The Qurʾan Reader's Companion

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To my dear wife

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Introduction

For better or for worse, the Qurʾan is one of the most momentous works of literature in the history of mankind. Incredibly, almost a quarter of humanity asserts that it contains the very words of God Himself. Societies across a vast swathe of the earth, stretching almost uninterrupted from the Atlantic coast of North Africa to the South Pacific, cite it as their spiritual, moral, political and legal compass. Given current demographic trends and population movements, it seems inevitable that significant urban areas of Western Europe will, within a few decades, similarly guided.

The radical nature of the belief the Qurʾan comprises the verbatim words of God is often overlooked by a population that has grown unused to serious critical evaluation of religious ideas. The most devout Jew or Christian reading the Bible can reflect upon the fact that the books of the Old and New Testaments were composed by humans, in many cases contributed to by many people over extremely long periods of time. They can readily be seen to preserve folklore, pious mythology, moral fables, laws, spiritual reflections and sacred history, all from the perspectives of authors who were limited, as are we all, by their circumstances and human condition. By contrast, it follows inevitably from the Qurʾan's supposed divine authorship that no part of the Qurʾan may be considered by any true Muslim to contain a factual error, to contradict another part, to have been ill-considered or poorly expressed, to have been derived from a human-authored work or to have become out-dated. A Muslim reader of the Qurʾan may permit themselves to reflect that in it God addressed Himself to the people of seventh century Arabia in a manner that would make His message accessible to them. His words may be understood to employ metaphors or idioms, or to address the concerns of a primitive tribal desert-dwelling society that need to be suitably adapted to changed circumstances. But where the Qurʾan unambiguously presents descriptions of past events or the

supernatural world as statements of fact or lays down a specific instruction, a Muslim may not in good faith revere those words as the final revelation of God whilst being in any way flawed. To this extent, for all their differences of interpretation and application, all Muslims are ultimately, in a sense, fundamentalists.

Yet astonishingly, despite the Qurʾan's huge historical and contemporary importance, barely any non-Muslim, and surprisingly few Muslims, have ever taken the time to actually pick up a copy and try to understand it for themselves.

In fairness, several factors make the Qurʾan a difficult read.

- The Qurʾan consists of one hundred and fourteen bodies of metered poetry or rhyming prose, known as surahs, which vary greatly in length from **Surah 108 and 112** which each consist of a mere twenty-four words in English translation, to **Surah 2**'s 286 verses (over eleven thousand words). The rhyming pattern suggests that most, if not all, were designed to be memorised and intoned probably in congregational prayer. In the original Arabic, the last word of each surah rhymes with the last word of the preceding or following verse, and several whole surahs are monorhymes. As one might expect with any foreign language poetry intended for performance, the text inevitably loses much of its literary quality when it is translated and read as printed prose.

- Due to it being the first major text to be composed in the Arabic language, the meaning of individual words is often contentious. Subsequent generations of scholars have invested words such as '*sharīʿah*', '*hijra*', '*fitna*', '*kuffār*', '*shirk*' and '*jihād*' with meaning by drawing upon the traditional accounts of the circumstances in which the Qurʾan was announced. However, these accounts were first written down over a century after the events they purport to describe and can often be shown to owe more to theological motifs, political needs or entertaining story telling as to history. Moreover, the Qurʾan author is prone to being deliberately enigmatic with his language use, employing a range of different words when referring to a

single thing, or else employing one word in contexts in which it must carry very different meanings. Many phrases are repeated either exactly (less than a half of the text of the Qurʾan appears only once) or with one or more crucial word substituted by another. This literary style may imbue the text with a sense of mysterious complexity but is frustrating for the reader seeking clarity. And even where a translator is clear in their own minds as to a word's intended meaning within a certain context, the concept involved may be so arcane and laden with contemporary significance as to lack a straightforward modern English translation. Any translator attempting to convey what they believe to be the Qurʾan's meaning, faces a choice. Either they must paraphrase the text according to their own understanding of its purpose, or else they must break up the text with a plethora of explanatory footnotes and insertions. The latter is the more honest approach but makes the going heavy for the reader.

- Many passages within the Qurʾan allude to stories on the assumption that they would be well known by their audience. Even for biblical stories, this assumption does not apply to many modern readers, but a good number of the stories referred to in the Qurʾan are inspired by non-canonical Jewish and Christian texts now familiar only to scholars of late antiquity, whilst some remain completely obscure.

- Other Quranic passages are clearly directed to specific situations faced by, or questions posed to, the Qurʾan's announcer. Without knowing the historical context, the significance of the guidance it offers is difficult, sometimes impossible, to appreciate.

For most readers of the Qurʾan, though, the single most formidable obstacle they face, and the one that this book is primarily intended to help them overcome, is the lack of a clear chronological or thematic structure. There is a consensus within Islam on the arrangement and numbering of the surahs (although not of naming of them or the numbering of the verses). There is no consensus

though over the chronological order in which the surahs were composed, nor even which surahs should be regarded as being intact compositions at all. In the introduction to a 1924 edition of the Qurʾan produced by the Al-Azhar University, hereafter referred to as the 'Cairo Edition', which is currently gaining acceptance across the Islamic world as the official standard Qurʾan text, thirty-six of the surahs are presented as including interpolated verses, *i.e.*, verses added to it after the core surah had been announced. This list is produced at **⟨8⟩** below, but it is by no means universally accepted.

It is not that the Qurʾan lacks any structure. After a short, introductory **Surah 1**, subsequent surahs are arranged, more or less, according to length from longer to shorter (a pattern that has a biblical precedent[1]) The length of verses also tends to decrease in proportion to the number of verses (the Qurʾan's longest verse, **{2.282}**, exceeds in length thirty-two whole surahs). With familiarity, other patterns can be discerned. Of the longer surahs, **2**, **3**, **4** and **5** tend to set out the Qurʾan's message in contrast to Judaism and Christianity, whilst surahs **6**, **7**, **8** and **9** are principally presented as opposing those who commit the sin of '*shirk*' – the association of partners with God (traditionally understood as a reference to polytheism and/or idolatry). Surahs often seem to consist of a tripartite structure around a narrative central section. Furthermore, they often visit and revisit themes according to an order that is either repeated (A-B-C-A-B-C), mirrored (A-B-C-C-B-A**)** or concentric (A-B-C-D-C-B-A). This last scheme, in which a passage's second half revisits the same themes that were addressed in the first half but in reverse order and reflecting a pivotal middle section has been observed in individual verses, sections of surahs and whole surahs, and sometimes on all three levels creating a highly sophisticated structure of 'wheels within wheels'.[2] In at least **Surahs 2** and **3** multiple 'ring' pattens are combined with a division into subsections identified by recurring forms of words. A structure that can strike the unenlightened reader as repetitive and chaotic, Nevin Reda[3] has compared to the complexity of a musical score with a rhythm brought to life with falling and rising 'volume', changes in tempo and recurring leitmotifs.

Some surahs seem to be designed to form pairs and clusters, addressing related topics, and several pairings of surahs have been proposed, in which the theme that is central to one becomes the commencement and conclusion of its companion and vice versa.

Notwithstanding the proposed sublime intricacy of its structure, for those people who wish to understand the meaning of the Qurʾan's messages, its fragmentary presentation of topics is unhelpful. The traditional account of the writing of the Qurʾan is that it had not been compiled as a single text within Muhammad's lifetime, but was collated following Muhammad's death, by Thabit bin Zayd who assembled the scattered records of the words of God from wherever he could find them, inscribed upon '*parchments, thin white stones, scapula, the leaf-stalks of date palms and in the hearts of men.*'[4] Many a Qurʾan reader through the ages must have felt, as one surah after another flits between biblical pericope, rallying oration, legal prescription and apocalyptic vision, that they are still sharing in Zayd's task, wading through disconnected passages, seeking to order and make sense of, to paraphrase Eric Morcambe, '*all the right words, not necessarily in the right order*'.

After addressing some preliminary issues, this book presents the topics encountered in the Qurʾan thematically. For each of the one hundred themes that are identified, the reader is directed to the relevant verses of the Qurʾan. I add to this summary, what secular scholarship can tell us of the circumstances in which they came to be written, as well as occasionally and to a lesser degree, how verses are interpreted within traditional Islamic thought.

The Qurʾan is a hugely important text. There is great controversy, often acrimonious and far too misinformed, over the issue: 'What does the Qurʾan say?' The purpose of this book is to offer navigational assistance and essential background information to the Qurʾan reader who embarks upon discovering the answer to that increasingly vital question for themselves.

Paul D d'A Ellis

Qurʾan references appear in **{_}** *brackets and quotations are, unless otherwise stated, taken from The Study Quran (2015).*

References to related sections of this book appear in **⟨ ⟩** *brackets.*

I

The Speech of God

1. Historical Context

Surah 30 (*Al-Rum/ The Byzantines*): 2-5

2. The Grecians were vanquished

3. Upon the frontier of the Persians,
but shall be victorious

4. Before the end of seven years.
God disposeth all things from the
beginning to the end.

When they shall be victorious, the True
believers shall rejoyce in the victory that
God shall give them.

5. He protecteth whom to Him seemeth good;
He is omnipotent and merciful.

[*'The Alcoran of Mahomet … newly Englished for the satisfaction of all that Desire to Look into Turkish Vanities', 1649,*
the first English translation of the Qurʾan (from a French translation) attributed to Alexander Ross, chaplain to Charles I.[5]]

The traditional Islamic narrative

In the traditional Islamic narrative, the revelations that make up the Qurʾan were received and delivered by Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years that started in 610 and ended with Muhammad's death in 632. For the first twelve of these years Muhammad is said to have preached in the desert trading hub and pagan pilgrimage site of Mecca. Then, fearing for his life from the scheming of Meccan pagans, Muhammad is said in the year 622 to have made the hijra, a migration to the oasis settlement of Yathrib, later to be renamed Medina. From this base, Muhammad organised his followers into a fighting force that waged a seven-year campaign against his former hometown, which eventually

surrendered to him in 630. With the original Meccan opponents of his message having been subdued, Muhammad ordered further expeditions to expand his domain, both south into Yemen and north to the frontier of the Byzantine Empire in Syria. By the time of his death, Muhammad's authority was unchallenged throughout the western part of the Arabian Peninsula, which he presided over as its divinely appointed ruler.

The society to which Muhammad preached was, according to Islamic tradition, overwhelmingly polytheistic. Some Jewish communities existed in locations across the Hijaz, notably at Yathrib and at Kaybar, and individual Christians are occasionally to be encountered in his story, such as Waraq ibn Nawfal, the cousin of Muhammad's first wife, Khadija. There were some Arabs, including Muhammad's own parents, who had preserved a pure form of monotheism called '*al-ḥanīf*' or '*the creed of Abraham*' **⟨22⟩**, which had been passed down through the generations from Abraham via his first-born son Ishmael. Besides the Jews and the Christians, two further religious communities are mentioned in passing in the Qurʾan, referred to, without elaboration, as the Sabeans and the Magians **⟨88⟩**. But fundamental to the story of Islam is the belief that Muhammad had been born into a world characterised by '*jāhilīyah*' ('*ignorance*'), in which the overwhelming majority of his neighbours were pagans, living uncivilised lives that were so deeply defined by dishonesty, licentiousness and superstition that almost any laws that the Qurʾan might have contained could be assumed to have been an improvement on their state.

Following Muhammad's death, so the traditional narrative continues, the community of believers that had coalesced around the prophet came to be led by four of his companions in turn. These are the so-called '*rāshidūn caliphs*' ('*rāshidūn*' meaning '*rightly guided*' and '*caliph*', either '*deputy*' or '*viceroy*'[6]) although it is worth observing that none of these four are known to have actually used the title caliph. These first four successors to Muhammad are Abu Bakr (632-634), Umar (634-644), Uthman - who compiled Muhammad's revelations into the Qurʾan we read today – (644-656) and finally Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali (656-662). Between them, these rulers forged a great Islamic empire that

stretched by the time of Ali from Libya in the west to Central Asia. The companions of the prophet's unity of purpose, however, was shattered by the murder of the third caliph, Uthman. His successor, Ali, proved unable to rally the community under his authority and his caliphate was overshadowed by a civil war, known as the First Fitna. At the conclusion of this war the office of caliph was seized by Uthman's cousin, Muawiyah I, who established his own clan, the Umayyads, as a ruling dynasty that would lead the Islamic community for the following ninety years. During this period, the empire expanded yet further so that within a century of Muhammad's death in the west its armies had crossed the Mediterranean (711), conquered the Iberian Peninsula and penetrated into Gaul, whilst in the east, the caliphate shared a border with China.

In 680, Muhammad's last surviving grandson, Husayn plotted against the Umayyad dynasty and at Karbala, the governor of Iraq ambushed his group, slaying Husayn, his two sons and many other leading members of the clan of Ali. This shocking event was the catalyst for a Second Fitna, a rebellion that came to be led by one Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr, which lasted for nine years although in the traditional narrative it has little long-term significance. Then in 750, a Third Fitna resulted in the overthrow of the Damascus-based Umayyads and the founding of a new dynasty, the Abbasids, who founded a new capital city, Baghdad, in Mesopotamia. The Abbasids would preside over the Islamic heartland for the following five centuries and oversee a fabled golden age of Islam, characterised by scholarly pursuits and tolerance.

This, in outline, is the origin story of Islam that appears in all the classical Islamic sources and still tends to be recounted more or less uncritically by encyclopaedias and schoolbooks. However, over the past half century it has become increasingly apparent that the society in which the Qurʾan was composed must have been far more religiously complex and sophisticated than the scorned 'age of ignorance' of later Islamic disdain. More puzzling, any contemporary physical and documentary evidence for the practice prior to 750 of a religion that is recognisable as Islam is astonishingly sparse and almost always problematic for the traditional narrative. The subject of the history of early Islam has

become a rapidly expanding field of research, in which the few facts over which there is academic consensus barely provide the sketchiest outline of a narrative.

The date of the Qurʾan's completion

Whilst it is clear that the Qurʾan must have been composed over a period of decades, the period within which it reached its final form can now be reduced just thirteen years. We can be confident that the Qurʾan was completed after 630 because the Qurʾan shows unmistakeable signs of drawing inspiration from two texts, *The Victory of Alexander* and Simocatta's *History of Maurice*, that must have been written after this time. More will be said of these works and the use that the Qurʾan author makes of them later in this section. The latest date upon which the Qurʾan could have reached its canonical form is provided by radiocarbon dating of the earliest Qurʾan manuscripts. A partial Qurʾan manuscript held at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, tested using this technique, has yielded a parchment creation date range of 591-643. This range has the earliest *terminus ante quem* (the earliest latest possible date) to have been found for a Qurʾan fragment analysed by this means, but it is by no means an isolated finding. In 2015 a Qurʾan manuscript discovered at the University of Birmingham was tested by four institutions and on the basis of their findings allocated a date range of 570-645. In fact, at time of writing a total of nine Qurʾan manuscripts have been dated to a period entirely before 690. Technically, one may say that this method only dates the parchment and not the writing upon it to these early dates, but the possibility that early Qurʾans were all written upon old parchments becomes less plausible with every manuscript dating. One may also wonder if some Qurʾan passages may have been added, amended or removed long after the basic text was first completed. It is a remarkable fact, given the supposed centrality of the Qurʾan to the great empire that formed in the middle east in the seventh century, that there exists nowhere a complete Qurʾan manuscript that is dated any earlier than 799 (and even that date is regarded as very dubious.[7]) Nor is there any satisfactory explanation for the fate that must have befallen all of the Qurʾans that must have been produced in Islam's first one and a half

centuries, so that not a single one survived intact. Despite these grounds to suspect some Qurʾan-tampering, every early manuscript with one notable exception (the lower text of the Sana'a palimpsest ⟨7⟩), agrees with the standard Qurʾan canon over the order of words within the verses that they record, the order of those verses within the relevant surah and the order of surahs. Moreover, meticulous studies of variations such as spelling differences across these manuscripts is allowing scholars to build up a detailed stemma, or family tree, mapping out the sequence in which these manuscripts must have been copied, one from another. The existence of this stemma demonstrates that all early Qurʾan manuscripts (subject to the aforementioned exception) were copies from copies, that must have originated with a single canonical archetype, now lost, from which four second generation copies, also all lost, were made. The scenario that a late antiquity ruler may have desired to change the text of the Qurʾan for his own ends is not in the least implausible. The scenario that he in fact did this by tracking down every Qurʾan across three continents and for each one, required a local scribe to make an amended reproduction of it, that retained the particular idiosyncrasies of the manuscript that he wished to see destroyed, is highly unlikely. Such a project would have been an Orwellian exercise in falsifying history unprecedented (so far as we know), before or since, in its ambition and success. Therefore, despite some lurking suspicions, this book will proceed upon the premises that the Qurʾan was composed, probably mostly by one man - there can be absolutely no doubt that the Qurʾan was written by a man - who completed his work no earlier than 630, and that canonical Qurʾans were in existence no later than 643. This is a short timeframe, but one that, as it happens, includes the traditional date for Muhammad's death of 632.

The dearth of evidence for early Islam

Throughout this Companion, the traditional Islamic narrative, of the life of Muhammad, with the sole exception of the recorded text of the Constitution of Medina, will be treated as entirely unreliable. The accounts of Muhammad's life, that date from the eighth century onwards, contain vastly more detailed information concerning the life, works, sayings, habits and preferences of

Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Abd al-Muttalib, than can be garnered for any other historical figure. And yet in fact we know virtually nothing concerning him with any degree of certainty. The earliest accounts of his life were written more than a century following his death **⟨5⟩** and read as moral or legal exemplars, heroic tales or hagiographic depictions of Islam's founder re-enacting a biblical or classical motif. Many episodes were clearly concocted for no reason other than to provide an explanation for an otherwise opaque passage in the Qurʾan. Where Muhammad lived, how his prophethood developed and even his name, are all matters of contention, and must be reconstructed anew from scanty historical evidence.

Concerning the empire that Muhammad founded, the sudden collapse in the 630s of Byzantine rule in north-west Arabia and Egypt, and of Sasanian rule in Persia and Mesopotamia is not in doubt, but there is little evidence of the Arab conquerors having formed a unified political entity before the 690s. They operated under no universally recognised collective name and, so far as we know, no insignia (Muhammad and the Rashidun Caliphate are traditionally said to have marched under a foreboding plain black banner, the Umayyads under a plain white one). It is probably more accurate to envisage these 'Arab conquests', as a coalition of tribes establishing their control over regions in which the imperial authority of Byzantium and Iran had collapsed rather than any unified but anonymous, flagless and largely undocumented empire. A fair comparison, it is suggested, might reasonably be drawn with the influx of barbarian tribes from Germany to sub-Roman Europe two centuries earlier. There is certainly little to no evidence that these initial conquests were seen by their leaders as any kind of religious enterprise, still less that the new rulers' religion, when it can be glimpsed at all, was recognisable as Islam. When Arab envoys reached China, they told the T'ang court a story of their nation's origins that bore no mention of Muhammad or of any religious cause (see **⟨5⟩** below). Amongst the earliest appearances in the historical record, of any of the 'caliphs' was the inscription of Muawiyah's name on the dedication plaque of a bathhouse in northern Palestine with the non-denomination-specific title '*emir of the believers*', alongside a prominent, but for Muslims highly incongruous, Greek cross. A less formal

inscription that likely commemorates the short reign of his son, Yazid I also incorporates a cross.[8] In fact the Arab conquerors continued to mint coinage featuring Christian crosses in the west and Zoroastrian fire alters in the east, almost until the end of the seventh century, and even after the addition of Arabic religious mottos such as the basmala ('*In the name of Allah*') **⟨5⟩**, the takbir ('*Allāhu akbar*', '*God is greatest*') and – strangely inscribed alongside the image of Kusrow II - '*Mhmd rasūl Allāh*' ('*Muhammad*' or '*maḥamad*' **⟨5⟩**, *is the messenger of God*'). One mysterious undated small square copper penny or charm bears the single word '*Mhmd*' directly beneath the depiction of a figure holding aloft a large cross.[9] A handful of short Quranic phrases appear in late seventh century rock inscriptions and on formal documents, and a series of Jesus-focussed Qurʾan passages feature in the decoration of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem that is dated to 72 AH (691/692). Yet no reference to the existence of a document that might be the Qurʾan has been found in any source earlier than the 720s.[10] This is more than seventy years after the Qurʾan's completion and is a silence that is simply incompatible with the traditional view of a vast and powerful empire spurred to conquest by the zeal to spread Islam. As late as the 730s, the last of the church fathers, St John of Damascus, who is described in his biography as having been a senior Umayyad official in the Umayyad capital, felt quite uninhibited in mocking stories that appear in the Qurʾan as heretical nonsense and Muhammad as an obvious charlatan. Amazingly, despite his position and learning, he appears to have been unaware of the existence of the Qurʾan as a single body of texts at all.

Evidence of the practice of Islam that, based upon the traditional narrative, one would have expected to find is conspicuous by its absence. The city of Mecca is now universally recognised as the spiritual home of Islam. It is supposedly the location of a shrine that God's final prophet had devoted much of his efforts to secure from paganism, towards which Muslims regard themselves as bound to face five times each day as they pray and to make pilgrimage to at least once in their lifetime if possible. Yet of this place there is no certain trace in any written account prior to the 690s, and even when references to a shrine do appear in the historical record, these early mentions are highly ambiguous and

contradictory as to the shrine's whereabouts.[11] Despite extensive excavation around the Kaaba in modern times to build infrastructure for the millions of pilgrims now making the annual Hajj pilgrimage, not one single archaeological object or trace of habitation from Muhammad's time or earlier has ever come to light. For a supposed pilgrimage site and trading centre the fact that not a single coin or shard of pottery should have surfaced appears extraordinarily suspicious. In 1987 Patricia Crone published *Meccan Trade and The Rise of Islam* which persuasively argued that not only is there no evidence that Mecca in fact existed during the lifetime of Muhammad, but that no trading centre could plausibly have existed in the seventh century at Mecca's location, far from any coast, major town or trade route and with minimal access to water. The Arab conquerors built few religious buildings, and, so far as one can tell, not a single one was oriented in even the approximate direction of the Hijaz until 727.[12] The reader will no doubt by now have deduced that the early Arab conquerors were not a bookish folk, but it is nonetheless remarkable that they presided over such great centres of learning as Alexandria, for well over a century without a second significant text (i.e., other than for the Qurʾan) dealing with any Islamic theme having been produced.

From the mid-seventh century, a modest number of impressive Qurʾan manuscripts were created across Arabia. Moreover, detailed analysis of the earliest legal texts committed to writing shortly after 750 demonstrates that these record a complex web of precedents and opinions based upon the Qurʾan and the practices of Muhammad and his companions. It is simply not credible that a group of eighth century jurists, often taking quite different approaches to the interpretation and application of law from literalists to traditionalist to rationalist, and reaching differing conclusions, would have conspired together to concoct the hundreds of informants that their law reports share.[13] It seems then that for much of the first Islamic century, production of Qurʾans was carried out by a relatively small group of devotees whilst the memory (or invented memory) of the practices of Muhammad had become embedded as part of a system of dispute-resolution and the maintenance of order, with little support from the leadership class. With regard to the latter, one might reflect the present proliferation in non-Islamic countries of sharia tribunals,

maintained by custom and societal pressure, as a modern equivalent of this original process.[14] And even within this emergent Arab legal system, the significance of the Qurʾan is unclear. Several entrenched sharīa law practices flatly contradict the clear provisions of the Qurʾan, of which the best known is the penalty of stoning to death for adultery **⟨69⟩**.[15] After about 690 short excerpts from the Qurʾan came to be imprinted upon coins and other official inscriptions and upon the decoration of the Dome of the Rock shrine, but there was to be no unambiguous recognition of the role of Muhammad or the Qur'an for the hundred or so years following its author's death. Based upon the rarity of unambiguously Islamic rock inscriptions, the same is probably true for the great majority of their subjects too. It is only from after the Abbasid revolution of 750, that we have evidence of the Qurʾan as a canon receiving significant official recognition. By this stage, it seems that a complex, and manifestly implausible, story of how it had come into existence had had to be devised. Even then, the crucial first biography of Muhammad by Muhammad ibn Ishaq has, like all the earliest Qurʾans, been inexplicably lost, coming to us only in quoted extracts, from works written one or more generations yet further removed from the events they purportedly describe **⟨5⟩**.

What one can say with confidence from a careful reading of the Qurʾan is that whilst Muhammad's world may have been extraordinarily poorly documented, it was far from the barren wilderness of primitive superstition and isolated monotheists that the traditional narrative describes. Rather, the Qurʾan provides ample evidence that it emerged from a highly complex and religiously sophisticated milieu that was framed by four great religious-political conflicts.

The 'Jesus Wars'[16]

In the century prior to the announcement of the Qurʾan, the Christian church had been riven by fierce and often violent disputation over the knotty theological question of the precise manner in which Jesus was the Son of God. The monophysite party, led by the patriarchs of Alexandria had preached that Jesus

possessed only one nature that was simultaneously human and divine. In its most extreme form, holders of this position disputed that Jesus, as God having taken on human flesh, could have even experienced physical pleasure or pain. To the church at Antioch, this interpretation amounted to an effective denial that Jesus was human at all. Its patriarchs responded that in order for Jesus to have been God made man, he must, as a matter of logic, have possessed two natures that had somehow co-existed separately (dyophytism). At the Council of Chalcedon, 451, an elegant compromise proposed by Pope St Leo I was adopted – that Jesus possessed '*two natures in one person*', his divine and human attributes existing '*unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably*'. Today the Chalcedonian definition satisfies most Christians who chose to ponder this arcane question, but in the late fifth and sixth centuries it was rejected by many on each side of the debate, leading to a series of schisms, purges, inquisitions and mutual excommunications across Christendom. One result of this disharmony was the emergence of a number of monophysite churches, including the Coptic Church in Egypt, the Tawahedo church in Ethiopia, the Armenian Apostolic Church, and in Arabia the Syrian Orthodox Church based in Antioch, formerly the staunchest defender of the two-natures position. The latter is often referred to as 'West Syriac Christianity' to distinguish it from a church based in Mesopotamia and Persia, beyond the reach of the Byzantine Empire and under the protection of the Kingdom of the Iranians, known as the Church of the East (or 'East Syriac Christianity'). This had declared itself to be autonomous of Rome and Byzantium prior to Chalcedon, and preached Jesus's divinity in pre-Chalcedonian terms ('Nestorianism') from within the Persia. By the time of the Qurʾan's composition then, Christianity in Arabia included overlapping Byzantine orthodox and monophysite sees, and two major schismatic Syriac churches, as well as a plethora of minor sects. Three great figures of this confusing Syriac Christian tradition are known to have influenced the Qurʾan through their writings:

> St Ephrem of Syria, 306-373, who established a literary tradition of poetic homilies and exhortations or *memrê*, short excerpts of which

appear at **⟨10⟩** and **⟨99⟩** below, that the format of parts of the Qurʾan appears to emulate.

Narsai, 399-502, who was baptised into the Church of the East and trained in the West Syriac tradition, whose homilies included several expansions on biblical stories which found their way into the Qurʾan **⟨22⟩**.

St Jacob of Serugh, 451-521, who managed to skilfully negotiate the Christological controversies whilst in the east, without losing communion with the western church, who was the earliest recorder of the legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, a version of which is told in the Qurʾan at **{18.9-22} ⟨28⟩**.

In the 620s and 630s, with Christian Byzantium fighting for its very survival, its emperor Heraclius, aided by Sergius, the patriarch of Constantinople, sought to heal the post-Chalcedonian schism by the addition of an interpretative gloss upon St Leo's compromise. Jesus still combined two natures in one person, but, it was proposed, both these natures involved the same '*theandric*', that is the same '*will*' or '*energy*'. The new proposal, monotheletism, initially seemed to promise unity. It attracted support from leading monophysites including the patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria and the schismatic Armenian church. But this was attained at the cost of alienating dyophysites who fiercely objected to the watering down of the two-natures stance. One of the most prominent critics of the new formula was a monk Sophronius, whose opposition propelled him, in 634, to the crucial position of patriarch of Jerusalem. The extent to which the Qurʾan author was aware of the subtleties of these controversies in his treatment of Jesus is not known. However, he was certainly aware of Christian disunity which he presented to his audience as God's punishment upon Christians for their saying that Jesus was God at all. He may have borrowed the invectives used by Christians against one another **⟨88⟩**.

The last great war of antiquity

The early seventh century saw the culmination of the epic struggle between Rome and Persia, sometimes said to have been humanity's most protracted conflict. During the seven-century course of this ultimate culture war, pagan Rome had been reincarnated as Christian Byzantium whilst the Parthian Empire had become Iranshahr, ruled over by the kings of kings of the Zoroastrian House of Sasan. By the start of seventh century, the two great empires were separated in Arabia by two confederations of Arab tribes. Jordan and southern Syria were under the control of the Christian Ghassanids, who were clients of the Byzantine Empire and guarded its desert frontier, whilst the predominantly pagan Lakhmids performed a similar role in Southern Iraq, for their patrons, the Sasanids. The final war that would become the conflict's endgame, commenced with both empires renouncing their Arab proxies, after the latter's religious affiliations had cast a doubt over their loyalty. In 583 the Byzantine emperor Maurice had deposed and exiled the last independent Ghassanid king, Nuʿman VI ibn al-Mundhir over his refusal to accept the Chalcedonian definition of the incarnation. Twenty years later, in 602, the Sasanian Shah, Khusrow II, invaded and annexed the territory of the Lakhmids, as the result of the conversion of their king - coincidentally also called Nuʿman ibn al-Mundhir - to Christianity. Kusrow appointed in Nuʿman's place one Iyas ibn Qabisa al-Ta'i, chief of the Tayyaye tribe, who ruled as Kusrow's vassal king from the city of al-Hirah. A letter, reputedly sent by Khusrow, explains his actions and refers to his proxy in disparaging terms:

> *Nuʿman and his clan had conspired with the Arab tribes against us by convincing them that our empire will pass to them. I learned this from a letter, so I killed him and appointed an ignorant Arabian who known nothing of all this to rule Hirah.*[17]

At the start of 602 the Byzantine emperor Maurice enjoyed friendly relations with Khusrow, whom he had helped to power, but later in the year Maurice was deposed by one of his generals, Phocas, and Kusrow launched an offensive against Byzantine territory in Arabia purportedly to avenge Maurice. In the first phase of the war Khusrow enjoyed extraordinary success and eight years later,

Phocas was facing the loss of all of its eastern territories. In 610 a general Heraclius seized the imperial throne in an attempt to save as much as possible of what remained, but he found Kusrow's armies to be unstoppable. Damascus fell to the Sasanians in 614, and Jerusalem in 615, Khusrow capturing and carrying off the relic of the one True Cross. By the end of 615 Kusrow was besieging Constantinople itself. However, the siege failed. and between 622 and 628 Heraclius led one of the greatest comebacks in military history, launching an unexpected attack on the Sasanian heartland through Armenia. The success of this prompted a civil war within Iran and the removal of Kusrow, whose successor Kavadh then agreed to return all of the Byzantine territory that had been seized in 611-15. In 630 Heraclius entered Jerusalem in triumph.

At some stage during these events, reports describe an Arab revolt against Sasanian rule led by a tribe, the Banu Bakr ibn Wāʾel. Ibn Qabisa confronted the Banu Bakr at a location in northern Iraq referred to as Dhu Qar, but he was defeated, and removed by Khusrow in 617 (see **⟨5⟩** below).

These dramatic events are alluded to explicitly in the Qurʾan just once at **{30.2-5}** (see below). Their impact upon the life and ambitions of the Qurʾan author, however, must have been colossal. Jacob, bishop of Edessa, writing in the 680s recorded that Muhammad established a Tayyaye kingdom in 622. This was the traditional date of the hijra - but the kingdom would probably have been further north than Yathrib and made possible by Khusrow's scramble to redeploy his forces to meet the threat from Heraclius. Later, the Qurʾan would adopt Heraclius's propaganda, composed upon his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, as its own, probably as the Qurʾan author himself prepared to do likewise.

The expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem and Edessa

The Qurʾan draws deeply upon Jewish thought, not merely as contained in the sacred text of the Hebrew (and Christian) Bible, but also upon rabbinic commentaries and more esoteric Jewish mystical traditions. Several verses of the Qurʾan address Jews within its audience and its author apparently judged cases according to the Mosaic law. Yet there is no archaeological or

historical record of any permanent Jewish communities having ever lived in Yathrib, Kaybar or anywhere else in the Hijaz as described in the traditional narrative.[18] This alone, would give cause to suspect that it was composed further north of the Hijaz. One chronicle tells us exactly how Muhammad came to lead an alliance of Arabs and Jews. This is a chronicle written in Armenia under the adopted name of Sebeos, an illustrious former Armenian bishop, often referred to as the *Armenian History of Pseudo-Sebeos* (but hereafter for convenience, referred to just as Sebeos). The last entries in this chronicle record events in 661, and so it is likely that its accounts of the 602-628 was were recorded within a few decades at most of those events occurring. According to Sebeos, with the Sasanian advance into Byzantine territory the long-persecuted Jewish population of the Levant rose up in revolt against the Byzantine authorities.

> *'The entire country of Palestine willingly submitted to the king of kings* [Khusrow]. *The remnants of the Hebrew people especially rebelled from the Christians and manifesting desire for a homeland wrought very damaging slaughters among the multitude of believers, and united with (the Iranians)'.*[19]

Jerusalem fell to Khusrow in 614 and both Christian and Jewish traditions relate that the Persians permitted the Jews to return to Temple Mount and to build a place of worship there. Shortly afterwards however, conflict broke out between the Jewish and Christian communities in which the Christians prevailed, massacring many Jews. A Jewish hymn *Ha'et li'geor* (*The Time to Rebuk*e) celebrates the brief Jewish re-occupation of the Temple Mount and mourns their expulsion from it:

> *A brief respite will be gained by the people of holiness,*
> *Assyria allowing them to found a temple of holiness;*
> *and they will build there an altar of holiness*
> *and they will sacrifice offerings of holiness.*
> *But they will not have chance to erect the mountain of holiness,*
> *for there has yet been no scion of the root of holiness.*
>
> *First there will come the advance guard*

> *into a temple there to talk to the people,*
> *and he will be made a general and a head.*
>
> *Within three months…*
> *upon him a general will pounce,*
> *and in the Temple he will be trampled*
> *and on the rock his blood will be spilt.*

Following their defeat, Sebeos describes that '*the remainder of the Jews jumped from the walls and went to the Iranian army*.' This brought them little benefit, however, as upon the Sasanians reasserting order in the city, they refused the Jews permission to return. Worse, when Heraclius regained control of his lost territories in 628, he is said to have responded to the Jerusalem Jews' treachery by compelling all Jews throughout the Byzantine Empire to convert to Christianity. A later chronicle written by Michael the Syrian records:

> *In this era, the Emperor ordered that all the Hebrews that lived in all Roman territories would become Christians. For this reason, Hebrews ran away from Roman territories. First, they came to Edessa, when they began being attacked there they ran to Persia. Many of them received the baptism and became Christians*.[20]

According to Sebeos one particular group of Jews fortified the city of Edessa and Heraclius besieged them there. No date for this is given, but it was probably on or around 628. The siege concluded with Heraclius permitting the Jews to leave and '*go and stay in their own place*'. It was these same Jews, according to the chronicle, that then encountered Muhammad and forged an alliance with him **⟨37⟩** to reclaim the Holy Land.

South Arabia

Inscriptions show that the kings of Himyar, in modern day Yemen, had converted to Judaism in the 380s. In the 520s the last Jewish Himyarite king, Yusuf As'ar Yathar (Dhū Nawās), is said to have ordered a massacre of Christians at the city of Najran provoking an invasion of Himyar by the Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum. The

Aksumite invaders were led by a general called Abraha, who deposed Yusuf and established himself as a Christian king of Himyar. His dynasty was to be a short one. In 570, the traditional year of Muhammad's birth, Abraha's son was deposed in an uprising led by a Jewish prince, Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan with Sasanian support, and after a further civil war the Sasanians established direct control of Yemen. The Najran massacre is traditionally believed to have been the event described in the Qurʾan's **Surah 85**, whilst Abraha, who had avenged it, is said to have been the leader of the doomed '*companions of the elephant*' of **Surah 105**. Both these explanations of Qurʾan passages are, it will be suggested at **⟨9⟩** below, implausible. **{85.4-8}** cheerfully describes God's enemies' destination in the Hellfire, rather than the victims of a historical immolation, whilst the fanciful story of Abraha's march with an elephant upon Mecca would not have been feasible for practical reasons. However, the debunking of these two pieces of exegesis should not distract from the fact that the Qurʾan contains substantial evidence of an Ethiopian/ South Arabian influence on its language and ideas. The Ethiopian Tawahedo church preserved in Quranic times, and still retains, a far stronger Jewish identity than almost any other Christian denomination. Unlike other Christian churches, its adherents abide by the Jewish sabbath, uphold Old Testament dietary laws and practise circumcision. Rock inscriptions demonstrate that after Abraha's invasion of Himyar, show that he had adopted the distinctively Jewish or Quranic sounding phrase '*Messiah of God*' to describe Jesus rather than a term that proclaimed Jesus's divinity. An example is given at **⟨10⟩** below. The Jewish character of Ethiopic Christianity of course preserves the practises of the original apostolic church. It also, no doubt, served later to make Abraha's rule more palatable to his Jewish subjects than Byzantine or Syriac styles of Christianity would have been.[21]

This also chimes with the theological outlook of the Qurʾan, which presents Jesus as one of the Jewish prophets and validates aspects of the Mosaic law that had long since been eschewed by mainstream Christianity **⟨26⟩**, **⟨88⟩**. It has occasionally been suggested, based upon the Qurʾan's apparent fusion of Jewish and Christian ideas that the Qurʾan's author may have taken his inspiration from some 'Jewish-Christian' sect. By this phrase is

meant either a Christian group that had retained or rediscovered the Jewish identity of the apostolic church, or else a Jewish sect that had accepted Jesus as the promised messiah. Such groups had once existed but there is no evidence for any having survived into the fifth, let alone the seventh century. It would be entirely unsurprising, though, that the Qurʾan's author, should have been influenced by his exposure to an Ethiopian/South Arabian tradition of combining Jewish and Christian terminology and practices.

There is no tradition in Islam that Muhammad himself ever went to Africa, nor even to Himyar. However, the Qurʾan at **{33.14}** cites Yathrib as the home of the believers, a city that had been claimed by Abraha as part of his hegemony.[22] Moreover, the traditional narrative preserves a memory that in the first decade of his mission, Muhammad sent half of his followers to Abyssinia for their safety. Whether or not this event occurred, the story does not seem to have been required to explain the Qurʾan and so at the very least, probably a South Arabian orientation during Muhammad's Yathrib years. Evidence of such an orientation may also be found in the Qurʾan in the use of a number of words that are derived from Ge'ez (an Ethiopic language), including:

> '*wangel*', originally from the Greek '*euangelion*', likely to have been the immediate source of the Qurʾan's word for gospel, the '*injīl*',
>
> '*ḥawāryā*' (literally '*walkers*'), referring to the disciples of Jesus, which appears in the Qurʾan as '*ḥawāariyyūn*', and
>
> '*mā'edd*' ('*feast*') that appears in the Qurʾan as '*al-māʾida*', '*the table spread*' by Jesus in **Surah 5**,
>
> '*al-shaytan al-rajīm*' ('*repulsive satan*') **⟨17⟩**, and
>
> '*jibt*' ('*false god*', literally '*newcomer*') and '*tāghūt*' *('idol')* **⟨34⟩**.

The name '*Tawahedo*' itself, a Ge'ez word meaning '*to be united*' adopted by the Ethiopian church to proclaim its monophysite Christology, has provided Islam with the name ('*tawḥīd*') of its central doctrine: the oneness of God. Most importantly, it begins to refer to God by the name '*al-Raḥmān*' ('*the Merciful*'), and to adopt the distinctively repetitive phrase '*al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*', that rock inscriptions show has a long history of pre-Quranic use by both Jews and Christians in southern Arabia (to be considered in more detail at **⟨10⟩** below). This Ethiopic linguistic influence is not pervasive throughout the Qurʾan. It is entirely absent from the short surahs that are normally considered to be the Qurʾan oldest compositions and when it appears, it is striking that it tends to feature in passages that are particularly pertinent to Christianity.

Eschatological expectations

These four religious-political struggles, the Christological disputes within Christendom, the thwarted ambition of the Jewish people to restore the Temple, and the wars for dominance over North and South Arabia, all contributed to a heightened expectation across all communities that the end of the world could be at hand. In *The Apocalypse of Empire, Imperial Eschatology in late antiquity and Early Islam*, Stephen J Shoemaker traces the evolution of the apocalyptic genre from its origins as consolation for the Jewish people during their captivity by the Babylonians (e.g. the Books of Jeremiah, Isaiah), through grand historical narratives seeking to present the rise and fall of empires as leading inexorably to End of Days (the Book of Daniel). Jesus had taught that the End of Days was not merely close but that '*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*' (Matthew 3.2, 4.17, 24.34 and 26.64; Mark 1.15). These words, followed by the Jewish War (66-73) and the destruction of the Second Temple had inspired over a dozen Christian apocalypses detailing how the End of Days would occur, of which one, the Book of Revelation, had been accepted by the Church into the New Testament. When the Roman Empire became Christianised in the fourth century, Shoemaker explains, a new apocalyptic model was called for that predicted not the salvation of the Jews from a corrupt empire but a Christian empire's culmination in a final heroic emperor. Expectation of such a figure seems to have originated in *Tiburtine*

Sybil, a pseudo-Sibylline oracle. This predicted that the Last Emperor would repel an invasion by barbarians, referred to with the biblical names of Gog and Magog **⟨30⟩**, and spread his reign over all the world, converting Jews and pagans and ruling righteously, before relinquishing his crown at Jerusalem to returned Jesus. As the world passed, so it was believed, into its seventh millennium, its completion of six 'days' (every day to God equalling a thousand years on earth, *per* Psalm 90.4, 2 Peter 3.8, *c.f.* **{22.47}** and **{32.4}**) such a figure was expected to arise at any moment. Justinian (527-565) who had recaptured north Africa from the Vandals and Italy from the Ostrogoths had seemed a likely candidate. In the 590s, within the lifetime of the Qurʾan's author, Pope Gregory I endorsed the accuracy of a vision received by his recent predecessor John III that '*the end of all flesh has come!*' observing that '*in this land of ours the world is not merely announcing its end, it is pointing directly to it*'.[23] Heraclius fulfilled the *Tiburtine Sybil*'s criteria of he expected Last Emperor better than had any predecessor, even the great Justinian. Not only had he repelled a pagan invasion in the most dramatic of circumstances but, he had ordered the conversion of all Jews in his empire to Christianity and had even, no doubt with the legend in mind, entered Jerusalem in imitation of Jesus, bearing the retrieved relic of the cross.

Two pieces of imperial propaganda were produced that presented these events as apocalyptic, both of which can be shown to have directly influenced the text of the Qurʾan. One of these is called *The Victory*, or *Heroic Deeds*, *of Alexander*, sometimes the *Syriac Alexander Legend* and depicts the events of the Byzantine-Sasanian War through a romanticised allegory featuring Alexander the Great fighting a war against a fictitious Persian king, Tubarlaq. During the central portion of this book, Alexander travels to the ends of the earth, discovering the places where the sun rises and sets. He also protects a people who are threatened by Gog and Magog, by building a great wall of iron and brass between them and their tormentors. However, he places an inscription upon the wall warning when Gog and Magog eventually break through the defences, this will set in chain a series of events that will signal the end of the world. **Surah 18** of the Qurʾan tells the tale of a traveller whom the Qurʾan identifies as Dhu'l Qarnayn which contains unmistakable elements from *The Victory of Alexander*. Like

Alexander, Dhu'l Qarnayn attends the locations of sunrise and sunset and confines two tribes Majuj and Jajuj, behind a great wall of iron and bronze **⟨30⟩**.[24] It is, for Stephen J Shoemaker, a 'smoking gun' indication of a direct connection between the Qurʾan and late imperial eschatology.[25]

The second such text is the *History of Maurice* by Theophylact Simocatta. Maurice was the former Byzantine emperor whose deposition by one of his generals had sparked the 602-628 war. Simocatta's history contains a passage in which Khusrow, whilst a guest of Maurice in Constantinople, had received a premonition of future events: the coming war, his early success and eventual defeat. For Khusrow, as with *The Victory of Alexander*, the Byzantine victory was portrayed as ushering in a period of righteous rule prior to the apocalypse:

> *Be assured that troubles will flow back in turn against you Romans. The Babylonian race will hold the Roman state in its power for a threefold cyclic hebdomad of years* [a hebdomad being a sevenfold period]. *Thereafter you Romans will enslave Persians for a fifth hebdomad of years.*
>
> *When these very things have been accomplished, the day without evening will dwell among mortals and the expected fate will achieve power, when the forces of destruction will be handed over to dissolution and those of the better life hold sway.*

{30.2-5} (produced above) contains the only direct allusion in the Qurʾan to a contemporary event. Almost all editions of the Qurʾan render the passage as referring to a recent Byzantine defeat - '*the Romans have been vanquished*', **{30.2}** - followed by the prediction of a resurgence in Roman fortunes - '*Yet after being defeated they will prevail after a few years…and on that day the believers shall rejoice*', **{30.3-4}**. A Quranic variant reverses the position, predicting that a recent Roman victory would be followed by its ultimate defeat.[26] Since the victory of Heraclius over the Sasanians was to be followed shortly thereafter by the loss of most of the territory that he had regained to the Arabs either version could be the authentic one. Whichever version was the original, these verses are generally

interpreted by believers as a straightforward demonstration of God's knowledge of and power over future events. Why it should be that (on the majority reading) the believers should rejoice at the triumph of an empire that proclaimed trinitarian Christianity is not clear. To rejoice at the success of Christians over Zoroastrians seems wholly inconsistent with the Qurʾan's teaching that belief in the divinity of Jesus is itself a grave error. Explanations that have been offered include that the verses demonstrate monotheist solidarity in the face of a common foe or that the hope for a Byzantine victory was purely opportunistic. Neither is entirely convincing.

The key to understanding the passage, though, lies in the innocuous-sounding expression '*on that day*' ('*yawma ḏin*'). This phrase is used over seventy times in the Qurʾan to refer specifically to '*the Last Day*'. On several occasions it is repeated in close succession, appearing for example in four consecutive verses in **{69.15-18}** and five times within six verses in **{25.22-27}**. Clearly the Qurʾan author's intention was to invest the phrase, in the minds of its audience, with this very particular meaning (*c.f.* **{18.99 & 100}** produced at **⟨30⟩** below). The phrase is even used in this way on two subsequent occasions within **Surah 30** itself: in **{30.43}** ('*On that Day (the idolaters) shall be spread asunder*') and in **{30.57}** ('*On that Day the excuses of those who do wrong will benefit them not*'). Sensitive to this usage, **{30.4}**'s '*day*' should in English translations be capitalised to reflect that it refers not to the day of the Byzantine victory but to the Last Day: '*On that Day the believers will rejoice*'. Shoemaker suggests the following paraphrase of the four verses:

> *'The Romans have been defeated in the nearest (part) of the land [the Holy Land]. But after their defeat, they will triumph in a few years. The reign of God is before and after, and on the Last Day the believers will rejoice in the victory of God. The Promise of God!'* [27]

The significance of these verses lies then not in the military fortunes of Byzantium *per se* at all, nor of the anticipation of any mere earthly celebration. As with the story of Dhu'l Qarnayn, the Qurʾan author adopted for his own purposes the then current Heraclian propaganda that the Byzantine-Sasanian war of 602-628

had indeed been the war to end all wars, the Armageddon that signalled that the long-awaited eschaton was finally at hand.[28]

The Quranic milieu

The four conflicts described above, the fracturing of Christendom over the nature of Jesus, the final war between Byzantium and the House of Sasan, the expulsion of Jews from the Holy Land and the Byzantine-Sasanian struggle for dominance in the south - each would have contributed to the complex religious milieu from which the Qurʾan emerged. The Qurʾan's dependence upon *The Victory of Alexander* and Simocatta's *History of Maurice*, outlined above, illustrate the importance of complex Judeo-Christian themes to the outlook of the Qurʾan author and at least some of his audience. Whilst Jews, Byzantine and Syriac Christians and Zoroastrians fought to control Palestine the Jordan plain, Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia, on the southern periphery of this great battlefield, it is reasonable to suppose that many survivors of persecutions, expulsions, deportations and the inevitable disruption of war, might have found themselves. Beyond these borderlands, the remote and inhospitable deserts and mountains of north and central Arabia, may easily have attracted not merely the full spectrum of Jews and Christians, but also the followers of creeds from further east: Manichaeism **⟨5⟩**, Mandaeism and Mazdakianism. Adherents of all of these traditions and, one might easily imagine, a smattering of free-spirited hermits, mystics and gnostics, may have found themselves eking out a difficult existence in proximity to one another in a postulated '*Jurassic Park of heresies*'.[29] Far from the barren wasteland of primitive superstition that has traditionally been imagined, the evidence is that it was within a setting of intense, varied, well-informed and innovative religiosity that the Qurʾan author composed his masterpiece.

2. Geographic Setting

Surah 6 (*Al-Anʿam/The Cattle*): 99

> **It is He Who sends down water (rain) from the sky,**
> **and with it We bring forth vegetation of all kinds,**
> **and out of it We bring forth green stalks,**
> **from which We bring forth thick clustered grain,**
> **and out of the datepalm and its spathe come forth**
> **clusters of dates hanging low and near,**
> **and gardens of grapes, olives and pomegranates,**
> **each similar (in kind) yet different (in variety and**
> **taste).**
>
> **Look at their fruits when they begin to bear, and the**
> **ripeness thereof. Verily! In these things there are**
> **signs for people who believe.**

[*'Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qurʾan', 2011, by Dr Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Dr Muhammad Muhsin Khan, both of the University al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*]

The Qurʾan is short on clearly identifiable place names that provide clues as to where it was composed. The early Qurʾan, (discussed at **⟨9⟩** below) offers only a handful of proper names, most of which cannot be confidently attributed to known locations or peoples and some of which are likely entirely imaginal. Moses encounters the burning bush in the unknown '*holy valley of Tuwa*', **{79.16}**. The ledgers of mankind's sins and virtuous deeds are preserved at Sijjin and Illyyun respectively, **{83.7-8 & 18-19} ⟨97⟩**. On the Last Day ingrates shall be cast into Saqar, **{74.26-27 & 42}** (*c.f.* **{54.48}**). The audience is warned by reference to the destroyed peoples of ʿAd, Thamūd (literally '*the people after ʿAd*') and Iram, each of which has left some trace in the archaeological record whilst falling short of being a clear historical reference **⟨27⟩**. A single reference is made to a people called the Quraysh in **{106.4}**, traditionally supposed to Muhammad's own tribe.

The only two geographical placenames in these early surahs that can be clearly located are both best known for their associations with the story of Moses. These are:

- the land of Midian **⟨27⟩** on the Jordan plain, which Moses had settled after fleeing Egypt and where he had received his command to return to Egypt to liberate his people, and

- Mount Sinai, where Moses had received the ten commandments, which is invoked in an oath made in **{95.2}** (*c.f.* **{23.20}**).

The reference to the doomed people of Thamud who had inhabited '*rock hewn dwellings*' that were said to have been well known to the Qurʾan's audience, is often associated with either the ruined city of Petra in Jordan **⟨27⟩** or the deserted tomb complex of al-Hijr, 250 miles from Yathrib. Whilst these famous sites must be the two most likely candidates, there are a number other abandoned 'rock-hewn dwellings' within the potential Quranic landscape, from Lalibela in Ethiopia to Cappadocia in Turkey. **{37.137}** draws its audience's attention to some unspecified sign of God's destruction of the people of Lot, which the Qurʾan's listeners are reminded that they '*pass by … in the morning, and at night*' **⟨75⟩**. The Torah tells us that Lot lived near the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah on the Jordan plain, and so, whatever sign the Qurʾan was referring to - possibly one of two geographical features each known as the Pillar of Salt on the shore of the Dead Sea – this was probably on the Jordan plain.

Comment has already been made on the absence of any early evidence for the existence of Mecca during the lifetime of Muhammad **⟨1⟩**. Even had a settlement existed on the site of present-day Mecca, it is inconceivable that some of the passages of the Qurʾan that are traditionally called 'Meccan' could have been announced there. Several verses, including **{2.164}**, **{6.99}** (produced above), **{6.141}**, **{32.27}** and **{80.24-32}** invite its audience to reflect upon the blessings of abundant rainfall and a fertile land as symbols of God's providence. This would have been a comedic line of argumentation to have deployed in one of the most arid and inhospitable places on earth. Where the Qurʾan

condemns idolaters for '*slitting the ears of cattle*', **{4.119}**, and refers to the pastures of its audience's flocks, **{80.32}**, this is strong evidence that the Qurʾan's first audience included livestock farmers. Other passages appeal to the experience of seafarers. Seas are cited a number of times as signs of God's creative benevolence as are ships and their navigability **⟨13⟩**. **{24.40}** describes the '*darkness of a fathomless sea, covered by waves*' and listeners are asked to reflect upon being caught in a storm at sea, '*as waves come at them from every side, and they think that they shall be encompassed by them*', **{10.22}** (*c.f.* **{6.63}**, **{17.67}**, **{29.65}** and **{31.32}**). This may have been an attempt to replicate Psalm 107's sea-sickness inducing:

> *23. All those who sailed in ships on seas,*
> *trading on the deep waters,*
> *24. These saw the works of the Lord,*
> *And His wonders in the abyss,*
> *25. His command raised up a storm wind,*
> *which tossed its waves on high,*
> *26. They mounted up to heaven, they sank to the depths,*
> *their hearts melted away in their plight,*
> *27. They reeled and staggered like drunken men,*
> *And all their skill was swallowed up,*
> *28. They cried to the Lord in their distress,*
> *And from their straits he rescued them.*

The reality is that one would hardly expect to encounter many farmers or sailors deep in the Arabian desert. Later accounts of Muhammad's life include details such as his grazing livestock as a young man, his praise for Mecca's grass and a Muslim prisoner eating grapes from a Meccan vine. They also describe Mecca as a city overlooked by mountains and reached through upper or lower mountain passes with a nearby parallel valley. None of the above can be reconciled with the climate, lack of vegetation and topography of Mecca in the Hijaz, which is in a sandy plain, with the nearest mountain several miles away. It seems to be an unavoidable conclusion that, at least in its earliest stages, the Qurʾan was announced far away from the Mecca we know today and that the story of its narrator was subsequently transplanted there, probably by somebody unaware of the harshness of its climate.

Although the geographical references are meagre, those that are present in the text point to the Qurʾan's early surahs having been announced in the Ghassanid- or Lakhmid- occupied lands of Jordan and Syria. Since there is no single location for which inhabitants could have both passed any remnant of Sodom daily and also have had ruined rock-hewn 'dwellings' visible to them, and since the localities of neither Sodom, Petra nor al-Hijr would be likely to attract many seafarers, one might reasonably speculate that for part of the Qurʾan's announcement history, its author was itinerant in the Syria, Jordan and Palestine region. This scenario is consistent with the traditions, from both Muslim and non-Muslim sources, that Muhammad had once been a travelling merchant. It might also be a factor in explaining the Qurʾan's repetitiveness and its author's relaxed approach to consistency.

The Masjid al-Haram

Central to the Qurʾan's narrative is a place that it calls the Masjid al-Haram, commonly rendered by a phrase such as '*the sacred place of worship*'. This name appears in the Qurʾan fifteen times: **{2.144, 149-150, 191, 196 & 217}**, **{8.34}**, **{9.7, 19 & 28}**, **{17.1}**, **{22.25 & 29}** and **{48.25 & 27}** but the same place is also referred to by a number of different epithets:

'*the House*', **{2.127}**and **{8.35}**,

'*the Sacred House*', **{5.97}** and **{14.37}**,

'*the Ancient House*', **{22.26}**,

(in the divine voice) '*My House*', **{2.125}** and **{22.26}**
(*c.f.* the description of God as '*Lord of this House*', **{106.4}**),

'*the first house created for mankind … at Bakka*', **{3.96}**,

the '*station*' or '*standing place*' of Abraham, **{2.125}**
and **{3.97}**, and

'*the Kaaba*' (literally '*The Cube*'), **{5.95 & 97}**.

Barely mentioned in the early surahs, this place comes to assume huge importance in the Quranic worldview. It is towards here that believers are told to face when they pray **⟨40⟩** and they are obligated to make a pilgrimage here if they are able to **⟨57⟩**. It is the location from whence God's servant is reported to have embarked upon a mysterious journey to '*the furthest mosque*' **⟨35⟩**. It is also a sacred place from which the Qurʾan's audience has been wrongfully expelled, which they are commanded to fight to regain access to **⟨37⟩** and from where the Qurʾan ultimately commands that idolaters should be themselves excluded upon pain of death **⟨51⟩**. In short, it is the centre of the Qurʾan's sacred landscape. Of its history we are told that this place had been '*assigned for Abraham*', **{22.26}**, that the foundations of a building had been raised there by Abraham and Ishmael, **{2.127}**, and that Abraham '*settled his progeny*' nearby **{14.37}**. It was already, in Quranic times the destination of two pilgrimages known as the '*ḥajj*' and the '*ʿumrah*', that are associated with animal sacrifices, circumambulation **⟨57⟩**, the going '*to and fro*' between two places, named as Safa and Marwa, **{2.158}**. This last activity is commonly translated as being '*amongst the rituals of God*', although *The Study Quran* notes that '*shaʿāʾir*' ('*rituals*') may alternatively mean only '*sacred places*'). The masjid may be located within *'the Mother of all Cities*', **{6.92}** and **{42.7}**.

Islamic tradition has no hesitation in holding that all of the above refers to the present-day, Kaaba, the rectangular, black curtain-draped shrine, at the centre of a colonnaded piazza that bears the name Masjid al-Haram, at Mecca. The Qurʾan's reference to this shrine as being '*the first house created for mankind'* and the multiple associations of it with Abraham are justified by Islamic traditions including the following:

- Adam and Eve descended to the land where Mecca now stands, following their expulsion from Paradise **⟨7⟩**, which, in some mystical way, exists directly above the Kaaba.

- Abraham's first-born son Ishmael was taken as a baby to this precise spot by his mother Hagar, it was here that Hagar feared death by thirst but was

saved by the miraculous discovery of a spring (a story told in Genesis 21.14-19).

- It was there that Abraham later found them many years later, whereupon he and Ishmael together built the first Kaaba, as a shrine to God.

- This shrine had subsequently become corrupted by Arab polytheism, which Muhammad was tasked with restoring to its restoring to monotheistic purity.

Why it should be that Hagar, carrying her infant, Ishmael, and years later the elderly Abraham, might have walked five hundred miles from fertile Canaan to the unknown, remote and barren location of the Hijaz - and in the case of Abraham five hundred more to return home - is unexplained, and these stories can be dismissed with confidence as pious fictions invented for the sole purpose of connecting the obscure shrine at Mecca with the Qurʾan's Masjid al-Haram.

The Jerusalem thesis

In fact, the attributes associated with the God's House in the Qurʾan can all be firmly linked with the House of God in the Bible, the Jerusalem Temple.

- 2 Chronicles 3.1 records that King Solomon built the Israelites' First Temple upon a Mount Moriah, a name that links the location of the Temple with the mountain in '*the land of Moriah*', that God had identified to Abraham as the place at which he was required to sacrifice his son Isaac. Genesis 22.2 had described Abraham having built an altar for the purpose, and later traditions had had Isaac helping his father to assemble the altar for his own holocaust. Thus, the Jewish Temple fulfils the Quranic criteria of being situated at a place '*assigned for Abraham*', and of having had its '*foundations*' '*raised by Abraham*' and his son (the Qurʾan's account of Ishmael's role in building the altar for

the sacrifice of his half-brother will be addressed at **⟨22⟩** below).

- The Qurʾan's two references to the Masjid al-Haram using the phrase '*the cube*' are consistent with the fact that the Holy of Holies of the Temple is described in 1 Kings 6.20 as being '*twenty cubits long, twenty high and twenty wide*'. This cubic inner sanctum replicates in stone, the design of the Holy of Holies of the portable Tabernacle in the Wilderness (Exodus 26), and elsewhere in the Bible, the holy of holies of the mystical temple seen in a vision by Ezekiel (41.4) and the New Jerusalem measured by St John in the Book of Revelation (21.16) are also described as being cubic.

- Exodus 23.14-17 requires that three annual festivals to be held by the Israelites at a place that will be appointed by God (clearly intended to be understood as being the Jewish Temple). These are each referred to by the Hebrew word '*ḥagē*' (meaning '*festival*' and between them, share the rituals of animal sacrifice (at the '*ḥagē hammaṣṣôṯ*' or Feast of the Passover) and circumambulation (the '*ḥagē shāḇûʿôṯ*' or Feast of Weeks) with the Qurʾan's account of the '*ḥajj*' **⟨57⟩**.

- Of the three Quranic place names associated with the location, the reference to Bakka recalls the words of Psalm 84, composed to be sung during the pilgrimage to the Jerusalem Temple:

> *5. Happy are those who dwell in your house,*
> *continually they praise you,*
>
> *6. Happy the men whose strength you are,*
> *their hearts are set upon the pilgrimage,*
>
> *7. When they pass through the valley of Bakka,*
> *they make a spring of it, the early rain clothes it*
> *with a generous growth.*
>
> *8. They go from strength to strength,*
> *they shall see the God of gods in Zion*.

- Marwa is easily recognised as an Arabicisation of Moriah. Safa is a name once given to the tallest

neighbouring mountain to Mt Moriah, now known as Mount Scopus, the Mountain of the Watchmen. Significantly, it is referred to by the name Sapha in the *Antiquities of the Jews* by the first century Jewish historian Josephus, within the context of the surrender of Jerusalem to Alexander the Great. We have already seen that the Qurʾan author, through the story of Dhu'l Qarnayn, had presented this event as a precedent for his for his own situation (see also **⟨57⟩** below).

- Jerusalem was certainly sufficiently grand and religiously important enough to carry the epithet '*Mother of all Cities*'.

It is difficult to believe that all of these points of commonality between the Qurʾan's '*sacred place of prostration*' and the Jerusalem Temple could be a series of mere coincidences[30]. It is clear that the Qurʾan author was himself extremely well versed in the Jewish and Christian scriptures which the Qurʾan repeatedly confirms **⟨20⟩**, with their ubiquitous references to the Jerusalem Temple as being God's House, and even if he had somehow missed the parallels himself, it is not conceivable that they would have escaped the attention of the Jews whom we know at one stage formed an important part of the Qurʾan's audience. Yet there is never a hint in the Qurʾan that God had moved the location of His House or that he had taken the Masjid as a second home. On the contrary, the reference in **{22.26}** to the Masjid al-Haram as '*the Ancient House*' would seem to rule out both of these possibilities. Nor, upon reflection, should anyone be in the least surprised that the Qurʾan's author, who was clearly deeply influenced by biblical lore and law should have centred his sacred geography upon Jerusalem rather than a polytheist shrine, deep in the desert and unknown to the Judeo-Christian world.

The inevitable consequence of the realisation that the Qurʾan's Masjid al-Haram refers to the Jerusalem Temple is that some or all of the Qurʾan's battle verses were composed in order to support a campaign to capture and expel infidels from Jerusalem, not Mecca. Yet this conclusion fully accords with what little we know of the historical Muhammad and explains in a way the traditional Islamic

narrative cannot the actions of the early Arab conquerors. The earliest two historical references we have to an individual called Muhammad, both probably first recorded during his lifetime, place him not in the Arabian Desert but leading an Arab army in Gaza and Galilee **⟨50⟩**. The Arab conquest of Jerusalem took place between 635 and 638, within six years at most of the traditional death date of Muhammad in 632. The only known religious structures built by Arabs in the seventh century were situated, not on the Arabian Peninsula but in Palestine and, of particular note, upon Temple Mount itself. The Christian patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius (d. 638, and referred to in the preceding section **⟨1⟩**), described the first of these as having been built immediately following the surrender of the city:

> *The godless Saracens entered the holy city of Christ our Lord, Jerusalem, with the permission of God and in punishment for our negligence, which is considerable, and immediately proceeded in haste to the place which is called the Capitol. They took with them men, some by force, others by their own will, in order to clean that place and to build that cursed thing, intended for their prayer and which they call a 'midzgitha'* [*i.e.*, *masjid*].[31]

The *Armenian Chronicle of Pseudo-Sebeos* (see also **⟨1⟩**) tells the rather different story that, following the Arab capture of Jerusalem. In this it had been Jews who had initially '*decided to rebuild the Temple of Solomon*' whereupon '*the Ishmaelites being envious of them expelled them from that place and called the same house of prayer their own*'.[32] However, whoever it was that had laid the first stones, a little more than a decade after Sebeos had completed his chronicle (661), and at a place that itself would have been an excellent candidate for the epithet '*the furthest place of worship*', Adomnán, the abbot of Iona, wrote the account of a monk, Arculf, who had recently returned from the Holy Land, including the description of a rectangular '*Saracen prayer hall*' that Arculf had observed on the site of the old Jewish temple. This, Arculf estimated, was capable of holding a congregation of three thousand.[33] Approximately twenty years after that, the Umayyads would complete a building that is today one of the world's most recognisable structures, the Dome of the Rock. The traditional account of its purpose – that it marks a point on Muhammad's miraculous night journey from Mecca to

converse with God in the heavens, even if it accepted, conspicuously fails to explain its design or decoration. In fact, the shrine is built allow worshippers to circumambulate the site of the Holy of Holies of the old Temple, and it dominated the Jerusalem skyline a full fifty years before the earliest mention in any text other than the Qurʾan of a place called Mecca.

'*Makah*'

The name of Makkah (from the root m-k-h, in modern English, Mecca) appears only once in the Qurʾan, at **{48.24}**. The context is that it was here that Muhammad met with some disbelievers over whom he was granted a victory without bloodshed. In the traditional narrative this verse is associated with the negotiation of the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah between Muhammad and the Meccans **⟨46⟩** which guaranteed peace between the two parties for ten years. This would prove a disastrous miscalculation for the Meccans since it allowed Muhammad to strengthen his hand by dominating the land to the north of Mecca, and just two years later he was strong enough to march upon Mecca at the head of an army and to force its surrender.

Like many aspects of the traditional narrative, however, this explanation sits awkwardly with the text it seeks to explain. **{48.24}** presents Mecca as a geographical feature, usually rendered '*the valley of Makkah*' rather than the name of a settlement. In the tradition, the Meccans had come out of their city to intercept Muhammad in the valley of Hudaybiyyah. That the Meccans must have met Muhammad somewhere away from Mecca was necessitated by the geography of Mecca which, as previously noted, is located in a slight depression in a plain that could not be described as a valley. So why then would the Qurʾan have referred to the proposed valley of Hudaybiyyah, which must have been some miles from Mecca as '*the valley of Makkah*'? Moreover, whilst **Surah 48** states that the unbelievers with whom a treaty was made had earlier turned the believers away from the Masjid al-Haram, it gives the reader no reason to suppose that the Masjid al-Haram lay within the valley of Makkah, nor gives any clue that this 'valley'

was the prize which the Quranic community had been striving to gain control over for the best part of a decade.

Islamic tradition has it that Makkah in **{48.24}** is the same place as Bakka in **{3.96}**, but there is no obvious reason to reach this conclusion. Whilst the Qurʾan does sometimes spell the same word differently in different verses, this is incapable of explaining why one place name should appear with different initial letters within a single document. The revisionist author, Dan Gibson, of whom more will be said below (see especially **⟨40⟩**) has proposed that the original text used Bakka in both verses (which he suggests, means a place of weeping) but that at some stage the first letter of Bakka in **{48.24}** was varied, for an unknown reason from a bā' (pronounced 'b') to a mīm (pronounced 'm'): to yield Makkah. However, it is suggested that there is another, more persuasive, explanation for the similarity of the two names. The Qurʾan author seems to have had a particular fondness for giving pairs of characters in a story names that rhyme. On four occasions these paired names vary only in their initial letter.

- In **{2.102}** two angels descend to earth to teach men magic called *Hālūt* and *Mālūt* **⟨14⟩**.
- Aaron and Korah appear in the Moses narrative as *Hārūn* and *Qārūn* **⟨23⟩**.
- Two demons, who are known in the Old and New Testament by the names Gog and Magog, in the Qurʾan become *Yājūj* and *Mājūj*, **{18.94-98}**, **⟨30⟩**, **⟨96⟩**.
- King Saul is referred to in the Qurʾan as '*Ṭālūt*', a name which has no resemblance at all to his biblical name and which appears to have been given him for no other reason than that his name should rhyme with that of his enemy Goliath, who in the Qurʾan is called '*Jālūt*' (from the Hebrew '*Golyat*') **⟨24⟩**.

Three further related pairs of names are also notably similar although unlike the four mentioned above, their names do not

appear in relation to the same story and they are differentiated by more than just their initial letter. Two are particular to the Qurʾan:

- The Qurʾan's two most frequently named prophets, Moses **⟨23⟩** and Jesus **⟨26⟩** are rendered *Mūsā* and *ʿIsā*.

- The Qurʾan's *Idris* is traditionally identified as Enoch, who in Jewish mystical tradition was elevated to God's presence and transformed into an angel; the reverse story to *Iblis*, a jinn that was expelled from the ranks of angels in God's presence and cast down to earth **⟨14⟩**, **⟨17⟩**.

A seventh name-pairing is biblical and consequently provided the precedent for the six which are original to the Qurʾan. In the Book of Genesis, God renames Jacob as Israel ('*God rules*'), a name that resembles that of his uncle, Ishmael ('*God has listened*') **⟨22⟩**. Just as God gave Jacob an entirely original name that resembled the name of a character already introduced into the text, so the Qurʾan author has given Saul and Enoch entirely original names, apparently in order to create similar 'twinning' effects. Once one has been alerted to this distinctive Quranic device, one must wonder whether the Qurʾan's unknown '*valley of Makkah*' may have referred to a valley that had been known by a quite different name but which the Qurʾan author wished to connect with the biblical '*valley of Bakka*'. As we have seen, Bakka features in the Psalm 84 as a place of refreshment upon the pilgrimage route to Jerusalem. Since the Qurʾan author too had set his eyes upon attaining Jerusalem, his calling a valley where an agreement was made with unbelievers '*Makkah*' may have conveyed to his followers the encouraging message that this event was a milestone on their advance upon Jerusalem. Later generations though would have found the name Makkah in the Qurʾan that belonged to no location that they knew of. Like the Quraysh of **Surah 106**, it would have been temptingly available for use in the construction of an alternative history, deflecting Arab religious devotion away from the sanctuary of the Jews and Christians towards the 'blank slate' of the Arabian desert.

Yathrib

Unlike Mecca, Yathrib has a well attested pre-Quranic existence, having been mentioned in Claudius Ptolomy's second century *Geography*. As with Mecca, Yathrib is named only once in the Qurʾan, this time within the context of a vibrant battle scene:

{33.10} When they came upon you from above you and below you and when yes swerved and hearts reached into throats and you thought many things regarding God,

{33.11} It was there that the believers were tried and shaken in a manner most severe,

{33.12} And when the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease said: God and his messenger promised us naught but delusion,

{33.13} And a group amongst them said: 'O people of Yathrib There is no stand for you, so turn back!'

Since members of the Quranic community, albeit uncommitted ones, address their fellow fighters as '*O people of Yathrib*', it may be inferred that the believing community - or at least one section of it for a period of time - was based in Yathrib. That this was in fact the case is corroborated by references to Yathrib in the only text from Islamic history that dates from the same period as the Qurʾan itself, a treaty commonly known as the Constitution of Medina (to be considered in more detail at **⟨37⟩** below). Further references to Muhammad having had a base in Yathrib appear in two of the earliest non-Muslim sources to mention Muhammad: the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (c.660), and a chronicle, likely dating from the mid-eighth century, which is now lost in its original form but is quoted from in several later works and which is known as the *Syriac common source*, or sometimes *The Chronicle of Theophilus* (an extract from

which is produced at **⟨50⟩** below). The accounts drawn from this source describe Yathrib as Muhammad's home city, where he first preached. From here he is said to have led expeditions, initially to trade in Palestine, later to pillage and take slaves, until, at the height of his power, he sat there in honour, receiving tribute and booty from across the lands of the Romans and the Persians.[34] Yathrib is also cited as the place from whence the sons of Hagar were said to have emerged to visit atrocities upon Christians in the *Apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius*, written before 692, although this work does not mention Muhammad or Islam by name. Yathrib is a natural oasis capable of supporting a modest amount of agriculture. However, it is hardly the rich farmland of abundant rainfall described in the verses mentioned above. It produces no olives – a fruit that is mentioned six times in the Qurʾan, **{6.99 & 141}**, **{16.11}**, **{24.35}**, **{80.29}** and **{95.1}** and at ninety miles from the coast one may reasonably suspect that in ancient times it is unlikely to have attracted very many sailors. So, whilst the fact of Muhammad's residence in Yathrib is well attested, it is unlikely to have been the scene for all of the Qurʾan's revelation.

Medina

In four verses, **{9.101 & 120}**, **{33.60}** and **{63.8}**, the Qurʾan refers to a specific place as '*al-Madīnah*' ('*the City*'). Traditionally these are all treated as references to Yathrib. However, **Surah 9** is largely concerned with the Masjid al-Haram, which it is proposed as being Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Moreover, the context of its appearance in **{63.8}** (produced at **⟨89⟩** below), namely '*hypocrites*' saying to one another - '*If we return to al-Madīnah, the mightier will surely expel the weaker therefrom*' – fits well as the scenario that some Jews may have feared that even if they could enter Jerusalem, they would be unable to control it. This after all, had been the situation in 614 **⟨1⟩**. These words are usually projected onto serial hypocrite Abdullah ibn Ubayy **⟨42⟩** who is said to have abandoned Muhammad as their armies marched out of Yathrib to face a Meccan army at the Battle of Uhud[35]. He is said to have turned back to Yathrib with the aim of preventing Muhammad's return there. However, the traditional narrative contains no account that Abdullah actually sought to exclude Muhamad's return to Yathrib,

notwithstanding the latter's defeat and injury at Uhud, and so the episode falls into that large category of stories that serve no purpose other than to provide an explanation for an otherwise verse. Etymologically, '*madīnah*'is derived from the word '*dīn*', an important Quranic word meaning '*the practice of religion*' ⟨87⟩, so that the name '*al-Madīnah*' may have been adopted to carry connotations of a people or place under religious rule, analogous to the Christian use of the word '*Christendom*', or possibly the Holy Land.

3. Arabic

Surah 16 (*Al-Nahl/The Bee*): 103

> **We certainly know that they say: 'Only a man teaches him.'**
>
> **The one to whom they refer has a foreign tongue, while this is in lucid Arabic.**

[*A Universal Message Interpreted from the Holy Qurʾan, Linda "iLham" Barto.*]

The Qurʾan states on eight occasions that it was '*sent down as an Arabic Qurʾan*', **{12.2}**, **{20.113}**, **{26.195}**, **{39.28}**, **{41.3 & 44}**, **{42.7}** and **{43.3}** '*that haply you may understand*' **{12.2}**. Whilst this accords with the eminently sensible practise that God '*has sent no messenger save in the language of his people, that he might make clear unto them*,' **{14.4}**, for a composition to state the language in which it is being verbally delivered seems extremely odd. For Peter Townsend in *The Mecca Mystery*, the phrase is as striking as if Shakespeare had periodically included into his plays the statement: *'Remember this play is in excellent English*'.[36] The motivation for this declaration is apparently revealed by **{6.25}**, **{16.103}** (produced above), **{25.4-5}**, **{26.198-199}**, and **{41.44}**, each of which specifically refutes the accusation that the announcer was merely translating for the Arabs, stories and homilies that were borrowed from the existing religious traditions of other peoples who spoke an '*aʿjām*' ('*foreign*', possibly '*Persian*') tongue. In **{16.103}** the Qurʾan author even appears to acknowledge the existence of an identified supposed informant. Given the large cast of biblical figures appearing in the Qurʾan, the suspicion must have been that the Qurʾan's announcer was plagiarising his revelations from the Hebrew or Babylonian Aramaic scriptures of Judaism and/or Christianity (in which case, Syriac, Greek or Latin).

Prior to the first century, the preeminent Arab civilisation had been the kingdom of Nabataea that wrote in a script that is now known as Imperial Aramaic. It appears from surviving inscriptions that with the annexation of Nabataea into the Roman Empire in 105, written Aramaic underwent a period of change, increasingly influenced by spoken dialects, and with the shape of letters gradually taking on the forms that we now know as the Arabic alphabet. Over the past decade many inscriptions have been found that are recognised to constitute actual written Arabic prior to the Qurʾan. All of these that address religious themes, such as petitions for divine protection, help or mercy, appear to be monotheistic, with a substantial proportion using Christian phrases and images. Poetry exists in Arabic, passages of which closely resemble the Qurʾan in style, and some of these poems may well predate the Qurʾan. although without early manuscripts containing these poems, their reliable dating is not possible. Just as it denies that it is recycled stories from foreign languages, the Qurʾan itself denies that is mere poetry, **{21.5}**, **{26.224}**, **{36.69}**, **{37.36}**, **{52.30}** and **{69.41}**. Both denials may be thought to strengthen rather than disprove the accusation being refuted. Consequently, the Qurʾan must be treated as the first substantial written text known to have been composed in Arabic, the writing system developed over the previous century by Arab monotheists.

Interpreting Quranic Arabic poses huge difficulties. One problem is that the Arabic vocabulary of the Qurʾan is extremely limited. Most words are constructed around a root consisting of three consonants or long vowels and this root may be called upon to carry an extraordinarily wide range of meanings. For example, from the root ʿ-w-r, Arabic forms the noun '*ʿawrah*' which may mean imperfection or vulnerability, and by extension '*nakedness*', from which it gains the more specific meaning of '*private parts*' and ultimately '*chastity*'. In his endeavour to express his intended meaning precisely, the author was forced to employ a large number of non-Arabic words, including from Eastern and or Western Aramaic, Persian, Pahlavi, Hebrew, Ethiopic and Greek. This expanded vocabulary increases the precision and complexity of the ideas that can be expressed, but so doing also creates a new level of ambiguity: uncertainty as to which word has been loaned from where and for what purpose.

A second problem in reading the Qurʾan's Arabic comes from the structure of the language, and its incomplete preservation in early manuscripts. Written Arabic might be thought of as consisting of four layers. The basic cursive script is called the rasm and in general it represents consonants and long vowels. The majority of the individual elements that make up the rasm may be used to represent more than one letter. Precisely which letter is intended by a given shape is only made completely clear by the addition of diacritical marks, known as *iʃjām*, either above or below the rasm. By way of an example, the downward curved glyph ب, when it appears in a medial position in a word (*i.e.*, as neither the word's first or last letter) may indicate any one of the five letters: b, t, th, n or y. A rasm consisting of three of these glyphs, سب , may be used to create the roots بنت (b-y-t), forming '*bayt*' meaning house or family, تبب (t-b-b) for '*tabab*' meaning ruin, بيت (b-n-t) for '*bint*' meaning daughter, or نبت (n-b-t) for '*nabt*' meaning plant. Even where the rasm has been fully 'dotted' with the *iʃjām*, the script arrived at may still be ambiguous, for it will still contain only the consonants and long vowels. In English, a script with short vowels omitted would normally be fairly easy for a reader to decipher but because of the way that Arabic words are formed, the range of possible meanings is far greater than would be the case for a similar sentence in English. The root k-t-b, for example, conveys the core idea of writing, but without full vowelisation in addition to the *iʃjām*, these letters may indicate '*kitābun*', a book or other written document, such as a contract or treaty, '*kutub*' (books, etc), the verbs '*kataba*' ('*he wrote*'), '*kutiba*' ('*it was written*') or, since the doubling of a consonant is not written by writing the consonant twice but by indicating the duplication with a separate marker, '*kattaba*' ('*he caused someone to write*').[37] Therefore, to make the individual letters that comprise a text unambiguous, a third and fourth layer of script is required to specify the short vowels (known as the *ḥarakāt*) and indicate other essential important features of the text formation: double-consonants, two adjacent consonants or pauses.

In the earliest Qurʾan manuscripts, all of which are incomplete, it is only the bare rasm that was fully inscribed. It is likely that this was in reliance upon the reciter already knowing which consonants and vowels the rasm represented and requiring only

an *aide memoire*. Sometimes *ʾijām* was added, but the extent of dotting varies from one manuscript to another and seems to have been at the scribe's discretion. By the eighth century and before the date of the earliest complete Qurʾan, the practice had become established of only writing down the rasm, eschewing additional marks entirely. By the time that Quranic manuscripts were produced that were fully marked a wide range of reading traditions had developed. The reader has already encountered one disputed passage resulting from this. In **⟨1⟩** above, it was noted that **{30.2-3}** may be vowelised either to mean either '*the Romans have been vanquished … they will be prevail*' ('*guliḇat al-Rūm … sa-yagliḇūna*') or '*the Romans have been victorious … they will be vanquished*' ('*galaḇat al-Rūm … sa-yuglaḇūna*'), depending upon one's choice of vowels. In '*The Romans Will Win!' Q 30:2–7 in Light of 7th c. Political Eschatology*, Tommaso Tesei observes that in tenth century two further possible readings were discussed: that the Romans had recently been victorious and would ultimately win ('*galaḇat al-Rūm … sa-yagliḇūna*') and, in the alternative, that they had recently been defeated and would ultimately lose ('*guliḇat al-Rūm … sa-yuglaḇūna*'). One Qurʾan scholar Manfred Kropp has suggested that none of the above readings is the authentic one and that the verses were intended to operate as a curse that was destined to be fulfilled: '*May the Romans lose! …they will be vanquished.*'[38] Since with a bare or sparsely dotted rasm, not only the meanings to be given to words but even the identification of the letters that form them, have to be discerned from looking at a given word (or its consonantal skeleton) within its textual context, the difficulty in divining the intended meaning of the Qurʾan in particular becomes apparent. Not only is the Qurʾan the first major text known to have been written in its language, and not only does it deal with complex and mystical topics in a strikingly idiosyncratic manner, but it was later rearranged into a canon that is neither thematic not chronological. Discovering the original context for any word in these latter circumstances would be a challenge. Doing so when the identification of individual letters is uncertain produces a puzzle of Enigma Machine-like complexity.

Prior to the 1970s, these difficulties had not received much appreciation. This is because fully marked up Qurʾan manuscripts had been in circulation from the tenth century and there is in fact a

general consensus within Islam concerning the identification of most words. Moreover, if the words of the Qurʾan seemed puzzling, Islamic libraries were able to produce voluminous ancient commentaries explaining what each verse meant, often accompanied by stories that seemed to provide its exact context. It is only in the past fifty years or so that the significance has become widely recognised of the long centuries that passed between the composition of the text and its recording in precise script and the composition of the narration accounts. By the normal standards of assessing historical accounts, virtually all of the traditional narrative is unreliable and much of it is manifestly false. That these accounts appear to explain the Qurʾan as neatly as they do is undoubtedly because they were composed, centuries after the event, for that very purpose, after the true meaning of had been lost or needed to be concealed. Other interpretations were likely influenced by theological needs. In *Prophecy and Writing in the Qurʾan, Or Why Muhammad was not a Scribe*[39], Islam Dayeh considers the word '*ummiyy*' which appears twice as an adjective of the Qurʾan announcer in **{7.157-158}**. '*Umm*' (from the Hebrew '*aim*'') means '*mother of*', and an '*ummah*' (in Arabic as in Hebrew) indicates a people or nation. But in the Qurʾan, the context shows that '*al-ummiyyīn*' is used specifically to refer to those peoples that have not been given any scripture, **{3.20}**, to gentiles in **{3.75}** and **{62.2}**, and to Jews who fail to live according to the scripture that has been given to them in **{2.76-78}**. When essentially the same word in its singular form is used to describe the Qurʾan's announcer, this has traditionally been understood as '*unlettered*' *i.e.*, illiterate. No doubt this rendering would have been popular since it appears to provide evidence that Muhammad, who had received no formal education and lived for most of his life in a predominantly pagan town, could not possibly have derived his knowledge of the Bible from reading it. Given the way that this word is used in its plural form this is almost certainly not the Qurʾan's intended meaning, which is more likely to mean '*is from a people that had not previously been sent a scripture*'. Yet on the strength of the Islamic tradition concerning Muhammad, '*ummī*', meaning illiterate has now entered into standard modern Arabic usage. The instance illustrates a problem which is difficult to quantify. Since the Qurʾan was the first major document written in Arabic, and since, naturally enough, all early commentaries upon

the Qurʾan were written by scholars who were pious Muslims steeped in the traditional lore, these commentaries have influenced the development of Arabic for the past fourteen centuries, with each generation potentially further muddying the waters as it went.

It has long been observed that the Qurʾan script derived from the earliest manuscripts contains many archaic forms, inconsistent spellings and failures to conform to classical Arabic's rules of grammar and syntax. Many of the latter had once been regarded by non-Muslims as mere errors. Indeed, a hadith probably dating to before 770 has Uthman recognising these incongruities but refusing to permit that they be amended, showing that discomfort with the Qurʾan's apparently defective grammar dated back to early Islam.[40] From the eleventh century, Qurʾans have been produced with a rasm in line with the norms of classical Arabic. As secular academics have focussed upon the range of possible offered by the earliest manuscripts, fundamental questions have arisen concerning the language of the Qurʾan. Several alternative explanations have been proposed, a common feature of these being a significant disconnect between the original vocalisation of the rasm, and its punctuation centuries later by scribes. In 2000, a writer going under the pseudonym of Christophe Luxenberg published *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran in which he* proposed that some Quranic idiosyncrasies can be explained as translations, and sometimes mistranslations, from Syro-Aramaic and proposes that these parts were an attempt by Christians to produce an Arabic lectionary. Others have suggested that the Qurʾan was composed in a regional dialect of Arabic,[41] a high poetic koine (a koine being a common formal language shared by people commonly speaking different Arabic dialects) or a sociolect (the composite language of a particular class of bilingual or multilingual Arabs[42]). The knowledge that the Qurʾan was not first written in modern classical Arabic is not, of course a new discovery, but because Muslims share a broad consensus as to the meaning of most of the terms used in the Qurʾan, the consequences are only now being fully explored.

3. Arabic

With the traditional Islamic narrative of the origins of the Qurʾan now unravelling, and the ambiguity of its script becoming evident, modern scholars, less deferential to the tradition, find that every new insight that is gained into their original meaning leads to further questions and away from certainty. As Ibn Warraq observed: '*Ironically, far from increasing our understanding of the contents, as devout Muslims would have us believe, a look at the Koran in its original Arabic only increases the confusion*.'[43] The following three examples illustrate how fundamental Quranic concepts are now opening up to radical new interpretations:

- In a 2013 article, *Islam, Arabs and the Hijra*,[44] Robert M. Kerr, suggests that accounts that the '*muhijarūn*' - a term that has traditionally been understood as referring to those who made the '*hijra*' (migration) with Muhammad from Mecca to Medina **⟨38⟩** - were supported upon their arrival at Medina by a community of '*anṣar*' - from the root n-ṣ-r, traditionally rendered as '*helpers*' - is in fact more likely to refer to Arabs - based upon the Syriac term '*mhaggraya*', meaning '*the descendants of Hagar*' - having been made welcome by Christians - '*naṣara*', or even one specific Christian sect, the Nazoreans.

  Both these pairings of words will be revisited below: '*muhijarūn*'/'*mhaggraya*' at **⟨38⟩**, '*anṣar*'/'*naṣara*' at **⟨88⟩**.

- Tom Holland's *In the Shadow of the Sword*, presents the argument that the '*Quraysh*' (**{106.4}**), supposedly Muhammad's tribe, and possibly all of those condemned as guilty of the sin of '*ṣhirk*' (the '*association*' of partners with God **⟨88⟩**) were in fact being accused of being '*confederates*' - in Syriac, '*qariṣa*' - that is to say, Arab collaborators with either Byzantium or Persia.[45]

- Holland's thesis fits well with a suggestion that the term '*āhl al-kitab*', which any Muslim can today confidently explain means the '*People of the Book*', a compendious term for Jews, Christians and the

> unknown Sabeans, referring to those communities' receipt of a holy scripture prior to the revelation of the Qurʾan **⟨20⟩**, in fact may refer more prosaically to '*people of the treaty*'. When Muhammad arrived in Yathrib he drew up a document, commonly known as the Constitution of Medina **⟨2⟩**, in which various Arab and Jewish tribes accepted his dominion over them. In its preamble, this treaty describes itself as the '*kitab*' of the prophet. Such an interpretation would require a wholesale reassessment of major parts of what is considered to be the Qurʾan's fundamental message.

In this book, such revisionist theories can only be mentioned briefly. However, the Qurʾan reader must be constantly aware of the uncertainty and severe limitations of the language of the Qurʾan, which has been described as a '*woefully inadequate*'[46] medium for the complexity of meaning that its author strove to convey.

