philosophy. A distinction must be made between the two cognate terms *jism* and *jirm*: the former refers to sub-lunary bodies (see Tahānawī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt*, I, 561–6) and the latter to supra-lunary bodies (see Tahānawī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt*, I, 557). While sub-lunary bodies are made of four earthly elements, the supra-lunary bodies are made of a single element, the celestial quintessence; the supra-lunary bodies thus are simpler (*basīf*) than sub-lunary bodies. See T. de Boer, 'Djism', *EI*², II, 553–5.

⁸³ Here Rāzi cites the same line of verse as the one cited by Ṭabrisī on the same point; however, in Ṭabrisī the citation has *muḥṣiyahu* while the citation in Rāzi has *uḥṣiyahu*. Ibn Jinnī in his book *al-Khaṣā'is* cites this verse but without giving the name of the poet; he only mentions that the verse was cited by Sibawayh. See Ibn Jinnī, *Khaṣā'is*, III, 247.

- c) Third aspect: the meaning of this [verse] is ‘there is the satisfaction (*marḍa*) of God’, similar to His saying, *We feed you only for the face of God* [Q. 76:9] meaning ‘[only] for God’s satisfaction (*riḍwān*)’. [Similar to this also is] His saying *All things perish except His face* [Q. 28:88], meaning [except] that which was [intended] for the satisfaction (*riḍā*) of God. The purport of the metaphor (*isti’āra*) is that when a person desires to go to [meet] another person, he will approach his face, from the front. Likewise when a person seeks the satisfaction of another, he does not cease to draw close to his satisfaction [i.e., he works ceaselessly to draw close to what satisfies him], and that is why seeking satisfaction is expressed as seeking the ‘face’.
- d) Fourth aspect: *wajh* is in fact a relative clause (*ṣila*), like where He says *All things perish except His face* [Q. 28:88]. People say, ‘Here is the *wajh* of a matter’ meaning nothing else but it [the matter]. What they mean by this is that it is from ‘this point’ that one should deal with that matter. You should know that although this explanation is grammatically sound, [further] discussion remains. For, it could be said to the one who says this,⁸⁴ so what is the meaning of God’s saying *there is the face of God* despite [the fact that] it is impossible for Him [to be] in a space (*makān*)? Thus, inevitably there has to be an interpretation [of the phrase] as having the [following] intended meaning: ‘There is His *qibla* through which He is worshipped’; or ‘there is His mercy, His beneficence, the path to His reward and the acquisition of His satisfaction’.

This is a response to the second (ii),⁸⁵ which is that He describes Himself as All-embracing. Now, it is undoubtedly impossible to understand this in keeping with its literal sense (*zāhir*) or else He would consist of divisible parts and portions and would thus require a creator. Rather, it is necessary to construe the meaning [of the All-embracing] as denoting the range of power and sovereignty; or that He is All-embracing in giving and in mercy; or that He is All-embracing in His bounty for making clear what is in the interest of servants, so that they might attain His satisfaction. Perhaps this [last] aspect is the most appropriate in the [context of the present] discussion; it [certainly] cannot be understood as meaning the ‘All-embracing’ in terms of knowledge, or else the mention of ‘All-knowing’ after it would be a [superfluous] repetition.

As regards His saying ‘*alīm*, All-knowing’, in this instance, it is like a threat, so that the one performing the canonical prayer will be cautious of being

⁸⁴ That is, one who says that *wajh Allāh* is to be taken as synonymous with *Allāh*, since *wajh* indicates the very thing itself.

⁸⁵ The second argument in favour of a corporeal conception of God.

negligent, envisaging that God knows what he is hiding and what he is manifesting. And since, *From God nothing whatsoever can be hidden* [Q. 14:38], that person will be cautious of being remiss. It is also possible that God's saying *All-embracing, All-knowing* means that God is All-embracing in His power to fulfil the reward of the person who performs the canonical prayer in accordance with its provisions, and to discharge the punishment for the one who is too idle to perform it.

V. **Fifth issue.** [The term] *wallā* means 'he drew near', and it means 'he turned away'. It is one of those words with two opposite meanings (*aḍḍād*); here, it means 'drawing near'. Al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] read *fa-aynamā tawallū*, with a *fathā* on the *tā*', derived from [the infinitive] *al-tawallī*, meaning, 'whichever direction you appoint as the *qibla*'.

Kāshānī

Kāshānī's commentary focuses upon an important feature of the metaphysics and cosmology of the school of Ibn 'Arabī, namely the key homologies between the 'three realities' of God: the cosmos as the macrocosmic manifestation of Him, and the humanity which is not only the microcosmic face of God in the cosmos and the face of the cosmos oriented towards God, but also the mesocosmic reality (*barzakh* in the technical language of Ibn 'Arabī) that mediates between cosmos and God. Significantly, his commentary also reflects a key method of *ta'wīl*, of elucidating the spiritually transformative sense of the text that can guide the Sufi initiate along the path to spiritual realisation. Consistent with this method is the desire to discern complete pairings between, on the one hand, the explicit words and exoteric sense and, on the other, the implicit and esoteric meaning behind it (sc. *taṭbīq*). Thus the east must correspond exactly with the 'Paradise of Christians' and the physical orientation towards the *qibla* must correspond to the spiritual and esoteric turning of the believer towards God.

And to God belong[s] the east,⁸⁶ that is, the realm of light and manifestation, which is the paradise of the Christians and their prayer direction, and is, in reality, His esoteric aspect (*bāṭinuhu*); *and the west*, that is the realm of darkness and concealment, which is the paradise of the Jews and their direction of prayer, and is, in reality, His exoteric aspect (*ẓāhiruhu*).⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Tafsīr*, I, 79–80.

⁸⁷ Cf. Mayer 2006:

The Qur'ānic reference here [in Kāshānī's commentary on Q. 2:115] is to [another Qur'ānic] verse: *Huwa'l-awwalu wa'l-ākhiru wa'l-ẓāhiru wa'l-bāṭinu* (*He is the first and the last, the manifest and the hidden*) [Q. 57:3]. The terms *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* could also be translated as "outward" and "inward", but are also rendered as "exoteric" and "esoteric" respectively.

Whithersoever you turn, that is, in whichever direction you turn outwardly and inwardly, *then there is the face of God*,⁸⁸ that is, the essence (*dhāt*) of God self-disclosed (*mutajalliya*) through the totality (*jami'*) of His attributes.⁸⁹ Or [it means] to God belongs the illumination (*ishrāq*) of your hearts by [His] manifestation in them and [His] self-disclosure to them through the attribute of His beauty in the state of your presential vision [of God's beauty] (*shuhūdikum*)⁹⁰ and your annihilation [in it] (*fanā'ikum*); and [that to God belongs] the alienation (*ghurūb*) in them [the hearts] through His self-concealment and His self-veiling in their [the hearts'] forms and essences, and through His concealment through the attribute of His majesty in the state of your subsistence (*baqā'ikum*) after annihilation (*fanā'*).⁹¹ Thus, in whichever direction you turn, then there is His face, no thing can be except He alone.⁹²

⁸⁸ Zayd b. 'Alī (exec. 122/740) comments that this means the [prayer] direction towards God (*Gharīb*, 136). Ibn 'Arabī mentions that what this phrase signifies is that all, regardless of their actual religious affiliation, seek God; all are in His presence because He is omnipresent. However, this does not mean that one adopts any *qibla* one wishes; in prayer, one still has to orient oneself to the *qibla* ordained: see Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūhāt*, IV, 106, 424. In various instances, he also stresses that the *wajh* is the essence of the thing, its reality and also the mode in which it presents itself and through which it is known; significantly, the *wajh* is the mode in which the divine discloses itself. See Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūhāt*, I, 83, 405, IV, 212.

⁸⁹ In the thought of Ibn 'Arabī, the face of God refers to His manifestation and to the modes of self-disclosure by which the divine reality unfolds itself in the cosmos. The cosmos as the face of God is His unveiling, and everywhere that one turns in the cosmos one encounters the unveiling of the divine essence and attributes: see Chittick 1989, 18–20; Izutsu 1983, 99–107. More specifically, Ibn 'Arabī says that the face of something is its essence, and the face of God is the divine essence: see Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūhāt*, III, 306, II, 3; cf. Chittick 1989, 122, 277.

