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## SOURCES AND APPROACHES ACROSS DISCIPLINES IN NEAR EASTERN STUDIES

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### THE ROLE OF PRAYERS IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE QUR'AN

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1. This paper addresses the topic of prayer as *du'ā'*, i.e. a prayer in the sense of a supplication or invocation of God in demand of something as opposed to the ritual prayer, *ṣalāt*, which is often mentioned in the Qur'an. Formula such as *tasbīḥ*, *tahmīd* and the like, which frequently constitute the opening lines of a *sūra*, are not given specific attention in this paper.

2. A close reading reveals that the Qur'an begins and ends with prayers as frame elements. In the beginning there is the *Fātiḥa* which is the main Muslim prayer comparable as such with the "Pater Noster" and the "Shma' Israel". In reciting these verses, the believer asks for guidance (*hudā*) to the straight path (*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*). The Qur'an itself provides the response to this prayer as it states in the beginning of the subsequent *sūrat al-Baqara*:

*Alif-lam-mim. That is the Book, wherein is no doubt, a guidance (hudā) to the godfearing ...<sup>1</sup>*

The existence of this link between the *Fātiḥa* and the beginning of the *Baqara* is mentioned by many Muslim commentators. Some go as far as to state that the existing link actually makes them a unit containing two *sūras* rather than two independently existing ones.

The two final *sūras* constitute prayers which are incantations against the evil — *al-Falaq* or "The Daybreak" (no. 113) and *an-Nās* or "Men" (no. 114). Reciting the last *sūra* of the Qur'an, the believer seeks protection from the main enemy of man — the Satan or Shayṭān — whose main goal is to mislead people and divert them from the straight path and make them to abandon guidance which they asked for. Like the first two *sūras*, Muslim tradition considered these two a twofold semantic and compositional unit, which is attested through their occasions of revelation

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<sup>1</sup> See A. J. ARBERRY, *The Koran Interpreted*, N.Y., 1955, p. 2.

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