The 'mysterious letters'

Twenty-nine surahs of the Qurʾan (**Surahs 2**, **3**, **7**, **10–15**, **19–20**, **26–32**, **36**, **38**, **40–46**, **50** and **68**) begin with a numbered verse that either consists of, or commences with what appears to be one or more, up to a maximum of five, letters of the Arabic alphabet, presented without context or explanation. None are ever written with *ïjām* (diacritical marks) and so one cannot be certain whether they were used as letters at all or as the basic letter outlines used as symbols. Fourteen 'letters' are used in this way and in only fourteen combinations, the most frequent two combinations appearing six times each, with three surahs beginning with a single letter-shape. The 'letters' always appear in the same order and this approximates to, but is not quite the same as, the traditional Arabic abjad (consonantal alphabet).

Explanations proffered for the 'mysterious letters' range from the esoteric, such as mystical symbolism and secret codes (the fact that the letters mostly comply with the abjad may indicate a special

significance to those that break the pattern or indicate that they were selected from some short phrase) to the mundane: the initials of early scribes or the sources of the material. The latter possibility is strengthened by the fact that in the traditional canon, surahs beginning with the same arrangement of these letters are grouped together, and often share common features.

Groups of verses indicated by shared 'mysterious letters'

Alif-lam-mim (الم)	**Surahs 2**, **3** and **29-32**
Alif -lam-ra (الر)	**Surahs 10–15** (with an additional letter م at **Surah 13**)
Either ta-sin (طس) or ta-sin-mim (طسم)	**Surahs 26-28**
Ha-mim (حم)	**Surahs 40–46** (**Surah 42** with three additional letters).

Against such explanations, it has been noted that in eight of the surahs (**2**, **12**, **13**, **15**, **26**, **27**, **28** and **31**) the letters immediately precede a reference to sacred scripture, such as:

{2.1} الم

{2.2} This is the Book in which there is no doubt, a guidance for the reverent.

This correlation suggests that the letters form an integral part of the Quranic revelation and communicate something connected with the Qurʾan as a scripture. However, it could simply be that these eight surahs belong to a sub-genre, possibly having undergone editing by a scribe with a preference for surahs to begin in a particular, self-reflective, way. The only thing that one can say for certain concerning these letters, is that for fourteen centuries, their meaning, and the reason why the Qurʾan should contain an

apparently undecipherable revelation, has utterly stumped the religious and non-religious Qurʾan-reading world.[47]

4. The Qurʾan

Surah 25 (*Al-Furqan/The Criterion)*: 4-8

4. They say: 'This is but a forgery which he (Muhammad) himself has concocted and certain other people have helped him in this.' These people speak unjustly and lie.

5. They say: 'These are legends of the earlier communities which he has got written down for himself and they are being dictated to him morning and evening.'

6. Say (O Muhammad): 'Rather He has sent it down Who knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth. He is the Pardoning One, the Merciful One.'

7. And they say: 'What a (queer) prophet! He eats food and goes about in the marketplace! Why has not an angel been sent down upon him so that he might be a co-warner with him?

8. Or why has a treasure not been sent down upon him or (why has he not been given) a garden whose fruits he can eat?'

And the unjust ones say: 'You (Muslims) are only following a victim of sorcery.'

[*Fazlur Rahman, 1988 from Major Themes of the Qurʾan*]

The divine voice

The essential belief of the religion of Islam is that the Qurʾan comprises the speech of God and not of any man or '*naught but a revelation revealed*', **{53.4}**. The Qurʾan asserts this divine authorship through a number of devices. First and foremost, most surahs purport to speak from the perspective of God using the first person ('*I*', '*We*', 'My', '*Our*' etc). In later surahs the voice often addresses the Qurʾan's announcer personally as '*O Prophet*' or '*O Messenger*' and in over three hundred verses, fifty of them in **Surah 6**, the substance of a revelation is preceded by a command to him to repeat what he is about to be told with the command '*Say…*' The incorporation of such an instruction in the text is actually illogical. It makes grammatical sense neither as part of the message to be delivered, nor as an off-script cue that the time to begin reciting has arrived. This instruction, and the attempts to create the impression that the audience is listening in to God speaking to His prophet are clearly included for dramatic effect. Moreover, even the casual reader must suspect that the word '*Say*' has been appended to **Surahs 109** and **112-114**, after these surahs had previously been written without it, for the purpose of converting statements about and prayers to God, into divinely commanded speech.

In addition to God's direct speech to His prophet and His commands to His prophet and people to recite from a script, the Qurʾan frequently has the divine voice recall or anticipate the past or future speech of humans. Those who are quoted by God include past prophets, the Qurʾan announcer himself, his opponents, al-Shaytan and, on one occasion, a chimney of jinn **⟨15⟩**. On eleven occasions the Qurʾan introduces a verse with the words '*They ask thee concerning…*' In **Surah 2**, six such questions are posed and replied to within twenty-four verses, **{2.189-222}**. This format would have allowed the Qurʾan announcer to answer queries that were posed to him, sometimes about previously announced verses, whilst continuing to present himself as a mere conduit of sacred wisdom, in the style of an oracle. In other verses, by anticipating the responses to its message ('*if it is said to them … they say…*') God prepares his messenger with the correct answer to rebut the anticipated scepticism of his audience. Those who rejected the Qurʾan's divine origin, it frequently tells us, accused the Qurʾan's announcer of plagiarism **⟨3⟩**, **⟨33⟩**, of being a mere poet **⟨3⟩**, of

engaging in '*sorcery*' **⟨19⟩**, of being possessed by a jinni; and of recounting '*muddled dreams*', **{21.5}**. All of this gives the Qurʾan a theatrical quality with the direct speech of God broken up with a large cast of quoted secondary speakers and imagined conversations.

It should be noted that by no means all of the Qurʾan is phrased in the divine voice. About twenty surahs contain no indication that they comprise divine speech, most of which probably belong to the earliest stage of the Qurʾan's composition. These are considered in more detail at **⟨9⟩** below. Even where a surah does contain one or more indication of the divine voice, this is normally only relevant to a small part of the text. The vast majority of the Qurʾan refers to God in the third person and occasionally in the third person (without being commanded speech). Two verses, **{19.64** & **65}**, are phrased as though they are the words, not of God, but of angels acting as His messengers.

In fact, notwithstanding the Qurʾan's frequent framing as the speech of God, it is highly unlikely that the Qurʾan author actually intended this to be taken literally in the way that has become Islamic orthodoxy. The structure of the longer surahs is too complex, the phraseology too formulaic and too many passages show it to have been written from its author's earthbound perspective for verbatim revelation from God to have been at all credible. Rather, it is proposed that the divine voice was a rhetorical device by which the Qurʾan author claimed to articulate God's Will, not necessarily repeat his words. This issue will be addressed more fully at **⟨6⟩** below.

The '*Qurʾān*'

Earlier surahs do not generally allude to themselves in any way. No specific audience is addressed, and no reference is made to their announcer or the circumstances of their delivery. They are worded as entirely free-standing compositions. Later, in addition to verses that are directed to the human locutus directly, the Qurʾan addresses its verses to:

the world at large (as '*O mankind*', **{2.21 & 168}**, **{4.133, 170 & 174}**, **{10.23 & 57}**, **{22.1, 5 & 73}**, **{31.33}**, **{35.3, 5 & 15}**, **{49.13}**, **{82.6}**, **{84.6}**, or in **Surah 7** '*O children of Adam*'); or at least that part of humanity with wisdom to recognise its authenticity ('*O Possessors of intellect*', **{2.179 & 197}**, **{5.100}**, and **{65.10}**),

most frequently to its own congregation (as '*O you who believe*'), with **{66.7}**, by contrast, addressed to '*you who disbelieve*'; and

monotheists who are not counted amongst the believers, either Jews in particular (addressed as '*Children of Israel*', **{2.40, 47, 83-84 & 122}**, **{17.6-8}** and **{20.80}**) or '*People of the Book*', **{3.64-65, 70-71 & 98-99}**, **{4.47 & 171}**, **{5.15, 19, 59, 68 & 77}**, a term broad enough to potentially include both Jews and Christians **⟨88⟩**.

Some passages make clear that the Qurʾan is intended for an exclusively male audience **⟨66⟩**, save for just a handful of verses that are addressed to the wives and household of the Prophet **⟨79⟩**. **Surah 55** appears to be addressed jointly to men and jinn **⟨15⟩**.

As the corpus develops, very many verses refer to the fact that they form part of a wider body of revelation, and the necessary implication of this is the expectation that this body of revelation will be preserved in a permanent form. The totality of this revelation is most commonly referred to by the words '*qurʾān*' (usually translated as '*recitation*') and '*kitāb*' (usually rendered '*book*' but more accurately '*writing*' or '*scripture*'). Other terms used include:

'*dhikr*' ('*remembrance*' or '*recollection*') **⟨18⟩**,

'*furqān*' ('*the criterion*'), **{2.53 & 185}**, **{3.4}**, **{8.29 & 41}**, **{21.48}** and **{25.1}** (from which **Surah 25** takes its name),

'*naba*ʾ' ('*the tiding*'), **{38.67}** and **{78.2}** (from which **Surah 78** takes its name),

'*bushrā*' ('*glad tidings*'), **{<u>3.126</u>}**, **{<u>8.10</u>}**, both of which verses use the term with specific reference to promises of angelic help in battle **⟨41⟩**,

'*That which has been sent down*', **{<u>2.4</u>}**, **{<u>7.3</u>}** and **{<u>29.46</u>}**,

and words for warning, revelation, admonition, judgment, truth, wisdom and guidance.[48] The most frequently occurring of these terms (occurring in more than seventy verses), and the one that has stuck, is the Qurʾan. The word is related to the Hebrew '*qâraʾ*', meaning '*to call out to*', '*to proclaim*' or '*read aloud*'. At the time of the Qurʾan's composition, this verb already carried strong religious connotations. It is used in the Torah to describe the actions of God and Adam when naming elements of creation, people, and places and the calling out of God to various individuals. It is also used by the prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah and Nehemiah for their delivery of God's Word to the Israelites (see **⟨34⟩** below). The Hebrew bible itself, which is now generally referred to by Jews as the Tanakh was in Quranic times more commonly known as the '*miqraʾ*', a word from the same root as '*qâraʾ*', and one that appears twenty times in the Torah to refer to a religious gathering. It believed by many (and argued for forcefully by Christophe Luxenberg in *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Qurʾan*) that '*qurʾān*' was a direct variant of the Aramaic word '*qeryana*', used to refer to a lectionary, in Syriac Christianity, making the phrase '*qurʾānan ʿarabiyyan*' (used in **{<u>12.2</u>}**, **{<u>20.113</u>}**, **{<u>39.28</u>}**, **{<u>41.3</u>}**, **{<u>42.7</u>}** and **{<u>43.3</u>}**) translatable as '*an Arabic lectionary*'.[49] Thus is can be reasonably inferred that during the course of the Qurʾan's composition, its author intended his output to be received as belonging to the same exclusive order of religious canons as the Old and New Testaments.

The form in which the Qurʾan author expected his work to be preserved is less clear. There are indications that the earliest surahs were intended to serve primarily as oral rather than written compositions. Claims that the revelations are '*easy upon thy tongue*', **{<u>19.97</u>}**, **{<u>44.58</u>}**, and '*easy to remember*', **{<u>Surah 54</u>: <u>17, 22, 32</u> & <u>40</u>}**, suggest that these surahs may have been envisaged as a composition to be memorised and recited rather than read, and the frequent repetition of refrains in some surahs, such as '*So which of*

your Lord's boons do you two deny?' throughout **Surah 55** and '*Woe that day to the deniers*' in **Surah 77**, are suggestive that these surahs were designed to be performed in some form of liturgy. In **{29.48}** (*c.f.* **{6.7}** and **{42.51-52}**) the apparently spontaneous nature of the revelations is adduced as further evidence, if this were needed, of its divine origin. The suspicion of sceptics that the Qurʾan was merely human-authored is rebutted with the recollection, formally in God's voice addressed to the Qurʾan's announcer, but clearly included for the audience's benefit, that the speaker has no background as an author: '*And thou didst not recite before this any book, nor did thy write it with thy right hand…*' Perhaps most significantly, the Quranic community is frequently contrasted with the '*People of the Book*'. These are people who learn God's word from ancient texts. They are distinguished from those who follow a living prophet of God walking amongst them.

On the other hand, the use of book imagery is also a common motif within the Qurʾan. Introductory oaths include:

> '*By a book when it is inscribed upon a parchment outspread*', **{52.2-3}**, and
>
> '*By the pen and that which they inscribe*', **{68.1}**.

In **{96.4}** (produced at **⟨32⟩** below; *c.f.* **⟨11⟩**, **⟨13⟩**) God is said to '*teach by the Pen*'. The Qurʾan twice denies that the entirety of the Word of God could ever be written down, even:

> '*if all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea and seven more added to it (were ink?)*', **{31.27}**, or
>
> '*If the sea were ink…and another the like thereof to replenish it*', **{18.109}**.[50]

In these verses, the Qurʾan conceives of itself as the product of pen, parchment and ink.

Oral or written – or, as it in fact turned out to be the case, only partially reduced to writing - the Qurʾan frequently proclaims its miraculous eloquence as evidence of its divine authorship. It repeatedly defies doubters, **{2.23}**, **{10.38}**, **{17.88}** and **{52.34}**, even with the assistance of jinn, **{17.88}**, to produce a verse – or in **{11.13}**

ten verses - of a similar quality. The Qurʾan describes itself as being delivered in an Arabic **⟨3⟩**, that is '*clear*' to understand, **{5.15}**, **{12.1}**, **{36.69}**, and containing no discrepancies, **{4.82}**. This ambitious claim to clarity is detracted from by numerous passages, especially in the earlier surahs that are quite deliberately worded to appear mysterious. **{3.7}** accepts, probably in response to questions about material previously announced, that in the interpretation of the Qurʾan it is in fact only some verses that are '*clear*' (*per* Pickthall and Arberry, alternatively '*definite in meaning*', Abdel-Haleem). These are the '*foundations*' (*per* Yusuf Ali) or '*essence*' (Arberry) of the Qurʾan, but other verses, it explains, carry a meaning that is '*mutashābih*', literally '*resembling another*', usually interpreted as '*symbolic*', '*allegorical*' or '*ambiguous*'. Delving deeply into the meaning of the latter is not encouraged, since this is liable to mislead those '*whose hearts are given to swerving*', and '*none know its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge*.' This suggestion that the Qurʾan contains hidden meanings accessible only to a wise few has encouraged esoteric branches of Islam, but arguably it is **{3.7}**'s discouragement of asking awkward questions that has had the greater impact upon the course of the faith.

The '*Celestial Library*'

Surah 85 contains the verses:

> **{85.21}** Nay, it is a glorious Qurʾan,
>
> **{85.22}** Upon a Preserved Tablet.

In the Book of Exodus (31.18), God having announced to Moses the ten commandments '*He gave him the two tablets of the commandments, the stone tablets inscribed by God's own finger*'. The essence of **{85.21-22}** would seem to be to assert some similar divine authority for his own revelations. The Qurʾan author, of course, had no divinely inscribed stone tablets, but the verses seem to postulate a mystical tablet existing in some transcendent form with God. In Islamic tradition, the '*Preserved Tablet*' is generally understood literally as an inscribed text existing outside of space and time, which acts as a prototype for the Qurʾan - and possibly for all previously revealed scripture.[51] This is often associate with **Surah 97** which describes a decree having been sent down from God with '*the angels*

and the Spirit' **⟨12⟩** on the '*Night of Qadr*', usually rendered the '*Night of Power*', literally the '*Night of Measurement*'.

{97.1}	Truly We sent it down in the Night of Power.
{97.2}	And what shall apprise thee of the Night of Power?
{97.3}	The Night of Power is better than a thousand months.
{97.4}	The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the leave of their Lord, with every command,
{97.5}	Peace it is until the break of dawn.

Surah 97 leaves unstated precisely what it was that God had sent down, but in **{44.2-3}**, a passage that was probably revealed some time later, the Qurʾan seems to refer back to **Surah 97 a**nd clarify that the item that was '*sent down*' on a '*blessed night*' was the Qurʾan itself. **{2.185}** also refers to the sending down of the Qurʾan as a single event, which is said to have occurred within the month of Ramadan (and for which reason during believers are required to fast during Ramadan as a memorial **⟨56⟩**). These references to a '*sending down*' of the Qurʾan, of course support the literalist interpretation of **Surah 85**, *i.e.*, that the complete text of the Qurʾan had existed in some form with God long before its revelation by Muhammad.

In contrast to these accounts of the sending down of the Qur'an as the traditional Islamic narrative describes the Qurʾan's announcement by Muhammad as proceeding in instalments over a period of approximately twenty-three years. Such a protracted process of revelation is attested by the text of the Qur'an itself, which responds to events, criticisms and queries, and in which later verses sometimes clarify or abrogate those that had previously been announced. This process of gradual revelation is specifically referred to within the Qurʾan itself, in **{17.106}** which confirms that the Qurʾan was sent down '*divided in parts, that thou*

mayest recite it unto men in intervals and in successive revelations' and in **{25.32}**. The latter even offers a reason for this:

> **{25.32}** And the disbelievers say:
> 'Why was the Qurʾan not
> sent down upon him as a
> single whole?'
>
> It is so that We may make
> firm thy heart thereby.
> And We have recited it unto
> thee in a measured pace.

In order to resolve the apparent contradiction between the propositions that the Qurʾan was sent down on one particular night and the undeniable fact of its piecemeal revelation by Muhammad over decades, Islamic theology has had to infer an intermediate stage. The text of the Qurʾan, it has been concluded, existing in some portable form, must have been '*sent down*' from the Preserved Tablet, existing above the seven heavens, to some lower place – often identified as the first (*i.e.*, lowest) heaven **⟨13⟩** - on the Night of Power. It is from this holding location that individual passages must have been disclosed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel, the purpose of the exercise presumably being to reduce avoidable and unnecessary travelling back and forth between the Preserved Tablet and Arabia by Gabriel.

In fact, the item that **Surah 97** describes being sent down is unlikely to be the Qur'an. It has been observed that the surah bears a similarity to verses 1-3 of St Ephrem's *Nativity Hymn Number XIV*:

> 1. *Of the birth of the Firstborn,*
> *Let us tell on His Feast Day …*
> 2. *Let us not count our vigils like the vigils of every day.*
> *His feast, its reward exceeds a hundredfold ...*
> 3. *Today the angels and archangels descended,*
> *To sing a new song on earth…*

Each has the element of a special night when the angels descend, and prayers are more precious than at other times. In Ephrem's hymn, this is Christmas Eve. In **Surah 97**, though, the angels have descended from heaven, not to carol with churchgoers on Christmas Eve, but to convey a command from God. Elsewhere in the Qurʾan, night-time is frequently used as a symbol of the time for believers to turn to God and save themselves, before God's punishment is exacted upon the unrighteous at dawn **⟨35⟩**. Such a meaning here is suggested by **{97.5}**'s foreboding '*Peace it is until the break of dawn*.' Daniel Beck has argued that the Dawn that will bring peace to an end can only be the commencement of the Last Day and that the '*commands*' that the angel bear are not the words of the Qurʾan but nothing less than God's command to bring about the eschaton. It is for this, perfectly logical reason, that repentance and prayer at this late hour will be of more use to a person than a thousand months of prayer at other times.

On occasions, the Qurʾan presents itself as consisting of something far more expansive than the series of announcements delivered orally during the ministry of Muhammad. It asserts that prior to God creating the heavens and earth, He inscribed all that will ever happen in a '*Clear Book*' ('*kitābin mubīn*'), **{6.59}**, **{10.61}**, **{11.6}**, **{27.75}** and **{34.3}**. In **Surah 5** the Qurʾan uses precisely the same phrase, '*kitābin mubīn*', that it uses to refer to this primordial book of destiny to refer specifically to itself:

> **{5.15}** O People of the Book!
> Our Messenger has come
> unto you, making clear to
> you much of what you once
> hid of the Book, and
> pardoning much. There has
> come unto you, from God,
> a light and a clear Book.

Surahs 12, **26** and **28** each begin, after some 'mysterious letters' **⟨3⟩**, with the statement '*These are the signs of a Clear Book*'. One might suppose that this statement was made in order to clarify that the Qurʾan that was being announced verbally in Arabic was not itself synonymous with Clear Book of destiny but just one worldly manifestation or '*sign*' of it. Two factors undermine this solution

though. First, the word that is here rendered '*signs*', '*āyātu*', has become the standard term for verses of the Qurʾan. We cannot know when this usage first occurred, but with this understanding the meaning of the above statements becomes '*These are verses of the Clear Book*' (as indeed they are translated by Yusuf Ali and others). Perhaps more significantly, **{27.1}**, at the place where the surahs before and after it have '*These are the signs of a Clear Book*', has t '*These are the signs of the Qurʾan and a Clear book*', apparently confirming that the revelations given by Muhammad on earth are not merely 'signs of' the Clear Book but are one with after all.

Two further books fall to be mentioned in this section. **Surah 56** refers to a '*Book concealed*':

{56.77}	Truly it is a Noble Qurʾan,
{56.78}	In a Book Concealed.
{56.79}	None may touch it save those made pure,
{56.80}	A revelation from the Lord of the worlds.

The Qurʾan being '*in a Book concealed*' is rather similar to it being '*upon a Preserved Tablet*' and it may well be that the Book Concealed and the Preserved Tablet are intended to serve as two terms for the same document. By contrast **{3.7}**, **{13.39}** and **{43.4}** all refer to '*the Mother of the Book*', something that is, by definition, distinct from, and the source of, the Qurʾan. It is conceivable that '*the Mother of the Book*', is yet one more term for the Preserved Tablet, emphasising the latter's existence before the revelation of the Qurʾan. Alternatively, given the classical Muslim exegesis, either or both of the Book Concealed and the Mother of the Book may refer specifically to the Preserved Tablet in its part-disclosed state as it rested in the lowest heaven, in between the Night of Power and the completion of its revelation on earth. Most likely, though, it is suggested that neither of these terms refer to the wording of the Qurʾan at all, but are terms adopted to link it, through the metaphors of revealing and giving birth, to the Clear Book of destiny, that is to say God's Will, of which the Qurʾan is but one manifestation. This is the implication of **Surah 43** that features three of these terms together:

{43.2} By the clear Book,

{43.3} Truly We have made it an Arabic Quran, that haply you may understand.

{43.4} Truly it is with Us in the Mother of the Book, sublime indeed, wise.

{43.5} Shall We withdraw the reminder from you altogether for your having been a prodigal people?

Speculative theories concerning the organisation of this '*celestial library*'[52] abound, but the Qurʾan's ill-defined and shifting terminology seem to render (probably intentionally) this one of the '*mutashābih*' topics that preclude the drawing of firm conclusions concerning what exactly it is that is being proposed. This is a great pity for the issue has colossal significance. It is suggested that the claims in the Qurʾan to share an association with invisible scriptures in the heavens, were made for the purpose of asserting the equivalence of the Arab prophet's oral utterances with the pre-existing scriptures of the Jews and Christians. Its claim to share its essence with the book of destiny in particular was likely intended to evoke a mystical understanding of its significance, akin to the Christian concept of the Logos or the Word of God. This understanding should, for believers, have embedded God's revelation through the words of the Qurʾan within a broader context of God revealing Himself through sacred scriptures and history. In practice, however, due to excessive literalism these verses have had opposite effect, leading to a doctrine of the uncreated pre-eternal Arabic script of the Qurʾan, existing with God as the exclusively pre-eminent statement of His Will, to which the very scriptures that the Qur'an confirms and justifies itself by, are deemed to be inherently inferior.

One minor consequence of this literalism has been the interpretation of **{56.79}**, which must surely have been intended as a reference to the Qurʾan's original reciter having been found

worthy to accessing a transcendent book in the heavens, as a divine prescription for the treatment of physical books on earth. Accordingly, it has become a common understanding that Muslims who find themselves in a state of ritual uncleanliness, and all non-Muslims, are prohibited from handling any material upon which the text of the Qurʾan is reproduced.

5. Muhammad

Surah 48 (*Al-Fath/Victory*): 29

Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Those who are with him are harsh against the unbelievers but merciful to one another. You see them bow and prostrate themselves seeking the bounty and pleasure of Allah. Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration. That is their likeness in the Torah and their likeness in the Gospel, as the seed which puts forth its shoot and strengthens it, so that it grows stout and rises straight upon its stalk, delighting the sowers, and through them He enrages the unbelievers. Allah has promised those of them who believe and do good deeds, forgiveness and a great wage.

[*Qaribullah, 2000, (Omdurman Islamic Univ., Sudan)*]

In the traditional Islamic narrative, Muhammad was born in Mecca in 570. His father, Abdullah ibn Abdul-Muttalib ibn Hashim had died whilst Muhammad's mother was pregnant with Muhammad, and Amina herself died when he was just six years old. At the age of twenty-five, Muhammad is said to have married a wealthy widow, fifteen years his senior, called Khadija and their twenty-five-year marriage was monogamous, during which time Khadija bore Muhammad four daughters and two sons (both sons dying young). They also adopted their slave called Zayd to be their male heir. In 610 Muhammad announced his first revelation **⟨32⟩** and for the following twelve years he is said to have preached monotheism in Mecca to a largely sceptical audience. After Khadija's death in 619, relations between Muhammad and the wider Meccan community deteriorated. Muhammad's clan were subjected to a trade boycott, and some Meccans are said to have tortured, in at least one instance to death, their slaves who had accepted Muhammad's prophethood. As the situation grew more fraught in Mecca, Muhammad sent approximately half of his supporters to Abyssinia for their safety. Things changed for the better, however, when Muhammad received the support of a group of pagan

pilgrims from an oasis settlement north of Mecca at Yathrib (modern Medina). In 622, the '*ansar*' (literally the '*helpers*') as the Yathrib converts came to be called, pledged their allegiance to Muhammad, who forthwith announced to his followers that he had received revelations permitting him to fight the Meccans **⟨37⟩**. Almost immediately afterwards, Muhammad migrated to reside with his new followers in Yathrib, a journey known to history as the hijra **⟨38⟩**. From Yathrib, Muhammad began his campaign of brigandage against Meccan caravans, triggering a decade long conflict between him and his hometown. In 630 Muhammad prevailed and Mecca surrendered to him. By the time of his death in 632, Muhammad's dominion over Western Arabia appears to have been unchallenged. He received emissaries from as far afield as Egypt and Bahrain and in the last two years of his life dispatched armies to attack settlements in Syria and Palestine that were allied to or part of the Byzantine Empire.

Further details of this traditional narrative are given in **Part IV.**

Sources for the traditional narrative

The structure of this narrative is based largely upon early two written sources. One, probably the older of the two, is a compendium of about thirty stories, mostly focussing upon Muhammad's life after the hijra, that were composed by Maʿmar ibn Rashid (said to have died in 774) and preserved by his student ʿAbd al-Razzak ibn Hamam. The other, a much more detailed and better integrated account, including much commemorative verse, was written by Muhammad ibn Ishaq (said to have died in 767 or 768). Ibn Ishaq's book has now been lost in its original form, but several copies must have been made of it, which were relied upon by the authors of later works that have survived, including:

- *As-Sīra An-Nabawīyairatun* (*The Conduct of the Prophet*) by ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Hisham (d. 834), in introduction to which ibn Hisham candidly admits that he has omitted: '*things described in Ibn Ishaq's book that are too ugly to mention and too displeasing for some people to remember*',

- *Kitab al-Tariqh wa al-Maghāzī* (*The Book of History and Campaigns*) by Muhammad bin Umar al-Waqidi (d. 830), which addresses only Muhammad's Medinan years,

- *Kitāb aṭ-Tabaqāt al-Kabīr* (literally *The Book of The Greater Generations*) by al-Waqidi's scribe, Muhammad ibn S'ad (784-845), which draws upon al-Waqidi's work but also adds material, apparently from Ibn Ishaq's biography, that had not been recorded by either his former master or ibn Hisham, and

- the extensive *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, (*The Annals of Prophets and Kings*) by Muhammad al-Tabari (839-923), by far the fullest biography of Muhammad from the classical era but produced more than three centuries after Muhammad's death.

These, and indeed all early accounts of the life of Muhammad were generally referred to by early Muslims as *maghāzī* (literally '*expeditions*') literature. The use of this term illustrates that Muhammad's profile was primarily understood by these writers as that of a mythical warrior, strategist and divinely guided leader. Alfred Guillaume, who produced the most commonly consulted reconstruction of Ibn Ishaq's book by collating the surviving excerpts (published in 1955 as *The Life of Muhammad*) observes in his introduction that Ibn Ishaq's accounts of Muhammad's Meccan years read like '*hazy memories*', in contrast with the '*dramatic detail, interest and excitement*' of his military exploits and rise to dominance at Medina.

Each of Muhammad's first biographers, Ibns Rashid and Ishaq, claimed to draw upon the same individual as their principal source, one Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri,[53] attached to the court of caliph Hisham ibn ʿAbd al-Malik. Al-Zuhri is said to have gained his information from individuals, and in particular four '*oceans of wisdom*', who were born in the years around or shortly following Muhammad's death. It follows that, upon the face of it, the stories

of Muhammad's life, when they were first committed to writing, related events that were said to have occurred about one hundred and thirty years beforehand and were, at the very best, third hand hearsay. In the circumstances, they would, over that time, have attracted a political and theological significance that would have coloured people's understanding of what had occurred and how they chose to present them. Consequently, these earliest biographies of Muhammad were sufficiently near to the events that they describe for them to potentially retain some credibility, but too far removed and too politically charged to be accepted as reliable history, even prior to them having been edited and embellished by subsequent biographers.

One fact that has received relatively little attention is the centrality to the telling of the telling of the Muhammad story of one Urwa ibn al-Zubayr. Urwa was one of al-Zuhri's '*oceans of wisdom*'. He (Urwa) and his son Hisham were also amongst the principal authorities for the three earliest collections of *aḥādīth,* short anecdotes purportedly of the words and acts of Muhammad. These are the *aḥādīth* collections of Maʿmar ibn Rashid and of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Jurayj[54] that were combined within the *Musannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzaq, and the much better known and preserved *Al-Muwatta* of Malik bin Anas. Urwa is further said to have written a series of letters to the caliphs ʿAbd al-Malik and his successor Walid, answering their questions upon aspects of Muhammad's life which have recently appeared in English translation in Sean W Anthony's *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, in which they are presented as constituting - if they are authentic - '*the earliest extant written sources concerning the life of Muhammad*'. What makes Urwa's prominence as the likely architect of the traditional life of Muhammad surprising, is that he was the younger brother of Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr who had led the Second Fitna or civil war, against the Umayyad caliphate from 683-692. Neither the theological or political agenda that al-Zubayr had sought to promote, nor his precise role in the evolution of Islam can now be known for certain. One chronicler, a Christian monk called John bar Penkaye, writing in Iran when the outcome of the rebellion was still uncertain, described Abdullah as '*filled with zeal for God's house*',[55] but the monk's focus was upon the moral lessons of Christians' easy subjugation by '*the kingdom of the sons of Hagar*', and if he knew the

cause of the dispute between Abdullah and the Umayyads, he did not record it. This is unfortunate because whilst there is no contemporary evidence of the Umayyads bestowing any official recognition to Muhammad or the Qurʾan prior to al-Zubayr's revolt, it is upon coins that were probably struck by the rebels that we find the earliest Arab use of the word Muhammad outside the Qurʾan.[56] One would not normally expect a defeated rebel's brother to take a leading role in advising the victors on their regime's sacred history, but in the case of Urwa and the Umayyads, this is precisely what appears to have occurred.

From 833-848 the Abbasid caliphate sought to impose a rationalist interpretation of the Qurʾan (the school of the Muʿtazila) upon its people through an inquisition called the Mihna. This was ultimately abandoned in the face of a literalist movement of whom the most famous leader was one Ahmad bin Hanbal. In the aftermath of this fundamentalist triumph, and nearly a quarter of a millennium after the death of Muhammad, half a dozen scholars from Iran and Central Asia would compile vast collections of *aḥādīth*. By this stage the early Islamic accounts of the words of Muhammad, which had contained fairly little biographical information, had expanded to include the tiniest of details concerning his utterances, habits and preferences, from the names of his camels to the manner in which he performed his latrine ablutions, remembered and recorded to serve as exemplars for pious imitation and binding legal precedents. Once Ibn Ishaq's biography of Muhammad had received official recognition in the mid-eighth century, it seems that there was no shortage of those who were anxious to expound tales of the roles that their ancestors had played in the adventures of God's messenger and the divinely ordained Arab conquests and empire.

The Muhammad of the Sira

It is apparent from a critical reading of the early biographies that the Muhammad that they describe is mostly a formulaic construct. In one instance after another his life re-enacts episodes from the Bible. Even prior to his birth, his parents ʿAbd Allah (literally '*God's servant*') and Amina ('*She who says Amen*') replicate an aspect of the

nativity of Jesus, when Amina's search for a milk mother for him meets repeated rejection, mirroring Joseph and Mary seeking shelter on the first Christmas Eve. Like Noah, Abraham, Moses and other biblical prophets he received messages directly from God. Like these he responded to God's commission by departing the land of idolaters where he was born and setting out upon a challenging journey to establish a righteous nation in a new land, governed under covenant with God. More particularly in his receipt of messages from a '*Preserved Tablet*' **⟨4⟩** of God's law and in the pursuit of him by the idolaters Meccans, although they had taken no steps to prevent him leaving, he follows in the metaphorical footsteps of Moses pursued by Pharaoh **⟨23⟩**. During this episode, he hid in a cave the entrance to which was then covered by a miraculously thick spider's web, just as, so legend has it, David once hid from Saul **⟨24⟩**. The story of Muhammad's chance sighting of his undressed daughter in law, Zaynab bint Jahsh, and his subsequently sending of her husband to his death in battle clearly recasts David's scandalous lust for Bathsheba and removal of the loyal Uriah **⟨24⟩**. Muhammad's lack of children following his call to prophethood, despite his many wives, yet his impregnation of his Egyptian concubine, Maryam, recreates the impregnation of the Egyptian maid Hagar by Abraham **⟨22⟩**. In the Night Journey, Muhammad ascends to heaven, replicating the similar ascents of Enoch and Ezekiel and the transfiguration of Jesus, whilst upon his arrival in the presence of God, his incremental beseeching of God to reduce the required number of daily prayers from fifty down to five is in strikingly similar terms to the manner in which Abraham had once pleaded with God for the sparing of Sodom **⟨35⟩**. By fulfilling the covenant made between God and Abraham and establishing by force of arms a land for the descendants of Abraham, he achieves for the children of Ishmael what Joshua and Saul had for the children of Israel.

In addition to biblical motifs, Muhammad's military fortunes also seem to suspiciously mirror those of Heraclius, outlined at **⟨1⟩** above. Muhammad is said to have received God's permission to fight the Meccans in the same year, 622, that Heraclius had launched his counter offensive against Kusrow. Heraclius had found himself besieged in Constantinople just as Muhammad was in Yathrib. In 628 both Heraclius and Muhammad reached peace

terms with their opponents and in 630 Muhammad made his triumphant entry into Mecca to reclaim an Abrahamic shrine from idolaters, preceding the similar action of Heraclius at Jerusalem by a mere three months.

Yet other episodes from the traditional narrative plainly have no significance other than that they provide an explanation for verses of the Qurʾan. For example, the reflection upon a victory in battle '*and thou threwest not when thou threwest but God threw,*' **{8.17} ⟨41⟩**, is prompts the Islamic communal memory to recall that at the Battle of Badr, Muhammad had thrown a handful of sand at his enemies precipitating a miraculous sandstorm. Examples of such inventive exegesis are legion, with several more given at **⟨9⟩** below.

The historical Muhammad

Behind this manifestly suspect Islamic narrative, we know fairly little about the announcer of the Qurʾan for certain. For a ruler who is reported to have united a large expanse of territory under his dominion, and waged battles beyond its borders, and whose companions after his death founded a vast empire including many great centres of learning, he left virtually no trace in the contemporaneous non-hagiographic historical record. As has been noted above, he is unknown from any inscription on an Arab building or coin until more than fifty years had passed from his reported death. The smattering of seventh century references to Muhammad in non-Arab sources paint a confusing picture. Jacob, bishop of Edessa, writing in the 680s or 690s created a chronological chart of world rulers upon which Muhammad appears upon the latest charts to have survived, covering the periods 617-620, 221-225 and 626-630. The first of these periods carries the margin note:

> *Muhammad goes down on business to the lands of Palestine and of the Arabians, the Phoenicians and of the Tyrians.*

The second reads:

> *Muhammad, the first king of the Arabs ruled, 7 years,*

followed by:

> *While Heraclius the king of the Romans entered his eleventh year and Khosrau, the king of the Persians entered his thirty first, the kingdom of the Arabians* [*'Tayyaye'*]*, those whom we call the Arabs began.*

The third includes:

> *The Arabs began to make raids into the land of Palestine.*[57]

Jacob's final preserved endorsement records that in the eighteenth year of Heraclius (628-629) Muhammad was succeeded by:

> '#*2 of the Arabs, Abu Bakr, reigned two years, seven months*'.

Although the remainder of the chronicle is lost, a different chronicle completed in 705 gives essentially the same information as Jacob continuing the line of Arab kings broadly in accordance with the line of succession as told in the traditional Islamic narrative.

The *Armenian Chronicle of Pseudo-Sebeos* (referred to at **⟨1⟩**, **⟨2⟩** above), written c. 661 tells a very different story. According to Sebeos, '*a certain man from among the sons of Ismael whose name was Mahmet, a merchant, as if by God's command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth.*' He created a single community '*united by religion*' of his followers amongst the Arabs and those Jews who had been expelled by Heraclius from Edessa **⟨1⟩** and he inspired them with a divine mission: '*Go and seize your land which God gave to your father Abraham. No one will be able to resist you in battle, because God is with you*,' **⟨37⟩**.

Both Jacob of Edessa and Sebeos are highly regarded as historical sources. Each was writing within a few decades of the events in question, which were clearly of great importance, and the information concerning these events must have been fairly easy to

discover. Moreover, each is corroborated by external evidence. The Islamic calendar, known as the hijra calendar, which supposedly counts years from the date of Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Yathrib commences in March 622, within the year that Jacob of Edessa gives for the foundation of an Arab kingdom (a far more likely event to start a new era than an ignominious forced relocation). Sebeos's chronicle, meanwhile, contains an account of Muhammad embedding the Jewish *émigrés* within Arab tribes which is supported by a document known as the Constitution of Medina (see **⟨37⟩**). Yet despite the good reputations of their authors for accuracy, their proximity to the events they record and each having external corroboration, the accounts of Jacob of Edessa and Sebeos seem to be in complete disagreement over the life of Muhammad. Jacob has a King Muhammad reigning over the Arabs for seven years from 621 or 622 until 628 or 629; Sebeos has the expulsion of Jews from Edessa - which if it occurred, probably occurred in 628 **⟨1⟩** - as the catalyst for the formation of a religious community around a merchant-preacher Muhammad. For both, the period around 628 is crucial to their accounts, but for one this year seems to mark the end of Muhammad's role in history, whilst for the other it sees his rise to prominence. The former impression cannot plausibly be maintained. Three contemporary sources record military activity in Palestine in the 630s, two of them referring to the protagonists specifically as the fighters '*of Muhammad*', the third describing '*a false prophet come with a sword*' *t*hat could only realistically be the Qurʾan announcer **⟨50⟩**. Moreover, as noted at **⟨1⟩** above, the Qurʾan adopts for its own purposes Byzantine propaganda that must have been written after 630. Throughout this book it will be argued that other passages of the Qurʾan can only be properly understood as having been composed in relation to an Arab invasion of Palestine (*c.f.* the Jerusalem thesis proposed at **⟨2⟩** above).

Stephen J Shoemaker's proposed solution to this apparent conflict between Jacob and Sebeos is that the normally reliable Jacob of Edessa has made a '*rare*' and '*quite surprising*' error over his dates. It is considered that this explanation fails to account for the unlikely coincidence that Jacob's year for Muhammad's foundation of a Kingdom of the Arabians matches the start of the Hijra calendar. Nor is it very likely that such an obvious error

would have been simply repeated by the *Chronicle of 705*. Jacob's chronology has also been recognised as receiving support from an Islamic source dealing with the Arab invasion of Persia. This is the *Kitāb al-futūh al-kabīr wa'l-ridda* (*The Great Book of Conquests and Apostasy Wars*) by Sayf ibn Umar, probably written before 809. Sayf describes the first battles in the Arab invasion of Persia as having occurred in the reign of Abu Bakr, later battles in the reign of Umar. This fully accords with Islamic tradition, but Sayf's history was long considered in deep confusion over the chronology of events because his references to the Sasanian rulers opposing the second and third caliphs consistently failed to fit the accepted Islamic dates for their reigns. In *The Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*, Parvaneh Pourshariati refutes this negative assessment of Sayf's history. She demonstrates that if the dates in Sayf's text - which were likely added to the text by a well-intentioned copyist after Sayf's death – were to be disregarded, his description of the campaign is detailed, coherent and credible, and she concludes that it is the dates of Abu Bakr and Umar's reigns that must fall to be revised. Accordingly, the Arab invasion of Persia and Abu Bakr's reign must both have commenced in 628, four years earlier than the traditional narrative, precisely as stated in the chronicle of Jacob of Edessa and the 705 Chronicle.

It is suggested that the most likely scenario is that both Jacob and Sebeos were essentially correct in what they each wrote. The Arab calendar commenced in March 622 with the formation of an Arab kingdom, which occurred under a figure known as Muhammad. The Byzantine victory over the Sasanians in 628 and the arrival in Arabia of Jews from Edessa then appears to have led to two connected events: the launching of a religiously framed offensive led by Muhammad westwards to capture the Holy Land and the loss of his 'kingdom' to Abu Bakr who ordered its fighters east into Persia. It may be noted that the Chinese annals record an envoy from the Tayyaye arriving at the Tang court in 651 and giving an account of the foundation of their kingdom that resembles the Battle of Dhu Qar **⟨1⟩**, in which the Banu Bakr ibn Waʿel had rebelled against the Sasanians and their proxy king Iyas ibn Qabisa and defeated them. The envoys also describe their visit as occurring in the thirty-fourth year of their kingdom, placing the

foundational event in 617 – the year that the defeated ibn Qabisa was replaced on Khusrow's orders by a Sasanian general.[58]

The precise details of how all this played out, how may never be known but the notion that Abu Bakr ('the father of the Bakr') was connected to the Banu Bakr ibn Waʿel, and that it is a version of his tribe's story that was told to the Chinese is by no means far-fetched. The failure of the envoys to mention Muhammad, Islam or the Qurʾan to the Chinese, and their asserting their kingdom to have come into existence at the same time as the removal of Ibn Qabisa corroborates the view that the early successors of Abu Bakr saw the history of their realm in a way that excluded the role of Muhammad altogether. From the perspective of the Qurʾan author it is striking that in later surahs the Qurʾan attaches great importance to true believers being '*muhijarūn*', '*emigrants*', in the cause of Allah. The context makes clear that this '*emigration*' in fact referred to one or more military expeditions **⟨37⟩**. The root h-j-r from which '*muhijarūn*' was formed (from which Islamic traditions derives '*hijra*') is a complex and religiously charged one in the Qurʾan, where it carries an implication, inter alia, of the righteous separating from wrongdoers. The traditional explanation for this is these verses simply scolded stay-at-home laggards for their cowardice or laziness, but this does not do justice to the Qurʾan's sophisticated use of the word. Instead, it is suggested that the accounts of both Jacob in Edessa and Sebeos in Armenia are likely describing the same event from different perspectives, and that in 628 Muhammad surrendered one purely secular realm - willingly or otherwise - as the price of his ambition to establish another in the name of God in Jerusalem.

'*Muḥammad*' in the Qurʾan

Two biographical facts concerning Muhammad's background are commonly thought to be disclosed by the Qurʾan, both of them, it is suggested, unjustifiably. **{93.6-8}** ('*Did we not find thee an orphan and shelter, find thee astray and guide, and find thee in need and enrich?*') is often taken to be a reference to the Qurʾan's announcer himself having been orphaned. **{7.157 & 158}**, as has been mentioned already **⟨3⟩**, **⟨4⟩**, is traditionally treated as a statement that

Muhammad was illiterate. It is suggested that **Surah 93**, read in its entirety, is more likely to have been intended figuratively as a surah of consolation upon mankind's vulnerable state than as a biographical statement to the Qurʾan announcer; whilst as suggested above, the traditional interpretation of **{7.157 & 158}**, was likely imposed upon the text to bolster the credibility of its claims to divine authorship. Traditions, Islamic and non-Islamic and including the chronicles of both Jacob of Edessa and Sebeos, independently assert that prior to his later careers as preacher and warlord, Muhammad had been a merchant.[59] Daniel Beck has cautioned that this tradition should not be accepted at face value '*the merchant-preacher motif was common in late antique religious discourse*'.[60] However, the proposition that the Qurʾan was written by a trader finds support from the text itself, in which mercantile language abounds. Honesty is depicted as '*giving full measure when you measure and weighing with the straight balance*' **⟨80⟩**; the martyr's reward in Paradise is presented as '*a profitable bargain*' **⟨95⟩** and generosity is '*a loan unto God*' **⟨55⟩**. The laws on marriage in particular, are expressed in the transactional, not to say mercenary, terms of the grant of conjugal rights upon the transfer of an asset (for which see **⟨60⟩** below).

The surahs that are traditionally regarded as the Qurʾan's earliest make barely any reference to their human announcer.[61] In later surahs, God's messenger ('*rasūl*') or prophet ('*nabī*') emerges in the text to become central to his revelations, which contain frequent instructions to obey him **⟨86⟩**, to imitate him **⟨31⟩** and to show him special deference **⟨79⟩**. In **{2.129}** Abraham had prayed to God for the raising up from his progeny a '*messenger … who will recite thy signs to them, teach them the Book and Wisdom and purify them*'. It comes as no surprise when twenty or so verses later these precise attributes are claimed for Qurʾan's own announcer in **{2.151}** – as they are in **{3.164}** and **{62.2}** as well - framing his ministry as the fulfilment of Abraham's prayer. Some revelations address matters that were entirely personal to him and which one would hardly have expected to have merited divine intervention, such as the proper etiquette for people who visited his house or sought to attract his attention, and warnings to his wives to obey him or risk being divorced and replaced with better **⟨79⟩**. By the time that the Qurʾan's final surahs came to be announced, '*God and His*

Messenger' had become a very familiar formula in which God's Messenger is juxtaposed with God, the two together forming a combined object of obedience and veneration. By this stage, accusations of madness, possession by jinn, sorcery, artistry or fraud had clearly all been silenced.

The word that is conventionally rendered as '*muḥammad*' and conventionally treated as the personal name of the Qurʾan's announcer appears in four verses.

> **{3.144}**: '*Muḥammad is naught but a messenger; messengers have passed before him …*'
>
> **{33.40}**: '*Muḥammad is not the father of any man amongst you; rather he is the … seal of the prophets*' (for which see also **⟨67⟩**), and
>
> **{47.2}** (produced below): '*Those who believe and perform righteous deeds, and believe in what has been sent down unto Muhammad – and it is the truth from their Lord …*'
>
> **{48.29}** (produced above): '*Muḥammad is the messenger of God...*'

As so often with the Qurʾan's vocabulary, the word comes with a biblical heritage. The root ḥ-m-d from which the adjective '*aḥmad*' and, with the addition of the participle '*m-*' the name Muhammad are formed, is traditionally translated as indicating '*blessing*' or '*praise*'. In fact, the origin of this word is Hebrew, in which '*chamod*' means to choose or desire. This word features in the ninth and tenth commandments, God's forbiddance of jealousy, where it is frequently rendered in English as to '*covet*'.

With an 'm-' it appears in two books of the Hebrew bible. In the Book of Ezekiel it is used three times by God in the phrase *'the delight* ['*machmad*'] *of your eyes*' (Ezekiel 24.16, 21 & 25). On the first occasion this is a reference to Ezekiel's wife, on the other two occasions it refers to the Temple. The significance of the passage is that God informs Ezekiel that his wife is soon to die, and the temple is soon to be destroyed, but in neither case should the loss be visibly mourned. A similar word '*machamadim*' is used by the

Shulamite bride in the Song of Songs to describe her beloved to the '*daughters of Jerusalem*' through a series of superlative metaphors (5.10-16).

> *My lover is radiant and ruddy,*
> *He stands out amongst thousands.*
> *His head is pure gold,*
> *his locks are palm fronts, black as the raven.*
> *His eyes are like doves beside running waters.*
> *His teeth would seem bathed in milk, set like jewels…*
> *His cheeks are like beds of spice with ripening aromatic Herbs.*
> *His lips are red blossoms, they drip with myrrh.*
> *His arms are rods of gold, adorned with chrysolites.*
> *His body is a work of ivory, covered with sapphires.*
> *His legs are columns of marble, resting on golden bases.*
> *His stature is like the trees of Lebanon, imposing as the cedars.*
> *His mouth is sweetness itself he is altogether desirable* [*'machamadim'*].'
> *Such is my lover and such my friend,*
> *O daughters of Jerusalem.*

There is clearly more to this description than a eulogy to an idealised man. Some see in the descriptions of gold and jewels, pillars and timbers – and the use of the word that is associated with the Temple in Ezekiel - references to the ceremonial dress of the high priest or to the structure of the Jerusalem Temple itself.

The '*machmad*' of Ezekiel and *'machamadim'* of the Song of Songs share the common features that they use the love for a spouse as an allegory for the love of God's Temple, and by implication for God Himself. In Christian theology the Song of Songs has consistently been linked with Jesus's parables of the wedding feast (Matthew 22.1-14) and of the bridesmaids **⟨20⟩**, which inspired the metaphor of the church as the '*bride of Christ*', seen in the letters of St Paul (Ephesians 5.21-27, 2 Corinthians 11.2) and the Book of Revelation (19.6-9). The term also carries connotations of separation, Gabriel Said Reynolds suggesting that *'the one longed for*' best captures its meaning.[62] Within context then, it must be an eschatological title, a religious figure, identifiable with the Temple,

whose arrival is intensely desired. In fact it is suggested that the epithet '*maḥamad*' (as the consonantal rasm m-ḥ-m-d was probably originally vocalised[63]) was first coined, either by the Qurʾan author or by pre-Quranic Arab Christians, as a title for Jesus. Jesus described His body as the Temple (John 2.18-22) and used the allegory of a wedding feast to describe the afterlife of the faithful, and it was Jesus who was 'beloved by God' (Matt 3.16-17, 17.5) and the messiah who had been '*longed for*' by the children of Israel and whose second coming was now longed for by his followers. There is no reason to associate any of these attributes with the Qurʾan's author.

Moreover, two of the four appearances of '*maḥammad*' in the text of the Qurʾan contain indications that it is in fact Jesus who is the person being referred to. The opening words of **{3.144}** – '*Muḥammad is naught but a messenger; messengers have passed before him*' – replicates verbatim words that describe Jesus in **{5.75}**: '*The Messiah, son of Mary is naught but a messenger; messengers have passed before him*'. The phrase '*naught but a messenger*' by itself challenges the mistaken belief that the person concerned was more than a prophet. But, as Edouard Gallez asks, if the passage relates to the Qurʾan announcer, '*What else could he be?*'[64] The statement in **{33.40}** that '*muḥammad*' is the '*seal of the prophets*' is also more apposite to Jesus than the Qurʾan announcer. This phrase is normally treated as a straightforward claim that the Qurʾan announcer was the final prophet in a series of prophets that had begun with Adam. However, since Jesus is expected to return as a portent of the Hour **⟨26⟩**, it will actually be he, who, according to the Qurʾan, will be the last of God's prophets to walk the earth. Moreover, the symbolism of the attachment of a seal to a document conveys a more profound idea than merely the final act in bringing it into existence. A seal confirms authenticity and lends authority to a document's contents. It transforms those contents from a mere arrangement of words to being the solemn statement of the sealer. Here again the image seems more Christian than Islamic (for the biblical application of a seal metaphor see **⟨32⟩** below). In the Christian theology, Jesus's death and resurrection are treated by Christians as fulfilling the law and the prophets, that had previously been provisional and imperfect. In the Qurʾan, however, even if the announcer of the words is God's final prophet and a prophet for

the Ishmaelites, it is hard to construe in what sense the Qurʾan announcer could have understood himself to be lending authority to those prophets sent to other peoples in bygone times.

We can be confident in identifying the clause introducing Muhammad to **{47.2}** as a later addition to the verse. In their canonical form to **{47.1 & 2}** read:

> **{47.1}** Those who disbelieve and turn
> from the way of God—He has
> made their deeds go astray.
>
> **{47.2}** And those who believe and
> perform righteous deeds,
> and believe in what has been sent
> down unto Muhammad—
> and it is the truth from their Lord—
> He has absolved them of their evil
> deeds and set their state aright

Clearly those who disbelieve in **{47.1}** are being contrasted with those who believe in **{47.2}**. The former are referred to by the well-known Quranic word '*kāfir*', often rendered, as here, '*those who disbelieve*' but literally meaning '*those who cover*', understood as indicating those who know but conceal the truth **⟨87⟩**. Those who believe, on the other hand, are promised that God will remove - '*kaffara*' - their evil deeds. This succinct symmetry of opposites, emphasised by the wordplay with '*kāfir*' and '*kaffara*', has been interupted by the addition of the words '*and believe in what has been sent down unto Muhammad – and it is the truth from their Lord*'. This spoils the originally intended effect, whilst clumsily repeating the word '*believe*', in a way that it is safe to say that the original author could not have countenanced.[65]

The occurrence of the word Muhammad in the long final verse of **Surah 48** could, as with that in the immediately preceding surah, also easily be a later addition. It forms part of the well-known motto '*Muḥammad is the messenger of God...*' ('*Muhammad rasūl Allah*'). This could, and almost invariably is, read as a simple factual statement that a person going by the name of Muhammad is the messenger of God. The phrase and its setting in **{48.29}** do

not contain any intrinsic evidence to counter this interpretation. However, one of the phrase's first uses outside the Qurʾan occurs in the ambulatory mosaic inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock – and this strongly suggests that it was Jesus who is the longed-for messenger of God referred to. The phrase periodically punctuates a series of statements that relate exclusively to Jesus (for which see **⟨35⟩**, **⟨40⟩**). The composer of the inscription was unlikely to have intended to repeatedly interrupt and distract from his Christological theme by the assertion that a different individual not otherwise mentioned was *the* messenger of God. In *Early Islam, A Critical Reconstruction Based upon the Earliest Sources*, Karl-Heinz Ohlig proposes that the refrain whilst primarily relating to Jesus, may also have intended to replicate the sentiment expressed in Psalm 118, used in the Christian Sanctus and possibly, one might easily imagine, chanted by the circlers of the temple stone in response to the verses in between:

'*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*'.

In so far as the Qurʾan contains a basis for identifying Muhammad with its author it lies in **{61.6}**:

> And (remember when) Jesus son of Mary said: 'O Children of Israel. Truly I am the Messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah and bearing glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name is '*ahmad*.'

This promise by Jesus of a Messenger to come after him bears a marked similarity with Jesus's promise in the gospel of St John that after he has gone to join his Father, God will send the '*Paraclete*' (literally the '*Counsellor*' or '*Helper*', often rendered '*Comforter*', also sometime '*the Spirit of Truth*') after the world sees him no more (John 14.15-16 & 25-26 and 15.26). This promise, which is invariably associated in Christian exegesis with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Jesus's use of the adjective '*ahmad*' in **{61.6}**, on the other hand, naturally suggests that the future messenger that Jesus is predicting is none other than the Qurʾan announcer, Muhammad. However, this view has two problems. The first lies

in the wording of **{61.6}**. If the purpose of the verse had been that Jesus predict a future prophet called Muhammad, it makes no sense that, at the crucial moment, he should abbreviate the name to Ahmad, a name that there is no trace in Islamic or non-Islamic sources that the Qurʾan author ever used. The second problem is that Islamic tradition contains a substantially different **{61.6}** that was said to exist in the Qurʾan manuscript of Ubayy ibn Kaʿb. This reads:

> And (remember when) Jesus son of Mary said: 'O Children of Israel. Truly I am the Messenger of God to you, a prophet whose community will be the last community and by whom Allah shall apply the seal to the prophets and apostles'.

It is hard to see why this variant, which posits that it is the Jews who would be '*the last community*', would have been substituted by Ubayy ibn Kaʿb in place of the version that is now the canonical one. On the other hand, the motivation for the Qurʾan author or a later editor to replace Jesus's statement that his community would be the last one, with a prophecy justifying a later messenger's assumption of Jesus's messianic title for himself are all too obvious.

6. Revelation

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah / The Cow*): 97-98

97. Say: 'Whoever is an enemy to *Jibriel* (Gabriel), for indeed he has delivered this (book) to your heart by Allah's permission, confirming as true what is in between its two hands (*i.e.* already there), and (it is) guidance and good news for the Believers.

98. Whoever is an enemy to Allah, and His angels and His Messengers and Jibriel and Mikal, then verily, Allah is enemy to the disbelievers.

[*Qurʾan al-Katib, Kamal Omar, 2003 (Quranicist)*]

The Qurʾan gives fairly little information on the process by which it purports to have been revealed by God to his prophet. As already stated **⟨4⟩**, more than two dozen early surahs give little or no indication of having been composed as revelations at all. Later, the surahs come to be phrased as though they comprise the words of God Himself. **Surah 81** refutes the scepticism of his audience that this means that the author is possessed by relating an account of his having seen a mysterious figure '*on the horizon*'.

{81.22}	Your companion is not possessed,
{81.23}	He surely saw him upon the clear horizon,
{81.24}	And he does not withhold grudgingly the unseen.

Technically **Surah 81** is written in the divine voice, in that in these three verses only it refers to the announcer in the second person as '*Your companion*' and '*he*'. However, the substance these verses,

that is to say the account of the Qurʾan announcer having seen a figure in the distance, is told literally from the perspective of the Qurʾan announcer. Neither the mysterious figure upon the horizon, nor God above the heavens would have worded the event in the way that is worded, since for neither of them would the person observed have been '*upon the horizon*'. This location was only true to the person observing the figure. **{53.4-16}** expands upon this first encounter and tells of a second:

{53.4}	It is naught but a revelation revealed,
{53.5}	Taught him by one of awesome power.
{53.6}	Possessed of vigour he stood upright,
{53.7}	When he was upon the highest horizon,
{53.8}	Then he drew nigh and came close,
{53.9}	Till he was within two bow's lengths or nearer.
{53.10}	Then He revealed to His servant what He revealed,
{53.11}	The heart lied not in what it saw.
{53.12}	Do you then dispute with him as to what he saw?
{53.13}	And indeed he saw him another time,
{53.14}	At the lote tree ['*sidra*'] of the boundary,
{53.15}	By which lies the garden of the refuge,
{53.16}	When there covered the lote tree that which covered.

'*The horizon*' in these passages, it has been suggested by Daniel Beck,[66] represents a symbolic meeting place of the heavens and the

earth. It is the nature of horizons that they are always distant and in **Surah 81** this remoteness is consistent with the brief and ambiguous 'fleeting glimpse' nature of the sighting of the stranger. In **Surah 53**, however, the interaction between the Qurʾan announcer and the figure on the horizon is presented as something much more substantial, in which a '*revelation*' is '*taught*'.

Surahs 73 and **74** (which resemble one another in several respects and were probably composed together) include an instruction, *'warattili l-qurʾāna tartīla'*, **{73.4}**, addressed to the Qurʾan announcer concerning his utterances (repeated at **{25.32}**). This is usually translated as a direction relating merely to the manner of their oral delivery. For example, *The Study Quran* renders these words '*recite the Qurʾan in a measured pace*' and Yusuf Ali: '*recite the Qurʾan in slow, measured rhythmic tones*.' Daniel Beck however translates as a command by God to '*arrange the Qurʾan into an order*'. He attributes the mistranslations to translators being '*unwilling to countenance human agency in formulating the recitations*'. The following verse purports to prepare the Qurʾan announcer, in reality for his audience's benefit, of a great announcement to follow: '*Truly We shall soon cast upon thee a Weighty Word*.' It is unlikely that S**urahs 73** and **74** were the earliest surahs to be framed in the divine voice (for reasons given at **⟨10⟩** below) and it is unknown whether the preceded the description in **Surah 81** of the first theophanic vision. They do, however, represent the Qurʾan's only allusion to its announcer's call to prophethood.

Much later, **{2.97}** (produced above) names Gabriel as the conveyer of a revelation '*to the heart*' of its announcer. The name Gabriel is familiar as the messenger angel of the Old and New Testaments. He delivers the first apocalypse to Daniel (Daniel 8.15-26 & 9.21-27). He later brings glad tidings to Zechariah of the forthcoming birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1.11-12) and then to Mary of her pregnancy with Jesus (Luke 1.26-38). It is likely that Gabriel's appearance in Daniel that was at the forefront of the Qurʾan author's mind, given the eschatological nature of the Qurʾan and the fact that his name appears in **{2.97}** alongside that of his fellow archangel Michael (who also appears in the Book of Daniel, 10.13-21). Islamic tradition records that Gabriel had appeared to Muhammad at the occasion of the first revelation (for which see

⟨32⟩ below). It was thus a small step for the early exegetes to conclude that Gabriel must also have been the unnamed apparition that Muhammad perceived upon the horizon and at the lote tree. However, the traditional account of Muhammad's encounter with Gabriel at the time of the first revelation is impossible to reconcile with **{81.22-24}**'s description of an unidentified figure briefly seen for the first time '*on the horizon*'. It is more realistic to think of the Qurʾan author progressing from writing hymns that made no claim to divine authorship, to strengthening his warnings of a coming apocalypse with phrasing his words as God's, allusions to mystical experiences, and finally naming his celestial informant as the biblical angel Gabriel.

Although most of the Qurʾan is worded as though it is the speech of God ('*kalām Allāh*'), it is far from clear that the Qurʾan's actual author expected anyone to consider his role in the process as merely one of repeating words that had been revealed to him in Arabic. The phrase *'warattili l-qurʾāna tartīla*' ('*arrange the Qurʾan into an order*') in **{73.4}** seems to assume an active role by the Qurʾan announcer in selecting and ordering the necessary words to communicate an inwardly received revelation. Similarly, **{2.97}** refers to the delivery of revelation to the Qurʾan announcer's heart, again suggesting a non-verbal communication of meaning rather than a dictation of words.

The framing of the supposed revelations must also be borne in mind. The Qurʾan's recounting of stories is too formulaic for them to be regarded as straightforward assertions of fact. This is particularly evident in reported speech where several speakers are described each using the exact same phrases despite their different historical settings (examples of which are given at **⟨27⟩**). The Qurʾan in its entirely is delivered in rhyming prose. Moreover, the surahs become longer and their structure more complex as time goes on. In *The Poetics of Sūrat Āl-ʿImrān's Narrative Structure (Q 3)*[67] Nevin Reda demonstrates that **Surah 3** contains three distinct sections or 'panels' identified by certain recurring words and phrases – verses 1 to 63 being an exhortation to righteousness, 64 to 99 a polemic against the People of the Book and 100 to 199 a demand of obedience from the believers themselves; and yet the surah simultaneously contains a ring pattern, as nine themes are

visited in the first hundred verses and then revisited in reverse order in the second half. Reda describes an even more complex structure applies to **Surah 2** in *The Al-Baqara Crescendo: Understanding the Qurʾan's Style, Narrative Structure, and Running Themes*. The technical achievement of these compositions is impressive and the effect of the text upon the listener may well have been enthralling '*resembling the dynamics of rising and falling volume in musical compositions*'. But would anyone have believed, before the belief had become firmly rooted in culture, that such obviously poetic compositions could have been how God talks?

The Qurʾan contains other clues that it was not expected to be taken as a verbatim repetition of the words of God. On occasions, the Qurʾan announcer recites a revelation that is phrased in the divine voice but which in fact contains a statement about the announcer's own mental state. Examples of this include:

> **{42.15}**: '*Say: 'I believe in that which God has sent down…'*,
>
> **{72.25}** and **{21.109}**: *'Say: 'I know not whether that which is promised is nigh …'*,
>
> **{6.15}** and **{39.13}**: '*Say: 'Truly I fear the punishment of a tremendous day'*, and
>
> **{6.90}**, **{25.57}**, **{38.86}** and **{42.23}**: *'Say: 'I ask not for any reward… '*

In **{6.145}**, the absurd position is even arrived at of God appearing to instruct the Qurʾan announcer to say that a revelation is merely his own opinion: '*Say: 'I do not find in that which is revealed unto me anything forbidden…'* **⟨76⟩**. **{33.56}** includes the problematic statement: '*God and His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet*' **⟨31⟩**. When read in the divine voice, this convoluted idea - either that God instructs believers to request Him to grant His blessing upon Muhammad, or else that God Himself invokes blessings upon the Prophet (from whom?) - are barely intelligible. Frequently the Qurʾan's words are qualified by the word '*perhaps*' and whilst God's uncertainty about the future can be theologically explained, the same can hardly be said for the four occasions in which the

divine voice uses the well-known Arabic expression of resignation, '*inshāʾllāh*' ('*if God wills it*'), **{9.28}**, **{85.10}**, **{33.24}** and **{48.27}**.

Although the Qurʾan demands to be received as a divine revelation of the Will of God, its author in fact makes little effort to imitate how one might expect God to express Himself. On the contrary, the framing of the divine speech is often unrealistically formulaic (a dozen clarifications each framed '*They ask you concerning… Say …*') Rather than treating such phrasing as an unconvincing charade, the adoption of the divine voice should be regarded as a literary device to formal assert God's authority for the message being delivered. Perhaps, an analogy would be that of an agent exercising power of attorney expressing their own words as being, *per procurationem*, those of the principal on behalf of whom they act. An even more apposite analogy might be a viceroy – or caliph - exercising the authority of his sovereign monarch. It is suggested that it is in this indirect way that the Qurʾan author expresses his hymns and homilies as *kalām Allāh*.

7. The Canon

Surah 15 (*Al-Ḥijr/The Stone*): 6-10

6. And they said: 'You, upon whom the Reminder has been bestowed from on high, very truly you are insane.

7. If only you would bring us the angels if you were truthful!'

8. <u>We bestow not the angels</u>[a] from on high, except with the truth[b], and in no way would they[c] then be respited.

9. Indeed We, We alone, have bestowed the Reminder from on high and We will most surely preserve it.

10. And most surely, We sent (messengers) before you[sing.] to the sects of the ancients, but no messenger comes[d] to them but they used to ridicule him…

[a] All except Hafs, Hamza, Al-Kesa'i and Khalaf read it as '<u>The angels are not bestowed</u> from on high…'

[b] According to Ibn Ashour and other exegetes 'with the truth' means 'for a purpose'.

[c] The deniers.

[d] Frequently the Qurʾan speaks about prophets using the present tense; this should be pondered by the reader.

[*Bridges' Translation of the Ten Qiraʾat of the Noble Qurʾan, Fadel Soliman, 2020*]

Although individual verses of the Qurʾan frequently express themselves as forming part of a body of revelation that it is expected will be preserved in some form and recited, no verse refers explicitly to any other and other than for **{53.56-57} ⟨4⟩** there is no indication in the text as to how the Qurʾan author intends this corpus to be organised. The orthodox account as to how the Qurʾan came to be canonization is not at all straightforward. It is believed that as verses were announced by Muhammad, they were initially memorised by the prophet and his followers, before some verses, over time, also came to be recorded in an ad hoc manner upon a haphazard variety of writing surfaces. One early and much discussed hadith, has it that when differing versions of the Qurʾan were put to Muhammad, he stated that the angel Gabriel in seven variant forms, known as *ahruf*, possibly to make memorisation easier to the speakers of differing Arabic dialects.[68] Following Muhammad's death in 632, and the deaths in battle shortly thereafter of some of those who had memorised the Qurʾan in its entirety, the first caliph, Abu Bakr (ruled 632-634), is said to have commissioned one Zayd ibn Thabit to identify and preserve on a single set of parchments all of the Qurʾan revelations that he could identify. Zayd is said to have done this, reconstructing the text of the Qurʾan from the disparate records of those verses that had been committed to writing and from the recollections of trusted individuals. On Abu Bakr's death, this precious manuscript passed to his successor Umar who entrusted it to his daughter Hafsa **⟨D⟩**. Two decades later, the third caliph, Uthman (644-656) convened a committee of Qurʾan reciters, chaired by Zayd, and tasked them with reviewing the Quranic material that Zayd had previously been assembled, and re-arranging it into ordered surahs. The document that this committee produced is the Qurʾan that is used today, often now referred to as the '*Uthmanic recension*'. With a definitive canon now settled upon, Uthman is said to have ordered the creation of several bound copies, one of which he sent to '*every Muslim province*', after which, in an attempt to ensure absolute uniformity, Uthman he ordered that all earlier, unofficial Qurʾan manuscripts to be burnt.[69] Hafsa had refused to surrender her manuscript, but after her death this too was seized and consigned to the flames.

Since early Qurʾan manuscripts tended to consistently record only the consonantal rasm **⟨3⟩**, a vast range of different readings and meanings could each be consistently read from the script that appears in these early manuscripts. Shady H Nasser notes in *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qurʾan, The Problem of Tawatur and the Emergence of Shawadhdh* that in the late eleventh century one scholar had documented fifty different 'readings' ('*qirāʾāt*') of the rasm.[70] In the tenth century, one Abu Bakr ibn Mujahid sought to reduce the range of variant Qurʾan texts, by proposing that only those '*qirāʾāt*' that could be attributed to one of seven illustrious Muslims who had lived about a hundred years earlier, should be relied upon. However, there were inconsistencies even amongst the scholars of these reading traditions, and so in the eleventh and twelfth centuries two 'transmitters' ('*riwāyas*') for each of ibn Mujahid's approved '*qirāʾāt*' came to be regarded as orthodox. The addition of three further '*qirāʾāt*' to Ibn Mujahid's original list of seven came to be widely accepted in the fifteenth century, each of which came with the standard two approved transmitters. This resulted in fourteen differing, but generally approved, Qurʾan texts all derived from the same rasm in modern times. Since 1923 the Islamic world has increasingly adopted just one version of the Qurʾan, promoted as the standard Qurʾan text by the Al-Azar University in Cairo (based upon the *rāwī* by Abu ʿAmr Ḥafs, 706–796, of the qiraʾat reading by Abu Bakr ʿAsim, d. 745; and commonly called the 'Cairo Edition').

Naturally this wide divergence of Qurʾans posed awkward questions concerning the reliability of any single reading and of the reliability of the transmission process generally. Whichever reading an individual Muslim might adopt as appearing to be the true meaning of the Qurʾan, the existence of accepted variants seems to contradict the Qurʾan's own assurance that God will protect the transmission of His message from being corrupted after it has been announced:

> **{41.42}** Falsehood comes not upon it, from
> before it or from behind it, a
> revelation from One Wise, Praised;

(*c.f.* **{15.9}** produced above; also '*None alters His Words*', in **{6.115}** and **{18.27}**, and '*None alters the Words of God*' in **{10.64}**). The hadith

stating that Muhammad had delivered the Qurʾan in seven different *ahruf* has been seized upon by some to explain the divergent 'canonical' readings as each being authentic. On this view the Qurʾan becomes a unique multi-layered script for which a single rasm was always intended to communicate a range of possible meanings, each of which had divine origin and absolute legitimacy. However, although Shady Nasser has described the process of the Qurʾan's transmission the five canonisations of the Qurʾan he is at pains to emphasise that there is no record that ibn Mujahid himself claimed that his endorsement of seven trusted readers, represented an assertion that their readings were entirely accurate, nor that any scholar proposed this idea for centuries afterwards. Indeed, in his second book on the topic, *The Second Canonization of the Qurʾan (324/936): Ibn Mujāhid and the Founding of the Seven Readings* Shady Nasser records six instances in which ibn Mujahid explicitly rejects as incorrect specific readings from the readers that he endorses as most reliable.

Reports of lost, non-canonical and divergent texts

The traditional accounts of the first and most important of these 'canonisations', namely the proposed fixing of the rasm by Uthman, contains a number of apparent internal inconsistencies or '*holes in the narrative*'.[71] If the companions of Muhammad alive during the caliphate of Abu Bakr had included even one person who had memorised the Qurʾan, why would Zayd have had to reconstruct the Qurʾan using fragmentary documentation and tracking down individual recollections? Should there not have been, at the very least a broad, and easily accessible, consensus of what the Qurʾan had said? Why would Caliph Uthman have required a committee to determine which order the surahs should be presented in, effectively 'jumbling up' for no obvious purpose what the memorisers would naturally have tended to remember in blocks that would have been reasonably easy to assign to particular occasions or phases? And if Uthman's recension had been only the second written Qurʾan, after Abu Bakr's what were the non-canonical manuscripts that he had ordered to be burnt?

In fact, there are several Islamic traditions that verses and even whole surahs revealed by Muhammad were lost during the

canonisation process. One hadith recounts that Abu Bakr had only been persuaded to compile the first written Qurʾan, after Umar had asked for a verse to be recited to him but discovered that the only person known to have memorised it had been killed in battle.[72] The earliest extant collection of *aḥādīth*, *Al-Muwatta* of Malik bin Anas, records a tradition that **Surah 9**, which now consists of 128 verses, had once been the same length as **Surah 2** (at more than twice that length). One of the companions of Muhammad, Ubay ibn Kaʿb, is said to have made a similar claim for **Surah 33**, a surah which in now has just seventy-three verses.[73] This is particularly significantly, since **Surah 33** contains verses that are personal to the Qurʾan's author and his household, including, in the traditional narrative, the renunciation of his adopted son, Zaid **⟨67⟩**, and one may reasonably wonder whether any missing verses from this surah may have addressed the issue of succession to leadership of the Muslim community. Possibly the best known such report attributes to Aisha, one of Muhammad's wives, the following explanation for the absence in the Qurʾan of any reference to the sentence of stoning to death for adultery:

> *The verse of stoning* **⟨69⟩** *and of breastfeeding an adult ten times* **⟨60⟩** *was revealed, and the paper was with me under my pillow. When the Messenger of Allah died, we were preoccupied with his death, and a tame sheep came in and ate it.*[74]

Umar is quoted as having lamented that '*most of the Qurʾan has been lost*' and that what had been preserved should not be described as the Qurʾan, but '*the Qurʾan that appeared.*'[75]

In addition to these reports of lost verses, the account that Uthman had ordered the destruction of all non-canonical Qurʾan manuscripts, seems unlikely, or at least singularly unsuccessful, since more than a dozen such manuscripts are known to have survived into the eight century when their deviations from the Uthmanic recension were recorded in Abdullah ibn Abu Dawud's *Kitab al-Masahif* (*Book of the Manuscripts*').[76] One of these 'companion codices', the Qurʾan compiled by the companion Abdullah ibn Masʿud, is said to have omitted the first and final two surahs of the present Qurʾan. Ibn Masʿud's contemporary, Ubay ibn Kaʿb, by contrast, had a manuscript that contained these three

surahs and two other short surahs that were not accepted into the canon (the contents of which have now been reconstructed from other sources.[77]) Ibn Masʿud is said to have been particularly scathing of Zayd's editing of the Qurʾan canon and to have disparaged Zayd personally describing him as '*from the loins of a disbeliever*' and boasting: '*I read the Qurʾan while this Zayd was still a boy with two locks of hair, playing among the Jewish children in the Jewish school*'[78]. He even reportedly urged Muslims in Iraq to conceal their alternative Qurʾan manuscripts in order to protect God's Word from Thabit's innovations. Of course, none of these traditions of lost verses and bitter disputes can be corroborated today, and Muslims adopt different stances concerning them. The existence of such accounts by itself is evidence that the canonisation of the Qurʾan was far more controversial and fractious than the glossed and illogical account that is usually told.

Canonisation of the text

Modern scholarship is now beginning to cast a glimmer of light into the canonisation process. It appears that the accuracy of Abdullah Ibn Abu Dawud's description of the dozen or so non-canonical Qurʾan manuscripts in his *Kitab al-Masahif* is supported by the identification of a fragment of a non-canonical companion codice has survived to the present day. A Qurʾan manuscript found in a mosque in Sana'a in 1972 has been discovered to be a palimpsest (a document for which an original text was erased and overwritten). Analysis of the lower, but still partially legible, text has revealed several of the same variants from the canon that are listed by Abdullah ibn Abu Dawud.[79] It has also been observed that on any given verse, the canonical Qurʾan has a tendency to reflect the majority view of the non-canonical variants collected by Ibn Abu Dawud. All of this suggests that the canonical Qurʾan rasm emerged from a process of compromise and harmonisation of earlier differing codices. This scenario also fits the tradition that of the five surahs that appeared in the codex of Ubay ibn Kaʿb but were absent from that of Ibn Masʿud, the canon includes three.

The more interesting question then becomes not the canonisation that led to the so-called '*Uthmanic recension*', but the processes through which these earlier similar but differing codices came into

existence. These variants may have come about as the defective reproductions of an earlier prototype or ur-Qurʾan. The insertion before every surah except **Surah 9** of the declaration:

> '*Bismillah al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*',
>
> ('*In the Name of God,*
> *the Compassionate, the Merciful*') **⟨10⟩**,

which, it is safe to assume from ibn Abu Dawud appears on all the companion codices to which he had access, is by its nature an act of placing disparate texts into a single canon. The appending of this formula then must have preceded the creation of all the variant codices from which the archetypal canon was later formed.

Almost all of the Quranic variants, whether from the *Kitab al-Masahif* or the qiraʾat, could fairly be described as minor and inconsequential. What unites the Qurʾan s is always vastly more than what divides them. It can quite rightly be claimed that the Qurʾan is an exceptionally well-preserved document for its age and type. In fact, mapping the variations amongst the oldest manuscripts, far from weakening confidence in the reliability of the transmission of the Qurʾan rasm, has the opposite result of confirming the account of four first generation copies made from a canonical archetype and sent to different regions of the Arab empire. But the obscurity concerning the process leading to its compilation into a canon, and the suspicion of lost and misplaced verses is important for those interested in discovering its original message and purpose to bear in mind. It also makes the reader's natural instinct to interpret any verse within its textual context a potentially misleading one. The project to excavate the intended meaning of the Qurʾan's words, when they were first uttered fourteen centuries ago, from the canonical rasm, remains very much in its infancy.

8. Abrogation

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah/The Cow*): 106

> **None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar. Knowest thou not that Allah Hath power over all things?**
>
> [*Yusuf Ali/Saudi approved revision, 1985*]

The Qurʾan asserts in **{4.82}**. that it contains no discrepancy. It is, perhaps, the nature of religious texts that they can raise paradoxes, but within the Qurʾan, some instructions go beyond this and notwithstanding the claim in **{4.82}** plainly do contradict one another. Well known examples include the sentence prescribed for illicit sexual activity **⟨69⟩** and the permissibility of the consumption of alcohol **⟨77⟩**. One method that Islam has adopted to deal with such inconsistencies is through the doctrine of abrogation, that is to say by treating a verse as having replaced (abrogated) an instruction given in a previously announced verse. **{2.106}**, produced above, is one of a handful of verses in which the Qurʾan appears to accept that its instructions have changed. Others include:

> **{13.39}**: *'God effaces what he will and establishes'*,
>
> **{17.86}**: *'And if We willed, We could take away that which We revealed unto thee…'*

A possible fourth is:

> **{87.6-7}**: *'We shall teach thee to recite that thou wilt not forget. Save what God wills'*.

{16.101} records that such changes did not pass without adverse comment from sceptics.

{16.101} And when we replace one sign
with another – and God knows
best that which He sends down.

They say: 'You are only a
fabricator!' Nay, but most of them
know not;

(*c.f.* **{22.52}**, reputedly announced in relation to the 'Satanic verses' episode **⟨34⟩**.) Abrogation is a well-established Islamic doctrine, but Islamic scholars' opinions concerning the number of verses that have been abrogated by later verses vary widely. Some lists of these are very short but others, such as that drawn from the seventeenth century Indian Islam revivalist, Shah Waliullah, exceeded five hundred.[80] It follows from the possibility of abrogation that when a Muslim is considering how they should interpret any verse, they must consider, amongst other things, whether it has been implicitly amended or repealed by an inconsistent later verse.

Following the tradition narrative, surahs are generally classified either as Meccan or as Medinan. When the Qurʾan is considered according to this binary division, and with the understanding that the former verses were announced to a small group of devotees in a hostile setting and the latter to a community that was autonomous and growing in power, the differences in style and content between the two is marked. So-called 'Meccan' surahs and the individual verses within the surahs tend to be shorter and more poetically expressed than the Medinan surahs and the themes addressed to be more spiritual. That is to say, the earlier surahs are more likely to address worship, righteousness and personal virtue that is expressed in general terms, supported by vivid if sometimes surreal descriptions of the Last Day, judgment, heaven and hell. The later Medinan surahs and individual verses are more prosaic and more likely to be concerned with the need to show obedience to '*God and His Messenger*' **⟨86⟩**, exhortations to wage holy war against God's enemies (**Part VII**) and the establishment of laws and punishments (**Part V**). Various proposals have been made for a more precise chronological ordering of the Qurʾan. The order offered in the introduction to the Cairo Edition (see **⟨7⟩**) above) is produced on the following pages:

The order of the Qurʾan surahs, as given in the introduction to *Qurʾan Karim* (the *1924 Cairo Edition*)

Meccan Surahs

96
68 (except verses 17-33 and 48-50)
73 (except verses 10, 11 and 20)
74
1
111
81
87
92
89
93
94
103
100
108
102
107 (except verses 4-7)
109
105
113
114
112
53 (except verse 32)
80
97
91
85
95
106
101
75
104
77 (except verse 48)
50 (except verse 38)
90
86
54 (except verses 44-46)
38
7 (except verses 163-170)
72
36 (except verse 45)
25 (except verses 68-70)
35
19 (except verses 58-71)
20 (except verses130-131
56 (except verses81-82)
26 (except verses 197 and 224-227)
27
28 (except verses52-55, 85)
17 (except verses 26, 32-33 57 and 73-80)
10 (except verses 40, 94-96)
12 (except verse 137)
15 (except verse 87)
11
6 (except verse 20, 23, 91, 93, 114, 141 and 151-153)
37
31(except verses 27-29)
34 (except verse 6)
39 (except verses 52-54)
40 (except verses 56-57)
41
42 (except verses 23-25, 27)

43 (excl. verse 54)	**Medinan Surahs**
44	
45 (excl. verse 14)	2
46 (excl. verses 10, 15 and 35)	8
51	3
88	33
18	60
28 (excl. verses 83-101)	4
16 (excl. verses 126-128)	99
71	57
14 (excl. verses 28-29)	47
21	13
23	55
32 (excl. verses 16-20)	76
52	65
67	98
69	59
70	110
78	24
79	22 (excl. verses 52-55)
82	63
84	58
30 (excl. verses 17)	49
29 (excl. verses 1-11)	66
83	62
	64
	61
	48
	5
	9

The above chronology by no means represents a consensus in the Islamic world. Indeed, there is considerable doubt as to whether it is generally sound to talk of the surahs being produced in a straightforward chronological sequence at all, since many may have undergone a process of concurrent editing. Even a cursory

reading of the Qurʾan, and in particular the very short surahs towards its end and the much longer but disjointed surahs towards its beginning, should raise the suspicion that the former may sometimes be mere fragments of longer compositions (of which Surah **98** is a particularly clear example) whilst the latter are amalgams of shorter ones. Even within orthodox Islam, treating a given passage as having been inserted into a previously revealed surah is not unusual. In *The Qurʾan, A Historical Critical Introduction*, Nicholai Sinai suggest that **Surahs 2**, **22**, **6**, **7** and **22** in particular show signs of '*Meccan-Medinan hybridity*'.[81] However, the fact that there was a sea-change from the Qurʾan's earlier to later announcements can hardly be denied. Without doubt, the single most controversial area of Quranic interpretation is the extent to which generally more tolerant and benevolent 'Meccan' verses (**Part VI**), should be balanced against or deemed to be revoked by later verses demanding subjugation to the author as God's viceroy on earth and culminating in the '*sword verses*' of **Surah 9** (see. **⟨37⟩**, **⟨50⟩**, **⟨51⟩** and **Part VII**).

It should be kept in mind that none of the verses cited above in support of abrogation specifically states that one verse of the Qurʾan could be read as removing the effect of an earlier verse. **{2.106}**, **{16.101}** and **{17.86}**, for example, might be read without difficulty as the Qurʾan merely explaining that it supersedes, for its Arab congregation, the Mosaic law as it is set out in the Torah for the children of Israel **⟨88⟩**. Not only does a doctrine of abrogation, seem rather unnecessary for the Word of God announced over a period of just twenty years, but one must wonder, whether, had the doctrine been understood in the way that it is now understood, at the time that the Qurʾan was still being announced, greater effort would have been made to note the chronological order in which verses had been announced. If the compilers of the Qurʾan had had a doctrine of abrogation within their contemplation, their decision to purposefully arrange the surahs in a non-chronological order and insert some verses into earlier announced surahs, was unhelpful to put it mildly (if not wholly inexplicable).

The premise promoted by this Companion is of course that the Meccan-Medinan narrative is manifestly false. Whilst the Qurʾan carries unmistakeable signs that its author's thinking evolved and

concerns changed over the course of its composition, neither the wording of any verse, nor their canonisation, provides any support for the idea that the author was concerned with providing a mechanism for the ironing out inconsistencies. However, for believers the absence of an agreed chronological sequence of revelation encourages an atomistic approach to reading the Qurʾan whilst the doctrine of abrogation, absent such a sequence, was always bound to be an abundant source of legal and doctrinal confusion. The two in combination enable the holders of inconsistent doctrinal positions within Islam, and nowadays interested non-Muslims too, to cite contradictory verses to one another, each relying upon the Qurʾan's assertions of its timeless authority to support uncompromising interpretations. In practice, it can only be very rarely that disputants over a disagreement of sincerely held principle are likely to leave their particular bone of contention to venture into the more difficult and technical subject of the chronology of the Qurʾan's revelation, which may depend upon such arcane matters as verse length and word-use, or the lifespans and reputations of the links in an ancient chain of hadith transmission.

9. Arabian Rhapsodies

Surah 88 (*Al-Ghashiyah/The Overwhelming Event)*

1. Has word reached you of the Enfoldment?
2. That day some faces will be diffident,
3. Labouring and defeated,
4. Admitted to a Fire vehement,
5. Given drink from a Fount fulminant!
6. For food only thorns and bracken,
7. That will not satisfy their hunger nor fatten.
8. That Day some faces will be jubilant.
9. Their efforts their source of contentment,
10. In a lofty garden recumbent,
11. Free of idle prattlement,
12. And graced with a Fountain effluent.
13.There couches will be loftily conveyed,
14. Cups carefully displayed,
15. Cushions plentifully arrayed,
16. Carpets beautifully laid.
17. Do people not wonder how camels were fashioned?
18. How the high heavens were fastened?
19. How mountain cliffs were battened?
20. How the earth was flattened?
21. Go ahead and remind them! You were sent to remind,
22. To dictate and not mind,
23. But to those who turn and disbelieve,
24. They will receive God's punishment without reprieve!

[*2015, Shawkat M Toorawa, Cornell University*[82]]

Notwithstanding the traditional classification of surahs as either Meccan or Medinan, the reality is that there is no simple binary division apparent from the text but rather the Qurʾan's literary style and themes seem to evolve gradually. One aspect of this stylistic development, it is generally acknowledged, is that the early surahs tended to have been shorter and more poetic and become, over time, longer and more prosaic. Since the surahs are generally ordered by length from the longest to the shortest this means that it is generally speaking, the closer to the rear of the Qurʾan that a surah is placed, the earlier it is likely to have been composed.

Before the Claim to Prophecy

Sixteen surahs of the Qurʾan contain no indication that they are intended to be received as the speech of God (**Surahs** 1, **82**, **85**, **91**, **93**, **99-107**, **110** and **111**). A further four surahs (**109** and the final three surahs, **112**, **113** and **114**) are divine speech merely by virtue of their commencing with the word '*Say*', possibly a later addition. Of these twenty surahs there are reasons to think that **Surahs 1** (which, it will be seen, follows the same structure as the Lord's Prayer of Christianity **⟨54⟩**,) and **112** (which resembles the principal Jewish prayer, the Schema Yisrael, whilst refuting the Nicene Creed **⟨11⟩**) were late additions to the Qur'an. Since the inclusion of **Surahs 113** and **114** in the Qur'an canon had at one stage been disputed **⟨7⟩**) **1** and **112** may well have, in one early canon, have been the first and last surahs and would have served as liturgical framing texts to the Qur'an proper. Setting aside these two, it seems reasonable, to regard the remaining eighteen surahs that are not drafted in the divine voice as belonging to the Qur'an's earliest phase of composition. This is because it seems unlikely that a preacher having once asserted the right to deliver his messages as though they came directly from God Himself, he would then abandon this authority and return to composing material in his own voice.[83]

These eighteen non-mantic surahs incorporate Judeo-Christian themes including Creation, the Last Day, and divine judgment, leading to reward or fiery punishment. However, in a striking

contrast to what would come later, none of these (nor for that matter **Surahs 1** and **112**) contains any explicit biblical allusions. The closest that any comes to so doing is **Surah 85** which includes references to pharaoh, **{85.18}**, and to a '*preserved tablet*', **{85.22}**, both hinting at the Moses story. The surahs contain several non-biblical references, including to the people of Thamud at **{85.18}** and **{91.11}**, the hamstringing of '*the she-camel of God*' at **{91.13-14}** (these being to allusions being expanded upon elsewhere in the Qurʾan **⟨27⟩**), the Companions of the Elephant, the Quraysh and Abu Lahab. Four read as though they could have easily originated as votive prayers of pagans. These include the Qurʾan's disputed final two surahs, known together as the Verses of Refuge:

{113.1} Say: 'I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak,

{113.2} From the evil of what He has created,

{113.3} From the evil of darkness when it enshrouds,

{113.4} From the evil of those who blow upon knots,

{113.5} And from the evil of the envier when he envies.'