⁹⁰ In this respect cf. the following comment by Mayer 2006:

In his *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, Kāshānī defines *shuhūd* as: *ru'yat al-ḥaqq bi'l-ḥaqq*, that is, the vision of [God] the Real through [God] the Real. He mentions *fanā'* in the entry on *al-faṭḥ al-muṭlaq*, 'the absolute victory': *al-istighrāq fi 'ayn al-jam' bi-fanā' al-rusūm al-khalqiyya*: 'immersion in the very essence of union through the extinction of all traces of createdness'. There is an equation here between *shuhūd* (presential vision) and *fanā'* (effacement), because to witness God truly is to be effaced in Him, to the extent that God unveils Himself to a soul, the soul is both illumined and consumed – just as when a light is lit within a glass container, the container is full of that light and ceases to be anything apart from a passage-way for the light; or as when a fire is struck in a piece of wood, the wood burns brightly but the wood that is actually burning is no longer anything save food for the fire. The greater a soul's reception of the Divine Unveiling, the greater its effacement in It and the greater the passage of the Divine through that soul.

⁹¹ Cf. Mayer 2006:

Here the equation is between the Divine self-veiling and the continuity of the creature. Because of His Majesty, He must veil Himself in His manifestation, for otherwise creation could not subsist in the face of God totally unveiled. He veils Himself and then discloses Himself through the veils of creation. Thus the essences and forms of hearts are revealing veils of God; He conceals Himself in them that they might exist and that He be manifested.

⁹² The paradox of a manifest non-entity is expounded in Ibn 'Arabī's cosmology of beings. In his *Mashāhid*, he presents a theomorphic discussion with God in which he asserts his 'manifest non-entity' (*al-'adam al-zāhir*): see edition and translation by Ruspoli 1999, 3–4, 52.

God is indeed All-embracing, of the totality of existence, encompassing all directions and all existents,⁹³ *All-knowing*, of all knowledge and knowables.⁹⁴

Abū Ḥayyān

Abū Ḥayyān commences his discussion of *To God belong the east and west* with a broad introduction to the various reasons for the revelation of the verse, ultimately choosing to look to the context of the verse that immediately precedes verse 115 in order to determine the latter's relevance and meaning. He then moves to a grammatical and semantic analysis of the clauses that make up the verse. Although Abū Ḥayyān touches on the legal implications of the verse, grammar remains his main concern, as is reflected by his detailed discussion of God's juxtaposition to east and west and of the significance of the repeated use of the explicit noun in the verse. His antipathy towards anthropomorphism and, more specifically, his animosity towards the Karrāmiyya,⁹⁵ is expressed with reference to the phrase *the face of God*.

Al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣri] and Qatāda say: 'In the beginning, He made it permissible for them to pray in whichever direction they wished, but then abrogated that.'⁹⁶

Mujāhid and al-Ḍaḥḥāk say: 'Its meaning refers to the Ka'ba, that is to say, "wherever you may be in the east or the west, you are able to face the Ka'ba"; in this way it abrogates the Holy House [of Jerusalem as a *qibla*].'

⁹³ Kāshānī follows Ibn 'Arabī in associating God's knowledge with His comprehensive being, a relationship that equates His knowledge and existence: see Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, 370; cf. Chittick 1989, 320. Ibn 'Arabī notes that these two divine names are often paired because they express the idea that divine knowledge is all-encompassing: see *Futūḥāt*, II, 84.

⁹⁴ The attribute of God's knowledge emerges from the epistemic status of all things that are knowable, a class that comprehends all things that exist here and now and more. Unlike some of the theologians who insisted that a thing is something knowable, Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine insists upon the plenitude and potentiality of what comes into being and the immanent entities that exist as knowables in the mind of God. The divine attribute of omniscience is intelligible because there are things that are knowable. See Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, I, 188–90. On these two names, Zayd comments that they mean generous and gracious (*jawādun karīm*): see *Gharīb*, 136.

⁹⁵ See n. 195, in 'The commentators and their commentaries', on Abū Ḥayyān and the Karrāmiyya.

⁹⁶ *Baḥr*, I, 529–32. In a prefatory gloss (at 525) on the language of the verse, Abū Ḥayyān comments on the meaning and forms *mashriq* and *maghrib*. He says that they denote the place from which the sun rises and sets, respectively, and that both forms are based on the *maf'il* pattern, which, he adds, is an irregular form of *maf'al*. Abū Ḥayyān then discusses the particle *ayna*, stating that it is an adverbial particle indicating place. He says that it may have a particle appended to it (such as the *mā*) when it forms the first part of a conditional sentence; but it need not always have one so appended, as is shown by the line of verse (also adduced by Ṭabrisi) which Abū Ḥayyān cites. He adds that *thamma* is also an adverbial particle indicating location, and that it is frequently misconstrued as a direct object where it appears in Q. 76:26: *wa idhā ra'ayta thamma ra'ayta na'īman*; i.e., it is taken to mean 'when you see that place' rather than 'when you see in that place'. His last comment bears on *wāsi'*, as being an active participle from the verbal root *w-s-'*, which may be transitive, following the form *fā'il*.

Abū'l-Āliya and Ibn Zayd say: 'It was sent down in response to those among the Jews who had condemned the change of *qibla* from the Holy House to the Ka'ba.'

Ibn 'Umar says: 'It was sent down regarding the prayer of a traveller, and [his being permitted to perform it] in whichever direction his riding-animal happens to point him.'

It is also said that it was [sent down as] a response to those who had asked: 'Is our Lord near so that we should whisper to Him, or far so that we should call out [loudly] to Him?' Sa'īd b. Jubayr said this.

It is also said that it was [sent down] regarding [funeral] prayers for the Negus of Abyssinia, when they [the Companions] had said: '[But] he [the Negus] did not pray to our *qibla*!'⁹⁷

It is also said that it was [sent down] regarding those in whose case the [direction of the] *qibla* was unclear on an overcast night, and in an effort to ascertain [the actual direction] they ended up praying in various directions; it was narrated in a *ḥadīth* from Jābir [b. 'Abd Allāh] that this had taken place in the case of one raiding party.

[According to a report] from 'Āmir b. Rab'īa, this had happened to the Prophet on one journey; but if this were true, one would [need] not digress to these various other conflicting reports.

Nakha'ī says that the verse is general [in its application]: 'Whithersoever you turn in your comings and goings and in your endeavours'.

It is also said that it was sent down when the Prophet was prevented from approaching the [Sacred] House [of Mecca].

These are many reports on the occasion of the revelation of this verse. They would appear to be mutually contradictory and only the sound ones ought to be accepted. Commentators have filled up their books transmitting these. Al-Wāḥidī compiled a book on this [subject], but seldom is that which is in it sound: he should have occupied himself with transmitting only the sound ones.⁹⁸

The coherence of this verse with respect to what comes before it, namely the mention of the forbidding of God's remembrance in mosques and the active effort to destroy them, is made evident by His pointing out that such [acts] should not prevent the performance of prayer or the remembrance of God since the east and the west belong to God.⁹⁹ Thus, in whatever direction you

⁹⁷ This is reported on the authority of 'Aṭā' in Wāḥidī, *Asbāb*, 24.

⁹⁸ Abū Ḥayyān seems to be implying Wāḥidī's *Asbāb* (at 23–24), but all the reports there are duplicated in Abū Ḥayyān's *Baḥr*. Still it was common for the 'defenders' of Sunni 'orthodoxy' to attack Wāḥidī as an unreliable storyteller and fabricator of accounts.

⁹⁹ See Abū Ḥayyān, *Baḥr*, I, 526–9, for the discussion on the previous verse, in which those who forbid the remembrance and recitation of God's name in places of worship are condemned as

perform worship, it is to God and He will give a reward for it, and the place in which it is performed is not limited to the mosque. The meaning: to God belong the lands of the east and the west and what lies between them, so that it [the sentence] is to be understood as [containing] an elided annexation (*muḍāf*).¹⁰⁰

Or, the meaning [of this passage] could be: to God belong the east and the west and what lies between them, so that it [the sentence] is to be understood as [containing] an elided appositional phrase (*ma'ṭūf*).¹⁰¹ Or [it could be that] He mentions only them in order to exalt them by their being annexed (*iḍāfa*) to [the name of] God – even though all things belong to God – in the same way that the Sacred House [of Mecca] and other places have been exalted by being annexed to [the name of] God. But all of this is based on the assumption that *mashriq* and *maghrib* are nouns of place. Some commentators hold that they are verbal nouns (*maṣdar*), such that the meaning is [as follows]: to God belongs the control of the sun's rise from its place of rising, and its setting from its place of setting, in which case they would have the meaning of 'the rising' (*shurūq*) and 'the setting' (*ghurūb*); but His following words *whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God* render such an opinion unlikely.