{114.1} Say: 'I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind.

{114.2} The king of mankind,

{114.3} The God of mankind

{114.4} From the evil of the stealthy whisperer,

{114.5} Who whispers into the breasts of mankind,

{114.6} From jinn and mankind.'

The other two are **Surah 106**, which offers thanks to '*the Lord of this house*' for the sustenance and secure passage of the Quraysh during '*the journey of winter and of summer*' and **Surah 111,** calling down a curse upon one Abu Lahab and his wife. From all of these factors it seems reasonable to conclude that the Qur'an commenced with short compositions for the spiritual benefit of an audience that was monotheistic but neither Jewish, nor Christian nor adherents of any other organised religion.

The overarching theme of these early surahs, seen with particular vividness in **Surahs 99**, **101** and **102**, is that of the coming apocalypse. God's imminent winding up of the world, they insist, is as certain as His creation of it, and will be surely followed by His allocation of its past and present inhabitants to either Gardens of Paradise or the Hellfire. The surah's insistence that the end is nigh are urgent and emotive:

{102.3} Nay, soon you will know.

{102.4} Indeed, soon you will know.

{102.5} Nay if you knew with the knowledge of certainty,

{102.6} You would surely see Hellfire.

Their imagery is striking but enigmatic. They were once thought to be the product of ecstatic mystical experiences, which is why one nineteenth century orientalist, Sir William Muir referred to the early surahs as Muhammad's '*rhapsodies*'. A contemporary scholar of Muir's, Theodor Nöldeke, wrote:

> *In the pieces of the first period the convulsive excitement of the Prophet often expresses itself with the utmost vehemence. He is so carried away by his emotions that he cannot choose his words; they seem rather to burst from him. Many of these pieces remind us of the oracles of the old heathen soothsayers …*
>
> *Muhammad speaks of visions and appears even to see angels before him in bodily form. There are some*

> *intensely vivid descriptions of the resurrection and the last day, which must have exercised a demonic power over men who were quite unfamiliar with such pictures. Other pieces paint in glowing colours the joys of heaven and the pains of hell.*[84]

This assessment, it is suggested, whilst understandable is incorrect. Although these surahs contain no explicit Bible references, the imagery is often biblically based. The signs of the Last Day in the heavens in **{82.1-2}**, for example:

> **{82.1}** When the sky is cleft asunder,
>
> **{82.2}** And when the stars are dispersed,

adapts the prophecy of Isaiah 34.4:

> *All the stars of heaven will be dissolved. The skies will be rolled up like a scroll, and all their stars will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like figs from a fig tree***.**

this prediction of all the stars falling from the sky at the end of days is also referred to by Jesus in the Gospel of St Matthew (24.29) and appears in the Book of Revelation (6.13-14). The snorting war horses that are envisaged in **Surah 100**, thundering down upon humanity, sparks flying from their hooves, recalls the imagery of Jeremiah 8.16 ('*From Dan is heard the snorting of His steeds, The neighing of His stallions shakes the whole land, They come devouring the land and all it contains*'), Joel 2.4 ('[*the day of the Lord's*] *appearance is that of horses, like steeds they run, as with the rumble of chariots they leap on the mountain-tops, as with the crackling of a fiery flame devouring stubble*') and, again from the Book of Revelation, the four horsemen of the apocalypse (Revelation 6).

Inventive exegesis and anti-Sasanian polemics

Islamic tradition has striven to explain some of the more obscure passages, by weaving a web of narrative accounts, sometimes fantastic, sometimes banal, around them, although what these explanations really seem to tell us is that these surahs appear to have been just as mysterious to the Muslim scholars of the first

centuries after Muhammad, as they had been to Muir and Nöldeke. The following are three of the best-known exegetic expansions from these early surahs.

- **Surah 85**:

  {85.4} May they perish,
  the inhabitants of the pit,

  {85.5} The fire well fuelled,

  {85.6} When they sat by it,

  {85.7} And were witness to what they did
  to the believers,

  {85.8} And took vengeance on them for
  naught but that they believed in
  God, the Mighty, the Praised.

  is traditionally associated with a well-documented massacre of Christians in Najran, by the Jewish Ḥimyarite king Dhu Nuwas in 523.

- The Ethiopian general Abraha, who had avenged the Najran massacre and established a Christian state in Yemen, is said to have led the doomed '*companions of the elephant*' of **Surah 105**, upon an expedition against Mecca in the year of Muhammad's birth. The motivation for the attack is not satisfactorily explained, but Abraha is said to brought with his army an elephant called Mahmut for the express purpose of demolishing the Kaaba. Ibn Ishaq describes how Muhammad's own grandfather ʿAbd al-Mutallib organised the evacuation of the city to nearby mountains from which vantage point they watched as:

  > *God sent upon* (Abraha's army) *birds of the sea like swallows and starlings. Each bird carried three stones, like peas and lentils, one in its beak and two between its claws. Everyone who was hit died but*

> *not all were hit. They withdrew in flight by the way they came…*[85]

- The seething invective of **Surah 111** against the accursed hands of Abu Lahab and his wretched wife is said to have been directed at Muhammad's treacherous uncle who, it is said, organised opposition to his nephew's mission, and the uncle's wife, called '*the wood-carrier*' by God '*because she carried thorns and cast them in the apostle's way where he would be passing*.'[86]

These three passages have been examined in detail by Daniel Beck in *Evolution of the Early Qurʾan, from Anonymous Apocalypse to Charismatic Prophet*, and a subsequent development of his ideas t *Anti-Sasanian Apocalypse and The Early Qur'ān: Why Muḥammad Began His Career As A Prophet Who Genuinely Prophesied*. Beck considers that the perpetrators of an injustice against believers marked in **Surah 85** was far more likely to refer to the more recent massacre of Christians in Jerusalem by the Sasanian army in 614. The surah does not assert that this injustice had involved the burning of believers, nor for that matter does it refer to any pit. Adam Silverstein in *Who are the Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd? Q 85:4–10 in Near Eastern Context* draws attention that the rasm, ʾ-kh-d-d, that is frequently rendered in English translation as '*pit*' has not been found in pre-Islamic Arabic, and suggests a derivation from the Hebrew '*ʾakh*' meaning '*furnace*'. Silverstein draws attention to the similarity in the expression of a '*fire well-fuelled*' - '*al-nāri … waqūdi*' - in **{85.5}** and the blazing furnace that failed to harm three believers thrown into it of the Book of Daniel, described no less than eight times in chapter 3 as '*nū-rā yāqiḏtā*'. Both Beck and Silverstein agree that the evil doers of **Surah 85** sit awaiting punishment in the fire of Hell, that burns the wicked but leaves the righteous unscathed.

The story of Abraha's marching of an African elephant hundreds of miles across the Arabian desert would not have been feasible for practical reasons that are explored by Daniel Beck, and, even if possible, would have been a ridiculous method to achieve the end of pulling down what must have been a very modest structure. But even setting aside practicalities, it makes no theological sense for a

Christian king to have sought to destroy, rather than purify, a shrine that local tradition asserted was built by Abraham. Nor does it make sense for God to smite a monotheist king for his efforts to confront paganism. Rather, Beck convincingly argues, the elephant appears in **Surah 105** as a symbol of the military might of the Sasanians, which frequently used Indian war elephants in battle and used the elephant motif as an emblem of their imperial splendour. The last Lakhmid king, Nuʿman, had, so it is said, been punished for converting to Christianity by being trampled to death by elephants.[87] As with **Surah 85** the anti-Sasanian message of **Surah 105** invokes a biblical image, for in 2 Maccabees 15, Judas Maccabeus demonstrated God's favour by defeating a Seleucid army that had used elephants against Israel. The flock of '*birds*', Beck argues, should in fact be read not as swallows and starlings, but as a flight of warrior angels (the word Arabic word '*ṭayran*' from the root t-y-r, '*to fly*', literally means '*fliers*'), delivering God's vengeance against the Persians, not by dropping tiny clay stones upon them but by reading from inscribed tablets.

The cursing of Abu Lahab (literally '*the father of the flame*') is yet again, Beck argues, anti-Sasanian polemic, this time a direct reference to the Shah, Kusrow II. The flame of his epithet links Kusrow's Zoroastrian faith to his ultimate destination in the Hellfire. Abu Lahab's '*wife*' is a more difficult metaphor to unpack - possibly she is an avatar for his sin - but the symbolism of her carrying kindling for his immolation requires no great decryption and has nothing to do with Muhammad pricking his feet on scattered thorns.

Beck sees further anti-Sasanian polemic in surahs employing the divine voice, including **Surahs 68** and **80**. The '*blind man*' of **{80.25}** is traditionally given the banal literal interpretation of referring to a blind follower of Muhammad whom, for some unspecified reason, the prophet is said to have found to be irritating. Beck offers the more meaningful reading that it is a reference to Kusrow's father, Hormizd IV, the Sasanian Shah of Persia, whose eyes had been put out in 590 during the palace coup that had put Kusrow **⟨1⟩** on the throne. The moral of the surah is that his blinded father should have acted as a warning to Kusrow of the inevitable fate of those who pursued treacherous scheming rather than righteous

conduct. All of these anti-Sasanian themes help to place the early Qur'an within a political context. Beck suggests that the defeat of the companions of the elephant was a reference to the Battle of Dhu Qar, an Arab rebellion of against Sasanian rule. Alternatively, it could be the first major defeat of the Sasanian army by Heraclius in 622. Both contributed to the collapse of Sasanian authority in Northern Arabia, and its replacement there by the Kingdom of the Tayyaye. They also allow the early Qurʾan to be seen as delivering a political message to the people to who it was first announced. The consequence of the traditional narrative explaining **Surahs 80**, **85**, **105** and **111** by reference to a massacre far away and a hundred years earlier, in the case of **Surah 85**, and otherwise to obscure Meccan affairs and personages, has the effect not only of isolating the Qurʾan from the epoch-defining times in which it was actually composed, but effectively denying these surahs any coherent message.

Early Qur'an style

Later surahs would be phrased in the divine voice, but many would continue to demonstrate some of the same stylistic devices as the early non-mantic surahs. For example, of the non-mantic surahs **85**, **91**, **93**, **100** and **103** commence with a series of short oaths**. Surah 85**, for example begins:

{85.1}	By the sky possessed of constellations,
{85.1}	by the Day promised,
{85.1}	and by the witness and the witnessed

Similar oaths open **Surahs 36**, **37**, **38**, **43**, **44**, **50**, **51**, **52**, **53**, **68**, **77**, **86**, **89**, **92** and **95**, of which **Surahs 75** and **90** contain a verb, '*I swear by…*' In addition, oaths appear within the body of three other surahs: **69**, **81**, **84**, and within **Surah 86** which starts with an oath.[88]

Angelika Neuwirth[89] has divided the entities that are sworn by into three types:

> a category that she describes as 'tableaux', invoking animate but supernatural, undefined and generally threatening entities, such as:
>
> > '*By those ranged in ranks,*
> > [probably angels, *c.f.* **{37.165}**]
> > *And the drivers driving,*
> > *And the reciters of a reminder…'*, **{37.1-3}**,
> >
> > '*By those that wrest violently…*', **{79.1}** **⟨14⟩**,
> >
> > '*By the sky and that which comes by night*', **{86.1}**,
> >
> > '*By the panting chargers…*', **{100.1}** (see above);
>
> sacred sites:
>
> > '*By the Mount…*', **{52.1}**,
> >
> > '*By this land…*', **{90.1}**,
> >
> > '*By the fig and the olive,*
> > *By Mount Sinai …*', **{95.1-2}**;
>
> and celestial phenomena representing time:
>
> > '*By the night as it enshrouds,*
> > *By the day as it discloses…*', **{92.1-2}**,
> >
> > '*By the sun and its morning brightness*
> > *By the moon when following it*', **{91.1-2}**,
> >
> > '*By the declining day…*' **{103.1}**;

For the divine voice to preface his message to humans by swearing upon features of His creation is hard to rationalise. Humans may swear by such phenomena in an attempt to amplify the potency of

their words with their audience, but the impact of the words of God, if they are accepted as such, cannot be bolstered by association with something more powerful. The traditional Islamic interpretation of these verses is reduced to treating them as either conveying esoteric wisdom or as empty poetic devices. The fact that the practice was initiated prior to the adoption of the divine voice, was continued after the Qurʾan became styled as the speech of God and yet does not feature in any surah numbered lower than 36, may lead us to provisionally identify the 'divine voice' surahs in which oaths occur as belonging to a second phase of Qurʾan composition. **Surahs 36** and **50** commence with oaths by the Qurʾan itself and **43** and **44** with oaths to the Clear Book **⟨4⟩**. These four surahs may be deemed to have been composed, or at least to have reached their final form, in an intermediate period between the tableaux/sacred site/celestial phenomena oaths and the cessation of any oaths at all.

A rather similarly poetic characteristic is that six surahs begin with the words '*When the…*' Of these, two are surahs that are not couched in the divine voice: **Surahs 82** (verses 1 and 2 of which are produced above) and **99** ('*When the earth is shaken with her shaking …*') The others are **Surahs 56** ('*When the Event befalls…*'), **63** ('*When the hypocrites come unto thee…*'), **81**, which contains a sequence of thirteen auspicious occurrences, produced at **⟨96⟩** below and **84** ('*When the sky is rent asunder…*') Since both **Surahs 81** and 84 contain oaths within the body of their text, at **{81.15-20}** and **{84.16-18}**, it seems reasonable to treat the beginning of a surah with '*When the…*' as a second indicator, along with oaths, of an early stage of composition.

A third characteristic phraseology both preceding and postdating the adoption of the divine voice, is for the author to tease the audience with a rhetorical question concerning some ambiguous word or phrase. An example opens **Surah 101**:

{101.1}	The Calamity.
{101.2}	What is the Calamity?
{101.3}	And what shall apprise thee of the calamity?

Similar '*What shall apprise thee of…*' questions are asked concerning '*the Undeniable Reality*', **{69.1-3}**, '*Saqar*', **{74.27}**, '*the Day of Division*', **{77.13-14}**, '*Sijjin*', **{83.7-8}**, '*that which comes by night*', **{86.2}**, '*the steep path*', **{90.12}**, '*the night of Power*', **{97.1-2}** (see **⟨96⟩** above) and '*the crushing Fire*', **{104.5}**. None of these mysterious phenomena can be said to have been satisfactorily explained, which is no doubt the point of raising them in the form of an unanswerable question.

It is suggested that those surahs that are expressed in the divine voice, but which continue to employ the same style markers that were used before it held itself out as revelation, may be regarded as belonging to the first revelatory phase (*i.e.*, the second phase overall):

Surahs in the divine voice sharing characteristics with surahs not in the divine voice

<table>
<tr><td>Beginning
'When the…'</td><td>56 and 63</td><td rowspan="2">81 and 84</td></tr>
<tr><td>Oaths</td><td>36, 37, 38, 43, 44, 50, 51, 52, 53, 68, 86, 89, 92 and 95</td><td rowspan="2">69, 77 and 86</td></tr>
<tr><td>'What shall apprise thee of …'</td><td>74, 83, 90 and 97</td></tr>
</table>

This list may be refined a little further.

> Since **Surahs 36, 43, 44** and **50** include oaths on the Qurʾan, they may be deemed to have been composed after the surahs featuring oaths on extrinsic phenomena.
>
> As referred to above, twenty-nine surahs begin with '*mysterious letters*' **⟨3⟩**. Six of these surahs feature in the above table: **36, 43, 44** and **50** - that is the say the four that include oaths upon the Qurʾan or Clear Book, corroborating the thesis that these surahs belong to a later

phase than the other 'oath' surahs, and also **Surahs 38** and **68**.

Surah 73 is clearly a companion surah to **Surah 74**. although it does not feature any of the characteristics considered in this section.

Surahs 40-46 all share the same letters (ha and mim, حٰمٓ) and should therefore be treated as a set.

This yields the following overview of the early Qurʾan:

First Phase: surahs not phrased in the divine voice	Second Phase: surahs phrased in the divine voice incl.		
	Incl. oaths on cosmological phenomena, '*When the…*', and '*What shall apprise thee…*'		Incl. oaths on the Qurʾan/ Clear Book
	Phase 2A (without mysterious letters)	Phase 2B (with mysterious letters)	Phase 2C (with mysterious letters)
82, **85**, **91**, **93**, **99-107**, **109 - 111** and **113 -114**	**37**, **51-53**, **56**, **63**, **69**, **73**, **74**, **77**, **83**, **86**, **89**, **90**, **92**, **95** and **97**	**38** and **68**	**36, 40-46** and **50**

Of course, other surahs were no doubt also composed in the above periods which, like **Surahs 73**, **40-42** and **45-46**, do not display any of the three particular characteristics examined here, and it is possible that subsequent editing may have confused the picture in some cases. Nevertheless, it is suggested that the above chart provides a good basis upon which the reader might approach the early Qurʾan.

Biblical allusions in 'Period 2A'

The seventeen surahs allocated above to Period 2A, that is to say surahs that:

1. are composed in the divine voice,
2. share one or more of the style features of the pre-antic surahs, but
3. do not feature the 'mysterious letters',

display, between them, a range of reliance upon biblical allusions.

Eleven of these (**Surahs 52, 56**, **63**, **74**, **77**, **83**, **86**, **90**, **92**, **95** and **97**), like all the surahs that, it is proposed, belong to the pre-mantic period, contain no explicit biblical allusions (other than, arguably, for two oaths that refer to Mount Sinai, one, **{95.2}**, by name; the other, **{52.1}** ('*By the Mount*') by implication. The dominant themes of these surahs are of the Last Day, judgment, and rewards in the gardens or punishment in the hellfire. But whilst these themes draw upon the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Qurʾan's presentation of them is unfamiliar. The gardens feature un-biblical houri ('*wide-eyed maidens*') and '*ghilān*' ('*immortal youths*'), (**{52.20 & 24}**, **{56.17-24}**, **⟨99⟩**, and there are two levels of garden, one for '*the companions of the right*' and a superior one for '*the foremost*'; whilst above the hellfire '*are nineteen*'. Those names that do appear are unknown from any pre-Quranic source. Hell is '*Saqar*', **{74.26-27}**, and within it grows a foul tree called '*Zaqum*' **{56.52}**. The books recording the deeds of the righteous are stored in '*ʿIlliyyuna*', **{83.18-19}**, whilst the books of the profligate are in '*Sijjin*', **{83.7-8}**.

Three surahs, **69**, **73** and **89**, like the pre-mantic **Surah 85**, include a reference to pharaoh (at **{69.10}**, **{73.15-16}** and **{89.10-14}**) within contexts that suggest the Exodus story, although Moses is not mentioned other than as an anonymous messenger **{69.10}**, **{73.15-16}**. The divine voice in **{69.11}** also refers to how '*when the waters overflowed, We carried you upon the ship*', doubtless an allusion to Noah's Ark, although as with Moses, the prior prophet is not named. As with the elven surahs cited in the previous paragraph,

the proper names used are all unbiblical, with **Surahs 69** and **89** both giving the references to pharaoh, and in the case of **Surah 69** the ark, after allusions to punishments that had been visited upon the peoples of Ad/Iram and Thamud.

Surahs 51 and **53** each names Noah, Abraham, and Moses and gives the barest of outlines of their stories, which appears in a sequence of punishment stories that also features those of Ad and Thamud.

Surah 37 contains a significantly expanded cast of named biblical characters: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Lot, Jonah, Moses Aaron, Elisha and offers substantially more detail to their stories, for example describing Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, **{37.102-108}** and summarising the whole story of Jonah **{37.139-148}**.

It would appear then, that it was this second period of Quranic composition that saw the gradual introduction and increasing prominence of direct biblical allusions (all of which relate to the Old Testament). The sketchy details offered, the unsophisticated message compared with later surahs and the alternation of biblical stories with references to Arab folklore all strongly suggests that these surahs were announced to an audience that was neither Jew nor Christian but which had - or at least was gaining through this period - a basic familiarity with the Hebrew bible. If it is the case that the Qurʾan's earliest four biblical references were all to the pharaoh, this must have significance. In **{89.10}** and (from a surah allocated in the above table to the subsequent period) **{38.12}**, pharaoh appears is equipped with some sort of sticks or staves. These items are understood by most translators as camping accoutrements, '*tent poles*' or '*tent pegs*', but, given that **{89.11}** accuses him of having '*tyrannised the land*', it is suggested that Sarwar's inserted explanation that Pharaoh '*victimised people by placing them on the stakes*' is more to the point. Daniel Beck has suggested that, in line with his interpretation of the cursing of Abu Lahab, and the companions of the pit and of the elephant, the title pharaoh is a thinly veiled refence to Khusrow II.

10. '*Bismillā*'

***'Bismillāhi r-raḥmān r-raḥīim'*,**

In the Name of God,
the Compassionate, the Merciful.

As has been previously noted **⟨7⟩**, each surah of the Qurʾan, with the exception of **Surah 9**, begins with the words of the basmala, produced above. In **Surah 1** (produced at **⟨54⟩** below), these are the opening words of the first verse, and consequently the opening words of the Qurʾan. In the remaining one hundred and twelve surahs, the formula precedes the numbered verses as a preliminary invocation.

Devotion directed specifically towards the *name* of God, as distinct from reverence to God Himself, has a particular significance in Jewish tradition where God's name ('*ha-shem*') is often left unstated or abbreviated. The Christian practice of praying *to* God *in the name of* God, whilst somewhat paradoxical, derives from the doctrine of the Trinity, and Jesus' reassurance in John 14.12-14: '*I go to the Father and whatever you ask in my name I will do*'. Pursuant to this verse, and Jesus's instruction in Matthew 28.19 to his disciples to baptize '*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*', it has become common for Christians to commence any prayer by invoking all three members of the Trinity with the same words. The Qurʾan's invocation of God's name at the start of each surah would appear to serve a similar role, although, as one would expect, without reference to the Trinity.[90] It also has the effect - like the prefixing of **Surahs 109** and **112-114** with the word '*Say*' - of formally asserting that what follows is a revelation from God, even where this may not be obvious from the surah proper.

The latter two words that are used for God in the basmala, '*al-raḥmān*' and '*al-raḥīm*', are both derived from the Arabic root r-ḥ-m. These are typically rendered together in English as '*the Compassionate*, *the Merciful*', or some similar pair of virtually

tautologous adjectives. The compound-term undoubtedly plays upon the close similarity of the two words, and is an example of a polyptoton, that is to say a word appearing in different grammatical forms in close proximity for the purpose of creating a poetic emphasis. Polyptotons feature frequently in the Qurʾan and obviously much appealed its author. The divine voice swears '*by the scatterers as they scatter*' **{51.1}**, '*the spreaders spreading*' and '*the discerners discerning*', **{77.3-4}**. Four prophets, namely Moses Jacob, Joseph and Job, independently address God as '*the most Merciful of the merciful*' (**{7.151}**, **{12.64}**, **{12.92}** and **{21.43}** respectively). Christians are condemned for calling Him '*ṯāliṯu ṯalāṯatin*', '*the third of three*', **{5.73}**, whilst the Qurʾan announcer, describes himself (apparently hiding with a companion in a cave) as '*thāniya ithˈnayni*' ('*second of two*'), **{9.40}** **⟨6⟩**. Elsewhere, he describes himself (*per* Droge) as '*a warner of the warners of old (that) the impending is impending*', **{53.56-57}**, and declares his prophetic mission to be that he arrange the Qurʾan into an arrangement **{73.4}** (produced at **⟨6⟩** above). Believers are urged to pray to God for help against the '*whisperer who whispers*' (the wonderfully onomatopoeic '*al-waswasi yuwaswisu*'), **{114.4-5}**, before the Day that '*the Occurrence will occur*', **{56.1}** and **{69.15}**. On that Day, we are told, the sky will '*churn with a great churning*' **{52.9}**, and below it '*the quaker will quake*', **{79.6}**, the earth be '*shaken with her shaking*', **{56.4}**, **{99.1}**, and *'ground up, grinding upon grinding'*, **{89.21}**; its mountains '*crumbled with a violent crumbling*', **{56.5}**, so as to create a plain upon which humans are propelled to judgment by '*drivers driving*', **{37.2}**. Polyptotons have a precedent in the Hebrew Bible but only as singular from plural superlatives, of which the best known are '*servant of servants*', '*Sabbath of sabbaths*', '*Holy of Holies*', '*vanity of vanities*', '*Song of Songs*', '*God of gods*' and '*King of kings*'. The last phrase was the imperial title of Assyrian and Persian monarchs and may well have been the original use of the device in the Jewish scripture. It also occurs four times in the New Testament, on each of which occasions it is followed by '*and Lord of lords*'.[91]

Forms of the word '*racham*' meaning compassion appear throughout the Hebrew Bible as describing God's mercy, for example in Exodus 34.6 ('*Thus the Lord passed before* [*Moses*] *and proclaimed: 'The Lord is a merciful* [*ra-ḥūm'*] *and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and truth*') and Deuteronomy 4.31 ('*Since*

the Lord your God is a merciful [*ra-ḥūm*]. *He will not abandon or destroy you*.') It is not used in the bible as a name for God but significantly, this has usage been discovered in dozens of devotional inscriptions made by pagans, Jews and Christians in pre-Islamic South Arabia. Sometimes the word has even been found in pre-Islamic inscriptions repeated as a polyptoton, for example in the invocations '*Spread all over the world, Rḥamanan, your mercy*' ['*Rḥmnn rḥm-k*'] , written to commemorate a victory of Yusuf, the Jewish king of Himyar, c.533; '*With the power, the aid and the mercy of Rahman*' ['*w-rḥ-mt Rḥmnn*'] *His Messiah and the Holy Spirit*', in a commemorative stele erected by the Christian king Abraha **⟨1⟩** in the second half of the sixth century, and '*They built their house with the assistance of Rahmanan, most merciful* ['*Rḥmnn mtrḥm*']' by a Christian, dated 614.'[92] In 2018 what appears to be an early version of the full basmala was found etched into a Yemen rockface outside a mountain cave using a pre-Arabic script. This inscription begins '*In the name of Allāh, the Raḥmān, have mercy upon us…*' Ahmad al-Jallad, has suggested that since the term '*Allāh*' was a term for God that, prior to the rise of Islam, had generally been used in the north of Arabia (for which see **⟨11⟩** following) whilst '*Raḥmān*' was used primarily in the south, the formula '*Allāh, the Raḥmān*' may have originated '*to synchronize the two main monotheistic poles of Arabia by equating North Arabian Allāh with South Arabian Raḥmān*'.[93] This understanding of the basmala as a fusion of two Arab religious traditions, offers an insight into **{17.110}** in which '*Allāh*', and '*Raḥmān*', are presented as alternatives.

> **{17.110}** Call upon God ['*Allah*']
> or call upon the Compassionate
> ['*al-Raḥmān*']. Whichever you call
> upon, unto Him belong the most
> beautiful Names…

Given that the juxtaposition of the two terms had apparently originated in South Arabia, it may be no coincidence that the only instance in which the basmala appears within the body of a surah other than for **Surah 1** is in Solomon's salutation to the South Arabian Queen of Sheba, **{27.30} ⟨24⟩**.

Al-Raḥman is the second most common title for God to be used in the Qurʾan, its usage outnumbered only by that of Allah. Half of

all surahs (**Surahs 1-30**, **32-36**, **38-44**, **46**, **48-50**, **52**, **55**, **57-60**, **64**, **66-67**, **73** & **78**) use a word from the r-ḥ-m. root as an epithet or attribute to refer to God. Of these fifty-seven surahs, none are amongst the eighteen proposed in the previous section to be the product of the first phase of Quranic composition (*i.e.*, surahs that are not expressed in the divine voice) and only one (**Surah 73**) is included in seventeen surahs that it was proposed constitute 'phase 2A' (i.e. surahs that are expressed in the divine voice but share stylistic features of those that came before and are not prefixed by 'mysterious letters'). Consequently, it seems a reasonable conclusion that there came a time, following the adoption of the divine voice and the incorporation of explicit biblical allusions, when the Qurʾan author adopted the South Arabian al-Raḥman along with the North Arabian Allah.

The word's use is particularly prominent in passages focussing upon retelling Christian stories, al-Raḥman being employed no less than sixteen times in verses that are mostly concerned with the life of Jesus in **Surah 19**. This is consistent with a pattern already referred to (at **⟨1⟩** above) in which vocabulary of Ethiopic-South Arabian origin is used for Christian themes. It will be argued below (**⟨17⟩**, **⟨26⟩** and **⟨88⟩**) that the Qurʾan's author, had effectively ignored the figure of Jesus and the existence of Christians in the early surahs, in which all explicit biblical references are based on the Old Testament, but that in later surahs, prior to the announcement of **Surah 9**, he pursued a relatively indulgent approach to Christianity – contrasted with his treatment of pagans, Jews and Zoroastrians. The reason for this, it will be suggested, is that as the Qurʾan author conquered Byzantine territory, he sought, as far as possible, to accommodate Christians within his domain. His adoption of Ethiopic vocabulary may even suggest that he was building upon a model of South Arabian Christian-Jewish coexistence in his attempt to do so.

It follows from all of this that '*al-Raḥmān*' in the Qurʾan should usually be read as a theonym. It does not appear to be an indication that God is actually, within the context of the verse in which it appears, inclined towards showing compassion or mercy. Indeed, in some verses, such as:

{19.45}: '*Truly I fear a punishment from al-Raḥmān…*',

{19.68-69}: *'… We shall surely bring them around Hell on their knees. Then indeed We shall pluck out* [to burn] *from every group, whosoever amongst them was most insolent towards al-Raḥmān'*,

{19.75}: *'Whoever is in error, al-Raḥmān will extend his term till, when they see that which they have been promised, be it punishment or the Hour, they will know whose position is worse and whose protector is weaker'*,

{21.42}: *'Say: 'Who will protect you, night and day, from al-Raḥmān?...'* and

{36.23}: *'If al-Raḥmān desires harm for me, intercession would avail me naught…'*

to give '*al-Raḥmān'* its literal meaning of '*the compassionate one'* would render the verse nonsensical.

For the absence of the basmala from **Surah** 9 see **⟨52⟩** below.

II

God and His Creation

11. Allah

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah / The Cow*): 255

Allah! There is no god but He,
the Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal.

No slumber can seize Him nor sleep.

His are all things in the heavens and on earth.
Who is there can intercede in His presence
except as He permitteth?

He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures as)
before or after or behind them.
Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge
except as He willeth.

His Throne doth extend over the heavens and
the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in
guarding and preserving them for He is the
Most High, the Supreme (in glory).

[‘*The Holy Qurʾan*’, *Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Saudi approved revision), 1985*]

‘*Allāhu*’

‘*Allāhu*’, God’s name, appears in the Qurʾan over two and a half thousand times. The precise route by which the word reached the Qurʾan is unclear, but it almost certainly reaches the Qurʾan via the Hebrew bible in which ‘*el*’ is used as a generic word for a god, the name of a specific pagan god or as a reference to the one God. When the word is used in the later sense, it is frequently combined with a superlative attribute to distinguish it from the other possible uses, so we find El ʿElyon (‘*God Most High*’), El Sheddai (‘*Almighty God*’) or El Hai (‘*the Living God*’). The word ‘*el*’ also operates as a suffix, for example in the names of the patriarchs and prophets,

Ishmael, Israel **⟨2⟩**, Ezekiel ('*God strengthens*') and Daniel ('*God is my judge*' – for '*dīn*' see **⟨43⟩**), or of angels, '*Gabri-el*' ('*Strength of God*'), '*Mikh'el*' ('*Who is like God*') and '*Rafa'el*' ('*Healing of God*') **⟨14⟩**. More frequently, though El is extended to form Eloah and its plural '*Elōhīm*', usually employed to mean God, but also occasionally used to refer to pagan gods (sometimes the two uses in close proximity to one another, as in Exodus 20.2-3: '*I am the Lord thy God* [*Elohim*] *which has brough thee out of the land of Egypt ... Thou shalt have no gods* [*elōhīm*] *before me*.') Inscriptions have been discovered showing that the title '*al-ilāh*', literally '*the god*', was in use by pagans, Jews and Christians in pre-Islamic Arabia.[94] In a Judeo-Christian context, the definite article must have distinguished the addressee of their prayers from pagan gods. For pagans it has been suggested that it formed a reverential form of address suitable to use towards any god within their specific devotional context, '*just as any king in his own land is called 'the king''*.[95] In later pre-Islamic inscriptions however, the term seems to have become generally understood by non-Jewish or Christian Arabs as the title of a supreme deity or possibly a shared divine essence manifested in individual gods. The contracted form '*Allah*' had existed as a part of names such as ʿAbd Allah ('*servant of god*'). Pagan Allah also acquired a female form, Allat (literally '*the goddess*'), which appears on rock inscriptions and was probably understood amongst pagans as supreme-Allah's consort (she is referred to in the Qurʾan at **{53.19} ⟨34⟩**). However, there is no clear record of any Arab use of the contracted form '*Allah*' as a stand-alone term for a monotheistic God, prior to the Qurʾan. On four occasions the Qurʾan differentiates its '*Allah*' from a pagan or indeterminate monotheist understanding of '*the god*' by a word play upon the importance of the definite article: '*There is no god but the God*' (*'lā ʾilāha ʾillā 'llāhu*), **{2.255}**, **{3.2}**, **{4.87}** and **{64.13}**. This phrase has subsequently been incorporated into the formal, concise, declaration of the Islamic faith, called the shahada, later expanded to include the name of Muhammad:

> '*There is no god but God (or Allah)*
> *and Muhammad is His Messenger*' **⟨53⟩**.

Anthropomorphism of Allah

God, in Islam as in all monotheistic religions, exists outside of creation: unique and transcendent, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent, the creator and sustainer of all that is and everyone's ultimate judge. **{42.11}** and **{112.4}** (see below) assert: '*None is like unto Him*', or literally '*none is like unto his likeness*' but many verses of the Qurʾan refer to Him possessing of distinctively humanoid features. God recalls how He kept the infant Moses adrift in his basket on the Nile **{20.39}**, Noah building and sailing in his ark, **{11.37}** and **{54.14}**, and the Qurʾan author, **{52.48}**, each '*under His Eye*' or '*Eyes*'. Even outside the context of delivering revelations, God 'speaks', for example creating the heavens and earth by uttering the word '*Be!*' **⟨13⟩** suggesting that He possess a mouth. Although the heavens and the earth came into existence by God's oral command, God is said to have created cattle **{36.71}** and Adam **{38.75}** with His Hands (**⟨17⟩**, in the latter case recalling Isaiah 64.8: '*You, Lord, are our Father. You are the potter, we are clay, the work of Your Hands*'). He further states that His Hands are outstretched to bestow as He will **{5.64}**, He keeps His Hand over the hands of those who pledge allegiance to His messenger, **{48.10}** and informs us that on the Last Day the whole earth shall be '*but a handful to Him ... and the heavens will be enfolded in His Right Hand*' **{39.67} ⟨96⟩** Come that Day, God will '*lay bare His Shin*' towards which people will prostrate themselves **{68.42}**, after which '*All things perish save His Face*', **{28.88}**; one of a dozen references to God's Face, that include **{2.115 & 272}**, **{30.38}**, **{55.27}** and **{76.9}**. Eight verses, **{2.255}** produced above, **{7.54}**, **{10.3}**, **{13.2}**, **{20.5}**, **{25.59}**, **{32.4}** and **{57.4}**, describe God as seated upon or mounting His Throne, implying that God possesses a human-like torso, lower back and buttocks, whilst **{2.255}**, continues the furniture imagery by referring to the heavens and earth as God's '*pedestal*' or '*footstool*', once again reflecting Isaiah:

> *Thus says the Lord:*
> *'The heavens are My throne,*
> *And the earth is My footstool'*, (66.1).

Other artifacts used by God include a pen **{96.4}** **⟨32⟩** and keys, **{39.63}** and **{42.12}**. For Yusuf Ali, He oversees His creation '*on a watchtower*', **{89.11}**. He appears to have a right and a left **⟨97⟩**.

The question of how literally to interpret these anthropomorphic references has been the topic of fierce debate in Islam from at least the second Islamic century. During the mihna (an unsuccessful attempt by four successive Abbasid caliphs to impose rationalist interpretations of the Qurʾan) a scholar's views on the attributes of Allah became one of the tests of the soundness of their approach generally. So literally did some dissenters take the references to God's body parts that one hadith transmitter, writing shortly after the failure of the mihna, and clearly troubled by reconciling God's possession of hands to a series of *aḥādīth* in which Muhammad had ruled that the left hand should be reserved for 'unclean' acts, added to the quotation from Muhammad that:

> *'Those who are just and fair will be with Allah, Most High, on thrones of light at the Right Hand of the Most Merciful',*

the caveat:

> *…. And both of His Hands are right hands.*[96]

Some Hanbali scholars have noted that the Qurʾan only compels believers to hold that Allah had one leg and foot and hold that the belief in a second leg relies upon impermissible speculation. By contrast the eleventh century Andalusian scholar Abu Bakr ibn al-Arabi felt it necessary to record: '*I consider it necessary for (God) to possess everything in the way of attributes except a beard and genitals*'.[97]

Notwithstanding such speculative conclusions, it is suggested that the literalists were closer to the author's intention than the allegorists. Whilst it is perfectly reasonable to interpret keeping a person under one's eye or being seated upon a throne figuratively, the density and variety of anthropomorphic references throughout the Qurʾan, coupled with God's promise in **{89.22}** that on the Last Day He will come with His angels to punish the unrighteous (*c.f.* **{2.210}** and **{6.158}**) implies that the Qurʾan author envisaged God as possessing a defined form that exists in spatial dimensions. This

may well have been rooted in a literalist reading of the earliest Israelite conceptions about God contained in the Book of Genesis, including that '*God created man in His own likeness and image*' (Genesis 1.27), and that He walked with Enoch **⟨14⟩**, dined with Abraham and Sarai **⟨22⟩** and wrestled with Jacob (Genesis 32.24-32).

Shirk

The Qurʾan is unequivocal and insistent that God has no associate. To '*associate*' a partner with God is the sin of '*shirk*', said in **{4.48 & 116}** to be unforgiveable **⟨34⟩**. The Qurʾan is especially forceful in its condemnation of the belief that God has taken a child. **Surah 112** replicates Deuteronomy 6.4 and the opening words of the Jewish prayer the Shema Yisrael. In its denial that God had begotten a child it also refutes the opening of the Nicene Creed:

Deuteronomy 6.4 The Schema Yisrael	**The Nicene Creed**	**Surah 112**
Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone [*Adonai echad'*]!	We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, eternally begotten of the Father…	1. Say: 'He, God, is One ['*l-lahu aḥadu'*], 2. God the eternally sufficient unto Himself. 3. He begets not, nor is He begotten, 4. And none is like unto Him.

Similar refutations that God had had a child appear at **{2.116}**, **{6.100-101}**, **{10.68}**, **{17.111}**, **{18.4}**, **{19.88-92}** and **{21.26}**. These denials expand upon the word '*ṣamad*', in **112** a word that appears only once in the Qurʾan which *The Study Quran* renders '*eternally sufficient unto himself*'. Literally, '*ṣamad*', may have either of the two meanings of '*solid*' or '*tightly bound together*' which, in the context

of discussing God's nature, leaves the position ambiguous. Doubtless most, if not all, of these verses were delivered to refute the divinity of Jesus, but in other passages the Qurʾan also specifically denounces the beliefs that either angels, **{16.57}**, **{17.40}**, **{37.149}**, **{43.16}** and **{52.39}**, or three named pagan gods, al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat, are God's daughters. In its last surah to be announced, the Jews are condemned alongside Christians, in their case for allegedly making a claim of divine parentage for the prophet Ezra **⟨88⟩**.

In **⟨34⟩** below, it shall be argued that the Qurʾan author was not a strict monotheist in the sense of disputing the existence of 'gods' other than Allah. He appears to have believed that some of the false gods worshipped by the pagans may well have been real supernatural beings; what he denounced was the association of these creatures with Allah. With this in mind, it is suggested that the arguments proposed in the Qurʾan as to why it is that God could not have gods, angels, Jesus or Ezra as His offspring are far more instructive concerning the nature of Allah than the denials themselves. In **{72.3}** the Qurʾan declares that Allah '*has neither consort nor child*' and in **{6.101}**, it rhetorically asks '*How should He have a child when He has no consort …?*' (*c.f.* **{42.11}**: '*He has appointed for you mates from among yourselves and has appointed mates also among the cattle. He multiplies you thereby (but) naught is like unto Him*'). On all five occasions when it is denied that God had angels as his daughters, He scorns the suggestion by asking how it could be that an omnipotent God could have chosen a daughter for Himself rather than a son (for the Qurʾan's approach to the merits of sons over daughters see **⟨66⟩** below). Finally, the Qurʾan explains that it could not be the case that these were '*gods besides Allah*', since were that to be the case '*they*' (referring to the heavens and the earth) '*would surely have been corrupted*', **{21.22}**, and '*some* [Gods] *would have overcome others*', **{23.91}**. From these explanations, it seems that although Allah happens to reign over His creation in splendid isolation, His nature is not so different to pagan gods, that it is nonsensical, as opposed to merely being inaccurate, to talk of Him having had a consort and offspring and struggling with beings similar to Himself.

God's lack of foreknowledge

The Quranic God makes very many claims to know all things, an omniscience often expressed by the contrast of opposites: '*that which is before and that which is what is behind*', **{2.255}** above, **{20.110}** and **{21.28}**; '*the visible and the unseen*', **{9.94 & 105}**, **{32.6}**, **{62.8}**; '*whatever is in the heavens and upon the earth*', **{17.55}**,**{24.64}** and **{29.52}**, and '*what they hide and what they disclose*', **{16.23}**, **{36.76}**. However, Daud Rahbur in *God of Justice*[98] challenges whether these assertions should be understood as including foreknowledge of the actions of men. He points out that the context of verses in which God seems to know the future is almost invariably either one of God knowing what He has decided to make happen – especially the timing of the Last Day – or knowing the judgment that individuals have earned by their (past) actions. Knowing what sins a person has committed is not, he points out, the same thing as knowing what a person will do before they do it. Moreover, it would defeat the purpose of the Qurʾan's assertions that His purpose is to test man – such as **{3.152-154}**, **{33.11}**, **{47.4}**, and **{57.5}** – if God already knew at the moment of creation what the results of His test were destined to be. Rather, **{3.142}** and **{9.16}**, both confirm that God does not know, in advance, the outcome of His tests:

> **{3.142}** Or did you suppose that you would enter the Garden without God knowing whom among you strove and without knowing those amongst you who are patient?

The words of God in the Qurʾan approximately a hundred times include '*laʿalla*', meaning '*perchance*' or '*haply*'. Even more bizarrely, on four occasions He says '*inshāʾllāh*' ('*if God wills it*') **⟨6⟩**. The only logical explanation for such words, that is consistent with divine authorship, is that when revealing the verse in question God had not yet decided what it was that He would do, and the only reason that one can conjecture for this uncertainty is that whilst He knows everything that is capable of being known at any given moment, He does not know in advance how man will choose to use his free will. Thus, Allah, unlike the God of Judaism and Christianity, not

only exists within the dimensions of space, but also, it seems, travels upon the same timeline as His creation.

God's beautiful names

In addition to the North Arabian name '*Allāh*' and the South Arabian '*Raḥmān*', discussed at **⟨10⟩** above, the divine voice adopts for Himself several specific dominions or lordships. Most commonly He is '*Lord*' ('*rabb*') of '*the worlds*', a title that appears forty-two times across twenty-one surahs. He is also the Lord of:

- '*the Throne*', **{9.129}**, **{21.22}**, **{23.116}**, **{27.26}**, '*the heavens and the earth*', sometimes '*… and whatsoever is between them*' (eleven times, each in a separate surah) '*the ascending ways*', **{70.3}**, and '*the seven heavens and the Throne*' **{23.86}**, **{43.82}**; ~~**{43.82}**~~,

- '*the daybreak*' **{113.1}** **⟨9⟩**, and the star Sirius **{53.49}**;

- '*this House*' **{106.3}**, **⟨2⟩**;

- '*mankind*' **{114.1}** **⟨9⟩**, '*your fathers of old*' **{26.26}**, **{37.126}**, **{44.8}**, and '*Moses and Aaron*', **{7.122}**, **{20.70}**, **{26.48}**, and

- '*all things*', **{6.164}**.

- He is Lord of '*the East and the West*', **{73.9}**, (*c.f.* **{26.28}**; see also **{2.115, 142}**). More puzzling, He is Lord of '*the easts*', **{37.5}**, '*the easts and wests*', **{70.40}** and '*the two easts and two wests*', **{55.17}**.

In addition to these titles of dominion, the Qurʾan frequently concludes a group of verses with one or more attribute of God. Two examples - '*the Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal'* and *'the Most High, the Supreme (in Glory)'*, are produced above at the beginning and end respectively of **{2.255}**. These short descriptions are referred to as His '*most beautiful names'* in **{7.180}**, **{17.110}**, **{20.8}** and **{59.24}**. Based upon a hadith[99] the Qurʾan is said to contain ninety-nine such names, but although several lists of ninety-nine of these names have been compiled, none is regarded as definitive. In fact, as many as 552 such short descriptors of God have been identified

within the Quran.[100] Some of these 'names' describe essential aspects of monotheistic divinity: '*the Almighty*', '*the Creator*', '*the All-seeing, All-hearing*', '*the First and the Last*, **{57.3}** - an epithet that appears four times in the Bible, Isaiah 44.6 & 48.12 and Revelation 1.17 & 22.13 - *the Outward and the Inward*'. The '*Giver of Life*' and '*Bringer of Death*'. Through others, God provides mankind with suitably deferential terms to use when addressing Him: '*the Absolute Ruler*', '*the Pure One*', '*the Beautiful*', '*the Praiseworthy*', '*the Greatest*'. Gabriel Said Reynolds has observed[101], citing Daud Rahbur,

> '*The Qurʾan on occasion gives pairs of divine names that would seem to affirm both one thing and its opposite. For example, Allah is 'the one who honours' and 'the one who humiliates', 'the one who grants' and 'the one who withholds', 'the one who offers help' and 'the one who causes distress', 'the one who guides' and 'the one who leads astray'. These names simply make the point that God is responsible for everything. They do not define his character or disposition in any particular way. Indeed, they would seem to keep God's nature a mystery.*'

Just twice, at **{11.90}** and **{85.14}**, God describes Himself in these names as '*Loving*', but on the occasions where God specifies whom it is that He loves, it is made clear that this is not a love offered unconditionally but is invariably favour granted to those who demonstrate a desirable characteristic – '*the virtuous*' **⟨84⟩**, '*the just*' **⟨85⟩**, '*the reverent*', **{3.76}**, **{9.4-7}**, '*those who fight in in His way in ranks, as if a solid structure*', **{61.4}** and '*those who repent and those who purify themselves*', **{2.222}**.

{59.22-23} contains the longest sequence of beauteous names:

> He is God other than Whom there is no god,
> Knower of the Unseen and the seen,
> And he is the Compassionate, the Merciful.
>
> He is God other than Whom there is no god,
> the Sovereign, the Holy Peace, the Faithful,
> the Protector, the Mighty, the Compeller, the Proud.
> Glory be to Him above the partners they ascribe.

Since, as Reynolds has pointed out, these periodically inserted adjectives are ultimately fairly uninformative, they appear to serve a primarily literary function, to divide the longer surahs into blocks of verses and to round off a stanza with a suitable rhetorical flourish.

Allah's true personality, as it is displayed in the Qurʾan overall, shares many traits with the Hebrew Bible's Eloah/Yahweh; attributes that led Richard Dawkins to famously describe God as '*arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction*.'[102] The rules of both seem capricious, often petty, bizarrely preoccupied with menstruation, sex and diet, and the punishments inflicted harsh, illogical and unevenly applied, see **Part V** and **⟨85⟩**. Both Gods present as unpredictably partisan, short-tempered and concerned, above all, with Their own veneration which is, the Qurʾan tells us in **{51.56}**, the sole reason for His making mankind and jinn at all. However, Yahweh's irascible nature is mitigated by the fact that we perceive Him through the lore of an ancient people, a thousand years in the telling, recalling their history through the prism of a belief that, through all their hardships, God never utterly abandoned them. Following the teachings of Jesus, Christianity transforms the stories of the Old Testament into an extended allegory for the loving, and self-sacrificial God of the New. In the Qurʾan, though, Allah purports to write His own personal testimony and, as a result, His character appears in sharper focus, than the God of the Bible seen through the separating media of either sacred history or theological motifs.

Claims of Allah's merciful nature abound in the Qurʾan, but as Rahbur notes: '*Wherever there is an allusion to God's mercy or forgiveness in the Qurʾan we find that within an inch there also is an allusion to the torment He has prepared for the evil doers*.'[103] Moreover, unlike the depictions of God in the Old Testament, the God of the Qurʾan openly communicates His odium, **{35.39}** and **{40.10}**, of those who disbelieve in him and He clearly derives pleasure from contemplating the comeuppance of those whom He is about to destroy (see for example the fulminating rage of **Surah 111 ⟨85⟩**). An unbecoming mocking sarcasm can be seen in:

'*Send them glad tidings of a painful punishment*',
used on no less than eight occasions: **{3.21}**, **{4.138}**,
{9.3 & 34}, **{31.7}**, **{45.8}** and **{84.24}**;

'*Evil indeed is the gift that will be offered them!...*
We shall surely give (idolaters) their share
undiminished', **{11.99 & 109}**;

'*The Qurʾan … increases the wrongdoers in naught but loss*', **{17.82}**;

'*They say* [traditionally in relation to the expedition to Tabuk **⟨50⟩**] '*Go not forth in the heat*'; *say: 'The Fire of Hell is of a heat more intense*', **{9.81}**;

and following a graphic description of the torments of Hell, '*This shall be their welcome on the Day of Judgment*', **{56.56}**,

Allah several times asserts His primacy in through his excelling in a quality '*mark*', that is translated as plotting, craftiness or cunning, even deviousness. So, in **{3.54}** and **{8.30}** He states: '*They plotted, and God plotted. And God is the best of plotters*'. Similar claims of His superlative plotting skills occur at **{7.99}**, **{10.21}**, **{14.46}** and **{27.50}** and **{13.42}** even boasts '*Unto God belongs plotting altogether*'. A similar attribute is referred to by '*kaya*' (which can also be translated as '*plotting*') in **{86.15-16}**. In **{89.14}**, (the verse that Yusuf Ali translates as God occupying a watchtower) is more commonly rendered '*Truly thy Lord lies in ambush*'. In fact, a curious recurring device in the Qurʾan has God express Himself as engaged in the same activity as those He condemns, including mocking (see especially **{2.15}**), leading astray **⟨19⟩**, '*stirring up enmity*' between, **{5.14 & 64}**, and fighting (see especially **{4.76}** produced at **⟨34⟩** below) those whom He is about to destroy. It is a curious feature that the two punishments threatened by Pharaoh **⟨23⟩**, amputation and torture, are also included in the punishments that the Qurʾan itself mandates **⟨72⟩**. This leaves the impression that it is not the objective nature of what men do in which sin lies, but only in the rejection of God's (through His messengers') supremacy over their actions.

The Lamp and the Dye

The core doctrinal message of orthodox Islam is that Allah is mighty and inscrutable, utterly removed from human comprehension. In fact, the Qurʾan describes a God that shares many of our physical features, our ignorance of what the future holds and many of our character traits. The authorial voice by which that message is delivered is far more recognisably human than Muslims might protest. However, two expositions in the Qurʾan of the nature of God give a very different account of God's nature, both of them, it is suggested with a clear Christian undertone. In **Surah 24**, God compares himself to a lit lamp in a niche (*'al-nūr'*):

> **{24.35}** God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.
>
> The parable of His Light is a niche,
> wherein is a lamp.
> The lamp is in a glass.
> The glass is as a shining star
> kindled from a blessed olive tree,
> neither of the East nor of the West.
> Its oil would well-nigh shine forth,
> even if no fire had touched it.
>
> Light upon light.
>
> God guides unto His Light
> whomsoever He will, and God sets
> forth parables for mankind,
> and God is Knower of all things.

The imagery of God emitting a light is, of course, common in the Old and New Testaments and is deployed in several other passages of the Qurʾan. God's people are said to move '*out of darkness into light*' through their belief, **{14.1 & 5}** and **{65.11}**, the sighted and those in the light are described as superior to the blind and those in the dark, **{13.16}** and **{35.19-20}**, and at the dawning of the Last Day, the whole earth '*will shine with the light of its Lord*', **{39.69}**, making the faces of those beholding him radiant, **{75.22-23}**. It calls to mind the parable told by Jesus - who described himself as the

light of the world (John 1.9–10, 8.12, 9:5) – in which followers are urged to place the 'lamp' of their faith upon a lampstand rather than to hide it away under a bushel (Matthew 5.15-16, Mark 4.21-22, and Luke 11.33-36). But the comparison of God with an inanimate human artefact, a lamp, is unique in the Qurʾan. It is especially intriguing, since this lamp is not, as classical Islamic theology would lead one to expect, presented as a single indivisible light source, but rather is expressly described as the working together of three different components: the oil, the wick and the glass. The verse has been the occasion of mystical interpretations of the meaning of these separate elements (the Qurʾan, the prophets, faith, etc) that combine to create God's Light, but the point of the verse is surely that the light shines forth only by the combination of all three. One may well wonder if the metaphor had originally been constructed as a metaphor for the Holy Trinity. The suspicion that this might have been the case is heightened by its inclusion of the short, but distinctive sentence '*Light upon light*' which bears a marked similarity to a line from the Nicene Creed to represent the incarnation of Jesus:

> '*God from God,*
> *light from light,*
> *True God from True God.*'[104]

Other Quranic impersonal objects used as metaphors for God include that a rope, **{3.103 & 112}** and a firm handhold, **{2.256}** produced at **⟨43⟩** below) but the one that is most intriguing is that a dye in **{2.138}**. In Ahmed Ali's translation this reads:

> We have taken the colouring of
> God and whose shade is better than
> God's?
>
> Him alone we worship.

The image raises the symbolism of baptism, a symbolism that the rendering of the verse in *The Study Quran* embraces wholeheartedly:

> The baptism of God.
> And who is better than God in
> baptism?

And we are worshippers of Him.

The two impersonal and philosophically informed metaphors for God of a three-component lamp and a dye convey a message concerning the nature of God that is very different to the primitive and mythical enthroned Allah-Rahman that dominates in the Qurʾan. It is suggested that they be read in conjunction with **Surah 112** (with its similarity to the Nicene Creed), **Surah 1** (which it will be seen follows the structure of the Lord's Prayer **⟨16⟩**), the basmala (imitating the Christian invocation of the Trinity through making the sign of the cross) **⟨9⟩** and the passages concerning Jesus **⟨26⟩**, and the Holy Spirit **⟨12⟩**. All of these read together likely form part of a late stratum to the Qurʾan corpus reflecting substantial contact between the Quranic community and the Christians of Palestine **⟨50⟩**, **⟨88⟩**.

12. God's Spirit

Surah 5 (*Al-Maʾidah/ The Table Spread*): 73

He sends the angels with the Spirit to carry His orders to whichever of His servants He wants, so that they would warn people that He is the only God and that people must have fear of Him.

[*The Holy Qurʾan the Arabic Text and English Translation, Sarwar, 1981 (Pakistani-US, Shia*)]

Orthodox Islamic theology insists not merely upon the oneness of God meaning His uniqueness, but also his indivisibility into parts. As seen in the previous section, this quality is never stated unambiguously in the Qurʾan and is in fact contradicted many times by references to His Body Parts and in the metaphor of the lamp in a niche in the previous section. It also conflicts with multiple references throughout the Qurʾan to the agency of one, or more than one, divine Spirit or '*rūḥ*'. Passages refer to '*His (God's) Spirit*', '*The Spirit of the Command*', '*the Holy Spirit*' and in one verse '*the Trustworthy Spirit*'. Although in each instance '*rūḥ*' appears in its singular form, it is unclear whether what is being described by all these different terms is one and the same entity or if there may in fact be more than one Spirit emanating from Him.

The Spirit of the Command

In **{97.4}** (produced at **⟨4⟩** above) a Spirit descends in the company of angels with a command during the Night of Power. This verse probably introduced to the Qurʾan's audience a being that is referred to in four subsequent verses, **{16.2}**, **{17.85}**, **{40.15}**, **{42.52}**, as '*the Spirit of the Command*'. There are also good reasons to link this being with two further Spirit references that appear in **{70.4}** and **{78.38}**. Just as both **{97.4}** and **{16.2}** describe the Spirit of the Command travelling with messages between heaven and

earth in the company of angels, descending in the former verse, ascending in the latter, so '*the angels and the Spirit*' also ascend in **{70.4}**. In **{78.38}** the Last Day is envisioned in which '*the Spirit and the angels stand in rows*' before God. On that Day, it will be too late for messages and warnings, but the Spirit may not be silent. We are told that of those present, none will speak '*Save one whom the Compassionate* [*al-Raḥmān* **⟨10⟩**] *permits and who speaks aright*'. Unfortunately, the verse does not, make absolutely clear who it is who speaks aright nor to whom they are speaking, but given the context the most likely interpretation is that the permitted speaker is the Spirit - the only individual entity to be mentioned in the verse other than God Himself– and the only purpose of speaking at that time will be to intercede on the part of those who will be prevented from speaking for themselves (see **⟨97⟩** below). The fact that this Spirit moves vertically between God and His creation, and that he is 'permitted' by God to speak, and that the inferences that he does so to intercede with God makes reasonably clear that the Spirit of the Command is presented as possessing a distinct and autonomous identity from Allah enthroned above the heavens. This cannot merely be a phrase describing the essence of God nor poetically personalising God's agency. However, the fact that it travels in the company of angels makes it clear that nor is it an angel. It is a unique being, more exalted than the angels but with an identity that is distinct from Allah.

The Trustworthy Spirit

In **{26.192-194}**, the divine voice says of the Qurʾan to His locutus '*it is a revelation brought down by al-rūḥ al-'amin upon thine heart*'. '*Al-rūḥ al-'amin*' is commonly rendered the '*Trustworthy Spirit*' or the '*Honest Spirit*' but '*al-'amin*' which is derived from the same root as '*belief*' and '*believer*' **⟨88⟩** (and according to Islamic tradition was Muhammad's nickname prior to his first revelation) means something more profound than merely reliable or truthful. Yusuf Ali suggests '*the Spirit of Faith and Truth*'. The words used in **{26.192-194}** are very similar to those used about Gabriel in **{2.97}** (produced at **⟨6⟩** above): '*it is who sent it down upon thy heart*'. On this basis, the Trustworthy Spirit of **{26.192-194}** is generally treated within Islam as an epithet for Gabriel. However, this

inference, not unreasonable in itself, creates a problem, for if the Trustworthy Spirit is Gabriel, then it must be a different entity to the Spirit of the Command which is customarily accompanied by angels and, by necessary implication, cannot be an angel itself. And if the Faithful Spirit/Gabriel is different to the Spirit of the Command, this begs the question of what message or warning does the latter deliver?

The breathing of God's Spirit into Adam and Jesus

The Qurʾan tells how God's Spirit was 'breathed' into two humans. The first was Adam **⟨17⟩**, whose animation as described in **{15.29}** and **{38.72}** - '*I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit*' (*c.f.* **{32.9}**) reflecting Genesis 2.7 ('*the Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils*') **⟨16⟩**. In **{21.91}** and **{66.12}** the same phrase is used to describe the conception of Jesus by God's Spirit being blown into the womb of the Virgin Mary **⟨26⟩**. The '*breathing of God's Spirit*' into Adam's body and Mary's womb cannot be considered as a mere poetic turn of phrase to express God's ultimate responsibility for the gift of life. In **{19.17-20}** the physical characteristics of the Spirit-blower are described, as those of a perfect man and through his speech he confirms his own persona, distinct from God.

> **{19.17}** And she (Mary) veiled herself from them (her family). Then We sent unto her Our Spirit, and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man.
>
> **{19.18}** She said: 'I seek refuge from thee in the Compassionate if you are reverent!'
>
> **{19.19}** He said: 'I am but a messenger of thy Lord, to bestow upon thee a pure boy'.

In **{21.91}** and **{66.12}** the physicality of the scene is given in surprisingly explicit detail:

{21.91} and **{66.12}**	(Mary the daughter of Imran) who preserved her chastity ['*farjaha*': literally her '*vagina*']. Then We breathed therein of Our Spirit…

These passages name the life force that is breathed into Adam and Jesus as God's Spirit. They also raise the issue of the identity of the Spirit that had assumed the likeness of a '*perfect man*' who breathed into Mary. It is not easy to see how an entity other than God might exhale God's Spirit. Even if this were a possibility, there is no reason from the text to suppose that God did not breath His Spirit into Adam personally, whilst the interaction with Mary seems far too intimate to leave any room for any intermediary angel to have been involved in the process. Adding to the already complicated picture of Jesus's Quranic nature, not only does he come into existence by having God's Spirit breathed into his mother's womb by God's Spirit, but he is himself described as '[God's] *Word … and a Spirit from Him*...', a phrase to be considered at **⟨26⟩** below.

The '*Holy Spirit*'

A further reference to a Spirit is conveyed by the phrase '*rūḥ al-qudus*', often rendered in translations using the familiar Christian term '*the Holy Spirit*'. '*Rūḥ al-qudus*' is a direct translation into Arabic of the Hebrew '*ruach kodsho*', which appears three times in the Old Testament, in Psalm 51 and Isaiah 63.10 & 11. On each of these occasions the phrase represents the experience of God by his people, in Isaiah 63.11 this is specifically linked to the events of Exodus:

> *Then they remembered the days of old and Moses His servant.*
> *Where is he who brought up out of the sea the shepherd of his flock?*
> *Where is He Who put His Holy Spirit in their midst,*
> *Whose glorious arm was the guide at Moses right hand,*
> *Who divided the waters before them,*
> *Winning for himself eternal renown.*

The phrase *rūḥ al-qudus*' appears in the Qurʾan four times **{2.87 & 253}**, **{5.110}** and **{16.102}**, on three of which occasions it is specifically associated with God's strengthening of Jesus.

{2.87 & 253} And we gave Jesus son of Mary clear proofs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit ...



{5.110} Then God will say: 'O Jesus son of Mary, remember ... when I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit ...'

These passages accord with the account in the gospels that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism (Matthew 3.13-17, Mark 1.9-11 and Luke 3.21-22; *c.f.* John 1.29-34). This adds yet further complexity to the question of God's Spirit, apparently confirming that the entity that strengthened Jesus was no angel but a manifestation of God Himself.

The Spirit of God cast onto believers

Although Adam and Jesus have God's Spirit blown into them in a special way, two verses hint at the Spirit coming down upon other believers in a similar manner to the way in which Christians believe themselves to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit:

{40.15}: '*He casts the Spirit from His Command upon whomsoever He will among His servants to warn of the Day of the Meeting*', and

{58.22}: '*You shall not find a people who believe in God and the Last Day loving those who oppose God and His Messenger … God has inscribed faith upon their hearts and strengthened them with a Spirit from Him.*'

The Sakinah and the Ṣayḥata

A further supernatural emanation of God in the Qurʾan is '*Sakinah*', often rendered '*His Tranquillity*', which He sends down upon His Messenger and '*into the hearts of the believers*', **{48.4}**. This is referred to in the Qurʾan six times.

> In **{2.248}** it is a quality conveyed by the Ark of the Covenant.
>
> In **{9.26}** it descends upon the believers in a battle setting, traditionally believed to be the Battle of Hunayn **⟨49⟩**.
>
> In **{9.40}** it supported two people sheltering in a cave, traditionally identified as Muhammad and Abu Bakr, hiding from pursuing Meccans shortly after setting out upon the hijra **⟨37⟩**.
>
> In **Surah 48** it is referred to three times, **{48.4, 18 & 26}**, sent down '*with the reward of a victory nigh*' after pledges of allegiance were made under a tree, traditionally associated with Muhammad and his followers at Hudaybiyyah, preparing to storm Mecca, prior to learning that Uthman had negotiated a truce with its inhabitants **⟨46⟩**.

Just as '*rūḥ al-qudus*' is a direct translation into Arabic of the Hebrew '*ruach kodsho*', so the Quranic '*sakhina*' seems to adopt a rabbinic concept, the '*Shekhinah*', developed to explain the frequent biblical references to the presence of God on earth. Although this word does not appear in the Bible itself, it was used in the Targum (the Aramaic translation and commentary of the Hebrew bible) to represent God's presence amongst the Israelites first in the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and later in the Temple. It is also used in relation to the experience of being in the divine presence described by prophets such as Ezekiel and Daniel, and as an empowering force that descends upon Jews whenever they are gathered together for prayer or religious study.

It is the earliest of these usages, *i.e.*, God's presence with the Israelites during the Exodus, that is recalled in **{2.248}**. Here the Sakhina is associated with the Ark of the Covenant, that the Torah tells us was kept in the Tabernacle and the Inner Sanctum of the Temple. This Ark of the Covenant connection probably explains why it is that the gift of 'Tranquillity' tends, somewhat counterintuitively, in the Qurʾan to be associated with battles. In the Hebrew Bible the Ark was a mysterious and powerful object that could bring success in battle, famously collapsing the walls of Jericho in Joshua 6.1-27. In **{9.26 & 40}** the coming down of the Sakhinas is accompanied with '*hosts whom you saw not*', in some translations: '*unseen legions*'. Since Isaiah uses the phrase '*ruach kodsho*' to describe the presence of God with the Israelites during the Exodus, the same phenomenon that the rabbinic scholars describe as the '*Shekhinah*' (God's presence alongside Moses in the wilderness) it seems reasonable to suppose that, at least on some occasions, the Qurʾan's '*rūḥ al-qudus*' ('*Holy Spirit*') that strengthened Jesus and the '*Sakinah*' ('*Tranquillity*') that descended with armies of warrior angels to bolster the Quranic community in times of battle, is one and the same entity.

Yet another manifestation of God's power is the '*Ṣayḥata*' ('*the Cry*'): a terrifying manifestation of God's destructive force with which He has, in the past, utterly destroyed numerous disobedient peoples and which will, on the Last Day, devastate the whole world (for more on which see **⟨27⟩** below).

Allahology

The frequently advanced proposition that the Qurʾan's God exists as a singularity without parts entirely separate to His creation cannot be reconciled with the text of the Qurʾan. The Qurʾan author's principal understanding of God is not merely that he existed within time and space but was anthropomorphic, possessing a body capable of sitting upon a throne, speaking, moving and writing. In this part we have seen that the Qurʾan describes a complex array of spiritual avatars of that enthroned God operating within His creation. There is no doubt that the

Qurʾan refuted what its author understood to be the Christian theology of a Holy Trinity:

> **{5.73}** They certainly disbelieve who say: 'Truly God is the third of three.' If they refrain not from what they say, a painful punishment will befall those among them who disbelieved.
>
> ✣
>
> **{4.171}** ... So believe in God and his Messengers and say not 'Three'. Refrain! It is better for you. God is only one God.

Yet this rejection of a holy trinity is not inconsistent with God having one or more Spirits for an astonishing reason. In **{5.75}** and again at **{5.116}**, the Qurʾan's author appears, incredibly, to have promoted the view that Christians believed the third member of the Trinity, after the Father and the Son – to be not the Holy Spirit but Jesus's mother, Mary. Two verses after the condemnation of those who say '*Truly God is the third of three*', the Qurʾan feels it necessary to insist that not only Jesus, but Mary too was a mere human:

> **{5.75}** The Messiah, son of Mary, was naught but a messenger – messengers have passed away before him. And his mother was truthful.
>
> Both of them ate food...

Eating food is, in the Qurʾan, a sign of not being supernatural, see **{11.73}** (*c.f.* **⟨26⟩**). The same point is made later in the surah, when God challenges Jesus with the accusation of deifying himself and Mary:

> **{5.116}** O Jesus, son of Mary, did thou say unto mankind: 'Take me and my mother as gods apart from God'?

It is inconceivable that an individual as well versed in a wide range of Christian texts as the author of the Qurʾan was might have made such a basic error. There may have been a subtle allusion in these verses. The Byzantine court could be extravagant in its veneration of Mary, the Mother of God and Queen of Heaven. In Aramaic the words for 'spirit' is feminine and Patricia Crone finds apocryphal instances of Christians of or before Muhammad's time referring to the Holy Spirit as their mother, to complete the nuclear family with Gods the Father and Son, the very idea that the Qurʾan condemns **{72.3}**.[105] As noted in **⟨1⟩** above, at the time of the Qurʾan's composition disputes between different branches of Christianity over issues of Christology preoccupied Christian thought and each party to the debate was prone to parodying the views of their opponents. Monophysite ('one nature') Christians would accuse their opponents of 'tritheism', the belief in three separate Gods, whilst dyophysite ('two nature') Christians mocked the monophysites in return for believing in the illogicality that a mother could have given birth to her own creator which would make her like a god herself. The above Qurʾan's passages may have adopted the language of both these polemics. It is unlikely that the Qurʾan author would have been misled or confused by hearing these arguments. Rather, he may have deliberately chosen to parody both branches of Christianity, using against each the words of their hostile co-religionists.[106]

In the earlier surahs of the Qurʾan, supernatural entities feature to a much greater extent than they do in later ones. Gods, angels, jinn, shaytans, the '*guards*' of heaven and talk of sorcery abound. Possibly this reflects a prophet steeped in the more esoteric Judeo-Christian mystical traditions; possibly it was calculated to impress an early pagan audience familiar with flamboyant imagery of a lively paranormal world. These beings fade from the later surahs which emphasise the role of obedient human beings rather than angels and demons as the instruments of God's will. It is likely that the many verses referring to God's Spirit or Spirits - the Command, the Faithfull, the Holy, the perfect man, the Spirit breathed and cast, God's Tranquillity and His Cry, emerge in a medial period of the Qurʾan s composition and serve as a more or less explicit 'echo' of the Jewish '*ruach kodsho*'/'*Shekhinah*' and as part of a wider embrace of Christian doctrines **⟨26⟩**.

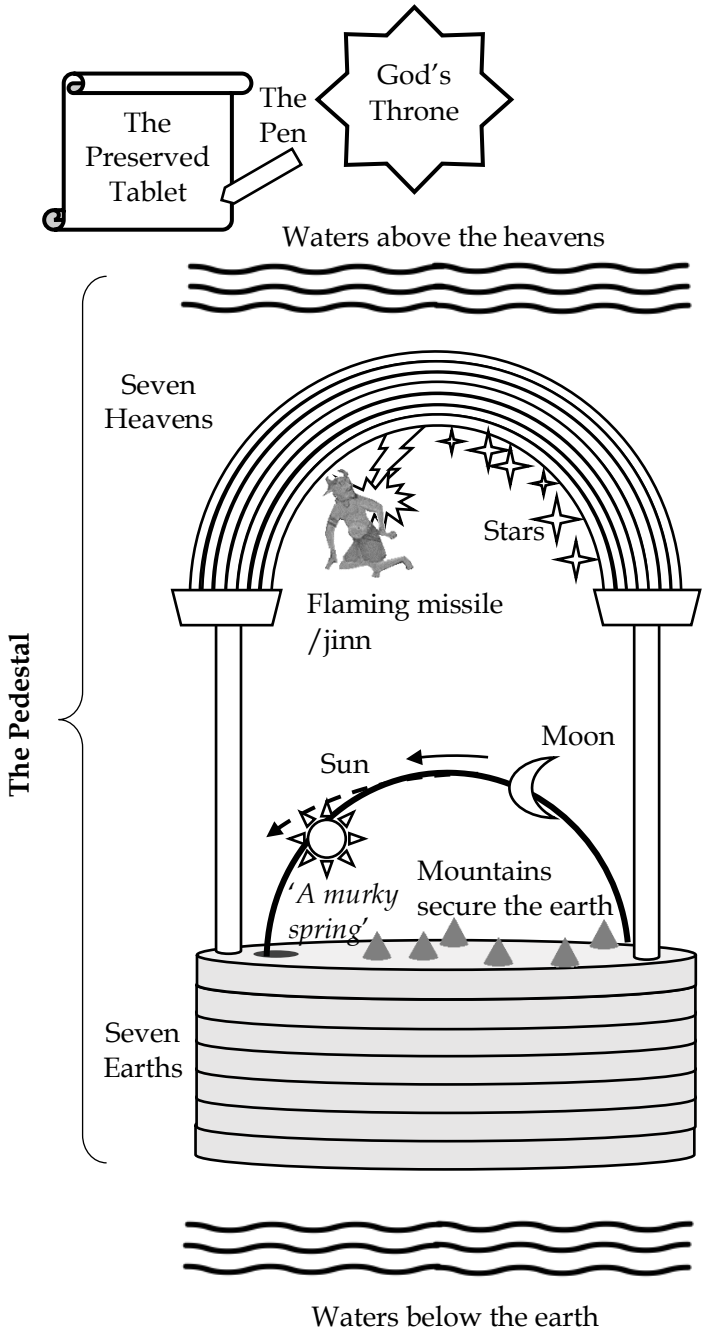
12. *God's Spirit*

The Qurʾan repeatedly states that God is '*one*' and that he has begotten no children **⟨11⟩**, but for Jews and Christians, the proclamation of the oneness of God is not seen as being inconsistent with God engaging with His creation through His Spirit, and there is no reason to suppose that the Qurʾan author would see these as inconsistent either. The notion that God has attributes that may take a personalised form is never explicitly rejected in the Qurʾan, in the same manner as it rejects the divinity of Jesus or Mary, and the fact that the Qurʾan appears to reject a trinity that comprises God, Jesus and Mary by no means prevents it endorsing something similar to the Judeo-Christian concept of a Holy Spirit. Consequently, despite conventional insistence that Islam upholds 'strict' monotheism in contrast to trinitarian Christianity, Quranic theology is at the very least binarian. In fact, an ontology of the Qurʾan's godhead that fully reflects the Qurʾan's descriptions of the corporeal Allah enthroned above the heavens and His multiple Spirits operating within creation is likely to be vastly more complex than the three persons of the Holy Trinity. During the lifetime of Muhammad, some of his followers, apparently confused over the verses referred to in this section had sought clarity of the nature of '*God's Spirit*'. They are unlikely to have found the reply that they received very satisfying.

{17.85} They ask thee about the Spirit.

Say: 'The Spirit is from the Command of my Lord, and you have not been given knowledge, save a little'.

A. The Cosmology of the Qurʾan



13. Creation

Surah 41 (*Fussilat/Expounded*): 11

Moreover, He set the balance towards the sky which was smoke.

So he said to it and to the earth:
'Come willingly or unwillingly.'

They both said: 'We come willingly.'

[*A Simple Translation of The Holy Quran (with notes on Topics of Science), Mir Aneesuddin, 1993 (Indian geologist, and President of Islamic Academy of Sciences, Hyderabad*]

Quranic Cosmology

God's creation of '*the heavens and the earth*' is referred to throughout the Qurʾan, with **{7.54-58}**, **{13.2-5}**, **{21.30-33}**, **{41.11-12}**, **{45.3-5}**, **{50.38}**, **{51.47}**, **{57.4}**, **{65.12}** and **{71.13-17}** offering the most detailed accounts. In **{7.54}**, **{10.3}**, {**11.7**}, {**25.59**} and {**50.38**} the Qurʾan states that God created '*the heavens and the earth*' '*in six days*', repeating the well-known account of creation in the Book of Genesis. Unlike in Genesis, none of these verses ascribe particular stages of creation to particular '*days*', leaving the division of the period of creation six segments without any intrinsic significance. By contrast, in **{41.9-12}** creation is divided into three separate periods. According to this scheme, God brought the earth into existence in two days, over the course of the following four days He placed mountains upon it and apportioned '*means of sustenance*', before, in the final two days through the commands of **{41.11}** (produced above) and **{41.12}** He transformed the '*smoke*' that existed above the earth into '*seven heavens*'. However, these three periods aggregate to eight days with no explanation offered for the inconsistency with the six-day verses. **{21.30}** describes the heavens and the earth, having formerly been '*sewn together*', but being '*rent asunder*', during the creation event, a division that in Genesis occurs upon the second day.

As in Genesis, God calls what he wishes into being by saying the single word '*Be!*', **{2.117}**, **{6.73}** and **{40.68}** (*c.f.* Psalm 33 *'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made … For he spoke and it was made'*). This is the same command that He used to create Jesus in Mary's womb in **{3.47 & 59}** and **{19.35}**, and by which He will bring about the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day in **{16.40}** and **{36.82}**. (However, there is a subtle difference between the two accounts. Whereas in the Bible God's creation commands are impersonal expressions of his will, such as in Genesis 1: '*Let there be light*', in the Qurʾan the command '*Be!*' is addressed to the very thing that does not exist. This is a difficult concept to rationalise, and the difficulty is compounded in **{41.11}** by the sky, which at the time of the utterance did not yet exist, and the earth, which had been created in the preceding verse, somehow both verbally replying to God in unison that they would come into existence as they were bidden. God would hold a subsequent conversation with His creation, this time described as '*the heavens, and the earth and the mountains*', when he offered them the '*Trust*' that He would later bestow upon Adam, but the heavens, earth and mountains were '*wary*' to accept it, **{33.72}**. The reticence of the mountains transpired to be a prudent course for them to adopt, since in **{59.21}** God proclaims that '*Had we made this Qurʾan descend upon a mountain, thou wouldst have seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of God*' and in **{7.143}** something of this sort actually occurred when as a demonstration of the power of His presence to Moses, God manifested Himself to a mountain, causing it to instantly crumble to dust. It is possible that these conversations between God and His creation – particularly mountains - may carry a vestige of former Arab animist beliefs. It may also draw upon the hymn sung by three youths, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, condemned to the fiery furnace in the Book of Daniel (3.52-90) and the similar Psalm 148, in which a number of natural phenomena including the '*highest heavens*' and '*mountains and hills*' (and also the '*waters above the heavens*', to be mentioned below) are invited to praise the Lord.

The existence of seven heavens is referred to in **{2.29}**, **{41.12}**, **{65.12}**, **{67.3-4}** and **{71.15}**; alternatively '*seven paths*', **{23.17}**, and '*seven strongholds*', **{78.12}**. In **{67.4}** and **{71.15}** these heavens are described as though tiered '*one upon the other*', and, in these verses and **{41.12}**, the lowest heaven is '*adorned … with lamps and a guard*',

(*c.f.* **{37.6}** and **{67.5}**). The sky is depicted as a physical object as it is in Genesis, a firmament separating the heavens from the earth below. But the specific image used by the Qurʾan of a '*canopy*' over the earth, **{2.22}**, **{21.32}**, **{79.28}**, '*with no rifts*' **{50.6}**, conveys the image of humanity living within a large tent (note Isaiah 40.22: '*(God) stretches out the heavens like a veil, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in'*) and Psalm 104 (see below). In **{13.2}** and **{31.10}** the sky is said to be raised '*without pillars that you see*', **{22.65}**, suggesting, some think, that it must then be held aloft on invisible pillars, an idea that is consistent with the concept expressed in **{34.9}** and **{52.44}** that the sky might, in some circumstances, fall to earth. The sun and the moon are set in the sky as lights or lamps, **{10.5}**, **{25.61}** and **{71.15}**. There they follow one another, **{91.1-2}**, each '*gliding in an orbit*', **{21.33}** alternatively '*running for a term appointed*', **{13.2}**, **{31.29}**, **{35.11}** and **{39.5}**, it befitting neither to overtake the other, **{36.40}**. Their purpose is primarily '*that you might know the number of years and the reckoning of time*', **{10.5}**, making them effectively subservient to man, **{14.33}**. To this timekeeping end also God wraps '*the night around the day and the day around the night*', **{39.5}**, like a coiled turban. This pre-Copernican geocentric model of the sun and moon travelling across the sky is also evident in the Qurʾan's understanding sunset and sunrise:

> **{36.38}** And the sun runs to a dwelling place of its own.
>
> That is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing,
>
> **{36.39}** And for the moon We have decreed mansions till it returns like an old palm stalk.

That this is no poetic use of language is put beyond doubt by Qurʾan's account of how Dhu'l Qarnayn actually visited the places where the sun rose and set **⟨30⟩**.

Man, of course, cannot by his own efforts rise through these heavens but some jinn **⟨15⟩** or '*shayatīn*' **⟨17⟩** apparently can, since

God appoints '*guards*' to defend the lowest heaven from being penetrated, **{15.16-18}**, **{37.6-10}**, **{67.5}** and **{72.8-9}**. In these verses, the Qurʾan describes these guards chasing away with flaming missiles any jinn or '*shayatīn*' that dares to approach the heavens for the purpose of eavesdropping on conversations or to the recitation of the Qurʾan beyond them:

{15.16} We have set constellations in the sky and we have adorned them for the onlookers.

{15.17} And We have preserved them from every shaytan outcast,

{15.18} Save he who gains a hearing by stealth, and then a manifest flaming star pursues him.

Water

God creates oceans and rivers, **{13.3}**, **{16.15}**, **{27.61}** and He provides '*abundant rainfall*', **{25.48-49}**, **{43.11}**, **{50.9}**. He also sets a barrier between '*two seas, one sweet satisfying the other salty, bitter*', **{25.53}**, from which food and ornaments (presumably shell jewellery) are taken **{35.12}** (*c.f.* **{27.61}** and **{55.19-20}**). The '*barrier*' that God sets between '*two seas*' may be an allusion to the rhetorical and metaphorical question asked by St James (James 3.11) '*Can both fresh water and saltwater flow from the same spring?*'

Unlike in the Book of Genesis, there is no reference in the Qurʾan to God actually creating water. On the contrary, in **{11.7}** God is said to have created the heavens and the earth '*whilst His Throne was upon the water*', suggesting, possibly, that water was already in existence prior to the creation of solid things with defined forms. The Qurʾan's depiction of God's Throne sitting above water reflects an idea present in the second verse of Genesis:

> '*Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters*' (Genesis 1.2).

More particularly the '*Throne upon the water*' imagery invokes Psalm 104, which also contains the idea of the sky as a tent canvas:

> *1. …O Lord, my God, you are great indeed.*
>
> *2. You are clothed in majesty and glory,*
> *robed in light as if a cloak,*
> *You have spread out the heavens like a tent-cloth;*
>
> *3. You have constructed your palace upon the waters.*
> *You make clouds your chariot,*
> *You travel on the wings of the wind,*
>
> *4. You make the winds your messengers,*
> *and flaming fire your ministers.*

The '*waters above the heavens*' are also mentioned, in the Book of Daniel and Psalm 148 (referred to previously in this section) and God's Throne above them is likely the inspiration for Solomon's throne, which we are told is set in the midst of a crystal floor that the Queen of Sheba mistook for a pool of water (see the 'test of water' **⟨24⟩** below.) According to the Genesis account of creation on the second day God separated the water into two bodies by creating the sky and the earth between them (1.6-10), the understanding of antiquity being that there exist both waters above the heavens that are the source of precipitation, and waters below the earth that are source of the sea and groundwater. In chapter 7 of Genesis both of these are simultaneously unleashed upon the earth during the Great Flood:

> '*All the fountains of the great abyss burst forth, and the floodgates of the sky were opened*', (Genesis 7.11)

Precisely the same imagery of water inundating the earth from both above and below appears in the Quranic account of the Flood:

> **{54.11}** So We opened the gates of
> the sky with pouring water,

{54.12} And We caused the earth to
burst with springs …

and of the return to normality:

{11.44} …It was said: 'O earth,
swallow your water!
And O sky! Hold back!'…

The Biblical cosmology is known to derive from earlier Sumerian creation myths, especially the Babylonian *Enuma Elis*. Inherited themes include, in particular: the existence of a watery chaos prior to the creation of land; the rending asunder of the earth and the heavens, (in the *Enuma Elis*, achieved by the tearing apart of the goddess Taimat); the fixing of lights in the sky, and the separation of the world's water into two different types. All of these ideas have thence migrated to the Qurʾan. In the references to the seven heavens, the Qurʾan partially also adopts the cosmology of ancient Mesopotamia, according to which the earth lies below seven celestial domes which the sun, the moon and the five visible planets traverse with the lowest heaven being the setting of the constantly moving array of stars. However, just as the Qurʾan gives no significance to the division of the creation process into six days, it makes no connection between the existence of seven heavens and the movement of celestial bodies. On the contrary, other than for flaming missiles hurled at the jinn, the sun and moon are the only heavenly bodies to be mentioned in the Qurʾan and these appear to travel not in separate celestial spheres but along the same paths that are located below the lowest heaven.

God's Throne

Following His completion of creation, God '*mounts His Throne*' (for which see **⟨11⟩**) where He presides over history as it plays out from His creative act. God's Throne is at the pinnacle of the Quran's cosmological scheme, the seat of God's power and majesty. The heavens and the earth below it together form God's footstool, **{2.255}** (see **⟨11⟩** above). The throne is described as being '*encircled*' by angels '*hymning the praise of their Lord*', **{39.75}**, and on the Last Day eight angels shall bear it forth, **{69.17}**. The imagery of God sat

upon a throne or chariot, borne by angels, replicates the iconography of the Books of Daniel (7.9-10), Ezekiel (1.26) and Isaiah (chapter 6), as well as Jesus's description of the Day of Judgment: '*When the Son of Man comes in his glory escorted by all the angels of heaven, (sitting) upon his royal throne*' (Matthew 25.31). However, in **{50.38}** the Qurʾan makes a point of denying that God had found the act of creating the heavens and the earth tiring and that He had had to sit down in order to recuperate. This insistence was no doubt to correct a popular literal reading of Genesis 2.2 that '*God rested on the seventh day*', associated with the Jewish observation of the sabbath. Islam has no sabbath day- the institution of the sabbath being the only one of the Ten Commandments for which the Qurʾan contains no equivalent **⟨84⟩**, **⟨90⟩**.

God's provision

The earth (which in **{65.12}** may in fact consist of seven different earths) was '*spread out*', **{15.19}**, **{20.53}**, **{43.10}**, **{50.7}** and **{51.48}**, **{71.19}**, in some translations (*e.g.* Yusuf Ali) '*as a carpet*', and fixed securely in place by '*casting into the earth*' mountains as '*stakes*', **{31.10}** and **{78.7}**, '*lest it shake*', **{16.15}** and **{21.31}**. Once God had made man and his mate (to be recounted at **⟨16⟩** below) He provided for their sustenance a diverse landscape of '*neighbouring tracts, vineyards, sown fields and date palms*' in which are fruits - cryptically said to be '*of two types*' **{13.3-4}** and '*in pairs*', **{36.36}**. Into this fertile country, he '*sent down … of cattle eight pairs*', **{39.69}**. These '*eight pairs*' seem to be a reference to the four basic types of livestock kept in seventh century Arabia: sheep, goats, camel and oxen, since these four species are also mentioned as '*eight pairs*' in **{6.143-144}** (notwithstanding that the text clearly only lists four pairs). Animals are commonly anthropomorphised in the Qurʾan. Cane is advised on the disposal of his brother's body by a crow **⟨16⟩** and Solomon overhears an ant talking to its fellow ants about his approach, musters birds in ordered ranks and holds conversations with a hoopoe bird **⟨24⟩**. In **{16.68}** God explains the facts of life to a bee, and at **{18.18}** He creates a supernatural dog to watch over the sleepers in the cave **⟨28⟩**. In **{6.38}** this anthropomorphism is generalised with the statement that: '*there is no creature that crawls*

upon the earth nor flies upon its wings, but that they are communities like (men)'.

God is said to have made several other specific provisions for man's sustenance. He '*sent down*' iron, **{57.25}**, which is strong and beneficial, '*so that God may know those who will help him and his messengers unseen*'. Also, He bestowed upon him two means of transportation: paths to allow him to move across the land, **{16.15}**, **{20.53}** and **{21.31}**; and ships, **{2.164}** and **{36.42}**, which He makes subservient to man's will, **{14.33}**, **{17.66}**, **{31.31}** and **{42.32}** (*c.f.* **{23.22}**, **{35.12}** and **{55.23}**). In **{16.80-81}**, a diverse selection of other things is attributed to God's bounty: '*dwellings made from the skins of cattle … from their wool, fur and hair, furnishings…, shade…, places of refuge in the mountains,* [and] *coats that protect from heat and from man's own might*'. The former garments may be a reference to God's clothing of Adam and his wife after the fall **⟨16⟩**; the latter garments are probably chain mail – for the forging of which see **⟨14⟩**, **⟨24⟩**.

14. Angels

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah / The Cow*): 102

They had also followed the devils (those who cause corruption by inciting illusion) in regard to (denying) the sovereignty of Solomon (formed by his essential reality).

It was not Solomon who disbelieved (curtained from his reality), but the devils who (by following their illusions) disbelieved (denied the reality), teaching people magic and that which was revealed to the two angels at Babylon, Harut and Marut.

But the two angels did not teach anything to anyone without saying: 'We are but a trial, so do not become a disbeliever by covering that which is in your essence (by resorting to external forces to practice magic).' And yet they learned from them that which causes separation between a man and his wife.

But they cannot harm anyone except with permission from Allah. They were learning what harms them and not what benefits them.

Indeed, those who purchased it (magic) will have no benefit in the eternal Hereafter. If only they knew how wretched was the thing for which they sold the reality of their essence.

[*Decoding the Quran, Ahmed Hulusi, 2013 (Turkish Sufi)*]

Belief in angels is one of the essential articles of faith required of believers by **{2.285}** and **{4.136}** (produced at **⟨53⟩** below).

Of what angels actually are, the Qurʾan tells us fairly little; only that they are made of light[107] and that they have differing numbers of wings: '*two or three or four*', **{35.1}** (for which phrase see **⟨61⟩** below). It would appear that all angels are male, possibly because if they were female, they would be disqualified from acting as witnesses **⟨65⟩**, **{37.150}** rhetorically asking: '*Did We create the angels female while they were witnesses?*'

Either four or five angels are named within the Qurʾan. The four certain named angels are:

- Gabriel (Jabril), whom Muslims believe to have transmitted the Qurʾan to Muhammad **⟨6⟩**,
- Michael (Mikail), who is referred to by name alongside Gabriel in **{4.136}** (produced in **⟨6⟩** above); in Judeo-Christian tradition Michael is the principal warrior angel, invariably depicted wearing a breastplate and helmet and wielding a sword, although he is never invoked as such in the Qurʾan's many *jihād* verses **⟨93⟩** but is traditionally associated with the more tranquil duty of dispensing rainfall; and
- Harut and Marut, '*two angels of Babylon*', who were sent down by God in the time of Solomon **⟨24⟩** to teach men magic but who did not harm anyone '*save with God's leave*', **{2.102}** (produced above).

In addition, three further specific angels are referred to specifically:

- Malik (the Arabic word for king or angel, but here it is generally thought treated as an angel's personal name), the keeper of Hell, to whom the damned will plead in vain to end their torment, **{43.77} ⟨100⟩**;
- an unnamed angel, traditionally identified with the biblical archangel of healing, Raphael (Israfil), who will blow the trumpet heralding the dawn of the

Last Day **⟨96⟩**, it is anticipated from the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and

- an angel, traditionally given the name of Azrael, who escorts the souls of the departed to God, **{32.11}**.

Other angels are referred to as carrying out a range of practical tasks on behalf of God. Some are messengers, **{35.1}**, or distributors of blessings amongst God's people by His Command, **{51.4}**. These blessings can include military assistance, as occurred at the Battle of Badr where warrior angels emboldened Muhammad's outnumbered fighters, and '*cast terror into the hearts*' of the disbelievers, whose necks and fingertips they struck off **⟨41⟩** (*c.f.* also the '*unseen legions*' of **⟨12⟩** above).

Each one of us is said to be accompanied throughout his or her life by a guardian angel ('*mu'aqqibat*') that protects us from death until our allotted hour, **{6.61}**, **{13.11}**. A rather less comforting thought is that we are also watched over constantly by the '*kiraman katibin*' ('*honourable recorders*') who record all our deeds:

{82.10} And yet truly over you there are guardians:

{82.11} Noble, writing,

{82.12} Knowing what you do.

Details of these watcher angels are provided by **{43.80}** and **{50.18}**, in the latter of which they are said to work in pairs '*seated on the right and on the left*'. For the level of detail of what is recorded, namely '*everything great and small*', see **{54.52-53}**. In traditional Islamic angelology, the angel on the right records a person's virtuous deeds and exercises a supervisory authority over the angel on the left who records sins.

Based upon the opening verses of **Surah 79**:

{79.1} By those who wrest violently,

{79.2} By those that draw out quickly,

{79.3} By those that glide serenely,

{79.4} By those that race to the fore, outstripping,

{79.5} And by those that govern affairs,

{79.6} On the Day that the quaker quakes,

{79.7} And the successor follows upon it,

the principal angel of death, Azael, is said to be assisted in his grim work by two orders of angels, the '*naziat*' ('*wresters*', *i.e.*, those that physically pluck men's souls out of their chests) and the '*nashitat*' ('*those that draw out*'), who execute for some a violent or unexpected death or arrange for others a more peaceful passing, as they are directed. **{23.99-100}**, **{32.11}** and **{63.10}** describe disbelievers, when death (in **{32.11}** '*the angel of death*') comes to them, begging for the chance to return to life and do more good works. Tradition has it that such requests are received - and denied - by two angels called Munkar and Nakir (described as having blue faces, long teeth and wild hair) who confront each person in their grave with their life's deeds prior to their resurrection and judgment. For similar forlorn requests, see **{2.167}**, **{26.102}**, **{35.37}** and **{39.58}**.

On the Last Day, bearer angels shall bring forth the ark of the covenant, **{2.248}**, whilst '*drivers*', **{37.2}**, will escort the resurrected to their place of judgment. Those whose sins condemn them to the Hellfire, will find there awaiting them Malik's subordinates, the '*zabaniyyah*' (wardens of hell): '*angels, stern and severe, who do not disobey God in what he commands of them and who do what they are commanded*', **{66.6}** (*c.f.* **{96.18}**). Yet more angels '*glorify God night and day without tiring*', **{21.20}**, a phrase similar to the description of the living creatures stood around God's throne, given in the Book of Revelation 4.8:

> *Day and night without pause they sing:*
> *'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty',*

which in turn recalls the seraphim of Isaiah 6.1-3. Some angels encircle the throne, **{39.58}**, which eight of their number shall carry on the Last Day. Whilst the Qurʾan tells us that angels normally have no power to speak, other than as God commands, and that they '*are wary*' (alternatively '*quake*' or '*tremble*') for fear of Him, **{26.27-28}**, these eight throne-bearers alone, are permitted to intercede with God, **{40.7-9}**, on behalf of believers. Permission to speak in their own right must also have been given to some messenger angels, since two verses of the Qurʾan, **{19.64-65}**, are phrased as though spoken by angels rather than by God Himself **⟨4⟩**.

Angels in Genesis and Enochic literature

Angels, when they are now thought of at all, are generally conceived as obedient and sinless, agents of God's will, with the exception of a handful who have 'fallen' to evil **⟨17⟩**. Imagined in these terms, it is hard to rationalise what benefit such mere functionaries might ever have brought to an omnipotent God. However, the above array of angels includes traces of a mythology that long predates the Qurʾan, in which angels were closer to God than the bland attendants, messengers and servants they later became. This earlier understanding of angels is reflected in the three visitors to Abraham (Genesis chapter 18), who are eventually revealed by the text to be the Lord and two angels, but who initially speak and act as a group **⟨22⟩**. It is also evident in the occasional appearance of a figure described interchangeably as '*the Lord*' and '*the Angel of the Lord*' who delivers messages, not merely in the name of God, but whilst speaking as God in the first person (Genesis 16.7-13, 22.11-18, 31.11-13 and Exodus 3). In appreciating these ancient passages, it should be borne in mind that in Judaism angels tend to take names suggesting that they are not independent beings so much as emanations of God (already discussed at **⟨11⟩** above).

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the '*bene Elōhīm*' ('*sons of God*') of Genesis (6.1-4) who descended to earth without God's permission to lie with mortal women, are generally deemed to be angels.

> *When men began to multiply on earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God* [alternatively *'the sons of heaven'*] *saw how beautiful the daughter of men were and so they took for their wives as many as they chose …*
>
> *At that time the Nephilim* [literally '*the fallen*', later commonly translated as '*giants*'] *appeared on earth, as well as later, after the sons of God had intercourse with the daughters of man who bore them sons. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.*

The Nephilim, whom it appears are the offspring of the *bene Elōhīm* and their human mates, are mentioned again in Numbers 13.33, where they were observed in Canaan by Moses's spies, who felt '*as grasshoppers*' compared to them. These brief references to angel-human hybrids are expanded upon in a collection of writings that are known collectively as the Book or Books of Enoch. Enoch is listed in the Book of Genesis as the paternal grandfather of Noah (Genesis 5.18-24). His short and otherwise unremarkable entry in the Bible ends with the enigmatic words: '*Then Enoch walked with God and he was no longer here, for God took him*,' which came to stimulate a very substantial amount of mystical exegesis. The First Book of Enoch reached its final form no later than the first century BC but may record traditions as old as the Book of Genesis. One section, known as *The Book of Watchers*, describes that Enoch, after having been raised to heaven, learns of a group of two hundred angels, '*the Watchers*', who, as they gazed down upon the earth below them, had become overcome with lust for mortal women. Led by two of their number, called Semjaza and Azazal, they had descended from heaven and mated with the women, and it was their children who had been the Nephilim of Genesis 6. Whilst they were on earth, these angels taught mankind many things including, of particular significance to the Qurʾan, Azazal who taught men how '*to make swords and knives and shields and breastplates*', and women how to create make-up including colouring for '*the beautifying of the eyelids*'. Semjaza taught men the

casting of spells. Eventually, this mix of lust, war, magic and unnatural couplings had prompted God to send more angels, led by Uriel, Gabriel and Michael, to destroy the renegades and the bodies of their hybrid offspring, reducing the Nephilim to '*evil spirits upon the earth*' (1 Enoch 15.8). The Qurʾan's Babylonian angels, Harut and Marut, almost certainly take their names from two of Zoroastrianism's seven '*holy immortals*', Haurvatat (meaning '*Wholeness*') and Ameretat ('*Immortality*'), which names are rendered in Armenian translation as Haurot and Maurot.[108] Their story in the Qurʾan, though, has nothing to do with those two personifications of virtue, but seems to retell the tale of fallen angels and the illicit education of man set out in Genesis and *The Book of Watchers*, with the two hundred angels reduced to two, and their role sanitised by the assurance that they had only taught man magic with God's permission as a test for man. The tradition that the manufacture of armour and cosmetics were skills that had been taught by angels appears elsewhere in the Qurʾan: see **⟨24⟩** re: armour and **⟨79⟩** re: make-up. In the first century AD, a Second Book of Enoch was compiled (possibly by an early gnostic Christian sect[109]) further elaborating upon the stories of 1 Enoch. In this sequel, Enoch is himself transformed into an angel and it is disclosed that it was through Enoch's intervention that his great grandson, Noah, came to be alerted to the impending Great Flood. In a Third Book of Enoch, written after the second destruction of the Jewish Temple, one Rabbi Ismael ascends to heaven and encounters the most powerful of all the angels, a being called Metatron (possibly from the Greek '*metatar*', '*the measurer*'[110]) who reveals himself to be Enoch. Metatron is described as having been crowned by God, enthroned in God's presence and afforded the title '*the lesser Yahweh*'.[111]

Although none of the Books of Enoch was accepted as part of the Hebrew or orthodox Christian Bible, the interpretation of Genesis 5.24 that Enoch was raised to God is affirmed in Hebrews 5.11 and 1 Enoch is alluded to in Jude 1.14-15. *The Book of Watchers* is in fact included in the biblical canon of the Ethiopian (Tewahedo) Church (for which see **⟨1⟩** above). The Enochic literature generally is associated with the Jewish Merkabah mystical traditions which also include the 'test of water' that first the Babylonian Talmud,

and later the Qurʾan, insert into the account of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon **⟨24⟩**.

Enoch himself is traditionally said to be the Qurʾan's Idris, **{19.56-57}** and **{21.86}**. **{19.57}** states that Idris had been '*raised up to a sublime station*', which can be safely treated as a reference to his bodily ascension to heaven (see **⟨26⟩** below). Although this identification of Idris with Enoch may seem rather speculative, it is strengthened considerably when his name (from the Arabic word '*dars*', '*to study*') is contrasted with its Quranic 'rhyming twin' **⟨2⟩** Iblis. Although Idris and Iblis do not appear in the same surahs, it is suggested that the circumstance that Enoch was a virtuous man who was raised up by God to sit amongst the angels in His presence, whilst Iblis, as shall be seen **⟨17⟩** was a jinni who had been exiled from God's presence and cast down to earth for his disobedience, makes the linkage of the ascending Enoch and descending Iblis very likely.

For a possible conflation of Enoch with Ezra in **{9.30}**'s accusation that '*the Jews say Ezra is the son of God*' see **⟨88⟩** below.

15. Jinn

Surah 72 (*Al-Jinn/The Jinn*): 1, 9-11

1. ... A band of jinn attentively listened to the recitation of the Qurʾan and then (went back to their people) and said: ...

9. 'We would take up stations in the heaven to try to hear, but anyone who now attempts to listen finds a shooting meteor in wait for him.

10. We do not know whether evil is intended for those on the earth, or whether their Lord intends to direct them to the Right Way.

11. Some of us are upright and some of us are otherwise for we follow widely divergent paths'…

['*Towards Understanding the Qurʾan', translated by Zafar Ishaq Ansari in 2006 from a 1972 Urdu translation by Syed Abul A'la Maududi, 1972, a proponent of Pakistan becoming an Islamic state*]

Jinn are supernatural beings, who are recognised in Islam as a lesser order to angels, with a greater freedom to be disobedient. In Arabic the root j-n-n tends generally to convey '*a meaning of invisible, unseen or hidden*' (per Amira El-Zein in *Islam, Arabs and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*), encountered, for example, in '*Jannah*' (Paradise), '*Jahannam*' (the Hellfire) or '*janin*' (the foetus in the womb). Consequently, it is not always clear in the Qurʾan whether in a given context the word '*jinn*' refers to a particular species of supernatural creature, analogous to faeries, elves and goblins, or is being used as a generic term for all paranormal entities, potentially including angels.

The existence of the jinn is attested to, in the Aramaic '*ginnaye*', in many pre-Islamic inscriptions, particularly in Palmyra, and the jinn are one of the most prominent elements of pagan origin in the Qurʾan. There is a rich Islamic folklore concerning these impish figures, especially in the *Tales of the One Thousand and One Nights* genre which includes the most famous jinni of all, the '*genie of the lamp*' from the story of *Aladdin and his Magic Lamp*. El-Zein lists seven distinct sub-species of jinn from this story-telling tradition, although only two of these are Quranically based, the Irfit, one of whom volunteered to bring the Queen of Sheba's throne to Solomon in **{27.39}**, and the Marid (derived from '*shaytan marid*' or '*manifest satan*' **⟨17⟩**) who are chased from the edge of heaven in **{37.7-8}**. Extra-Quranic species of jinn include the hinn, which have a tendency to take the form of animals, in particular snakes and wild dogs, and, haunting cemeteries and places of death, ghouls (from the Arabic '*ghūl*') iconic even in the secular west for their sinister interest in the macabre.

The Qurʾan tells us that the jinn were created from a '*smokeless fire*', **{55.15}**, or '*scorching winds*', **{15.27}**. **{15.27}** states that the creation of jinn had taken place prior to the creation of Adam but that this must have been the case is shown by the role of Iblis, who is described as being '*of the jinn*' and who was present at on the occasion that life was breathed into Adam **⟨16⟩**, **⟨17⟩**. The great tenth century Islamic scholar al-Tabari reported a hadith that '*The first ones to dwell on earth were the jinn, and they caused mischief therein, shedding blood and killing one another*.' Broadly contemporaneous with al-Tabari, the *Akhbār al-Zamān* (*The History of Time*) by Abu al-Hassan al-Masudi, expands upon this theme by constructing a mythological prehistory for the world before the creation of Adam. This included a fantastical list of twenty-eight nations, each comprised of hybrid creatures defined by their unlikely combinations of animal parts and their bizarre behaviour.

As '*hidden*' beings, jinn normally occupy a parallel realm to the earth that humans inhabit, possibly one or more of the multiple earths alluded to in **{65.12}.** The inhabitants of these alternative realities generally interact with the physical world in subtle ways that depend upon human imagination such as in a vision or dream. In the Qurʾan, a '*majnūn*' is a person who is possessed by a jinni,

and the Qurʾan tells us five times (**{15.6}**, **{23.70}**, **{37.36}**, **{44.14}**, and **{68.51}**) that this was an accusation that had been levied against Muhammad, the same suggestion being pre-emptively refuted on a further six occasions (**{7.184}**, **{34.8 & 46}**, **{52.29}**, **{68.2}** and **{81.22}**). Jinn are often only to be sensed as disembodied spirits in peripheral zones of time and space such as in the twilight or around doors and windows. Despite this normal ephemeral existence, the Qurʾan gives instances when the jinn must, on occasion, manifest themselves as physical beings.

- In **{27.39}** and **{34.12-14}**, King Solomon compels jinn to labour for him to build his palace.

- **{72.11}**, produced above, describes how the jinn occasionally need to be chased away from heaven with flaming stars: a celestial defence system that is also described operating against '*shaytans*' (which may here be used as a pejorative term to describe misbehaving jinn **⟨17⟩**) in **{15.17-18}**, **{37.6-10}** and **{67.5-7}**.

- The fact that houris, the supernatural maidens created for the pleasuring of male believers in Paradise **⟨99⟩** are described as being those '*whom neither man not jinn has ever touched*', **{55.56 & 74}**, necessarily implies that jinn have both the desire and capacity for sexual intercourse, and that receiving a jinn-defiled woman was a genuine concern for a section of the Qurʾan's original audience.

- Although Iblis's physical form is not described in the Qurʾan, when he tempts Adam in the Garden of Eden, he may well have assumed the appearance of a serpent, since this is how Adam's tempter is described in the Book of Genesis.

{46.18} tells us that jinn are, like men, comprised of separate '*communities*'. Those of **{46.29-31}**, for example, would seem to have been Jewish, since when they discover the Qurʾan they refer to it as '*a book sent down after Moses*'. By contrast, the deliverers of the

speech of the jinn in **{72.1-15}** (the longest piece of recorded speech in the Qurʾan, of which four verses are produced above) renounce their past error of believing that God had a '*consort and child*' – suggesting that they had previously been pagans.

Jinn, along with humans, were created '*for no reason but to worship God*', **{51.56}**, **{51.57}** adding, one might have thought rather unnecessarily, '*I desire no provision from them, nor do I desire that they should feed me*'. Whilst their fiery nature may make jinn especially prone to misbehaviour and a destination in Hellfire, **{7.179}**, they nevertheless crave salvation which, for some is possible. Whilst the Qurʾan can be unclear where the divisions between men, jinn and shaytans lie, **{6.112}**'s reference to '*shaytans from amongst mankind and jinn*' implies that not all jinn are evil and doomed. In **{6.128-130}**, God rehearses a speech that He shall deliver to the jinn on the Last Day. During the course of this address, He will remind them that he sent prophets to jinn and men '*from amongst yourselves*'. Islamic scholarly opinion is divided as to whether this means that jinn may have, in the past, been sent by God as messengers and prophets, or whether some jinn merely acted as '*warners*', transmitting to jinnkind of what they had discovered by listening to human prophets, **{46.29}**, **{51.56}**. Certainly, jinn are capable of being rightly guided by listening to the Qurʾan. Indeed, some risk flaming missiles to hear it and *'when the servant of God rises to call upon (God)*' on earth, the jinn are so eager to harken to his words that they '*well-nigh swarm upon him*', **{72.19}**. **{55.34}** is explicitly addressed to '*jinn and men*' and, based upon this, it is thought likely that **Surah 55**'s refrain '*So which of your Lord's favours do you two deny?*' is thought to be likewise addressed to both types of creature.

Although some jinn may take corporeal form and possess magical powers, their chief danger lies in their ability to tempt and deceive, the soul either through their '*flowery discourse*', **{6.112}**, or as a '*slinking whisperer*' ('*waswāsi*'), **{114.4}**. Some who go astray have a personal *shaytan* known as a *qarīn* ('*companion*') set aside for them as a constant mischievous tempter, a fourth member of their personal extradimensional entourage alongside one's guardian angel and two watcher angels **⟨14⟩**:

{43.36} Whosoever turns blindly
away from the remembrance
of the Compassionate, We
assign to him a satan who is
then a companion unto him.

C.f. **{4.38}** and **{50.23}**.

However, the acquisition of such a demon is not necessarily a sign that one's fate is sealed, for **{37.51-53}** depicts a scene in which an inhabitant of Paradise will observe their former *qarīn* burning in the Hellfire.

16. The First People

Surah 23 (*Al-Muminun*): 14

Then fashioned We the drop, a clot,
Then fashioned We the clot a little lump,
Then fashioned We the little lump bones,
Then clothed the bones with flesh,
And then produced it as another creation.
So blessed be Allah, the Best of creators!

[*'The Meaning of the Glorious Qurʾan', Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, 1930 (British orientalist and convert)*]

The single soul

The Qurʾan states several times that all of humanity was created by God '*from a single soul*', **{4.1}**, **{6.98}**, **{7.189}**, **{31.28}** and **{39.6}**. It also states that humanity was fashioned from either a blood clot, **{96.2}** ⟨**32**⟩; water, **{25.54}**; clay, **{6.2}**, **{15.26-33}**, **{23.12}**, **{37.11}** and **{55.14}**, or dust, **{30.20}**. As previously noted, God gave life to the first human, Adam by breathing into him '*of his Spirit*' ⟨**12**⟩.

From this first man, a female mate was created '*that he might find rest in her*', **{4.1}**, **{7.189}** and **{39.6}**, and from their loins over time proliferated many '*peoples and tribes*', **{49.13}**, of diverse '*tongues and colours*', **{33.22}**, that mirror the diversity God created in fruits, mountains, beasts and cattle, **{35.27-28}**. **{2.213}** and **{10.19}** each assert that at one time mankind had originally been one community but had '*differed*'. This probably refers to the period described in the Book of Genesis between the Fall of Adam and the Deluge, and specifically to the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11.1-6 (a story that the Qurʾan includes, without this significance, as part of its Moses narrative ⟨**23**⟩). Neither of the two aforementioned verses offers any detail concerning humanity's

division, but **Surah 2** implies that these '*differences*' were disagreements over religion. If in these two passages human diversity is presented as the result of man's tendency to argue, it is more common that the Qurʾan presents human diversity as an integral part of God's plan, stating in **{5.48}**, **{11.118}**, **{16.93}**, and **{42.8}** that '*had the Lord willed, he would have made mankind one community*' – presumably, since **{2.213}** and **{10.19}** state that mankind had once in fact been one community, meaning that He could have *preserved* mankind as one community. Two reasons for God willing diversity are given. In **{49.13}** the variety of peoples is permitted to allow cultural interaction: '*that you may come to know one another*', whilst **{5.48}** optimistically suggests that division encourages a healthy competition in the performance of good works (see **⟨84⟩**). In **{5.18}** the suggestion that men and women are, and should think of themselves as, being in some way the children of a loving Father in heaven, is scotched:

> **{5.18}** And the Jews and Christians say: 'We are the children of God, and His beloved ones.
>
> Say: 'Why then does he punish you for your sins? Nay, but you are mortals of his creating…'

Adam and his wife

Separately, to the '*single soul*' verses referred to above, the Qurʾan tells in several places, most fully at **{2.30-38}**, **{7.11-28}**, **{15.28-50}**, **{20.115-123}**, **{32.9}** and **{38.71-88}**, of the creation of man through the more personal story of Adam. God created Adam to be His '*khalifa*' ('*successor*', or possibly '*vice-regent*') upon the earth and to take up the '*trust*' that the '*the heavens, and the earth and the mountains*' had declined to undertake for themselves **⟨13⟩**. The gathered angels are, possibly as a result of their experiences battling to subdue the previous of God's creatures to have been given free will, the jinn **⟨15⟩**, are instinctively wary of this plan, asking God: '*Will Thou place therein one who will work corruption therein, and shed blood whilst we hymn Thy praise and call thee holy?*',

{2.30}. Undeterred, having formed Adam and breathed into him of His Spirit, God commanded all the angels to bow to him. However, Iblis, who is present at the scene though apparently not an angel, refuses so to do and is expelled from God's presence; see, in addition, to verses already cited, **{17.61-65}**, **{18.50}**, **{20.116}** (for more on Iblis see **⟨17⟩** following.

Adam is then placed in a garden, **{2.35-38}, {7.19-25}** and **{20.117-123}**. This garden is not named in the Adam narratives, but the name Eden is applied nine times in the Qurʾan to the Paradise where the righteous will dwell at the End of Days **⟨99⟩** and as a consequence the blissful gardens that are inhabited before and after history are therefore understood to be one and the same place. Two of the three accounts of Adam in the Garden refer to him being there with a wife (**{7.20}** and **{20.123}**), although her creation is at no point described, the first woman appearing alongside her husband without name or introduction. The two are told not to eat from a specific tree that is identified in **{20.120}** as the Tree of Immortality ('*Shajarat al-Khold*'). Both of them, however, succumb to the temptation ('*waswāsi*') of al-Shaytan that they eat the fruit of this tree and their subsequent embarrassment at their nakedness prompts them to sew leaves together to make clothes. In the Judeo-Christian tradition it is popularly assumed that Adam and Eve's embarrassment was due to their loss of childlike innocence, but in **{7.26-27}** we are told that after eating of the forbidden fruit Adam and his wife had actually been stripped of their heavenly attire by al-Shaytan. After being confronted by God with their disobedience, Adam, his wife and al-Shaytan are all expelled from Paradise, whereupon God provides the two humans with new clothing - literally '*a garment to cover your shameful parts and feathers,*' (*per* Arberry).

In this narrative the Qurʾan follows, in general terms, the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden contained in chapter 3 of the Book of Genesis. In turn, the story of Adam and Eve, along with that of the Great Flood has been recognised since the late nineteenth century to be a Jewish adaptation of part of the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. It is the discovery of this much earlier source that enabled scholars to finally make sense of the Genesis version of this well-known but confusing legend. In *Gilgamesh*, a

wild man, Enkidu, is described as roaming naked in the wilderness, releasing animals from traps set by town dwellers. The townspeople sent a woman, Shamhat, to seduce Enkidu and then, once he had succumbed to her influence, to civilise him, which she succeeded in doing, sharing her clothing with him prior to returning with him to the town. Here, in the presence of other people, Enkidu learnt for the first time of his own mortality and he cursed the woman who had taken him away from the blissful ignorance he had enjoyed in his former life and led him to this unwanted knowledge that he would never be able to unlearn.[112] It is overwhelmingly likely that this story and that of the Flood, and probably that of the Tower of Babel too, became known to the Israelites during the Babylonian Captivity. Following the exiles' return to Israel, elements of Enkidu's story - the innocence of a naturist life ruined by the knowledge of mortality, brought about through the agency of a temptress, and symbolised by the donning of clothing – together with the other stories - appear to have been given a monotheistic gloss and placed at the beginning of the Torah, transformed into creation myths to act as a prelude to the more authentically Jewish stories of the patriarchs. From the Torah and Bible, these elements then transferred to the Qurʾan. In this process the story of Adam was, in several respects, changed again removing it even further from its original form:

- In the Genesis version there were two named trees in the Garden of Eden, probably indicating that two or more versions of the story had circulated that had then been combined into one narrative. These are called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, from which Adam and Eve ate, and the Tree of Life, the fruits of which they were denied to them as punishment for their sin. In the Qurʾan, these two trees are conflated - or restored – as one tree, identified as the Tree of Immortality. However, for reasons that the Qurʾan fails to make clear, after the Fall, Adam and his wife remain mortal despite having eaten of this tree.

- The Qurʾan names the tempter in the Garden as al-Shaytan, whereas in Genesis the role of tempter is

played by an anonymous serpent, although in truth the Judeo-Christian connection between the snake and Satan has never been far away (*c.f.* jinn as snakes **⟨15⟩**).

- Unlike in the Genesis story, where first the serpent tempts Eve and then Eve tempts Adam, there is no indication in the Qurʾan that Adam is encouraged to taste the forbidden fruit by his wife. On the contrary, in **{20.121}** al-Shaytan explicitly addresses his seditious words to Adam alone, omitting an element of the biblical story that has, in modern times, been interpreted as a misogynistic slur against Eve.

- Following the Fall, both the biblical and Quranic Adam and Eve receive new clothing from God (Genesis 3.21), but the Quranic couple also receive words of comfort from God, **{2.37}** and **{7.23-28}**, that are understood as words of forgiveness. As a result, Muslim theologians have not developed from the story any equivalent to the Christian doctrine of original sin.[113]

Cane and Abel

In chapter 4 of the Book of Genesis, three children of Adam and Eve are named: Cain, Abel and Seth. Cain, embittered by envy at the Lord's favour towards his brother Abel, murders Abel and buries his body in a field, prompting God to declare to Cain that '*Your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil!*' (4.10). A version of this story is told in the Qurʾan **{5.27-32}**, although none of the participants are named. In these verses, there are two significant changes to the Genesis account. One is the Qurʾan's insertion into the story of a discussion between Cain and Abel in which Cain declares to Abel his intent to kill him to which Abel replies that, if attacked, he would refuse to defend himself, a rare suggestion of pacifism for the Qurʾan although it may be pointed out, one that clearly does not end well for its proponent. The innovation is

consistent with a number of pre-Islamic Christian writings, in which Abel's refusal to defend himself is presented as prefiguring the willing self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.[114] The second Quranic innovation is the appearance of a crow that demonstrates to Cain, by scratching the ground, how Cain should bury his brother's corpse. The role of the crow is likely derived from a Jewish legend recorded in a late (possibly post-Quranic) addition to the Babylonian Talmud, *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, in which Cain is inspired to bury his brother by observing a raven burying another bird. The Quranic account of Cane and Abel culminates in the oft-quoted - and misquoted - **{5.32-33}**: *'For this reason we prescribed for the children of Israel unless it be for another should or for working corruption upon the earth, it is as though he slew mankind altogether…'* – see **⟨72⟩** below.

17. Iblis and *al-Shaytan*

Surah 7 (*Al-Aʿrāf/The heights)* 11-13

11. And indeed, We created you,
then We fashioned you,
then We said to the angels
'Prostrate yourselves unto Adam.'
So they (all) did prostrate themselves
except Iblees; he was not of the prostrating
ones.

12. (He said) 'What prevented you that you
did not prostrate when I commanded you? '
He said ' I am better than him. You created
me of fire while You created him of clay.'

13. (Allah) said 'Get you down from this
(state). It does not befit you to behave
proudly therein. Therefore, go you out.
Verily you are of the abject ones'.

[*'An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qurʾan', Sayyed Abbas Sadr-ameli, 2014, (Iranian Shia)*]

Iblis

The name Iblis is derived from the Greek 'διάβολος' ('*diabolos*'), the same word from which English receives the word '*devil*'. Iblis's refusal to obey God's command that he prostrate himself before Adam, referred to in the previous section, is described at **{2.34}**, **{7.11-13}**, **{15.31-32}**, **{17.61}**, **{18.50}**, **{20.116}** and **{38.74-75}**. After this show of defiance **{7.16-17}**, **{15.36-43}** and **{17.62-64}** recount a conversation between God and Iblis during which Iblis seeks, and is granted, a respite from immediate punishment, in order that he might lead mankind astray with his whisperings, aided by his '*cavalry and infantry*', **{17.64}**.

In **{7.11}**, produced above, Iblis is introduced as though he was one of the angels, although he declares that he was '*made of fire*' like the jinn **⟨15⟩**, and in **{18.50}** he is described as being '*of the jinn*'. In Abu al-Hassan al-Masudi's *The History of Time* **⟨15⟩**, Iblis, who had initially been called al-Harith, although he was a jinni, had ascended to heaven and had served God with great zeal. When rebellion against God broke out amongst his fellow jinn he led an army of righteous jinn and angels to drive his own kind from the temporal world.[115] By the thirteenth century a better explanation had been arrived at as to how Iblis had ended up in heaven: he had been captured as a child jinni during the angel-jinn wars and brought to heaven as an innocent prisoner, where he had then been raised amongst angels.[116]

The story of the angels being required to bow to Adam is an episode taken from *The Life of Adam and Eve*, a tract that likely had Jewish origins, but which had circulated amongst Christians from the first century. In this, Eve confronts Satan, following their expulsion from Eden, to enquire why he had hated her and Adam so much as to trick them into disobeying God. Satan explains that he had once been an angel but had been expelled from heaven for refusing to worship Adam. A version of the story also appeared in the fourth century *Questions of St Bartholomew* in which Satan describes his response to God's command using words that are almost identical to those of Iblis in **{7.12}** (produced above):

> '*I am fire of fire. I was the first angel to be formed and shall I worship clay and matter?*'[117]

The significance of the Iblis story in the Qurʾan is far from obvious. The Judeo-Christian story is predicated upon the statement in Genesis 2.26-27 that '*God created man in His image; in the divine image He created him.*' It is this mirroring of the attributes of God that the angels were called upon to venerate. However, if there is one dominant theological imperative in the Qurʾan, it is that worship is due to God and to God alone. The instruction given by God to the angels and Iblis to bow to mortal Adam seems to contradict this and even to constitute a divine command to commit *shirk*. Upon the view of the tenth century Sufi, Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, Iblis was a tragic figure whose absolute devotion to God prevented him from worshipping another, even at the cost of incurring God's

wrath in return.[118] Al-Hallaj's sympathy for Iblis sees the latter caught in a paradox that many humans face between what they believe must be God's Will and the explicit words of His Command. On this view, the story's intended moral, would be clear, if somewhat unsatisfying. Iblis's sin lay in his failure to submit to God's command immediately and without question, rather than his refusal to bow down to Adam *per se*. Had this unexplained and incongruous instruction not been issued, refusing to bow to Adam would have been virtuous and bowing to him the unforgivable sin.

An alternative reason that has been offered to explain why Adam was deserving of veneration by the angels is that because, whilst most of creation came into existence at God's verbal command '*Be!*', Adam was the work of God's '*two Hands*' **⟨13⟩**. More to the point, since cattle and the sky too are said to have been made by God's Hands, he had been animated by having also had God's Spirit breathed into him **⟨12⟩**. If it is correct that Adam deserved veneration for having been inspired of God's Spirit, this may have a significance for reading the Qurʾan that has, it is believed, not previously been remarked upon. Presumably, God's Spirit was not transmitted to the children of Adam through reproduction since it is an anathema to the traditional Islamic outlook to see humans as containing the Spirit of God rather than being His creation and slaves. Whether Adam's unknown wife also had had God's Spirit breathed into her and was deserving of angelic reverence we cannot say, since the process by which she came into existence is not mentioned. But one other person besides Adam in the Qurʾan is said to have been brought to life by receiving God's Spirit, namely Jesus. It will be seen that whilst Jews were at one time at the heart of the Quranic community but became the object of a series of bitter denunciations, Christians, prior to the very last surah, seem to have received a more indulgent treatment. Many Christian dogmas came to be adopted by the Qurʾan in its later surahs **⟨26⟩**, **⟨88⟩**. It may well be that the story of the angels bowing to Adam was seized upon by the Qurʾan author as a convenient precedent to justify permitting Christians to bow to the depictions of Jesus. Adam and Jesus are compared in **{3.59}**: '*Truly, the likeness of Jesus in the sight of God is that of Adam. He created him from dust and said 'Be!' and he was*'. They are two exceptional beings that as living

vessels carried God's Spirt and it is upon this basis that the veneration of Jesus may have been permitted.

This pragmatic explanation may also explain why the Greek-derived name Iblis only appears in the Qurʾan in relation to the story of the refusal to bow to Adam. Throughout the remainder of the Qurʾan, including the Garden of Eden narratives, the being formerly known as Iblis bears a different name that originates in Hebrew, '*al-Shaytan*' ('*Satan*'). It has already been described **⟨14⟩** that Iblis acts as a rhyming-twin to Idris. It may also be relevant that the rarity of a Greek word in the Qurʾan contains a clue that it was included for a purpose of specifically related to Christianity.

'*Al-Shaytan*'

In traditional Islamic thought, the two names Iblis and '*al-Shaytan*' are treated as effectively interchangeable (just as the '*the devil*' and '*Satan*' are in the Book of Revelation, 12.9 and 20.2). It is a linguistic oddity that in the Qurʾan Iblis is used as a personal name and '*al-Shaytan*' as a descriptor, whereas in modern English usage, the position has become reversed, with Satan becoming the personal name for the devil.

It has been seen **⟨16⟩** that al-Shaytan speaks to Adam and his mate in Paradise by suggesting to Adam that he eat from the tree that God had forbidden to them. Outside of the context of the Garden of Eden narrative, although the Qurʾan frequently refers to '*al-Shayṭan*' as a '*manifest enemy*' of mankind, it also tends to use the term less as a reference to a specific supernatural person, than as a personification of sinfulness. Typically, this is expressed through '*al-Shaytan*'s' whisperings, referred to either using the word '*nazgh*' **{7.200}**, **{12.100}**, **{17.53}**, **{41.36}** or the onomatopoeic '*waswasa*', **{7.20}**, **{20.120}** and (produced at **⟨9⟩** above) **{114.4-5}**. These whisperings may be inner voices of temptation -

> **{2.168 & 208}**, **{6.142}** and **{24.21}**: '*Follow not the footsteps of al-Shaytan*',
>
> **{22.52-53}**: '*No messenger or prophet did We send before thee but that when he had a longing;*

> *al-Shaytan would cast into his longing, whereupon God effaces what al-Shaytan cast*',

> **{41.36}**: '*Should a temptation from al-Shaytan provoke thee, seek refuge in God*',

or of deceit:

> **{4.60}**: '*Has thou not seen those … desiring to seek judgment from false deities, although they were commanded not to believe in them? Indeed al-Shaytan desires to lead them far astray*',

> **{4.119-120}** and **{17.64}**: '*Al-Shaytan promises naught but delusion*',

> **{8.48}**: '*And remember when al-Shaytan made (the Meccans before the Battle of Badr's) deeds seem fair unto them and said: 'None among mankind shall overcome you today and I am indeed your defender' but when the two hosts saw each other he turned on his heels and said: 'I am quit of you! Truly I see what you see not. Truly I fear God and God is severe in retribution'*;
>
> (*c.f.* **{6.43}**, **{14.22}**, **{16.63}**, **{25.27-29}**, **{27.24}**, **{29.38}** and **{59.16}**);

or the sowing of enmity, **{5.90-91}**, **{12.100}**, **{17.53}** (see **⟨34⟩**), or of fear, **{3.175}**. In **{7.175-176}** the Qurʾan refers to one unnamed person to whom God had given signs but who had '*cast them off*' and become a follower of Shaytan and one of the deviant **⟨90⟩**. In this manner of usage, the Qurʾan follows the example of Jesus who, in the gospels of Matthew (at 16.23) and Mark (8.33) rebukes St Peter with the words '*Get behind me, Satan*'.

Al-Shaytan also appears as a convenient entity that is available to be blamed in a general sort of way whenever things go wrong. When Pharaoh's sommelier, following his release from prison forgot to tell his master about Joseph who continued to languish

for years behind bars, **{6.68}**; or when Moses's servant forgot that the fish he had been preparing to cook had escaped from him, **{18.63}**; when Moses in rage killed the Egyptian slave driver, **{28.15}**, or when Job was afflicted with weariness and punishment, **{38.41}**; the cause of these situations is identified as al-Shaytan (*c.f.* the 'Satanic verses' episode **⟨34⟩**).

In all of these manifestations, an important distinction from Christianity must be borne in mind. Whether he is inspiring disobedience, error, disunity, fear, forgetfulness or rage, in the Qurʾan there are no grounds to regard al-Shaytan as evil himself. On the contrary, he acts as an agent of God in the process of testing man, fulfilling a commission that has been given to him by God, whom, it will be seen, is also wont to lead man astray. Shaytan thus is not the equivalent of the devil as the embodiment of the seven deadly sins imagined in Christianity so much as the devil's advocate. However, this being the case, the Qurʾan becomes trapped in a paradox. For it is not at all clear how a person following a suggestion made by al-Shaytan at God's command can properly be deemed to be disobedience of God. It would seem that sin lies in the failure to distinguish between those inner promptings that God wishes us to follow and those that He wishes us to hear but ignore; akin to playing a psychological game of Simon Says.

Shaytans

On yet other occasions, '*shayatīn*' is used in the plural form, either as a type of supernatural creature.

> **{26.221}**: '*Shall I inform thee of those upon whom the shayatīn descend…*,
>
> **{22.3}**: '*And among mankind are those who dispute concerning God without knowledge, and follow every defiant shaytan*',
>
> **{19.68}**: '*And by thy Lord, We shall surely gather them (unbelievers) and the shayatīn and We shall surely bring them around Hell on their knees*.'

or a pejorative term capable of being applied to men and/or jinn to define them by their wickedness:

> **{6.112}**: *'We made for every prophet an enemy – shayatīn from among mankind and jinn – who inspire each other with flowery discourse in order to deceive'.*

Since both shaytans, **{15.17-18}, {37.6-10}** and **{67.5-7}**, and jinn, **{72.8-9} ⟨15⟩**, are described being chased away from eavesdropping into heaven by flaming missiles, the terms shaytans and jinn must overlap, although whether the shaytans are a category of jinn defined by their wickedness or the jinn are a category of wicked beings defined by their belonging to the hidden world is not clear, and probably just a matter of perspective.

Both the singular '*al-Shaytan*', **{3.36}** and **{16.98}**, and the plural '*shayatīn*', **{15.17}** and **{81.25}**, appear alongside the word '*al-rajīm*' which is generally translated as '*accursed*' or '*outcast*' but literally comes from the root r-g-m meaning '*to stone*'. The precise origins of the phrase '*stoned shaytan*' is unclear, but it has been observed that the Ethiopic Bible renders the cursing by God of the serpent in the Book of Genesis (3.14 – a story that is obviously fundamental to the character of Satan) with the verb form '*ragamt*' and the phrase '*saytan regum*' became popular in Ethiopian Christianity at about the same time that the Qurʾan was being composed, suggesting that its use in the latter had an Ethiopian origin.[119] The dual meaning of the term '*al-rajīm*' as referring to the repelling with either curses or stones may well lie behind the Qurʾan's account of satans being literally chased away from heaven with fiery missiles **⟨15⟩**, and the ritual of stoning a pillar to represent Satan during the hajj pilgrimage **⟨57⟩**. Further shaytanic references include **{2.102 & 268}**, **{17.27}** ('*the wasteful are the brethren of al-Shaytan*'), **{35.6}**, **{36.60}** and **{59.16}**.

18. The Day of Alast

Surah 7 (*Al-Aʿrāf/The Heights)* 172-173

172. And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins their progeny [*'seed'*] and made them bear witness concerning themselves: 'Am I not your Lord?', they said: 'Yea, we bear witness', lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: 'Truly of this we were heedless',

173. Or lest you should say: 'It is only that our fathers ascribed partners unto God beforehand, and we were their progeny after them. Wilt thou destroy us for that which the falsifiers have done?'

{7.172-173} describe God revealing Himself to the spirit of each person prior to their birth, a proposed encounter known in Islam as the Day of *Alast* (literally '*Am I not…?*') The verses immediately prior to **{7.172-173}** had recalled the covenant that had been made between God and Moses at Mount Sinai, and in particular had drawn attention to the fact that this had been binding not only upon Moses and those Israelites present on that day, but also upon their descendants forever:

{7.169} Then a generation succeeded them who inherited the Book. They grasp the ephemeralities of this lower world and say: 'It will be forgiven us.'

> And if other ephemeralities like them were to come their way, they would grasp them (also).
>
> Did not the covenant of the Book commit them to say aught of God save the truth...'

However, **{7.172-173}** develops this notion in two different ways. It extends the scope of the parties to the covenant with God from the Children of Israel to all who are '*born of the loins of the children of Adam*'. It also asserts that the commitment to obey God was no mere inherited obligation, but an agreement that had been voluntarily entered into by each person individually prior to their birth, even though the conscious memory of having done so has been withheld from them. A similar event known as the Covenant of the Prophets is apparently referred to in **Surah 3**:

> **{3.81}** And remember when God made the covenant of the prophets: 'By that which I have given you of a Book and Wisdom should a messenger then come to you, confirming that which is in you, you will surely believe in him and you shall help him.
>
> He [*God?*] said 'Do you agree and take on my burden on these conditions?'
>
> They said: 'We agree.'…

Although these are the only verses of the Qurʾan that directly allude to the pretemporal covenant, the notion that man is born with an innate sense of having already encountered God is seen in vocabulary that pervades the Qurʾan. The Qurʾan frequently calls upon its audience to '*remember God*' ('*dhikr Allāh*'), **{2.152}**, **{4.103}**, **{7.205}**, **{13.28}**, **{29.45}**, **{33.41-43}** and **{63.9}**, and a quarter of all

surahs employ the phrase '*Unto Him is your return*' or some similar form of words, both of which phrases imply a prior encounter between the soul and God. The practice of accessing the '*remembrance of God*' is a foundational element of Sufi devotional spirituality, based particularly upon:

> **{13.28}**: '*(God) guides to Himself … those whose hearts are at peace in remembrance of Him*', and
>
> **{29.45}**: '*Prayer prevents against indecency and abomination, but the remembrance of God is surely greater*', and
>
> **{33.41-43}**: '*Remember God with frequent remembrance and glorify Him … that He may bring you out of darkness into light.*'

Belief in commitments made at the Day of Alast is the reason for Muslims commonly referring to those who adopt Islam as '*reverts*' rather than '*converts*'. It is a useful concept upon which to build the Islamic doctrine that a person is born with *fitrah*: a natural predisposition to recognise God and His messengers. This provides a theological basis for the Qurʾan to present itself as an expansion upon the pure monotheism that had been rediscovered by Abraham merely by meditating upon nature. Futhermore, it justifies the characterisation of those who reject the Qurʾan or its announcer as not merely unbelievers but *kafir* ('*those who bury the truth*') and the '*munāfiqūn*' ('*hypocrites*') **⟨87⟩**. Such perversity as denying God's message or messenger, which any virtuous person must recognise the authenticity of, could only be the result of a person having nurtured a disease in their hearts or having been led astray, ether by al-Shaytan **⟨17⟩**, the corruption of past generations **⟨88⟩**, or the lies of other unbelievers, or God Himself to ready them for the Hellfire.

19. Causation and free will

Surah 6 (*Al-Anʿam/The Cattle*): 59

And with Him are the keys of the Unseen.

None knows them but He, and He knows what is on land and sea.

No leaf falls but that He knows it,
nor any seed in the dark recesses of the earth,
nor anything moist or dry,
but that it is in a clear Book.

The Qurʾan frequently asserts God's dominion over all the world, **{54.49}** – '*Truly We have created everything according to a measure*' - with several verses stating that every event that occurs is already written by God in '*a clear Book*'. This is presumably the same book referred to in:

{35.11}: '*And none grows old, nor has aught lessened of his life, but that it is in a Book*',

{57.22}: '*No misfortune befalls the earth nor yourselves, save that it is in a Book before We bring it forth. Truly that is easy for God*';

(*c.f.* **{6.59}** produced above, **{10.61}**, **{11.6}**, **{20.52}**, **{22.70}**, **{27.74-75}**, **{34.3}**. **{36.12}**, **{50.4}**, and **{78.29}**). The notion of such a book may draw upon the concept of a heavenly '*Book of Life*' that is alluded to in both the Old and New Testaments, and which, in turn, may contain the echoes of even older, Mesopotamian, beliefs.[120]

In a similar vein but without employing the metaphor of a book:

{9.51}: '*Naught befalls us save that that which God has decreed for us.*'

{60.67}: '*He it is who created you from dust …*
that you may reach a term appointed...';

In **{13.39}** a process is described whereby '*God effaces what he will and establishes, and with Him is the Mother of the Book*'. Some believe that this verse depicts phenomena that are experienced on earth as events, as, from God's overview, a process of His transcribing His commands from an unchanging book of destiny to some sort of temporary ledger of changing information, a postulated '*tablet of appearance and dissolution*'. For those without God's sovereign perspective, all of this creates the impression of God as not merely able to ordain events, but determining every occurrence long before it occurs, and in fact before even the creation of the heavens and the earth.

Free will

This pre-determinist outlook is inevitably in conflict with the concept of free will, and also with God's claim to be acting justly in rewarding some individuals and punishing others, since these rewards would be bestowed and punishments inflicted for conduct that He had Himself ordained that a person was compelled to act out. Yet very many verses of the Qurʾan appear designed to support precisely that conclusion. The Qurʾan frequently states that God '*leads astray whomsoever He will and He guides whomever He will*', **{6.39}**, **{14.4}**, **{16.93}**, **{35.8}** (similarly: **{4.88 & 143}**, **{7.178-179}**, **{13.27}**, **{17.97}**, **{18.17}**, **{40.74}**, **{42.8, 13 & 44-46}** and **{87.2-3}**), that He '*causes some to err*', **{11.34}**, and '*seals their hearts, blinds their eyes and deafens them to the truth*', **{2.7}**, (similarly **{9.87 & 93}**, **{10.74}**, **{16.108}**, **{18.57 & 101}**.) **{76.30}** and **{81.29}** seem unequivocal that a person has no volition other than as directed by God: *'And you do not will but that which God wills*', whilst worst of all for free will and justice, the Qurʾan's God states at **{7.178}** that '*We have indeed created for Hell many among jinn and men*', suggesting that for some, their eternal punishment was the only purpose for which they were ever brought into existence.

Despite these apparently clear statements of pre-determinism free will, the Muʿtazila **⟨5⟩**, a theological movement which taught the

existence of free will, dominated Islamic scholarly thought upon the subject in the first half of the ninth century. The Muʿtazila pointed out that in other verses the Qurʾan speaks of God leading astray '*none but the iniquitous*', **{2.26}**; '*whosoever is a prodigal doubter*', **{40.34}**, and the '*kafir*' (those who cover the truth), **{40.74}**. Based upon these statements it was inferred that whenever the Qurʾan talks of God leading people astray it should be read as God leading to punishment those who were already unrighteous in some way. This reading would be consistent with the Qurʾan's statement that man's disbelief had never been God's desire: **{13.31}**: '*If God had willed He would have guided mankind all together*', and **{32.13}**'s '*Had We willed We would have given every soul its guidance*.' This philosophical gloss on the Word of God aroused vehement opposition from a literalist movement, led by Ahmad bin Hanbal, who accused the Muʿtazila of denying God's own free will. This was because insisting that God was bound by His nature to act in accordance with principles that were external to Himself. In 848, as noted in **⟨5⟩**, **⟨11⟩** above, popular support for Imam Ahmad forced the then caliph to withdraw his support for the Muʿtazila position, a loss of popular and institutional influence from which the rationalist school of Islamic theology has never fully recovered. In the tenth century Abu al-Hassan Ashari sought to establish a middle ground in the debate. In the Asharite model, which became and probably remains the most influential of all Islamic theological schools, God granted a person freedom of intention only, and so it was just that a person should 'acquire' the consequences of their desires, whilst God alone had dominion over the physical world and chooses in His wisdom, in each instant, whether to realise a person's intent. It is in consequence of this view of causality and in obedience to the Qurʾan's instruction in **{18.23-24}**, that the expression '*inshāʾAllāh*' ('*if God wills it*') should be uttered by Muslims after any reference to an anticipated future event. In any event, Ashari insisted, adopting a Hanbali position, it was irrational to talk of God acting justly or unjustly since neither justice nor morality had any objective meaning other than obedience to God's Will.

It has been seen above **⟨11⟩** that Daud Rahbur in *God of Justice* has argued, it is suggested persuasively, that the Quranic God does not have foresight of human actions. In the same book Rahbur lists

every verse in which God states that He misleads people and demonstrates that the vast majority (although not all) of these appear in close proximity to passages that either condemn the sinfulness of those being misled or else refers to God's wisdom in matters that are beyond human understanding. From this analysis he concludes that the Qurʾan depicts a God that does indeed permit free will, notwithstanding the very many verses that, taken out of their immediate context, would suggest the contrary.

Sorcery

The Qurʾan describes disbelievers dismissing the revelations of Jesus, **{5.110}**, **{61.1}**, and those in the Qurʾan, **{10.2}**, **{11.7}**, **{34.43}**, **{43.30}**, **{46.7}**, and **{54.2}**, as being '*sorcery*' ('*sahr*'), sometimes '*manifest sorcery*'. The prophets Salih, **{26.153}**, Shuayb, **{26.185}**, and the Qurʾan's author himself, **{17.47}**, **{25.8}**, we are told, had each faced the accusation of being '*but one of the bewitched*', and the latter and Moses together of being '*two sorcerers supporting one another*', **{28.48}**. Clearly wearying of this repeated slur, in **{15.14-15}**, the Qurʾan author sarcastically predicts that: '*Were We to open for them a gate unto heaven … they would say: 'Our eyes are merely spellbound. Nay we are a people bewitched'* and warns the deniers that on the Last Day, when they are consigned to burn in the Hellfire, God will mock them for their disbelief, with the words '*Is this sorcery?*', **{52.14}**.

In each of **{7.109-126}**, **{10.76-81}**, **{20.57-73}**, **{26.30-51}**, **{27.13-14}** and **{28.36}** the Qurʾan describes a contest (based upon the events described in Exodus 7.8-13) between the sorcerers (*sāḥirs*) of Pharaoh and Moses. As with the biblical account Pharaoh's sorcerers cast down their staffs which appear to turn into snakes, but when Moses does likewise, his snake consumes theirs **⟨23⟩**. The Qurʾan's accounts of this incident, when read together, seem to be deliberately ambiguous on the point of whether the Pharaoh's *sāḥirs* used actual wizardry or merely tricks of a magician in the modern sense of the word. **{7.116}** states that the sorcerers '*bewitched the eyes of the people*', and **{20.66}** describes how '*their staffs appeared through their sorcery to move swiftly*', each worded so as to avoid a commitment on whether the magicians' staffs were

actually transformed into live snakes. None of these passages compel the believing listener to conclude that humans are capable of practising sorcery. In the same way, whilst Moses's proclamation in **{10.76-81}** that '*the sorcerers will not prosper*' may be interpreted as him accepting that his opponents were actual sorcerers, these words are also capable of being merely a prediction of the inevitable victory of God over Pharaoh's charlatans.

Belomancy, the use of divining arrows, is twice forbidden in the Qurʾan, **{5.3 & 90}**, although it, or something very similar, is the method used to select Joseph as the husband of Mary **⟨26⟩**. On each of the occasions upon which it is prohibited, the ban appears within alongside other as *ḥarām* (*i.e.*, '*forbidden*') practises that include idolatry, and, in the case of {**5.90**}, gambling. So, whilst the purpose of these verses may well have been to warn humans off dabbling in the occult, they are also consistent with the Qurʾan's discouragement of superstition and disorderly conduct. The prohibition does not require the reader to conclude that diving arrows were themselves regarded as actually possessing any supernatural power.

However, three passages of the Qurʾan are hard, if not impossible, to interpret in a way that does not acknowledge that it is affirming that magic is real. These are:

- the reference to shaytans '*teaching people sorcery*' as it had been taught to them by the angels Harut and Marut **⟨14⟩**,

- the account of the Israelites having created a golden calf idol in Moses' absence that '*lowed*' ('*mooed like a cow*', *per* Ahmed Ali), and the suggestion a few verses later that this had been achieved through the action of a Samaritan who '*saw that which they* [the Israelites] *saw not*' and '*took a handful of earth from the footsteps of the messenger and cast it*,' **{20.88-96}**, in what could only have been some form of 'foot track' spell **⟨23⟩**, and

- the prayer for protection in **Surah 113**, '*From the evil of those who blow on knots, and from the evil of the envier when he envies*' (see **⟨9⟩** above).

This last passage is traditionally explained by a story that a Jewish sorcerer, Labin bin Asam, had placed a hex on Muhammad by burying a comb that contained strands of his hair, a spell that was only broken when Muhammad, in a dream, overheard two angels discussing what had been done to him.[121] A later version of the tale, in order to fasten it to **Surah 113** more securely, has Labin weave Muhammad's hair with date palm fronds, and tie the resulting cord into eleven knots.[122] '*The envier*' of **{113.5}** is generally associated with the superstition of the evil eye; as is **{68.51}**'s reference to disbelievers who '*would well-nigh smite thee down with their glances*'.

There can, of course, be no doubt that the Qurʾan's jinn practise magic, **⟨15⟩**, and that at least four humans, Solomon **⟨24⟩**, Jesus **⟨26⟩**, al-Khidr **⟨29⟩** and Dhu'l Qarnayn **⟨30⟩** were endowed with supernatural powers that were more under their control than merely the power that we all have to call upon God to perform a miracle.

III

Sacred History

20. The Torah and Gospel

Surah 3 (*Al ʿImran/ The house of Imran*): 3-4

3. Step by step has He bestowed upon thee from on high this divine writ, setting forth the truth which confirms whatever there still remains (of earlier revelations), for it is He who has bestowed from on high the Torah and the Gospel

4. Aforetime, as a guidance unto mankind, and it is He who has bestowed (upon man) the standard by which to discern the true from the false.

Behold, as for those who are bent on denying God's messages - grievous suffering awaits them.

For God is Almighty, an Avenger of evil.

[*'The Message of the Qurʾan', Muhammad Asad, 1980 (Austrian Jewish convert to Islam)*]

The Qurʾan states that a messenger or '*warner*' has been sent to '*every community*', **{10.47}, {16.36}** and **{35.24}**. These prophets – it is not entirely clear whether in the Qurʾan there is a technical difference between messengers, warners and prophets but in this companion the term '*prophet*' will be used as a catch-all to refer to all three - include '*messengers We have recounted to thee before and messengers We have not recounted unto thee*', **{4.164}** and **{40.78}**. This allows for many prophets to have been sent to humanity by God who were unknown to the Qurʾan's original audience and who remain unknown to us now, no religious figure other than those mentioned in the Bible and Qurʾan having ever gained acceptance as an Islamic prophet. God states that He draws no distinction between these messengers, **{2.136}**, **{2.185}** (produced at **⟨53⟩**), **{3.84}** and **{34.150-152}**. Despite this claimed vast array of past prophets from which to draw its examples, the Qurʾan limits its

allusions to those from the Jewish and Arab traditions, to whom it devotes a very considerable part of its text.

The Qurʾan also refers to revelations, often as books or '*the Book*' ('*al-Kitab*') that have been previously '*sent down*'. It names the '*Tawrāt*' (Torah) and the '*Injīl*' ('*gospel*') together nine times in **{3.3, 48 & 65}**, **{5.46, 66-68 & 110}**, **{7.157}**, **{9.111}** (in which the two are bracketed with the Qurʾan itself) and **{48.29}**. The Torah is also mentioned on its own on a further five occasions, **{3.50 & 93}**, **{5.43}**, **{61.6}** and **{62.4}**, and the Injeel on its own just twice, at {**57.27**} and, as part of the phrase '*the People of the Injeel*', at **{5.47}**. In addition to the '*Tawrāt*' and the '*Injīl*', the Qurʾan gives names to three further prior revelations, although the identification of the scripture from the context given is not straightforward.

{53.36-37} and **{87.19}** each refer to '*the scriptures of Moses and Abraham*'. A book sent down upon Moses is referred to in **{2.53 & 87}**, **{6.91}**, **{28.48-49}** and **{46.12}** and there can be no doubt that this is a reference to the Torah. The question then arises of what could have been meant by the phrase '*scriptures of Abraham*'. Conceivably, this may be a reference to some apocryphal text attributed to Abraham such as the *Testament of Abraham*, which is treated as canonical by the Ethiopian Jewish community, or the *Apocalypse of Abraham* which was in circulation in the time of Muhammad and which the Qurʾan draws upon **⟨22⟩**. The reference is commonly assumed by Muslims, though, to refer to a lost scripture comprising revelations delivered by Abraham.

A prior revelation referred to as '*al-Zabūr*' is mentioned in two verses, **{4.163}** and **{17.55}**, as having been sent down to King David **⟨24⟩**. David is traditionally credited (along with Asaph) with the composition of the psalms and on a third occasion, **{21.105}**, the Zabur is mentioned, without any reference to David, but where a connection with the psalms is beyond doubt. The Qurʾan verse in question reads:

> '*We have indeed written the Zabur, after the Reminder, that My righteous servants will inherit the earth*' **⟨20⟩**,

a statement that so closely resembles the words of Psalm 37.29:

> '*The just shall possess the land and dwell in it forever*,'

as to make the Zabur-psalm connection certain. In fact, the Qurʾan contains several passages that include adaptations of the psalms. God's assertion in **{2.255}** (produced **⟨11⟩** above) that '*No slumber can seize Him nor sleep*', replicates Psalm 121's: '*Indeed, He neither slumbers nor sleeps*', and further examples are given below in this section, and elsewhere in this Companion at **⟨2⟩**, **⟨5⟩**, **⟨13⟩**, **⟨23⟩**, **⟨32⟩**, **⟨53⟩**, **⟨54⟩** and **⟨60⟩**. None of these passages from the psalms, though, are associated with the word '*al-Zabūr*', which appears in several other verses, including **{3.184}**, in which it features - rendered *per* Yusuf Ali as '*the books of dark prophecy*' – juxtaposed with '*a luminous Book*'.

Finally, the Qurʾan refers six times to '*al-Ḥikmah*' generally translated as '*Wisdom*' **{2.151}**, **{3.48, 81 & 164}**, **{4.54 & 113}** and **{5.110}**. Within a biblical context the word Wisdom (in Hebrew '*Ḥokmah*') may refer to a particular book, the Book of Wisdom, or alternatively as a section of the Bible comprising several books, those of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom and Sirach, as the Bible's Wisdom literature.

A Quranic Logos?

The way in which the Qurʾan uses the terms that '*Tawrāt*', '*Injīl*', '*Zabūr*', '*Ḥikmah*' and '*Kitab*' leaves uncertain how specifically it intends these to be used as specific references to the Torah,

Gospels, Psalms, Wisdom (book or literature) or biblical canon respectively. Indeed, it is not entirely clear that it always intends them to refer to any specific document at all. At **{2.151}**, **{3.81 & 164}**, **{4.54 & 113}** and **{5.110}** the Qurʾan uses the phrase '*the Book and Wisdom*', indicating either that Wisdom is not a book or that '*the Book*' refers to one book (as Christians use the word '*Bible*') and Wisdom to another. Similarly, **{45.16}** juxtaposes *'the Book*' with '*judgment and prophecy*', and at **{3.48}** an angel (or possibly God's Spirit) promises Mary that God will teach her son Jesus '*the Book, Wisdom, the Torah and the Injeel*'. It is unlikely that any of these three combinations are written to convey a technical scheme of book identification.

The significance attached to the above scriptural references is that they are texts containing revelations from God. Numerous verses, including **{2: 40-41, 89, 91, 97 & 101}**, **{3.3}** (produced above) and **{3.81}**, **{5.44 & 48}**, **{6.92}**, **{35.31}** and **{46.30}**, '*confirm*' these previous book or books as having been '*sent down*' by God. More specifically, in addition to the book sent down upon Moses and the Zabur upon King David, {**5.46 & 68**} each refer to both the Torah and Injeel having been '*given*' or '*taught*' by God to Jesus, who of course was born several centuries after the Torah was completed. The usual, literalist, understanding of these verses is that the Qurʾan author was presenting past scriptures as consisting of direct messages authored by God and announced by past prophets in a manner similar to the nature of revelation that the Qurʾan claims for itself. However, such a position must have struck anyone familiar with the Hebrew and Christian bibles as unsustainable. Whilst in some biblical texts God's direct speech is recorded, this is always introduced into the text by the human author. No book of either Old or New Testament is phrased in such a way that a reader could possibly believe that it was authored by God rather than by human scribes. That the Qurʾan author appears to have thought otherwise is often attributed by anti-Islam polemicists to the gross ignorance of Muhammad concerning the Bible. Two other supposed basic errors concerning past scriptures are commonly cited in support of this thesis. One is that the Qurʾan always refers to Injeel in the singular, although Christianity recognises not one but four canonical gospels, each of them named after its putative human author. The other is that the Qurʾan author occasionally

introduces passages from the Talmud as though they are canonical, of which the best known example is **{5.32}**'s citation of a passage from the *Misnah Sanhedrin* as '*whoever destroys a single soul is regarded as though he destroyed a complete world*' -introduced with the words '*We prescribed for the children of Israel…*', **{5.32} ⟨72⟩**.

Given the extensive and sometimes obscure scriptural references within the Qurʾan, it is implausible that its author could have been unaware of how the Torah and four gospels were framed, or of the difference between the Torah and the Talmud. In fact, it is the thesis of this companion that the Qurʾan author did not intend even his own pronouncements to be understood as a verbatim delivery of words composed by God (see **⟨4⟩** above). It seems far more likely that '*Tawrāt*', '*Injīl*', '*Zabūr*', '*Hikmah*' and '*Kitab*' were used in a deliberately ambiguous way to refer to God's Will as it is contained in prior revelations, loosely associated with particular texts depending upon the context. The use of abstract terms for revelation has a precedent in the Christian concepts of the '*logos*' ('*Word of God*'), '*euangélion*' ('*Good News*'), from which the word '*injīl*' is derived – and the '*kerygma*' ('*proclamation*'). The use of bookish terms to refer to an abstract revelation rather than to the established reports of them, may have been expected to have held a practical appeal to the Qurʾan author. It would have enabled him to present himself as following in the hallowed tradition of Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus, whilst retaining wriggle-room to amend, qualify and 'correct' previously accepted revelations as circumstances required, based upon the irreproachable authority of the angel Gabriel. Perhaps the most apposite comparison for the way that the Qurʾan tends to employ its scriptural terms is to be found in the First Letter of St Paul to Timothy at 5.18:

> *For scripture says: 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain' and 'the worker deserves his wages.'*

The prohibition on muzzling an ox to which Paul refers is included in Deuteronomy 25.4, but the second of these two appeals to '*scripture*' appears in fact to quotes a verbal saying of Jesus. This would later be included in the Gospel of St Luke (10.17) but there is no reason to suppose that it appeared in any document at the

time of Paul's writing to Timothy. Paul seems to have treated the words of Jesus as sufficiently authoritative to be deemed part of '*Scripture*', even prior to their being committed to writing.

Physical scriptures and the suggestion of their falsification

Notwithstanding the above, on a handful of occasions the Qurʾan unambiguously envisages the Torah and Injeel as physical documents in the possession of its audience.

> In **{3.93}** the Qurʾan instructs its speaker to say: '*Bring the Torah and recite it…*',
>
> **{5.43}** asks '*How is it that they come to thee for judgment, when they have the Torah wherein is God's judgment?*',
>
> **{6.91}**, echoing Jesus's criticism of the Pharisees, speaks of the Torah as '*brought by Moses as a light and guidance for mankind*' that the Jews of the Qurʾan's time '*make into parchment that (they) display whilst hiding much*', and
>
> **{7.157}** refers to Torah and Injeel as books that some of the audience '*have with*' them.

Moreover, on multiple occasions including **{2.89}, {3.81}, {4.47}, {6.92}, {7.157}, {5.47 & 68}**, **{10.94}** and **{46.12},** the Qurʾan confirms these former revelations as continuing to be authoritative, at the very least for the Jews, even at time that the Qurʾan was being announced. To be meaningful, this must necessarily be taken as referring to the established canon, rather than to some otherwise unknowable original message.

In what were probably its earlier surahs, the Qurʾan generally refers to the '*People of the Book*' and '*the children of Israel*', both of which terms, of course, include Jesus and the first Christians, with more or less positive connotations. However, their portrayal would become more critical over time, with Jews in particular

accused of a large number of vices **⟨88⟩** that include having distorted the scripture that had been given to them. **{4.46}** is an example:

> Among those who are Jews are those who distort the meaning of the Word and say: 'We hear and disobey,' and 'Hear as one who hears not!' and 'Attend to us,' twisting their tongues and disparaging religion.
>
> And had they said: 'We hear and obey,' and 'Listen' and 'Regard us,' it would have been better for them and more proper,

Similarly, accusations are made at **{2.59 & 75-76}**, **{3.78}** and **{5.13 & 41}**). By contrast, against Christians it is said only that they '*forgot part of that whereof they were reminded*', **{5.14}**. '*Some amongst the people of the Book*' are condemned for the fraudulent creation of religious texts in **{2.79}** (*'Woe unto those that who write the book with their hands then say 'This is from God' that they may sell it for a paltry price'*, *c.f.* **{3.199}**). Ultimately, **Surah 9** would accuse both Jews and Christians generally of having fully lapsed into idolatry **⟨52⟩**, **⟨88⟩**. Based upon such verses, it is sometimes argued that following the reception of God's revelation, corrupt rabbis and priests had altered their scriptures in order to accommodate the rebellion and disbelief of the communities that they had been sent to guide. The accusation of scriptural falsification by Jews and Christians is a superficially convenient explanation for those who treat the Qurʾan as divine speech and need to explain the many inconsistencies between the Torah and the gospels, on the one hand and the Qurʾan, which apparently confirms them, on the other.

However, contrary to popular belief, the alteration of the text of either the Torah or Injeel is never explicitly alleged in the Qurʾan, which (again like Jesus addressing the Pharisees) accuses the Jews and Christians only of '*distorting*' these scriptures, by twisting them '*with their tongues*' or '*forgetting*' them. Moreover, the view that the

Qurʾan '*confirms*' authentic revelations previously sent down whilst the falsification of the scriptures purporting to contain them leaves the Qurʾan contradicting itself. For if the Torah and gospels of Muhammad's time were merely corrupted records, why should the Qurʾan refer to these works as authoritative, **{5.43-46 & 68}**, using the names by which those corrupted forms were known, and specifically urging acceptance of them in their entirety, **{2.85}** ('*Do you, then, believe in part of the Book and disbelieve in part?*'), rather than denouncing them as corrupted? Even more perplexing, why should it have had its announcer ask for a corrupted Torah to have been brought forth to use as evidence of the Qurʾan's consistency with past revelations? Put simply, why should the Qurʾan '*confirm*' a corrupted book – in reality a completely different book - by the name given to it by its forgers, if the uncorrupted form in God's direct speech is no longer available to its audience?

It is unlikely that the Qurʾan author would have not been alerted to this paradox. However, a contradiction only arises if the Quranic terms '*Torah*', '*Injeel*' etc are taken as specific references to the relevant canonical texts. Once these terms are understood as referring only loosely to the past revelation of God's Will, of which the books that share their names are merely a record, the problem disappears.

Biblical 'borrowings'

It will already be clear to the reader of this Companion, if it had not been previously, that the Qurʾan does not merely features dozens of biblical characters, stories and themes, and also replicates many biblical phrases and images. Several unmistakeable examples have already been encountered such as a day for God being like a thousand years for man **⟨1⟩**, God's creation of the heavens and the earth in six days and separating sweet and bitter water **⟨13⟩**, the angels circling His Throne **⟨13⟩**, and God's breathing of His Spirit into Adam **⟨12⟩**, **⟨14⟩**. In *Biblical Turns of Phrase in the Qurʾan*,[123] Gabriel Said Reynolds identifies about three dozen such instances and makes the important observation that whilst the Qurʾan's use of biblical stories tends to emphasise the Old Testament over the New, its use of language owes more to Jesus and the early church

than to Judaism. Several parables of Jesus are unmistakeable in their Quranic form.

- The parable of the sower (Matthew 13.18-23, Luke 8.15 and Mark 13.20), in which the word of God is compared to seeds cast out by a farmer only some of which land in good soil and yield crops, presumably inspired **{2.261-265}**'s contrast of the unrighteous man who is swept away by a downpour '*like dust upon a smooth rock*', whereas '*the parable of (the righteous is that of a garden upon a hill: a downpour strikes it and brings forth its fruit twofold*'

  (*c.f.*

  > **{22.31}**: '*Whosoever ascribes partners unto God, it is as if he fell from the sky and the birds snatched him, or the wind swept him away to a place far off*', and
  >
  > **{48.29}**: '*And [the believers'] their likeness in the Gospel is a sapling that puts forth its shoot and strengthens it, such that it grows stout and rises firmly upon its stalk, impressing the sowers*', **⟨5⟩**).

- The parable of a wealthy farmer who took pride in barns full of crops unaware of his impending death (Luke 12.13-22) reappears in the Qurʾan involving two farmers, one reproaching the other, in **{18.31-44}**.

- The Qurʾan's invitations to reflect upon how God enables birds to fly, **{16.79}**, **{67.19}**: '*Have they not regarded the birds of the sky? No one sustains them save Allah…*' seems to echo Jesus' '*Look at the birds of the sky. They do not sow or reap … yet your heavenly father feeds them.*' (Matthew 6.26, Luke 12.24).

- His citing of a mustard seed as an illustration of something tiny (Matthew 13.31-32, 17.20, Mark 4.30

and Luke 13.18-19) is found in the Qurʾan at **{21.47}** and **{31.16}**.

- The following exchange from Jesus's parable of the bridesmaids:

> *The foolish ones said to the sensible: 'Give us some of your oil. Our torches are going out.' But the sensible ones replied: 'No, there may not be enough for you and us. You had better go to the dealers. And buy yourselves some' …*
>
> *Then the door was barred.* (Matthew 25.9)

is replicated, without context, in:

> **{57.13}** On the day when the hypocrites, men and women, will say to those who believe: 'Wait for us that we may borrow your light', it will be said: 'Turn back and seek a light'! Thereupon a wall with a gate will be set between them.

This extensive borrowing of Jesus's sayings, though, does not necessarily involve adopting the messages that the parables originally communicated. In fact, in some instances, the meaning has effectively been reversed so that an intended moral of inclusivity and universal compassion becomes distorted to one sectarianism and obedience.

- Jesus's memorable images of a camel passing through the eye of a needle as an impossible event to describe how the accumulation of wealth may obstruct devotion of God, appears in the Qurʾan at **{7.40}** directed against those who resisted its announcer's authority: '*Truly those who deny our signs and wax arrogant against them … (shall not) enter the Garden till the camel pass through the eye of the needle*'.

- Whereas Jesus answers St Peter's question (Matthew 18.21-22) whether he must forgive his neighbour as many as seven times: *'Not seven times. I say seventy times seven times*', **{9.80}** completely inverts this message: '*If (believers) seekest forgiveness for (those who had reproached them) seventy times, God will not forgive them*.'

- **{21.105}**'s promise that the righteous shall inherit the earth, noted above, recalls Psalm 37.29, (*c.f.* Proverbs 2.21) but whereas Psalm 37 - quoted by Jesus in the Beatitudes of St Matthew (5.5) - vindication is promised to '*the meek*' (verse 11) and '*the just*' (verse 29) as a consolation that they would ultimately be rescued from their oppressors. in the Qurʾan, the verse probably carried a literal meaning of justification for the Quranic community's seizure of territory in Palestine. A similar change of meaning may have been communicated by **{33.47}**'s announcement of '*Good News*' to the Qurʾan's audience of '*a great bounty from God*'.

- The comforting 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst' (Matthew 18.20) becomes a warning against sedition:

> **{58.7}** Has thou not considered that God knows whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth? There is no secret converse amongst three but that He is their fourth, nor among five but that He is their sixth, nor less than that nor more but that he is with them wheresoever they are.'

See also the fate of martyrs **⟨95⟩**.

Occasionally subtle and interesting structural patterns can be discerned in the Qurʾan's biblical borrowings. Reynolds notes

(following Michael Cuypers) that the final words of the first surah **⟨54⟩** resemble those of the first psalm.

Psalm 1	**Surah 1**
6. For the Lord watches over the way of the just,	**6.** Guide us upon the straight Path,
The way of the wicked vanishes.	**7.** The path of those whom thou hast blessed not of those who incur wrath.

He also identifies no less than three phrases that he traces to the Second Epistle of St Peter, appearing in the same order, in just ten verses of **Surah 24**.[124]

Non-canonical sources

In addition to the Hebrew and Christian bibles, the Qurʾan draws upon an impressive range of non-canonical sources. Many of these allusions are identified *The Bible and the Quran*, again by Gabriel Said Reynolds, and they include:

- rabbinic commentaries on the Hebrew Bible, such as:

  Bava Batra **⟨65⟩**, *Gittin* **⟨24⟩**, *Sanhedrin* **⟨72⟩**, *Shabbat* **⟨22⟩**, *Taanit* **⟨28⟩** and *Tamid* **⟨29⟩**, all of which are tractates of the Mishna (former 'oral law') and part of the Talmud that was completed (in Babylon) c.500,

  the *Tosefta* **⟨22⟩**, a second century supplement to the Mishna,

  Genesis Rabbah **⟨22⟩** and the *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus* **⟨16⟩**, being commentaries on the Hebrew Bible forming part of the Midrash literature (the latter probably post-dating the Qurʾan but likely retaining much older traditions),

the *Second Targum of Esther* **⟨24⟩** and the *Pesitka of Rav Kahana* **⟨24⟩** (annotated translations of Jewish scripture into Aramaic and Syriac respectively);

- mystical Jewish texts including:

  the Books of Enoch **⟨14⟩**,
  the *Book of Jubilees*, the *Testament of Solomon* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* **⟨22⟩**;

- *The Life of Adam and Eve*, a document that likely had Jewish origin but which circulated amongst Christians from the first century **⟨16⟩**;

- apocryphal gospels:

  the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Infancy Gospel of Matthew*/the *Gospel of pseudo-Matthew* and the *Protoevangelium of James* **⟨26⟩**;

- Christian, especially Syriac Christian, devotional texts including:

  Didascalia Apostolorum **⟨64⟩**,
  The Questions of Bartholomew **⟨17⟩**,
  The Cave of Treasures (see **⟨12⟩** - endnote),
  the homilies of Narsai, and 'pseudo-Narsai',
  and the *pseudo-Clementine Homilies* **⟨53⟩**,
  the *Syriac History of Joseph* attributed to Basil of Caesarea and *Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* **⟨22⟩** and the homilies of Jacob of Serugh **⟨22⟩**, **⟨28⟩** and **⟨29⟩**;

- and the secular *Victory of Alexander* and *History of Maurice* **⟨1⟩**, **⟨30⟩**.

At several points the Qurʾan closely mirrors the Bible narrative, sentence by sentence, as can be seen from the following examples from **Surah 20**:

Book of Exodus	**Surah 20**
3.4-5	**11-12**
(God called out) 'Moses, Moses! Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet for the place where you stand is holy ground.'	(God called:) 'O Moses! Verily I am thy Lord. Take off thy sandals. Truly thou art in the holy valley of Tuwa.'
4.2-4	**17-21**
The Lord therefore asked (Moses): 'What is that in your hand?' 'A staff', he replied. The Lord then said: 'Throw it to the ground' When he threw it on the ground it was changed into a serpent and Moses shied away from it. 'Now put out your hand,' the Lord said to him, 'and take hold of its tail.' So he put out his hand and laid hold of it and it became a staff in his hand.	'And what is that in thy right hand?, O Moses' 'It is my staff. I lean upon it and beat down leaves for my sheep. And I have other uses for it.' He said: 'Cast it O Moses!' So he cast it and behold it was a serpent moving swiftly. He said: 'Take hold of it and fear not We shall restore it to its former way.'

However, at no point does the Qurʾan actually replicate a complete verse from the Bible verbatim, and, as will be evident from the extracts above, often biblical phrases and imagery that are familiar to Jews and Christians appear in the Qurʾan with significantly different meanings to those that they originally bore. Even more surprisingly, for a text that is clearly the work of an extremely erudite author, are discrepancies with the Bible that give the impression of being basic errors. Some of these may be regarded as fairly minor.

- The Qurʾan has a man called Haman acting as an associate or senior official of Pharaoh in the time of Moses **⟨23⟩**; in the Book of Esther Haman is the servant of Ahasuerus, king of Persia (although Adam Silverstein has demonstrated that across a number of late antique texts, Haman had acquired the role of '*an ahistorical character, who could dip in and out of literary contexts whenever a villain was required*.'[125])

- As Moses prepares his people for entry into the Promised Land he recalls that God had appointed prophets and kings from amongst them, **{5.20}**, which contradicts the biblical chronology according to which the kingdom of Israel would only be established, and the prophets be called to prophethood, after Canaan had been occupied.

- The Israelites' idolatry towards a golden calf is in the Qurʾan instigated by an individual identified as '*al-Samiri*'**,** normally rendered a Samarian or a Samaritan. However, Samaria was a name given to the northern part of the Promised Land after the dissolution of the United Monarchy, making the presence of a Samarian/Samaritan during the events of the Exodus anachronistic (although an alternative explanation for the use of the term has been proposed, see **⟨23⟩** below).

- The description of Saul instructing his soldiers not to lap water straight from a stream is a version of a biblical story that involved not Saul but Gideon **⟨24⟩**.

Other discrepancies are more perplexing and are difficult to ascribe to mere errors.

- The Qurʾan consistently presents Jacob as Isaac's brother rather than his son (an explanation for which is proposed in **⟨22⟩** below).

- The story of Jacob toiling for years in order to earn the right to marry Rachel becomes transferred, in an altered form, to Moses **⟨23⟩**.

- Most bizarrely of all, at two instances the Qurʾan appears to identify Mary the mother of Jesus (*Μαρία*, or *Μαριάμ* in the gospels) with Miriam the elder sister of Moses and Aaron. The former is addressed by her people as '*sister of Aaron*' in **{19.28}**. On its own this may merely mean 'kinsperson of Aaron' and in Luke 1.5 we are told that Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, is a descendant of Aaron. However, it can be no coincidence that the Qurʾan twice names Mary's father '*ʿImran*', **{3.35}**, **{66.12}**, rather than the traditional Joachim; a name very close to Amran, the biblical father of Miriam, Moses and Aaron. This cannot be, as some have suggested an error. This is not only because the lives of Jesus and Moses were separated by a vast span of time, possibly as long as a millennium, but because the Qurʾan in **Surah 19** describes Mary's upbringing in the Jerusalem Temple and marriage there to Joseph, leaving no scope for her to be present in Egypt caring for an infant Moses. There is presumably a reason for the Qurʾan drawing this association, beyond the similarity of their names, but what this reason is is not known.

Finally, the Qurʾan also has a tendency to include details, especially from the non-canonical sources, in a way that fails to convey their significance within the story being retold, and apparently without purpose. So, for example:

- when the Queen of Sheba bares her legs in **{27.44}**, believing Solomon's crystal floor to be a pool of water, there is no reference to Solomon's comment on the hairiness of her legs, that in the *Second Targum of Esther* is the purpose of including the detail, *i.e.*, to make the point that the role of ruler is unbecoming to a woman **⟨24⟩**.

- in the apocryphal *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the reason for the child Jesus giving life to the clay model birds that he had made **⟨26⟩** was to avoid being scolded for creating an artefact on the Sabbath, a story that is intended to foreshadow Jesus's proclamation in the canonical gospels that he was '*Lord of the Sabbath*', (Matthew 12.8, Mark 2.28 and Luke 6.5); the Qurʾan refers to the clay birds episode twice, but in neither does it make any refence to the sabbath.

- In the story of the sleepers in the cave, reference is made to the sleepers having money, a fact that in Jacob of Serugh's version becomes symbolic of the transience of worldly power (explained at **⟨28⟩**) but in the Qurʾan serves no purpose at all.

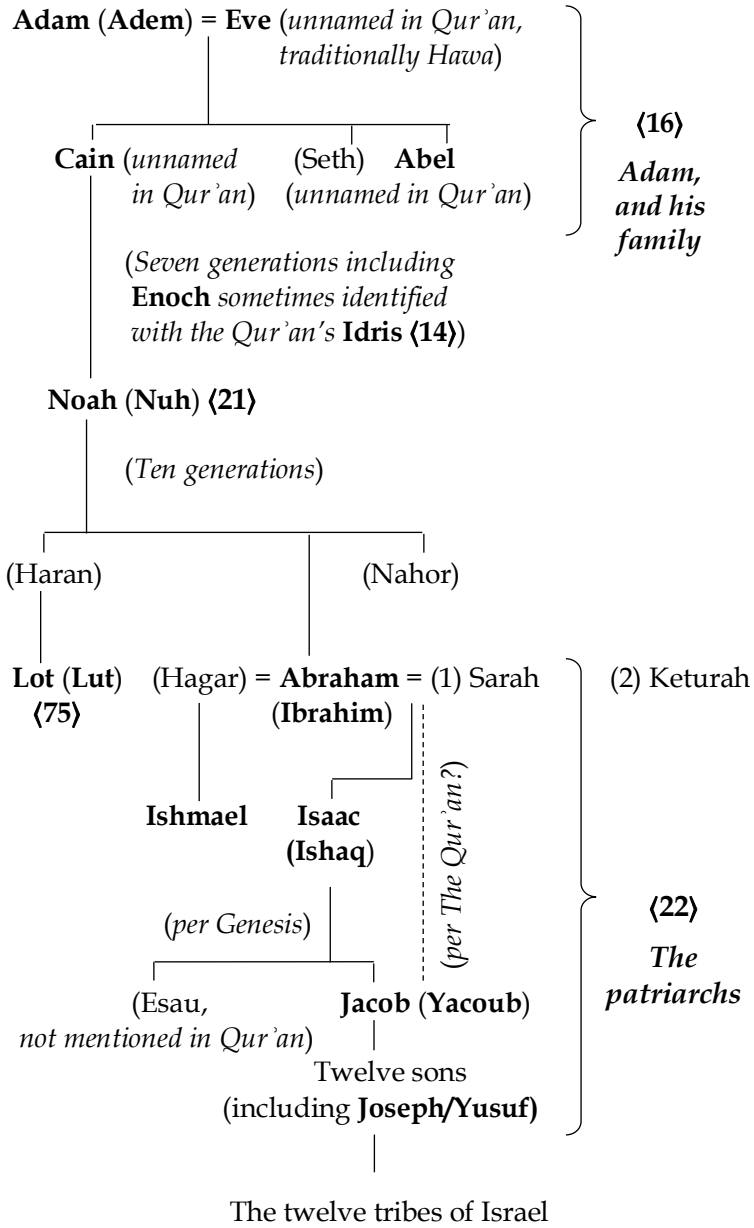
- In the *Mishna Sanhedrin* the words that appear in **{5.32} ⟨72⟩**, as '*whoever destroys a single soul is regarded as though he destroyed a complete world*' - have a specific and logical meaning which in the Quranic variant is lost, reducing them to a mere pious-sounding platitude.

All of the above misapplied turns of phrase, apparent errors and inconsequential details, together with the Qurʾan's failure to discriminate between sources that are canonical (i.e. '*sent down*' from God) and those that have never been claimed to be other than the fruits of human reflection, combine to suggest that, notwithstanding the Qurʾan author's familiarity with a wide range of sources, these were materials that its author had encountered aurally, and which he was reproducing for his audience from a prodigious and creative, but occasionally flawed, memory without a sound grasp of their original purpose. The concept of '*the Book*' is strong in the Qurʾan, which is, of course, itself now generally encountered as a book. However, it should be borne in mind that some of the surahs show clear signs of having been composed for oral recitation **⟨4⟩**. The term '*people of the Book*', which is used in contrast to believers in the Qurʾan, may even have been adopted to draw a specific contrast between the book-learned Jews and

Christians, and the Arabs who listened to, memorised and recited the verbal utterances of their living prophet **⟨3⟩**.

B. Biblical Figures in the Qurʾan

i. Simplified Genealogy of Genesis Figures



ii. Context of Post-Genesis Biblical figures mentioned in the Qur'an

The Captivity in Egypt	In Genesis 46/**{12.99-101}**, Joseph brought all his family from Canaan to Egypt. Over subsequent generations their descendants, the Israelites, became slaves to the Pharaohs.
The Exodus	**Moses** (**Musa**) and **Aaron** (**Harun**) led the Israelites to Canaan **⟨23⟩**
c.1050- c. 930 BC **The Kingdom of Israel** (the United Monarchy)	**Samuel** (*unnamed in the Qur'an*) anointed the first two kings of Israel: **King Saul (Talut**) and **King David** (**Dawood**). **⟨24⟩** The third King of Israel was David's son, **Solomon** (**Sulayman**) ~ 930 BC the kingdom divided into two: Israel and Judah.
c.597-539 BC **The Babylonian Captivity**	In 597 Judah was conquered by Babylon which held prominent Jews hostage in Mesopotamia. During this Captivity several major Jewish prophets emerged, including: **Elijah (**possibly **Ilyas**), **{6.85}** & **{37.123-130}**, **Elisha (**possibly **al-Yasa**), **{6.86}** & **{38.48}**, **Ezekiel**, (possibly **Dhu'l Kifl**, **{21.85}** & **{38.48}**) (see **⟨ 28⟩**). **Ezra** (see **⟨88⟩**).