A singular [implication in the case of] *mashriq* and *maghrib* is [explained] on account of the [single] direction [in both cases], or on account of the verbal noun that occurs in [the case of] each direction; as for the plural [implication], that is [explained] on account of the varying locations of the setting and the rising [sun] each day; a dual [implication], however, is [explained] on account of the two points of sunrise and sunset of winter and summer.

The meaning of *tawliya* is to turn towards something with the face [i.e. 'to turn to face'] (*istaqbala*); but it is also said to mean 'to turn one's back [to something]' (*istadbara*), like when you say *wallaytu 'an fulān* to mean that 'you turned your back on him' (*istadbartuhu*). The implied meaning [in this latter case] would be 'whatever direction you turn away from in order to face another, there is the face of God'.

It is said that this [verse] does not concern prayer, but that it in fact addresses those who destroy mosques, that is to say: 'Wherever they turn, fleeing from Me, I observe them'. This [last sense] is strengthened by al-Ḥasan's reading of

unrighteous. Abū Ḥayyān cites two referents for this: first, a certain Roman governor who destroyed the temple in Jerusalem; and second, the Meccans who denied the Muslims the right to worship in their way in the Ka'ba precinct. The point is that places of worship are, obviously, defined by worship which consists of the remembrance of God; thus it is worship that defines the place of worship and not the place that defines worship.

¹⁰⁰ The annexation (*muḍāf*) being an implicit 'and what lies between them' (*wa-mā baynahumā*).

¹⁰¹ In other words, the implicit *wa-mā baynahumā* is not an annexation (*muḍāf*) to *wa li'llāhi al-mashriq wa'l-maghrib*, but in apposition, or coordination ('*af*'), to it.

tawallū,¹⁰² making it third person, in agreement with [the third person in] His saying *lahum fi'l-dunyā khizyun* [for them in this world there will be degradation, Q. 2:114] and *wa-qālū ittakhadha'llāhu waladan* [And they say 'God has taken to Himself a son', Q. 2:116], so that the personal pronouns follow one arrangement. Zamakhsharī says:¹⁰³ [It means] in whatever place you make that turning, meaning, the turning of your faces toward the *qibla*, as is indicated by His saying, *Turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you may be, turn your faces towards it* [Q. 2:150]; so that he has qualified the 'turning' [meant] in a general sense here as [specifically] turning towards the *qibla*, which is the opinion of al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī].

A certain commentator, with regard to His saying to God *belong the east and the west*, mentions issues whose subject matter is the science of *fiqh*.¹⁰⁴ Among such [issues] is the case of one who prays in a particular direction in darkness having made the effort [to face the right direction], but it thereafter becomes clear that he prayed towards other than the *qibla*; also, the issue of one who performs the prayer while mounted on animal-back [either] because of illness or as supererogatory prayers;¹⁰⁵ and the issue of prayer for the absent dead, if we were to say that it [the verse] was revealed with reference to the Negus of Abyssinia. [That certain commentator] has filled his book [of *tafsīr*] with the citation of such cases and of the differences [of opinion] regarding them and some of the proofs for them; such subject matter, however, as we have mentioned, is [properly] the realm of the science of *fiqh*.

There is the face of God: this is the response to the conditional [sentence] while being itself a nominal sentence. It is said to mean: 'There is God's *qibla*', so that *wajh* (face) means *jihā* (direction), and this is adjoined to [the Name of] God as He has commanded that one turn to face it, for it constitutes the direction in which God's satisfaction lies; al-Ḥasan, Mujāhid, Qatāda and Muqātil have [all] said this.

It is also said that *wajh* here is a *ṣila*, the meaning being 'there is God', that is to say, His knowledge and His decree (*ḥukm*). It is reported from Ibn 'Abbās and Muqātil: 'Or, [it could be that] by means of *wajh* He is referring to His [very] essence (*dhāt*), like where He says, *Yet there shall remain the face of your Lord* [Q. 55:27] and *All things perish except His Face* [Q. 28:88]. It is [also] said that the meaning is that works [should be] performed for God's sake; al-Farrā' said this.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Rāzī and Zamakhsharī have already noted this variant. One suspects that Abū Ḥayyān's source for the variant is indeed Zamakhsharī, given his extensive citation and use of that literary and linguistic commentary, the *Kashshāf*.

¹⁰³ See Zamakhsharī's commentary, this chapter.

¹⁰⁴ Most probably these are commentaries that focus on legal questions, such as Qurṭubī's *Jāmi'*; cf. Ignaz Goldziher – [Joseph Schacht], 'Fiḫh', *EP*, II, 886–7.

¹⁰⁵ See Qaffāl, *Ḥilya*, I, 76ff.

¹⁰⁶ Abū Ḥayyān adduces the same verse as Ṭabrisī for this sense of *wajh*.

It is also said that *wajh* here may signify ‘high rank’ (*jāh*), like when it is said that so-and-so is *wajh al-qawm* (lit. ‘the face of the people’), that is to say, the locus of their honour; or that so-and-so enjoys *wajh* among people, meaning, high rank and honour. The implied meaning is therefore: ‘There is God’s majesty and grandeur’; Abū Maṣṣūr says this in *al-Muqni’*.¹⁰⁷ Since [the word] *wajh* (face) is annexed to [the Name] *Allāh* (‘God’), then it must have an [alternative] significance according to the Arab tongue, since it is an expression which is used in several senses and cannot possibly be understood to be [referring to] the bodily part [in God’s case], even if this [sense] happens to be the one in which it is more widely understood.

Some people, through aural transmission, hold the opinion that this [‘face’] is an immutable attribute of God’s, exceeding the attributes of the Eternal One that reason turns to. Abū’l-Āliya and others deem this opinion weak, because it involves the unequivocal affirmation of an attribute for God by means of a term that is equivocal. [In addition,] this [‘face’] is an attribute that is not known, nor is its meaning comprehensible in the Arab tongue. It is therefore necessary to reject this opinion and rely on what constitutes an admissible meaning according to the Arab tongue, for the term [*wajh*] may indicate [an element of] corporealism. Thus, where it [the term] is equivocal [and susceptible of more than one meaning] (*mushtarik*) we should understand it according to the essential sense of which it admits and which may validly be ascribed to God; or [we should understand it] metaphorically, where it is not equivocal. Metaphor in the speech of the Arabs is more plentiful ‘than the sands of Yabrin’¹⁰⁸ and ‘the waters of Palestine’. To stick to the outward [sc. the literal form of the] term, one indicating corporealism, is foolishness and ignorance of the Arab tongue, of its [different] aspects and spoken applications, and [ignorance] of the rational proofs, to which the correlation of ambiguous terms must resort. God forbid that we should be like the Karrāmiyya or those who have followed their course in affirming corporealism and ascribing bodily parts to God. God be exalted high above what those who fabricate falsehoods say.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ This is most probably Abū Maṣṣūr al-Ayyūbi, properly, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Abi Ayyūb al-Naysābūrī (d. 421/1030). He is known to have been the most astute Ash‘arī *mutakallim* of his age: see Dhahabī, *Siyar*, XVII, 573. Madelung identifies him in his role as one of the principal Ash‘arī polemicists in Transoxiana against the Māturīdī school and its theological doctrines: see Madelung 2000, 318–30.

¹⁰⁸ This is a proverbial expression denoting sand and desert as far as the eye can see. See Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, V, 427. Abū Ḥayyān is purposely using metaphor to emphasise the widespread use of metaphor in Arabic.

¹⁰⁹ It is quite common for the mature Ash‘arī school to allow for some metaphor in the Qur’ān and to attack anthropomorphism, as represented by the Karrāmiyya. See, for example, Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, in Guillaume 1934, 103–22 (Arabic text), 43–50 (English). The same is true of the Ḥanbalīs, who are often accused of anthropomorphism; for a later Ḥanbalī use of metaphor and rational explanation, see Swartz 2002.

His saying, *Whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*, constitutes a response to those who say that He is in a space (*hayyiz*) or a direction (*jiha*). For when He gave the choice to turn and face any direction, He indicated that He is not in any one direction or space. Had He been in a space, then turning towards and facing it, rather than than all [other] places (*makān*), would be most correct. But since He does not specify a place, we know that He is neither in a direction, nor in a space. Rather, all directions are within His dominion and under His rule, and so to whichever direction we turn, to face Him in submission, we will be glorifying Him and obeying His command.