539-333 BC **Judea as part of the Achaemenid Empire**	In 539 Babylon was defeated by the Achaemenid emperor, Cyrus the Great, who allowed their Jewish captives to return home and rebuild the Jerusalem temple (starting the Second Temple Period) but kept Judah under Achaemenid control.
333-140 BC **The Hellenic Period**	The Achaemenids were defeated in 333 BC by **Alexander the Great** (see **Dhu'l Qarnayn ⟨30⟩**). Judea remained under the control of the successor (Ptolemaic and Seleucid) empires to Alexander's realm until 140 BC.
140-37 BC **The Hasmonean Kingdom**	The Maccabean Rebellion (167-160 BC) re-established Israel as an independent kingdom.
From 37 BC **Roman rule**	In 37 BC, the Roman Empire imposed Herod the Great as a proxy king over Judea, then, in AD 6, during the infancy of **Jesus** (**Isa**) **⟨26⟩**, annexed it as a Roman province, Iudaea.

Jonah (**Yunus** or **Dhu'l Nun**/'***the Man of the Fish***') and **Job (Ayyub)** cannot be placed within a historical context, each of their stories originating in the Bible's Wisdom literature **⟨25⟩**.

21. Noah

Surah 7 (*Al-Aʿrāf/The Heights*): 59…64

59. Of old, sent We Noah to his people,
and he said: 'O my people! worship God.
Ye have no God but Him. Indeed. I fear for
you the chastisement of the Great Day'…

64. Marvel ye that a Warning should come to
you from your Lord through one of
yourselves, that he may warn you, and that
ye may fear for yourselves, and that haply
ye may find mercy?

[*'The Koran, translated from the Arabic'* John Meadows *Rodwell, 1861 (British clergyman)*]

In the Book of Genesis, Noah is the great-grandson of Enoch **⟨14⟩** and the ninth generation from Adam. Chapters 6 to 9 tell that in Noah's day God looked upon the wickedness of men, He saw that the earth had become corrupt and full of lawlessness and He '*regretted that He had made man upon the earth*.' He resolved that He would wipe not only humanity but all living things from the world, save for Noah and his family, who alone found favour with Him, and pairs of animals that they would select. God instructed Noah to build an ark of gopherwood to prescribed dimensions. When Noah had completed the vessel, God ordered him to enter into it with his family and with the animals, '*two by two*', after which '*all the fountains of the great abyss burst forth and the floodgates of the sky were opened*.' The waters covered the earth, and remained submerging the land for forty days, after which they receded, the emergence of land becoming known to Noah when a dove that he had released returned to the ark with an olive leaf in its beak. The ark finally came to rest on Mount Ararat. Noah's family then re-established humanity under a covenant with God in which God forbade man to eat meat with the blood still in it and required that man submit to retributive justice for wounding and murder

(Genesis 9.4-6). In return God promised that He would not destroy mankind again.

A Mesopotamian clay tablet, first deciphered in 1873, revealed that the biblical account of the flood was, like the story of Adam and Eve **⟨16⟩** a Jewish adaptation of an episode forming part of the Epic of Gilgamesh. We now know that even this tale was not the origin of the legend of the great flood, which had been adopted by the Assyrians from the even more ancient Akkadian story of Atra-Hasis. As with Noah, Atra-Hasis had received divine warning of an imminent flood, with precise instructions on how to build a boat, and a command to use it to rescue only his family and animals. The Gilgamesh version had added to this story the element of the release of birds as a means of testing for the presence of land, and the Israelites had then, as with the story of Adam and Eve, recast the story into a monotheist morality tale and placed it at the start of Genesis as a prelude to the sacred history of the people of Israel.

In the Qurʾan, the story, now in its fourth version, is summarised seven times, at **{7.59-64}**, **{10.71-74}**, **{11.25-49}**, **{23.23-31}**, **{26.105-120}**, **{54.9-17}** and **{71.1-28}**. In **Surah 71** the sin for which Noah's neighbours were drowned, is specified as their clinging to the ways of paganism, and in particular their veneration of five antediluvian pagan gods: Wadd, Suwa', Yaguth, Ya'uq and Nasr, **{71.23}**, and their ignoring and mocking of Noah's warnings. In two of the Qurʾan accounts, Noah is even presented as the instigator of the Flood, calling to God: '*My Lord, they disobeyed me … My Lord, leave not a single disbeliever to dwell upon the earth … and do not increase the wrongdoers in aught but ruin,*' **{71.21 & 26.28}**. However, despite Noah's cursing of all unbelievers, in the Qurʾan, as with the pre-biblical accounts, the flood seems to be localised with each one of the flood passages linking the punishment firmly to the punishment of the people of Noah who had earned their own destruction.

The ark's famous animal passengers are briefly mentioned in just two of the seven accounts - at **{11.40}** and **{23.29}**. In fact, if the Qurʾan's flood was localised rather than worldwide, Noah's 'saving' of animals other than his own livestock would be a

problematic detail in the story, serving no real purpose other than to link the Qurʾan's flood account to that of Genesis. Indeed, the construction of the ark itself raises a similar problem since in less time than it would have taken Noah build a large boat, he could presumably have simply walked with his family to an area of high ground some distance away. Yet in **Surah 11** it transpires that escape via boat was an essential precondition for being saved. When the command comes to Noah to embark, he is told to bring with him '*two of every kind and thy family - save the one against whom the Word had already gone forth - and those who believe*', **{11.40}**. '*The one against whom the Word had already gone forth*', it transpires, is an unnamed son of Noah, for Noah calls to his son to join him on the ark, but instead of doing so the son attempts to save himself by climbing a mountain only to be swept away by the rising waters **{11.42-47}**. As the tragedy unfolds before his eyes, Noah pleads with God to save his son, imploring '*Truly my son is from my family*', but God refuses, throwing Noah's words back at him: '*Truly he is not from thy family. Surely such conduct was not righteous. So question me not concerning that whereof thou has no knowledge…*' Noah, thus reprimanded, then seeks forgiveness for himself for having questioning that whereof he had no knowledge. God's denial that Noah's doomed son is a truly a part of Noah's family is normally interpreted metaphorically – the doomed son had foregone his right to be regarded as a member of his father's family. Why this was the case is not explained. It cannot be that the son sought to save himself by his own efforts rather than obeying his father and trusting to God's providence, for God had forbidden him entry to the ark beforehand (**{11.40}**). One must therefore assume that he was guilty of some sin that had rendered him unworthy to be saved, the details of which are not disclosed. A minority, more literal, reading of the situation is that God was revealing to Noah that his apparent son was not in fact his biological son at all. This receives some support from the Qurʾan's only reference to Noah's wife which does not occur during any of the flood narratives, but as part of a comparison of four biblical wives, **{66.10} ⟨66⟩**. In this she is condemned to the hellfire for having '*betrayed*' her husband.

The figures of Noah's '*son*' and wife, as close relatives of a prophet denied salvation for some disobedience or infidelity, fulfils a recuring Quranic motif. A similar exclusion from salvation is

applied to the wife of Lot **⟨75⟩** and by the father – and possibly, it will be argued, one of the sons too - of Abraham **⟨22⟩**. The wife of Job apparently earns herself a beating for her failure to stand by her husband during his suffering **⟨25⟩**. But most closely, God's drowning of Noah's son resembles an incident in the Qurʾan's story of an unnamed servant of God who is commonly called 'al-Khidr', in which al-Khidr kills a boy in order to prevent his rebellious spirit grieving his parents. Although neither Noah nor the parents of al-Khidr's victim are a party to the killing of their respective sons, the justification of al-Khidr's killing of the boy as the correct response of a moral exemplar to disobedience by a child towards its father seems to capture the essence of the story of Noah's son **⟨29⟩**.

Just as the Torah incorporates the Babylonian story of the flood into its overarching theme of God's faithfulness to those who turn to him, and Christianity reinterprets the ark as an allegory for God's offer of salvation and renewal for all the world, in the Qurʾan's rendition, the focus of the story is much more upon the drowning of the disobedient than the rescue of the righteous. In the Bible we are not told why it is that Noah was chosen to be saved, but he is not asked to call others to righteousness and no interaction with his neighbours is recorded. In the Qurʾan, on the other hand, it is only Noah's people's refusal to recognise his prophethood that brings disaster upon them, the moral plainly being that those who reject God's prophets do so at their peril.

22. The Patriarchs

Surah 37 (*Al-Saffa/Those arranged in ranks*): 101-103

101. We gave him (Abraham) glad tidings, the glad news of the birth of a forbearing son.

102. When his son was old enough to work with him, he said: 'My son, I have had a dream that I must sacrifice you. What do you think of this?'

103. He replied 'Father, fulfil whatever you are commanded to do and you will find me patient, by the will of God'.

Abraham in the Torah

In the Book of Genesis, the story of Abraham is primarily told in Chapters 11 to 25. Originally called Abram, he was born in Ur of the Chaldees in Southern Mesopotamia. Genesis tells us that he set out for Canaan together with his father, Terah, his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot, the four relatives settling for a while at Haran where Terah died. After resuming their journey, Abram, Sarai and Lot reach Canaan, where Abram and Sarai made their home, whilst Lot settled in the Jordan plain near the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis recounts four initial encounters between Abram and God (at 12.1-3, 12.7, 13.14-17 and in chapter 15). In these God promised him that, although he was by then an old man and childless, his descendants would one day be as numerous as the stars in the night sky, and that that they would form a great nation and occupy the land '*from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River*' (traditionally considered to be from the Red Sea to the Euphrates). The sealing of this covenant was symbolised by the changing of Abram's name to Abraham and by the Lord's command that henceforth each of his male descendants should be circumcised.

At the suggestion of Sarai, who believed herself to be incapable of bearing children, Abraham lay with her Egyptian servant called Hagar (from ha-gar, literally the sojourner), leading to the birth of Ishmael. Abraham then had a fifth encounter with God (17.1-22) and then a visit from three strangers, who, during the course of the story, come to be identified as God and two angels (chapter 18). After the three visitors had eaten a meal prepared by Abraham and Sarai, God promised that Sarai, who would henceforth be called Sarah, would herself bear Abraham a child. Thereafter the two angels walked away, whilst God remained and spoke more with Abraham, informing him that the angels had gone to destroy the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah for the wickedness of their inhabitants. Upon hearing this plan, Abraham interceded on behalf of the people of those towns, eventually securing a promise from God that the cities would be spared if just ten virtuous people could be found there. As the story develops, however, the arrival of the angels at the home of Lot, precipitated a sequence of events that led to God's destruction of the two cities, a narrative separately described below at **⟨75⟩**. In due course, Sarah bore Abraham his second son whom they called Isaac. After the birth of her own son, Sarah persuaded Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away.

In one of the Torah's best-known episodes, God then tested Abraham's obedience by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22). Only after Abraham had demonstrated his willingness to kill Isaac by building a pyre and binding him, did God order that Isaac be replaced as the sacrifice with a miraculously provided goat. The Torah proceeds to recount that Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob, and Jacob as having twelve sons who would father the twelve tribes of Israel. It is a traditional understanding, long predating Islam, amongst the Arabs that they are descended from Ishmael, the son of Hagar. Abraham later married a second wife Keturah who bore him a further six sons.

Abraham and the idols

At **{6.75-79}**, the Qurʾan includes an account of Abraham discovering monotheism by reflecting upon the movement of the stars, moon and sun. It also provides several accounts of Abraham

defying his idolatrous father, whom the Qurʾan names Azar, by preaching this monotheism to his people, **{6.74 & 80-83}**, **{19.41-48}**, **{21.52-67}**, **{26.69-82}**, **{29.16-17 & 24-25}**, **{37.83-96}**, **{43.26-27}** and **{60.4}**. One of these accounts, **{21.52-67}**, describes an occasion upon which Abraham smashed all of his people's idols *'save the largest of them*.' He was later accused of their destruction, apparently at some sort of trial ('*They said bring him before the eyes of the people that haply they may bear witness*', **{21.61})** at which Abraham suggested to his accusers that they enquire of the surviving idol what had transpired. When they replied: '*Certainly you know that these speak not*', their response allows Abraham to make his point: '*Do you worship, apart from God, that which benefits you not in the least nor harms you?*' Unimpressed by this scorning of their idolatry, the people attempt to burn Abraham for his insolence, but God intervenes, turning the fire to coolness. Allusions to this story also appear at **{29.24-25}** and **{37.91-96}**.

None of these events, which presumably took place in Ur, feature in the Book of Genesis, but the account of Abraham destroying all but one of a group of idols and blaming the damage upon the one that he had spared does appear in several Jewish rabbinic commentaries, including in particular the *Genesis Rabbah* (compiled in the fourth and fifth centuries) in which Abraham goes so far as to place a club in the hands of the idol that he had sought to 'frame'. In *Genesis Rabbah* the breaking of the idols takes place in idol shop that was owned by Abram's father, and the subsequent trial takes place before a king, Nimrod.[126] The tradition that Abraham's father, Terah, had owned an idol shop was taken from the much earlier *Book of Jubilees* (c.150 BC) but in this book Abraham demonstrates the powerlessness of the idols in a more direct and deadly manner than the story that is told in *Genesis Rabbah* and later retold in the Qurʾan. In *Jubilees*, Abraham carries out a night-time arson attack upon his father's shop, that kills his brother, Haran, who rushed into the flames to save the idols. In yet another version told in the Christian *Apocalypse of Abraham* (AD 70-150), Terah's icon shop also burns down, but in this version, the fire is the result not of arson but a divine thunderbolt, and this time it is Terah himself who died in the blaze. No specific punishment is recorded in the Qurʾan as having inflicted by God upon Abraham's father or his people for their idolatry but two verses, **{9.70}** and **{22.42-44}**,

include '*the people of Abraham*' in lists of divinely punished peoples, and the only known bases of this is the immolation of Haran in the *Book of Jubilees* and Terah in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. In **{14.41}** Abraham prays for his father, Azar's, forgiveness but as with Noah praying that his son be saved from the flood waters, Abraham's intercession is rejected by God, **{14.41-46}**, with the Qurʾan elsewhere explaining to its audience upon Abraham's behalf that '*(Abraham's) plea for forgiveness of his father was only due to a promise he had made to him*,' **{9.114}**.

The confrontation between Abraham and Nimrod in *Genesis Rabbah* is also likely to be the episode that the Qurʾan briefly refers to with:

> **{2.258}** Hast thou not considered him who disputed with Abraham about his Lord because God had given him sovereignty?
>
> When Abraham said: 'My Lord gives life and causes death', he said: 'I give life and cause death. Abraham said: 'Truly God brings the sun from the east. Bring it then from the West'.
>
> Thus was he who disbelieved confounded.

Abraham and his sons in Canaan

The Qurʾan describes Abraham's visit from three messengers, with a difference from the Genesis version being that in the Qurʾan the guests refuse the food that Abraham offers to them and it is from this that he recognises them as supernatural entities, **{11.69-76}**, **{15.51-61}**, **{29.31-35}** and **{51.24-34}**.

In **Surahs 15** and **51** Abraham is promised a son (*c.f.* **{37.101}** produced above), in **{11.71}** he receives '*glad tidings of Isaac and after Isaac of Jacob*'. There is no reference in the Qurʾan to Hagar nor to the birth of Ishmael. In fact, the Qurʾan is curiously ambiguous

concerning the genealogy of the patriarchs; as it also is concerning the testing of Abraham. In **{14.39}** the Qurʾan refers to Ishmael and Isaac as being the sons of Abraham, which is in agreement with the Book of Genesis, and in **Surah 12** both Jacob at **{12.6}** and his son Joseph, at **{12.38}**, refer to the lineal descent of Jacob from Abraham via Isaac. However, other passages suggest that the family tree described in the Book of Genesis is not being followed. The issue is involved and three apparently distinct but, it is suggested, connected topics need to be considered separately.

1. In the Book of Genesis, Isaac has two sons, Esau and Jacob, but on five separate places, **{6.84}**, **{11.71}** (see above), **{19.49}**, **{21.72}** and **{29.27}**, the Qurʾan implies that Isaac and Jacob are brothers, both born to Abraham and Sarah; **{21.72}** describing Jacob as an *'added gift'* to Abraham. Whilst it could be argued that these verses are imprecise enough that they might refer to Jacob being Abraham's grandchild, born within his lifetime, that is not how these five verses read. Moreover, such an interpretation would resolve one discrepancy between the Qurʾan and Genesis at the cost of creating another: why should it be that the Qurʾan refers to Jacob as Abraham's grandchild, but nowhere mentions Esau who was Jacob's elder brother? Adding to the confusion over Abraham's family tree, in **{2.133}** Jacob's sons speak to their father on his deathbed in course of which conversation they refer to both Isaac *and* Ishmael, as being amongst his (Jacob's), forefathers.

2. Although the Qurʾan at no point mentions Esau as the brother of Jacob, a name remarkably similar to Esau does appear frequently in the Qurʾan in the form of Isa, the name that the Qurʾan gives to Jesus. Most biblical figures appear in the Qurʾan with a name that is readily recognisable as an Arabised version of their biblical name, with the Arabic letter yā generally being used in place of the Hebrew letter yodh. As a result, the English-speaking reader has no difficulty recognising Yacoub, Yusuf, Younus and Ayub as the Hebrew Bible's Yaaqob (Jacob), Yoseph (Joseph), Yonah (Jonah) and Iyyab (Job). In this way, Arabic-speaking Christians generally refer to Jesus by the name

Yasū, which is clearly an Arabised version of the Hebrew Yēshua. With this in mind, the Qurʾan's rendering of Jesus as Isa is anomalous, and seems to call for an explanation.

3. Unlike in Genesis, where Isaac is tricked by Abraham into ascending Mount Moriah with him, the sacrificial son in the Qurʾan, willingly agrees to accompany his father knowing the purpose of the journey from the outset. This is a tradition that is to be found in many pre-Islamic Jewish and Christian sources, including the homilies of Jacob of Serugh, where Isaac replies to his father's declaration of his intent to sacrifice him:

> '*Perform your will: if the knife is sharpened against me I will not draw back; if the fire is kindled for me I will hold my ground. If the lamb is to go up bound, here are my hands, but if you are going to slaughter me unbound, I have no objection.*'[127]

The only Quranic account of the episode is found at **{37.102-111}** The two most intriguing factors of this are its failure to specify which of his sons it was that Abraham had prepared to sacrifice, and the absence of any statement that the sacrifice was in fact aborted:

{37.103} But when they had submitted and Abraham had lain (his son) on his forehead,

{37.104} We called unto him: 'O Abraham! Thou hast been true to the vision'.

{37.105} Thus indeed do We recompense the virtuous.

{37.106} Truly this was the manifest trial.

{37.107} Then We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.

The account is immediately preceded by Abraham receiving glad tidings a '*gentle son*', **{37.101}**, which one might have expected to be a reference to Isaac since it was Isaac's birth that was announced to Abraham by God. However, the story is then immediately followed by his receipt of glad tidings of '*Isaac, a prophet from amongst the righteous*', **{37.112}** which strongly implies that the '*gentle son*' whom Abraham laid upon his forehead must have been Isaac's elder half-brother, Ishmael.

It is suggested that a second passage, **{2.124-129}**, which describe God trying Abraham with a test that Abraham fulfilled, and God thereafter making a covenant with Abraham and Ishmael, pursuant to which they purify and '*raise the foundations of*' a structure that is variously described as the '*sacred House*', and the '*standing place*', '*of Abraham*' also relate to this episode. For the reasons set out at **⟨2⟩** above, the '*foundations of the House*' should be taken as referring to the altar upon which Abraham had prepared to sacrifice one or other of his sons. This later became the site of the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple and, many centuries after that, the Dome of the Rock. Again, the Qurʾan's assertion that Abraham was assisted in the construction of the altar by his son, may reflect a homily of Jacob of Serugh, *On Abraham*, wherein Isaac willingly assisted Abraham to build the altar upon which he would be sacrificed:

> *When Isaac looked and saw what his father was doing,*
> *he picked up stones to bring them to the building of the altar.*

and

> *Isaac lent a hand to his old man with the building, that he would not estrange the type by this construction. Who has [ever] seen a lamb building an altar for its slaughter, or a sacrifice becoming a labourer on the day of its death?* [128]

> Islamic tradition would later identify the '*foundations of the House*' as the literal foundations of the Kaaba in Mecca. It is noteworthy though that Muslims today commemorate the near-sacrifice by Abraham of his son, during the festival of Eid al-Adha ('*feast of sacrifice*') that concludes the annual hajj pilgrimage, a trace of **{2.124-129}**'s original meaning.

If the Qurʾan author's purpose in **Surahs 2** and **37** was merely to tell/refer to the Genesis story with Ishmael switched for Isaac, this would be of little wider significance. The substitution of the ancestor of the Jews with the ancestor of the Arabs in the story of the sealing of God's covenant with man, could merely have been an attempt to buttress the Ishmaelites' claim to the Holy Land under that covenant. But if this had been the purpose, there is no obvious reason why this should not have been clearly stated in the text, and it leaves the suggestion that Jacob was Isaac's brother and the absence of Esau - and possibly the application of Esau's name to Jesus - unexplained. There is a more sinister possibility. In *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of your Men*, David S. Powers draws attention to an ancient Jewish tradition that Abraham did, in fact sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah. A basis for this belief appears within the text of Genesis itself, for Abraham ascends Mount Moriah with Isaac, leaving his servants at the mountain base (Genesis 22.6-8) but after the sacrifice has been performed he returns to them alone (22.19). It is possible, even likely, from the text of Genesis that the staying of Abraham's hand and late substitution of a goat in the place of Isaac, was an interpolation added to moderate an original, grislier, version of the story. If the Qurʾan was deliberately worded to keep open the possibility that Abraham's '*great sacrifice*', **{37.107}**, might have been that of a son rather than a provided goat, then this could not have been the sacrifice of Ishmael from whom the Arabs believed themselves to be descended, and it could only have been the sacrifice of Isaac, if Abraham had had a second son by Sarah, from whom the twelve tribes of Israel might have been born.

It is normal for Christians to see in the story of the binding of Isaac an Old Testament prefiguring of the willingness of God to sacrifice His own son, Jesus, upon the cross. The Qurʾan author, however, liked his prophets to emerge from their stories at least vindicated

and preferably triumphant and he seems to have found no place in his theology for the crucifixion of Jesus. **{4.157}**, which is the Qurʾan's only reference to the crucifixion denies that the Jews had killed Jesus '*though it appeared so unto them*' **⟨26⟩** and the traditional Islamic explanation of this verse is that one of Jesus's disciples was crucified in his stead. It may be that the Qurʾan shares with the New Testament the perception that the story of the crucifixion is anticipated in the story of Abraham, but that it gives the two a different outcome and message. Lost verses or oral exegesis may have clarified that God had spared Abraham's more exalted servant by the sacrifice of one less so.

Neither Ishmael nor Isaac appears independently of Abraham in any narrative account in the Qurʾan, although their names feature in the litanies of past prophets (together at **{2.136** & **140}**, **{3.84}**, **{4.163}**, **{19.49** & **54}**, **{21.72** & **85}** and **{23.45** & **48}**; Ishmael alone at **{6.86}**).

In **{2.260}** God performs a miracle of bringing to life four birds that Abraham had been first instructed to kill, dismember and place on different mountain tops. It is unclear where this miracle fits into the Qurʾan's Abrahamic narrative, but it may be linked with the story of Jesus bringing clay birds to life, **⟨26⟩**.

Hanifism

Abraham is, of course, the foundational figure for what would later become known as the Abrahamic religions. The Qurʾan eight times describes Abraham's own faith, or *dīn*, as that of a '*ḥanīf*', **{2.135}**, **{3.67 & 95}**, **{4.125}**, **{6.79 & 161}** and **{16.120 & 123}**, a word that literally means '*heathen*',[129] but probably indicates '*neither Jew nor Christian*'.[130] It presents this faith as a pure original monotheism, free from the later corruption and sectarianism of Judaism and Christianity **⟨88⟩** (*c.f.* **{10.105}**, **{22.31}**, **{30.30}** and **{98.5}**):

> **{2.135}** And they say: 'Be Jews or Christians and you shall be rightly guided.'

> Say: 'Rather (ours is) the creed of Abraham, a '*ḥanīf*', and he was not of the idolaters',

It also, as noted above, ascribes to Abraham the announcement of a scripture, **{53.36-37}** and **{87.19}**, although no details of this are given. In the '*ḥanīf*' passages, the Qurʾan may be asserting that some Arabs had inherited their monotheist faith from Abraham via the descendants of Ishmael. This would not have been an entirely novel idea. The fifth century church historian Sozomen had noted in his *Ecclesiastical History* that he had heard of a tribe of Arabs:

> *… which took its origin and had its name from Ishmael, the son of Abraham; and the ancients called them Ishmaelites after their progenitor. As their mother Hagar was a slave, they afterwards, to conceal the opprobrium of their origin, assumed the name of Saracens, as if they were descended from Sara, the wife of Abraham. Such being their origin, they practice circumcision like the Jews, refrain from the use of pork, and observe many other Jewish rites and customs … Moses, who lived many centuries after Abraham, only legislated for those whom he led out of Egypt. The inhabitants of the neighbouring countries, being strongly addicted to superstition, probably soon corrupted the laws imposed upon them by their forefather Ishmael … Some of their tribe afterwards happening to come in contact with the Jews, gathered from them the facts of their true origin, returned to their kinsmen, and inclined to the Hebrew customs and laws. From that time on, until now, many of them regulate their lives according to the Jewish precepts.*[131]

This proposed faith of Abraham is capable in some passages of being read as allowing an ecumenical appeal to harmony and unity of purpose between the Jewish, Christian and monotheist Arab peoples, united by a shared religious heritage as well as distant bonds of kinship. However, the Qurʾan's appeal to this ancient creed of the '*hanif*' also allows it to assert that its message conveys a monotheism that has remained pristine; unsullied, in contrast to the long and complex history of Judaism and Christianity, by any

details of its transmission from the patriarchs. In **{30.30}** the supposed faith of '*hanifism*' is linked with the concept of '*fiṭra*' ('*primordial nature*' *per The Study Quran*) which, as seen in **⟨18⟩**, is understood as including the natural disposition towards monotheism that was set within every soul upon the Day of Alast:

> **{30.30}** Set thy face to religion as a *ḥanīf*,
> in the *fiṭra* from God, upon which
> He originated mankind – there is
> no altering the creation of God.;
> that is the upright religion but most
> of mankind know not.

Receipt of such a faith, unchanged from the time of Ishmael, would provide the theological basis upon which a subsequent Ishmaelite prophet such as Muhammad might emerge to assume the role of high priest, scribe, lawgiver and nation founder in relation to his people just as Moses had done for the Israelites centuries earlier. Crucially, such a prophet would be in a position to interpret the promise given by God to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the Holy Land **⟨88⟩** as being capable of fulfilment by the Arabs seizing the land either in conjunction with, or in place of, the Jews.

Jacob and his sons

Genesis 25 describes the birth to Isaac's wife, Rebekah, of the twins Esau and Jacob. Although Esau was the elder of the two, Jacob persuaded his brother to surrender to him his birthright as the first-born son in return for '*a mess of pottage*', and later tricked his father into giving him the blessing intended for his elder brother. As noted above Esau does not appear in the Qurʾan as Jacob's brother, and given the suggested redrawing by the Qurʾan of Abraham's family tree, he would have been denied any significant role. For the application of the name, and possibly some attributes, of Esau to Jesus see **⟨26⟩** below. Jacob would marry two sisters, Leah and Rachel, after having been required to perform fourteen years of labour for their father: a story that the Qurʾan tells a variation of in relation to Moses, see **⟨23⟩** following. Between them, Leah, Rachel

and their maid servants bore Jacob twelve sons who would become the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. Chapters 35 to 46 of Genesis tell the well-known story of the elder brothers becoming jealous of Jacob's favouritism towards Joseph, their selling him into slavery, Joseph's rise to prominence first in the household of a noble, Potiphar, then, after a spell in prison, at Pharaoh's court and concludes with his testing of his brothers' honesty when they came to Egypt in search of food during a famine.

In the Qurʾan, the story of Joseph carries the distinction of being the only biblical story recounted in its entirety in a dedicated surah, **Surah 12**. Other than for the presentation of Jacob as a son of Abraham rather than of Isaac, and of his appearance in lists of biblical prophets, Jacob features only in this surah, and in **{3.93}** where, under the name Israel, he is credited with introducing dietary laws '*before the Torah was sent down*'. As with other stories the Quranic telling of Joseph contains deviations from the biblical text that can be traced to non-canonical Jewish and Christian sources. As this is the only such story to be told in a single extended narrative, it is easier than usual to plot the influences that were blended to create the Quranic account.

- Jacob warning Joseph not to tell his brothers of the dream in which he foresaw that God would make him dominant over them, **{12.5}**,

  Joseph's brothers conspiring to kill him whilst they were still at home, **{12.9}**,

  Jacob's disbelief of the story that Joseph had been killed by a wolf, **{12.18}**, and

  Joseph's Egyptian master (in Genesis named as Potiphar, but in the Qurʾan given the title al-Aziz, '*the powerful*') disproving the accusation by his wife that Joseph had attacked her, by the physical evidence that Joseph's tunic had been torn from behind, **{12.28}**.

  All of these variations appear in a collection of Syriac Christian homilies on the story of Joseph that had once been incorrectly attributed to the fifth century Christian scholar, Narsai and are now generally referred to as the homilies of pseudo-Narsai.

- Jacob's becoming blind on hearing of the death of Joseph: '*his eyes turned white with grief*', **{12.84}**.

  The *Syriac History of Joseph* attributed to Basil of Caesarea (330-379): '*the light in his eyes grew dim*'.

- The wife of al-Aziz confessing to her husband that she had falsely accused Joseph, **{12.32}**.

  St Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron[132], 260-263.

- The unexplained advice from Jacob to his ten elder sons, as they set off for Egypt with Joseph's full brother Benjamin, to '*enter not by one gate, but enter by separate gates*', **{12.67}**. *Genesis Rabbah*, where this advice is also given and explained as a means of avoiding the attention of the Evil Eye.

The Qurʾan's identification of Potiphar by the Arabic title al-Aziz (via his wife who, although unnamed herself, is twice referred to as '*the wife of al-Aziz*', **{12.30 & 50}**) is presumably a reference to his exalted position in Egyptian society, rendered '*the king's minister*' *per* Abdel-Haleem, or '*viceroy*', *The Study Quran*. We know this because, by the end of the story, Joseph himself is addressed by the same title, **{12.78 & 88}**. As the only surah which tells a biblical story in its entirety, it is interesting that the narrative seems to lose its way as it recounts of the episode at al-Aziz's house, giving parts of the story out of sequence. Al-Aziz's wife makes her false accusation and is proved to be a liar in **{12.25-26}**, but a few verses later, in **{12.30-32}**, she is showing Joseph off to her friends and confiding in them her plot to have him thrown into prison. In **{12.34}**, God '*turned their scheming away from him*', yet this does prevent them committing him to prison in the following verse.

23. Moses and Aaron

Surah 17 (*Al-Israʾ/The Night Journey*): 101-103

101. We gave Moses nine self-evident signs. So, ask the Children of Israel (to tell you what happened) when Moses came to them (appealing to Pharaoh on their behalf) and Pharaoh responded to him: 'Truly, Moses, I think you are engaged in witchcraft.'

102 And (Moses) answered 'You know very well that no one but the Lord of heavens and earth can produce such miracles as evidence so that you may see. So, Pharaoh, (since you have chosen rather to reject what you see) I know you are utterly lost.'

103. And then Pharaoh wanted to wipe (the Children of Israel) from the face of the earth, and We subsequently caused Pharaoh and all who joined him to drown.

[*Kaskas & Hungerford, 2016*]

The Book of Genesis ends with the death of Joseph and the Book of Exodus, commences with an explanation that the descendants of Jacob remained in Egypt for generations, during which time they became numerous and strong, leading to the Egyptians enslaving them. At one stage, in fear at their strength, Pharaoh ordered all new-born male children of the Israelites to be slain (Exodus 1.22). The infant Moses escaped this fate by being placed in a basket by his sister, Miriam, and left on the bank of the Nile in a place where he would be found by Pharaoh's daughter. She adopted him and Moses was then raised in Pharaoh's household, but he fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian whom he saw beating a Hebrew slave (2.11). After leaving Egypt he settled in the land of Midian and married Zipporah, the daughter of a priest there, Jethro.

In an encounter with God, perceived in the form of a burning bush, Moses was instructed to return to Egypt to order Pharaoh to free his people (chapters 3 and 4). Moses complied and became involved in a contest with Pharaoh's sorcerers (chapter 7). Both Moses and Pharaoh's sorcerers were able to turn their staffs into snakes, but Moses's snake ate the snakes of Pharaoh's magicians demonstrating the power of God. Notwithstanding this inauspicious omen, Pharaoh refused Moses' demand that his people be freed, and maintained this stance despite his kingdom suffering a succession of plagues, relenting only when, in the tenth plague, God struck dead every first-born Egyptian son (chapter 11). This catastrophe finally persuaded Pharaoh to release the Israelites, but after their departure he changed his mind and pursued them with his army: a chase that came to an end when God miraculously parted the Red Sea to enable the Israelites to pass out of Egypt into Sinai, but drowning Pharaoh and his army when they attempted the same route (chapter 14).

The latter part of the Book of Exodus concerns Moses leading his people for forty years in the desert, led by God and sustained by miraculously provided food and water. During this time Moses, ascended Mount Sinai whereupon he received God's law in the form of Ten Commandments, only to discover upon his return that in his absence the Israelites had immediately lapsed to idolatry, creating a golden calf to worship. The laws that were said to have been prescribed during this period occupy much of the other three books of the Torah, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Moses constructed, upon God's instructions, an ornate gold-covered chest, the Ark of the Covenant, to contain the tablets upon which the Ten Commandments had been inscribed. At the conclusion of the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses ascended Mount Nebo to view the promised land of Canaan which God had granted to the Israelites in fulfilment of His covenant with Abraham. However, Moses himself was forbidden to enter Canaan as a punishment for his having doubted God during the years in the desert.

Moses (Musa) is named one hundred and forty-three times in the Qurʾan, far more times than any other person, and many of the episodes in the above biblical narrative are referred to. It is convenient to set out some of these references in the form of a table:

Main references to Moses in the Qurʾan

	Surahs									
	2	**7**	**10**	**20**	**26**	**27**	**28**	**43**	**44**	**Other**
Infancy				**37-40**			**7-13**			
Killing of an Egyptʼn				**40**	**14, 19-20**		**15-19**			
Moses in Midian							**22-28**			
Burning Bush				**9-23**		**7-12**	**29-35**			**79. 15-19**
Moses and Pharaoh		**103-134**	**75-89**	**41-73**		**13-14**	**36-40**	**46-56**	**17-24**	**40.23-50, 79.20-26**
Parting of Red Sea	**49-50**	**135-138**	**90-92**	**77-79**	**63-66**			**55**	**24**	**8.54 17.103**
In the Wilder-ness		**137**		**80-99**	**52-56**			**18-30**	**23-32**	
Golden Calf	**51- 55, 92**	**148-154**		**85-97**						**4.153**
Receipt of the law	**53, 87**	**142-147**								**40.53 19.52**

Unsurprisingly the Qurʾan's many Moses narratives contain much that is of interest for understanding its author's perspective and message. Several of these are set out below:

- In **{28.7-8}** Moses is adopted by Pharaoh's wife rather than his daughter. Gabriel Said Reynolds has suggested (assuming that this pharaoh is the same pharaoh who features later in the story) that this change in the narrative frames the later events as a father-son confrontation, similar to that between Abraham and Azar, rather than the biblical relationship of quasi-brothers. However, it may alternatively be seen as providing a biblical precedent for the Qurʾan's more general rejection of artificial family relationships such as adoption (for which see **⟨67⟩**).

- In **{28.23-28}** Moses assists two women, who were fearful of approaching a well to water their livestock, due to the presence of many men there. His helpfulness leads to Moses meeting the father of the two women, who hires Moses to work for him for eight years in return for the right to marry one of his daughters. Although a meeting at a well does feature in the biblical story of Moses meeting Zipporah, the Qurʾan's account of how Moses met his future wife, includes elements that have clearly been transferred over from the story of Jacob **⟨22⟩** in Genesis chapter 29. Like Quranic Moses, biblical Jacob assisted two unaccompanied sisters to water their flocks at a well and upon meeting their aged father agreed a long fixed-term of labour (seven years rather than eight) before he would be permitted to marry the daughter whom he loved, Rachel.

  The Genesis story of Jacob's labours leads to a development that is only hinted at indirectly in the Quranic narrative. Jacob works for Laben for the seven years that they had agreed, only to be tricked into marrying the Rachel's veiled elder sister, Leah.

For the right to marry Rachel too he must toil for a further seven years. The Qurʾan prohibits a man from marrying two sisters **⟨60⟩** and the only echoes of a second marriage are to be found in **Surah 28**, first in the presence of two sisters at the well, one of whom plays no further role in the story, and then with the suggestion by Moses' prospective father-in-law that Moses works for an additional two years after completing the eight years of the initial bargain. No reason is offered as to why Moses should perform this proposed extra work, which is so inconsequential to the Quranic account that it is not recorded whether Moses performed it or not.

- **{20.9-16}** and **{79.16}** place the burning bush in '*the holy valley of Tuwa*', a name which does not appear in any known biblical or Arabian literature.

- In the Qurʾan, Pharaoh is especially associated with torture. In **{89.10}**, he seems to possess some sort of instrument of torture, probably staves for impaling his enemies upon **⟨9⟩**. In **{7.124}**, **{20.71}** and **{26.49}**, Pharaoh threatens to amputate the limbs of his magicians and to torture them (a punishment-combination considered at **⟨72⟩** below).

- In **Surahs 28**, **29** and **40**, the account of Moses's dealings with Pharaoh come to involve two other individuals: Haman and Qarun (Korah). In **{28.6-8}** Moses is sent to '*Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts*', and in **{40.24}** to '*Pharaoh, Haman and Korah*' who all then respond to him as one.

  In **Surah 40** an unnamed believer at Pharaoh's court during the magic contest speaks up in support of Moses, warning Pharaoh of the fate of ʿAd and Thamud **⟨27⟩**. In response to this intervention, Pharaoh orders Haman to build a tower '*to the paths*' (it is generally assumed to the paths of the sun and moon as they travel across the sky), **{28.38-39}** and **{40.36-37}**. This is a project that is reminiscent of the

Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11 but this digression from the main Moses narrative leads nowhere, for in neither story are we told if Haman began the construction, and in each surah, once the instruction is issued, the narrative moves on without returning to the subject.

Although in **{40.24}** Moses is sent by God '*unto Pharaoh, Haman and Qarun*', Qarun is described in **{28.76}** as being '*of the people of Moses*'. This latter verse accords with the Book of Numbers, chapter 16, where Korah is the name given to an Israelite who leads a rebellion against Moses during the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness. Both Korah and Qarun perish by means of God having the earth open before him and swallow him up (Numbers 16.32, **{28.81}**). In **Surah 28**, though, it is not rebellion but personal vanity that is Qarun's undoing, for he incurs this punishment for having caused envy amongst the Israelites by his showy attire.

- The Qurʾan frequently implies, and in **{17.103}** states explicitly, that Pharaoh was drowned by God with his army, yet in **{10.90-92}** the Qurʾan offers an alternative ending in which Pharaoh repented and may have even been saved from drowning (the account is not clear) in order that he might serve as a sign for others.

- In three instances, **{2.63** & **93}** and **{4.154}** the Qurʾan asserts that God '*raised up the Mount*' – *i.e.*, Mount Sinai - over the Israelites whilst He made his covenant with them, and in **{7.171}** the event is made more explicit: He '*lifted the mountain above them as if it were a canopy and they thought it would fall upon them*'. This spectacular image is inspired by the unusually literal meaning given in the (pre-550) Midrashic *Shabbat*[133] to Moses instructing his people to stand '*beneath*' Mount Sinai in Exodus 19.17. According to *Shabbat* (88a) '*the Jewish people actually*

stood beneath the mountain' that God had overturned '*like a tub*'.

In an unrelated passage a different mountain crumbles to dust as a sign to Moses **⟨13⟩**.

- In **{7.148}** and **{20.85-97}**, the Israelites' lapse into idolatry, through their creation and worship of a golden calf whilst Moses was receiving the ten commandments is also given a dramatic twist since the 'calf' lows as if alive. This may reflect the grammatically ambiguous twentieth verse of Psalm 106:

> *They exchanged the glory of the Lord,*
> *For the image of an ox that eats grass*'

Upon the return of Moses, a man identified only as '*al-Samari*', '*the Samarian*', confesses that it had been he who had brought the calf to life using dust he had taken from '*the footprints of the messenger*.'

The presence of a Samarian amongst the Israelites in the wilderness, as mentioned above **⟨20⟩** would be anachronistic. His inclusion in the story may be due to the Qurʾan having conflated the idolatry of the Israelites during the Exodus with a quite separate and much later Bible story in which, the Samarians of Northern Israel, not having heeded the lessons of their ancestors, created either one or two further golden calves to worship (1 Kings 12.28, Hosea 8.5-6). **{20.97}**'s account of Moses's words to al-Samiri: '*Now observe your god to whom you remained devoted. We shall surely burn it and scatter its ashes in the sea*', in particular reflect the essence of Hosea's '*Cast away your calf, O Samaria … Destined for the flames, such is the calf of Samaria*'. The reason for the Qurʾan author's merging of these two stories appears to have been a perceived need for a villain versed in the occult who could take the blame for the creation of the idol away from Aaron, who '*fashions*' the

golden calf in Exodus 32.4. In *The Golden Calf between Bible and Qurʾan Scripture, Polemic, and Exegesis from Late Antiquity to Islam* Michael Pregill suggested al-Samiri is in fact a term that the Qurʾan has adopted for Aaron himself, drawing attention to his innovation of golden calf cult. This is difficult to reconcile with his having brought the calf to life, but even if correct the purpose of using the epithet instead of Aaron's name would surely be the same as introducing a separate character.

A more esoteric angle to the story is explored by David Halperin in *Faces of the Chariot, Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision*. Halperin finds a link between al-Samari's spell and a mystical tradition recorded in a midrash on the Song of Songs. According to this, as the Israelites had passed out of Egypt across the parted Red Sea, an Israelite by the name of Micah (not to be confused with the prophet Micah), conjured up a vision of God's chariot. This chariot appears to be similar to the mystical living vehicle described in the Book of Ezekiel (chapter 1) as consisting of four living creatures, each with four faces, one face of each creature being that of an ox. The midrash states that, having brought this mystical chariot into existence before him, Micah '*took some of the dust that was underneath the ox element*', '*and kept it with him until the appropriate time*'. Although the link to the Qurʾan's al-Samiri is not explicit, it is suggested that the three features common to both stories - the events of the Book of Exodus, a foot dust gatherer amongst the Israelites, and a normally inanimate object in bovine form that is brought to life - makes some connection between the midrash and the Qurʾan very likely.

- The Ark of the Covenant is mentioned in the Qurʾan once, but only in the context of it being returned to Israel at a much later time (see **⟨24⟩** following).

- A particularly enigmatic allusion, even by the standards of the Qurʾan, appears in the story recounted at **{2.67-72}**, from which **Surah 2**, *'The Cow'*, takes its name. This passage links a divine instruction to slaughter a yellow cow with a successful investigation into an unexplained death. The Qurʾan has here conflated two separate sacrifice rituals prescribed in the Torah. The first of these appears in Numbers 19.1-3, in which Moses and Aaron are commanded to slaughter a red heifer. The other is prescribed in Deuteronomy 21.1-8, and requires that wherever there is an unexplained death, the inhabitants of the nearest village should sacrifice a cow and publicly state that they did not know how the person had died. The Quranic story seems to combine these two separate cow-sacrifice passages, whilst adding an original, miraculous, element that on one occasion when this combined ritual was performed by Moses, a murder victim was resurrected to name his killer.[134]

- A young Moses also features in two passages in **Surah 18**, first as a traveller with a servant and then in the role of a disciple to the '*servant of God*' al-Khidr **⟨29⟩**. It will also be suggested that in the same surah the Qurʾan author may have sought to plant the suggestion in its audience's minds that Moses was one and the same with Dhu'l Qarnayn, '*the two horned one*', normally identified as Alexander the Great **⟨30⟩**.

In *Inheriting Egypt, The Israelites and the Exodus in the Meccan Qurʾan*, Nicolai Sinai observes that the Qurʾan passages dealing with Moses and Pharaoh seem to describe not a flight of the Israelites away from Egypt, as occurs in the Bible, but the inheritance by the Israelites of Egypt followed by an expansion of their domain to the Sinai and Canaan. Quranic Pharaoh several times expresses fear that the Israelites will drive him from his kingdom, **{7.110 & 128}**, **{20.57 & 63}** and **{26.35}** and in **{26.57-59}**, God states that He did indeed expel the Egyptians from their '*gardens and springs, and*

treasures and a noble station' and that He '*made the Children of Israel to inherit them*'. A similar inheritance by the Israelites of the land of their oppressors is implied by:

> **{17.103-104}**: '*And he* [Pharaoh] *desired to incite them* [the Children of Israel] *from the land. So We drowned him … and said thereafter unto the Children of Israel 'Dwell in the land*','

and

> **{28.4-6}**: '*Indeed Pharaoh exalted himself in the land … Yet We desired to be gracious to those who were oppressed in the land … and to establish them in the land*.'

In **{10.87-93}**, God instructs Moses to create houses and places of worship for his people in Egypt. God then '*carried the Children of Israel across the sea*', drowned Pharaoh and settled the Israelites '*in a sure settlement*'. Sinai interprets this series of events as a depiction of the Israelites' journey to and across the Red Sea as a mere trap for Pharaoh, after which the Israelites return to Egypt to assume dominion of the land wherein they had formerly been oppressed. The Qurʾan does contain an emigration of the Israelites westwards during which the receipt of the law and the idolatry of the golden calf occurred, but this would appear to be an expansion of the Israelite domain from Egypt, the land promised to Moses in **{10.87}**, to colonise the land that had been previously promised to Abraham, bequeathing '*unto the people wo were oppressed, the eastern and western parts of the land that [God] blessed*', **{7.137}.**

Sinai observes that the Qurʾan's change of the Moses story from one of escape to one of destruction of the wicked and inheritance of their land fits the model of its other punishment narratives better than the traditional Exodus story. A similar variation may also be seen in the Qurʾan's statement that the followers of Jesus prevailed over their oppressors in **{61.14} ⟨26⟩**. This is probably a reference to the Roman Empire's occupation of the Jerusalem and the empire's subsequent conversion to Christianity. By this series of events, the followers of Jesus could indeed have been said to have prevailed, eventually, over the disbelieving Jews, although this is an imaginative gloss upon the gospel story. Given the remarkable

uniformity in the way that different prophets are portrayed in the Qurʾan this adherence to a standard formula may be reason enough for the change in the Moses narrative.

Muhammad as Moses

It has been noted at **⟨5⟩** above that the traditional life of Muhammad contains numerous biblical motifs. No prior prophet would have their story more thoroughly mined for this purpose than Moses. Both Muhammad and Moses were raised as orphans. From humble origins each was admitted into a wealthy household through gaining the affection of a woman, Moses through his discovery and adoption by Pharaoh's daughter, Muhammad by his marriage to the wealthy widow Khadija (see **⟨D⟩** ***The wives and concubines of Muhammad***). Both received direct messages from God upon a mountain. In the Qurʾan, as in the Bible, Moses is described conveying God's law to the Israelites upon '*tablets*', **{7.145}** - a reference to the ten commandments, which were the physical equivalent of the celestial '*Preserved Tablet*' from which the Qurʾan author claimed to be reciting **⟨4⟩**. Each had the experience of preaching only to find their messages and warnings scorned. Each then left the urban setting of their persecution to strike out into a desert as a test of their faith. Having passed this test, each established, by dint of their faith, their unflinching commitment to the strict application of God's law, and the sword, a powerful nation and theocracy. Whereas Moses had seen God smite his enemies with plagues and drown them in the sea, Muhammad and his followers had had to make themselves God's agent of vengeance. But by whatever it was attained, the result was the same. Both Moses and Muhammad made it possible that their respective peoples should seize and occupy the same Promised Land - although neither would live to see this for themselves.

These commonalities between their stories cannot be the result of chance. The nature of the Qurʾan is, in part as a great book of religious law and a new covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham. It makes frequent allusions to the Moses and the Torah and the Qurʾan claims itself to be inscribed by God

upon a celestial '*tablet*' **⟨4⟩**. In **{73.15}** the Qurʾan makes the comparison between its author and Moses explicit:

> We have indeed sent you a messenger as a witness concerning you, just as We sent unto Pharaoh a messenger.

This being the case, one must wonder what lies behind the Qurʾan's change to the Exodus story. After all, if the traditional Islamic account of the hijra from Mecca to Yathrib were to be believed, the biblical story of Moses was far more apposite to the life of Muhammad than the Quranic one. Why then would the Qurʾan author have desired to change the biblical narrative to make it less similar to his own situation?

It will be argued at **⟨38⟩** that the Qurʾan contains no hint of Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Yathrib as this is told in the traditional account of the hijra. Rather, the verbs from which this noun '*hijra*' is formed, refer instead to either the sallying forth of a military expedition or the shunning of wickedness. With this in mind, it is reasonable to read into in the Quranic variant of the Moses narrative a reflection of the actual history of Muhammad. It is suggested that Muhammad's 'Egypt' was Arabia and his 'Pharaoh' was Khusrow II. This fully accords with the prominence of Pharaoh in the early Qurʾan, with, it has been suggested, its anti-Sasanian invectives against '*the father of the flame*' and '*companions of the elephant*' **⟨9⟩**. It will be recalled that Jacob of Edessa, writing long before any Muslim historian, described Muhammad as having reigned as a king of a Tayyaye state from 621/622 for seven years. For the Qurʾan author, this would have been a supplanting of 'Pharaoh''s rule by the righteous servants of God akin to that achieved by Quranic Moses in Egypt. Other sources describe Muhammad raiding Palestine from a base in Yathrib in the 630s **⟨5⟩**, **⟨50⟩**. Again, by invading the Promised Land from a territory held in the south, he appears to follow the example of the Moses narrative, in its revised form.

Aaron

Aaron is brought into Moses' mission to Pharaoh at Moses' own request, **{20.30}**, **{25.35}**, **{26.12-13}** ('*My Lord truly I fear that they will deny me. And my breast will be straitened and my tongue will not be unfettered, so send unto Aaron*') and **{28.34}** and both brothers attend Pharaoh's court. The Qurʾan occasionally refers to them as though they are to be treated as a pair of prophets of equal standing. It has Pharaoh's sorcerers profess their belief in '*the Lord of Moses and Aaron*', **{7.122}**, **{20.70}** and **{26.48}**; **{2.248}** refers to the Ark of the Covenant containing relics from '*the House of Moses and the House of Aaron*', and Aaron is even raised to the exalted level of having been a recipient of '*the Book*' along with Moses in **{37.114}** (*c.f.* **{10.87}**).

However, whilst the Qurʾan shifts the guilt for the creation of the golden calf from Aaron to al-Samiri, Aaron's only independent role in the Qurʾan, that of having permitted the idolatry to take place, remains an ignominious one. The Qurʾan describes that when Moses discovered what had occurred in his absence, he dragged his younger brother by the latter's hair and demanded an explanation. Aaron's defence, given in **{7.151}** and **{20.94}**, that he had not intervened to prevent the idolatry because he had feared causing division, ('*O son of my mother! Seize not my beard or my head. Truly I feared that thou wouldst say: 'Thou hast caused division among the Children of Israel and thou hast not heeded my word*',') can hardly have been intended by the Qurʾan's author to have cast him in a particularly impressive light. As with John the Baptist to Jesus, the Qurʾan author showed little interest in developing an independent role for a prophet's junior partner.

24. The Kings of Israel

Surah 27 (*Al-Naml/The Ants*): 18-19

18. When they came to the Valley of the Ants, an ant said: 'Go into your dwellings, ants, lest Solomon and his warriors should unwittingly crush you.'

19. (Solomon) smiled, laughing at her words, and said: 'Inspire me, Lord, to render thanks for the favours with which You have favoured me and my parents, and to do good works that will please You. Admit me, through Your mercy, among Your righteous servants.'

[*Dawood, 1954 (commissioned by Penguin Classic as first popular translation of the Qurʾan)*]

Saul

In the Book of Numbers, Joshua assumed the leadership of the Israelites following the death of Moses and it was under his leadership that they entered into Canaan (Joshua 1.1-9) and carved out a nation for themselves by force of arms. Israel at that time is depicted as a confederation of twelves tribes united by the Mosaic law and through the ark of the covenant in which the tablets containing the ten commandments were kept. Following Joshua's death, the Israelites' foremost judge and priest, Samuel, acceded to popular demands that he establish for the Israelites a united monarchy (1 Samuel 8) and he chose Saul to be their first king (1 Samuel 9-11). The kingdom of Israel enjoyed several military successes against its main foe, the Philistines. However, when Saul failed to comply fully with an instruction from God to kill all of the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15) he was rejected as king by Samuel, who

withdrew his blessing transferring it to the humble shepherd and harpist David instead. As it happened, David, was summonsed to Saul's court to play the harp for him, and whilst he was attached to the royal entourage in this capacity, David volunteered to duel with the giant Philistine warrior Goliath, whom he famously felled by a slingshot (1 Samuel 17). As relations between Saul and David soured due to David's rising popularity, Saul drove David into exile, from which David returned after Saul's death to become the second king of Israel (2 Samuel 2-5).

Saul, whom in the Qurʾan is called *Ṭalut* (for the significance of which see **⟨3⟩** above) appears in only one passage in the Qurʾan, consisting of six verses of **Surah 2**: **{2.246-252}**. This alludes to the establishment by an unnamed prophet of the united monarchy under Saul, David's slaying of Goliath, and the subsequent granting of sovereignty to David. This sequence of verses also includes two misattributed references:

- an admonition by Saul to his soldiers not to lap water straight from a river rather than raising it to their lips in cupped hands; as noted above this instruction was in the Hebrew Bible given by Gideon to his men (Judges 7.5); and

- the return of the ark of the covenant as a sign of Saul's sovereignty; although in the Book of Samuel the capture of the ark by the Philistines, and its return to Israel, had occurred prior to the anointing of Saul as king (1 Samuel 4-6).

David

David, as Saul's successor, has a reputation for wisdom and musicality. In the Qurʾan, the former is alluded to by the citation of two of David's legal rulings are cited. One of these, a judgment delivered jointly with his son, Solomon, appears at **{21.78-80}** but the Qurʾan fails to provide sufficient detail for the reader to understand either the problem or its solution. The other, at **{38.21-24}**, is a variant of a parable put to David by the prophet Nathan in 2 Samuel 12. The purpose of this parable was to reproach David for

having lain with Bathsheeba. In 2 Samuel 11 King David had observed Bathsheeba bathing upon her roof and, moved by lust, he had slept with her despite his knowledge that she was married to his armour bearer, Uriah the Hittite. When Bathseeba informed David that she was pregnant with his child, David sent Uriah into battle whilst giving secret instructions to the army's commander that Uriah be sent to where the fighting was fiercest and then abandoned so that he be killed by the enemy. This treacherous plan was carried out and after Uriah's death David had married Bathsheba, a course of conduct that the Lord punished with the death of David and Bathsheeba's child (2 Samuel 12.13-23). Through the parable in question, Nathan confronts David with his sin in the form of a hypothetical case, that causes David to unknowingly condemn his own actions. In **{38.21-24}**, Nathan's allegory is transformed into an actual case that David is presented as judging. As with Jacob's marriage to Leah and Rachel, the Qurʾan protects prophets from the biblical accounts of behaviour that presents them as sinful, although following David's delivery of his judgement the words '*David understood that We had tried him, so he sought forgiveness from his Lord fell down kneeling and repented*' retains an element of the original version.

The Qurʾan refers to David having received the Zabur, literally '*scripture*', here likely a refence to the Psalms, as discussed in **⟨20⟩** above. In a foretaste of the magical qualities that would feature in the story of his son, Solomon, David is presented as having the power to charm birds, **{21.79}** and **{38.19}**, and it appears from **{27.15}** that, as with Solomon, he was granted the power to understand their language. God is also said to have taught David how to make chain mail, **{34.10-11}** (*c.f.* **{21.80}**): a claim that recalls the metalworking skills taught to the children of men by the rebel angel Azazel in 1 Enoch **⟨14⟩**.

Muhammad as David, Abraham

In *Muhammad Is Not The Father Of Any Of Your Men*, David S Powers points out parallels between biblical David and the traditional story of Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh, the wife of his adopted son, Zayd. Just as David's lust for

Bathsheeba, was aroused by a chance sighting of her naked, so the traditional Islamic narrative has it that Muhammad had called unexpectedly at his son's house and saw his daughter in law unclad. Muhammad received a revelation permitting him to marry Zaynab, once she had been divorced by Zayd **⟨67⟩** and shortly following Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab, Muhammad had sent Zayd to his death at the head of a small force facing overwhelmingly stronger army at the Battle of Muʾtah. The final element of the David story, the death of his infant son, Powers suggests, is provided by the death of the only son born to Muhammad after the death of Khadija. The traditional accounts of Muhammad's life record that Muhammad consummated between ten and thirteen marriages after the death of Khadija, **⟨D⟩**. The remarkable fact that notwithstanding this very large number of spouses, Muhammad's only child after the death of Khadija had been born to Maryam, an Egyptian slave, seems to render this part of the Muhammad story a version of Abraham impregnating Sarah's maid Hagar (also an Egyptian) after Sarah's failure to conceive. Just as with the similarities between Muhammad's prophetic career and that of Moses **⟨23⟩**, the scandalous story of his marriage to Zaynab, the death of Zayd, and the birth and death of Ibrahim, shows too many signs of recycling elements of biblical stories such as those of Abraham and David, to be regarded as a factual biography.

Whilst biblical prophets are generally limited in the Qurʾan to the role of warner (*c.f.* **{6.48}** and **{18.56}**), alerting their respective peoples to their peril from God's wrath, the kings of Israel represent a more militant way of serving God. David is presumably forging his armour and Solomon leading his army (see below) in preparation for imminent combat. The Qurʾan's shift in focus from prophets to kings may well have occurred at the time when the Qurʾan's author was preparing his own followers to take up arms in God's cause.

Solomon

David and Bathsheba's son, Solomon, was the third king of Israel and he is traditionally renowned for his wisdom, and for having

overseen the building of the first Jewish temple. As with David's making of armour, the Qurʾan's treatment of Solomon anticipates a looming conflict. When the Queen of Sheba hears from Solomon, she fears that he will sack her kingdom, **{27.34}**, and indeed when she offers him gifts, his response is to command his armies:

> **{27.37}** Return (to Sheba) for we shall come upon them with hosts that they cannot withstand, and we shall expel them hence, abased and they shall be humbled.
>
> **{27.38}** He said 'O notables! Which of you will bring me her throne before they come to me in submission?'

Whilst Quranic David had the ability to understand birds and was taught metalworking skills by God, the depiction of Solomon in the Qurʾan is more fantastical yet. In so far as the Quranic narrative of Solomon has a start, this appears to be **{38.30-40}**, where Solomon, already a king, is presented stroking some horses at eventide and regretting having prioritised the love of good things over the remembrance of God. This leads to the mysterious passage:

> **{38.34}** And We did indeed try Solomon and We cast a corpse upon his throne. He then repented,
>
> **{38.35}** Saying: 'My Lord forgive me and bestow a kingdom upon me such as shall not befit anyone after me.' Truly thou art the Bestower

These verses seem to recall a variation of the story of Solomon and the demon prince Ashmedai. Contained in the Babylonian Talmud (*Gittin* 68a), this story is based upon an attribute of Solomon described in the first or second century text, *The Testament of Solomon*, namely that he had been given a ring by the archangel Michael with which he could bind and command demons. In *Gittin* a particular demon called Ashmedai (also called Asmodeus, and traditionally associated with the husband-slaying demon in the

biblical Book of Tobit) tricks Solomon into releasing him from his chains and handing over the ring. Upon Solomon having surrendered the source of his power, Ashmedai transports him away to a distant place and takes on his appearance so that the royal court believe that Ashmedai is Solomon. Solomon himself is reduced to begging. However, Ashmedai is unable to disguise his rooster-like feet, and when, at last Solomon is in a position to demand that these be examined, Ashmedai flees allowing Solomon to regain his throne. The word that the Qurʾan uses to describe the demon is literally '*a body*', often translated as '*a (lifeless) body*', but using a little creativity Sale renders it, more meaningfully, as '*a counterfeit body*'.

Complying with Solomon's audacious request in **{38.35}** for God to bestow a kingdom upon him such as would never be seen after his time, God '*made the wind subservient*' to him, a power also referred to in **{21.81}** and **{34.12}**, and, again reflecting *The Testament of Solomon*, '*gave him mastery of shaytans, every builder and diver and others bound together in fetters*'. It will be recalled that it was in the time of Solomon that the two angels Harut and Marut had descended to the earth to teach men magic '*by God's leave*' **⟨14⟩** and although the angels' descent in **Surah 2** is not expressly linked with endowment upon Solomon of supernatural powers in **Surah 38**, it does not seem unreasonable to see Harut and Marut as tutors sent by God as part of this dispensation. In *The Testament of Solomon* the king enlists the demons to help him to raise the stones to construct the Jewish temple. The Qurʾan does not link Solomon's jinn workforce to the construction of the Temple, which the Qurʾan author may have found a theologically unappealing idea. Rather, in **{34.13}** he gives some fairly underwhelming examples of the building works that Solomon was able to achieve with his supernatural workforce: '*elevated chambers, statues, basins like reservoirs and cauldrons firmly anchored*'.

{27.15-45} recounts how Solomon, like David, could communicate with animals, and that he '*gathered … his hosts of jinn* **⟨15⟩**, *men and birds marshalled in ordered ranks*'. In the passage produced at the beginning of this section, Solomon is described smiling when, as he passed through '*the Valley of the Ants*', he overheard one ant warn its fellow ants of his army's approach.

A hoopoe bird arriving late to the conference, explained its tardiness by telling of its discovery of the land of Sheba, ruled over by a queen and where the people worshipped the sun. Solomon sent the hoopoe bird back to Sheba first with a letter demanding that the queen visit him in submission and, when she responded with gifts, threatening that he would come against Sheba with forces it could not withstand (see **{27.37-38}** produced above). The Queen duly attended Solomon's court (a retelling of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon that is described in the Bible in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9). In keeping with the tradition that Solomon could command jinn he dispatched an Ifrit jinn to Sheba to bring him the queen's throne '*in the blink of an eye*' so that it was there for her when she arrived, although the significance of this, whether it was a demonstration of his power or a test of her reaction, is unclear.

By far the most interesting aspect of the story of the visit is its conclusion, at which the Queen of Sheba raises the hem of her tunic in order to paddle in a crystal floor, having mistaken it for a pool of water. The image of God occupying a Throne over the waters appears in the Bible and the Qurʾan as recounted above **⟨13⟩**, and in the Book of Revelation, St John describes a vision of a throne in heaven, of which '*the floor around the throne was like a sea of glass that was crystal clear*' (Revelation 4.6). But the significance of the Queen of Sheba mistaking the glass for water rests upon a Jewish mystical story, that of *The Four Who Entered Pardes*. This describes four rabbis who by their spiritual endeavours managed to enter Paradise. In order to progress further in their journey, these four were obliged to pass several tests, one of which involved a marble floor so shiny that it appeared to be beneath a layer of water. One of the four rabbis, Rabbi ben Azzai, is described as having gazed upon it and to have said '*Water! Water!*' whereupon he was promptly cut to pieces as the penalty for his lack of discernment. The story of *The Four Who Entered Pardes* exists in several pre-Quranic forms, the earliest in the second century *Tosefta*.[135] In the fourth century the '*test of water*' element of the story was adopted into a rabbinic commentary upon the Book of Esther (the *Second Targum of Esther*). It was in this book that the test became associated with the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, and acquires a new element in a personal detail concerning the queen's feet:

> *Then Beneyahu (a member of Solomon's court) conducted (the Queen of Sheba) to the King, who, when he heard she was coming, went and sat down in an apartment of glass. When the queen saw the king sitting there, she thought in her heart, and in fact said, that he was sitting in water and she raised her dress to cross the water.*
>
> *When the king noticed that her foot was covered with hair, he said to her: 'Thy beauty is the beauty of women, but thy hair is the hair of men. Hair is becoming to a man, but to a woman it is shame.'*

The targum's story of the queen and Solomon's glass apartment is sufficiently bizarre that it can only have been derived from *The Four Who Entered Pardes*, with the queen's hirsute foot apparently added to make the point that in leading a country she had lost her femininity. The Qurʾan makes no direct reference to the Queen's foot hair, but the detail of her baring of her shin hints at this element of the targum story. Later Quranic commentators took up the theme and developed it still further with Solomon commanding jinn to use their magic skills to create the first depilatory cream, with which the queen was able to solve her foot hair problem.[136]

Such is Solomon's authority over the jinn in the Qurʾan that when he passed away, standing upright and leaning upon his staff, supervising a team of jinn labourers, his workforce toiled on, unaware of their taskmaster's death. The jinn only realised that Solomon had died when a termite ate through his staff causing it to break and his body to fall to the ground, in possibly the Qurʾan's one and only attempt at comedy:

> **{34.14}** ... And when he fell down, the jinn saw clearly that, had they known the Unseen, they would not have tarried in humiliating punishment.

25. Jonah and Job

Surah 37 (*Al-Saffat/Those arranged in ranks*): 139-144

139. And truly Jonah was among the message bearers.

140. Behold he fled to the full-laden ship,

141 And then cast lots and was amongst those rejected.

142. Then the fish swallowed him, for he was blameworthy,

143. And had he not been among those who glorify,

144. He would have tarried in its belly until the Day they are resurrected.

Job

The biblical Book of Job is thought by some to be the oldest book of the Bible having, like the stories of Adam and Noah, a Sumerian origin, bearing similarities with the poem *Ludlul Bēl nēl Nimeqi* (*The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*). Job consists almost entirely of a series of poetic exchange between Job and four companions, in which the five friends ponder at length the nature of undeserved suffering. Specifically, the four people with whom Job converses, seek to persuade him that a series of recent misfortunes that have befallen him - economic ruin and the illness and death of his children, leading to the scorn of his neighbours and his wife - must have been the result of some sin that he had committed, for God would not be unjust. Job denies any knowledge of having committed a sin, but states that continues to keep faith in God, even though he is incapable of understanding God's purpose. These exchanges are preceded by a short introductory narrative, which is thought to be a later addition, in which it is imagined by the author that God had

accepted a challenge by Satan to take away the blessings He has given to a righteous man to discover if such a person would still keep a faith that no longer rewarded him. With the addition of this prologue, it became for the purpose of this testing of Job's faith that God had blighted him. After Job had demonstrated sufficient fidelity, God restored to Job twice the wealth that he had earlier lost.

References to the story of Job appear in the Qurʾan twice, at **{21.83-84}** and **{38.41-44}**. In these, the essence of the original story is effectively reversed so that it becomes an account merely of God removing suffering from a righteous man, and restoring his family to him, when He was called upon so to do, without a mention of how this suffering and separation had originally come about. In the **Surah 38** passage, two of the four verses defy interpretation. **{38.42}**'s '*Strike with thy foot, this is cool water wherewith to wash and to drink*', may suggest that God created for Job a miraculous spring, as He also had for Moses **⟨23⟩** and Mary **⟨26⟩** although here the need for water is unexplained. Less pleasantly, the Job allusion ends on a violent note, with God instructing him to:

> **{38.44}** … take with thy hand a bundle of rushes and strike therewith, and break not thine oath.
>
> Truly we found him to be steadfast.
>
> What and excellent servant!
>
> Truly he turned oft unto God'.

Whom it is that Job is told to beat, and why he had previously sworn that he would so do, is not explained in the text, but it is generally and reasonably, supposed that this must have been Job's wife. In the biblical account she had, joined Job's companions in doubting that the curses sent from God could have been undeserved by him. For the Qurʾan, the moral of this passage, from the face of the text, appears to be that an oath to take revenge, once made to God, must be fulfilled and may not be later revoked. It also carries the regrettable element of divine approval for a man's right to physically chastise his wife for her lack of loyalty (*c.f.* **⟨62⟩**).

Jonah

In the Book of Jonah, its eponymous prophet is instructed by God to preach to the people of Ninevah, but instead of accepting this mission he seeks to escape by a sea journey. During the course of the voyage, God creates a storm which leads the other sailors, upon realising that Jonah is fleeing God, to throw him overboard. Then, in the story's best-known detail, Jonah is swallowed whole by a large fish and three days later disgorged unharmed onto a beach. When Jonah eventually succumbs to God's will and preaches to the people of Nineveh, its king and people repent of their wickedness and God spares the city. However, Jonah becomes angry at this turn of events since the lack of a punishment for Nineveh seems to him to have denied his warning its fulfilment. The biblical story ends with God addressing Jonah on the subject of mercy, using, to illustrate His point, Jonah's sadness at the death of a gourd plant. The Quranic account of the Bible's most reluctant prophet is summarised in **{37.139-148}** and alluded to fleetingly at **{10.98-9}**, **{21.87-88}** and **{68.48.50}**, the latter two of these passages referring to him anonymously as '*the man of the fish*.' For the Qurʾan, the '*people of Jonah*', **{10.98}**, who repented their wickedness and were spared, provides a unique departure from the otherwise unrelenting motif of peoples who fail to repent and suffer punishment as a result.

Job and Jonah also appear together in lists of prophets at **{4.163}**, and **{6.84-86}**.

26. Jesus

Surah 4 (*Al-Nisā/Women*): 156-157

156. …(A)nd for their (*the Jews'*) misbelief, and for their saying about Mary a mighty calumny,

157. And for their saying 'Verily, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of God'....

But they did not kill him, and they did not crucify him, but a similitude was made for them.

And verily, those who differ about him are in doubt concerning him; they have no knowledge concerning him, but only follow an opinion.

They did not kill him, for sure!

[*The Koran*, E H *Palmer, 1880*]

Jesus' birth and childhood

With the exception of the infant Moses being placed in his basket upon the sea, all Old Testament prophets, even the son that Abraham had prepared to sacrifice, are introduced into the Qurʾan as adults, most appearing in the text without any introduction whatsoever concerning their personal background or historical setting. By a stark contrast, approximately two-thirds of the canonical Qurʾan's telling of the overall story of Jesus ('*Isa*') relates either to events that took place prior to his birth or to his infancy and childhood.

Elements of this pre- and early Jesus narrative include:

- the birth and childhood of Mary, **{3.35-37}**,
- the annunciation and birth of Jesus's cousin John, **{3.38-41}**, **{19.2-15}** and **{21.89-90}**,
- the annunciation and conception of Jesus himself, **{3.42-49}**, **{19.16-22}** and **{21.91}**,
- the nativity of Jesus, **{19.23-26}**, and
- Jesus speaking as a baby, **{19.27-33}**,

In addition, an extended passage of reported speech in verses **{3.47-57}**, commences as an angel addressing Mary concerning Jesus, but then transforms seamlessly into a speech by Jesus in which he refers to the childhood miracle of his bringing clay birds to life as an event that at that time still lay in the future, before the speech switches a second time to Jesus as an adult, addressing his disciples. Much of the Quranic presentation of the pre-ministry narrative of Jesus will be unfamiliar with those who know Jesus only from the canonical gospels. Stories are drawn primarily from apocryphal sources, including:

- the pledge by Mary's mother that she will dedicate her unborn child (Mary) to God, **{3.35},**
- the description of Mary being raised in the Jewish Temple by her uncle Zechariah, during which time she is miraculously fed by angels, **{3.37}**, and
- the random selection of Joseph from a group of men to be Mary's husband, **{3.44}**,
- as a child the young Jesus miraculously breathing life into clay model birds – a miracle both predicted by Jesus in **{3.49}** and then recalled by God in **{5.110}**.

The first three of these episodes are drawn from the apocryphal gospel, the *Protoevangelium of James*.[137] The fourth, the miracle of the clay birds, appears in a different apocryphal gospel, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, according to which, Jesus performed this miracle

to remove the evidence of his having created the models on the sabbath (see **⟨20⟩**). Both *James* and *Thomas* are thought to date from the second century.

Concerning Jesus's nativity, a far more intriguing source of the Quranic narrative has been uncovered by Stephen J. Shoemaker in *Christmas in the Qurʾan: The Quranic Account of Jesus' Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition*. In **{19.22-23}**, we are told that Mary gave birth to Jesus '*in a place far off*' when '*the pangs of childbirth*' came upon her. In this, the Qurʾan again follows the *Protoevangelium of James*. But in the following verses, **{19.24-26}**, the Qurʾan then has the newly born baby Jesus miraculously commanding that a date palm tree to bend down and offer its fruit to Mary and that a spring appear at her feet for her to drink from. Shoemaker demonstrates that the first of these miracles, that of the date palm, had been recorded in various Christian traditions that had circulated in the near east since the third century.[138] However, these had without exception attributed the miracle to having occurred, not during the nativity, but later, during the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. The tradition, and its occurrence after the birth, is likely connected to St John's vision in the Book of Revelation of a woman who would be adorned with sun, moon and stars, who, after giving birth to a messianic son, '*fled into the desert where a place had been prepared for her by God and where she was taken care of for 1260 days*' (Revelation 12.6), which in turn may recall the miraculous spring provided for Hagar and the infant Ishmael after being forced to leave Canaan in Genesis 22.19 (*c.f.* other miraculous springs created for Moses, **{2.57}**, following Exodus 17.3-6, and possibly Job **⟨25⟩**).

Shoemaker explains how this miracle probably found itself included within the Qurʾan's nativity narrative, by reference to the ruins of the Church of the Kathisma, discovered in the 1990s midway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Prior to the fixing of the New Testament canon in the late fourth century, the Jerusalem Church had treated the Church of the Kathisma as marking the site of the Nativity, as described in the *Protoevangelium of James.* After the wider church had canonised the gospel of Matthew, with its account of Jesus' birth in a Bethlehem stable, Bethlehem inevitably became the centre of the Church's Christmas celebration. A new significance was needed for the Church of the Kathisma, and it became rededicated as the supposed site of the miracle of the date

palm during the flight into Egypt. It is, Shoemaker has discovered, in this context in which it is described in a pilgrim guide written c.560-570. When the ruins of the church were excavated in 1997, they showed that it had at some stage been converted into a mosque and decorated with date palm mosaics. It should also be noted that it was upon the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem that Patriarch Sophronius had complained that the godless Saracens were operating in 634. '*Thus*', Shoemaker concludes, '*the early Muslims found themselves in possession of an ancient Christian nativity shrine which had recently been identified as the site of Mary's encounter with the date palm. Rather than preserving the two traditions separately … the Islamic tradition fused them into what has become the Quranic version of the Jesus nativity*'.[139]

Jesus as an adult

In the speech of Jesus in **Surah 3** referred to above, Jesus predicts his future ministry. In addition to the animation of clay birds, Jesus declares that he will '*heal the blind and the leper give life to the dead by God's leave*'. These words are repeated almost verbatim in **{5.110}**, but this time within the context of a conversation that God anticipates that He will hold with Jesus at some time in the future. **Surah 3** also contains God's assurance that he would raise Jesus unto Himself, **{3.55}**, and place his followers in authority over those who disbelieved whom He would '*punish with a severe punishment in this world and the Hereafter*.' Accounts in the Qurʾan of Jesus's adult life are surprisingly scarce. The only passages relating to adult Jesus's words and deeds are:

- Jesus calling his disciples to follow him, asking them '*Who will be my helpers unto God?*' **{3.52}** and **{61.14}**.

- an account of a discussion between Jesus and God, apparently after the end of Jesus's earthly life, in which Jesus recalls having requested of God '*a table spread with food*' for himself and his followers, **{5.111-115}**. This appears to conflate the miracle of the loaves and fishes with the Last Supper, and was possibly included to emphasise Jesus's non-divinity, since food consumption is, in the Qurʾan, a specific

sign of mortality **⟨22⟩**. The recollection leads to Jesus's denial of having claimed to be divine, **{5.116-118}**,

- his prediction of a messenger who come after him who would be called '*aḥmad*' **⟨5⟩**, and
- the Qurʾan's rebuttal of the Jews' boast that they had killed him.

The Crucifixion

{4.157} (produced above) is the only verse in the Qurʾan that directly addresses the crucifixion of Jesus and its meaning has been much contested. It appears within a five-verse passage in which:

{4.155 & **156}** condemn Jews for what they say,

{4.157} asserts that notwithstanding the Jews' claim to have killed the Messiah, Jesus, this claim is untrue; nor did they do something else to Jesus ('*ṣalabūhu*', commonly translated as '*crucified him*' although it is suggested that this is misleading). It merely '*appeared so unto them*',

{4.158} states that '*God raised (Jesus) up unto Himself*', and

{4.159} states '*There is not one of the People of the Book, but will surely believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them.*'

It is likely that the reference '*And for their saying 'Verily, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus…*' is an allusion to two passages of the Babylonian Talmud. *Mishna Sanhedrin* 45b, interpreting Deuteronomy 21.22-23 ('*And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you shall hang him on a tree, it shall not remain on the tree overnight*') concludes that the Mosaic law requires that the body of an idol worshipper or a blasphemer should be '*hung after he is executed.*' 43a presents this as having occurred to Jesus, implying that Jesus was killed by Jewish authorities under the Jewish law rather than by Romans.

> *On Passover Eve they hung the corpse of Jesus the Nazarene after they killed him by way of stoning. And a crier went out before him for forty days, publicly proclaiming: Jesus the Nazarene is going out to be stoned because he practiced sorcery, incited people to idol worship, and led the Jewish people astray. Anyone who knows of a reason to acquit him should come forward and teach it on his behalf. And the court did not find a reason to acquit him, and so they stoned him and hung his corpse on Passover eve.*

The fact that the Qurʾan addresses denies what the Jews said that they did to Jesus in two parts, first denying that they killed him, then denying that they did something further to him, matches the rabbinic account. The verb that is commonly rendered '*to crucify*' is unlikely to mean '*to kill by crucifixion*'. Etymologically, it contains no reference to a cross shape and it reads awkwardly to say '*they did not kill him; nor did they kill him by crucifying him*'. '*They did not slay him; nor did they hang up his body*' aligns with the claim that rabbinic Judaism actually did make, and it reads better. The fact that '*ṣalabu*' is generally translated, here and elsewhere in the Qurʾan, as '*to crucify*' is due to its association here with the death of Jesus, illustrating the pitfalls of determining the meaning of an Arabic word by reference to its immediate context in the Qurʾan **⟨3⟩** (for the words other occurrences see **⟨72⟩** below).

Concerning the words '*they did not slay him … but it appeared so unto them … God raised him up unto Himself*', the most widely held Islamic understanding is that Jesus did not die on earth at all but rather that those present at Calvary were subjected to some visual deception whilst Jesus was raised to the heavens whilst still alive. Most frequently, it is thought that God had substituted some other person, possibly Judas, to be crucified in Jesus's place. If this is indeed what was intended by the Qurʾan's author, he would have been following the narrative second century gnostic gospel of Basilides, in which Jesus is said (we only have an unsympathetic summary of its text) to have miraculously swapped his outward appearance with one of his followers, Simon of Cyrene, and to have '*stood by laughing*' as the unfortunate Simon was crucified in his place.

The word that the Qurʾan uses for '*to raise*', '*rafaʿa*', appears as a verb twenty-three times in the Qurʾan, in twenty of which it is used for either the physical elevation of an inanimate object (the heavens, Mount Sinai over the Israelites **⟨23⟩**, places of worship, **{24.36}**, and the '*foundations of the House*' **⟨22⟩**); the exaltation of a person or class of people (such as messengers and believers) over others '*by degrees (of rank)*'; the ascent of righteous works to heaven, **{3.55}**, or the raising by a person of their voice over that of another **⟨79⟩**. The only other two occurrences of the word, are in **{3.55}**, which also relates to Jesus, and **{19.56-57}**, in which Idris is spoken of with the words that God '*raised him to a sublime station*'. Idris, as previously mentioned **⟨14⟩**, is traditionally associated with Enoch, who in Jewish lore was raised bodily to God's presence and transformed into an angel rather than dying an earthly death. The coincidence that **{3.55}**, **{4.158}** and **{19.57}**, and only these three verses, use '*rafaʿa*' in relation to '*raising*' a named individual means that the traditional view that the Qurʾan asserts a bodily ascension of Jesus and the identification of Idris as Enoch effectively corroborate one another.

Yet elsewhere the Qurʾan is clear that Jesus died an earthly death. **{3.55}** recalls a promise made by God to Jesus - '*I shall take thee and raise thee unto Me, and purify thee of those who disbelieved, and place those who followed thee above those who disbelieved, until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me is your return*'. This verse features '*rafaʿa*' ('*to raise*') but precedes it with a different verb, '*tawaffā*', also used in relation to Jesus in **{5.117}** and appearing frequently in the Qurʾan to refer to dying (e.g. **{3.193}**, **{6.60-61}**, **{10.46 & 104}**, **{13.40}**, **{16.70}**). Jesus proclaims his death from the crib: '*Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die and the day I am raised alive!*', **{19.33}**, replicating virtually word for word a statement that the Qurʾan had made a few verses earlier in relation to John the Baptist, **{19.15}**. And in **{5.75}**, Jesus's divinity is refuted with a reflection upon his mortality: '*The Messiah, son of Mary is naught but a messenger; messengers have passed before him*'.

Since both '*tawaffā*' and '*rafaʿa*' appear in **{3.55}**, the Qurʾan gives no basis to suppose that its author changed his mind about the fate of Jesus. On the contrary, the presence of both words, one immediately following the other, indicates that they were intended to refer to related but different events. It is proposed that the most

natural way of interpreting these verses is that Jesus both died and was raised alive to be with God, and that the obvious way that these statements may be reconciled is that the Qurʾan endorsed the Christian beliefs that Jesus died, but was later resurrected by God and raised from the tomb, prior to a bodily ascension. This explanation is consistent with the Qurʾan's acceptance of other Christian dogmas, such as the virgin birth. The statement that the Jews '*did not slay him; nor did they crucify him, but it appeared so unto them*' should not be interpreted literally. The Jews did actually slay Jesus and publicly display his corpse, but their triumph over him was illusory for God had then raised him from the dead.

The role of Jesus in the Quranic scheme

The role of Jesus in the Qurʾan is highly paradoxical. There are no explicit references to Jesus or Christianity at all in the early surahs of the Qurʾan (for which see **⟨9⟩** above). When he is eventually introduced into the text, Jesus's ministry does not have a significance for all mankind as it does in Christianity. He is a '*messenger to the children of Israel*', **{3.49}** (*c.f* **{61.6}**, **{43.59}**) reflecting Jesus's statement to the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15.24: '*My mission is only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel*'). His apostles are '*a group from the Children of Israel*' who believed, **{61.14}**, by which is presumably meant '*were righteous*' rather than that they held any specific Christological doctrine. Jesus is also included in four of the lists of Jewish prophets, **{2.136}**, **{3.84}**, **{4.163-165}** and **{6.84-87}**, each of which portrays him as but one prophet amongst many. This is, of course, entirely consistent with the Qurʾan's emphatic and repeated rejection of the Christian belief in Jesus as the son of God: **{4.171}**, **{5.17, 72-77 & 116-8}**, **{9.30-31}**, **{17.111}**, **{19.34-38}**, **{43.57-59}** and **{112.1-4}**.

> **{5.72}** They certainly disbelieve those who say: 'Truly God is the Messiah, the son of Mary'...
>
> Surely whoever ascribes partners unto God, God has forbidden him the Garden, and his refuge shall be

> the Fire. And the wrongdoers shall have no shelter.

In **{5.116-117}**, Jesus is challenged by God and forced to deny that he had encouraged this idolatry, and in a particularly tetchy-sounding **{5.17}** God points out to the Qurʾan's audience that should He so wish, He could '*destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, and those on earth altogether*'.

Yet in other verses Jesus is described as being, in his nature, utterly different to any other man who has lived. The Qurʾan agrees with the gospels that Jesus was born of a virgin, **{3.47}** and **{19.20}**, and explains how Mary had had the Spirit of God breathed into her womb **⟨12⟩**. He is depicted as foretelling future events and performing miracles even as a new-born baby. The Qurʾan refers to him eight times, **{3.45}**, **{4.171-172}**, **{5.17, 72 & 75}** and **{9.30-31}**, as '*al-masih*'('*the messiah*') although no specific significance is attached to this title. Most surprisingly, the Qurʾan refers to Jesus twice, **{3.45}** and **{4.171}** (and an arguable third occasion at **{19.34}**), as not merely having been miraculously brought into existence by God's utterance of a word, but as actually being the '*Word of God*' personified, and in **{4.171}**, '*a Spirit from God*':

> **{4.171}** … Verily the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and His Word which He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him...

This is not far, if it is different at all, to the Gospel of St John's description of Jesus as God's '*Word made flesh*' (1.14). The Qurʾan, it is suggested accepts Jesus's resurrection and ascension, and incorporates Jesus in the anticipated events leading up to the Last Day **⟨96⟩** stating '*(H)e is indeed a portent of the Hour*', **{43.61}** (*c.f.* **{3.55}**) Following this, Jesus '*will be a witness against*' all the People of the Book, **{4.159}**. Some of the passages concerning Jesus read as though they might have been lifted straight from a Syriac Christian devotional text (a possibility that has in fact been promoted by some revisionist historians.[140])

For all that the extended infancy and childhood passages, the devotional titles and eschatological expectations, exalt Jesus, these

all focus upon Jesus's unique nature as the bearer of God's Spirit. Whilst in fact the Qurʾan author mined the gospels for Jesus's iconic parables and turns of phrase (see **⟨20⟩** above), the Qurʾan attributes to him very little by way of words and actions. We are told that he healed the afflicted and raised the dead, but this is mentioned only briefly and in general terms. The only miracles of Jesus that are recounted – making a date palm bend and spring appear for his mother, animating clay models of birds and the provision of a feast for his followers – seem, by the general standards of miracles, to be minor and self-serving. Since two of the three instances involve the acquisition of food and drink, one may wonder if these were in fact selected primarily to emphasise his need for sustenance and hence his mortality (*c.f.* Matthew 11.19, Luke 7.34: '*The Son of Man appeared eating and drinking and they say 'This one is a glutton and a drunkard'*). In *the Qurʾan in Context, A Christian Exploration*, Mark Robert Anderson describes Quranic Jesus as proceeding from an '*unattractively adult and self-important*' child, to a '*decidedly needy*' adult, who notwithstanding superhuman powers and having been strengthened by the Holy Spirit, is conspicuous amongst the Qurʾan's prophets for repeatedly having to ask others to be his helpers and being obliged to answer pointed questioning from God.

Most strikingly to a reader of the Qurʾan who is familiar with the gospels, Quranic Jesus conveys no hint of Gospel Jesus's ethical message of universal, selfless compassion and the unconditional forgiveness of enemies. On the contrary, on occasion, this seems to be consciously reversed (again see **⟨20⟩**). The Christian doctrine of Jesus having atoned for the sins of man has no place in the Qurʾan, and may be the indirect target of:

> **{35.18}** And none shall bear the burden of another … And whosoever purifies himself, purifies himself only for his own soul.

The Qurʾan announcer and Jesus

It has been suggested **⟨5⟩** that the title '*Mahamad*', was likely introduced into the Qurʾan as an epithet for Jesus. The well-known

motto '*Muhammad rasūl Allah*' seems to have preserved this Jesus-connection as late as 692, since in the decoration of the Dome of the Rock it is repeatedly inserted into Qurʾan verses addressing the role and nature of Jesus. Later we know that the term came to be adopted for the Qurʾan announcer himself and to support this a prediction was placed in the mouth of Jesus that after him would come one who would be '*ahmad*', the '*longed for one*'.

As Muhammad campaigned in Palestine, he would have found himself controlling land inhabited by Christians and upon which many churches stood, such as the Church of the Kathisma referred to above. Given its uncompromising condemnation of the sin of '*shirk*' and the many punishment narratives, one might have expected Muhammad to have dealt with Christian communities in a similar way to that in which the traditional narrative describes him dealing with the pagans of Mecca, namely by expelling them from their places of worship and putting to the sword any who objected. But in a territory where the resident population was overwhelmingly Christian of one hue or another, such actions would no doubt have provoked intense resistance. It is suggested then, that instead of crushing Christian devotion as an unacceptable blasphemy, a role was belatedly created for Jesus within the Quranic scheme. The already circulating story of the angels bowing to Adam was seized upon to provide a precedent for permitting the public veneration of Jesus. God had commanded the veneration of Adam, not for anything that Adam had done, but because he had received his life by having had God's Spirit breathed into him. Since Jesus had likewise been infused of the divine breath, the story of Adam and the bowing angels could have been used to show that veneration of Jesus would also, exceptionally, have been permissible. Through the combination of the Adam story and the doctrine of the virgin birth, the Qurʾan author would have been able to accommodate many other Christian doctrines such as the resurrection and Jesus's return as on the Last Day. However, the artificiality of this interpolation of Jesus into the Quranic scheme is demonstrated by the fact that the only significant role that the Qurʾan announcer could find for this second Adam, was to foretell the coming of a messenger after him. It rings entirely unpersuasively since the metaphysical attributes that Qurʾan had lavished on Jesus had already raised him to a status far more exalted than the Quranic announcer he was created

to foretell. This also fails to explain why the adjective '*ahmad*' should be used rather than the Qurʾan announcer's full supposed name.