God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing. God describes Himself with the attribute *al-wāsi'* (*All-embracing*): it is said that this is because of the extent (*si'a*) of His forgiveness. It is mentioned [in the Qur'ān] that *your Lord is All-embracing in forgiveness* [Q. 53:32] and this is the meaning of Kalbī's statement that 'No sin is too great for Him'. It is also said that He is All-embracing in [terms of] gift, which is the meaning of Abū 'Ubayda's statement [that He is] All-sufficient (*ghanī*) and Farrā's statement [that He is] munificent (*jawād*). It [*wāsi'*] is also said to mean that He is All-knowing, as [suggested] in His saying *His seat (kursī) embraces the heavens and the earth* [Q. 2:255], according to one of the commentaries, and He has combined it [*wāsi'*] with *'alīm* for the purposes of emphasis. It is also said to mean [that He is] All-embracing in [His] power. It is further said to mean that He grants His servants latitude in [His] prescriptions, His religion being one of ease.

All-knowing ('alīm): that is to say, [All-knowing] of their welfare, or of the intentions of [their] hearts, which are the foundation of deeds, even if their outward appearances should differ regarding the direction of prayer (*qibla*) and otherwise.

These explanations are in keeping with the opinion of those who say that the verse was sent down concerning the matter of the *qibla*. Al-Qaffāl says, however, that it does not contain any mention of the *qibla* or prayer; rather, God is informing them of His knowledge of them, and the capacity of His authority over them, for they are as [described] in His saying: *If you are able ... to the end of the verse* [Q. 55:33] and *[Three men] conspire not secretly together ... to the end of the verse* [Q. 58:7].¹¹⁰ Therefore, this [verse] would constitute a threat against those who prevent God's name from being invoked in mosques and who strive to destroy them, to the effect that they cannot escape or flee from God, as God says: *Whither to flee? No indeed, there is no refuge! Upon that day the recourse shall be to your Lord* [Q. 75:10–12].¹¹¹ For as the poet says:

¹¹⁰ The two verses adduced emphasise God's transcendence and omniscience. The first describes humans as utterly incapable of reaching God's realm, while the second states that God knows the words and deeds, public and private, of all human beings.

¹¹¹ Abū Ḥayyān cites the lines of verse that follow to reiterate the point he has just made about man's inability to elude God.

*fa-innaka ka'l-layli'lladhī huwa mudrikī
wa-in khiltu anna'l-munta'ā 'anka wāsī'u*

You are like the night that is ever on my heels,
Even though I believe that my distance from you is vast.

And:

*wa-lam yakuni'l-mughtarru bi'llāhi idh sarā
li-ya'jaza wa'l-mughtarru bi'llāhi ṭālibuhu*

If he bedazzled by God were to set out by night, he would not be
frustrated,
For the one bedazzled is seeking [none other than] God.

And:

*ayna'l-mafarru wa-lā mafarra li-hāribin
wa-lahu'l-basīṭāni: al-tharā wa'l-mā'u*

Whither to flee? There is no escape for a fugitive,
When His are the two worlds of earth and water.

In this way, the message becomes a general one, subsuming those who prevent remembrance [of God's name] in the mosques and other [issues].

This [last] sentence [*inna'llāha wāsī'un 'alīm*] is emphasised by [the insertion of the particle] *inna* (truly) with the explicit mention therein of God's name [*Allāh*], indicating the [syntactical] independence [of the sentence]. We have already mentioned [a similar syntactical structure to] this with regard to His saying, *tajidūhu 'inda'llāh* (*You shall find it with God*) [Q. 73:20] and His saying, *wa'staghfirū'llāha inna'llāha ghafūrun raḥīm* (*And ask God's forgiveness; truly God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate*) [Q. 73:20], which is grander and more eloquent than [merely using] the personal pronoun, because the personal pronoun suggests a strong dependence, whereas the overt noun suggests independence. Do you not see that you can begin a sentence with it [an overt noun] without noticing what might have preceded it, in contrast to [the case with] a personal pronoun, which connects the sentence in which it appears to the preceding one? Do you not see that most of what is mentioned of this sort in the Qur'ān is expressed using the overt noun as in the examples we have given, and similar to His saying, *aqīmū'l-ṣalāta inna'l-ṣalāta kānat ...* [*Perform the prayer; surely the prayer is ...* Q. 4:103] and, *wa-law shā'a'llāhu la-dhahaba bi-sam'ihim wa-abṣārihim inna'llāha ...* [*Had God willed, He would have taken away their hearing and their sight. Truly God is ...* Q. 2:20] and [the poet says]:¹¹²

¹¹² From a verse by Abū Zubayd al-Ṭā'i, *mawlā* of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd; see Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, V, 138; Sīrāfī, *Sharḥ*, II, 211; Ibn Qutayba, *Shi'r*, 31.

layta shi' rī wa-ayna minnī layta
inna laytan wa-inna lawwan 'anā' u

If only! How can I cope with 'if only'?
Truly, 'if only' and 'if it were' are a great burden!

Burūsawī

Burūsawī focuses upon the meaning of the verse as an exhortation to recognising the omnipresence and transcendence of God. God does not inhere in a certain space; so when one directs oneself in prayer in a specific orientation or raises one's hands in supplication that does not entail God's inherence in that direction or space. His commentary also illustrates three common aspects of his exegetical method, all of which are key features of his Sufi *tafsīr*. First, whenever a divine name or attribute requires discussion, he turns to the famous theological commentary on the divine names by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) entitled *al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī ma'ānī asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā* (The Ultimate Goal on the Meanings of the Most Beautiful Names of God). Second, he often demonstrates ideas through recourse to didactic poetry, in most cases from the tales in the *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), the pre-eminent Persian Sufi poet. Third, he considers the act of commentary as didactic practice and hence interspersed within his explanations are stories of famous scholars in his tradition, whether they are theological progenitors like the famous Ash'arī theologian al-Juwaynī, in this passage, or famous Sufis in his order.

O God, place us among those who are busy with You.¹¹³ *To God belong the east and the west*: what is meant by these two [directions] are the ends of the earth, since there is no sense in the meaning being the two places of the rising and the setting [of the sun] specifically; that is, it [the phrase] means 'the whole of the earth' [belongs to Him]. It is not that any one place in it is designated specifically for His dominion and control, or as a locus for worshipping Him, to the exclusion of another place. So if you are prevented from praying in the Sacred Mosque (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*), or in the Furthest Mosque (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*),¹¹⁴ then [know that] the [entire] earth has been made a place of worship (*masjid*) for you.

¹¹³ *Rūh al-bayān*, I, 210–11.

¹¹⁴ The Furthest Mosque is the mosque sanctuary referred to in Q. 17:1, which in early exegesis and *qīṣaṣ* narratives was associated with the sacred precinct at the ancient site of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, to which the Prophet is said to have made his famous night journey (*isrā'*) from Mecca. This sacred precinct has been the focus of Muslim veneration since the arrival of the second caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–644) in 16–17/638 as part of the general conquest of Greater Syria. The Aqṣā Mosque, which stands on what is now called *al-ḥaram al-sharif* (the Noble Sanctuary), went through phases of construction beginning with the Marwānids, the caliph 'Abd al-Malik and later his son al-Walid. See Oleg Grabar, 'al-Masjīd al-Aqṣā', *IEJ*, VI, 707–8; N. J. Johnson, 'Aqṣā Mosque', *EQ*, I, 125–7; Guillaume 1953; Stern 1963.

So *whithersoever you turn*, that is, to whichever place you orient your faces [for prayer], that is the [direction of the] *qibla*.¹¹⁵

The Imam [al-Sakhāwī] said ‘*Wallā* is ‘to turn towards’, but *wallā* [also means] ‘to turn away’: it is one of those words which have opposite meanings [sc. enantiosema]; but what is meant in this place is ‘to turn towards’. *There is the face of God*, that is, there is the direction to which He has commanded [you to turn] and with which He is pleased as a *qibla* [for you]. So, the place in which the ‘turning [for prayer]’ is made is not specific to one mosque to the exclusion of another, nor to one location to the exclusion of another. Or [the words mean] ‘there is His essence’, in the sense of the presence of [His] knowledge, in which case, *wajh* (face) becomes a trope of the type whereby the name of a part is applied to the whole. Then the meaning is that in whatever place you make the orientation [for prayer], He is present in it and you can reach Him – since He is neither substance nor accident,¹¹⁶ for His being in one direction would mean another direction is empty of Him. In as much as it is impossible for *Him* to be in a place, I mean that His *knowledge* encompasses what is in all places and domains, and thus He knows what is done there and He rewards you accordingly. In the *ḥadīth* [it is reported that]: ‘If you cast down a rope to the lowest earth, then it would “fall on” God.’¹¹⁷ The meaning [of this *ḥadīth*] is that the knowledge of God comprises all areas, so the implication is that ‘it would descend on the knowledge of God’; God Most High is far transcendent above inhering in places because He was before He originated places. So it is [reported] in *al-Maqāṣid al-ḥasana*.¹¹⁸

Know that the *ayna* (where/whithersoever) is the conditional clause of location; here it is the object of *tuwallū*; and the *mā* [in *aynamā*] is for emphasis. *Thamma* is the adverb of location, of the same status as *hunāka*, ‘there’. To indicate a place close [to you], you say *hunā* (here), and [to indicate] a place that is far, *thamma* and *hunāka* (there). Thus the phrase is a preceding predicate, and the ‘face of God’ is the subject. The sentence is in the state of an apocopation as it is the apodosis of the conditional clause (*jawāb al-sharṭ*).