John

As with Jesus, John is introduced with accounts of his conception and birth (see above) but unlike his cousin, John fails to really mature in the Qurʾan at all. He is included in one list of prophets, **{6.84}**, and in a separate list of '*the righteous*', **{3.39}**. However, the Qurʾan's only substantive description of his individual attributes is couched in terms that one might use to praise a well-behaved youngster, rather than a prophet of God:

{19.12} 'O John, take the Book with strength.'

We gave him judgment as a child,

{19.13} And a tenderness from Our Presence, and purity and he was reverent,

{19.14} And dutiful towards his parents. He was not domineering or rebellious…

27. The Arab Prophets

Surah 89 (*Al-Fajr / The Dawn*): 6-10

6. Have you not noted what your Lord did unto Aad,

7. Of Iram, with their buildings proud,

8. The likes of which were never raised throughout the world?

9. And to Thamood, who rocky mountains hewed?

10. And unto Pharaoh, Lord of the multitude?

[*Quran, A Poetic Translation from the Original, 2000, Fazlollah Nikayin, Iranian-born linguist*]

The Qurʾan draws heavily upon Jewish and Christian prophets, but it also refers repeatedly to three non-biblical prophets: Hud of ʿAd, Saleh of Thamud and Shuayb of Midian. The stories of these three are often told in parallel to one another, and in a way that is so formulaic that their narratives seem to merge, with specific details moving from one to another without explanation.

Hud of ʿAd

Hud, see especially **{7.65-72}**, **{11.50-60}**, **{26.123-139}**, **{46.21-26}** and **{54.18-20}**, preached monotheism to the people of ʿAd. **{7.69}** tells us that these were '*viceregents after the people of Noah*', whilst **{46.21}** locates the Adites within a landscape of '*wind carved sand dunes*'. One reference to ʿAd, **{89.6-7}**, juxtaposes it with the word or name '*Iram*' and a phrase that tends to be translated as the '*many pillared*' (*per* Pickthall, Asad) or '*lofty pillared*' (Yusuf Ali, Abdel-Haleem). This has led to speculation of a city lost to the sand dunes, a postulated '*Atlantis of the Sands*',[141] although there is now good reason to associate the Qurʾan's Iram with Wadi al-Rum in

Southern Jordan. Here inscriptions have been found linking the site to the pagan worship of the goddess Allat by the people of 'Ad, including:

> '*May ʿAbdallâhi son of ʿAtmo be remembered for all time before Allât the goddess of Iram*' [142], and
>
> '*Ghawth son of Aslah son of Thokam, and he constructed the temple of Allât, of the people of Ad*".[143]

{53.50} refers to "*Ad the Former*', apparently contrasting 'Ad with Thamud which means literally '*after ʿAd*'. Since Thamud features in the archaeological record as far back as the eight century BC, and is mentioned by Claudius Ptolomy and Pliny the Elder (both in the first century AD), and as a result, when the Qurʾan refers to its predecessor community, ʿAd, it must have been drawing upon a communal memory that was very long indeed. Within the Qurʾan, it is only the circumstances of the Adites' disappearance from history that are given. When the people of ʿAd ignored Hud's message to them, the Adites were '*cut off* ', **{7.72}**, '*cursed away*', **{11.60}** and '*destroyed*', **{26.139}**, their cities smitten by '*a cloud bound for their valleys ... a wind carrying a painful punishment destroying everything by the Command of its Lord*', **{46.24-25}**.

Saleh of Thamud

Saleh, see especially **{7.73-79}**, **{11.61-68}**, **{15.80-84}**, **{26.141-158}**, **{27.45-53}**, and **{54.23-31}**, preached to the people of Thamud who had been '*made vice regents after ʿAd*', **{7.74}**. Saleh is conventionally treated as a proper name, but this may not be how it was received by the Qurʾan's original audience. '*Ṣāliḥ*', literally means '*a righteous man*' and the plural form, '*ṣāliḥīna*' is used four times in the Qurʾan to indicate a group, '*the righteous*', that includes Abraham, **{2.130}**, John and Jesus **{3.39 & 46}**, and those who pray at night **{3.114}**. Thamud, as stated above literally means '*after ʿAd*'. Within the Qurʾan, the people of Thamud are presumably the same folk as the people of al-Hijr who are referred to in **{15.80-84}**, since both peoples are said to have '*hewn out dwellings in the mountains*', **{26.149}** (Thamud) and **{15.82}** (al-Hijr). In **{27.52}** the Thamud dwellings are said to be still visible: '*And those are their houses, lying*

desolate for their having done wrong Surely in this is a sign for a people who know.' This description of abandoned '*rock hewn dwellings*' has been linked to the majestic, abandoned city of Petra in Jordan, chiselled out of mountains by the Nabatean civilisation. More likely, it is the Nabatean's second capital, a location 250 miles from Yathrib, now best known for its complex of one hundred and thirty rock carved tombs that goes by the name of al-Hijr.

Surahs 7, 11 and **26** tell how God granted the people of Thamud the '*she-camel of God*' as a blessing, a sign and a test of their obedience to His command that they must share their water with it, **{54.28}**, and do it no harm. This command was disregarded by the people of Thamud who hamstrung the camel, as a result of this they were destroyed by an earthquake, **{7.78}**, or alternatively by the mysterious but dreadful manifestation of God's wrath that the Qurʾan refers to as the *Ṣayḥata*. This terrible phenomenon is deployed by God to annihilate the peoples of Thamud, Midian, Lot **⟨75⟩**, the '*companions of the town*' (see below) and a further unnamed people, **{23.41}**. It will also play a role in the mass destruction to be wrought on all humanity on the Last Day, **{50.42}**. It has been variously translated as the '*the Cry*' (*per* Pickthall, *The Study Quran* and Ali Qarai), '*the Blast*', (Yusuf Ali, Abdel-Haleem), '*the Scream*', (The Monotheist Group), '*the Shriek*' (Sahih International) or (per Qaribullah) '*the Shout (of an angel)*'. Its effect upon the People of ʿAd is described in the Qurʾan as '*seizing*' its victims so that '*morning found them lying lifeless in their abode*', **{11.67}** and **{15.83}**, '*like a fence-maker's dry sticks*', **{54.31}**, or '*dross*', **{23.41}**.

The story of the camel, as it is told in the Qurʾan, makes little sense and these references probably allude to a story that was well known to its audience but unknown to us. In the late seventh or early eighth century the Church father and Umayyad official John of Damascus, wrote a condemnation of heresies entitled *Fount of Knowledge* in which he seemed aware of a now lost book that he attributed to Muhammad called the *Camel of God*. John, whose knowledge of the story was probably incomplete and is certainly not sympathetically recounted, is able to add a couple of details to the Quranic account: apparently the she-camel '*drank the whole river and could not pass between two mountain*s' for which she was killed by wicked men and it was her calf that called upon God for its

mother to be avenged. John had no reason to invent story-details from the Qurʾan in order to condemn it as heresy, which raise the prospect that at the Umayyad court he had access to original compositions by the Qurʾan announcer that were not available to the early Islamic community. But these details concerning the camel take us little further in understanding where the story originated or what it means.

Surah 27 gives a reason for God's destruction of Thamud that makes no mention of any camel at all. Here, nine people of Thamud plotted, for reasons that are not given, to assault Saleh and his household, for which God '*destroyed them and their people all together*', whilst saving the reverent, **{27.48-51}**.

Shuayb of Midian

Shuayb, preached to the people of Midian, **{7.85-91}**, **{11.84-94}** and **{29.36-37}**. The Midianites' principal vice appears to have been dishonesty, and their sins included in particular the giving of false measure **⟨80⟩**. They were presumably the same folk as '*the people of the Thicket*' of **{26.176-189}, {15.78-79}**, **{38.13}** and **{50.14}** to whom Shuayb also preached and who were also destroyed for the sin of giving false measure. Unlike ʿAd and Thamud, the land and population of Midian is fairly well documented in ancient history. It is the region east of the Red Sea coast and is named in the Bible as the place where Moses settled as a young man and married Zipporah, after leaving Egypt for the first time **⟨23⟩**. Since Moses's father-in-law, Jethro, is described in Exodus 3.1 as '*the priest of Midian*', Shuayb is sometimes either identified by Muslims either as Jethro himself, or else a relative of his, such as his uncle, although there is no basis for such a connection in the Qurʾan. In common with the people of Thamud, the people of Midian were destroyed by either a great earthquake, **{7.91}** and **{29.37}**, or the *ṣayḥatu*, **{11.67}**, in each case described using the exact same words as those used to describe the destruction of the Thamud in those same surahs.

The Three Arab Prophets

The smiting of 'Ad, Thamud and Midian belong in the following chronological sequence:

1. The people of 'Ad are said to be the '*khalifa*' ('*viceroys*' *per* Pickthall, '*heirs*', Abdel-Haleem; '*inheritors*', Yusuf Ali or '*successors and replacers*', Muhamed Ahmed and Samira) of the people of Noah, **{7.69}**.

2. The people of Thamud are the '*khalifa*' of the people of ʿAd, **{7.74}**.

3. The people of Midian probably lived much later than those of 'Ad and Thamud, since the name is associated with Moses and the Exodus story.

However, whilst the use of the word '*khalifa*', suggests a sequence of peoples inhabiting the same region, one after another, the different landscapes referred to in the stories - sandy desert for ʿAd, caves for Thamud and a forest for Midian – seem also to have been chosen to give the stories as wide a geographical distribution as possible.

Miscellaneous smitings

Several other instances of divine destruction are mentioned:

- The people of '*al-Rass*' ('*the well*'), **{25.38-39}** and **{50.12}**, are included in a sequence of peoples '*ruined entirely*' although no details are given.

- The people of Tubba were destroyed for denying the messengers that had been sent to them, **{50.14}**, and generally being guilty, **{44.37}**.

- The people of Sheba were punished by God twice. On the first occasion, the fertility of their two gardens was destroyed by the flood of

'Arim (possibly meaning '*of the (collapsed?) dam'*), so that these gardens thereafter bore only '*bitter fruit, tamarisks and a few lote trees*'. Subsequently, they were '*torn to pieces*' as a punishment for the obscure sin of wishing to '*increase the distance of (their) journeys*', **{34.15-20}**.

- The owners of another garden saw it destroyed in **{68.17-33}**.

- An unnamed generation after Noah refuted their warner saying '*Farfetched, farfetched is that which you are promised. There is naught but our life in this world. We die and we live; we will not be resurrected,*' only to find themselves victims of the *ṣayḥatu*, **{23.31-41}**.

- The inhabitants of an unnamed town mentioned in **{36.13-30}** were also destroyed by the *ṣayḥatu*, for having rejecting two of God's messengers, even after these had been reinforced by a third and after one of the town's own inhabitants had come running from its outskirts to add his voice to the strangers' warnings.

- Unnamed cities and peoples were '*subverted*' in **{53.53}** and **{69.9}.**

- Finally, a group plotted against God indoors only to find that the building offered no protection as He came upon them through the foundations and caused the roof to fall down upon them, **{16.25-26}**.

The punishment-narratives

A very large part of the Qurʾan is devoted to telling and retelling all these stories of the fate of past peoples who were destroyed by

God for one reason or another. A detailed analysis of these '*ominous history lessons*' has been undertaken by David Marshall in '*God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*'.[144] Marshall observes that the punishment-narratives began as a relatively minor genre in the early Qurʾan, for which the primarily focus was upon the coming apocalypse. To this theme, the prior punishments inflicted upon peoples within history were merely a prelude, a portent of the judgment that was soon to befall everyone. Probably the earliest two such narratives were **Surahs 105**, the companions of the elephant, and **85**, the '*companions of the pit*', and it has been noted above **⟨9⟩** that in both of these, a political anti-Sasanian polemic can be discerned.

The literary device of linking these stories together in chains seems to have developed thereafter, and to have involved, from the outset, juxtaposing biblical and non-biblical stories, as seen in **Surah 69**:

{69.4} Thamud and ʿAd denied the calamity.

{69.5} As for Thamud, they were destroyed by the overwhelming.

{69.6} And as for ʿAd they were destroyed by a howling, raging wind.

{69.7} He imposed it upon them for seven nights and eight days consecutively so that thou might see the people felled as if they were hollowed palm trunks.

{69.8} So dost thou see any remnant of them?

{69.9} And Pharaoh and those behind him and those subverted brought iniquity.

{69.10} They disobeyed the messenger of their Lord and he seized them with a devastating blow.

{69.11} Truly when the waters overflowed, We carried you upon the ship.

{69.12} That We might make it a reminder for you and that attentive ears might take heed.

A similar tally of the destroyed appears at **{89.6-14}**. It is notable that in neither **Surah 105**, **Surah 85** nor in several other of the early punishment-narratives, is any warner or warning mentioned. In the above passage from **Surah 69** the focus is clearly upon the destruction of the wicked, with only one reference to anonymous '*messengers*' and the names of Moses and Noah conspicuously absent, despite the clear allusion to their stories. As the punishment story genre develops, though, the motif of the spurned prophet emerges gradually, with the inclusion first of the warners' names, and then details of the indignities that they had to suffer from their unreceptive audiences. Later still, the prophet becomes the central figure of his story, and sometimes even its narrator. The account of the Flood in **Surah 71**, for example, is recounted almost entirely in the words of Noah, who recalls how he called down the deluge upon the disbelievers himself. As the stories become longer and embellished with more details, they also become more homogenous with one another within a surah (if at the cost of a given story becoming inconsistent between one surah and another). Their formulaic nature is often stressed through their being concluded with a refrain, such as:

Surah 26 '*Truly in that is a sign, but most of them are not believers,*

And truly thy Lord is indeed the Mighty, the Merciful',

{26.8-9, 67-68, 103-104, 121-122, 139-140, 158-159, 174-175, 190-191};

Surah 37 '*Thus do We recompense the virtuous,*

Truly he was (or '*they were*') *among our believing servants*',

{37.80-81, 105, 111, 121-122, 131-132};

Surah 54 '*How then were My Punishment and My Warnings?*' or '*So taste My Punishments and My Warnings!*',

'*And indeed, We have made the Qur'an easy to remember; so is there any who remembers?*'

{54.16-17, 21-22, 30, 37 & 39-40}; and

'*So We took vengeance upon them*',

{7.136}, **{15.79}**, **{30.47}** and **{43.25 & 55}**.

The same point is made by these stories being presented as items in lists of the peoples destroyed by God for ignoring His prophets, given at **{9.70}**, **{11.89}**, **{14.9}**, **{17.17}**, **{22.42-47}**, **{38.12-14}**, **{40.31}** and **{50.12-13}**. By contrast with the Bible, these stories represent, not an unfolding and varied history, but rather a repeating typology in which little more than the names of the prophets and the nature of the punishment changes:

{29.40} Each We seized for his sin.

Among them are some whom We
sent a torrent of stones,
and among them are some whom
the Cry seized,
and among them are some whom
We caused the earth to engulf,
and among them are some whom
We drowned.

God wronged them not, but they
did themselves wrong.

As for the prophets involved, their profile becomes '*flattened*',[145] not least by their shared use the same stock phrases, such as:

Surahs 7, 11 and **23**	'*O my people! Worship God! You have no god other than Him...*'
	{7.65} and **{11.50}** **(**Hud), **{7.73}** and **{11.61}** (Saleh), **{7.85}** and **{11.84}** (Shuayb), **{7.59}** and **{23.23}** (Noah), and **{23.32}** (an anonymous prophet of the succeeding generation to Noah); and
Surah 26	'*Will you not be reverent? Truly I am a trustworthy messenger unto you, so reverence God and obey me*',
	{26.105-108} (Noah), **{26.124-125}** (Hud), **{26.142-144}** (Saleh), **{26.160-164}** (Lot) and **{26.177-179}** (Shuayb).

Tellingly, the insults suffered by the prophets of old – the mockery and the accusations of lies, sorcery and possession are strikingly similar to those that are suffered by the Qurʾan author himself. All of this lends the Quranic accounts of sacred history a semi-autobiographical quality. It may not be unjust to suggest that Muhammad made himself the '*seal of the prophets*' as he acts as a matrix, impressing his own situation and message into the stories of all the prophets who had gone before him. As the Qurʾan author's message for his own time turns from warning to threatening, there is a brief period wherein the more martial figures of the kings of Israel **⟨24⟩** and Dhu'l Qarnayn **⟨30⟩** are invoked rather than prophets. Then, as the Qurʾan's surahs come to address an actual ongoing conflict, the genre of divine punishments, and indeed all references to Old Testament prophets, fade in prominence. There is little praying in aid of biblical figures in the Qurʾan's final surahs of war and law.

This rise and fall in the punishment narratives fits within a wider Quranic narrative arc. It would have been illogical that localised punishments should have been threatened in the same surahs that were insisting that Last Day was about to dawn for the whole of mankind. The only role of past punishments in this early phase was

to act as a past demonstration of God's power and as a foretaste of what as to come. The change of tactic to threatening future localised punishments may have been deemed necessary because continuous warnings of the imminent Last Day had proved ineffective upon its audience (for which there is plenty of evidence within the Qurʾan itself). Alternatively, it may have been necessitated by the apocalyptic warnings being too successful. A belief that the end of the world is nigh, may cause members of a congregation to examine their consciences, but be less successful in motivating them to put in the effort to form a community that is sustainable in the long term. Later, as the Quranic community became engaged in a battle, the failure of God to support his people by obvious supernatural means would have become more awkward the more that it was promised. The Qurʾan author thus would have been compelled by circumstances to adapt its message from the threat of supernatural punishments to the presentation of its audience as themselves being the agents of punishment.

Although the nature of the threat contained in the Qurʾan evolved through three broad stages: apocalypse, localised smiting and punishment of the wicked at the hands of the righteous, it has been pointed out by a commentator producing Youtube videos under the channel name *Islam Critiqued* that all three paradigms project a consistent underlying message that he terms the Qurʾan's '*theology of replacement*'. Any problematic behaviour identified in the Qurʾan - whether from the jinn or human; communities of the past or the idolaters **⟨52⟩**, Jews **⟨88⟩**, hypocrites **⟨50⟩** or those who '*spread mischief*' **⟨79⟩** of the Qurʾan's time; disobedient wives **⟨79⟩** or rebellious children **⟨29⟩** and ultimately the fate of the whole world - is consistently dealt with by God in the same way. This is that God destroys or expels rather than reforms, those who fail to show due deference and seeks to raise in their places others whom He is hopes to be more obedient. However, as the deviser of the term points out, the recurring nature of the theme ironically only serves to emphasise the approach's perennial ineffectiveness as a solution to life's disappointments.[146]

Luqman

A further non-biblical figure, though not, so far as one can tell, a prophet, is Luqman, quoted approvingly by God in **{31.12-19}** as he gives wise words counselling humility to his son.

28. The Sleepers in the Cave

Surah 18 (*Al-Kahf/The Cave*): 10—12

10. A group of young (Christian) men resolved to escape persecution; they betook themselves to the Cave - in a mountain nearby - where they expressed their invocatory prayer.

'O Allah, our Creator', they prayed, 'extend to us of Your Mercy, what will help us endure our tribulation, and direct us to a course of action determining what You commend for us of future events'.

11. We, in response, struck them deaf and induced them to sleep for a number of years.

12. Then We roused them and provoked them to activity so that We would see which of the two arguing parties would come closer to the exact length of time they remained dormant, as a marvel of Allah correlative with Resurrection.

[*Al-Muntakhab, 1985*]

The story of the sleepers in the cave, told in **{18.9-26}** of the Qurʾan, is a variation on a Christian legend, the *Seven Sleepers of Ephesus*. The earliest known teller of this story was Bishop Stephen of Ephesus (448-451) and the oldest extant written version exists in a homily of Jacob of Serugh (451-502). The story likely developed from the second century *Paralipomena of Jeremiah* (4 Baruch) story of Abimelech the Cushite sleeping through the Babylonian Captivity. In Jacob's version, a group of Christian youths flee the persecution of the Roman Emperor Decius (249-251). They take shelter in a cave, whereupon they fall asleep, under the care of a

'*watcher*', generally assumed to be an angel. Miraculously, when they awaken they discover to their amazement that a century has passed and that whilst they had slumbered, the empire that once had persecuted Christians had adopted Christianity as its official religion. A telling trace of the original story that has carried over to the Qurʾan is a reference to the sleepers having money, with one being told by his colleagues: '*So send one of you with this money of yours into the city and let him observe which of them has the purest food and bring you some provision therefrom. Let him be discrete and make no one aware of you*'. The money and expedition to the town is completely irrelevant to the Qurʾan's retelling of the story, for there is no subsequent reference to it. In the original Seven Sleepers story, though, it is the fact that the youths' coins bore the image of their long-deceased persecutor, that provides the means whereby they discover from the town's merchants how long they had been asleep, and which acts as a symbol of Christianity's triumph over vain paganism and transient wealth.

Another tell-tale clue of the Qurʾan's borrowing from Jacob of Serugh may be evident in its description of the boy's guardian, not as an angel but as a dog, '*stretching forth, his paws at the threshold*' of the cave. This detail is somewhat surprising to find in the Qurʾan, given that Islamic tradition generally regards dogs as unclean animals. Gabriel Said Reynolds explains this innovation to the story by referring to Jacob's metaphorical description of the youths as sheep and Decius as a wolf. Expanding upon this metaphor, he suggests, it makes sense that the sheep should be protected by a sheepdog, which as an outdoor working dog is presumably exempt from the opprobrium due to dogs kept as pets.

The Qurʾan notes that those who came later to build a place of worship over the site of the miracle had disagreed over the number of the sleepers, some saying they were three, others that they were five and yet others seven (the number given by Jacob of Serugh). Having drawn attention to this disagreement, the Qurʾan fails to resolve it, saying only: '*My Lord knows best their number. None know them save a few*'. The number of sleepers, of course, makes absolutely no difference to the meaning of the story, but in suggesting that there is a correct, albeit secret, answer to how many sleepers there were the Qurʾan makes it clear that it is presenting

the story of the sleepers as a historical event and not, as it had always been previously presented, as an uplifting parable.

The solitary sleeper and Ezekiel's vision of a valley of dry bones

A somewhat similar, but unrelated, suspended animation occurs in relation to a single anonymous individual at **{2.259}**. The man had come across a deserted town and, musing upon the ruined buildings had wondered aloud how it could be that God might resurrect life after death. By way of an answer, '*God caused him to die for a hundred years*'. When he revived a century later, he found his donkey and food had also been perfectly preserved.

The account is a variant upon the story of Honi in the Talmud.[147] In this parable Honi had chancing upon a man planting a carob tree and he had enquired why he was taking the effort to do such a thing when the tree would take seventy years to bear fruit. Honi then took a rest and fell asleep awakening seventy years later to find the grandchildren of the man to whom he had been speaking gathering fruit from the tree. That this is the source of the Qurʾan's story is put beyond doubt by the fact that Honi, as with the solitary sleeper of **{2.259}**, had fallen asleep in possession of both food and a donkey. The donkeys, though, are dealt with differently in the two stories. In the Talmud the donkey does not time travel with Honi. Instead, Honi awakens to find himself surrounded by a herd of grazing donkeys, being the descendants of the single donkey with which he had been travelling with at the time when he had fallen asleep. The man resurrected in **{2.259}**, however, encounters a more macabre scene upon awakening as God invites him to '*look at the bones. How We set them up and clothe them with flesh*.' We are not told which bones the man was being invited to look upon. Conceivably, they were the remains of the former inhabitants of the ruined town that the man had gazed upon, but if the man had seen the bones, why should he have focussed his thoughts upon the buildings as a metaphor for death? Whatever the answer to that may be, it would appear that in the Qurʾan the story of Honi has segued into the prophet Ezekiel's vision of a plain strewn with dry bones that, upon his word, reconstitute themselves as skeletons,

regrow sinews and skin and, thus fleshed out return to life (Ezekiel 37). Ezekiel's vision is probably also alluded to eighteen verses earlier at **{2.243}**.

> **{2.243}** Hast thou not seen those who left their homes by the thousands fearing death? Whereupon God said to them, 'Die', then revived them.
>
> Truly God is Possessed of Bounty for mankind, but most of mankind do not give thanks.

There is a Rabbinic tradition that the plain of bones that Ezekiel had seen returned to life had belonged to the tribe of Ephraim (a son of Joseph). These, we are told in the First Book of Chronicles '*were slain by the inhabitants of Gath because they had gone down to take away their livestock*' (*c.f.* Psalm 78). In the *Targum Jonathan* (pre-fourth century) this episode was explained as a group of Ephraimites that had escaped captivity in Egypt thirty years prior to Moses leading the rest of the Israelites to freedom. Because they had left prematurely, without having received God's blessing, when they reached the land of the Philistines they were cut down to a man. A hint of this tradition may, possibly, be preserved in **{2.243}**'s description of the resurrected as '*those who left their homes by the thousands fearing death*.'[148]

29. Al Khidr

Surah 18 (*Al-Kahf/The Cave*): 74…81

74. So they (*the Servant of God and Moses*) journeyed on till when they met a young boy.

He (*the Servant of God*) slew him.

Moses said: `What! hast thou slain an innocent person without his having slain anyone! Surely, thou hast done a hideous thing!'…

[*The Servant of God later explains his actions to Moses, referring to his victim's parents*]

81. 'So we desired that their Lord should give them in exchange one better than he in purity and closer in filial affection.'

[*Maulawi Sher Ali*]

In **{18.65-82}** the Qurʾan tells a story in which a young Moses **⟨23⟩** follows a mysterious unnamed '*servant of God*', traditionally called '*al-Khidr*' and associated with the colour green (and sometimes in later times with St George).

Moses and the fish

The story proper is preceded by an introductory scene, **{18.60-64}**, in which Moses says to his servant: '*I shall continue on till I reach the junction of the two seas even if I journey for a long time*', **{18.60}**. In the following verse Moses and the servant have reached this place only to realise that they have forgotten a fish which has escaped to the sea. In the verse following that, Moses asks his servant for the fish and receives the reply: '*Didst thou see it? When we took refuge at the*

rock, indeed, I forgot the fish, and naught made me neglect to mention it save Satan. And it made its way to the sea in a wondrous manner'. Moses responds to this information by exclaiming: '*That is what we were seeking!*' whereupon they turn back. Moses's servant then disappears from the story, but Moses encounters an individual who is himself introduced by God as the '*a servant from amongst Our servants*', whom Moses decides to follow.

The story of the escaped fish is an adaptation of an episode associated with the legends of Alexander the Great,[149] variations of which also appear in the Babylonian Talmud and a homily attributed to Jacob of Serugh.[150] In each of these versions, Alexander's cook, Andreas, is washing a dried, salted fish in a spring prior to cooking it when the fish returns to life, wriggles from his grasp, leaps into the water and swims away. Andreas jumps into the water after the fish in an attempt to recapture it. Later Andreas comes to realise that in so doing he had inadvertently stumbled into the font of immortality (for Jacob of Serugh, the story is an allegory for baptism). Though Andreas benefits from immortality himself, by the time that he realises what has occurred, he is unable to find the pool again to share his immortality with Alexander. As mentioned in **⟨1⟩** above, the legends of Alexander the Great are also the basis of the Quranic story of Dhu'l Qarnayn (literally '*the two horned one*') that follows later in **Surah 18 ⟨30⟩**. The attribution of the role of Alexander in the fish tale to Moses, may be intended to intimate that Dhu'l Qarnayn was none other than Moses. Alexander was sometimes referred to as '*the two horned one*'in pre-Islamic epics and depicted in ancient art as having two horns, due, it is thought to his conquest of Egypt and identification there as the horned Egyptian god Ammon. Coincidentally Moses is also depicted in art as having two horns, a tradition often attributed to St Jerome's mistranslation of Exodus 34.29 in the Vulgate Bible.

Al-Khidr

Returning to the Qurʾan's al-Khidr narrative, the Servant of God permits Moses to travel with him upon the condition that Moses does not question his actions. However, despite initially agreeing

to this term, Moses cannot resist asking al-Khidr for explanations when the latter scuttles a ship, kills a boy and builds a wall, all for no apparent reason. At the conclusion of their travelling, al-Khidr explains the reasons for his strange behaviour. In all three cases this reason involved his knowledge of some hidden or future circumstance that Moses could not possibly have guessed. Al-Khidr had sunk the boat because, had he not done so, it would have been seized by a king (and, one is left to speculate, used for some unjust purpose), had he not killed the boy, the boy would have grown up to challenge his parents with '*rebellion and disbelief*'; and '*As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city and beneath it was a treasure belonging to them; their father was righteous and their Lord desired that they reach their maturity and extract their treasure as a mercy from thy Lord*', **{18.82}**.

The story of al-Khidr derives from a Jewish legend, recorded in the fifth or sixth century *Pesitka of Rav Kahana*. In this Talmudic commentary, it is the prophet Elijah who occupies the role of the itinerant sage, and a historical rabbi, Joshua ben Levi, who serves as his curious disciple. Unlike Moses in the al-Khidr narrative, Ben Levi keeps to his promise not to question his teacher, as over the course of their travels Elijah petitions the Lord for three things: for the death of a cow that is the only possession of a poor couple who had shown the two travellers kindness, for the repair of a wall of a miser who had refused them hospitality, and for many leaders to arise from a community that failed to show them any kindness, but only one leader from a community that had honoured them like princes. Upon eventually explaining the meaning of his actions Elijah explains that his curse upon the cow was to make it a sacrifice in the place of the woman, who would otherwise have died the following day, his preventing the collapse of the wall was to prevent the miser from discovering treasure that was buried beneath it, and his prayer that many leaders emerge from a community was actually a curse upon them, since too many leaders inevitably results in discord and tragedy.

Roger Paret describes a pre-Quranic Christian adoption of the *Pesitka* story, discovered in a manuscript variation of the *Pratum Spirituale* of John Moschus (d. 619). In this, an angel, teaching a monk about wisdom:

> *'…steals a cup from a pious man, strangles the son of another pious man and rebuilds the wall of which belonged to an impious and inhospitable man.'*
>
> *The angel explains that the cup which belonged to the first pious man had been stolen. The son of the second pious man was to grow up to be an evil sinner; by strangling this son the angel allowed him to die before he fell into sin. Beneath the wall of the impious man lay hidden treasure and by rebuilding the wall he found the man from finding the treasure and using it for evil'.* [151]

Clearly the overall structure of the *Pesitka* and the *Pratum Spirituale*, and in particular the details of the collapsing wall above buried treasure, and the causing of a death, makes the identification of them as the source of the story of al-Khidr certain. The disturbing element of al-Khidr killing a boy to prevent his future rebelliousness disobedience grieving his parents (a change of emphasis, at the very least, from the *Pratum Spirituale*'s angel's child-killing rationale, to protect the boy from his own sin) inserts a Pentateuchal theme. In Deuteronomy 21.18-21 the proper response to a '*stubborn and unruly son who will not listen to his father and mother and will not obey them even if they chastise him*' is that he be brought before the elders of the city and, should they confirm the charge, *'all his fellow citizens should stone him to death*'. As with the Sleepers in the Cave (preceding section) and the story of Dhu'l Qarnayn (following section), the tale of al-Khidr is clearly an allegory, its purpose being to encourage steadfast faith and obedience, even where this leads to consequences that appear, to human perception, to lead to perverse outcomes. However, the unglossed approval of killing a child in order to prevent him challenging his parents with '*rebellion and disbelief*', not only justifies the paradoxical punishment of an offence before it has been committed, but also endorses the taking of a life in circumstances that today would lead to it being referred to as an 'honour killing'.

30. Dhu'l Qarnayn

Surah 18 (*Al-Kahf/The Cave*): 94-98

94. 'Dhu'l Qarnayn,' they said, 'Gog and Magog are ravaging this land. May we pay you a tribute so that you erect a barrier between us and them?'

95. He answered: 'That with which my Lord has established me is better (than any tribute). Hence, do but help me with strength, and I shall erect a rampart between you and them!

96. Bring me blocks of iron!' At length, when he had filled up the gap between the two mountainsides, he said 'Ply your bellows!' Then, when he made (the iron glow like) fire, he said: 'Bring me molten copper which I will pour over it.'

97. And thus their enemies were unable to scale (the rampart), nor could they dig their way through it.

[*Sayyid Qutb, 1965 (Egyptian Islamist, leading figure in the Muslim Brotherhood, executed 1966)*]

{18.83-98} tells the story of a traveller whom the Qur'an calls Dhu'l Qarnayn, literally '*the two-horned one*'. In **{18.86}** Dhu'l Qarnayn visits '*the place of the setting sun*' where he found that the sun sets into a '*muddy spring*' (*per* Pickthall; '*dark waters*', Shabbir Ahmed, or a '*black sea*', Shakir.) Next, he travels to the place of the rising sun where he finds '*a people for whom (God) had not made any shelter from it*', **{18.90}**. Having visited both ends of the earth, he finally goes to a third place where he builds a barrier of iron and copper

across a valley to protect a people from being overrun by Yajuj and Majuj, commonly identified as the biblical Gog and Magog, **{18.92-97}**. The story ends with Dhu'l Qarnayn delivering a prophecy that on the Last Day, the Dhu'l Qarnayn's wall would be destroyed and Gog and Magog unleashed upon the world:

> **{18.98}** (Dhu'l Qarnayn) said: 'This is a mercy from my Lord. And when the Promise of my Lord comes, He will crumble it (the barrier he had built) to dust.
>
> And the Promise of my Lord is true.
>
> **{18.99}** And We shall leave them, on that Day, to surge against one another like waves. And the trumpet shall be blown, and We shall gather them together.
>
> **{18.100}** And We shall present Hell, on that Day, as an array before the disbelievers…

The names Gog and Magog had a long history prior to the Qurʾan. They are first mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel (chapters 38 and 39) when Ezekiel foretells that shortly before the End of Days, Israel will face an invasion by the people of Magog, led by King Gog. In later Jewish apocalyptic literature this feared invasion force became thought of as two separate peoples, the people of Gog and the people of Magog, who also appear as two peoples in the Book of Revelation (20.8). These tribes are first associated with the legends of Alexander the Great by the first century Jewish-Roman historian Josephus.[152] Their apocalyptic presentation in the Qurʾan has led to Gog and Magog being perceived not as tribes of barbarians but as wild, supernatural creatures. In later Islamic writings this depiction has continued to be embellished. The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* summarises their description in post-Quranic Arab literature thus:

> *They are of small stature attaining to only one half the size of a man. Very ferocious, they have claws instead of nails, teeth like a lion, jaws like a camel and hair which completely hides their bodies. Their ears, hairy on one side, are so large that they use one for a bed and the other for a covering*.

As mentioned in **⟨1⟩** above, and subsequently, the adventures of Dhu'l Qarnayn that are described in the Qurʾan replicate those contained in the first and second parts of a three-part legendary depiction of Alexander the Great, written in Syriac, called *The Victory of Alexander.* Alexander romances were a popular genre in the ancient near east, but the *Victory* shows very specific points of contact with the Qurʾan.[153] Part three, describes Alexander going to war with a Persian king, Tubarlaq, a conflict that ends with a treaty favourable to Alexander, after which Alexander travels to Jerusalem where he is enthroned as a conquering hero. Part two has him travelling to the ends of the earth and building a wall to keep out Gog and Magog, depicted as central Asian tribes. It is generally agreed that the *Victory* was composed as propaganda literature to celebrate the triumph of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius over Kusrow II, and his restoration of the cross relic to Jerusalem. This would initiate a period of righteous rule prior to the Last Day. Since the treaty that brought the last Byzantine-Sasanian war to an end was signed in 628, the *Victory of Alexander* and therefore **Surah 18**, must have been composed after this date.

The description of the journey of Dhu'l Qarnayn to the places of the sunrise and sunset one must assume, was intended to be understood to be taken literally - the idea of the sun setting in a specific place is also mentioned at **{36.38}**. For the possible association of Dh'ul Qarnayn with Moses see **⟨29⟩** above.

IV

The Circumstances of the Qurʾan's Composition; The 'Life of Muhammad'

31. Muhammad as '*a beautiful example*'

Surah 33 (*Al-Ahzab/The Parties*): 21

In truth, in (the sacred person of) Allah's Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him) there is for you a most perfect and beautiful model (of life) for every such person that expects and aspires to (meeting) Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah abundantly.

[*Tahrir Ul-Qadri, 2012 (former Pakistani politician)*]

In the above verse, God extols the person who is delivering His words as a '*beautiful example*' for believers to emulate. Similarly, in **{68.4}** the messenger is described as being '*of exalted character*'. This supposedly involuntary self-aggrandisement reaches its zenith in **Surah 33**. Not only is God's messenger called upon to declare himself a perfect model of conduct (see **{33.21}** above) but God describes him using the same language that He had elsewhere used to describe Himself. Whereas in **{50.16}** God declares that He is closer to those who believe in Him than their own jugular veins **⟨97⟩**, in **{33.6}** the Prophet is said to be '*closer to the believers than they are to themselves*'. Later in the surah, **{33.46}** describes the prophet as a '*luminous lamp*', the same metaphor that in **Surah 24**, God had adopted for Himself **⟨11⟩**. The messenger's exceptionality is also evident in verses in which God specifically addresses his domestic affairs, including the former's exemption from the marriage laws that are prescribed for '*the rest of the believers*' and special rules for his wives and visitors to his home **⟨79⟩**. **{24.63}** instructs the early believers: *'Do not deem the Messenger's calling among you to be like your calling to one another …'* So exalted is he, that we are told:

{33.56} Truly God and His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet.

O you who believe, invoke blessings upon him and greetings of peace **⟨6⟩**.

inspiring the pious ritual amongst believers of following any mention of the prophet Muhammad, with a formulaic eulogy such as '*ṣallā llāhu ʿalayhī wa-sallama*' ('*may Allah grant peace and blessings upon him*').

Determining the facts of the life of Muhammad in order to use him as a moral exemplar is problematic though. The extant biographies of Muhammad are historically unreliable at best **⟨5⟩**. In large part, it will be seen that they are demonstrably inaccurate. Moreover, even where an account of a particular act or saying of Muhammad may be judged to be reliable, the sira and hadith literature hardly ever presents it with the detail or in the context necessary to fully reconstruct the reasons for the speech or action that they describe.

There is a problem with treating Muhammad as a '*beautiful example*' to emulate beyond mere weak sources of information. Both the biographies of Muhammad and the collections of *aḥādīth* describe Muhammad instructing his followers to commit acts that are utterly reprehensible by modern ethical standards. These acts include robbery **⟨39⟩**, **⟨41⟩**, unprovoked attacks upon people that had done him no harm and posed him no threat **⟨47⟩**, and the enslavement, torture, rape and execution, of captives **⟨45⟩**, **⟨49⟩**, **⟨59⟩**, **⟨72⟩**. Muhammad is recorded as having kept slaves **⟨58⟩** including concubines **⟨59⟩**, to have taken for himself three widows of men whom he had shortly beforehand had killed **⟨D⟩**, to have married his daughter in law **⟨D⟩** and possibly most notoriously of all to have married the daughter of his friend, when she was a young child **⟨60⟩**. It is nowadays commonplace for Muslims faced with such unpalatable accounts of their principal prophet to dispute their historical accuracy, and virtually all secular scholars would agree that the traditional narrative of Muhammad's life should indeed be treated as being of dubious reliability. However, there is no reason, based either upon historiographic criteria nor upon the wording of the Qurʾan, to reject as inaccurate only those

stories of Muhammad that describe actions that contravene contemporary moral standards, whilst admitting all those that present him in a virtuous light, which it must be said are much fewer in number and tend to have appeared much later in the historical record. Although the historical reliability of Muhammad's recorded life may certainly be challenged, so doing leaves the pious Qurʾan reader with two problems. Without any reliable biography of Muhammad, there is no narrative context in which many verses of the Qurʾan can be understood, and the Qurʾan's instruction to treat Muhammad as a guiding light becomes one with which it is impossible to comply.

C. i. The Traditional Life of Muhammad

Year (AD)	Event	See below
570	Birth of Muhammad	
595	Muhammad's marriage to Khadija	
610	Muhammad announces the first revelation of the Qurʾan ⟨32⟩	
	Muhammad preaches in Mecca	⟨33⟩ *'To you your religion and to me mine'*
		⟨34⟩ *The 'satanic verses'*
619	Death of Khadija	
		⟨35⟩ *The Night Journey*
		⟨36⟩ *Splitting the moon*
622	The Hijra (migration to Yathrib) ⟨38⟩	⟨37⟩ *The first permission to fight*
623	The raid on Naklah ⟨39⟩	
		⟨40⟩ *Changing the Qibla*
624	The Battle of Badr ⟨41⟩ First raids on Bedouin tribes	
	The Banu Qaynuqa are expelled from Medina ⟨43⟩	
625	The Battle of Uhud ⟨42⟩	
	The Banu Nadir are expelled from Medina ⟨42⟩	

627 The Battle of the Trench ⟨**44**⟩

The annihilation of
the Banu Qurayza ⟨**45**⟩

628 The Treaty of Hudaybiyyah ⟨**46**⟩

629 The conquest of Kaybar ⟨**47**⟩

630 The conquest of Mecca ⟨**48**⟩

The Battles of Hunayn and Autas ⟨**49**⟩

631 The conquest of Tabouk ⟨**50**⟩

Raids into Yemen

Expulsion of idolaters from the Masjid al-Haram, imposition of the jizya upon the People of the Book.

⟨**51**⟩ ***Jizya***

⟨**52**⟩ ***'The Sword Verse'***

The Farewell Pilgrimage and sermon

632 The Death of Muhammad

Due to the nature of the sources, it is not possible to construct a biography of Muhammad in which the details of every event will be agreed by every Muslim. However, it is believed that what is offered in this section as the traditional narrative is in full accord with the traditional, orthodox Muslim understanding of the history of Muhammad, using the earliest sources that we have available to us. Unless indicated otherwise, quotations from Ibn Ishaq's biography of the Muhammad are taken from Alfred Guillaume's reconstruction of it in *The Life of Muhammad, A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*.

C. ii. Chronology of Muhammad according to earliest historical sources

Year (AD)	Event	See above/below
602-617	Kingdom of Hira under Iyas ibn Qabisa al-Ta'i	⟨5⟩
621-622	Establishment of Kingdom of Tayyaye under Muhammad, (*per* Jacob of Edessa's chronological charts, the 705 Chronicle)	⟨5⟩
628	Khusrow deposed,	⟨37⟩
	Jews expelled from Edessa meet Muhammad. (*per Armenian Chronicle of Pseudo-Sebeos*)	
628-629	Muhammad succeeded as King of Tayyaye by Abu Bakr, (*per* Jacob of Edessa's chronological charts, the 705 Chronicle)	⟨5⟩, ⟨38⟩
	Arab invasion of Persia begins under Abu Bakr (*per Kitāb al-futūh,* Sayf bin Umar as analysed by P. Pourshariati)	⟨5⟩, ⟨38⟩

630-637	Muhammad based in Yathrib	**⟨2⟩**
630-1	Umar succeeds Abu Bakr.	
634	Tayyaye of Muhammad raid Gaza (*per* Chronicle of Thomas the Presbyter)	**⟨50⟩**
637	Battle near Galilee involving Muhammad, (*per* BL Gospel fragment)	**⟨50⟩**
	Death of Muhammad	**⟨52⟩**
637-8	Arab Conquest of Jerusalem	

32. The First Revelation

Surah 96 (*Al-ʿAlaq/The Blood Clot*): 1-5

1. **Read in the name of thy Lord who created,**
2. **Who created man of blood coagulated,**
3. **Read! Thy Lord is most beneficent,**
4. **Who taught by the pen,**
5. **Taught that which they knew not unto men.**

[*Alfred Guillaume, from The Life of Muhammad, A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*.]

The traditional account of the initial revelation coming down upon Muhammad is given, with some differences, by both of Muhammad's first biographers Maʿmar ibn Rashid and Ibn Ishaq. The fuller of these, that of Ibn Ishaq as it appears in the Sira of ibn Hashim, reads as follows:

> *Every year during (Ramadan) the apostle would pray in seclusion and give food to the poor that came to him. And when he completed the month and returned from his seclusion, first of all before entering his house he would go to the Kaaba and walk around it seven times or as often as it pleased God; then he would go back to his house, until in the year when God sent him concerning what he willed of His grace. The apostle sent forth to Hira (a mountain close to Mecca) as was his wont and his family with him.*
>
> *When it was the night on which God honoured him with His mission, and showed mercy on his servants thereby, Gabriel brought him the command of God.*

> *'He came to me', said the apostle of God, 'while I was asleep with a coverlet of brocade whereon was some writing. He said: 'Read'. I said: 'What shall I read?' He pressed me with it so tightly that I thought it was death. Then he let me go and said 'Read'. I said: 'What shall I read?' He pressed me with it again, so I thought it was death. Then he let me go and said 'Read'. I said: 'What shall I read?' He pressed me with it the third time so that I thought it was death and said 'Read'. I said: 'What then shall I read?' and this I said only to deliver myself from him, lest he should do the same to me again. He said:*
>
> > *'Read in the name of thy Lord who created…'*
> > [**{96.1-5}**, see above].
>
> *So I read it, and he departed from me. And I awoke from my sleep, and it was as though these words were written on my heart.'*

At this point in the narrative, a later version of this story recorded by al-Tabari inserts (still in Muhammad's reported speech):

> *Now none of God's creatures was more hateful to me than an ecstatic poet or a man possessed: I could not even look at them. I thought: 'Woe is me, poet or possessed – never shall a Quraysh say this of me! I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and find rest. So I went forth to do so.*

Returning to Ibn Hisham's account:

> *When I was midway up the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying: 'O Muhammad! Thou art the apostle of God and I am Gabriel.'*
>
> *I raised my head towards heaven to see (who was speaking) and lo, Gabriel in the form of a man with feet astride the horizon saying: 'O Muhammad! Thou art the apostle of God and I am Gabriel.' I stood gazing at him moving neither forward nor backward. Then I began to turn my face away from him but towards whatever region of the sky I looked, I saw him as before.'* [154]

This description of Muhammad's first encounter with Gabriel seems to combine two quite distinct narratives. One account is of a mysterious person, possibly having been conjured from a dream by Muhammad having slept under a blanket '*whereon was some writing*', squeezing Muhammad and requiring him to '*Read*'. The impossible command to read ('*Iqraʾ*!', from the same q-r-ʾ root as '*qurʾan*') and the prophet's response ('*Mā aqraʾ, 'What shall I read?*') have been adapted from Isaiah chapter 29:

> 11. *For you the revelation of all this has become like the words of a sealed scroll. When it is handed to one who can read with the request 'Read it!'* [in Hebrew '*qera!*'], *he replies: 'I cannot. It is sealed'.*
>
> 12. *When it is handed to one who cannot read with the request 'Read it!', he replies: 'I cannot read',*

and chapter 40:

> 6. *A voice says: 'Cry out!'*
> *I answer: 'What shall I cry out?'* [*'māh ʾeqra'*].[155]

Isaiah's image of an unreadable scroll also occurs in chapter 5 of the Book of Revelation in which St John is granted a vision of heaven:

> 1. *In the right hand of the One who sat on the throne I saw a scroll. It had writing on both sides and was sealed with seven seals.*
>
> 2. *Then I saw a mighty angel who proclaimed in a loud voice 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?'*
>
> 3. *But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could be found to open the scroll or examine its contents.*

Sean W Anthony devotes the final chapter of *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith, The Making of the Prophet of Islam*, to considering the traditional story of Muhammad's encounter with Gabriel. He observes that by the time of Islam, the motif of a supernatural

visitor appearing to a pious individual as they slept and giving them an impossible instruction to read, had already become established as a recurring feature in the accounts of Christian saints. He cites as the most prominent example an early second century text called *The Shepherd of Hermas*, that had at one time been considered for inclusion in the New Testament. The main focus of Anthony's chapter, though, is upon the particularly strong similarity between the story of Muhammad's first revelation and an account written three thousand miles from Arabia by the Venerable Bede in his *History of the English Church and People* (c.731).[156] the account in question concerns a Northumbrian monk and composer of hymns, Cædmon, Although Cædmon is told to '*sing*' rather than to '*read*', the relevant passages of Bede and Ibn Ishaq match one another at points almost sentence for sentence. After the encounter, each story then leads onto a subsequent scene involving an authoritative woman and a Christian verification. Ibn Ishaq has Muhammad confide his experience in his wife Khadija. She then takes him to her cousin, Waraqah bin Nauful '*who had become a Christian and read from the Torah and the Gospel*' and after Muhammad had recounted what had occurred Waraqah confirmed the vision's authenticity.[157] In Bede's narrative, Cædmon tells his tale to Abbess Hilda of Whitby who summonsed '*many learned men*', and again, after the story had been told it was confirmed as correct. Anthony notes that similar scenes are unknown from other known examples of the '*Iqra*' genre. The prospect of a story being transmitted by travellers between Arabia and northern Britain in the eighth century is not so unlikely as one might suppose. It will be recalled that we owe the only account of the first Arab prayer hall built on Temple Mount to the pilgrim Arculf who described it to the Abbott of Iona in the 670s **⟨2⟩**. However, it is impossible that Bede could have adapted his Cædmon story from Ibn Ishaq's life of Muhammad, and Anthony concludes that it is also very unlikely that Ibn Ishaq borrowed the story from Bede, accepting his explanation that he had learned it via al-Zuhri from the 'official story-teller' of Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr during the Zubayrid rebellion (683-692). The most plausible scenario is that Bede and Ibn Ishaq each relied upon a common source that has since been lost. In this case, the precedent of *The Shepherd of Hermas* and the prominence given in Ibn Ishaq's version to a woman and a Christian as authenticators of

Muhammad's revelations, suggests that this common source was likely a Christian tale.

The Qurʾan itself makes no reference of the apparition of the angel Gabriel to Muhammad. As previously referred to, it does attribute to Gabriel sending revelations upon the heart of the Qurʾan announcer. It also describes two encounters with an unnamed mystical figure seen first '*on the horizon*', and later by a lote tree, **{53.4-16}** and **{81.22-24}** (see **⟨6⟩** above). But the account of the bearhugging stranger in the first part of Ibn Ishaq's story seems to be entirely separate to that of the gigantic Gabriel with feet astride the horizon who appears at its conclusion. Probably Ibn Ishaq had heard the former account indirectly from Abdullah ibn Zubayr's court story-teller and had sought to combine it with the text of the Qurʾan. If so, the end result is disjointed. Two centuries later, al-Tabari tried to connect the two parts of the story more securely by inserting a passage stating that the effect of Gabriel's first apparition had been so discombobulating upon Muhammad that he had thought himself possessed and had climbed up the mountain intending to hurl himself to his death, and that it was this unexpected reaction that forced Gabriel to swiftly materialise in his giant form and clarify that he was from God.

{96.1-5} produced above, is usually cited in Islamic tradition as being the first verses of the Qurʾan to have been announced, no doubt because it commences with the word '*iqrā*' ('*Read*') recalling Ibn Ishaq's story of the first revelation. In fact, the instruction from the celestial messenger to the human one disqualifies these verses from being the first verses of the Qurʾan since, as seen in **⟨4⟩** above, as many as two dozen surahs of the Qurʾan may have been composed prior to any claim that they be received as the words of God Himself. **Surah 96**'s use of writing imagery ('*Read…*', '*the Pen*') also suggest that it was composed sometime after the initial urgent warnings of an imminent apocalypse **⟨9⟩**, in which any Quranic self-referentiality is in terms of verbal warnings. **{96.1-5}** may be an adaptation of Psalm 49.1-5:

> *Hear this all you peoples,*
> *harken all who dwell in the world,*
> *Of lowly birth or high degree,*
> *rich and poor alike.*

My mouth shall speak wisdom,
prudence shall be the utterance of my heart.
My ear is intent upon a proverb,
I will set forth my riddle to the music of the harp.

There is no single verse of the Qurʾan that can be singled out as likely to have been the first to have been announced, but it has been suggested above that:

> **Surahs 106**, **113**, **114** read as being the most 'pagan' surahs of the Qurʾan, and therefore likely belonging to its earliest phase **⟨9⟩**, and
>
> **Surahs 73** and **74** seem composed to mark the start of the announcer's career as a prophet **⟨6⟩**.

The latter two surahs are each named after their opening verse that describe the Qurʾan announcer as being as covered by or clad in some unspecified material:

> **{73.1}**: '*O thou, enwrapped*!',
>
> **{74.1}**: '*O thou who art covered!*'

The literal interpretation of these forms of address was doubtless the inspiration behind the detail of the mysterious inscribed blanket under which Muhammad huddled to pray in Ibn Ishaq's account. Daniel Beck in the final chapter of *Evolution of the Early Qurʾan, From Anonymous Apocalypse to Charismatic Prophet, A Servant Wrapped in Glory,* offers a more plausible, symbolic reading. It was, he proposes, a reference not to any physical robe but to an intangible 'robe of glory' that is a metaphor for their exceptional righteousness. Such a mantle makes several appearances throughout the Hebrew bible, including Job 29.14 ('*I put on righteousness and it clothed me*'), Psalm, 132 ('*Let your priests be clothed with righteousness*'), Zechariah 3.4 ('*I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you in festal robes*') and Isaiah 61.10:

He has clothed me in garments of salvation,
He has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness.
As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
And as a bride adorns herself with jewels.

Isaiah's relating of the robe of glory to a wedding scene was then taken up by Jesus, who concludes the parable of the wedding banquet **⟨5⟩** with an invited guest being bound and cast out into the night for having attended without having attired in a wedding garment (Matthew 22.11-14; *c.f.* 6.28-29). Beck's interpretation **{73.1}** and **{74.1}** is consistent with the 'raiment of righteousness' that the Qurʾan tells us it is better for the Children of Adam to don than clothing to cover their nakedness in **{7.26}**. It also offers a meaningful reading of **{74.4}** in which the Qurʾan announcer is instructed: '*Thy garments purify!*', which it is absurd to interpret as a divine reminder that the Qurʾan announcer regularly launder his physical clothes.

33. *'To you your religion, and to me mine'*

Surah 109 (*Al-Kāfir/ the Disbelievers*)

1. Say 'O disbelievers!

2. I worship not that which ye worship.

3. Nor worship ye that which I worship.

4. And I shall not worship that which ye worship.

5. Nor will ye worship that which I worship.

6. Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.'

[*Pickthall*]

As noted in the previous section, in the traditional Islamic narrative the first person whom Muhammad informed of his first encounter with Gabriel was his wife, Khadija, and the second was her cousin, Waraqah bin Nauful **⟨32⟩**. The third person to be told was Muhammad's cousin, Ali bin Abu Talib, who believed, followed by Muhammad's adopted son, Zayd bin Harith, and his close friend, Abu Bakr. About forty other Meccans are said to have become followers of Muhammad during his continued residence in Mecca, although Muhammad did not preach his revelation publicly for the first three years following his initial encounter with Gabriel.

When Muhammad did start to preach his revelations, Ibn Ishaq describes these receiving a hostile response, although not so hostile towards Muhammad himself as is often imagined:

> *The Quraysh … stirred up foolish men who called him a liar, insulted him and accused him of being a poet, a sorcerer, a diviner and of being possessed. However, the apostle continued to proclaim what God had ordered him to proclaim, concealing nothing and exciting their dislike by condemning their religion, forsaking their idols and leaving them to their unbelief…*

> *Yahya ibn Urwa ibn al-Zubayr on the authority of his father* [for Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, see **⟨5⟩** above] *from Abdallah al-As told me that the latter was asked what was the worst way in which the Quraysh showed their enmity to the apostle.*
>
> *He replied: 'I was with them (the Quraysh) one day when the notables had gathered … and the apostle was mentioned. They said that they had never known anything like the trouble they had endured from this fellow: he had declared their mode of life foolish, insulted their forefathers, reviled their religion, divided the community and cursed their gods. What they had borne was past all bearing.' While they were discussing him, the apostle came towards them and kissed the black stone. Then he passed them as he walked around the temple. As he passed, they said some injurious things about him. This I could see from his expression. He went on and as he passed them the second time they attacked him similarly. This I could see from his expression. Then he passed the third time and they did the same. He stopped and said: 'Will you listen to me O Quraysh? By Him who holds my life in His hand, I bring you slaughter.' This word so struck the people that not one of them but stood silent and still. Even one who had hitherto been most violent spoke to him in the kindliest way possible….*
>
> *(The next day when Muhammad attended the Kaaba) 'they leapt on him as one man and encircled him saying: 'Are you the one who said that?' And I saw one of them seize his robe. Then Abu Bakr interposed himself, weeping and saying: 'Would you kill a man for saying 'Allah is my Lord'?' Then they left him. That is the worst that I ever saw the Quraysh do to him.'* [158]

The Qurʾan is frequently defensive of accusations that it is invented by its human announcer or derived from a nefarious source. In **{44.14}** it is said that the Qurʾan's announcer was called '*a well-tutored madman*' (*per* Maududi), in **{9.61}** his audience are said to have '*tormented*' him by calling him '*an ear*'. As Muhammad's influence grew, the Quraysh are said to have begun to go beyond argumentation and to have taken punitive action against Muhammad's followers in their midst.

> *Then the Quraysh showed their enmity to all those who followed the apostle. Every clan which contained Muslims attacked them, imprisoning them, beating them allowing them no food or drink and exposing them to the burning heat of Mecca so as to seduce them from their religion.*[159]

Muhammad himself enjoyed the protection of his clan but those of his followers who did not enjoy such protection were sent to Abyssinia for their safety. At Mecca, the other clans declared a boycott of his tribe and for a time Muhammad was forced to leave the town and to live in a ravine nearby.

A partial accommodation between Muhammad and his opponents occurred when Abu Jahl, one of the foremost of Muhammad's opponents in Mecca met with apostle and said to him:

> *'By God, Muhammad, you will either stop cursing our gods or we will curse the God you serve.'*

It is in response to this that Ibn Ishaq states that God revealed*:*

{6.108} Curse not those to whom they pray other than God, lest they curse God wrongfully through lack of knowledge.

Thus have We made the deeds of every community seem fair unto them. Then unto their Lord shall be their return, and He will inform them of that which they used to do.[160]

A second attempt by the pagan Meccans to reduce the discord was, however, unsuccessful, and provides the setting for the announcement of **Surah 109** (produced in its entirely above):

> *There met the apostle, as he was going around the Kaaba, so I have been told, Al-Aswad bin al-Muttalib …, al-Walid al-Mughira, Umayya bin Khalaf and al-As bin Wa'el, men of reputation amongst their people. They said: 'Muhammad, come let us worship what you worship and you worship what*

> *we worship. You and we will combine in the matter. If what you worship is better than what we worship, we will take share of it, and if what we worship is better than what you worship you can take a share of that'.*
>
> *So God revealed, concerning them:*
>
> [**{109.1-6}**, which Ibn Ishaq paraphrases as]
>
> > *'Say, O believers, 'If you will only worship God on condition that I worship what you worship, I have no need of you at all. You can have your religion, all of it, and I have mine.'* [161]

This surah may have been the first indication contained within the Qurʾan that its author considered himself to be establishing a distinct religious tradition. The surah probably also represents an early high point of tolerance in the Qurʾan, by presenting the Quranic *dīn* as belonging to the same genus of belief systems as the *dīn* of unbelievers, and, on one view, implicitly recognising the rights of others to live by an alternative *dīn*. The formula '*Unto me my … unto you your…*' is reprised in the later:

> **{10.41}** And if they deny thee say:
> 'Unto me my deeds and unto you
> your deeds.
>
> You are quit of that which I do, and
> I am quit of that which you do.'

Here, however, the *laissez faire* approach to the unbelief of others, is firmly linked with a statement of complete renunciation. They remain words of coexistence, but hardly of ecumenism, and lay the foundations for the Quranic doctrine of separatism, addressed in **⟨91⟩** below.

34. The 'Satanic Verses'

Surah 53 (*Al-Najm/The Star*): 19-23

19. Have you considered al-Lat and al-Uzza,

20. And Manat, the third, the other?

21. Unto you males and unto Him females?

22. This, then, is an unfair division.

23. They are naught but names that you have named – you and your fathers – for which God has sent down no authority. They follow naught but conjecture and that which their souls desire, though guidance has surely come to them from their Lord.

The Mushrikun

Based upon the traditional narrative of Ibn Ishaq the word '*mushrikūn*', has tended to be translated as '*idolaters*' (*per* Pickthall, Arberry, *The Study Quran*) or '*polytheists*' (Sahih International, Wahiduddin Khan) but by scholars of Islam it is increasing rendered with its literal meaning of '*associators*' The term is used pejoratively to refer to hostile members of the Qurʾan's audience. Some of these, it would appear, did indeed believe in multiple gods since they are, on occasion, depicted in the Qurʾan as referring to '*our gods*', **{25.43}**, **{37.36}** and **{43.58}**. However, even these literal polytheists would not have been polytheists, in the way that that term is normally understood, since to associate something with God, by definition, necessitates a belief in God (with a capital G). In fact, the Qurʾan contains several references to the fact that the mushrikun recognised a single supreme divinity and that they called Him Allah. In **{29.61}** the Qurʾan says:

> Wert thou to ask them:
> 'Who created the heavens and
> earth, and made the sun and moon
> subservient?' they would surely
> say: 'Allah'.

Similar statements appear in **{31.25}**, **{39.38}** and **{43.9}**, and in **{43.87}** which replicates the wording of the first part of **{29.61}** save for substituting '*you*' in place of '*the heavens and the earth*'. **{23.84}** invites its audience to ask their doubters '*Whose is the earth?*' to which it is said that they will receive the response '*Allah's*', **{23.89}**.

Conversely, whilst the Meccan pagans believed in God, it would also appear that the Qurʾan author believed in the existence of some of the entities worshipped by the mushrikun. G R Hawting noted in *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*[162] that the Qurʾan author tends to employ two terms, '*ṣanam*' and '*wathan*', for idols when referred to in a historic context such as the inanimate objects destroyed by Abraham. Those who worship such objects are mocked for believing that they hold any power at all. Two different words are used for the false gods of Muhammad's own time, both likely of Ethiopic origin: '*ṭāghūt*', and, on just one occasion, **{4.51}**, '*jibt*'. Believers are warned to shun the '*ṭāghūta*', **{16.36}**, **{39.17}**, as though they have a real existence to be shunned, and they are juxtaposed with al-Shaytan and even with Allah Himself.

> **{4.76}** Those who believe fight in the way
> of God, and those who disbelieve
> fight in the way of false deities
> ['*ṭāghūti*']. Fight, therefore, against
> the allies of Satan. Surely the
> scheme of Satan is ever feeble.

{25.3} tells us that the '*mushrikun*' have '*taken gods… who are themselves created*'. **{42.6}** refers to God as the '*Keeper*' of the beings revered apart from him; and **{21.98-100}** even states that the false gods are destined to suffer alongside their devotees in the Hellfire:

{21.98} Surely you and that which you worship apart from God shall be fuel for Hell. Unto it you shall come.

{21.99} Had these been gods, they would not have come unto it. But each shall abide therein.

{21.100} Theirs shall be groaning therein and therein they shall hear not.

It would seem then that the '*ṭāghūt*' and '*jibt*' are false deities but nevertheless real supernatural beings, as real as al-Shaytan. Nine 'gods' are mentioned in the Qurʾan by name: the three goddesses al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat, **{53.19-20}** (produced above); the five gods worshipped by the people of Noah, Wadd, Suwa', Yaguth, Ya'uq and Nasr **⟨21⟩** above) and Ba'al, a Mesopotamian god referred to dozens of times in the Bible, **{37.125}**. A tenth specified idol is found in the Qurʾan's account of the Israelites idolatry with the golden calf **⟨23⟩**.

The Qurʾan author's belief that 'false gods' exist below God is not in itself idolatrous. In fact, it accords with several passages of the Torah, such as Deuteronomy 32.16-17 which describes idolised gods as real entities, '*newcomers just arrived*' ('*al-ǧibt*' in the Tawahedo bible translation):

> *(The Israelites who scorned God) provoked Him with strange gods and abominable idols,*
>
> *They offered sacrifice to demons who are not God* [*Elōhīm*] *to gods* [*elōhīm*] *whom they had not known before,*
>
> *To newcomers just arrived,*
> *of whom their fathers had never stood in awe.*

The discord between the Qurʾan author and the mushrikun then, lies not in the mere belief in such entities, but in the sin of supposing that supernatural beings, can be '*sharīk*' ('*associates*') of God, **{12.106}**, the offspring of God **⟨11⟩**, or equals or possibly rivals to God **{2.165}**, **{14.30}**, **{39.8}**, **{41.9}**; or of taking them as

protectors other than God, **{7.3 & 30}**, **{29.41}**, **{39.3}**, **{42.6}**, and **{45.10}**, making offerings to them **{6.136}**, **{16.56}**, worshipping them, **{11.109}** or **{39.64}**, or seeking their intercession with God (for which see **⟨97⟩**).

The satanic verses episode

Several verses of the Qurʾan refer to its announcer becoming disconsolate over his lack of converts and the hostility of sceptics towards his message:

> **{3.176}**: '*(L)et not those who hasten unto disbelief grieve thee. Truly they will not harm God in the least…*',
>
> **{6.33-35}**: '*We know well that what they say grieves thee… And if their turning away is distressing to thee*',
>
> **{18.6}**: '*Yet perhaps thou wouldst destroy thyself with grief* ['*fret thyself to death*' *per* Yusuf Ali] *for their sake should they believe not in this account*'.

(*c.f.* **{10.65}**, **{16.127}**, **{26.3}**, **{27.70}**, **{31.23}**, **{35.8}**, and **{36.76}** and, with particular reference to the Qurʾan's rejection by Jews and Christians, **{5.41 & 68}**). In response to this distress, God reassures the Qurʾan announcer several times that he has not been sent to be his audience's *'keeper*' or '*guardian*', **{4.80}**, **{6.66, 104 & 107}**, **{10.108}**, **{11.86}**, **{17.54}**, **{39.41}** and **{42.6 & 48}**. For him to seek to be responsible for the fate of others would be as though he sought to be '*… a tunnel into the earth or a ladder unto the sky*', **{6.35}**. It is within this context of frustration on the part of the Qurʾan's author that al-Tabari's history records an incident concerning the announcement of **Surah 53** which has become particularly notorious. **{53.21-23}**, in their canonical form, condemn the worship of three named pagan gods: al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat. However, al-Tabari reports (attributing his account to Ibn Ishaq) that when these verses had originally been announced, they had in

fact not condemned but endorsed the worship of these gods as a means of prayer:

> *Now the apostle was anxious for the welfare of his people wishing to attract them as far as he could …*
>
> *When the apostle saw that his people turned their backs on him and he was pained by their estrangement from what he brought them from God, he longed that there should come to him from God a message that would reconcile his people to him. Because of his love for his people and his anxiety over them, it would delight him if the obstacle that made his task so difficult could be removed. So that he meditated on the subject and longed for it and it was dear to him.*
>
> *Then God sent down,* [**Surah 53**] *and when He reached His words:*
>
> > *'Have you thought of Al-Lat and al-Uzza and Manat, the third, the other',*
>
> *Satan, when he was meditating upon it and desiring to bring reconciliation to his people put upon his tongue:*
>
> > *'These are the exalted gharaniq*
> > [often translated '*high flying cranes*']
> > *whose intercession is approved'.*
>
> *When the Quraysh heard that, they were delighted and greatly pleased at the way in which he spoke of their gods. And they listened to him while the believers were holding that what their prophet brought them from their Lord was true, not suspecting a mistake, or a vain desire or a slip … And the polytheists of the Quraysh and others who were in the mosque prostrated when they heard the mention of their gods, so that everyone in the mosque, believer and unbeliever prostrated…*

Al-Tabari reports that the news of this incorporation of the pagan gods into Islam even reached the emigrant community in Abyssinia, causing some of its members to return to Mecca, in the belief that hostility between Muhammad and the Meccans was at

an end. However, upon their return to Mecca they were to be disappointed, for at some point after having issued these words, Ibn Ishaq reports, Gabriel had reproached Muhammad and said:

> *'What have you done, Muhammad? You have read to these people something I did not bring you from God, and you have said what He did not say to you.'*
>
> *The apostle was bitterly grieved and was greatly in fear of God. So God sent down a revelation, for He was merciful to him, comforting him and making light of the affair, and telling him* [**{22.52}**, see below].
>
> *So God annulled what Satan suggested and God established His verses.'*[163]

The verse **{22.52}**, that God is said to have revealed to Muhammad to comfort him after the mis-spoken verse and **{22.53}**, which completes the thought, reads as follows:

> **{22.52}** And no messenger of prophet did
> We send before thee, but that
> when he had a longing Satan
> would cast into his longing,
> whereupon God effaces what
> Satan cast.
>
> Then God makes firm His signs,
> and God is Knowing Wise,
>
> **{22.53}** That He might make what Satan
> casts to be a trial for those in
> whose hearts is a disease,
> and those whose hearts are hard -
> and truly the wrongdoers are in
> extreme schism.

The veracity of the story of the satanic verses was challenged early in Islamic history, but it also remained an oft-recited episode in Islamic lore. *The Study Quran* concludes that '*it seems likely that many Muslims of the first centuries accepted that something like this incident actually happened or at least were comfortable enough with the story to pass it along as a subject of interest.*'

{22.52-53} only make sense if a revelation had had to be hastily retracted and evidence of the Qurʾan author having been tempted by a belief that he later renounced as *shirk* is also suggested from the less commented upon **{17.73-75}**:

> **{17.73}** And they were about to tempt thee away from that which We revealed unto thee, that thou mightest falsely ascribe unto Us something other than it, whereupon they would surely have taken thee as a friend.
>
> **{17.74}** And had We not made thee firm, thou wouldst certainly have inclined towards them a little.
>
> **{17.75}** Then We would have made thee taste double in in life and double in death.
>
> Then thou wouldst have found thyself no helper against Us

Hence it would seem that not only did some of the Qurʾan's original audience believe in multiple subordinate gods below a supreme God, but the Qurʾan author, in his early phase also acknowledged existence of such entities but that he may have flirted with incorporating them, as he did with the jinn, as an order of creation in the Islamic imaginal realm.

35. The Night Journey

Surah 17 (*Al-Isrāʾ/The Night Journey*): 1

Immaculate is He who carried His servant on a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose environs We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs.

Indeed, He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.

[*Ali Qarai*]

Based upon several accounts received by Ibn Ishaq, the above verse treated by Muslims as a reference to a story that, if true, would have been by far and away the most spectacular incident of Muhammad's life. This story commences with God transporting Muhammad overnight from Mecca to Jerusalem on a winged horse called Buraq, a journey traditionally referred to as '*al-ʾIsrāʾ*', '*the Night Journey*'. According to one of these accounts, on his arrival at Jerusalem, Muhammad found Abraham, Moses and Jesus already gathered there to greet him. The better-known account has Muhammad ascending through the seven heavens to the presence of God Himself, '*al-Miʿrāj*', '*the Ascent*', there to talk with God. During the ascent, Muhammad is said to have encountered past prophets on his way in the following sequence:

First heaven:	Adam,
Second heaven:	Jesus and John son of Zachariah,
Third heaven:	Joseph son of Jacob,
Fourth heaven:	Idris (traditionally Enoch **⟨14⟩**),
Fifth heaven:	Aaron,
Sixth heaven:	Moses, and
Seventh heaven:	Abraham.

Muhammad was also said to have been granted a vision of Hell where he saw a selection of people being tortured for their sins. It is said that he saw those who in life had devoured the wealth of orphans being forced to eat fire, usurers being trampled by camels, and women who had borne illegitimate children hanging by their breasts. As Muhammad commenced his descent to earth, Moses is said to have repeatedly encouraged him to return to God to intercede with Him to reduce the required number of daily prayers, which Muhammad does, eventually persuading God to reduce the prayer cycle from an initial fifty prayers a day, in stages, down to just five **⟨54⟩.**[164]

A prophet's ascent to heaven has several precedents in Judaism and Christianity, most prominent amongst them Enoch, Ezekiel and St John. The story of Muhammad's endorsement by past prophets, also resembles the gospel account of the transfiguration of Jesus in which Jesus is seen by three of his disciples, to be transformed into a dazzlingly radiant form in which he converses with Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17.1-8, Mark 9.2-8 and Luke 9.28-36). Muhammad's repeated beseeching of God for reductions in the number of daily prayers, on the other hand, follows the pattern of Abraham's intercession for Sodom (Genesis 18.16-33). The first leg of the journey, the *Isra*, to Jerusalem also has several precedents. The earliest such journey appears in the gospels where it is the devil who takes Jesus to a parapet of the Temple from where to tempt him (Matthew 4.5, Luke 4.9). Later miraculous journeys to Jerusalem escorted by angels were reported by the anti-Chalcedonian monk denied entry to the city, Peter the Iberian and in the first or second century Jewish text known as the *Apocalypse of Baruch*. The similarity of the name Baruch with that of Muhammad's flying steed is, if a coincidence, a remarkable one.

Popular Muslim belief has it that the Dome of the Rock on Temple Mount in Jerusalem is a shrine built by the Umayyad Caliph, ʿAbd al-Malik to venerate the location from where Muhammad ascended to heaven. However, for reasons that have been expounded in **⟨2⟩** above, this explanation manifestly fails to account for the design of the structure, which facilitates worshippers to circumambulate the pinnacle of Mount Moriah, the reputed scene of the testing of Abraham and former site of the Holy

of Holies of the Jewish Temple on which the Ark of the Covenant had once been kept. As one circles the rock of the Dome, one may raise one's eyes and see, lining the ambulatories, a mosaic containing several short passages from the Qurʾan. The text includes periodic basmalas ('*In the name of God…*') **⟨10⟩** and the two elements of the shahada ('*There is no god but God*' and '*Muhammad is the messenger of God*') **⟨53⟩**, but virtually all of the passages in between theses religious formulae focus upon Jesus. The sequence of verses conspicuously fails to include **{17.1}** which surely would have been included had the purpose of the shrine been to mark the Night Journey of Muhammad. In fact, the purpose of the shrine would appear to be the veneration of the sacred location for its past associations with the binding of Isaac and the Jewish Temple and its significance as the place Jesus was expected to return upon the Last Day.

Even setting to one side the later evidence of the Dome of the Rock, the text of **{17.1}** itself falls far short of what one might have expected to read if it was composed to refer to the story of the Night Journey. **{17.1}** does not identify the servant who was '*carried by night*' nor their destination, other than as '*masjid al-aqṣā*' ('*farthest place of worship*'). And if this verse was a cryptic reference to Muhammad's 'horizontal' trip across the earth's surface, it would be all the more bizarre for failing to allude at all to his 'vertical' elevation through the heavens to talk with God and the prophets of old, surely by far the more significant part of the episode. Therefore, the story of the Night Journey can be dismissed with some confidence as a late invention, contrived to provide a Muhammadan gloss upon the awkward fact that Islam's oldest and second most prominent monument in fact pays homage to Jewish rather than Arab tradition.

A proposed reinterpretation

The verb *'asrā'* that is translated as making a journey by night is employed on five occasions in the Qurʾan besides **{17.1}**, and on each of these occasions it is used by God to instruct his prophets to remove themselves from a wicked people prior to the latter's destruction by God. On three of these, the word appears as God's

instruction to Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, **{20.77}**, **{26.52}** and **{44.23}**; twice it appears as the warning given to Lot to leave Sodom, **{11.81}** and **{15.65}**. This tells us that the Qurʾan announcer is use the motif of a night journey with this very specific meaning.[165] It has been proposed above **⟨2⟩** that the Qurʾan's Masjid al-Haram refers to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. If this is correct, then Jerusalem would be the departure point for **{17.1}**'s night journey, not its destination, and if the Qurʾan in **{17.1}** gives 'night journey' the same particular meaning that it does on every other occasion in which the word appears, the reason for the servant being carried far away from Jerusalem, would be to rescue the servant from Jerusalem's imminent devastation. This interpretation of **{17.1}** is supported by the verses that follow it. **{17.2 & 3}** briefly recall God's revelations to Moses, and rescue of Noah. The surah then continues:

{17.4} And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book 'Surely you will work corruption on the earth twice.'

{17.5} So when the promise of the first of these came to pass, We sent against you servants of Ours, possessed of great might, and they ravaged your dwellings, and it was a promise fulfilled.

{17.6} Then We gave you a turn against them, and We aided you with wealth and children, and We made you greater in number.

{17.7} If you are virtuous, you are virtuous for the sake of your own souls, and if you commit evil, it is for them.

> So when the other promise
> comes to pass, they will
> make wretched your faces,
> and enter the Temple as they
> entered it the first time, and
> utterly ruin whatsoever they
> overtake.

In **{17.4}** God recalls having decreed that the children of Israel would work corruption twice. The following verse describes how He had punished the first of these rebellions by sending '*servants of great might*' who had ravaged the children of Israel's dwellings. **{17.6}** then describes the children of Israel's' recovery but **{17.7}** warns that this is just a brief respite until the second punishment comes to pass, during which an unspecified agent '*will enter the Temple as they entered it the first time and utterly ruin whatsoever they overtake*.' This prediction of a second imminent devastation of the Jerusalem Temple in **{17.7}** fully supports the interpretation of **{17.1}** proposed above. That is to say **{17.1}** describes God's servant having been rescued from the Temple precincts before its destruction, which is predicted in **{17.7}**. The identification of the first destruction is unclear. Jerusalem had been famously sacked twice in antiquity, by the Babylonians in the sixth century BC and by the Romans in AD 70. However, the verse may well have referred to more recent events, the capture of Jerusalem by the Sasanians in 613 and the subsequent fighting between its Jewish and Christian inhabitants.

This revised night journey as God's plucking of the righteous from harm's way before He visits devastation upon Jerusalem also fits the historical scenario that will be proposed below. This is that a party of Jews, who had sought to re-establish Temple worship during the first phase of the Sasanian occupation, were exiled from Jerusalem and later from Edessa and had found refuge in a distant '*place of prostration*' (it will be suggested with Muhammad at Yathrib). Here they received God's '*signs*' ('*āyātinā*' - the verses of the Qurʾan **⟨4⟩**), just as the law had once been revealed to Moses after his rescue from Pharaoh and as Noah had formed the Noahide covenant with God after the Deluge (the two prophets alluded to in n the intervening **{17.2-3}**).

36. 'Splitting the Moon'

Surah 54 (*Al-Qamar/The Moon*): 1-2

1. **The Hour (of doom) is drawing near,
and the moon has split asunder
(the people of Makkah requested
Muhammad to show a miracle, so he
showed them the splitting of the moon).**

2. **Yet, when they (disbelievers) see a sign, they
turn away and say:
'This is continuous magic.'**

[*Abdul Hye, 2006 (former NASA engineer)*]

There are several short *aḥādīth* purporting to explain the context of this verse, of which the following (from Sahih Bukhari) is typical:

> *The people of Mecca asked Allah's Messenger to show them a miracle. So he showed them the moon split in two halves between which they saw the Hira mountain.*[166]

A slightly fuller hadith was recounted by the ninth century jurist, Ahmad bin Hanbal:

> *The moon was split into two pieces during the time of Allah's Prophet; a part of the moon was over one mountain and another part over another mountain. So they said: 'Muhammad has tricked us by his magic.' They then said: `If he was able to trick us by magic, he would not be able to do so with all people.'* [167]

However, the supposed miracle of the splitting the moon is not mentioned at all by Ibn Ishaq (writing c.760), nor does it appear in the additional notes made in the *Biography of the*

Prophet of Ibn Hashim (d. 834); compelling evidence that this literalist explanation of **{54.1-2}** was not in circulation at the time when Ibn Ishaq compiled everything that he could discover of Muhammad's life. In fact, the report of this miracle, which had it occurred would have been visible not just to Muhammad's audience in Mecca, but across the whole of Europe, Africa and Asia, is not merely implausible (as is the nature of all miracles) but contradicts many verses of the Qurʾan that declare that there would be no miracles forthcoming from the Qurʾan announcer. Demands for such a sign are referred to in many verses, including **{6.37}**, **{7.203}**, **{10.20}**, **{11.12}** ('*Why has no treasure been sent down upon him or an angel not come with him?*'), **{13.7 & 27}**, **{17.90-93}** ('*We shall not believe in you until you make a spring gush forth for us from the earth,… or you make the sky fall on us in pieces or till you have a house of gold ornament or you ascend to Heaven. And we will not believe in your ascension until you bring down unto us a book we can read*'), **{20.133}**, **{21.5}** and **{29.50}**. Yet on each occasion the demand for a miracle beyond the 'miracle' of the Qurʾan itself, is refused. Two reasons are provided for this. First this is because past experience had demonstrated to God that signs were ineffective: '*Never did a sign from amongst the signs of their Lord come unto them, but they turned away from it*', **{6.4}** (*c.f.* **{6.109}** and **{17.59}**; also **{2.145}**). Secondly, because it is not for people to be persuaded by their own mental efforts: '*God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides to himself whosoever turns in repentance*', **{13.27}**. Instead of a miracle worker, Muhammad is stated no less than eighteen occasions (**{7.184** & **188}**, **{11.12}**, **{13.7}**, **{17.105}**, **{22.49}**, **{25.56}**, **{26.115}**, **{27.92}**, **{29.50}**, **{34.28** & **46}**, **{35.23}**, **{38.65** & **70}**, **{46.9}**, **{67.26}** and **{79.45})** to be '*only a warner*' or '*only a bearer of good news and a warner*'.

Since **{54.1}** begins '*The Hour is drawn nigh…*' it seems that the '*splitting of the moon*' was presented as an eschatological sign rather than a proof of Muhmmad's authenticity. Possibly it was an observed astronomical occurrence such as a meteor (an occultation of Mars in 610 has also been suggested). It is more likely, though, that the phrase may have been intended metaphorically. Night-time is frequently presented in the Qurʾan as metaphor for humanity awaiting God's judgement

and dawn as a metaphor for the dawn of the Last Day. Just as the wicked '*conspire by night*' in **{4.81 & 108}**, so Moses and Lot '*travelled by night*' to avoid God's wrath as it was to be visited upon the Pharaoh and Sodom **⟨35⟩**. When *Ṣayḥata* comes upon the people of Thamud and Midian '*morning found them lifeless in their abodes*', **{7.78 & 91}**, **{11.67 & 94}** and **{29.37} ⟨4⟩**, just like the firstborn children of the Egyptians during the night of the Passover (*c.f.* **{28.71}**, **{74.32-5}**). Daniel Beck fits the splitting of the moon verse within this overarching theme of the end of night-time itself, and in particular links it with **Surah 97** which announces the Night of Power and ends ominously *'Peace it is until the break of dawn'* **⟨4⟩**:

> *Compare the solar warhorses of* **{100.1-5}** *who shatter darkness with their fire at dawn … The rabb is the Lord of Daybreak,* **{113.1}** *and* ***Surah 104*** *implies that His imminent Day will bring the fire that closes over the darkness, a profoundly Manichaean image. The Lord's pre-figuring lunar signs signified his impending solar fire. Audiences familiar with basic dualist imagery would understand this profoundly Manichaean image.* [168]

37. Permission to Fight

Surah 22 (*Al-Ḥajj/The Pilgrimage*): 39-41

39. Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is waged, because they have been wronged.

Most certainly, God has the power to grant them victory.

40. These are the ones who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying: 'Our Lord is God!'

Were it not that God repels some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques – in all of which God's name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed.

God will most certainly succour him who succours God's cause.

God is certainly Most Powerful, Almighty.

41. They are those who, if We firmly establish them on earth, attend regularly to their prayers, give in charity, enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong.

With God rests the final outcome of all events.

[*In the Shade of the Qur'an by Sayyid Qutb, 1965 (Egyptian Islamist and leading figure in the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood; executed in Egypt 1966 for conspiracy to assassinate President Nasser)*]

In the traditional narrative, after more than a decade of preaching in Mecca, relatively few Meccans had been persuaded by Muhammad's revelations. The Qurʾan itself addresses its audience's scepticism and its announcer's disappointment on many occasions. However, Muhammad's fortunes changed remarkably after he preached to and converted six pagan pilgrims visiting Mecca from the oasis of Yathrib, about two hundred miles to its north. In the account of Ibn Ishaq:

> *The time came when (Muhammad) met a number of the Helpers at one of the fairs, and while he was offering himself to the Arab tribes, he met at al-Aqaba a number of the Khazraj whom God had intended to benefit. …*
>
> *When the apostle met them, he learned by inquiry that they were of the Khazraj and allies of the Jews. He invited them to sit with him and expounded Islam to them and recited the Qurʾan to them. Now God had prepared the way for Islam in that they lived side by side with the Jews who were people of the scriptures and knowledge, whilst they themselves were polytheist and idolaters. They had often raided them in their district and the Jews used to say to them: 'A prophet will be sent soon. His day is at hand. We shall follow him and kill you by his aid as ʿAd and Iram perished* [**⟨27⟩**].'
>
> *So when they heard the apostle's message they said to one another: 'This is the very prophet of whom the Jews warned us. Don't let them get to him before us.'*
>
> *Thereupon they accepted his teaching and became Muslim. … (and) returned to Medina as believers.*

The following year, these coverts returned to Mecca bringing six others with them and the twelve made a pledge, known as the First Pledge of al-Aqaba, that they would become followers of Muhammad. The year following that, they returned to Mecca yet again, this time with many others – so that they were seventy-five in total - all of whom swore to obey and to protect Muhammad (the Second Pledge of al-Aqaba).

Immediately, after this assurance of support and protection had been given to him, Muhammad announced that he had received a revelation from Jabril giving him permission to fight the Meccans. This critical moment is described by Ibn Ishaq as follows:

> *The apostle had not been given permission to fight nor allowed to shed blood before the second Aqaba. He had simply been ordered to call men to God and to endure insult and forgive the ignorant. The Quraysh had persecuted his followers, seducing some from their religion and exiling others from the country. They had to choose whether to give up their religion, be maltreated at home or flee: some to Abyssinia, others to Medina.*
>
> *When the Quraysh became insolent towards God and rejected His gracious purpose, accused His prophet of lying and ill-treated and exiled those who served him and proclaimed His unity, believed in His prophet and held fast to His religion, He gave permission to His apostle to fight and to protect himself against those who wronged them and treated them badly.*
>
> *The first verse which was sent down on this subject was...* [**{22.39-41}** produced above]…[169]
>
> *Then God sent down*:
>
> **[{2.190}** And fight in the way of God against those who fight against you but do not transgress.
>
> Truly, God loves not the transgressors.
>
> **{2.191}** And slay them wheresoever you come across them and expel them whence they have expelled you, for *fitna* is worse than slaying. But do not fight them near the Masjid al-Haram until they fight with you there. But if they fight you then slay them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers.

{2.192} But if they desist, then truly God is Forgiving, Merciful.

{2.193} And fight them until there is no *fitna* and all is for God.

But if they desist then there is no enmity save against the wrongdoers.]

When God had given permission to fight and this clan of the Ansar had pledge their support to him in Islam, and to help him and his followers and the Muslims had taken refuge with him, the apostle commanded his companions, the emigrants of his people and those Muslims who were with him in Mecca, to emigrate to Medina and to link up with their brethren, the Ansar: 'God will make for you brethren and houses in which you may be safe.'

So they went out in companies and the apostle stayed in Mecca waiting for his Lord's permission to leave Mecca and migrate to Medina. [170]

Surahs 2 and **22** have many common features, and for Ibn Ishaq verses **{2.190-193}** and **{22.39-41}** were both announced at about the same time and address the same problem with the same solution. Fighting is justified, not to say commanded, to Muhammad and his followers as a proper and righteous response to their having been '*expelled*'/'*driven from their homelands*' because of their obedience to God. In **{22.39-41}** this is supported by the general observation that violence is sometimes necessary in order to protect diverse places of worship. A similar point is made at **{2.114}** which refers to the wrong of barring entrance to places of worship ('*masājid*', *i.e.*, the plural of '*masjid*') to prevent God's name being uttered there and of striving for the ruination of them. However, the rationale for resorting to violence given in **{22.39-41}**, that places of worship should be defended is not to the point. Both it and **{2.114** & **190-193}** clearly anticipate that those to whom the verses are directed will be doing more than merely repelling an attack. Rather, both passages assert that the believers have already been excluded from somewhere - '*their homelands*' in **{22.40}**, the vicinity of the Masjid

al-Haram in **{2.191}** - and that their goal is nothing less than regaining access to that place and expelling from it or subduing those who had been responsible. The instruction in **{2.190-193}** to '*slay (those who fight against you) wheresoever you come across them*' and the prohibition against fighting '*near the Masjid al-Haram until they fight with you there*' suggests that the fighting that was anticipated was a campaign around, although ideally not within the immediate vicinity of, the Masjid al-Haram. These verses do not fit within the context that Ibn Ishaq gives for them. Up until this point in his biography of Muhammad, Ibn Ishaq has nowhere described Muhammad having been excluded from Mecca, nor of his being under any threat of serious violence there. Nor, on Ibn Ishaq's version of events, after the emigration to Yathrib was there to be any prospect of any skirmish breaking out around the Meccan shrine. It would be many years before Muhammad would march against the settlement at the head of an army.