¹¹⁵ This comment contains a double confirmation: 1) you may pray in any place on earth; and 2) in whichever direction you orient yourself in prayer, it will be acceptable as a valid direction.

¹¹⁶ In the terminology of philosophical theology, all things that exist are either a substance (*jawhar*) – meaning, in the Aristotelian sense, that they exist in themselves in a certain space and time – or an accident (‘*araḍ*’), which can be considered to be a property that inheres within a certain substance. God cannot be an accident because He cannot inhere within any particular substrate (and this is partly the Islamic argument against incarnation), nor can He be confined by space and time as a substance. He is self-sufficient and transcendent above the ontology of the phenomenal world; see Simon van den Bergh, ‘*Djawhar*’, *EI*², II, 493; Fazlur Rahman, “*Araḍ*”, *EI*², I, 603. For a philosophical expression of God’s transcending cosmic ontology, see Ibn Sinā, *Shifā’ ilāhiyyāt*, I, 37–40.

¹¹⁷ Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, III, *ḥadīth* no. 3352.

¹¹⁸ Sakhāwī, *Maqāṣid*, 342 (*ḥadīth* no. 886).

God is indeed All-embracing, through His encompassing all things as [His] possession and [His] creation. This [phrase] is appended to His saying, *To God belong the east and the west*. Similarly, if the extent (*sa'a*) is interpreted as the extent of mercy, then His saying, *To God belong the east and the west*, would include the meaning that we have given it, namely that worship and prayer are not designated for only some mosques [above others]; rather, the whole earth is a mosque for you, so pray in any part (*buq'a*)¹¹⁹ of it you wish. It is understood from this that He is all-encompassing in the Law through permitting concessions and latitude for His servants in their religion, and not obliging them [to do] what they cannot perform. The intention is to provide latitude for His servants and facilitation for them in all that they have need for, and the latitude concerning the matter of the *qibla* enters this [general latitude and facilitation] as a priority. This generalisation is inferred from the application of 'All-encompassing' such that it is not confined to one thing rather than another. In his commentary on the most beautiful names [of God],¹²⁰ Al-Ghazālī said:

[The word] All-encompassing is derived from *sa'a* (extent). Now *sa'a* is sometimes related to knowledge when it is broad and encompasses many known things, while [at other] times it is related to goodness and the expansive bestowal of blessings. But however it is determined and whatever it is sent down upon, the absolute All-encompassing one is God for if one contemplates His knowledge, there is no shore to the ocean of the things He knows, rather the oceans would be spent if they were ink for His words,¹²¹ and if one contemplates His goodness and boons, there is no limit to the things He determines. Every expanse, however great it is, comes ultimately to an end but the one who does not come to [any] end is the most worthy of the noun of 'expanse' (*sa'a*). Thus God is the absolute All-encompassing one because every encompassing thing is narrower in relation to what is more encompassing than it, and every expanse ends at a limit as one can conceive of more than it. But no increase may be imagined for that which has no end or limit. The expanse of the servant is in his knowledge or his character. If his knowledge is much, he is encompassing (*wāsi'un*) to the extent of his knowledge; if his character expands to the point that it is not oppressed by fear of poverty or the burning of envy or the dominance of greed, or other reprehensible attributes, then he is encompassing. But all of that has limits; only God is truly all-encompassing.

¹¹⁹ This term has the connotation – at least by the time of Burūsawī – of a sacred place, maybe even a tomb. So the point being made might be that whilst shrines and tombs are sacred spaces, they are not exclusively so, insofar as the whole earth is a sacred space for Muslims. See Clifford E. Bosworth, 'Buḳ'a', *El² suppl. Fasc. 1*, 154.

¹²⁰ Ghazālī, *Asmā'*, 129–30 (for an English translation see Burrell and Daher 1992, 116).

¹²¹ This is a paraphrase of Q. 18:109: *If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the words of my Lord are spent.*

He [Rūmī]¹²² said in the *Mathnawī*:

Ay sag-i gurgīn-i zisht az hīrṣ o jūsh
Pūstin-i shīr-rā bar khwud mapūsh
Ghurra-yi shīrat bi-khwāhad imtīhān
Naqsh-i shīr ū āngāh akhlāq-i sagān

O foul mangy dog, through an exuberant insolence
 Do not clothe yourself in the lion's skin;
 The roar of the lion will demand from you the test (of sincerity)
 The figure of a lion, and the disposition of dogs.¹²³

All-knowing of all their [His servants] best interests and actions. This includes the benefit of a warning to the praying individual to beware of negligence and carelessness, just as it comprises the [promise of] fulfilment of reward for praying individuals in all places. So it is clear that this verse is related [directly] to *and who does greater evil than he who bars God's places of worship* [Q. 2:114]. The meaning is that 'O believers, God's earth is vast for you, so do not be barred [from the canonical prayers] by the destruction of the mosques of God, but turn yourselves towards the *qibla* of God wherever you are on His earth'. Mujāhid and al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] said that when *your Lord has said: 'Call upon Me and I will respond to you'* [Q. 40:60] was revealed, they [the Companions of the Prophet] said, 'Where shall we call upon Him?' Then God sent down *To God belong the east and the west. Whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*, without [any specification of] direction or location.

If it is said, what can it mean to raise one's hands to the heavens in supplication as God is above being in a certain direction or place, then we say that the prophets and the saints one and all did so; not in the sense that God is in a certain place but because His exalted treasures are in the heavens, as He says: *And in heaven is your provision and what you have been promised* [Q. 51:22] and *naught is there but its treasures (khazā'inuhu) are with Us, and We sent it not down but in a known measure* [Q. 15:21].

The throne (*'arsh*) is the locus for the establishment of the attribute of mercy (*istiwā' al-ṣifa al-raḥmāniyya*), so the raising of the hands to the heavens and looking towards them during supplication is the equivalent of the supplicant indicating the imperial treasury, then requesting from the Sovereign that He bestow upon him a gift from that treasury.

¹²² Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī Balkhī (d. 672/1273), popularly known as Mawlānā (Our Master), perhaps the greatest Persian Sufi poet. See Alessandro Bausani, 'Djalāl al-Dīn Rūmī', *EI*², II, 393–7; Lewis 2000; Schimmel 1978. The *Mathnawī* is a didactic 'epic' divided into six books (*daftar*). The text was edited and published in 1925–40 in six volumes in twelve parts, along with an English translation by Nicholson; for this and the newer 1990 edition, see Rūmī in the bibliography, primary sources.

¹²³ Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, in Nicholson 1925–40, III, verses 188–9, IV, verse 146, on the claims of Pharaoh to divinity that resemble the wolf pretending to be a lion.

It is reported that Imam al-Ḥaramayn [al-Juwaynī] was a guest with one of the great notables, and scholars and notables gathered to meet him. One of those in the meeting rose and said, 'What is the proof (*dalīl*) that God transcends space when He has said, *the Compassionate One (al-rahmān) presided upon the throne* [Q. 20:5]? He said, 'The proof for this is the saying of Jonah, when he was in the belly of the whale: *there is no god except You, glory be to You! I have indeed been one of the wrongdoers* [Q. 21:87]. The audience were amazed and the host asked him for an explanation. The imam said, 'Here is a poor man who has a debt of one thousand dinars; pay his debt for him and I will explain [my statement].' The host accepted [to take on] the [poor man's] debt and the imam said, 'When the Messenger of God went on the heavenly ascension (*mi'rāj*) to the high point God wished, he said, "I cannot enumerate Your praise as You have praised Yourself."¹²⁴ When Jonah suffered in the darkneses of the depths of the ocean in the belly of the whale, he said, *there is no god except You, glory be to You! I have indeed been one of the wrongdoers*. Both of them addressed Him by saying "You" which is the [form of] address to one who is present, so if He were in one place [only], then that would not be valid. That then, indicates that He is not in a place.'

Alūsī

Alūsī's concern in this verse is to counter the anthropomorphist notion that God is confined to a certain space or that there are certain exclusively sacred spaces devoted to the worship of God. Rather, the whole cosmos is the locus of the worship of God since God is omnipresent in the cosmos, a point Alūsī reiterates with implicit reference to the Sufi commentary of Kāshānī. He understands the divine names as reflecting this omnipresence as nothing is hidden from Him. At the same time, since the names reflect both God's beauty and His majesty, God's encompassing the cosmos is an expression of His latitude with regard to His creatures in the performing of their duties, while His knowledge is a reminder to His creatures that nothing is hidden from Him, so latitude does not mean that the failure to perform those duties is acceptable.

*And to God belong the east and the west,*¹²⁵ that is to say, the two known extremities that lie next to the point where the sun rises and sets; [God's] sovereignty over the entire earth is alluded to [implicitly] by means of the [explicit reference to His] sovereignty over these two [directions]. Some hold the opinion that since the earth is spherical, any point that is eastern in one respect would be western in another respect, relatively speaking, the whole earth being thus, and so there is no need even to suggest the indirect allusion. [The verse] also

¹²⁴ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, I, *kitāb* IV: *al-ṣalāt*, *bāb* 42 *fi'l-rukū' wa'l-sujūd*, *ḥadīth* no. 222; Nasa'ī, *Sunan*, I, *kitāb al-ṭahāra: bāb tark al-wudū'*.

contains [the following words] *so whithersoever you turn*, which means: in whatever place you turn to face the *qibla*. Al-Ḥasan [understood] that *tuwallū* (you turn) referred to [a situation where the *qibla* could not be discerned]. *There is the face of God*: i.e. there is His direction which you have been commanded [to turn towards]. Thus, the place in which one turns [to God] is not restricted to any one mosque to the exclusion of another, or any particular place to the exclusion of another; *aynamā* (*whithersoever*) is an adverb (*ẓarf*) that, by circumstantial necessity, implies a condition; (*aynamā*) is not the direct object of the verb *tuwallū*. In morphological terms (*bi ma'nā al-ẓarf*), this *tawliya* [i.e. the verb *tuwallū*] is in the position of an intransitive verb.¹²⁶ *There* (*thamma*) is a demonstrative noun (*ism ishāra*), especially used when the place referred to is distant, and ends indeclinably in a *fathā*; it cannot be declined except with a [preceding] *min*. Many misconstrue it as a direct object where God says: *wa idhā ra'ayta thamma ra'ayta na'imān* (*and when you shall see, there you will see*) [Q. 76:20],¹²⁷ whereas in fact it is a preceding predicate and what comes after it is the subject,¹²⁸ this [whole] clause (i.e. *thamma ra'ayta na'imān*) being the apodosis of the conditional clause (*wa idhā ra'ayta*). The *wajh* (face) [mentioned in the verse] is 'direction' (*jiha*), much like [the pattern of] *wazn* and *zina* (weight). The specification (*wajh Allāh, the face of God*) through the construct of possession (*iḍāfa*) is in consideration of it being what has been commanded [by God] and in which lies His pleasure. This is the opinion of al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī], Muqātil [b. Sulaymān], Mujāhid [b. Jabr] and Qatāda [b. Di'āma].

It is also said that *wajh* (face) stands for [God's] essence (*dhāt*), analogous to His saying *kullu shay' in hālikun illā wajhahu* [*All things perish except His face*, Q. 28:88], except that here (in 2:115) it is an expression of His knowledge and awareness of what is being done [in any given place]. Abū Manṣūr says that it represents [His] glory (*jāh*), and [refers] to [His] majesty and greatness.¹²⁹ According to this [reading], the phrase is meant to console believers that remembrance of God and prayer can be made anywhere, and not exclusively in mosques. A sound *ḥadīth* relates, 'I have made the earth a clean place for prostration to Me.'¹³⁰ Perhaps others before the Prophet were not allowed to

¹²⁵ *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī*, I, 365–6.

¹²⁶ That is to say, a verb which does not take a direct object.

¹²⁷ In other words, it is not to be understood – as some modern translations (Arberry) erroneously have it – as, 'And when you see them then, you [shall] see bliss', but as 'And when you shall see, there you shall see bliss' (cf. Pickthall). The better translation is that of Qarā'ī: 'As you look, you will see there bliss'. Alternatively, Abdel Haleem's translation subsumes the *thamma* with the verb ('look around'): 'And if you were to look around, you would see'.

¹²⁸ In other words, the word order would normally be *wa-idhā ra'ayta ra'ayta thamma na'imān*.

¹²⁹ This is very likely the same Abū Manṣūr cited by Abū Ḥayyān (see n. 107, this chapter).

¹³⁰ This is a well-attested *ḥadīth*, see for example Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ: kitāb al-Tayammum* (no. 7), ch. 1: no. 335 and *Kitāb al-ṣalāt* (no. 8), ch. 56: no. 438.

pray in any place other than in churches or synagogues. As for Jesus, his prayers in other than these places when he was travelling were out of necessity, and so there is no need for the opinion [that this indicated] total concession. It is possible for *aynamā* to be the direct object of *tuwallū* if it signifies 'a direction', since *aynamā tawajjahū* (whithersoever you direct yourselves) is commonly used to mean 'to whichever direction you turn'. This is based on what has been reported from ['Abd Allāh] Ibn 'Umar, namely, that the verse was sent down regarding prayers during travel and supererogatory ones on camel-back; and based also on what has been reported from Jābir [b. 'Abd Allāh], namely, that it was sent down regarding some people he was with who could not make out the direction of the *qibla*, while they were away on a raid. Some prayed towards the south, others towards the north. The following morning they realized that they had prayed in the wrong directions.

But it is also possible, according to these two reports, that *aynamā* is as [stated] in the first instance, with the meaning being 'in whatever place you choose to make the turn [towards God]', since the elision of a direct object indicates a generalisation. Some confine themselves to this last opinion, claiming that no expert of the Arabic language has ever argued for the other opinion. Some have said that this verse was a preface to the abrogation of the [earlier] *qibla* and a declaration that the Worshipped One is free of [being confined to] a space or direction,¹³¹ for otherwise it would be more correct to face that direction; and [these also say] that this verse is to be interpreted [as applying] generally and not restricted to cases of travel or cases [where one needs to seek out the *qibla*]. So, what is meant by *aynamā* is 'any direction', and [what is meant] by *wajh* is [God's] essence (*dhāt*). In this case then, the manner of connection is that because 'mosques' have just been mentioned,¹³² He almost immediately thereafter, sets forth the regulation regarding the *qibla*, by way of rejoinder: some take this to be the soundest of opinions; but it is debatable.

God is All-embracing (wāsi'), i.e., He encompasses all things in His dominion (and) with His mercy. Hence, He has made the matter of the *qibla* easy for you (*wassa'a*), and does not restrict you. [He is] *All-knowing ('alīm)* with regard to the interests of [His] servants and their actions wherever these be. According to the first [opinion], this phrase (*inna' llāha wāsi' un 'alīm*) follows on from *To God belong the east and the west*; or according to the second [opinion], it follows on from His saying *whithersoever you turn*. An uncommon opinion has it that the phrase is a threat against *those who bar God's places of worship* [Q. 2:114], and the preceding address [i.e., the rest of Q. 2:115] is also [made to apply] to

¹³¹ This would counter any anthropomorphic suggestions that God is confined to a space or direction.

¹³² In the preceding verse Q. 2:114.

them. The meaning then is that there can be no escape from God for tyrants and no flight [from Him] for aggressors, since the sphere of His authority surrounds all directions, and the power of His knowledge encompasses the celestial spheres.¹³³

*ayna'l-mafarru wa-lā mafarra li-hāribin
wa-lahu'l-basīṭāni: al-tharā wa'l-mā'ū*

Whither the escape: there is no escape for one in flight
When His are the two planes, the earth and the sea.

According to allusive commentary [...] ¹³⁴ to God belongs all that: whichever way a person turns outwardly and inwardly, *then there is the face of God*, manifest with the totality of His attributes and self-disclosed in what He wishes, transcending directions. The poet says:

*wa-mā'l-wajhu illā wāḥidun ghayra annahū
idhā anta 'addadta'l-marāyā ta'addadū*

There is only one countenance, but if you multiply the reflections,
They [the countenances] too will multiply.

God is indeed All-embracing: nothing is outside His grasp (*iḥāṭa*); *All-knowing*: nothing of the circumstances of His creation or of the manifestations of His attributes is hidden from Him.