Muhammad's turning to war

The *Armenian History of Pseudo-Sebeos*, written just thirty years after the traditional date of Muhammad's death and a full century before Ibn Ishaq's biography, tells a very different story. This involves a group of Jews whom Heraclius had expelled from Edessa after his recapture of the city, referred to at **⟨1⟩** above. Sebeos writes:

> *At this time there was an Ishmaelite called Mahmet, a merchant. He presented himself to* [the Jews who had been expelled from Edessa] *as though at God's command, as a preacher, as the way of truth, and taught them to know the God of Abraham, for he was very well-informed, and very well-acquainted with the story of Moses. As the command came from on high, they all united under the authority of a single man, under a single law, and, abandoning vain cults, returned to the living God who had revealed Himself to their father Abraham…*
>
> *(Mahmet said to them): 'God has promised this land to Abraham and his posterity after him forever. He acted*

> *according to His promise while he loved Israel. Now you, you are the sons of Abraham and God fulfils in you the promise made to Abraham and his posterity. Only love the God of Abraham. Go and take possession of your country which God gave to your father Abraham, and none will be able to resist you in the struggle, for God is with you.*'
>
> *Then they all gathered together … (and) divided into twelve tribes according to the lineages of their patriarchs. They divided among their tribes the twelve thousand Israelites, a thousand per tribe, to guide them into the land of Israel…*
>
> *All that remained of the peoples of the children of Israel came to join them, and they constituted a mighty army...*[171]

Although Sebeos's description of Muhammad dividing the Arabs into twelve tribes has an obviously symbolic quality, his assertion that Muhammad divided the Jews who came to him amongst Arab tribes receives corroboration from a document that is likely to be contemporary to these events. This is commonly referred to as the Constitution of Medina, although it refers to Yathrib rather than to Medina. Its text is preserved in slightly differing versions in each of the accounts attributed to Ibn Ishaq.

The treaty describes its signatories as '*the believers and submitters of Quraysh and Yathrib*' sand these parties agree in it to form '*one community (ummah) to the exclusion of all men*'. It then lists eight tribes of believers whose obligations are briefly set out. There follows a general statement concerning Jews - '*To the Jew who follow us belongs help and equality He shall not be wronged nor shall his enemies be aided*' – followed by a list of seven specific groups of Jews, each of which is described as '*the Jews of…*' followed by the name of a tribe. Six of these associated tribes appear in the list of eight tribes of believers given earlier in the document, with one group of Jews referred to as the Jews of a tribe not otherwise mentioned in the treaty. For each group of Jews, a similar statement of their rights and duties is given, accompanied by a statement that '*the Jews are to have their religion and the Muslims theirs*'. Both Jews and Muslims

accept a duty to help the other if one is attacked, but '*none of them shall go out to war save with the permission of Muhammad*.' Crucially, '*If any dispute or controversy likely to cause trouble should arise it must be referred to God and to Muhammad, the apostle of God*.'[172]

In Ibn Ishaq's narrative Yathrib already had a significant settled Jewish community at the time that Muhammad and his followers arrived there. For him, the fact that the Qurʾan with its many Old Testament themes and paraphrases was announced in a town with a large Jewish population was a matter of pure providence. His account of the Constitution is that a little while after Muhammad's arrival, he '*wrote a document concerning the emigrants and the helpers in which he made a friendly agreement with the Jews and established them in their religion and property and stated their reciprocal obligations*'.[173] As has been noted previously, there is no trace in any Jewish, Arab or other source, prior to Islam, and no archaeological evidence, of there ever having been any significant Jewish presence anywhere in the Hijaz. Moreover, the wording of the Constitution of Medina, like the wording of the Qurʾan's 'first permission to fight' passages are hard to reconcile with Ibn Ishaq's version of events. One would have expected that in a predominantly tribal society, a people united by ethnicity, culture and faith would form one or more distinct tribes of their own. This is the model for the Medinan Jews that are encountered later on in Ibn Ishaq's narrative, when Muhammad is described launching punitive expeditions against three Jewish tribes, each of which lived in its own walled compound. Yet not only are the three tribes in question not mentioned in the Constitution of Medina, but those Jews who are mentioned therein appear to be dispersed amongst predominantly non-Jewish tribes. This unusual state of affairs is left completely unexplained by Ibn Ishaq, but the account of Sebeos provides an explanation for the division of Jews amongst Arab tribes that makes perfect sense. These were Jews who had been embedded by Muhammad into Arab tribes as a term of their inclusion within his movement, a move that would limit their opportunity to act as a unified group in a way that might challenge his authority.

The fact that eight tribes had agreed to place the control of their affairs, and in particular decisions of whether to go to war and against whom, into the hands of Muhammad shows that this was

much more than Ibn Ishaq's '*friendly agreement*'. Reading Sebeos and the Constitution of Medina together calls for a major revision of the traditional understanding of Muhammad's relationships with the Jews of Yathrib. This was, from the outset, not one of curious neighbours, but of parties to a military alliance. The presence of Jews amongst his followers would have given Muhammad military strength and would have added credibility to his claim to be walk in the footsteps of biblical patriarchs, kings and prophets. In return, it is suggested by Sebeos, Muhammad offered the Jews the prospect of regaining their homeland, and particularly their Temple, from the Byzantines.

The objectives set out in the verses above granting the first permission to fight are twofold: to restore control of the Masjid al-Haram to those who '*perform the prayer, give the alms, enjoin right and forbid wrong*', **{22.41}**, and thereafter to fight its current occupiers, '*the wrongdoers*', until there is no more *'fitna'* and *'all is for God*', **{2.193}** (see **⟨39⟩** below).

38. The Hijra

Surah 9 (*Al-Tawbah/Repentance*): 40

**If you do not help him (the Messenger),
yet for certain God helped him when those who disbelieve drove him out (of his home during the Hijrah), the second of the two when they were in the cave (with those in pursuit of them having reached the mouth of the cave),
and he said to his companion (with utmost trust in God and no worry at all): 'Do not grieve. God is surely with us.'**

Then God sent down His gift of inner peace and reassurance on him, supported him with hosts you cannot see, and brought the word (the cause) of the unbelievers utterly low.

And God's word (His cause) is (always and inherently) supreme.

God is All-Glorious with irresistible might, All-Wise

[*The Miraculous Qur'an, 2006, Ali Unal*
(*Turkish author, currently serving a nineteen year prison sentence for his support of Hizmet movement led by Fethullah Gulen)*]

Muhammad's reported hijra or migration from Mecca to Yathrib is traditionally perceived as a pivotal moment in the life of Muhammad. It is by reference to this date rather than the first or last revelation, that the Islamic al-Hijra (AH) calendar is said to have been calculated, and the event is almost universally used in Islamic tradition as a watershed to divide the Qur'an into its earlier ('Meccan') and later ('Medinan') surahs **⟨8⟩**.

Ibn Ishaq describes that when Muhammad sent his companions ahead of him to Yathrib, a group of the Quraysh realised that Muhammad would also leave and feared, correctly, that he

would use his new home as base from which to attack them, '*so they assembled … to take counsel what they should do with regard to the apostle, for they were now in fear of him*.' He then describes the first of several plots against Muhammad's life. Each time without exception that Muhammad is threatened, he receives a divine warning and is able to take appropriate measures to escape from or attack his enemies prior to his enemies ever progressing beyond mere scheming. In this first case, Muhammad's response to the plot against him by the Meccans is to leave the city by stealth.

{9.40}, produced above, although it is included within the last surah to have been announced, is traditionally understood to describe Muhammad and Abu Bakr, hiding in a cave from Meccan pursuers. According to this exegetical expansion, the two companions remained in the cave for three days, after which time Abu Bakr's family was able to bring them two camels upon which they could embark upon the long trek to Yathrib. A hadith that was first recorded by Ahmad bin Hanbal in the ninth century, weaves two further details onto the story: that a spider spun a web across the mouth of the cave and a dove laid eggs in a nest close by, deceiving a group of Meccans who were searching for them into deducing that Muhammad could not possibly be within. The web, however, is a detail lifted from a Jewish commentary upon 1 Samuel 24.3 in which it was David hiding in a cave from King Saul, who, like the Meccans in the Islamic narrative, was beguiled into thinking that it was impossible that the cave had recently been entered.

The noun '*hijra*' does not appear in the Qurʾan, and although verbs derived from the h-j-r root do feature in a range of settings. '*Hājara*' is usually translated as emigration. The Qurʾan contains no basis to associate this with one journey in particular. Indeed, in **{4.97}** it is said of those who fail to migrate that in the grave the angels *'will say: 'Was not God's earth vast enough that you might have emigrated therein?' These shall have refuge in Hell*'. It is, then, not one specific journey but a type of journey. It is often associated with a response to some mistreatment:

> **{3.195}**: '... *So those who emigrated, and were expelled from their homes, and were hurt in My way, and fought and were slain…*',

{16.110}: '*Then indeed thy Lord, for those who emigrated after being oppressed…,*

{59.8}: '*For the poor emigrants who were expelled from their homes and their property seeking bounty and contentment from God...*',

c.f. **{16.41}** (produced below).

However, it does not follow that the migration is necessarily always involuntary. On the contrary, '*hājara*' is frequently used to encourage the Qurʾan's audience to perform a voluntary act, to '*set out*' set out upon a journey that is imbued with spiritual significance. In some instances, this might be perceived as similar to the idea of a pilgrimage or Jesus' frequent instruction to his disciples to follow him:

{4.100} Whoever migrates in the way of God will find upon the earth many a refuge and abundance, and whosoever forsakes his home, emigrating unto God and His Messenger and death overtakes him his reward will fall upon God. And God is Forgiving.



{16.41} And those who emigrate for the sake of God, after having been wronged, We shall surely settle them in a good place in this world – and the reward of the Hereafter is the greater if they but knew.

Moreover, just as in Ibn Ishaq's narrative Muhammad's instruction to emigrate is closely linked with his declaration that permission to take up arms **⟨37⟩**, so several of the later and more militant surahs of the Qurʾan lend this '*setting out*' more the character of fight than flight; more akin to embarking upon a crusade than upon a

pilgrimage. The verb '*hājara*', and the verb '*jahada*', to strive (for which see **⟨93⟩** ***Jihad*** below) are each refined with the formula '*fī sabīli llāh*' ('*in God's cause*'), **{22.58}** and **{24.22}**, (similarly **{16.41}**, above), and the two verbs are effectively combined in the phrase '*Those who believe and those who emigrate* ['*muhājirūn*'] *and strive* ['*wage 'jihād*'] *with their wealth and their selves in the way of God*', **{2.218}**, **{8.72 & 74-75}**, **{9.20}** and **{16.110}** (see also **{3.195}**, above).

Caterina Bori in *'All We Know is What We have been Told', Reflections on Emigration and Land as Divine Heritage in the Qurʾan* identifies in the Qurʾan three 'ranks' of apparent believer:

> those who emigrate (the *'muhājirūn'*) as well as those who help them **{8.74-75}**, **{9.100}**. Within this category of true submitters, those who fight and are slain are assured to be absolved of their evil deeds **⟨95⟩**, **⟨97⟩**,
>
> those who believe but are unable to emigrate because they are disadvantaged **⟨93⟩**, and
>
> those who refuse to emigrate who are roundly condemned for their hypocrisy, for example *c.f.* **{4.89 & 95}**, **{9.73-89}**; see **⟨50⟩** below).

Within the context of these verses the 'emigration' that is referred to is unmistakably a military expedition. This in turns casts the assurances to the muhajirun that they '*will find upon the earth many a refuge and abundance*', **{4.100}**, and that God '*shall surely settle them in a good place in this world*', **{16.41}** in a very different light to mere pious trust in divine providence. The reward that is promised is not merely a place in Paradise after death but also, for those who survive the fighting, land and booty here on earth. This has connotations of invasion and colonisation; it is clearly neither the flight of refugees nor a symbolic act of discipleship.

Hijra as Separation

The fact that this enterprise of fighting and establishing new homes is repeatedly expressed as an emigration, that is as a moving away

from somewhere rather than a movement towards somewhere is somewhat strange. It is of course true that the two elements are necessarily present in any movement, but the characterisation of military action as a dissociation from those who refuse to join it is significant. It may be that the Qurʾan's investment of such significance in the verb to emigrate may be intended to contrast righteousness of fighting in God's cause with the hypocrisy of those who refused so to do. **{4.89}** (produced at **⟨93⟩** below) urges of the latter: '*So take them not as protectors till they migrate in the way of God. But if they turn their backs, then seize them and slay them*'. In some surahs the related verb '*uhˈjur*' (from the same h-j-r root) is used to indicate a conscious act of separation as a means of defining purity from corruption. It is significant that the two associated surahs that refer to the Qurʾan announcer's call to prophethood, **Surahs 73** and **74**, each employs this verb in this way. In **{73.10-11}** the prophet is told to '*take leave of (the deniers living in luxury) in a beautiful manner*' whilst **{74.5}** instructs him simply to '*shun defilement*'. Husbands are similarly instructed to dissociate themselves ('*uhˈjurūhunna*') from rebellious wives **⟨62⟩**. The two words become almost interchangeable in the story of Abraham and Lot's dissociation from the idolatry of Abraham's father. In **{19.46}** Azar orders Abraham '*Leave me!*' ['*uhˈjurˈnī*' from '*uhˈjur*') and in **{29.26}** Lot responds to Abraham's rejection of his father by saying '*Truly I am fleeing* ['*muhājirun*' from '*hājara*'] *unto my Lord*.'

Who it is that the Qurʾan author bitterly reproaches for their refusal to emigrate has never been satisfactorily explained by the traditional narrative. If a Meccan had believed Muhammad to be God's messenger, why would they not have followed him to Yathrib? If some purported followers had lacked the faith or courage to join him, why would the resulting separation from them have become such a defining element of the hijra?

The Abrahamic Alliance

It has already been noted that Jacob of Edessa in his chronological charts had fixed the eleventh year of the reign of Heraclius (621-622), as the date upon which the Kingdom of the Tayyaye had been established under a king called Muhammad **⟨5⟩**. His endorsement

concerning this event gives no indication of any associated migration. Although Jacob's notes pertaining to Muhammad are extremely brief, the fact that they include a reference to Muhammad having undertaken trading expeditions in the four-year period prior to the establishment of his kingdom, and raiding expeditions in the following four-year period, makes it fairly unlikely that Muhammad would have migrated anywhere in the middle period, without this having also been recorded.

According to Jacob's charts Muhammad ruled over this kingdom for seven years, i.e., until 628-629, the period within which the defeated Sasanian empire was agreeing peace terms with Heraclius. It was also at about this time, according to the *Armenian History of Pseudo-Sebeos*, that Heraclius expelled the Jews from Edessa **⟨1⟩**. These sons of Israel, as seen in the previous section would join with the sons of Ishmael '*united under the authority of a single man*' (presumably Muhammad) as '*sons of Abraham*' and inspired to fulfil '*the promise made to Abraham and his posterity*'. It seems perfectly feasible, then, to think of the Qurʾan announcer, aware of the military exhaustion of Byzantium and the defeat of the House of Sasan and emboldened with the influx of zealous and battle-hardened Jewish fighters, conceiving of a plan to lead an Abrahamic alliance of Arabs and Jews to capture the Holy Land, with himself acting in the role of as a new Moses.

However, the fact that this moment is also recorded as the year of his replacement as king by Abu Bakr, suggests that he was unable to persuade a majority of the elite to pursue this course. The likely reason why may now have been uncovered by Parvaneh Pourshariati. In *The Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*, published in 2017, Pourshariati demonstrates that Abu Bakr led an Arab invasion into Persia in 628 **⟨5⟩**. It would appear from this, that the prevailing view amongst the Arab tribes had been that the richest and most easily acquired plunder was to be had by raiding eastwards into the territory of the defeated and divided Sasanian Empire, rather than the pursuit of a primarily religious quest against the resurgent Byzantine Empire in the west. That many Arabs who were invited to join him refused to participate in the project explains his angry condemnation of those who refused to

migrate. It also made the Qurʾan-submitters' splintering off from the main Arab polity in order to reclaim the Promised Land simultaneously a symbolic departure from disbelief in the pattern of Noah, Abraham, Lot and Moses.

Hagarism

There are further layers of meaning to the h-j-r root that may have been present in the minds of the Qurʾan's audience. The Ishmaelites traced their Abrahamic ancestry through Sarah's Egyptian servant Hagar **⟨22⟩**. '*Ger*' is a Hebrew word that may mean an alien resident or sojourner (used with this meaning in Exodus 12.43-45; Leviticus 19.34, 25.6, 35, 40, 45, 47; Numbers. 35.15) and the name Hagar refers to the status of Ishmael's mother as a gentile: the ('*ha-*') *'ger*'. Because under the Mosaic law alien residents were required to comply with some aspects of Judaic law, (for example not worshipping idols) the word '*ger*' over time came to be used in the phrases '*ger toshav*', meaning those who had sworn to abide by the Noahide covenant (Genesis 9.8-17) who were thus esteemed righteous people of the world, and '*ger tzedek*' meaning those who had elected to abide by the full Mosaic law. Meanwhile, the word '*Hagarenes*' also came into usage, along with '*Ishmaelites*', to indicate the non-Jewish inhabitants of the Middle East who were believed to be descendants of Hagar (1 Chronicles 5.10, Psalm 83.6).

The usual translation of the Quranic word *'muhājirūn'* as simple '*emigrants*' fails to capture any of this complex and religiously charged etymology. The word carried connotations of a physical journey, separation from corruption, being a sojourner in a foreign land, the voluntary adoption of Jewish law and of being a descendant of Hagar. In *Hagarism, the Making of the Islamic World*, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook observed that the Syriac Christian community in the time of Muhammad used the words '*mahgre*' or '*mahgraye*' as a generic term for Arabs. The term, they note, appears to have been commonly understood as a reference to the Arabs' reputed descent from Hagar but they also note its similarity with the Quranic *'muhājirūn*', meaning emigrant, and propose that the two similar words would have been equally

applicable to describe Arabs emerging from the desert in the mid-seventh century either to raid or colonise the former lands of the collapsing Byzantine empire. '*The mahgraye*', Crone and Cook suggest, '*may thus be seen as Hagarene participants in a 'hijra' to the Promised Land*' and '*in this pun lies the earliest identity of the faith that would in the fullness of time to become Islam*'.[174]

39. 'The Raid at Naklah'

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah/The Cow*): 217

**They ask you about the sacred month,
about fighting therein.**

**Say 'Fighting therein is great (sin),
but averting (people) from the way of Allah
and disbelief in Him, and (preventing access
to) al-Masjid al-Haram and the expulsion of
its people therefrom, are greater (evil) in the
sight of Allah. And fitna is greater than
killing.'**

**And they will continue to fight you until they
turn you back from your religion if they are
able.**

**And whoever of you reverts from his religion
(to disbelief) and dies while he is a
disbeliever: for those, their deeds have
become worthless in this world and the
Hereafter, and those are the companions of
the Fire, they will abide therein eternally.**

[*Sahih International, 2010 (three female US converts)*]

Ibn Ishaq states that approximately twelve months following his arrival in Yathrib, Muhammad began organising his followers to carry out raids upon Meccan caravans. Up to seven raids are said to have been dispatched over the next six months although for a variety of reasons none of these resulted in conflict. Then, about eighteen months following the hijra, Muhammad sent a group of eight followers out with sealed instructions and orders that the group's leader, Abdullah bin Jahsh, was to open and read these only when the party was two days away from Yathrib. Although Ibn Ishaq does not provide a reason for this precaution, it seems reasonable to infer that Muhammad had suspected that an

informant at Yathrib was tipping off the Meccans about his preparations, and that the Meccans were then taking precautions to frustrating Muhammad's ambushes. When they were unsealed, these instructions read: '*When you read this letter of mine proceed to Naklah which is between Mecca and al-Taʾif. Lie in wait there for the Quraysh and find out for us what they are doing*.' Ibn Ishaq describes the expedition carrying out these orders, and then, acting upon their own initiative, raiding a caravan that they chanced upon:

> (*They*) *journeyed along the Hijaz until, at a mine called Bahran above al-Faru, Saʿd ibn Abu Waqqas and Utba bin Ghazwaz (two of the party) lost the camel which they had been riding by turns. So they stayed behind to look for it whilst Abdullah bin Jahsh and the rest of them went on to Naklah. A caravan of Quraysh carrying dry raisins and leather and other merchandise of the Quraysh passed by them.*
>
> *When the caravan saw them they were afraid of them because they had camped near them. Ukkasha (one of the expedition members), who had shaved his head, looked down on them and when they saw him they felt safe and said: 'They are pilgrims, you have nothing to fear from them.'*
>
> *The raiders took counsel amongst themselves, for this was the last day of Rajab (a month when fighting was traditionally forbidden). They said: 'If you leave them alone tonight they will get into the sacred area and will be safe from you, and if you kill them you will kill them in the sacred month.'*
>
> *So they were hesitant and feared to attack them. Then they encouraged each other and decided to kill as many as they could of them and to take what they had. Waqid bin Abdullah (one of the raiders) shot 'Amr bin al Hadrani (one of the caravaners) with an arrow and killed him. And (two other named caravaners) surrendered. (The fourth) escaped and eluded them. Abdullah and his companions took the caravan and the two prisoners and came to Medina with them.*

> *… When they came to the apostle, he said: 'I did not order you to fight in the sacred month.' And he held the caravan and the two prisoners in suspense and refused to take anything from them. When the apostle said that, the men were in despair and thought they were doomed.*
>
> *Their Muslim brethren reproached them for what they had done ... (and) the Jews turned this into an omen against the apostle ... But God turned this against them when he sent down to His apostle: 'They ask you about the sacred month…* [**{2.216-218}** of which **{2.217}**, is produced above].[175]

'Fitna is worse than slaying'

There is little in **{2.217}** itself to materially separate it from the verses treated granting the '*First Permission to Fight*' **⟨37⟩**. **{2.217}** and {**2.191-193**} appear in the same subsection of **Surah 2** which, despite its wide variety of content, Nevin Reda has demonstrated in *The Al-Baqara Crescendo* was composed as a single, cohesive literary work. Both passages refer to the exclusion of the believers from the Masjid al-Haram as the cause of their grievance, and both employ the same phrase to justify lethal force: '*Fitna is worse than slaying*'. '*Fitna*', literally means '*strife*' (*per The Study Quran*). Given the traditional narrative of the mistreatment of some of the believing community by the Meccans, this is often rendered in a way that suggests active hostility: '*oppression*' (*per* Yusuf Ali) or '*persecution*' (Arberry and Pickthall). However, there are no grounds in Ibn Ishaq's account of the Naklah raid to regard 'Amr bin al Hadrani, the slain caravaner peacefully going about his trade in raisins and leather, as having persecuted or oppressed anybody. Sarwar renders the verse '*Disbelief in God is worse than committing murder*.' This fits the context of the Naklah raid, but probably renders the phrase too aggressively. It is suggested that the clear basal meaning of '*fitna is worse than slaying*' is that God permits the use of deadly force towards those who obstruct the implementation of His Will as this is revealed by His prophets.

Since Ibn Ishaq's story of the Naklah expedition fails to fit even this minimal rendering, one must assume that it was devised for some other purpose. Undoubtedly this was to provide an explanation for the cryptic reference to believers not fighting during the *'sacred'* months. Even here, the story was only partially successful, for notwithstanding all the details of the expedition that the reader is given, such as the contents of Muhammad's instructions, the names of the raiders and caravaners, and even the recounting of one of the raiders' camels escaping and having to be recaptured, the story leaves the central issue of the '*sacred months*' unresolved. It seems quite illogical that the Qurʾan should justify a campaign of violence against Meccans for their idolatry - it would appear from the Naklah story, treat anybody who traded with them as a legitimate target - and yet should simultaneously instruct that hostilities be conducted so far as practicable to avoid the '*sacred*' (literally '*ḥaram*' or '*forbidden*') place of worship in **{2.191}**, and the '*sacred*'/'*ḥaram*' months in **{2.217}**. If a community has incurred God's wrath to the point of His ordering his righteous servants to wage war against them and anyone who deals with them, why should a customary '*sacred*' place or '*sacred*' time, being a pagan or at least pre-Quranic convention, carry any influence upon God at all? Just as it is suggested that the Masjid al-Haram may be the Jewish Temple from which, for the Jews had been made forbidden, so it is more likely that in the true circumstances in which this verse was composed, the '*ḥaram months*' may simply refer to the duration of some specific but temporary truce. This is the same phrase's clear meaning in **{9.5}**, when the '*ḥaram*' months are a four-month period of grace given to the '*mushrikūn*' to convert, depart the land of Islam or face death **⟨52⟩**.

40. Changing the Qibla

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah/The Cow*): 144-145

144. We have seen you turning your face towards the heaven. We shall surely turn you to a direction that shall satisfy you. So turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque (built by Abraham): wherever you are, turn your faces to it. Those to whom the Book was given know this to be the truth from their Lord. Allah is not inattentive of what they do.

145. But even if you brought those to whom the Book had been given every proof, they would not accept your direction, nor would you accept theirs; nor would any of them accept the direction of the other.

If after all the knowledge you have been given you yield to their desires, then you will surely be among the harm-doers.

[*Qaribullah*]

The Hebrew bible (1 Kings 8.44-49, 2 Chronicles 6.34) instructed the Israelites to face towards Jerusalem when they pray, and this was the practice of the prophet Daniel during his exile in Babylon (Daniel 6.11).[176] Christians tend to build churches and dig graves facing to the east and the rising sun, as a symbol of the resurrection, although this is never regarded as a strict religious requirement. In **Surah 2**, the Qurʾan devotes several verses to the subject of the '*qibla*', literally '*that which is facing*' or '*opposite*', and almost universally understood as the direction to which believers should orient themselves as they pray. In **{2.155}** and **{2.177}** the Qurʾan implies there is no significance to this direction:

{2.155} To God belong the East and West. Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God.

God is All-encompassing, Knowing.



{2.177} It is not piety to turn your faces towards east and west.

Rather piety is he who believes in God …

In **{2.139-150}**, by contrast, the physical direction that one faces whilst praying, becomes a divine mandate, although a variable one. It is presented as an indication not merely of the orthodoxy of one's faith, but also of one's ability to respond to a change in instructions. The issue is surprisingly complex:

{2.139-141} denies that either Jews or Christians were entitled to claim the legacy of the Jewish patriarchs to the exclusion of the other or of the Arabs: '*Say you that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes were Jews or Christians? Say: 'Do you know better or does God?*".

{2.142} alludes to the fact that the Quranic community has changed its direction of prayer, to the mockery of '*fools*'. The phrase '*To God belongs the east and west*' is used, but here, unlike in **{2.155 & 177}**, the significance of the phrase seems not to be that the direction is of no consequence, but rather that God, through His prophet, can command believers to pray in any direction that He chooses.

{2.143} refers to a qibla which had been previously fixed ('Qibla 1'). The abandonment of this former qibla is justified, in part, by the

statement that it had only ever been appointed as a test, '*to know those who would follow the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels*.' The reason why it was that praying in this direction had been a challenge is not stated, but the verse acknowledges that so doing '*was indeed difficult*'.

{2.144} promises a new qibla '*well pleasing*' to the followers, namely towards the Masjid al-Haram ('Qibla 2'), and comments that '*those who have been given the Book know that it is the truth from their Lord*.'

{2.145-146} contrasts the new qibla with the practise of '*those who were given the Book*' (Jews and/or Christians) who have different, '*capricious*' qiblas, over which they disagree ('*nor are they followers of one another's qibla*').

{2.148} reflects in a general, possibly rather philosophical, way that '*everyone has a direction toward which he turns*', and

{2.149 & 150} repeat, one after the other, the main point that the Masjid al-Haram is now the correct qibla, and require believers, wherever they are, to turn towards it when they pray '*so that the people may have no argument against*' them.

The traditional Islamic understanding is that before the hijra and for a period of Muhammad's time at Yathrib, Muhammad and his followers had faced towards Jerusalem when they prayed. The revelation of **{2.144-145}** changed this prayer direction away from Jerusalem towards the Kaaba at Mecca in the Hijaz. This move has generally been interpreted as symbolic of a more profound change in the direction of the movement led by Muhammad, away from seeking to attract Jewish support and thenceforth to forge a distinctly Arab identity. According to one hadith (although

sometimes assessed as having a weak chain of transmission) Muhammad had initially prayed towards the Meccan Kaaba, prior to adopting the Jerusalem qibla.[177] Although Muhammad is, of course, never described as having been a polytheist himself, he is described as participating in the rituals associated with the Meccan Kaaba, including circling the Kaaba, traversing between the two hills of Safa and Marwa and kissing the black stone (see for example the extract from Ibn Ishaq produced at **⟨33⟩** above). He is even said to have personally placed the black stone in its position, after the rebuilding of the Kaaba when he was a young man.[178] So within the traditional narrative, the proposition that Muhammad had initially faced the Kaaba as he prayed is hardly incongruous. However, Ibn Ishaq himself does not assert this but instead asserts that Muhammad's first qibla had been Jerusalem.

The Majid al-Qiblatayn (the '*Mosque of the Two Qiblas*') in Medina is said to be the place where the change in the qibla was first announced, causing the congregation to abruptly turn about-face to re-orientate themselves – almost 180° - away from Jerusalem and towards Mecca midway through their prayers. Subsequently, the mihrab (a niche indicating the direction of the Kaaba) has become an important element in mosque design.

Early qibla evidence

The lack of early evidence for the existence of Mecca and the factors linking the Qurʾan's '*al-masjid al-ḥarām*' to Temple Mount in Jerusalem have already been referred to at **⟨2⟩**, **⟨35⟩** and **⟨37⟩** above (and will be revisited again at **⟨57⟩** below). It has also been seen **⟨2⟩**, **⟨35⟩** that it was around the summit of Mount Moriah that the Arabs constructed their first religious buildings following the seventh century conquests.

The earliest reference to the Arabs facing a specific direction when they prayed comes in a letter from Jacob of Edessa **⟨5⟩**, **⟨37⟩** probably when he was bishop of Edessa, addressed to John the Stylite. John had asked Jacob why the Jews prayed to the south, to which Jacob had replied:[179]

> '*Your question is vain … for it is not to the south that the Jews pray nor either do the Muslim. The Jews who live in Egypt and also the Muslims there, as I saw with my own eyes and will now set out for you, prayed to the east and still do, both people, the Jews towards Jerusalem and the Muslims towards the Kaaba. And those Jews who are to the south of Jerusalem pray to the north and those in the land of babel (Babylon?), in Hira and in Basra pray to the west. And also the Muslims who are there pray to the west, towards the Kaaba and those who are to the south of the Kaaba pray to the north towards that place. So, from all this that has been said, it is clear that it is not to the south that the Jews and Muslims here in the regions of Syria pray, but towards Jerusalem or the Kaaba, the patriarchal places of their races.*

Jacob had observed Muslims at prayer face east from Egypt, west from Mesopotamia and '*not to the south … but towards … the Kaaba* when in Syria. Based upon this, and the discovery of two early mosques in Iraq oriented almost due south west – i.e., well to the north of Mecca - Patricia Crone and Michael Crook in *Hagarism* proposed that there must have been '*a sanctuary in north-west Arabia… (to which) the location of the Hagarene sanctuary in Mecca was secondary*.' Further evidence of a possible north Arabian shrine may be found in the *Khuzistani Chronicl*e, written sometime between 660 and 670, which refers to a site of Arab worship as the '*Dome* (a rendering of the Aramaic word '*kawāʿba*' that is clearly connected to the Arabic '*kaaba*') *of Abraham*'. The chronicler believed that Arab worship at this site long predated the conquests of the 630s ('*It was not new for Arabs to worship there*') but states that he did not know where this site was, save that he believed its foundation was due to the fact that '*(Abraham), because he wanted to distance himself from the jealousy of the Canaanites, opted to dwell in the faraway and open lands of the desert*'.[180] A more exciting account of an Arabian shrine appears in the *Edifying Tales* of Anastasias of Sinai, (660-690) which records a story told by a Christian who had been captured by Muslims and taken to '*the place where they who hold us in slavery have the stone and the object of their worship*'. There he had seen the sacrifice of '*innumerable myriads of sheep and camels*' whereupon a

she demon in the guise of an old woman emerges from the earth to devour the animals' carcases.[181]

Dan Gibson's thesis for the origins of Mecca

A remarkable development in the question of the qibla has been made by studies of early post-conquest Arab buildings by independent scholar Dan Gibson. His findings have been published in *Quranic Geography* (2011) and *Early Islamic Qiblas: A Survey of Mosques Built Between 1AH/622 C.E. and 263 AH/876 CE* (2017). Gibson has also presented his findings in a film, *The Sacred City*, and a series of videos, and at the time of writing he maintains a website in which satellite photographs of the buildings that he has studied and directional indicators are combined with interactive digital maps.[182] These findings appear to demonstrate that almost all the earliest major post-conquest Arab buildings fit a pattern that had previously gone unnoticed. Most such buildings that were constructed in Arabia between the 630s and the Abbasid revolution in 750 face towards one of two locations, either Petra in Jordan or upon a region of the north-western Arabian Peninsula lying approximately half-way between Petra and Mecca. The latter is an orientation that Gibson calls the 'Between' qibla. Only one mosque is unambiguously oriented towards Jerusalem, and only three pre-750 mosques face towards Mecca, the earliest with a known date of construction being the Banbhore Mosque in Sindh (built in 727). In North Africa, and Spain early mosques were invariably built facing towards the south. Gibson's findings have not been substantively challenged (although his conclusions from them are hotly contested). It is suggested that the pattern that is revealed is too pervasive to be explained as a coincidence.

Based upon his findings, Gibson has proposed a revised history of early Islam of which the following is a summary:

- Petra was the site known as Mecca in the traditional Islamic narrative, where Muhammad lived and first announced the Qurʾan and the site of the Qurʾan's Masjid al-Haram and Kaaba. Gibson observes, it is suggested persuasively, that

descriptions of Mecca's topography in the narrative - a steep-sided valley with an upper and lower entrance, two narrow side valleys, crossed by a water channel and close to a nearby parallel valley - matches the actual topography of Petra well. He has identified a cubic building within a walled compound that could fit the narrative's description of the Kaaba, and he also finds some evidence of early Islamic writers referring to Mecca being located, not in the Hijaz but in the region of Paran where Petra lies.

- The primary object of devotion at Petra was the black stone, pieces of which are currently installed in the eastern corner of the Kaaba at Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The Second Fitna (680-692) led by Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr **⟨5⟩**, which reportedly made its last stand in Mecca, in fact had its base at Petra. When the tenth century historian, al-Tabari, describes al-Zubayr destroying the Kaaba during the siege of Mecca (al-Tabari does not explain why al-Zubayr did this) Gibson proposes that it was at this point that the black stone was removed from its original Kaaba in Petra and sent south into the Hijaz for safe-keeping.

- Gibson speculates that after the crushing of al-Zubayr's rebellion, those who had been tasked with protecting the black stone in the south, built a new shrine for it which quickly became established as a new site of pilgrimage around which grew the modern city of Mecca. This, Gibson suggests, is the event referred to in a rock inscription found near Taʾif, dated '*the year the Masjid al-Ḥarām was built in the seventy eighth year* [of the Arab calendar, i.e. 697]'.

- In the years that followed the black stone's removal to the Hijaz, Gibson proposes that the Arab world entered a time of qibla confusion.

With mosque-builders reluctant to construct places of worship facing either towards the destroyed and empty Kaaba at Petra nor towards the new unauthorised 'rebel' shrine at Mecca, he suggests that many chose to orient mosques towards a location mid-way between the two (the Between qibla). Leading this compromise solution was the Umayyad general who had defeated the rebellion, Abu Muhammad al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, who ordered the construction of two prominent Between mosques in southern Iraq, one of which, the Al-Wasit Mosque, Gibson points out, could be translated as '*the Between Mosque*').

- Following the Abbasid revolution in 750, the new shrine at Mecca gained official recognition. Ibn Ishaq was then commissioned to write a biography of Muhammad with the events, some still retaining clues of their original Petran setting, transposed to Mecca.

A proposed variation on Dan Gibson's thesis

The Qurʾan contains no reference to any black stone, and it is hard to imagine that its virulently anti-*shirk* author would have had any sympathy for those who prostrated before such an object. Consequently, the incongruous prominence of the stone in the Kaaba and the continued practice of its veneration to the present day calls for a more plausible explanation than that offered by Islamic tradition. Gibson's scenario that the Umayyads were orienting their buildings towards an object that was capable of being moved fits the evidence of the Petra, 'Between' and Meccan qiblas and the black stone is the obvious candidate for such an item. The Umayyad court's participation in such a cult would be entirely consistent with the absence of any evidence of its official recognition of Muhammad or the Qurʾan until after 692, and the with the evidence that Abu Bakr had replaced Muhammad as leader of the Arab tribes in 628, during Muhammad's lifetime. Although Dan Gibson's thesis is inevitably speculative, it is

suggested that this part of it accounts for the physical evidence of the qiblas and the stone better than any other.

However, it by no means follows from Umayyad veneration of the black stone that this obviously pagan cult had any connection with the Qurʾan's references to the Masjid al-Haram and Kaaba, which, it has been argued above **⟨2⟩** should be treated as terms for the Jerusalem Temple. It may be connected to the name Makkah, since, as we have seen, this name features only once in the Qurʾan as a valley where a treaty with some disbelievers was agreed **⟨46⟩**. Although these reluctant allies are described as '*they who disbelieved and turned you from the Masjid al-Haram*', **{48.25}**, there is no basis in the text to infer that the Masjid al-Haram is to be found inside the valley of Makkah. It has elsewhere been suggested that '*Makkah*' was in fact a name that had been invented for the valley by the Qurʾan author, to invest it and the treaty made there, with significance of being a staging post upon the Qurʾan author's advance to Jerusalem **⟨2⟩**. Could the disbelieving ally in the valley have been the Umayyad tribe? Of course, there are a very many valleys in the vicinity of Jerusalem in which the Qurʾan announcer may have made an agreement with some unbelievers. However, Gibson's evidence of the Umayyads' Petracentric devotion and his spotting of Petran geographical features in the biographical accounts of Muhammad, point to Petra playing a major but undocumented role in this narrative. One may wonder if, the Umayyads having maintained a devotion to the black stone which had been kept at Petra, the Qurʾan author had, following his acrimonious separation from them in 628, thereafter attacked Petra to compel their support of his Palestine campaign. Such a sequence of events would explain why **{48.25}** accuses the reluctant allies in the valley of Makkah of having previously turned away the Qurʾan author from his designs upon the Masjid al-Haram. It would also be consistent with the accounts in the traditional narrative of cross marriages between Muhammad and the Umayyads which, it will be suggested below, are more indicative of a relationship of distrustful allies than they are of one between a prophet and his devotees (see **⟨D⟩** below).

The Black Stone of Elegabal

One might reasonably wonder if the black stone of Islamic tradition and the current pieces of black stone in the Meccan Kaaba remnants of are the '*huge black stone with a pointed in the shape of a cone*'[183] that the Roman historian Herodian had centuries earlier described being worshipped at Emesa (Homs) in Syria under the Arabic name '*Ilah al-Jabal*' ('*God of the Mountain*'). The reason that this cultic object had come to the attention of Herodian was that in 218 its hereditary high priest, Elagabalus, a member of the Severan dynasty, was successfully installed as Roman Emperor by a rebellious legion, taking as his regnal name Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.

Antoninus had the '*Ilah al-Jabal*' stone transported to Rome where he had a temple built for it on the Capitoline Hill. He is also personally accompanied it as it was carried around the city in a chariot. A different Roman historian, Cassiuis Dio records that Elagbalus was circumcised and swore to abstain from the consumption of swine.[184] After Antoninus's deposition and murder in 222, Herodian reports that '*The statues of the gods that Heriogabalus had moved or transferred were returned to their original positions in the ancient temples and shrines*'.[185] Thereafter, the Ilah al-Jabal is not heard of by that name again. It is by no means implausible that over the succeeding four centuries this obviously highly regarded item was moved the short distance from Homs to Petra to avoid its destruction by Christians, or that relics from its destruction were retrieved and taken there.

41. A Miraculous Victory. 'The Battle of Badr'

Surah 8 (*Al-Anfal/The Spoils of War*): 12-14

12. Remember thy Lord inspired the angels (with the message):

'I am with you, give firmness to the Believers. I will instil terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers: smite ye above their necks and smite all their finger-tips off them.'

13. This because they contended against Allah and His Messenger. If any contend against Allah and His Messenger, Allah is strict in punishment.

14. Thus (will it be said): 'Taste ye then (of the punishment). For those who resist Allah, is the penalty of the Fire.'

[*Yusuf Ali/Saudi approved revision, 1985*]

Surahs 2 and **22** justify fighting but it is not clear whether this longest and most technically complex surah was composed before during or after the hostilities that they contemplate. However, other surahs are certainly composed in a time of war and **Surah 8** in particular is exultant in celebrating an important victory. In the traditional Islamic narrative, this is the Battle of Badr, fought two months after the raid at Naklah **⟨38⟩**. Ibn Ishaq introduces the events as follows:

> *Then the apostle heard that Abu Sufyan bin Harb was coming from Syria with a large caravan of Quraysh, containing their money and merchandise accompanied by some thirty or forty men ...*

> *When the apostle heard about Abu Sufyan coming from Syria, he summoned the Muslims and said: 'This is the Quraysh caravan containing their property. Go out to attack it and perhaps God will give it as prey.'* [186]

After the raid upon the caravan at Naklah, Abu Sufyan is said to have been alert to a possible attack by Muhammad and to have sent out scouts who uncovered traces of scouts that had been sent out by Muhammad to locate the caravan. Having learned of Muhammad's proximity, Abu Sufyan sent a messenger to Mecca to summon help and altered his caravan's route in order to circumvent the ambush. Upon the arrival of Abu Sufyan's messenger, the Meccans hastily assembled a relief force which set off for the area where the caravan had last been known to be, bypassing Abu Sufyan's caravan, which returned to Mecca without incident. The Meccan fighters arrived in the valley of Badr at the same time as Muhammad and his followers and the two groups rested overnight before doing battle the following day. Ibn Ishaq reports that that evening a messenger reached the Meccan force to advise it that the caravan was now safe, and that on hearing this some of their number returned to Mecca, but that the Meccans' leader, Abu Jahl (literally '*the father of ignorance*') declared that he would not turn back '*until God decide between us and Muhammad*'.

According to al-Tabari, verses **{54.45-47}** record the words of Muhammad to his fighters on the morning of the battle:

{54.45}	The whole shall be routed and they will turn their backs.
{54.46}	Nay! The Hour is their tryst and the Hour is more calamitous and more bitter.
{54.47}	Truly, the guilty are astray and mad.

As it turned out, the confrontation did indeed result in a victory for Muhammad and in the deaths of eighty Meccans including some of the settlement's most prominent leaders including Abu Jahl.

Surah 8 commences with the claim that: '*The spoils belong to God and His Messenger*', **{8.1}** - although this blanket appropriation by the prophet in the name of God was amended by **{8.41}** to '*a fifth is for God and the Messenger, and for kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent and the traveller*', possibly added later as the regular acquisition of war booty – or his fighters - called for a more systematic distribution. Basking in the recollection of the victory, **{8.5-9}** call to mind that some of the believers had been reluctant to set forth on the expedition and that those who had joined him had desired to attack '*the unarmed company*' – in the traditional narrative, Abu Sufyan's caravan – rather than the armed one. However, following the victory confidence was high, **{8.39}** repeating the bullish formula seen in **{2.193}** ⟨**37**⟩: '*And fight them until there is no more fitna and religion is wholly for God*'.

Whatever were the actual facts of the conflict described in **Surah 8**, it seems to mark a critical transition in the Qurʾan author's depiction of his mission. The expectation that had been consistently promoted in the early Qurʾan, was that God would reserve the punishment of the wicked to himself and that the Qurʾan's announcer himself was '*naught but a warner*' ⟨**36**⟩. In later surahs it is repeatedly stated to be God's will that His messenger should command his followers to fight as a test of their devotion ⟨**93**⟩. Signs that **Surah 8** effectively forms a bridge between these two positions can be detected in verses that are at pains to attribute the victory to divine intervention. The battle is referred to using the same terms that appeared in the earlier punishment-narratives. **{8.7}** states that '*God had desired to verify the truth through His Words and to cut off the last remnant of the disbelievers*', combining the words of Moses in **{10.82}** ('*Surely God does not allow the deeds of those who work corruption to flourish. God verifies the truth through His Words*') and God's statements that He had '*cut off of the last remnants*' of the peoples of Noah, **{15.66}**, and of Lot, **{7.72}**. During the course of the battle God had reportedly sent the believers '*drowsiness*', **{8.11}**. which, whilst a strange asset in the midst of fighting, might indicate that the fighters had a sense of detachment from their actions, and '*a blessing of water from the sky to purify*' them, the latter explained in Islamic tradition as an unexpected storm that had worked to the tactical advantage of the Muslims. He also reportedly sent them, **{8.9}**, the assistance of '*a thousand angels, rank*

upon rank' - in the later **{3.124}** this would become three thousand angels **⟨41⟩** - who had cast terror into the hearts of the infidels and assailed with swords their necks and fingertips, **{8.12}**, faces and backs, **{8.50}**, saying '*Taste the punishment of the burning*'. Muhammad's fighters themselves were reassured with the words: '*You did not slay them, but God slew them, and thou threwest not when thou threwest but God threw,*' **{8.17}**. Only the barest detail is given of the battle itself. The reference to the audience's desire to fight an '*unarmed company*' suggests that the expedition had been planned as a raid on an undefended target. Later in the surah we are told that the believers and their enemy faced one another from facing slopes with a caravan below them:

> **{8.42}** When you were on the near slope
> and they were on the far slope
> and the caravan was below you.
> And had you made a tryst with
> each other you would have failed
> the tryst…

Badr is traditionally said to be one of only two fields of battle to be named in the Qurʾan, being apparently mentioned in **{3.123}** when the survivors of a less disciplined force (traditionally at the Battle of Uhud **⟨42⟩**) are urged to reflect how '*God certainly helped you at Badr when you were lowly*'. In *No Battle of 'Badr'*,[187] Christophe Luxenberg has disputed this. Based upon his analysis of the earliest manuscript to feature the verse, he proposess that the standard reading of '*bi-badrin*' as '*at Badr*' is mistaken and that when the later-added diacritical marks are disregarded, the rasm in fact reads '*bi-ʿiḏr*', importing to the Qurʾan the Aramaic word '*ʿeḏrā*' meaning '*help, aid, support; auxiliary troop*'. This reinterpretation accords with the Qurʾan's tendency to avoid contemporary place names. It would also fit the context provided by **{3.123}**, which concerns God's assistance to the believers in battle, and the following verse which quantifies this aid as '*three thousand angels sent down*'. Luxenberg offers a revised meaning of **{3.123}**: '*God helped you with an auxiliary troop (i.e., a heavenly legion consisting of three thousand angels) seeing that you were a small number*'. At the very least Luxenberg has demonstrated once again, the difficulty

deriving a reliable rendering of the Qurʾan based upon its rasm alone.

The captives of Badr

After the battle, the Qurʾan addresses the fate of the captives that had been taken:

> **{8.67}** It is not for a prophet to take captives until he overwhelms (his enemy) in the land. You desire the ephemeralities of this world whilst God desires the Hereafter.
>
> And God is Mighty, Wise.

What it is a prophet must do, according to this verse, before they are permitted to take captives has been variously translated to mean killing many of their enemy ('*made slaughter*' *per* Arberry and Pickthall or '*thoroughly decimated the enemy*', Ali Qarai) or confirming their dominance ('*thoroughly subdued the land*' *per* Yusuf Ali, '*conquered the battlefield*', Abdel-Haleem.) In either case, the counsel not to take prisoners prematurely admits no plausible interpretation other than that a prophet should continue to fight even should a withdrawal on advantageous terms be practicable, until their victory is absolute. Ibn Ishaq states that forty-three captives were taken at Badr. According to several *aḥādīth*, Muhammad asked his closest companions for their opinions what should be done with them. Abu Bakr's view was that they should all be released unconditionally, whilst Umar advised that they be put to the sword. In the event, the *aḥādīth* continue, Muhammad ransomed all of his prisoners except for two whom he ordered to be executed, this as punishment for their having mocked him during his Meccan years. A short time later, Umar is said to have found Muhammad weeping, and upon his enquiring the reason why, Muhammad informed him that God had just revealed **{8.67}** to him. His grief, it seems, was due to his belated realisation that God had intended him to kill more of the captives than had, rather than ransom them in exchange for the '*ephemeralities of this world*'.[188]

42. A Setback; 'The Battle of Uhud'

Surah 3 (*Al ʿImrān/The House of Imran*): 152-153

152. Indeed, Allah fulfilled His promise to you when you initially swept them away by His Will, then your courage weakened and you disputed about the command and disobeyed, after Allah had brought victory within your reach. Some of you were after worldly gain while others desired a heavenly reward.

He denied you victory over them as a test, yet He has pardoned you.

And Allah is Gracious to the believers.

153. (Remember) when you were running far away (in panic), not looking at anyone, while the Messenger was calling to you from behind!

So Allah rewarded your disobedience with distress upon distress.

Now, do not grieve over the victory you were denied or the injury you suffered. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do.

[*The Clear Quran, a Thematic English Translation, Khattab, 2016, (Al Azhar/Canadian Council of Imams)*]

Ibn Ishaq tells us that in the aftermath of the Battle of Badr and the deaths of many prominent Meccans, the wily caravan leader Abu Sufyan who had detected and avoided Mohammad's ambush, bringing his caravan safely home was acclaimed the new leader of the Meccan community. One year later, Abu Sufyan assembled a much larger and better prepared force than the one that had been

dispatched in haste with such disastrous result a year before. This time the Meccans had rode out in force under the command of Abu Sufyan, determined to avenge their losses and remove Muhammad as a threat to their trade routes.

The subsequent battle is described in detail by Ibn Ishaq. When Muhammad learnt of the Meccan advance upon Yathrib he is said to have led his fighters out of the town and deployed his main force at the foot of nearby Mount Uhud, with fifty archers positioned on a hill that overlooked the approach to the main force. This number, if accurate, would indicate that Muhammad's available fighting force had swelled considerably in numbers and vastly improved in discipline and weapons specialisation in the twelve months since Badr. The Meccans arrived and attacked but were deterred from using their cavalry by the presence of the archers. However, just as the Meccan fighters were being forced back and the day seemed to be won, the archers abandoned their positions in order to plunder the unguarded Meccan camp. In the reported account of one witness:

> *God sent down His help to the Muslims and fulfilled his promise. They slew the enemy with the sword until they cut them off from their camp., and there was an obvious rout. …*
>
> *There was nothing at all to prevent anyone seizing them when the archers turned aside to the camp when the enemy had been cut off from it. Making for the spoil. Thus, they opened our rear to the cavalry and we were attacked from behind. Someone called out 'Ha! Muhammad has been killed!' We turned back and the enemy turned back on us after we had killed the standard bearers …*
>
> *The Muslims were put to flight and the enemy slew many of them. It was a day of trial and testing in which God honoured several with martyrdom, until the enemy got at the apostle who was hit with a stone so that he fell on his side and one of his teeth was smashed, his face scored, and his lip injured.* [189]

A small group of Muhammad's most loyal defenders are described being cut down as they tried to protect their fallen leader, but the majority of his men, believing the battle to be lost and their prophet slain, retreated back to the foot of Mount Uhud, and Abu Sufyan called off his attack. It was sometime later, as the injured were being attended to, that Muhammad was discovered by one of his community to be still alive and helped to a ravine on Mount Uhud. From this position he held a shouted conversation with Abu Sufyan.

If these events had actually occurred, then Abu Sufyan could, had he so wished, with relative ease have pursued and either killed or captured Muhammad and then sacked his followers' undefended homes and enslaved their women and children. As Richard A Gabriel observes in *Muhammad, Islam's First Great General*, there can be little doubt that this is what the Muhammad of Ibn Ishaq's narrative would have done had the positions been reversed. But for reasons that the traditional accounts do not explain, but which one must attribute to a sense of chivalry, Abu Sufyan attempted none of these courses, and believing honour to have been satisfied, began the return march to Mecca.[190]

Uhud is said to be referred to throughout the second half **of Surah 3. {3.121}** is traditionally believed to describe how Muhammad '*didst leave (his) household at daybreak to assign the believers their positions for the battle*' and **{3.123-129}** take the form of an address to his fighters, reminding them of their earlier victory of Badr and encouraging them that '*if … they come at you immediately, your Lord will support you with five thousand angels*.' But whilst the earlier Surah **8** has triumphant tone, **Surah 3** is reproachful. **{3.140-141, 146-148, 152-158 & 165-168}** clearly either anticipate or reflect upon some military setback. One verse purports to prepare the believers in advance for the possibility of defeat and console them by reminding them of a past victory:

> **{3.140}** If a wound afflicts you, a like
> wound has already afflicted that
> people. And such days in turn
> We hand out to mankind.

> And this is so that God may
> know those who believe and take
> witnesses from among you and
> God loves not the wrongdoers.

{3.144}, which is one of the four verses of the Qurʾan to mention Muhammad by name (borrowing the same turn of phrase attributed elsewhere to Jesus **⟨5⟩**), even prepares the fighters for the potential death of their leader:

> **{3.144}** Muhammad is naught but a
> messenger; messengers have
> passed before him. So if he dies
> or is slain, will you turn back
> upon your heels?
>
> Whosoever turns back on his
> heels will not harm god in the
> least, and God will reward the
> thankful.'

{3.152-153} (produced above), reflecting upon the battle, describe how the squandered opportunity for victory and subsequent chaotic rout was a consequence of disobedience and greed.

The Battle of Uhud is also associated with the Qurʾan's repeated warnings in **Surahs 4 and 5** against relying upon unbelievers. **{4.51-52}** bitterly reflects that '*of those who were given a portion of the book, who believe in idols and false deities*' are cursed and from them believers will find no helper, whilst **{4.71-73}** instructs believers to '*go forth in companies or go forth all together*' and to beware those who would '*tarry*' whilst they weigh up the prospects for success. **{4.88-89}** goes further and asserts that '*hypocrites*', rather than deserting the Muslim army of their own volition, had been '*cast back*' by God Himself. One learning point of the battle is that success depends upon self-reliance and total commitment. Believers should not take unbelievers as allies; indeed, if a person shows themselves to lack belief by turning their back, the instruction is to '*seize them and slay them wherever you find them*.' By tradition, this rage at hypocrites was aimed primarily at one Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul, chief of the Banu Kazraj tribe at Yathrib who had confessed his belief in Muhammad as a prophet out of fear of him. According to al-Tabari,

ibn Ubayy had confided with associates shortly before the battle: '*Our situation with Muhammad is as in the saying 'fatten your dog and he will eat you'*.' Ibn Ubayy is traditionally said to have led his tribe out to fight alongside Muhammad but then to have turned back, either because Muhammad had rejected the assistance of Jews within his army's ranks, or because ibn Ubayy had had a change of heart and concluded that he could not leave the town undefended.

Ibn Ishaq adds a postscript to the story of the Battle of Uhud. According to this, as Abu Sufyan returned to Mecca, Muhammad followed him and, in order to deter him from turning back he lit many campfires and sent a man to warn Abu Sufyan that the Muslims had gained reinforcements from Yathrib. This story of a bold military deception, which is ill-suited to being applied to a defeated community pursuing retreating victors, was likely Ibn Ishaq's seizing upon **{4.101}**'s '*Slacken not in the pursuit of these people*', to mitigate the Qurʾan's unmistakeable reflection of a defeat, and affording Muhammad the dignity of demonstrating that he remained unbowed.

43. *'There is no compulsion in religion'*

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah/The Cow*): 256

There shall be no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error.

But whoever refuses to be led by Satan and believes in God has grasped the strong handhold that will never break.
God is all Hearing and all Knowing.

[*Wahihuddin Khan, 1997]*

After Muhammad and his supporters' arrival at Yathrib, Ibn Ishaq describes a deteriorating situation between Muhammad and the Yathrib Jews and their Arab allies.

> *About this time the Jewish rabbis showed hostility to the apostle in envy, hatred and malice, because God had chosen his apostle from the Arabs. They were joined by men from the al-Aus and al-Khazraj* [the two largest non-Jewish clans in Medina] *who had obstinately clung to their heathen religion. They were hypocrites, clinging to the polytheism of their fathers, denying the resurrection, yet when Islam appeared, and their people flocked to it, they were compelled to pretend to accept it to save their lives. But in secret they were hypocrites whose inclination was towards the Jews because they considered the apostle a liar and strive against Islam.*
>
> *It was the Jewish rabbis who used to annoy the apostle with questions and introduce confusion so as to confound the truth with falsity. …* [191]

The Banu Qaynuqa

The traditional narrative records the first conflict between Muhammad and his Jewish neighbours arising from an incident involving a Muslim woman and a goldsmith from the Jewish Banu Qaynuqa tribe in the year that separated the Battle of Badr from the Battle of Uhud. According to Ibn Hisham's biography of Muhammad, the goldsmith had, by means of a trick, exposed a Muslim woman's body in public, leading to a confrontation in which the goldsmith was killed by an outraged Muslim, and that Muslim was in turn killed by members of the goldsmith's tribe. Ibn Ishaq describes Muhammad gathering all of the Banu Qaynuqa tribe together and announcing two revelations from God. One of these, **{3.12-13}**, makes an ominous reference to the fate of the Meccans at his recent victory at Badr.

{3.12} Say to the disbelievers: You shall be vanquished and gathered unto Hell, an evil resting place.

{3.13} There was a sign for you in the two hosts that met, one host fighting in the way of God and the other disbelieving, whom they (the former) saw as twice themselves as the eye sees.

And God strengthens by His help whom He will. Truly in that is a lesson for those who possess insight.

The second revelation (within the context given by Ibn Ishaq) warns others present not to take the Qaynuqa's part.

{5.51} O you who believe, Take not Jews and Christians as protectors. They are protectors of one another. And whosoever takes them as protectors, surely he is of them.

Truly God guides not
wrongdoing people.

After announcing these verses, Muhammad is then said to have declared that the Qaynuqa were in breach of their covenant with him. Muhammad seems to have had some sort of a violent collective punishment in mind, because we are told that he was persuaded by Abdullah ibn Ubayy to permit the tribe to leave Yathrib with their property.[192]

The Banu Nadir

After the Battle of Uhud, with its defeat having been caused, in part, by the desertion of Muhammad by Abdullah ibn Ubayy, Muhammad besieged and expelled a second Jewish tribe, the Banu Nadir. This time the cause of the confrontation arose from Muhammad's demand for compensation from the Banu Nadir for two men that had been killed (concerning which Ibn Ishaq gives no details). Whilst he was waiting outside their compound for the Nadir to respond to his demand, Muhammad received a warning - according to one version from a woman informant, according to another from the angel Gabriel - that the Nadir were plotting to kill him by dropping a rock on him. As with the Banu Qaynuqa a year previously, when Muhammad's fighters besieged their compound and began cutting down their palm groves, the Banu Nadir surrendered to Muhammad and were permitted to leave Yathrib, some destroying their homes to prevent Muhammad occupying them. The ousting is said to be recalled in **Surah 59**, in which reference is made to the believers destroying the palm groves, **{59.5}**, and the Nadir destroying their own houses, **{59.2}**, rather than leave them for their enemies.

{59.2} He it is who expelled those who disbelieved among the people of the Book from their homes at the first gathering. You did not think they would go forth, and they thought their fortresses would protect them from God.

> Then God came upon them
> whence they reckoned not,
> and cast terror into their hearts as
> they razed their houses with their
> own hands, and with the hands
> of the believers.
>
> So take heed those of you who
> are possessed of sight.

'No compulsion in religion'

It was as the Banu Nadir were leaving that **{2.256}**, the well-known proclamation that '*There is no compulsion in religion*' (produced above) is traditionally said to have been delivered. One hadith records:

> *The women of the Helpers whose boys always died in infancy used to vow to bring up their boys as Jews if they were to live. When the Banu Nadir were driven out, they had among them children of the Helpers.*
>
> *The Helpers said: 'We will not leave our children!'*
>
> *Upon which Allah, exalted is He, revealed: 'There is no compulsion in religion… '*

These circumstances, a forcible mass expulsion of a tribe from its home for their refusal to comply with a demand for money, hardly support the frequent citation of **{2.256}** as the Qurʾan's pre-eminent statement of religious tolerance. However, this is very unlikely to have been the true context of the verse. The textual context is that **{2.256}** follows very shortly after the Qurʾan's approving citation of two historic instances of righteous violence. **{2.249-252}** contains the Qurʾan's account of Saul routing the Philistines and slaying their champion Goliath, **⟨24⟩**. This, we are told, was justified because '*were it not for God's repelling people some by means of other the earth would have been corrupted*'. Then, in the following two verses, we are told that God had ordained that the '*believing*' and '*disbelieving*' followers of Jesus should fight one another, **{2.253}**, this aggression justified on the basis that '*the disbelievers, they are the*

wrongdoers', **{2.254}**. These two accounts of the triumph through conflict of first the Israelites under Saul and then the followers of Jesus, lead to the '*throne verse*', **{2.255}** (produced at **⟨11⟩** above), which proclaims the sovereignty of God over all things. Following this build up, the intended meaning of **{2.256}**'s statement that there is no compulsion in religion, far from being an expression of ecumenical coexistence, would appear to be an exhortation to the Qurʾan's audience to perform their religious duty to fight unbelievers. That there is no compulsion in the performance of one's *dīn*, is merely a recognition that God has the power to compel man to perform his religious duty but that He chooses not to do so in order to test an individual's zeal. The same idea is expressed at **{50.39-45}** in relation to unbelievers: '*So bear patiently what they say … Thine is not to compel them.*'

Even were one to disregard both the verse's traditional narration context and its textual context, the wording of **{2.256}** would still be incapable of conveying the principle of interfaith tolerance that many present it as carrying. The verse instructs that one should not compel the '*religion*' ('*dīn*') of others, but what, in this interpretation, is it that should not to be coerced? The term, '*dīn*', of Hebrew origin, is defined in Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon* as '*a system of usage and rites, a mode of conduct, or the regulation of affairs*.' (see also **⟨33⟩**). Within the setting of **{2.256}** this may mean either the observance of a religion through compliance with its particular mandates and rituals (the narrow meaning), or it may carry a broader interpretation of the general ordering of society on religiously prescribed lines ('the broad meaning'). It must be the narrow meaning of personal religiosity that is intended by:

> **{109.6}**: '*Unto you your (dīn) and unto me my (dīn)* (see **⟨33⟩** above).

It is latter the latter broad meaning of societal organisation that is intended by:

> **{2.193}**: '*Fight them until there is no strife and (dīn) is all for God*' (see **⟨37⟩** above) and

> **{3.83}**: '*Do they seek other than God's religion (dīn Allāh), whilst whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth submits to him, willingly or unwillingly*'.

If **{2.256}** uses '*dīn*' in the narrow sense of complying with a religion's requirements on adherents, it would only prohibit a believer from coercing a reluctant unbeliever into performing religious rituals such as daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, the making of the hajj, acts, etc. Yet it would not make sense that any believer would seek to compel such conduct from an unbeliever, since to do so would bring about no benefit to either party. On the other hand, if '*dīn*' were to be given the broader interpretation of a structuring of society, it would deprive many Quranic laws of any real meaning. There is certainly no indication that the later announced sharĭa laws (to be addressed in **Part V**) concerning marriage and inheritance laws, the regulation of retaliation and the prohibition of certain activities as haram, is in any way a matter of individual choice. This would be inconsistent with the fixing of severe punishments to be inflicted upon those who fail to abide by the rules, and the legitimisation of violence against those who obstruct the spread of God's '*dīn*' **⟨93⟩**. Under either meaning of '*dīn*' the popular irenic interpretation of **{2.256}** makes no sense. The wording certainly falls a long way short of an instruction that a believer is obliged to respect, or even tolerate the expression of, a rejection of God's revealed word. Rather, the implicit characterisation in the latter two thirds of **{2.256}** of those who decline to follow God's *dīn* as people who are in error and have failed to grasp the only sure support, tends to suggest precisely the opposite.

44. 'The Battle of the Trench'

Surah 33 (*Al-Ahzab/The Parties*): 10

When they (the disbelievers) invaded you
from above (the eastern side of the valley),
and from below (the western side of the valley),
and when (your) eyes were distracted (with terror),
and (your) hearts rose up to your throats (with horror),
and you began to think various uncertainties about Allah
(in a state of fear and hope).

[*Tahrir Ul-Qadri,*]

The third and final military confrontation between Muhammad and the Meccans is said by Islamic tradition to have occurred after further attacks by Muhammad on Meccan caravans, and as the Muslims were increasingly subduing by raids and treaties the Bedouin tribes who controlled the land these caravans travelled through. In an attempt to break this tightening economic stranglehold, the Meccans raised their largest force yet, including mercenaries from Africa, and for a second time in three years marched out from Mecca upon Yathrib. This time, Muhammad kept his fighters within the settlement, which he fortified with a ditch across the only access route suitable for a cavalry charge. The Meccans appear to have been taken by surprise by this tactic and did not attempt to cross the ditch in numbers. Instead, they besieged Muhammad, but after a month, running low on provisions and suffering the demoralising effects of adverse weather, winds referred to in **{33.9}**, and without any plan to breach Muhammad's defences, the Meccans eventually abandoned their siege, without any major fighting having taken place.

The stand-off is said to be the events alluded to throughout **{33.9-25}**.

45. 'Annihilation of the Banu Qurayza'

Surah 33 (*Al-Ahzab/The Parties*): 26-27

26. He has brought those of the People of the Book (the Jews) who had backed them, down from their fortresses, and cast awe into their hearts, so as to make you kill some of them and take others as captives,

27. And He let you inherit their land and their homes and their wealth, and a land you have not trodden (so far).

And Allah is Powerful to do any thing.

[Quran-e-Karim, *Justice Mufti Taqi Usmani, 2007, former justice of the Pakistan federal Shariat court*]

Ibn Ishaq reports that during the Meccan siege of Yathrib, the so-called Battle of the Trench **⟨44⟩**, a Jewish tribe within Medina, the Banu Qurayza, had received messages from the besieging army. In these, the Meccans urged the Qurayza to attack Muhammad from within the enclosure and by so doing draw Muslim fighters away from the trench, enabling the Meccans to storm across. These negotiations had ultimately broken down due to mutual distrust, sown by an agent loyal to Muhammad.

Immediately following the abandonment of the siege, Muhammad marched his fighters against the Qurayza, and for a third time in three years he besieged a Jewish tribe in Yathrib. Ibn Ishaq does not say so, but the Qurayza appear at that time to have been be last remaining Jewish tribe in Yathrib. At any rate, no free Jews are mentioned in Yathrib thereafter.

As a condition for their surrender, the Banu Qurayza secured Muhammad's agreement that the fate of the tribe should be determined by a non-Muslim, one Sa'd ibn Mu'adh whom the Banu Qurayza had hoped would be sympathetic to them. However, against the expectations of the Qurayza, ibn Mu'adh delivered a verdict *'that the men should be killed, the property divided, and the women and children taken as captives'*.[193] The first part of this sentence was promptly carried out by Muhammad's men, as described by Ibn Ishaq.[194]

> *Then (the Banu Qurayza) surrendered, and the apostle confined them in Medina in the quarter of al-Harith, a woman of Banu al-Najjar. Then the apostle went out to the market of Medina (which is still its market today) and dug trenches in it. Then he sent for them and struck off their heads in those trenches as they were brought out to him in batches.*
>
> *Among them was the enemy of Allah, Huyayy bin Akhtab (the Meccan who had first proposed that the Qurayza enter an alliance with the Meccans) and Ka`b bin Asad (the Banu Qurayza's) chief. There were 600 or 700 in all, though some put the figure as high as 800 or 900.*
>
> *As they were being taken out in batches to the apostle, they asked Ka`b what he thought would be done with them. He replied: 'Will you never understand? Don't you see that the summoner never stops and those who are taken away do not return? By Allah it is death!' This went on until the apostle made an end of them.*
>
> *Huyayy was brought out wearing a flowered robe in which he had made holes about the size of the fingertips in every part so that it should not be taken from him as spoil, with his hands bound to his neck by a rope. When he saw the apostle, he said: 'By God, I do not blame myself for opposing you, but he who forsakes God will be forsaken.'*
>
> *Then he went to the men and said: 'God's command is right. A book and a decree, and massacre have been written against the Sons of Israel.' Then he sat down and his head was struck off.*

The women and children of the Banu Qurayza were then enslaved as ibn Muʿadh had decreed. Muhammad is said to have taken one widow, Rayhana, as his concubine, after she had refused his proposal to marry her (see **⟨D⟩** below). Some of the other female captives were said by Ibn Ishaq to have been exchanged for horses and weapons, further increasing Muhammad's military strength.

The Traditional Narrative's Jew-Punishment Episodes

All three stories of Muhammad attacking Jewish tribes in Yathrib follow a similar pattern. In each case the Jews are presented as having brought punishment upon themselves either by their refusal to submit to Muhammad's dominion over them (the Banu Qaynuqa and Banu Nadir **⟨43⟩**) or by their having secretly conspired to attack him (the Banu Nadir again and Banu Qurayza). In the each of the alleged conspiracies Muhammad is forewarned of their treachery by a human informant or possibly by the intervention of the angel Gabriel before any hostile action had been attempted, and so he is able to pre-empt it and get his retaliation in first. In the resulting confrontation, each Jewish tribe is essentially passive, one assembling in the centre of Yathrib at Muhammad's direction, the other two surrendering after having been briefly besieged in their compound. There is never any question as to which side is the stronger militarily or any real prospect of a battle that the believers might lose. Within Ibn Ishaq's broader narrative, the accounts of these three rebellions beg a factual question, as well as raising the obvious ethical considerations. On what basis is it proposed that the tribes had owed Muhammad their submission? As has been previously observed, none of these tribes is named amongst the parties to the 'Constitution of Medina' which refers to seven groups of Jews, each embedded in an Arab tribe **⟨37⟩**. In fact, Ibn Ishaq never revisits these Jewish signatories to the constitution to tell us what became of them, an omission that reinforces the sense of disconnect between his account of events and the only document other than the Qurʾan, likely to have originated in the period concerned.

It is likely that all three narratives stemmed from a need by the architect of the Muhammad story to explain the Qurʾan's references to its audience having expelled the People of the Book

from their homes, **{59.2}**, alternatively the believers having inherited the '*land … homes and … wealth*' of the People of the Book, **{33.27}**. The promise in **{33.27}** of yet further conquests, again from the People of the Book. The latter promises further conquest of '*a land you have not trodden*'; a reference duly explained as yet another assault upon a Jewish settlement, this time some distance away from Yathrib at an oasis called Kaybar (to be addressed at **⟨47⟩** below).

Both these verses of the believers seizing the homes, land and wealth of the People of the Book should be read in the light of the Qurʾan announcer's mission to establish his control over Jerusalem's Temple Mount, the Masjid al-Haram. This specific objective has been proposed at **⟨35⟩** above as providing the true context for **{17.2-7}**, supposedly referring to the miraculous Night Journey. This passage like **{59.2}** and **{33.27}**, refers to a past destruction of the '*homes*' of the children of Israel, and contains a promise that their faces will once again be made wretched when the believers enter the Jerusalem Temple.

It is proposed that the first part of **Surah 5** was composed on the eve of the Qurʾan announcer sending his forces into the Holy Land.

{5.1-7} contains various directions regarding ritual purity, including dietary laws **⟨76⟩** and ablutions before prayer **⟨54⟩**.

{5.8-11} follows these instructions with a promise of God's blessing and a great reward for those who believe and perform righteous deeds.

{5.12-14} then reflects upon how first the Children of Israel had broken their covenant with God, and then the Christians had forgotten '*that whereof they had been reminded*',

{5.18-19} refers to the claims by both Jews' and Christians' claim to be beloved by God, but counters this with the statement that God forgives and punishes whomsoever He will and states that He has sent a new messenger.

{5.20-26} then recalls how Moses had once chided the Israelites for their lack of faith in entering Canaan, and

{5.33} lays down a scheme of punishments that will henceforth be righteously imposed upon '*those who spread corruption in the land*' and wage war on God and His Messenger **⟨72⟩**.

If '*the land*' in **{5.33}** were a reference either to territory that was already controlled by the Qurʾan announcer at the time of the verse's composition or else a reference to the earth in general, there would have been no reason to prelude the announcement of the punitive sanctions by recalling the faithlessness of Jews and Christians or the hesitancy of the Israelites to enter the Promised Land. It is suggested that the only interpretation of **{5.33}** that relate it to the verses that precede it is that the land concerned is Palestine and that **Surah 5** was composed to rally the believers to enter the Promised Land as Moses had once long before rallied the Israelites to do. It is uncontested that the Arabs did indeed conquer Palestine in the 630s. It has also been alluded to above, and will be substantiated below, that two contemporary sources name Muhammad himself as the leader of these expeditions. Consequently, it is against this backdrop of the declaration of a mission from God to invade Palestine that we should read the Qurʾan's allusions to the believing community inheriting the homes of the People of the Book. The formulaic and implausible series of squabbles with isolated Jewish tribes of farmers, traders and artisans said to have been resident in Yathrib when Muhammad arrived there - entirely documented even in the Constitution of Medina - may be dismissed as mere inventive exegesis.

46. An Agreement with Unbelievers, 'The Treaty of Hudaybiyyah'

Surah 48 (*Al-Fath/Victory*): 24

It is He who restrained their hands from you, and your hands from them, in the hollow of Mecca, after that He made you victors over them.

God sees the things you do.

[*Arberry, 1955 (British orientalist)*]

With the horses and weapons purchased with the spoils of the Banu Qurayza and with the Meccans humbled by their failure to capture Yathrib at the Battle of the Trench, Muhammad is said to have led a large group of followers (Ibn Ishaq offers estimated figures of seven hundred and fourteen hundred) to Mecca, ostensibly to make pilgrimage to the Kaaba shrine. A Meccan force is said to have left Mecca and to have intercepted Muhammad's pilgrimage at Hudaybiyyah. Ibn Ishaq records that after the exchange of some unpleasantries between the two parties, Muhammad sent his son-in-law Uthman, the cousin of Meccan leader Abu Sufyan, to try to negotiate the Muslims' right of entry to the town.[195] As the negotiations took longer than had been expected, a rumour had then circulated that Uthman had been killed, and Muhammad took individual oaths from his men that if this rumour transpired to be true, they would fight the Meccans to avenge Uthman. These pledges of allegiance were said to have been taken under a tree, referred to in **{48.18}** (produced in **⟨47⟩** following).

According to this narrative, Uthman had not in fact been harmed and the negotiations eventually led to an agreement between Muhammad and the Meccans '*to lay aside war for ten years during which men can be safe and restrain from hostilities*.' It was during their return trip to Yathrib, Muhammad is said to have announced all

of **Surah 48**, beginning: '*Truly We have granted thee a manifest victory*'. **{48.25}** offers a reason for accepting the treaty, this being that otherwise innocents - '*believing men and believing women whom you know not*' - would have died in the fighting, and '*lest you … incur guilt unknowingly*.' Yet again, however, the story to explain a Qurʾan passage fails to adequately align with the passage concerned. The reason provided for God endorsing a peace treaty with the disbelievers recalls God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 18.16-33 that He would spare the people of Sodom and Gomorrah if ten righteous people were to be found amongst them. However, the Meccans had already left their city in order to confront Muhammad in a valley, which, for Ibn Ishaq's purposes they had had to do to comply with **{48.24}**. The consequence of this is that no non-combatants in Mecca itself would have been endangered by fighting between the two forces. Moreover, for Muhammad to have even contemplated an assault upon the city to avenge the death of Uthman, his men must have made the trek from Yathrib to Mecca well-armed, and hence the prospect of fighting must have been in the 'pilgrims'' minds from the outset. This being the case, it would have been unnecessary for Muhammad to have taken pledges of allegiance (from each of his hundreds of seven to fourteen hundred apparently loyal followers individually?) under a tree (itself a rare phenomenon in the Hijaz). **{48.15-16}** (which as with **{48.18}** **is** produced in the following part) proceeds to castigate '*the Aʿrābi who stayed behind*' for their hypocrisy, and by implication their cowardice, or at least a lack of commitment. Yet this criticism makes no sense if what had been intended had been merely a peaceful pilgrimage.

A proposal for the true historical context of **Surah 48** has been offered at **⟨40⟩** above. The surah tells of a confrontation between believers and disbelievers who had previously '*turned (the believers) from the Masjid al-Haram and the offerings detained from reaching their place of sacrifice*.' It is suggested, admittedly somewhat speculatively, that these disbelievers were the Umayyads and the valley of 'Makkah' was Petra.

47. 'The Capture of Kaybar'

Surah 48 (*Al-Fath/The Victory*): 18-21

18. Allah was definitely well pleased with the believers when they, as they sat under the tree, pledged their allegiance to you. He knew what was in their heart, so He bestowed a comforting calm upon them. As a reward, He arranged for them a victory in the near future.

19. They will acquire an abundance of booty. Allah is the Mighty, the Wisest.

20 Allah has promised that you would capture a lot of booty in the future. Meanwhile, He has granted you this (victory) in advance. He restrained the hands of men (your enemies); He kept them from hurting you! So that it may serve as a sign for the believers; that He may guide you on to the straight path,

21. And (He promises you) other (bounties)! You are (as yet) not capable of achieving them. But Allah has earmarked them (for you). Allah is capable of accomplishing everything.

[*Munshey, 2000*]

Surah 48, which is usually entitled ***'The Victory'***, presents the '*restraining of hands*' at Makkah as a great triumph. This is because it is seen as opening the way to '*a victory in the near future*' and '*an abundance of booty*', **{48.18-19}**. Ibn Ishaq provides the context for this that a month following the agreement of the treaty of Hudaybiyyah **⟨46⟩** Muhammad led his fighters to attack and

capture wealthy Jewish settlements at Kaybar, Fadak and Wadi al-Qura. He offers the following description of the initial assault:

> *One whom I do not suspect told me from Anas bin Malik: 'When the apostle raided a people he waited until the morning. If he heard a call to prayer he held back; if he did not hear it, he attacked.*
>
> *We came to Kaybar by night and the apostle passed the night there. When morning came, he did not hear the call to prayer, so he rode and we rode with him, and I rode behind Abu Talha with my foot touching the apostle's foot. We met the workers of Kaybar coming out in the morning with their spades and baskets. When they saw the apostle and his army they cried: 'Muhammad with his force' and turned tail and fled.*
>
> *The apostle said: 'Allahu akbar! Kaybar is destroyed! When we arrive in a people's square it is a bad morning for those who have been warned'.' Harun told us from Umays similarly…'*

Citing a different source, he wrote an account of the aftermath of the raid:

> *When the apostle had conquered al-Qamus, the fort of Abu Huqayq, Safiya bint Huyyay bin Akhtab was brought to him along with another woman. Bilal who was bringing them led them past the Jews who were slain, and when the woman who was with Safiya saw them she shrieked and slapped her face and poured dust on her head.*
>
> *When the apostle saw her, he said: 'Take this she-devil away from me!' He gave orders that Safiya was to be put behind him and threw his mantle over her, so that the Muslims knew he had chosen her for himself. I have heard that the apostle said to Bilal when he saw this Jewess behaving in this way: 'Have you no compassion, Bilal when you brought two women past their dead husbands?'*[196]

After this incident, Ibn Ishaq proceeds to describe Muhammad torturing by fire Safiya's father who had been the treasurer of the

Banu Nadir in order to discover where the tribe's gold was hidden, before ordering that he be killed.[197] Muhammad then 'married' (as Ibn Ishaq expresses it) Safiya before leaving Kaybar.

It was not only Safiya that Muhammad is said to have taken back to his hareem after Kaybar. He is also said to have retaken possession of Rayhana, whom he had taken as his slave following the massacre of the Banu Qurayza **⟨45⟩** in similar circumstances to those in which he now took Safiya. According to Ibn Ishaq, Rayhana had refused to marry Muhammad, preferring to remain his slave, but hadith accounts expand this story by adding that she later changed her mind and agreed to become one of Muhammad's wives, only to be subsequently divorced for her melancholic disposition and permitted to leave Yathrib. With her husband's tribe entirely destroyed, she is said to have returned to her birth tribe, the Banu Nadir, which, after Muhammad had expelled it from Yathrib **⟨43⟩** had found a new home with their fellow Jews at Kaybar. And so it was that with Muhammad's conquest of Kaybar, Rayhana found herself once again his captive. Due to her status as his former wife, she is said not to have been included as part of the spoils of war, but to have been taken back to Yathrib, where she remained as his slave until her death **⟨D⟩**.[198]

Muhammad permitted the Jews of Kaybar, and two smaller Jewish settlements, Fadak and Wadi al-Qura, to remain upon their land subject to a condition that they pay the Quranic community (whom in the account of Ibn Ishaq seems to have had little peaceful means of supporting themselves) half of their crop as tribute thereafter. This is regarded as the first instance of the acceptance of *jizya*, to be addressed more fully at **⟨51⟩** below.

The traditional understanding of **{48.15-16}** is that after the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah, some '*Arabi*' who had held back from marching upon Mecca had sought permission to join Muhammad's force to attack Kaybar, no doubt in the hope of partaking of easy spoils. This permission is refused. Anticipating a future conversation, the passage reads:

> **{48.15}** Those who stayed behind will say
> when you set out to capture
> spoils: 'Let us follow you.'

They desire to change the Word of God.

Say: 'You will not follow us, thus has God said before.'

They will then say: 'Nay but you are jealous of us.'

Nay, but they have not understood save but a little.

{48.16} Say to the Bedouin who stayed behind: 'You will be called against a people possessed of great might. You will fight them or they will submit. So if you obey, God will grant you a beautiful reward. But if you turn away as you turned away before he will punish you with a painful punishment.'

Having previously shown themselves to be fickle, the *Arabi* must now prove their loyalty by agreeing to fight '*a people of great might*'. This '*people possessed of great might*' is traditionally, and for once correctly, understood as the Byzantine Empire. Whatever the circumstances of the forced treaty with the disbelievers in the valley of Makkah **⟨46⟩**, it seems to have given Muhammad confidence to bring his alliance of Arabians, Edessene Jews and reluctant allies from 'Makkah' to bring against Byzantine Palestine.

48. 'The Conquest of Mecca'

Surah 17 (*Al-Isrāʾ/The Night Journey*): 81-82

81. And say: 'Has come the truth and perished the falsehood. Indeed, the falsehood is (bound) to perish.'

82 And We reveal from the Qurʾan that it (is) a healing and a mercy for the believers, but naught it increases the wrongdoers except (in) loss.

[*Corpus Coranicum, an ongoing research project by collaborating international scholars under the auspices of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities]*

Just two years into the agreed ten-year long truce between Muhammad and the Meccans, Muhammad is said to have cited a skirmish between a tribe allied to him and a tribe allied to the Meccans as grounds upon which to declare that the Treaty of Huddaybiyah had been breached and was voided. During the peace, Muhammad's taxation of Kaybar and subjugation of surrounding Bedouin tribes must, the narrative invites one to imagine, have led to a substantial strengthening of his power, for he is said by Ibn Ishaq to have marched on Mecca in 630 at the head of an army of ten thousand men. No doubt this army included many recent adherents possessed of the mercenary motivation addressed in **{48.15-16} ⟨47⟩**. The Meccans, caught by surprise and now facing a vastly stronger foe than they had left their city to confront two years earlier, now sent Abu Sufyan to attempt to negotiate a renewal of the treaty with Muhammad, his son in law. When Muhammad refused this and threatened his father-in-law with beheading, Abu Sufyan agreed to submit to Islam.[199] That day Ibn Ishaq records, the believers entered Mecca with instructions only to fight those who resisted, '*except a small number who were to be killed even if they were found beneath the curtains of the Kaaba*'.

There is a certain irony in the fact that despite so many dire warnings in the early and middle Qurʾan of the inevitability of God's wrath being visited upon peoples who reject His prophets, all of which, in the traditional narrative, were aimed at warning the Meccans of what lay in store for them should they not willingly accept Muhammad, when Muhammad finally did conquer his home-town, its inhabitants' lives and property were respected in return for belated pledges of allegiance. This is in marked contrast to the fate of the Jewish tribes of Yathrib and Kaybar who were issued with no such warning but were expelled, reduced to vassal status or utterly destroyed. Only six men and four women of Mecca were reportedly sentenced to death by Muhammad. Amongst these Ibn Ishaq names a former scribe of Muhammad, Abdullah bin Saʿd, '*who had been a Muslim and used to write down revelations, then he apostatized and returned to the Quraysh*', an Abdullah bin Khatal, who had also apostatized, and three women who had insulted Muhammad when he had preached in Mecca ten years earlier, and for whom he seems to have harboured a particular resentment. Two of these were singing girls attached to the household of Abdullah bin Khatal's and a third a freed slave called Sara. The sentences passed upon these five are prominent among the authorities cited by later Islamic jurists for ruling that the correct penalty for apostasy or mockery of the prophet is death (*c.f.* **{33.57-58}**: '*Truly those who affront God and His Messenger, God has cursed them in this life and the hereafter…*') According to the narrative, however, even of these five, two were eventually spared. Abdullah bin Khatal had an extremely fortunate escape when Muhammad's men failed to pick up on Muhammad's unspoken desire that they should kill him, and one of the two singing girls was pardoned when she threw herself upon Muhammad's mercy and offered to convert.[200]

Whilst the Qurʾan celebrates military successes, especially in **Surah 8**, there is no passage that seems to mark the triumphant attainment of the community's overall objective such as one might have expected, given the traditional narrative. This absence of a sense of victory, is consistent with an Arab source, probably written before 680, that offers a reliable indication that Muhammad had died prior to the capture of Jerusalem. However, Ibn Ishaq does not allow for his prophet to die without his moment of

triumph, and so he gives verses **{17.81-82}** this role, describing Muhammad reciting them continuously as he smashed the idols around the Kaaba,[201] in the manner commanded by God of the Israelite upon their entering Canaan:

> *This is how you must deal with them. Tear down their altars, smash their sacred pillars, chop down their sacred poles and destroy their idols by fire.*
>
> (Deuteronomy 7.5, see also **⟨52⟩** below)

49. 'The Battle of Hunayn'

Surah 9 (*Al-Tawbah/Repentance*): 25

Surely Allah has succoured you before on many a battlefield, and (you have yourselves witnessed His succour to you) on the day of Hunayn when your numbers made you proud, but they did you no good, and the earth, for all its vastness, constrained you.

[*Maududi*]

Two weeks following the conquest of Mecca, according to Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad commanded an army that comprised the ten thousand believers that he had marched up from Yathrib, and two thousand new Meccan recruits, south of Mecca to confront the Meccans' long-standing rivals, the Banu Hawazin. It has been suggested that, if one were to accept the facts of the Islamic narrative, the peaceful surrender of Mecca would have posed Muhammad a substantial problem, in that many of his fighters must have joined him in the expectation of plundering Mecca. When this was denied to them, it would not have been surprising that Muhammad was compelled to present them with the opportunity not to return north empty handed. [202]

According to Ibn Ishaq, as Muhammad's army, now said to be twelve thousand strong, approached them, the Banu Hawazin placed their women and children at the far end of a narrow valley with a line of men at the front of them in order to trick Muhammad into thinking that as he progressed down the valley he was heading towards their main force. The majority of the fighting men in fact concealed themselves along the sides of the valley with the intention of ambushing Muhammad's flanks. **{9.25}**, above, is said to refer to the foremost Muslim fighters' initial attempt to flee the Hawazin attack but inability to retreat due to the size of the force behind them and the narrowness of the valley.

Unable to go back, they were forced to turn again and fight the Banu Hawazin, eventually routing them in what would be the largest battle said to have been fought by Muhammad's fighters in his lifetime.[203]

After the battle, Ibn Ishaq describes Muhammad taking possession of the Hawazin women and children and dividing them amongst his fighters as spoils of war. Later, however, he negotiated with the Hawazin leadership to release them in return for their submission to him. It was during this allocation of the captives, an episode recounted in ugly detail by Ibn Ishaq and also in several *aḥādīth*, that **{4.24}**, permitting believers to have intercourse with captured women even if they knew the captives to be married, is reported to have been announced (for which see **⟨59⟩** below).

50. 'The Battle of Tabouk'; Muhammad's Palestine Campaign

Surah 9 (*Al-Tawbah/Repentance*): 93

God's judgment comes down on those with might,
Who despite their riches, refuse to fight,

Coming to you, for exemption they plead,
Woe unto them, they are weaklings indeed!

A long life they wanted, and with women to stay,
But their lives were destroyed, they were chased away.

Their hearts we have tightly sealed,
The good tidings remain from them concealed,

And revelation with its light
Is forever hidden from their sight.