Manār

The *Manār* commentary includes major continuities with the classical tradition but also indicates new directions in the interpretation of the Word of God. For traditional authority it refers back to the popular commentary *al-Jalālayn*, composed in sixteenth-century Egypt and completed by the famed polymath Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505). However, after the initial concern with the question of whether the verse explicates the conditions for prayer and the *qibla*, the commentators turn to the question of the significance of the verse in its Qur'ānic context, and an analysis of figurative language in the Qur'ān. Reflecting neo-Mu'tazilī hermeneutics, the *Manār* commentary attempts to explain the use of terms such as 'the face of God' and 'turning towards' Him, that sound like clear anthropomorphisms, as instances of figurative language in the Qur'ān. In fact, they argue that the Qur'ānic text indicates the importance of tropes and non-literal forms of expression that enrich language and discourse, and they suggest that Arabic stylists, thinkers and literary figures ought to follow its example. 'Abduh was very interested in the poetics of Arabic language and composition, and a key feature of the *Manār* 'project'

¹³³ Literally, 'the orbiting celestial bodies'.

¹³⁴ *Min bāb al-ishāra*, which refers to 'allusive' (Sufi) commentary; in this instance, he quotes directly from Kāshāni.

was to rediscover the canon of the Arabic heritage that lay in Islamic texts, not least in the Word of God. From an analysis and understanding of these texts, they hoped to learn lessons to apply to modern, even *Salafī* modes of thought, expressing the needs of Muslims in a modern age.

God has said,¹³⁵ *to God belong the east and the west*. The commentator Jalāl al-Dīn¹³⁶ held that what is meant by ‘the east’ and ‘the west’ is the entire earth, since they are its two limits. He [Jalāl al-Dīn] also said, regarding His [God’s] saying, *so whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God*, that whichever spatial location you face during your obligatory prayer (*ṣalāt*) [may serve as] the direction of the *qibla* toward which God has enjoined [the believers] to direct themselves [during obligatory prayers]. The teacher, the imam (*al-ustādh al-imām*),¹³⁷ explained this [Jalāl al-Dīn’s point] by saying: ‘It is proper that the worshipper turn towards the Worshipped One, and since God transcends matter and [spatial] direction, and since facing Him in this sense is therefore impossible, people were enjoined to face a specific place during their worship of God, and [God] made the facing of that place like facing His countenance.’ Then the teacher said:¹³⁸ ‘This verse is related to the previous verse, that is, His saying, *and who does greater evil than he who bars God’s places of worship [so that His name be not rehearsed in them, Q. 2:114].*’

Contrary to what Jalāl al-Dīn said in his explanation of ‘*the east and the west*’, the majority of Qur’ānic commentators say that God specifically mentions the two directions because they are the two directions known to everyone. This, then, is similar to His saying, *Lord of the two easts and the two wests* [Q. 55:17]. What Jalāl al-Dīn said [in fact] follows from this, since what is meant, in any case, is that whatever direction you face and look toward in your prayer, you are facing God because all directions are His. *God is All-embracing*, i.e., He cannot be confined or limited, and it is therefore valid to face Him in every place. [He is] *All-knowing*, i.e., [aware of] the one who directs themselves towards Him, wherever they may be. Hence, worship God wherever you are, turn to face toward Him wherever you alight [in a journey], and do not restrict

¹³⁵ *Manār*, I, 352–4.

¹³⁶ Jalāl al-Dīn refers to either Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) or, more likely, Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), who completed a commentary on the Qur’ān which the former, his teacher, began. The commentary came to be known as *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (The Commentary of the two Jalāls). See PA, Suyūṭī, for details.

¹³⁷ *Al-ustādh al-imām* (the teacher, the imam) is the deferential way in which Rashīd Riḍā frequently refers to Muḥammad ‘Abduh.

¹³⁸ Riḍā’s style of quoting ‘Abduh in many cases does not provide a clear indication as to where ‘Abduh’s statements end and his (Riḍā’s) own begin. As has been noted by those who have studied both the authors and the *Manār* commentary, the fact that Riḍā does not explicitly tell us whether he is conveying his teacher’s statements or expanding upon them with his own ideas compounds the difficulty of identifying the originator of the various ideas and opinions presented in the commentary.

yourself to [particular] places [for worshipping God], since your Worshipped One is not so confined. I would say: Indeed, He is above everything and does not mingle with anything.

To this I would add that some transmitters of the narrations have said that this verse was revealed before [the revelation of] the order to face a specific *qibla* during prayer. Others have said that it [the verse] was revealed concerning the change of the *qibla* from the Holy House (*bayt al-maqdis*) [sc. Jerusalem] to the Ka'ba [in Mecca]. However, there are detailed verses concerning this [issue] at the beginning of the second *juz'*,¹³⁹ in this [same] *sūra*.¹⁴⁰

Other [commentators and jurists] have said that it [this verse] was revealed with regard to voluntary prayer during travel, where it is not required that one face the direction of the *qibla*. Yet others have said that it [the verse] concerns those who make efforts to determine the proper direction [but arrive at an incorrect conclusion] – their prayer is valid, because the requirement of facing a particular direction was of communal significance with regard to the prayer and the unity of the [Muslim] community in [performing] it. The [underlying] basis [of the argument that one's direction during the prayer may be immaterial] is valid according to any of these opinions. Whatever direction the one performing the canonical prayer faces in his lawful prayer, he is directed toward God, seeking only Him in his prayer; God is also directed toward¹⁴¹ the one praying and is content with him.

It is known that the people of the book are obliged to face a certain direction in their prayer, like [for example] the Christian obligation to face the east. Since Muslims face the Ka'ba, the [Muslim] inhabitants of each country face one out of the four directions [during prayer]; [the Muslim community as a whole] therefore prays toward all of the directions, but this does not contradict their facing God. [The word] *wajh* here means direction (*jiha*); this is valid from the point of view of morphology, and means that there is a direction of prayer (*qibla*) which He [God] approves for you [given your geographical location]. It is said that this [verse] is analogous to [the verse], *three men conspire not secretly together, but He is the fourth of them* [Q. 58:7].¹⁴²

The relevance and connection between this verse [*so whithersoever you turn,*

¹³⁹ Beyond the *sūra* divisions (that is, the separate chapters), the Qur'ān is also divided, as a continuous running text, into 30 *juz'*s, each of which contains 2 *hizbs*. These divisions were intended to facilitate memorisation and recital: for example, in the fasting month of Ramaḍān, during which recital of the Qur'ān is particularly recommended, the thirty parts are managed as 1 *juz'* per day, so that the entire text is read in the one month.

¹⁴⁰ Obviously a *sūra* such as *al-Baqara* is disproportionately long in comparison to other chapters and actually continues into the third *juz'*. For the verses relevant to Riḍā's statement, see where the second *juz'* begins, at Q. 2:143.

¹⁴¹ *Muqbilun 'alayhi* has also the meanings of 'is attentive to him', 'draws close to him', or 'turns to [face] him'.

there is the face of God] and the previous one [*and who does greater evil than he who bars God's places of worship so that His name be not mentioned in them*] is apparent in light of this explanation – for [in the former verse] there is an invalidation of the belief, held by the followers of previous religions, that the worship of God is not permissible except in a specific temple or house of worship. In the invalidation of this [restriction], there is the elimination of what might be incorrectly assumed from the threat [contained in the latter verse against] *he who bars God's place of worship so that His name be not mentioned in them* – for this is a warning against the thwarting of worship in specified places. [The incorrect assumption would be that such a thwarting of worship in designated places of worship] would be a complete thwarting of the worship of God since such [worship] is only permissible [according to this opinion], in the designated places.¹⁴³ Thus the [former] verse refutes this false notion in a way whereby a most important credal rule is established for us, which is that God cannot be limited by directions or confined to locations. Nor is He drawn near to at [specific] sites or where certain religious covenants may have taken place. Nor can worshipping Him be restricted to temples and mosques. The warning [in the latter verse] then is directed at violations of what God has made sacred and at the destruction of a type of worship of Him, namely, the social ritual in which people gather at the most honourable of sites in order to perform the best of deeds, which purify their souls and improve their character.

This type of expression [i.e., the subtle connection between the two verses to make an additional point] distinguishes the Qur'ān from all other types of speech. In the Qur'ān, you find various types of rectifications (*istidrāk*) and precautions (*ihtirās*) mentioned in the course of a narrative or within the context of a legal ruling. You read a verse addressing a legal issue, an exhortation or a historical event in which there is an admonitory lesson that you may regard as independently meaningful; yet, in fact, it has [also] dispelled a false impression or completed a legal ruling [which is incomplete] by virtue of its connection to what was stated before.¹⁴⁴ Scholars of the Arabic language should have emulated these types of expression and so expanded [their] linguistic styles, for the

¹⁴² That is, both verses imply a condition: in the first case, that wherever you turn, the face of God is present; in the second case, that whenever three men conspire, God is with them as a fourth; and by extension, that whenever there is any secret talk between any number of people, and even just within the one person, God is there.

¹⁴³ In other words, Q. 2:115 redresses the following two beliefs: 1) that the worship of God is permissible only in restricted designated places of worship; and 2) that those referred to in the preceding verse, Q. 2:114, could possibly thwart the worship of God in its entirety by debarring worship in the designated places.

¹⁴⁴ In other words, such formulations are multi-faceted jewels, and typical of the way in which the Qur'ānic text works, whereby through one sentence several matters are dealt with.

Qur'ān liberated the language from its chains for them, teaching lofty styles [of expression] that delight the taste, affect the heart, move the soul deeply and stimulate alacrity. Instead, however, [these scholars] have not appropriated these new modes of expression [in their writing]. Nonetheless, their capacity for articulate expression was elevated after the revelation of the Qur'ān. The teacher said: 'We shall give this point its due explanation on an occasion when its relevance is stronger than it is here.'

Mawdūdī

Mawdūdī's commentary on this verse does not focus on the meaning of the *wajh Allāh*, nor does it discuss the medieval juristic reading of the verse in terms of the prayer-direction and its rules. Rather, his (limited) concern is with the omnipotence and dominance of God. God cannot be confined or reduced to certain (even sanctified) loci. For man to turn to God and His authority and the divine realm thus requires an internal orientation and trend within the human soul, an internal reform. Consonant with the methods of modern commentary, Mawdūdī's reading of the verse addresses the believer's immediate need to understand and internalise the import of the divine discourse. The medieval atomistic approach that spilt so much ink on the precise *Sitz-im-Leben* of the verse and the problem of the *qibla* change is discarded as petty squabbling that is not worthy of a true understanding of the verse.

*So whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God.*¹⁴⁵ God is neither eastern nor western. He is the possessor of all places and directions but He Himself is not limited to any particular place or direction.¹⁴⁶ Hence, to allocate a direction or place for His worship does not mean that God dwells in this or that direction.¹⁴⁷ Nor is it a matter worthy of argumentation or debate to say 'At first you used to pray in this or that direction, why have you now changed that direction?'¹⁴⁸

God is indeed All-embracing, All-knowing. That is, God is neither limited nor mean, neither narrow-minded nor poor in resources as you people, likening Him to yourselves, have thought Him to be. God's divinity is boundless and so

¹⁴⁵ *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, I, 105.

¹⁴⁶ This gloss stresses the omnipresent dominance of God and rejects a partial 'orientation' that may be read in a political sense.

¹⁴⁷ The denial of a specific cultic sanctity to a sacred space is a feature of much rationalising modernist thought. Whilst it may be read to affirm the universality of sacred space, here the issue of the *qibla* is determined in a conventional sense as obeying the divine command to orient oneself in a particular direction and the virtue of the *qibla* as prescribed and set by God.

¹⁴⁸ Mawdūdī attempts to shift the focus onto the existential import of the verse as a turning of man's attention and heart and loyalty to God; it is a critique of what is reported of the Jewish reaction to the change of the *qibla*, rather than a critique of classical commentary which sought to explain the *asbāb al-nuzūl*.

is His comprehensive vision and His all-encircling benevolence and mercy. Moreover, He knows which of His people is remembering Him, as well as where, when and with what intention [each person does that].¹⁴⁹

Faḍl Allāh

Faḍl Allāh's discussion of this verse, whilst briefly considering the issue of its context in the order of revelation, focuses upon the affirmation of divine unity. The verse is thus not about the *qibla*, the change of the *qibla* or how one orients oneself in prayer. Rather the verse deals with what he calls the central reality of monotheism and affirms the oneness of the godhead as indicated by His omnipresence and omniscience. Faḍl Allāh's method is to elucidate the meaning of the Word of God with the immediate concern of effecting a transformation in humanity's consciousness and awareness of itself as morally obliged agents and servants of God.

This verse expresses a monotheistic truth (*ḥaqīqa tawḥīdiyya*),¹⁵⁰ which is that God is not a body (*jism*) such that He might exist in a particular space as opposed to any other space, as other bodies do.¹⁵¹ He is above space and time, Possessor and Creator of everything, so that no specific place or direction confines Him. To Him belong the east and the west, and whithersoever you turn your faces, you will find God before you, 'displayed' in His creation through the fact that the greatness of the Creator is indicated by His creation. God is All-embracing in His sovereignty and His power, All-knowing of what is in your hearts when they turn in prayer and sincere devotion [to Him].

That is the general context suggested by the verse, but what lies behind this and what are the limits of its scope? Was it sent down with regard to humans turning [their faces] in prayer, so that it is mentioned in the place where the circumspexion of the *qibla* is mentioned, as has been transmitted from Ibn 'Abbās, since it is reported from Ibn 'Abbās that it was sent down regarding the Jews who denied [the validity] of the transfer of the *qibla* from Jerusalem (*bayt al-maḥḍis*) to the Ka'ba?¹⁵² Or was it sent down regarding voluntary prayer whilst on a journey, as is reported from the imams of the Family of the Prophet

¹⁴⁹ Divine knowledge is here being related to divine 'watchfulness'. God surveys and notes the actions and thoughts of man, since it is only through a thorough surveillance such as this that He judges fairly man's outcome. The sentence also slights hypocrisy. God knows why a person carries out a certain action, and if his prayer, for example, is merely an act of conformity or an attempt at currying favour, He knows, and hence the hypocrite better beware. Attacking hypocrisy is a major theme of modernist and reformist writing, along with the encouragement to 'wear one's religion' openly.

¹⁵⁰ A truth regarding the oneness, or unicity (or unity), of God.

¹⁵¹ *Min waḥy al-Qur'ān*, II, 184–5.

¹⁵² As reported in most of the preceding commentaries presented in this chapter.

(*ahl al-bayt*)?¹⁵³ Or was it sent down regarding cases of ignorance or doubt experienced by people turning in prayer other than in the direction of the *qibla*, thinking that it is the *qibla*, as is reported from Jābir [b. ‘Abd Allāh] in an incident that took place in the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad?¹⁵⁴

Nothing in the verse indicates that it is concerned specifically with cases involving prayer, or a particular form of prayer, although its general context does suggest this and that there was a discussion between Muslims [on this subject], and so this verse came to subsume the issue within its natural boundaries and eliminate the basis for any disagreement. Thus if God wanted us to turn towards a particular direction at a given time, it is within His capacity to make us turn towards a different direction at a different time, since the former direction was not legally prescribed on account of it being the place where God is located, but on account of the wisdom He knows [such a choice] entails: there is nothing to prevent there being further wisdom involved in [choosing] another direction. As for the case of [the verse] being specifically concerned with a particular type of prayer, this is subject to a close comparison between the [Qur’ānic] verses and the [narrated] reports that are set forth for the legislation of cases of total [applicability] and restricted [application of the regulations] concerning the *qibla*,¹⁵⁵ in the detailed discussions in jurisprudential treatises. Perhaps we should note in passing that the verse generally permits the turning towards God in any place [in any direction] wherever the context requires that a person turns towards God, except where a proof indicates that a specific direction is required, such as [in the case of] the obligatory prayer (*farīda*). For the remainder, such as voluntary prayers, they are unrestricted; in this way the reports cited regarding it [the verse] are explained as [references to] voluntary prayer or cases of doubt [concerning the direction of the *qibla*].

In any case, this does not prevent us from emphasising what we pointed out at the beginning of this discussion, namely that the verse is mentioned as the expression of a universal monotheistic truth and as the establishment [of the *qibla*], according to the unrestrictedness [implied] in this verse with regard to the situation of practical legal obligations.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ See the narrations in Qummī and ‘Ayyāshī.

¹⁵⁴ See the narration in Hūd; cf. Wāḥidī, *Asbāb*, 28–9, where also Ibn ‘Abbās is reported as holding that the verse was abrogated by verse 150 of the same *sūrat al-Baqara*.

¹⁵⁵ That is to say, when it is and when it is not necessary to turn towards the *qibla*.

¹⁵⁶ The unrestrictedness expressed in this verse should be taken as the establishing-point with regard to practical legal obligations. In other words, the practical matters of establishing either the direction of the *qibla*, or whether one is obliged to be facing the *qibla* in a particular prayer, should be established in accordance with the unrestrictedness mentioned in Q. 2:115, thus taking into account the situation of a person on a journey – that is, whether one is able to ascertain the direction of the *qibla*, or whether the prayer being performed is a canonical obligation or supererogatory worship.

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا
فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ
مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ
وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