[*Dr Sayfal al-Din Taha, 2005*
(*a poetic interpretation of the Qur'an, believed to be unpublished*)]

In the traditional narrative, Muhammad sent a total of four expeditions north to the border of the Byzantine Empire. Ibn Ishaq tells us that:

> *'(In) the fourth year of his sojourn in Medina, … (the Prophet) raided Damat al-Jandal. Then he returned, not having reached the place, without fighting and stayed in Medina for the rest of the year.'*[204]

Four years later, during the period of truce between Muhammad and the Meccans, an expedition said to have consisted of three thousand Muslims and led by Muhammad's formerly adopted son Zayd, was sent to Mu'tah in Syria. Whilst in the region Zayd's force received word that the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius was in the region with an army of one hundred thousand. Despite the

overwhelming odds, the Muslims did not retreat from Muʿtah, but stood and fought the Byzantines, Zayd dying in the battle.[205] In *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men, The Making of the Last Prophet*, David S Powers draws attention to the symbolism of the account of Zayd's death in battle at Muʿtah (a place whose name literally means '*death*' or '*madness*'[206]). Whilst it is by no means impossible that an Arab raiding party venturing close to Byzantine territory in 629 might have had the bad luck to have encountered an imperial army on manoeuvres during the Byzantine-Sasanian War **⟨1⟩**, Powers points out that Zayd's virtual suicide mission in fact is told to fit the theological model of son-sacrifice in Abrahamic religious tradition. This is a tradition that had begun with Abraham's binding of Isaac and reached its ultimate expression in Christianity's doctrine of God entering creation as His Son, Jesus, to be the paschal sacrifice. As addressed above at **⟨24⟩**, the story that Muhammad had earlier taken Zayd's wife, Zaynab, as his own, makes the story of Zayd's death at Muʿtah strongly derivative of the biblical story of King David sending Uriah the Hittite to certain death in battle, in order to conceal his infidelity with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba.

Muhammad is said to have sent a third expedition north in the year following his conquest of Mecca, and it is with this expedition that Ibn Ishaq associates **{9.93}**. On Ibn Ishaq's account, the expedition was to Tabouk, three hundred and fifty miles north of Yathrib, and its purpose was to avenge the slaying of his emissary and the defeat of the force led by Zayd. Ibn Ishaq tells us that before the expedition left Yathrib, '*the heat was oppressive and there was a drought. Fruit was ripe and the men wanted to stay in the shade with their fruit and disliked travelling in that season*.' One might imagine that, given the traditional narrative, the fighters may well have been discouraged by the fate of Zayd's expedition the previous year.[207] The verses that are said to have been announced before and during this expedition repeatedly chide the Qurʾan's audience for their lack of enthusiasm for fighting. Exhortations to sally forth and denunciations of those who '*when it is said unto (them): 'Go forth in the way of God' … sink down heavily to the earth*' are found at various points throughout **Surah 9**, including **{9.38-39, 42-47, 57-58 & 81-84}**. In these, laggards are incentivised with threats of '*a painful punishment*' and of being replaced '*with another people in their stead*'.

Unlike the previous two forays to the north, this third expedition is reported to have been a great success. As Muhammad approached Tabouk, the Byzantine regional governor '*came and made a treaty with him and paid him the poll tax*.' A smaller raiding party was then dispatched to neighbouring Dumat al-Jandal and was fortunate in capturing the settlement's Christian ruler Ukaydir and his brother whilst they were outside of their fortress hunting. After killing the brother, they secured Ukaydir's pledge of submission and his agreement to pay *jizya* protection money along with the Byzantine governor.[208]

The year after the expedition to Tabouk, in 632, Muhammad is said to have ordered a fourth expedition to Palestine, to be led by Zayd's son, Usama. Traditionally, this army departed Yathrib on the day before Muhammad died.

Muhammad's Palestine Campaign

We have seen that there are very good reasons to disbelieve the traditional Islamic accounts of Muhammad's eight-year battle with the Meccans, and indeed to doubt even the existence of Mecca at the time of the Qurʾan's composition. We have also seen that the *Armenian History of Pseudo-Sebeos* records a Muhammad uniting Jews and Arabs in the hope of reclaiming Palestine as the inheritance of those descendants of Abraham who abided by God's commands. It is within this context that this companion argues that the Qurʾan's encouragements to seize the homes of the People of the Book, to secure prayer on the Temple Mount and to banish corruption from the land should be read.

Three contemporary Christian sources describe a warlord, that two of them name as Muhammad and the third identifies merely as a false prophet, engaged in military activity across Palestine in the 630s. One of these is a fragment of a chronicle that covers events leading up to the year 640. Because this chronicle in one (unrelated) entry makes a reference to a priest called Thomas, who seems himself to have no particular significance to the narrative, this is thought likely to be a reference by the chronicler to himself, and, following the lead of Robert Hoyland in *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It*, the source is now commonly referred to as the *Chronicle of*

Thomas the Presbyter. The entry that is relevant to our purposes reads:

> *In* [*634*] *on Friday, 4th February at the ninth hour there was a battle between the Romans and the nomads of Muhammad* [*'tayyaye d-Mhmt'*] *in Palestine, twelve miles east of Gaza. The Romans fled leaving behind the patriarch Bryrdn, whom the tayyaye killed. Some 4000 poor villagers of Palestine were killed there, Christians, Jews and Samaritans. The tayyaye ravaged the whole region.*

The second source to refer to Muhammad is a note jotted onto a blank page in a manuscript of the Gospel of St Mark. It too appears to be the text of an entry from a chronicle although why it was written out of any context upon a page from a gospel is unclear. The best explanation that has been forthcoming is that the writer may have been testing a new pen.[209] The page that we have is in poor condition and the entry is only partially legible. The following rendering has been proposed by Michael Philip Penn in *When Christians First Met Muslims*:

> *… Muhamad … priest, Mar Elijah … and they came … and … and from … strong … month … and the Romans* [*fled?*] *… And in January* [*the people?*] *of Emesa received assurances for their lives. Many villages were destroyed through the killing by* [*the Arabs of?*] *Muhammad and many people were killed. And captives* [*were taken?*] *from Galilee to Bet … Those Arabs camped by* [*Damascus?*] *We saw … everywhere … and the* [*olive oil?*] *that they [had brought?] and … them.*
>
> *On the twenty-sixth of May* [*the sacellarius?*] *went … from Emesa. The Romans pursued them ... On the tenth* [*of August?*] *… the Romans fled from Damascus ... many, about ten thousand.*
>
> *The following year the Romans came. On the twentieth of August in the year nine hundred and forty-seven*

> [*I.e., 636 CE*] *there assembled in Gabitha … the Roman and many people were killed, from the Romans about fifty thousand. …*

A third near contemporary source is found in Christian devotional tract, the *Doctrina Iacobi Nuper Baptizati* (*The Teachings of Jacob the Newly Baptised*) apparently written in Palestine between 634 and 640. This tells the account of a Jew, Jacob, who has been forced to convert to Christianity **⟨24⟩,** but who comes to voluntarily embrace his new faith. During his account he refers to hearing news of a false prophet, and though the name Muhammad is not mentioned, in the circumstances it is very likely to be him:

> *When* [*the commander of the Byzantine army*] *was killed by the Saracens, I was at Caesarea and I set off by boat to Sykamina. People were saying … that the prophet had appeared, coming with the Saracens, and that he was proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who was to come.*
>
> *I … stopped by a certain old man well-versed in scriptures, and I said to him: 'What can you tell me about the prophet who has appeared with the Saracens?' He replied, groaning deeply: 'He is false, for the prophets do not come armed with a sword…'*
>
> *So I, Abraham, inquired and heard from those who had met him that there was no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of men's blood. He says also that he has the keys of paradise, which is incredible.'*[210]

We have also seen how in his chronological charts, Jacob of Edessa, writing in the early 690s, reports that '*The Tayyaye*' under the reign of Muhammad '*began to make raids into Palestine*' from 625 **⟨5⟩**. Stephen J. Shoemaker, in *The Death of a Prophet, The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* identifies a further seven seventh or eighth century sources that support the view that Muhammad in fact led the expeditions into Palestine.[211] These sources include the 634 Christmas sermon of Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who complains that he is prevented from

going to Bethlehem by '*godless Saracens*'. It will be recalled that Shoemaker has also demonstrated the likelihood that the history of the Church of the Kathisma, located precisely where Sophronius locates the Saracens, on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, has influenced the Qurʾan's account of the nativity of Jesus **⟨26⟩**. The evidence from these sources, is scanty and capable of a range of interpretations. However, it is suggested that when considered as a whole, is clear that in the mid-seventh century fighters commanded by an individual known as Muhammad were conducting substantial military operations in Palestine, initially in Gaza, then in Galilee and around Jerusalem. There is ample evidence that during part of this period Muhammad was based in Yathrib **⟨26⟩**. But, when the historical sources are combined with the interpretation of the Qurʾan proposed in this companion, it is suggested that the evidence is compelling that the Qurʾan's battle verses related to a campaign to the north of Yathrib in Palestine aimed at the conquest of Jerusalem, rather than to its south and the obscure supposedly Abrahamic shrine of Mecca.

51. *Jizya*

Surah 9 (*Al-Tawbah/Repentance*): 28-29

28. O believers, the idolaters are indeed unclean, so let them not come near the Holy Mosque after this year of theirs. If you fear poverty, God shall surely enrich you of His bounty, if He will;

God is All-knowing; All-wise.

29. Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden - such men as practise not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book - until they pay the tribute out of hand and have been humbled.

[*Arberry,*]

From the phrasing of the above verses, it would appear that they were announced after the author had gained complete control over the Masjid al-Haram, from which he and his followers had once been excluded. They are traditionally understood as allowing '*those who were given the Book*', that is Jews and Christians **⟨88⟩**, to live under Islamic rule and to observe Jewish or Christian religious practices - but only upon the conditions that they must under no circumstances enter the Masjid al-Haram shrine at Mecca, and that they must pay the '*jizya*' in submission to the Islamic ruler. '*Jizya*' is usually translated, where it is translated at all, as '*tribute*' (*per* Arberry, Pickthall, *The Study Quran*, Ali Qarai), but this word fails to capture the word's essential meaning, from the root j-z-y, which carries the core meaning of '*in return for*', '*reward*' or '*payment of that which is due*'. This transactional name for the imposition contrasts with the financial donation to be paid by believers, which is referred to as '*zakat*' (literally '*that which purifies*') **⟨55⟩**.

It is clear from the context of **{9.29}** that the payment of jizya is consideration for being permitted to live in a land governed by the sharĭa without fully submitting to the '*dīn*' of the Qurʾan or its announcer. A pragmatic explanation for the need to institute jizya is apparently given in the preceding verse. This relates to the exclusion of '*mushrikūn*' (which in the extract produced above is rendered '*idolaters*') from the Masjid al-Haram. The exclusion brings with it a '*fear of poverty*' but believers are urged to trust in God that he will nevertheless '*enrich*' the believers '*from His Bounty*'. The implication of the two verses being placed together is that the financial levy imposed upon the People of the Book is to make up for a loss created by the exclusion of mushrikun from Masjid al-Haram. Naturally, in the traditional narrative, the fear of poverty is understood as the loss to the believers of opportunities to trade with pagan pilgrims, after the effective abolition of the pilgrimage. This explanation ignores the obvious consequence of the success of Islam, that pilgrim traffic to Mecca should have been expected to increase rather than decrease, even in the short term. Moreover, **{9.28}** does not lead smoothly onto **{9.29}**. The phrase '*God will enrich you of His bounty*' and in particular the addition of the conditional '*if He will*' seems an odd way to introduce a system of compulsory payments. It is therefore possible that the verses were originally composed separately but joined together during the editing process due to the shared theme of the acquisition by believers of the property of unbelievers **Surah 9** is often considered to be the final surah to have been composed, and whilst some of the long surahs such as **Surahs 2** and **3** have highly complex internal structures,[212] trying to locate a structure within **Surah 9**, capable of providing a clear textual context for **{9.29}** is hard indeed. This is a topic that it is more convenient to deal with in the following section.

In later Islamic history the institution of the *jizya* became an important element in facilitating conquests and encouraging conversions to Islam. According to established rules of *jihād*, if a people resisted the Arab armies and are overcome, adult males are liable to be massacred, and their women and children, and men not killed, fall to be enslaved as the spoils of war **⟨94⟩**. Faced with this prospect, the alternative, open to the People of the Book only, of surrendering and retaining religious rights subject to the payment

of *jizya* to a caliph rather than taxation to an emperor had an obvious appeal. One monk, John bar Penkaye, writing in Fenek, Iran, probably in or close to 690, commented of the Arab conquerors: '*of each person they required only tribute, allowing him to remain in whatever faith he wished*'.[213] In fact, set against Byzantium's persecution of Jews and the bitter intra-Christian doctrinal conflicts, many Jews and Christians may well have found the payment of the *jizya* and thereafter enjoyment of an increased freedom of religion than had been previously possible much to be preferred. Over time, though, the subservient status of '*dhimmi*' became a major driver of conversions to Islam as non-Arab subjects succumbed to the reality that the act of proclaiming oneself a Muslim could change their lot in life from that of being part of a vanquished tributary people to membership of the conquering elite. Although some ancient Christian communities survive in the middle east, it is the financial burden and associated inferior legal and social status of '*dhimmitude*' that has been, historically, the far greater factor in conversions to Islam in Muslim lands than conversions forced at the point of the sword.

52. *'The Sword Verse'*

Surah 9 (*Al-Tawbah/Repentance*): 1-5

1. IMMUNITY is granted those idolators by God and his Apostle with whom you have a treaty.

2. (They can) move about for four months freely in the land but should know they cannot escape (the law of) God, and that God can put the unbelievers to shame.

3. A general proclamation is (made) this day of the Greater Pilgrimage on the part of God and His Apostle, that God is not bound (by any contract) to idolaters, nor is His Apostle.
It is, therefore, better for you to repent.
If you do not, remember that you cannot elude (the grip of) God. So announce to those who deny the truth the news of painful punishment,

4. Except those idolaters with whom you have a treaty, who have not failed you in the least, nor helped anyone against you. Fulfil your obligations to them during the term (of the treaty). God loves those who take heed for themselves.

5. But when these months, prohibited (for fighting), are over, slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them, and take them captive or besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every likely place.

But if they repent and fulfil their devotional obligations and pay the zakat, then let them go their way, for God is Forgiving and Kind.

[*Ahmed Ali, 1984 (Pakistani author/diplomat)*]

{9.1-5}, the so-called '*sword verses*', are generally considered to be among the final verses of the Qurʾan to have been announced and are certainly its most notorious. The open-ended instruction to believers to '*slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them*', when read as the Qurʾan's violent finale, on the face of the text imposes an irrevocable instruction on Muslims to wage a global war without end on those committing the ill-defined sin of associating something with God. Clearly then, the need to set these verses within a context is of greater importance than is the case for any other verses of the Qurʾan. However, **Surah 9** defies attempts to discern within it a coherent scheme, with its verses seeming to contradict one another, alternating schizophrenically between the bellicose to the irenic.

In **{9.1-5}**, God repudiates a treaty that had previously been made between the believers and the '*mushrikūn*' (rendered '*idolaters*' above, but more accurately '*associators of partners with God*' **⟨11⟩**, **⟨88⟩**. These mushrikun were put on notice that upon the expiry of four months, they must - unless they enjoyed special protection under some other treaty - have either renounced their *shirk* and pledged to pay the '*zakat*' **⟨55⟩** or else face being put to the sword.

{9.6} follows this harsh ultimatum, with the conciliatory sounding:'*…and if any of the mushrikun seek asylum with thee, grant him asylum until he hears the word of God… If they repent and perform the prayer and give the alms then they are your brethren in religion*', **{9.6}**.

{9.7} returns to the consideration of a treaty, or possibly – the verse is unclear - more than one treaty of which only the treaty that was made at the Masjid al-Haram is binding:

> How can the mushrikun
> have a treaty with God and

> His Messenger save those with whom you made a treaty at the Masjid al-Haram? If they remain true to you, remain true to them.

One wonders if, since **{9.7}** declares that the treaty made at the Masjid al-Haram continues to be valid, this is a different treaty to the one that **{9.3}** annuls.

{9.8-10} contains five accusations of perfidy against the Qurʾan author's opponents. Notwithstanding these, **{9.11}** repeats the offer that was made in the second part of **{9.5}** to receive them back into society should they repent and agree to pay *zakat*.

{9.12-15} promptly reverts to fighting talk; should these opponents renege on their oaths '*having made their treaty*' only fighting will '*dispel the rage in the (believers') hearts*.'

Surah 9 then turns to the maintenance of the Masjid al-Haram; **{9.17-18}** states that this must only be undertaken by believers, but **{9.19}** contrasts so doing with fighting ('*striving in God's way*' **⟨93⟩**) which is the greater form of religious service.

{9.20-27} continues to praise '*striving in God's way*' and orders that believers separate from those of their family who are not amongst the believers **⟨91⟩**.

As seen in the previous section, **{9.28}** prohibits the mushrikun from approaching the Masjid al-Haram and **{9.29}** commands believers to fight the People of the Book '*until they pay the*

jizya (the submitter's tax), '*having been humbled*',

{9.30} concludes the first thirty verses of the surah with the claim that: '*The Jews say that Ezra is the son of God and the Christians say the Messiah is the son of God*', to be considered at **⟨88⟩** below.

It is hard to see how these thirty verses could possibly have been composed to present a single set of instructions to the believers. One factor in the incoherence is the confusing messaging over treaties offered, agreed, rescinded, broken and confirmed. Another is the stark inconsistency in instructions concerning the mushrikun. **{9.5}**, as we have seen, commands believers to slay the mushrikun '*wheresoever (they) find them*'. But if believers are commanded to fight and kill the mushrikun wheresoever they find them, then there can be no point in **{9.28}** simultaneously banning the mushrikun from entry to the Masjid al-Haram. And the accusation in **{9.30}** that Jews and Christians call Ezra and Jesus the sons of God must, within context, surely amount to an accusation of shirk (associating partners with God). Yet if they are, as mushrikun they are liable to be killed pursuant to **{9.5}**; which conflicts with the requirement that they be required to pay the *jizya* as ordered in **{9.29}**.

The majority Islamic view is that despite these apparent contradictions, the above verses can nevertheless be reconciled by regarding **{9.30}** as failing to quite amount to an accusation that Christians and Jews are necessarily full mushrikun. The traditional narrative presents Muhammad's principal struggle as having been with the polytheists of Mecca who are the mushrikun. His expeditions against Jewish or Christian communities were either localised punishment raids occasioned by those specific communities' defiance of his authority or, as with the conquest of Kaybar, purely acquisitive in nature. The Meccan pagans had eventually been outmanoeuvred and had surrendered to Muhammad in the expectation that they would be permitted continued freedom of worship, at least during the sacred months. Many had in fact converted *en masse* to Muhammad's creed, two thousand having taken part in his raid against the Banu Hawazin.

However, according to Ibn Ishaq others had continued to practise pagan rituals including circumambulating the Kaaba naked.[214] This stubbornness had been tolerated by God for a short time but was then declared unacceptable behaviour in what had now become a city of believers. So, through **{9.1-5}**, God commanded the polytheists' complete removal from Muslim lands. Christians and Jews, on the other hand, were recognised categories of imperfect monotheists, and they fell to be dealt with according to a different regime. They were to be permitted the concession of living under Muslim rule, for so long as they pay a separate tax, the *jizya*, just as Muhammad had demonstrated by sparing the lives of the Jews of Kaybar in return for half of their produce in perpetuity.

The above understanding was probably encouraged, if not dictated, by the reality of the Arab world's financial dependency upon tributary Jewish and Christian communities by the time that the first post- Qurʾan Islamic texts came to be composed. However, this proposed twin track approach - of killing *mushrikun* but taxing People of the Book - is not justified from the text. As has been seen, the sin of *shirk*, the association of partners to God, cannot be equated with classic polytheism, since the Qurʾan accepts from its earliest surahs that the *mushrikun* acknowledged Allah as their creator and Lord **⟨11⟩** and anticipates that they will recognise biblical prophets such as Noah, Lot and Moses. Their doctrinal sin was that of associating other lesser beings such as pagan gods (*'ṭāghūt'*) **⟨14⟩** and angels with Allah and seeking their intercession. If there were any doubt that **{9.30}** accuses Jews and Christians of *shirk*, this is removed by **{9.28}** which names the offence of which these later verses give the particulars. Crucially, the commonly supposed dichotomy in **Surah 9** between the treatment of polytheists on the one hand and monotheists on the other, allows no role for **{9.28}** that prohibits the about-to-be-slain *mushrikun* from entering the Masjid al-Haram.

It is suggested that in order to make sense of these provisions one must assume **Surah 9** to have been composed in at least two phases. **{9.28-30}** were announced to condemn Jews and Christians as '*mushrikūn*', to ban them and all mushrikun, from the Masjid al-Haram and require them to pay the *jizya*. Verses **{9.1-5}** must have

been announced upon a later occasion, and superseded **{9.28-30}** by requiring that henceforth all '*mushrikūn*' must be slain. The four-month period of grace was no doubt allowed in the expectation that most of those in jeopardy would us it to carefully consider the advantages to them of formally submitting to Islam. **{9.5}** appears to declare Muhammad's final solution to the mushrikun question. From a modern secular perspective, the elimination of alternative belief systems by the slaying of all those who hold to them, is readily recognisable as the act of a totalitarian tyrant. However, seen from within the Quranic worldview this order would have been recognised as following the precedent of God's command to the Israelites upon entering Canaan in Deuteronomy chapter 7.1-2:

> 1. *When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations – the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you –*
>
> 2. *And when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.*

C.f. Deuteronomy 20.16-18, 2 Chronicles 15.12-13. The replication of the Israelites' violent cleansing of the Holy Land from idolators marks the logical culmination of Muhammad's mission. He had commenced warning of the imminence of the apocalypse, when God would end rebellion forever and consign the wicked to the Hellfire. His focus had then shifted to describing a series of punishment narratives in which disobedient peoples had been destroyed each to be replaced by better. These narratives of past smitings served as warnings of the fate that might yet befall sinners, even prior to the arrival of the Last Day. In the final phase, the Qurʾan announcer had presented his own military and judicial violence as being the instrument of God's wrath. His prophetic career had seen him elevated from being the object of mockery to a demagogue able to order the annihilation of all those who rejected his divine authority, as God had done so many times to rebellious populations in ages past, and as a sign of the Hour to come. The utter destruction of the wicked was, in this paradigm, not merely

ruthless act of a secular dictator. It was in direct imitation of the actions of the Israelites long before, and the logical conclusion to the Qurʾan author's theological outlook and career.

The death of Muhammad

If, as it has been argued throughout this companion, the Qurʾan's Masjid al-Haram in fact refers to Temple Mount in Jerusalem the implication of **Surah 9** is that the Qurʾan author must have attained his goal. **{9.7}** refers to a treaty entered into by the believers at the Masjid al-Haram, **{9.17-18}** address the maintenance of the site and **{9.28}** assumes that the Quranic community is in a position to dictate who may enter it and who is excluded. It has been seen that Muhammad reached Palestine, where he was reported fighting in 634 (by Thomas the Presbyter) and 637 (on the Gospel fragment). Jerusalem is usually said to have passed to Arab conquers in 638 although it may have fallen earlier. Consequently, to suppose that Muhammad entered Jerusalem as its ruler seems eminently plausible. Given that the traditional Islamic narrative, appears to be a sophisticated late invention to conceal the true foundational story of Islam, it would be no more difficult to bury the memory of the prophet's triumphant entry into Jerusalem as it was to conceal Muhammad's presence in Palestine, to reinvent the significance of the Dome of the Rock and to invent the series of confrontations between the believers and the Meccan polytheists and Yathrib Jews.

However, one source in particular provides persuasive evidence that Muhammad died before the fall of Jerusalem. A hadith reports Muhammad predicting six events that would occur in a set sequence prior to the Last Day. The first would be his death, the second the capture of Jerusalem and the fourth a civil war (fitna) amongst the Muslims. Of course, this companion has hitherto treated all *aḥādīth* as being by their very nature unreliable, and this hadith in particular, even if based upon a tradition going back the time of the companions, would be susceptible to having had the sequence of portents 'corrected' to fit the official narrative. In this instance though, as Stephen J Shoemaker points out in *The Apocalypse of Empire*, it is hard to see why, if this set of prophecies

had been composed or altered after 680, it should then 'predict' the First Fitna (656-662) as a portent of the Hour but not the second (680-692). It raises the possibility that **Surah 9** was not composed by the Qurʾan's principal author, but by his inner circle of scribes after his death to complete his great work.

Bismillah, no

Support for the proposition that **Surah 9** was not the work of the Qurʾan's principal author may be found in the fact that it is the only surah that does not begin with the basmala, the attestation that the text that follows is proclaimed '*in the name of God*.' To be sure, there are at least three other main competing theories concerning why **Surah 9** lacks a basmala, each of which has some degree of corroboration to it.

1. One scenario is that after Muhammad's death but before the final completion of the Qurʾan's consonantal canon, the opening verses of **Surah 9** were lost. This is consistent with the hadith account referred to at **⟨7⟩** above, that **Surah 9** had originally been as long as **Surah 2**. The natural expectation would be that if the surah had been edited in an orderly way, the basmala would been re-added to it in its revised form. This suggests that what might have occurred was not orderly. Possibly, at a time when only one Qurʾan manuscript existed one or more pages became detached from the main corpus either by misadventure or by being roughly torn out.

2. Alternatively, it has been suggested that **Surahs 8** and **9** may have once formed a single continuous surah, which was later separated into two parts. This would have been by far the longest surah in the Qurʾan, but the content of these surahs broadly fits with this thesis since both are surahs of war, **Surah 8** traditionally read as containing references

to Muhammad's earlier military expeditions whilst **Surah 9** addresses his later campaigns.

3. A third thesis is that, contrary to the Islamic tradition, the formal arrangement of surahs was undertaken personally by the Qurʾan's announcer. On that view, and since **Surah 9** is considered to have been the last full surah to have been composed, it is conceivable that Muhammad died leaving it unfinished, and his companions did not consider themselves competent to add the basmala to it on his behalf.

It is suggested that each of the above scenarios is prima facie plausible as an explanation. However, the possibility should also be considered that the absence of the basmala may indicate that **Surah 9** was added by Muhammad's companions to the corpus after Muhammad's death. They may have been anxious that the Qurʾan contain a record of how the prophet of God had posthumously achieved his mission to cleanse the Temple from corruption and heresy, albeit that this had actually occurred after his death.

On its canonical wording, the violence commanded by **{9.5}** against the mushrikun is worded to be offensive ('*besiege them and lie in wait for them at every likely place*') and unlimited by geography ('*wheresoever you find them*') a phrase that also appears in **{2.191}**, supposedly granting the very first permission to fight **⟨37⟩**, and in **{4.89}**; *c.f.* **{8.39}** **⟨93⟩** below). Since the whole theological basis for taking up arms had been the fulfilment of God's promise of the Holy Land to the descendants of Abraham, **{9.5}** and the restoration of this land in particular to God's law strictly applied, it may be doubtful whether the author of theses verses, be he Muhammad or anyone else, considered the consequences of centuries of subsequent generations of believers taking these expansive terms literally. However, treating the words of the Qurʾan as the words of God requires believers to exclude from their consideration the possibility of God having misspoken. Moreover, applying the doctrine of abrogation **⟨8⟩** **{9.5}**, as God's last word on the subject of interfaith relations, must be read as prevailing over any more conciliatory verse that had previously

been announced. The possibility that the missing attestation indicates a different author, which appears not to have been previously been considered, could hardly be of greater significance.

D. The Wives and Concubines of Muhammad

According to the traditional Islamic narrative Muhammad married his first wife, the wealthy widow and his former employer, Khadija, when he was twenty-five and she was forty. In contrast to the popular image of Muhammad, his marriage to Khadija, fifteen years his senior and in a culture where polygamy was commonplace, was monogamous and lasted for fifteen years. They are traditionally said to have had six children: two sons, both of whom died in infancy, and four daughters. Without a surviving biological son, they had also adopted a slave, Zayd ibn Harith (who would later be de-adopted, see **⟨67⟩**). Khadija is said to have died in 619 and in the twelve years or so following her death, Muhammad married by the lowest account at least ten more times, leaving nine widows at the time of his death.

The earliest list of the wives of Muhammad was compiled by Ibn Hisham and is appended to his ninth century biography of Muhammad. It reads as follows:

> *(The apostle) married thirteen women*:
>
> > *Khadija … his first wife whom her father … or according to others her brother Amr, married to him. The apostle gave her as her dowry twenty she-camels. She bore all the apostle's children except Ibrahim …*
> >
> > *He married Aisha in Mecca when she was a child of seven and lived with her in Medina when she was nine or ten. She was the only virgin that he married. Her father Abu Bakr* [traditionally the 'first caliph' of Islam, 632-634, but according to Jacob of Edessa, the successor to Muhammad in 628-629 **⟨5⟩**] *married her to him, and the apostle gave her four hundred dirhams.*
> >
> > [for Aisha, see **⟨60⟩**, **⟨70⟩**, **⟨79⟩** and **⟨89⟩** below].

He married Sauda … Salit bin Amr or according to others Abu Hatib married her to him … Ibn Ishaq contradicts this tradition saying that Salit and Abu Hatim were absent in Abyssinia at this time.

Zaynab bint Jahsh … She had previously been married to Zayd bin Haritha, the freed slave of the apostle **⟨67⟩**,

Umm Salama. Her name was Hind. Her son Salama married her to him, and the apostle gave her a bed stuffed with palm leaves, a bowl, a dish and a hand mill. She had been married to Abu Salama…

Hafsa, bint Umar… [*i.e.*, the daughter of Umar, who would later become the 'second caliph' of Islam, 634-644; alternatively, the third king of the Tayyaye from 630 for twelve years *per* the *705 Chronicle*],

Umm Habiba whose name was Ramla, daughter of Abu Sufyan [Meccan leader during the conflict with Muhammad **⟨41⟩**]. *Khalid bin Said married her to him when they were both in Abyssinia and the Negus have her on behalf of the apostle four hundred dinars. It was he who arranged the marriage for the apostle. She had previously been married to Ubaydullah bin Jahsh,*

Juwayriya bint al-Harith who was amongst the captives of the of the Banu Mustaliq…,

Safiya bint Huyay whom he had captured at Kaybar and chosen for himself… **⟨47⟩**,

Maymuna … and

Zaynab bint Khuzayma.

The apostle consummated his marriage with eleven women, two of whom died before him, namely Khadija and Zaynab bint Khuzayma. He died leaving the nine we have mentioned. With two he had not marital relations:

Asma bint al-Numan whom he found to be suffering from leprosy and so returned to her people with a suitable gift,

and Amra, daughter of Yazid.

Two further marriages are sometimes recorded for Muhammad following the conquest of Mecca **⟨48⟩**:

Mayluka bint Ka'b, whose father is said to have died defying the Muslim army during the conquest of Mecca, and

Fatima bint al Dahhak, whose marriage to Muhammad had been sought by her father but who was divorced by him for her disobedience.

Muhammad is also said to have kept concubines including:

Rayhana, who had been an enslaved widow of the Banu Qurayza whom tradition states that Muhammad divorced and freed and thereafter came into the possession of for a second time **⟨45⟩**, **⟨47⟩**,

and

Maryam, a gift to Muhammad from the king of Egypt, who bore Muhammad a son, Ibrahim **⟨24⟩**, **⟨59⟩**.

There is little to no reliable evidence for any of these wives and concubines. Maryam, in particular, seems to enter the Muhammad story merely to replicate the role of Hagar to Abraham **⟨23⟩** and to depict Muhammad as a leader of international stature. His marriages to the enslaved widows of his enemies, Rayhana, Juwayriya and Safiyya, were likely to have been similar inventions, created to emphasise the Sira Muhammad's virility and his total humiliation of his foes. Yet we do know that the Qurʾan's announcer had more than one wife, for verses of the Qurʾan address his wives and prescribe special rules for them **⟨79⟩**.

It is suggested that the four wives of tradition who have the strongest likelihood of having actually lived and married the

Qurʾan announcer are those whose marriages are reported to have influenced the succession to the leadership of the Arab community. These are:

- Khadija, some of whose descendants through her and Muhammad's daughter Fatima are revered by Shia Muslims, as imams,
- Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr,
- Hafsa, the daughter of Umar,
- and Ramla, whose family, the Umayyads would establish themselves as a dynasty controlling the Arab world a decade or so after the death of Muhammad.

Simplified family of Muhammad showing connections to his successors

Muhammad and the Umayyads

The first four leaders of the Arab conquerors are traditionally described collectively as the four Rashidun (literally '*rightly guided*') caliphs, and the fifth, Muawiyah I, is usually presented as the first caliph and founder of the Umayyad dynasty. The traditional account of the succession is as follows:

- following the death of Muhammad (632), a swiftly convened council of senior members of the Islamic community selected Abu Bakr to be the community's leader, whilst Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law Ali, whom Shia Muslims believe had been Muhammad's intended heir, was engaged in washing and burying his father-in-law. When Ali and Fatima returned to their home following Muhammad's burial, Umar attended upon them and presented the election in Ali's absence of Abu Bakr as a *fait accompli*.

- Abu Bakr died after a rule of just two years, naming Umar as his successor.

- Umar (ruled 634-644), on his deathbed is said to have formed a committee of six surviving companions of Muhammad to elect his successor, and these chose Uthman.

- When Uthman was murdered in the twelfth year of his reign, Ali was finally able to claim the mantle of ruler for himself. However, Ali faced an immediate rebellion from Abu Sufyan's son (and Uthman's cousin), Muawiyah, who had been installed as governor of Damascus, and eventually Ali withdrew his claim to be Arab leader.

- Muawiyah became the fifth Arab ruler, styling himself '*Emir* ['*prince*' or '*commander*'] *of the believers*'. He declared his son Yazid to be his successor prompting Ali's son, Husayn, to conspire against him. This led to Husayn and several other descendants of the prophet travelling with him to

> be ambushed and killed at the Battle of Kabala in 680, an act of violence that drove a wedge between Arabs loyal to the family of Muhammad and those following the de facto ruler, which eventually evolved into the Shia-Sunni divide of today.

Many aspects of this genealogical chart and succession to leadership of the Muslim community are inherently implausible. Abu Sufyan, it will be remembered had been propelled to leadership of Mecca by his detection of Muhammad's ambush at Badr **⟨41⟩**. He had then spared Muhammad's life at Uhud **⟨42⟩**, besieged him at the Battle of the Trench **⟨44⟩**, agreed the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah **⟨46⟩**, and two years later surrendered Mecca to Muhammad without a fight **⟨48⟩**, and became a general in Muhammad's army. It is highly unlikely that throughout Muhammad's supposed eight-year campaign to capture Mecca he would have had his arch-enemy's cousin, Uthman, as a member of his inner circle of advisers. It stretches credulity yet further that Uthman should have married Muhammad's daughter, Ruqayya, and after her death, a second daughter Umm Kulthum whilst Muhammad should have married Abu Sufyan's daughter Ramla. A third incredible element to this already unlikely narrative is that fourteen years after Muhammad's death, it is the family of Abu Sufyan, his former enemy who only accepted Islam reluctantly at the point of a sword, who took leadership of the movement that Muhammad had founded and established themselves as a dynasty, whilst Muhammad's own heirs would be side-lined from the community he had founded, and, in many cases, slain.

The evidence of Jacob of Edessa's chronological charts, gives the lie to the traditional pious story of the four 'rightly guided' caliphs succeeding to Muhammad one after the other. On the contrary, the evidence shows that Muhammad was replaced as leader of the Tayayye during his own lifetime by Abu Bakr. We may also set aside the role traditionally attributed to Abu Sufyan of Muhammad's chivalric nemesis. If there is truth in the tradition of Uthman's marriages to two of Muhammad's daughters and Muhammad's marriage to Abu Sufyan's, these three marriages can only realistically be interpreted as Muhammad having entered into an alliance with the Umayyads the two parties requiring an exchange of marriages as mutual guarantees of each other's

loyalty. Uthman is thus revealed as no devoted disciple but an untrusting ally who required at all times a daughter of Muhammad as a guarantee of Muhammad's continued fidelity. It has been suggested above **⟨40⟩**, based upon the qibla orientation of Umayyad buildings towards Petra, that the Umayyads may have been the disbelieving ally in the valley referred to in **{48.24}**.

The above revised scenario offers a context in which to understand the bitter and violent rivalry that all parties agree was endemic to the early Muslim conquerors, an animosity amongst first generation recipients of a revelation unlike that seen in any other religious movement. It also fits the best contemporary account of these divisions recorded by John bar Penkaye, writing in Fenek (Iran) c. 690:

> *So the Lord to punish the sons of Hagar for the ravages they had made, gave them two leaders from the beginning of their kingdom and divided them into two nations. This was so that we might understand the word that was spoken by our saviour. They were united until they had subjected the whole earth, but when they returned to tranquillity and rested from war, they fought one another.*
>
> *Those in the west said: 'Superiority is due to us and the king must be chosen from among us.' Those of the east contradicted them and claimed that it was to them that this was due. When they had settled the business according to their methods, the victory fell to the westerners called Umayyads and this after a great slaughter had taken place between them. A man among them called Muawiyah took the reins of government of the two empires, Persian and Roman. Justice flourished under his reign and a great peace was established in the countries that were under his government, and he allowed everyone to live as they wished.* [215]

Finally, it would also explain why, despite the phenomenal growth of the Arab empire after the death of Muhammad, his memory and the Qurʾan, received no formal recognition by the Umayyads until after 690 and remained virtually unknown outside to the non-Arab world until after 750.

V

Law and Ritual

E. The Five Pillars of Islam

The Qurʾan is said to set down five positive obligations that lie upon all Muslims individually (*'fard al-ayn'*), popularly called, following a hadith[216], the '*five pillars of Islam*'.

These obligations are:

- to make a profession of faith **⟨53⟩**,
- to perform the *ṣalāt* (obligatory daily prayers) **⟨54⟩**,
- to give *zakat* (compulsory alms) **⟨55⟩**,
- to fast during the month of Ramadan **⟨56⟩**, and
- to make the hajj pilgrimage if this is practicable to **⟨57⟩**.

'Twelver' Shia Islam, the school of Islam that recognises twelve imams after Muhammad and the most populous denomination of Shia Islam, supplements the five obligations listed above with an additional five:

- to wage *jihād* **⟨93⟩**,
- to '*enjoin what is good*',
- to '*forbid what is bad*',
- to follow and willingly submit to the authority of the imams and
- to dissociate from the enemies of God **⟨91⟩**.

53. Profession of faith

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah / The Cow*): 285-286

285. The Messenger believes in what was sent down to him from his Lord, and the believers; each one believes in God and His angels, and in His Books and His Messengers.

We make no division between any one of His Messengers. They say: 'We hear and obey. Our Lord, grant us Thy forgiveness. Unto Thee is the homecoming.'

286. God charges no soul save to its capacity, standing to its account is what it has earned, and against its account what it has merited.

Our Lord, take us not to task if we forget, or make mistake.

Our Lord, charge us not with a load such as Thou didst lay upon those before us.

Our Lord, do Thou not burden us beyond what we have the strength to bear.

And pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us. Thou art our Protector. And help us against the people of the unbelievers.

[*Arberry*]

The duty to make a declaration of faith, often expressed using the term '*shahāda*' (literally '*to witness*') is one of the 'five pillars of Islam'. It is unclear to whom this profession must be made. To God certainly, and presumably one's fellow believers. However, there is little in the Qurʾan from which to conclude that this duty of witness extends to proclaiming one's faith to unbelievers through proselytization. According to the traditional Islamic narrative,

when Muhammad preached the word of God he did so acting as God's messenger ('*rasūl*') pursuant to a personal commission and in the model established by previous such messengers: the Old Testament prophets, Jesus and the Arab prophets, Hud, Saleh and Shuayb. This 'L-shaped' model of God communicating His message to one specific messenger who would then convey it to his people recurs throughout the Qurʾan. The best-known Quranic verse that instructs '*dawah*', or '*inviting (others to submit to God)*', is phrased - in a grammatical form that is unambiguous in the original Arabic – as to a singular addressee:

{16.125} Call [*addressed to an individual*] unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation. And dispute with them in the most virtuous manner.

Surely thy Lord is He Who knows best those who stray from His way and He knows best the rightly guided.

{16.126} And if you would punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith you were punished. But if you are patient then that is better for the patient.

{16.127} So be patient and thy patience is only with God and grieve not on their account nor be distressed by what they plot.

The role of followers is to '*believe in him, honour him, help him and follow the light that has been sent down with him*', **{7.157}**; in short to follow him. Several verses call upon believers to '*enjoin right and forbid wrong*', **{3.104, 110 & 114}**, **{9.67, 71 & 112}**, **{22.41}** and **{31.17}**, but this phrase is concerned only with the encouragement, or enforcement, of obedience. Of these, only **{3.104}**'s addition of '*call to the good*' in addition to '*enjoining right*' carries any real sense of a general mission to preach a religious message. The evidence of both the Qurʾan and the recorded biography of Muhammad is that

although Muhammad had commenced his ministry as a lone preacher, once a community that accepted his prophethood had been established, the emphasis of that community swiftly turned to the subjugation of the enemies of God and expunging corruption from the land through force of arms rather than the continuation of peaceful evangelism. Those sira accounts that have Muhammad sending out delegations to Bedouin tribes calling upon them to submit to Allah, invariably serve as a prelude to conflict, the maltreatment of these missionaries providing the casus belli for later punishment raids or assassinations.[217] Even had things gone well, a call to a tribe to submit to Muhammad's religious authority was clearly a political invitation more than a spiritual one (see for example the battles of Mecca, Hunayn and Tabouk). Historically, Islam has largely spread through territorial conquest and the subsequent imposition of sharīa law rather than through missionary activity (see comments made in **⟨51⟩** above). There is no passage in the Qurʾan specifically encouraging its audience to go forth and proselytise akin to Jesus's sending out of his disciples to preach the Good News.

In so far as there is a duty to make a profession of faith to unbelievers at all, **{26.214-216}** presents this in restrictive terms:

> **{26.214}** And warn thy tribe, thy nearest kin,
>
> **{26.215}** And lower thy wing to the believers who follow thee.
>
> **{26.216}** And should they disobey thee, say: 'Truly I am quit of that which you do';

(*c.f.* '*Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion* **⟨33⟩**.)

The sufficiency of the Qurʾan announcer having delivered a formal warning, is conveyed with the phrase: '…*God suffices as a Witness*', **{4.79}**, **{4.166}**, **{6.19}**, **{13.43}**, **{17.96}**, **{29.52}**, **{46.8}** and, in its fullest context:

{48.28} He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all religion.

And God suffices as a Witness.

Neither he, nor his followers, should be concerned at the lack of belief of others. It is not for the believer to assume responsibility for who believes or disbelieves, since knowledge of God comes from God alone, and God guides or does not guide whomsoever He will. Unbelievers are frequently described as inherently incapable of recognising the truth when it is put in front of them. Those who reject the message of the Qurʾan are blind, deaf and dumb, **{2.17-20 & 171}**, **{17.97}**, **{30.52-53}**, or suffer some combination of these disabilities, **{5.71}** (re: Jews), **{6.39}**, **{10.42-43}** and **{41.44}**. In **{54.47}**, *'the guilty'*, traditionally Muhammad's opponents at Badr **⟨41⟩**, '*are astray and mad*'.

Any discussions that do take place on the subject of religion must only be conducted *'in the most virtuous manner'*, **{16.125-126}**, produced above, and **{29.46}**. In **{6.108}** a specific reason for avoiding intemperate language is offered, which is to reduce the likelihood of an insult being offered to Allah in return:

{6.108} Do not revile those whom they call upon apart from God, lest they should revile God out of enmity, without any knowledge…

Faced with disbelief, the ideal response of a believer is merely to say '*Peace*', **{25.63}** and **{43.89}** (*c.f.* **{88.21-22}**), and take solace from the knowledge that those who fail to accept the call to Allah's *dīn* will be deemed to have had notice served upon them and will soon suffer for their scepticism: '*Bear with them and say 'Peace'. For soon they will know*', **{43.89}**. This punishment may be delivered by God directly, but in both **{16.125-126}** and **{29.46}** the instruction to discuss religion virtuously is supplemented with an ominous caveat, suggesting that should the conversation not proceed as hoped for, the believer may themselves be called upon to be God's instrument of vengeance.

The shahada

As for what it is that must be professed, this is conventionally summarised in the mantra that is known as the shahada.

> '*There is no god but God and Muhammed is His Messenger*'

The first part of this well-known declaration, that '*There is no god but God*' appears four times in the Qurʾan, at **{3.62}** (produced at **⟨72⟩** below), **{37.35}**, **{38.65}** and **{47.19}**, with slight variants occurring in almost fifty other places. It expresses an idea that is fundamental to the Bible where it likewise finds expression in a variety of forms, including:

> '*You shall have no other gods before Me*'
> (part of the ten commandments, Exodus 20.3),
>
> '*He is God. There is no other besides Him*'
> (Deuteronomy 4.35 & 39, similarly 32.39),
>
> '*… so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no one else*,' (1 Kings 8.60),
>
> '*Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel*,' (*per* Naaman in 2 Kings 5.15),
>
> '*Who is God besides the Lord?*'
> (2 Samuel, similarly Psalm 18),
>
> by the prophets Nehemiah (9.6), Hosea (13.4), Joel (2.27) and most insistently Isaiah ('*I am the Lord, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God*', 45.5, similarly 37.16, 43.10, 44.6 & 8, 45.6, 14, 18 & 22, 46.9),
>
> and, in the New Testament, Mark 12.32 ('*He is one and there is no one else besides Him*') and 1 Corinthians 8.4 ('*There is no God but one*').

The second limb of the Shahada, the '*shahada risala*': '*and Muhammed is His Messenger*' is not without controversy, even in Islamic scholarship, since it seems to emphasise the person of Muhammad over the message that he delivered. Why should it not say 'and the

Qurʾan is His Message'? To commit to following Muhammad as God's Messenger requires not merely trust in the authenticity of the Qurʾan's announcer and one's ability to sift the reliable traditions about Muhammad from those that are weak or false (a tall order in itself **⟨5⟩**), but also assumes that from these sources one can discern a single coherent message. Naming the messenger is only the start.

{2.285} produced above, being part of the finale of the Qurʾan's longest surah, is often treated as a concise summary of Islam's essential articles of faith. These are:

- monotheism,
- the existence of angels **⟨14⟩**, and
- God's revelation to humanity through '*His Books and His messengers*' **⟨20⟩**.

A similar credo – belief in God, angels, books and messengers (or in this verse, '*prophets*') - appears at **{4.136}**. **{2.177}** contains another such list but adds a fifth belief requirement: fear of the Last Day **⟨96⟩**. These lists inspired the oft cited *Hadith of Gabriel*:

> *One day while the Prophet was sitting in the company of some people, (the angel) Gabriel came and asked: 'What is faith?'*
>
> *Allah's Messenger replied: 'Faith is to believe in Allah, His angels, the meeting with Him, His Apostles, and to believe in Resurrection.'*
>
> *Then he was further asked: 'What is Islam?' Allah's Messenger replied; 'To worship Allah alone and none else, to offer prayers perfectly, to pay zakat* **⟨55⟩** *and to observe fasts during the month of Ramadan.*
> *Then he was further asked: 'What is (perfection)?' Allah's Messenger replied: 'To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you…'*

If '*God's Books*' includes the Qurʾan (which of course was still incomplete when this verse was announced) then included within these two words must be the acceptance of everything that is presented in the Qurʾan as being factually true as though it is actually true. The list of implausible propositions that this embrace is long and includes the manner in which God brought into existence the heavens and earth, Quranic cosmology **⟨13⟩**, the existence of not merely of angels but also of many other paranormal entities, jinn and the guards of heaven **⟨15⟩**, Iblis **⟨17⟩**, the '*ṭāghūt*' **⟨11⟩**, Gog and Magog **⟨30⟩**, the '*Beast of the Earth*' **⟨96⟩** and the supernatural guard dog of **{18.18}**. It also includes the historicity of the many biblical and non-biblical stories related including the fantastical journeys of Al Khidr and Dhu'l Qarnayn, the numerous punishment-narratives **⟨27⟩** and the detailed descriptions of the Gardens of Paradise **⟨99⟩** and the Hellfire **⟨100⟩** including the clothes to be worn, food and drink to be consumed and creatures to be encountered there. If there is scope for a pious believer to regard any or all of these things, which are presented in the Qurʾan as warnings, promises or exemplars, as in fact mere fables or parables, Islam has never developed a strong tradition of stating this explicitly.

{2.286} converts the creed of the preceding verse into a prayer, seeking leniency and forgiveness, and culminating, in keeping with another of the most pervasive themes of the Qurʾan, with an appeal for strength to prevail against unbelievers.

For '*shaheed*' as a martyr, see **⟨95⟩** below.

54. The *Ṣalāt*

Surah 1 (*Al-Fātihah/The Opening*)

1. In the Name of Allah,
the Mercy-Giving, the Merciful,

2. All praise is due to Allah (alone),
the Sustainer of all the worlds,

3. The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

4. Lord of the Day of Judgement!

5. You alone do we conform to;
and unto You alone do we turn for help.

6. Show us the straight way,

7. The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray.

[*The Ascendant Qurʾan, Realigning Man to the Divine Power Culture, Al-Asi & Khan, 2008 (Institute of Contemporary Islamic Thought)*]

Since surahs in the Qurʾan are ordered in such a way that they tend to decrease in length, the fact that one of its shortest surahs is its first, is significant. It is notable that unlike all other surahs (with exception of **Surah 9** for which see **⟨52⟩**) in which the words of the basmala appear as a prelude, **Surah 1** commences with the basmala but as its first verse. Both features are good evidence that **Surah 1** was composed to act as an introductory prayer for the whole of the Qurʾan. This is a proposition that is strengthened by the absence of any indication in **Surah 1** that it is intended to be taken as the words of God, and confirmed by its title, Al-Fātiḥa, from the Hebrew word used for a prologue to rabbinic prayers '*Petīhah*'.

The structure of **Surah 1** mirrors that of the Lord's Prayer taught by Jesus in the New Testament (Matthew 6.9, Luke 11.2):[218]

Surah 1	**The Lord's Prayer**
Invocation:	
'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful'	*'Our Father who art in heaven'*
Veneration:	
'All praise is due to Allah'	*'Hallowed be Thy name'*
Anticipation of the Last Day:	
'Lord of the Day of Judgment'	*'Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven'*
Appeal for practical sustenance:	
'Unto you alone do we turn for help'	*'Give us this day our daily bread'*
Appeal for moral guidance:	
'Show us the straight way... the way of ... those who do not go astray.'	*'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'*

The *Ṣalāt*

Surah 1 is recited by Muslims before they perform each *rak'a* (prostration) of their periodic *'ṣalāt'* (obligatory prayers). The standard Muslim regime of daily prayers involves prayers at dawn (*'al-fajr'*), noon (*'al-ẓuhr'*), late afternoon (*'al-ʿaṣr'*), sunset (*'al-maġrib'*) and in the early hours of the night (*'al-ishā'*). Each formal prayer involves reciting **{1.1-7}** before prostrating a number of times. Usually this is two *rak"ah* at the dawn prayer, four at each of mid-morning and noon, three in the early evening and four at night That a prayer involves a sequence of physical movements

including standing upright, bowing, kneeling and touching one's forehead to the ground, may have been adopted to realise **{22.26}**, which describes the movements of pilgrims: '*those who circumambulate and those who stand and those who bow and prostrate*' and also **{48.29}**: '*You see them bowing, prostrating seeking bounty from God and contentment; their mark upon their faces is from the effect of prostration*'. These in turn reflect Psalm 95.6:

> '*Come let us bow down in worship,*
> *Let us kneel before the Lord who made us*.'

The Psalm 55 refers to praying three times a day '*in the evening and at dawn and at noon*', and three daily prayers was also the custom of the prophet Daniel (Daniel 6.11) and is the standard practice for religious Jews. In a direct precedent for the Muslim practice of reciting **Surah 1** during *ṣalāt*, the apostolic church adopted the practice of praying the Our Father during these prayers.[219] Church fathers Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian and Cyprian developed more elaborate prayer cycles which, in the case of all except Cyprian involved facing towards the east. Approximately a century before the Qurʾan was composed, St Benedict of Nursia had formalised the classic monastic liturgy of hours as sevenfold - lauds (dawn), prime (early morning), terce (mid-morning), sext (mid-day), none (mid-afternoon), vespers (early evening) and compline (late evening) – this time following Psalm 119's '*seven times a day I shall praise you*.' There was also a separate eighth office of nocturnal prayer, called vigil or matins.

The Islamic scheme of five daily prayers is not dictated by the Qurʾan itself. **{6.52}**, **{24.58}** and **{40.55}** anticipate only two formal prayer times, at the beginning and end of the day.

> **{6.52}**: '*… Those who call upon their Lord, morning and evening…*'
>
> **{40.55}**: '*… Hymn the praise of thy Lord, at eventide and at dawn.*'
>
> **{24.58}**, in which three periods of the day for private rest are specified - for somewhat unclear purposes that do not concern us here – described as:

'*before the dawn prayer,*
when you doff your garments at noon
and after the night prayer.'

Other passages, **{11.114}**, **{17.78-79}**, **{20.130}**, **{50.39-40}** and **{76.25-26}**, also refer to praying '*at the ends of the day*' but in addition recommend praying during the night. Of these **{11.114}** specifies '*the early hours of the night*', but in the other verses the time of the night prayer is not fixed and **{17.78-79}** is explicit that the nocturnal prayer is merely recommended and not an obligation.

{17.78} Perform the prayer at the declining of the sun till the darkening of the night and the recitation at dawn –
truly the recitation at dawn is ever witnessed!

{17.79} And keep vigil in prayer for part of the night, as a supererogatory act for thee
['*an additional prayer (or spiritual profit) for thee' per* Yusuf Ali,
'*an extra offering of your own*', Abdel-Haleem,
'*a largesse for thee*', Pickthall].

It may be that thy Lord will resurrect thee in a praiseworthy station.

One passage, **{30.17-18}**, may be interpreted as instructing believers to give glory to God four times in a day, referring specifically to glorifying God in the noon and late afternoon in addition to dawn and dusk, although the verses are so imprecise that they may mean merely that God *deserves to be* praised throughout the waking day. Only **{20.130}**, might give five prayers:

{20.130} Before the rising of the sun and before its setting, and in the hours of the night glorify [Him], and at the ends of the day.

Islamic tradition preserves a fanciful account of Muhammad repeatedly entreating God to reduce the number of required daily prayers from an implausible fifty (averaging every twenty-nine minutes) to five **⟨35⟩**. More likely the Qurʾan initially adopted the three daily prayers of the Jews, with the Jewish midday prayer replaced by a night prayer, '*a time better suited to the Bedouin travelling under the stars*' per Charles Cutler Torrey[220] but later increased this to five to strike a middle way between the customs of the Jews and of the Christian clergy.[221]

{5.6} requires that prior to rising to perform prayer, a person must perform ablutions ('*wuḍū*') by washing their head and face, their hands up to the elbows and feet up to the ankles. Praying whilst intoxicated is prohibited **⟨77⟩**, as *per* rabbinic law (*Mishna Berekoth* 31b).

{62.9-11} further instructs believers to '*leave off trade*' on '*the day of congregational prayer*.' Traditionally, Islamic congregational prayers take place at a mosque once a week at the Friday '*al-ẓuhr*' *ṣalāt*. In fact, whilst Arabic names every day of the week except Friday by reference to a number (Sunday being '*yawm al-aḥad*' or the first day, Monday, '*yawm al-ithnayn*' or the second day and so on) Friday is called '*yawm al-jumʿah*' or Day of Gathering and many English Qurʾan s even translate **{62.9}** as '*When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday*'. It has been suggested that, just as the first Christians had met upon the day following the Jewish Sabbath, the custom of Muslims attending such prayers on a Friday developed from Muhammad publicly preaching and determining disputes at busy markets that were held on the eve of the Sabbath.[222] However, this explanation could be pure conjecture. Setting aside the current Arabic word for Friday that merely reflects tradition, no day is specified in the Qurʾan whose author may have intended congregational prayers to take place on either the Jewish or Christian sabbaths, or daily or once a month.

55. *Zakat*

Surah 9 (*Al-Tawbah/Repentance*): 60

Zakat is but a vehicle of prayers. It is due only to:

the poor who are destitute of means of livelihood, and

the needy who are in temporary distress due to sickness, disability or the like,

those who are engaged as collectors and administrators thereof, and

those who have just reconciled themselves with their own hearts and with Allah,

those in bondage who are eager to buy their freedom,

those in debt who are genuinely unable to pay what is owed to others,

the support of the cause of Allah,

and the wayfarer -who does not have the means for transportation and has to travel on foot.

This is an obligation incumbent on Muslims and dutiful to Allah.

[*Al-Muntakhab*]

Paying a sum of money as *zakat* (literally *'that which purifies'*, from the Hebrew word of similar meaning, '*zekhūt*') is another of the 'five pillars' of Islamic piety. In the mercantile language of the Qurʾan the donation of funds as an act of religious devotion is on several occasions - **{5.12}** and **{73.20}** in verses that are specifically associated with *zakat*, but also **{2.245}, {57.11}**

and **{64.17}** - described as the making of a '*goodly loan*' to God.

A general duty of almsgiving is instructed in several verses of the Qurʾan **⟨82⟩**. The obligatory requirement to make a payment of *zakat*, though, appears to be distinct from this general exhortation to generosity, and is expressed in specific, formal terms. In **{4.77}, {9.5} ⟨52⟩**, **{9.11}** and **{22.41}** (produced at **⟨37⟩** above) paying *zakat* is presented as an essential condition of being a member of the Quranic community. In **{41.7}** failure to make the payment is equated with disbelief. '*Zakat*' is often paraphrased as '*regular*' or '*compulsory*' alms/charity, although, of course, '*compulsory charity*' is an oxymoron, and what is being described is, in reality, taxation.

Emphasising its nature as a regulated and enforced payment, **{9.60}** makes provision for the '*collectors and administrators*' of *zakat* to take a share of the money that they collect. In several places, including **{17.26}**, the recipient's share is described as his '*entitlement*' ('*haq'ahu*'); and in **{6.141}** a set time is prescribed for its donation: '*Eat of* [various listed] *fruit when they grow and pay the due thereof on the day of its harvest'*. The quantum of *zakat* is not prescribed in the Qurʾan, it being traditionally levied at one fortieth of a Muslim's capital assets, paid annually on the first day of each Islamic new year.

56. Fasting

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah/The Cow*): 185

Ramadhan is the month during which the Qurʾan was revealed. It is (not only) the guidance for mankind, (but is also) the self-evident proof of (the truth of) that guidance, and (it is) the criterion (of the right and the wrong conduct).

Whoever among you lives to see that month, must observe fasts (during that month).

Whoever among you is sick or on a journey, (must fast) the same number of other days.

Allah wants to make matters easy for you; He does not want to impose hardships on you.
So complete the period (of fasting).

Glorify Allah (and thank Him) for the guidance He has granted. Perhaps, you would be grateful!

[*Munshey, 2000*]

The Qurʾan instructs that during the month of Ramadan believers must fast and abstain from sex, from dawn to dusk. **{2.187}** expresses the time at which this self-denial must begin as being when '*the white thread and the black thread of the dawn become clear to you*', a variation on the *Mishna Berekoth* 1.2: '*From what time may one recite the shema in the morning? From the time that one can distinguish between blue and white*'. The introduction of the requirement with the words '*As it was prescribed for those before you*', **{2.183}**, may allude to the Jewish practice of spending the month of Elul in contemplation prior to Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) on which Leviticus 23.26-32 requires mortification of the flesh and abstention form work '*from evening to evening*' or the Christian abstinence during Lent. The requirements of Ramadan however exceed both Elul and Lent in austerity, recalling the solo biblical fasts of Daniel (10.2-3) or Jesus (Matthew 4.1-10, Mark 1.12-13).

57. The Hajj

Surah 22 (*Al-Ḥajj/The Pilgrimage*): 27

And proclaim unto men the Pilgrimage.
They will come to thee on foot,
and on every lean camel,
coming by every distant, deep, track.

[*Maulawi Sher Ali*]

The hajj pilgrimage is mentioned by name in five verses of the Qurʾan. Four occur in **Surah 2 {2.158, 189, 196 & 197}** with the fifth, **{22.27}**, produced above. Two of these **{2.158 & 196}** mention another apparent ritual the so-called '*lesser pilgrimage*', of umrah.

{2.158} reads:

> Truly Safa and Marwa are among the rituals of God; so whosoever performs the *ḥajj* to the House or makes the '*umrah*, there is no blame on him going to and from between them.
>
> And whoever volunteers good, truly God is Thankful, Knowing.

{2.189} describes new moons as '*the markers of time for mankind and for the ḥajj*',

{2.196-200} refers to the hajj and the umrah as a duty on believers. It also gives guidance upon the rituals: pilgrims should refrain from shaving their heads '*until the offering reaches its place of sacrifice…*' and, when they have '*poured out from Ararat*', '*seeking a bounty*', pilgrims are advised to '*remember*

God at the sacred ground … then surge onward and ask God for forgiveness'.

This passage also hints at conflict: offerings should be offered '*when you are safe*' and those pouring forth from Ararat are permitted to '*seek bounty from your Lord*'. Consistent with this idea of hajj requiring a strenuous physical exertion, alternatives to these rituals are prescribed for those who are unable to undertake them due to illness or lack of means.

{22.26-37} links the word '*ḥajj*' with the House of Abraham, gives some further details concerning the sacrifices, and, as seen in **⟨54⟩**, introduces some further physical activities to the pilgrimage scene: circumambulating, standing, bowing and prostrating.

In addition to the above, and without mentioning the hajj or umrah by those names:

{3.96-97} states that '*pilgrimage to the House*' is obligatory, '*a duty upon mankind before God for those who can find a way*'. It offers an explanation for the pilgrimage destination, that it is '*the first house established for mankind at Bakka, full of blessing and a guidance for the worlds*', wherein are '*clear signs, the station of Abraham*' and assurance that '*whosoever enters it shall be secure,*'

{5.1-2 & **95-97}** prohibit the slaughtering of game and the eating of hunted game when in a '*state of pilgrim sanctity*', and fixes penalties for contravention of these rules. **{5.95-97}** warns: '*Do not violate the rituals of God, nor the sacred months, nor the offerings, nor the*

> *garlands, nor those bound for the Kaaba, the Sacred House*.'

{8.34-35}, which were clearly announced during a time when the Quranic community was excluded from the Masjid al-Haram, scorns the worthless rituals of those who were still able to attend the pilgrimage, whose '*prayer at the House is naught but whistling and clapping*.'

All of these pilgrimage verses raise once again the issue of the location of the Masjid al-Haram (discussed above at **⟨2⟩**, **⟨35⟩**, **⟨37⟩**, **⟨40⟩** and **⟨51⟩**). It should be noted that the Hebrew word '*ḥagˉ*' (literally '*to move in a circle*') to which the Arabic word '*ḥajj*' is clearly related, appears twenty-five times in the Torah to indicate a religious feast, and in particular it is used to denote the three feasts of '*ḥagˉ hammaṣṣôṯ*, the Feast of Unleavened Bread/the Feast of the Passover; '*ḥagˉ shāḇûʿôṯ*', the seven day Feast of Weeks or Feast of the Harvest, and '*ḥagˉ hassukkôṯ*', the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths that are listed together in Deuteronomy chapter 16. Here they are addressed collectively:

> *Three times a year then, every male among you shall appear before the Lord, your God, in the place which he chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths. Nobody shall appear before the Lord empty-handed but each of you with as much as he can give, in proportion to the blessings which the Lord, your God, has bestowed on you*. [223]

After the founding of the Temple on Mount Moriah, the three festivals became, for non-Jerusalemites, the three great pilgrimage feasts of Judaism. During the First and Second Temple periods it was customary for pilgrims celebrating '*ḥagˉ hammaṣṣôṯ*, normally held upon the first full moon following the spring equinox, to sacrifice a lamb or goat at the Temple, pursuant to God's instruction in Exodus 12.24-27. The *Mishna Sukkah* (4.5) prescribes circling the temple once on each of the first six days of the '*ḥagˉ shāḇûʿôṯ*', and seven times on the seventh day.

It follows that several elements of the Qurʾan's hajj can be seen in these Jewish festivals, and especially to the Passover. Both involve a making pilgrimage, which is obligatory on those for whom doing so is practicable, on a date dictated by the lunar calendar, and at the destination, to circumambulate and prostrate towards a cubic structure attributed to Abraham, there to perform an animal sacrifice. As seen above **⟨2⟩**, each is also associated with a place called Bakka.

However, there are differences between Jewish *ḥāggî* and Quranic ḥajj too. The Qurʾan links its hajj to a new moon, **{2.189}**, whereas the Passover takes place upon a full moon. It specifically permits the sacrifice and consumption of camels, **{22.36}** which is a meat forbidden in Jewish dietary law **⟨76⟩** and it refers to ritual actions that are not to be commonly found in Judaism: the shaving of heads and the wearing of garlands, **{2.158}**. None of these differences challenge the thesis that the destination of both was the site of the Jerusalem Temple, but rather they seem to indicate that the Qurʾan author felt himself at liberty to introduce innovations that might appeal to his non-Jewish followers.

Safa and Marwa

Tradition treats **{2.158}**'s reference to traversing between two places named Safa and Marwa, as recording the performance of a ritual of walking or running several times between two rocky outcrops bearing those names, located within the Masjid al-Haram complex in Mecca. By way of an explanation for this action, it is said to be a re-enactment of Hagar who, having travelled five hundred miles to reach the location of the current Kaaba, at that time uninhabited, had left baby Ishmael on the ground between the two hills whilst she ran back and forth between them, desperately climbing each seven times looking for water or help. This account bears the now familiar hallmarks of a story devised to explain a verse of which the first Muslim exegetes were unable to make sense, or the true meaning of which they wished to conceal. In fact, the verse likely relates to two hills that form part of the Jerusalem landscape. Marwa is easily recognisable as Mount Moriah, the mountain pointed out by God to Abraham as the place upon which

he was to sacrifice Isaac and upon the summit of which Solomon built the Temple and later the Arabs built the Dome of the Rock shrine **⟨2⟩**, **⟨22⟩**, **⟨35⟩**, **⟨40⟩**. '*Ṣafā*', it is suggested is the nearby and taller mountain that is now known by the name Mount Scopus (from the Greek '*skopos*', in the original Hebrew '*Har HaTsofim*') literally the Hill of the Watchmen. In *The Antiquities of the Jews*, the first century historian Flavius Josephus refers to this mountain as Sapha. The significance of the Qurʾan author centuries later adopting the name for this mountain used by Josephus becomes clearer with the context. Josephus was describing the surrender of Jerusalem to Alexander the Great by the high priest Jaddua. Jaddua had feared the wrath of Alexander, since the Jews had refused to assist him against the Persians.

> *When* [Jaddua] *understood that* [Alexander] *was not far from the city, he went out in procession, with the priests, and the multitude of the citizens. The procession was venerable, and the manner of it different from that of other nations. It reached to a place called Sapha: which name translated into Greek signifies a prospect, for you have thence a prospect both of Jerusalem and of the temple: and when the Phoenicians, and the Chaldeans that followed him thought they should have liberty to plunder the city and torment the High Priest to death: which the King's displeasure fairly promised them: the very reverse of it happened. For Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the High Priest in purple and scarlet clothing; with his mitre on his head; having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the High Priest.*[224]

Alexander's triumphant entry into Jerusalem is indirectly alluded to elsewhere in the Qurʾan. It will be recalled that the Syriac *Victory of Alexander*, had been written as an allegory to celebrate the victory of Heraclius over the Persians in 628 and that this text had formed the basis of the Qurʾan's story of Dhu'l Qarnayn **⟨1⟩**, **⟨30⟩**; in turn probably intended to be understood as an epithet for Moses. So, in the *Victory*, the story of Alexander is used as an allegory for that of Heraclius' recovery of Jerusalem in 630, and in the Qurʾan

essentially the same story is used for the same purpose with regard to the Qurʾan author, in anticipation of his own conquest of Jerusalem eight years later. It will be recalled that in 634, the patriarch Sophronius had complained of Arabs blocking the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem **⟨1⟩**, **⟨2⟩**, **⟨26⟩**, **⟨50⟩**. Later he would record that he had personally made the arrangements for Jerusalem's surrender to the Arabs. In so doing, he found himself acting in precisely the same role as the Temple high priest Jaddua centuries before him. Within this broader literary context, the Qurʾan's allusion in **{2.158}** to the name Sapha is far from a mere archaic usage. Rather it fits into a Quranic pattern of presenting its announcer in the role of Dhu'l Qarnayn/Moses, Heraclius and Alexander.

58. Slavery

Surah 16 (*Al-Nahl/The Bee*): 71

> **Allah has made some of you excel in sustenance over the others; those who are so favored, do not give away their sustenance to their slaves so as to make them their equals.**
>
> **How can you think that Allah will allow other deities to be His equals?**
>
> **Would they refuse to acknowledge the favors of Allah?**

[*Farook Malik*]

Slavery was a fact of life in the ancient world. Joseph son of Jacob had been sold to be a slave in Egypt where later all the Israelites would be enslaved for generations, prior to being led to freedom by Moses. God's instructions to the Israelites in the Book of Deuteronomy included that upon entering Canaan they were to utterly destroy the tribes that they found occupying it (7.1-2 **⟨52⟩**) but they might enslave the inhabitants of cities that surrendered to them elsewhere (Deuteronomy 20.10-11). Israelites could sell themselves into slavery or be enslaved to repay a debt, but they were to be released after six years (Exodus 21.2-6, Deuteronomy 12.15-18), and in Leviticus 25.39-43 enslaving fellow-Israelites at all was discouraged. Non-Hebrews could be traded and enslaved permanently (Leviticus 25.44-46). In the New Testament the existence of slavery is accepted as a fact of life with Jesus invoking the relationship of master and servant many times in his parables as a metaphor for God and His people. However, the essence of Jesus's ethical teaching and his example is one of sanctification by selfless service to others and finding glory in humility, seen in statements such as:

> '*The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*,' (Mark 10.45)
>
> and
>
> '*Who is greater he who sits at the table or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am amongst you as one who serves*,' (Luke 22:24-27 *c.f.* Matthew 26:14-39, John 13:1-17).

St Paul (at Ephesians 6.5 and Colossians 3.22) and St Peter (at 1 Peter 2.18) each urged slaves to obey their masters, but within context this was within a context imitating the life of service preached and practised by Jesus. It is inconceivable that the Jesus, Peter or Paul depicted in the New Testament would have themselves owned slaves for their own comfort, or that they would have sought to defend the slavery as an institution.

The Qurʾan frequently uses a word from the root ʿ-b-d (connected to the Hebrew ''*ebed*', from which we inherit the English word '*obedience*') meaning slave or servant. Usually, this occurs within the pious context meaning that a given person is a slave or servant of God. In the Hebrew Bible, many prophets are referred to as God's servants, including Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Exodus 32.13 & Psalm 105), Jacob (Jeremiah 30.10), Moses (1 Chronicles 6.49, 2 Chronicles 24.9, Nehemiah 1.7-8, 9.14, 10.29 & Daniel 9.11), Joshua (Judges 2.8), Job (Job 1.8, 2.3) David (Ezekiel 34.23, Psalms 78, 89 & 144) and the Israelites generally (Leviticus 25.55, Psalms 113, 116, 119). The only prophet of the Hebrew Bible who is not ethnically Jewish is called Obadiah, meaning '*Servant of God*', a direct equivalent of the Islamic name ʿAbd Allah. The model of a prophet as '*servant of the Lord*' is particularly prominent in the prophecies of Isaiah (42.1-9, 49.1-13, 50.4-11, and 52.13-33) and as referred to above, this became a defining image for the ministry of Jesus. Throughout the Qurʾan, the divine voice also refers to believers as His slaves, for example in His assurances that He will not wrong His slaves (**{3.182}**, **{8.51}**, **{22.10}**, **{41.46}** and **{50.29}**) and in His lauding of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Solomon, Zechariah, Jesus, and Job for being His '*slaves*', sometimes qualified as being either '*thankful*' or '*excellent*' (**{17.3}**, **{38.45}**, **{38.30}**, **{19.2 & 30}** and **{38.41}** respectively) - as indeed is the Qurʾan's announcer himself,

{17.1}, **{25.1}**, **{53.10}** and **{57.9}**. The prophet conventionally known as al-Khidr, like Obadiah in the Bible, is referred to throughout as the Servant of God **⟨29⟩**. It may be the case, however, that the image of the servant, which in Isaiah and the Gospels is used as a metaphor for willing humility, is in the Qurʾan presented more literally to stress the importance of being fearfully slavish when complying strictly with God's instructions. This is a theme that is addressed in **⟨86⟩** below.

When the Qurʾan addresses the ownership of one human by another, it tends to use a different phrase, the idiom '*mā malakay aymānukum*' meaning '*those whom your right hands possess*'. Self-evidently, this term emphasises both physical control and legal right of ownership, although this and *'abd'* can on occasion be used interchangeably (for example in **{16.71 & 75}**). Several verses in the Qurʾan regulate the ownership of slaves.

- The Qurʾan permits a man to marry his own or another's slave (see **⟨60⟩** below) and permits a believing man to have intercourse with his own slaves (**⟨59⟩** following).

- **{4.36}** exhorts believers to be '*virtuous*' towards several categories of people including '*those whom your right hands possess*' (*c.f.* Colossians 4.1: '*You slaveowners, deal justly and fairly with you slaves realising that you too have a master in heaven'*).

- **{33.58}** instructs '*those whom your right hands possess and those who have not come of age*' to seek permission before disturbing believers at times of privacy.

- **{24.31}**, instructing believing women to adopt modest dress, is subject to an exemption clause that this requirement is not necessary in respect of a woman appearing before certain categories of people including '*those her right hand possesses*'.

- The punishment for slaves that commit fornication is half that of free people **⟨69⟩**.

Seven passages of the Qurʾan prescribe circumstances in which a slave is to be freed. Manumission may be:

- an act of piety, **{2.177}**, **{90.12-14}**
- out of charity or possibly from *zakat* revenue: '*The charitable offerings are only for the poor, and the indigent … and for (the ransoming of) slaves and for debtors*', **{9.60}**;
- as a penance to be performed for accidentally causing the death of a Muslim **⟨74⟩** or for breaking the terms of an oath, **{5.89}** and **{58.3-4}**, and
- in return for payment: '*… For those … who seek a contract (of emancipation) with you, contract with them if you know of any good in them*,' **{24.33}**.

For all these circumstances in which a particular slave might be freed, there is no verse of the Qurʾan that might be taken as disapproving of slavery itself. Rather, the sanction of releasing a slave for certain types of wrongdoing not merely presumes but requires the continued availability of slaves to be freed. In the only two verses that address the institution of slavery itself, **{16.71}** (produced above) and **{30.28}**, slavery is hailed as one of the means by which God blesses the slave owner and freeing slaves - God's '*provision*' - for the purpose of making slave and master equal is unambiguously discouraged. **{16.71}** and **{30.28}**'s defence of the division between slave and master may have been intended as a metaphor by which to denounce either the association of false gods with God or Christians' presumptuous assertion that they were the children of God (*c.f.* **{16.75-76}** and **⟨67⟩** below). However, such a metaphor would only work if it was accepted that slavery was not merely a practical reality but part of God's plan for mankind.

The traditional Islamic narrative makes numerous references to Muhammad owning, buying and selling slaves and enslaving people who had hitherto been free **⟨45⟩**, **⟨49⟩** and **⟨D⟩**. Muhammad's slaves even gain their own brief mention in the Qurʾan at **{33.55}**, in which they are excepted from the rule that his wives are to be addressed across a veil **⟨79⟩**.

59. Intercourse with *'those one's right hand possesses'*

Surah 4 (*Al-Nisā/Women*): 24

And all married women (are forbidden unto you), save such as your right hands possess (captives of war); it is a decree of Allah for you But lawful for you are all beyond these. So seek them with your wealth in honest marriage and not lust.

[*Hamid Aziz, 1981*]

Several biblical figures had father children through female servants of their household, including Abraham begetting Ishmael with Hagar and Jacob begetting two sons with each of Bilhah and Zilpah **⟨22⟩**. Solomon **⟨24⟩** is said to have had three hundred concubines. The permission to Muslims to take concubines from defeated foes, as with the taking of slaves generally, was permitted in the Torah (Deuteronomy 20.14 and 21.10 (*c.f* Judges 5.30; also Numbers 31.9). However, concubines were granted a level of protection that was not allowed to other slaves. Deuteronomy 20.10-14 provides that:

> *When you go out to war against your enemies and the Lord, your God, delivers them into your hand, so that you take captives, if you see a comely woman amongst the captives and become so enamoured of her that you wish to take her as your wife you may take her home to your house ... After she has mourned her father and mother for a full month you may have relations with her … later on, if you lose your liking for her you shall give her her freedom if she wishes it. You shall not sell her or enslave her, since she was married to you under compulsion'*

C.f. Exodus 20.7-11.

The above quoted passage implies that a concubine has a status akin, although still inferior, to a wife taken from free Hebrews. In the above passage a woman taken in this way is referred to as the man's '*wife*' and in the Book of Judges a man who has thus 'taken a wife' is referred to as her husband (19.3, 20.4) and her father is his father-in-law (19.9). Other than for royalty, concubinage appears to fade from the bible after the time of the united monarchy.

Five verses of the Qurʾan permit believers to have sexual intercourse with '*those whom their right hands possess*': **{4.24}** (produced above), **{23.1-9}**, **{33.50 & 52}** **⟨79⟩** and **{70.19-35}**. There is no indication in the Qurʾan that the status of women who are used in this way enjoy any enhanced status thereby. The term '*those whom their right hands possess*' does not raise any expectation of being treated as a member of the extended family. Nor does the Qurʾan contain any protection for a woman captured as a spoil of war from being sold and resold repeatedly. The one protection that the Qurʾan does afford a woman in this position is the prohibition in **{24.33}** against her owner forcing her into prostitution '*if she desires to be chaste*'. However, this limited recognition of a slave's right to say 'no' to intercourse with men other than their owners only serves to underscore the lack of any similar right, for either wives or slaves, to refuse their husband/owner. The suggestion that is sometimes made that respect for such consent was so universally acknowledged that it did not need to be stated, can be disregarded as lacking any real credibility.

In the traditional Islamic narrative, **{4.24}** was announced shortly after the Battle of Hunayn **⟨49⟩**. It will be recalled that according to Ibn Ishaq's account of this battle, the Hawazin had used their womenfolk as a decoy and that when the Hawazin men's surprise attack upon the flanks of Muhammad's army was repulsed, their womenfolk were captured by Muhammad. It is unnecessary here to recite in detail the deeply unpleasant *aḥādīth* that describe how Muhammad and his men divided the female captives up between them, but they make no effort to conceal the subsequent rape of the Hawazin women. It is within this context that some of his fighters are said to have asked Muhammad:

> *O Prophet of Allah! How can we possibly have physical relationships with women whose lineage and husband we know very well?* [225]

Whilst the details of this story are unreliable, the circumstances of the announcement of **{4.24}** may well have been along the same lines since this would have been either the third or fourth occasion upon which the Qur'an had expressly permitted men to have intercourse with their female captives, and the purpose of restating this in **{4.24}** would appear to have been to clarify that in Allah's eyes, sexual intercourse with married captives did not amount to an offence of violating the sanctity of these marriages.

C.f. **⟨D⟩**, **⟨45⟩** and **⟨60⟩**.

60. Marriage

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah/The Cow*): 221

> **And marry not an idolatress until she believe; while a believing maid is certainly better than an idolatress, even though she may highly please you.**
>
> **And do not give (believing women) in marriage to an idolater until they believe. And a believing slave is better than a (free) idolater even though she may highly please you.**
>
> **It is they who invite to the Fire, but Allah calls to the Paradise and to the protection by His Command. He makes His Messages clear for the people so that they may take heed.**

[*Amatul Rahman Omar and Abdul Omar, 1990 (a married couple, making this the first English translation of the Qurʾan by a woman)*]

In several verses, God refers to having created '*mates*' for his people for the purpose of procreation **⟨13⟩**. In **{30.21}**, the Qurʾan recognises that wives also offer men companionship: '*(God) created mates for you amongst yourselves that you might find rest in them, and he established affection and mercy between you*', (*c.f.* **{7.189}**). In the instructions for observing Ramadan, nocturnal intercourse is permitted between husband and wife with the words – addressed to the former: '*They* [your wives] *are a garment for you and you are a garment for them*', **{2.187}**. But other than for these brief allusions to the potential for spouses to offer emotional support to one another, the Qurʾan's treatment of the institution of marriage is presented primarily as a contract, at the heart of which is the regulation of sexual intercourse. The word '*nikāḥ*' that is commonly translated as '*marriage*' strictly means '*union*' with connotations of permitted intercourse. This distinguishing of licit from illicit sex exists within a framework of laws that are primarily concerned with certainty concerning the paternity of children and financial provisions that

are, on the face of the text, far removed from contemporary notions of romantic love and mutual commitment to a shared life.

Eligibility

{4.22-25} sets out classes of females that are forbidden to a man in marriage ('*maḥram*') by virtue of their relationship to him. This list unsurprisingly includes mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts and nieces. Less obviously, it also includes stepmothers, '*milk mothers*' and '*milk sisters*', mothers in law, stepdaughters in a man's care *'born of your wives with whom you have consummated marriage'*, *'the wives of your sons who are from your loins'* (for the background to this unusually specific phrase see **⟨67⟩** below) and '*two sisters together*'. A '*milk mother*' is a surrogate mother from whom the man has been breastfed, and a '*milk sister*', a female who has suckled at that same bosom. In one of the more bizarre hadith accounts, the impermissibility of marrying a milk mother or sister was used, reportedly at Muhammad's own suggestion, as a legal device whereby an adult man, by sucking upon a lactating woman's breast, might render her *maḥram*, thereby permitting him to spend time with her and her daughter(s) unveiled and unsupervised (although they could never thereafter marry).[226] According to one hadith, lost verses of the Qurʾan separately specified both ten and five as the number of occasions of suckling necessary to confer *maḥram* status. Both of these supposed verses were said by Aisha to have been lost when the leaves upon which they were written were eaten by a tame sheep as Muhammad died **⟨7⟩**.[227]

Marriage to women who are currently married to another man is unlawful, except where such a woman is one of '*those whom your right hand possesses*', **{4.24}**, in which case the possession of her is deemed to have brought her earlier marriage to an end and to make her available, in sharīa law, to her captor or purchaser **⟨59⟩**.

The Bridewealth

The Qurʾan makes no reference to any wedding ceremony and Muhammad reputedly married one of his wives, Ramla bint Abu Sufyan by correspondence from Arabia whilst she was in Abyssinia (see **⟨D⟩** above). Nor is there any requirement that the man either makes any commitment either to observe sexual exclusivity to his bride nor declares his intent that the marriage is to be permanent. On the contrary, the Qurʾan grants a man the unfettered right to marry multiple wives **⟨61⟩** and to have intercourse with '*those whom his right hand possesses*' **⟨59⟩**, whilst he may divorce his wife, subject only to a duty to attempt reconciliation **⟨63⟩**. The central element of the marriage contract is the transfer of property, referred to in the Qurʾan by a variety of words but commonly referred to as the *mahr*. The *mahr* may be expressed in translation as '*dower*' (*per* Yusuf Ali), '*bridewealth*' (*The Study Quran*), or, somewhat euphemistically, the '*bridal gift*' (Abdel-Haleem) This is an asset that a man must give to his bride upon their wedding (not, therefore, to be confused with a dowry that, in other cultures, is paid by a bride's family to the couple to hold jointly). The *mahr* is addressed in several verses:

In **{4.4}** the bridewealth is described as belonging to the woman as '*a free gift*' from her husband, which he is forbidden from retaking from her, **{2.229}**, although she may voluntarily surrender it back to him. In **{4.20-22}**, a man's retaking of the bridewealth after he and the wife to whom he had given it have '*lain with one another and made a solemn covenant*' is condemned as a '*calumny and manifest sin*', even '*if (he) desires to take one wife in place of another*.'

{2.236-237} sets out that where a man divorces a woman prior to their having had sexual relations, he shall, if a bridewealth had been designated, pay her half of it; or if one had not been fixed, make '*an honourable provision*' according to his means.

> In **{60.10}** believers are advised to reimburse the bridewealth that had been given to believing women by their disbelieving husbands if those women then seek not to be returned to them.

This last verse apparently relates to the situation should a believing woman request sanctuary with Muslims from a disbelieving husband, but is, for some reason, unable to repay him the bridewealth he had paid her on their marriage. This provision demonstrates that the bridewealth system was not an innovation of the Qurʾan, but a pre-existing Arab custom. Although the Qurʾan fixes no minimum, maximum or suggested quantum for this payment, and **{2.237}** indicates that the quantum may be kept unresolved until after the marriage has been consummated, the Qurʾan makes this pledge or transfer of property, rather than any vows of mutual commitment, the essence of a legitimate marriage: the sole element that distinguishes participation in a divinely ordained institution from sinful fornication, punishable with flogging or death.

Marriage and slavery

Marriages between free believers and slaves are specifically permitted in **{2.221}**, **{4.3 & 25}** and **{24.32}**. This is universally interpreted by sharīa jurists to be subject to the understanding that two people may not concurrently stand in the relationships both of owner and slave and of spouses to one another, and that consequently, the act of taking one's own slave as one's husband or wife releases that person from their slave status. However, in none of the four verses is this stated, and in **{4.3}** (produced at **⟨61⟩** following) marriage to one or more slaves is recommended to men who fear that they would be unable to treat multiple free wives equitably; carrying, it is suggested, the implication that such a slave-wife would remain her husband's property. Rather than a manumission at the point of marriage, it seems more likely that what is anticipated is a concubinage 'marriage' such as that discussed at **⟨59⟩** preceding.

The Qurʾan is often presented as having pioneered the notion of matrimonial rights for women. It is suggested that this is a claim that does reflect the reality of Quranic marriage. In *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, William Robertson Smith proposed that in any tribal society, marriages invariably fall into one of three fundamentally different types: those involving two members of the same tribe, those in which the man joins his wife's tribe and those in which the woman leaves her tribe to join that of her husband. From the wife's perspective, either of the first two of these will be vastly preferable to the last type of marriage since she can hope that her family and wider clan will protect her from any possible abuse by her husband and his family. If the husband joins her tribe, she and her birth-family would often continue to own the dwelling in which she lived, and should the marriage come to an end, the man would leave her in the former matrimonial home, since he would have lost the reason for his presence within the tribe. This sort of marriage would also benefit the wife's tribe as a whole since it would have its numbers increased by any children from the marriage – the next generation of labourers and warriors. From the man and his tribe's perspective, of course, it would be preferable that he take a wife from another tribe away from her tribe to join him in his for essentially the same reasons. A woman, geographically and socially isolated and with no right to return to her birth-tribe, would have little control over her own life and in the event of abuse be entirely dependent upon the intervention of strangers.

So disadvantageous to women and their tribe were 'female-out' marriages, Smith argues, that they could traditionally only be achieved either by a woman being physically captured and carried off or by else through the payment of a substantial 'bride-price' to her family. Smith asserts that both of these marriages are evident in accounts of pre-Islamic Arabia, but that by the time of Muhammad it was marriage through payment that predominated.

A trace of this understanding of the right to marry a woman as an asset to be bought and sold may be seen in **Surah 4**'s rules of inheritance. **{4.19}** provides that a wife does not form part of her husband's estate: '*It is not lawful to inherit women through coercion or prevent them marrying again'* and **{4.22}** states: *'And marry not those women whom your fathers married'.* Al-Tabari describes the practice

that these verses were intended to put an end to in his commentary on the latter verse:

> *In the Jahiliya* [the 'age of ignorance' preceding Islam], *when a man's father or brother or son died and left a widow, the dead man's heir, if he came at once and threw his garment over her, had the right to marry her under the mahr already paid for her by her deceased Lord.*[228]

In other words, the mischief that **{4.19 & 22}** were directed at outlawing was not the inheritance of widows as a part of a deceased's estate nor marriages within prescribed degrees of kinship, but rather families' attempts to prevent a widow leaving her former husband's tribe without the tribe being required to pay a further bride-price.

In an attempt to unite his people into a single community of believers, defined by their allegiance to him as their prophet, rather than upon kinship ties and ancient customs, the Qurʾan only partially abolished this trading of women between families. It retained the *mahr* as a contract price conferring the right to intercourse and submission, but now required that the recipient of the payment must be the woman herself. If the value of the *mahr* was substantial, then for wives, keeping it would have been an improvement on the way things had been previously, and the claim of Muslims that the Qurʾan improved the position of wives in pagan Arab society. However, Quranic marriage law still much resembles the marriages of dominion described by Smith. A man is permitted, if not encouraged, to take several wives **⟨61⟩**, whom he has the right to beat should they fail to show devout obedience **⟨62⟩**, and who, having accepted the mahr payment, have no right thereafter to bring the marriage to an end **⟨63⟩**. Sharĭa wives are not chattel slaves, but the Qurʾan sees no incongruity in juxtaposing the two as '*wives and those whom your rights hands possess*' **⟨69⟩**. As Kecia Ali observed in *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*:

> *Early Muslim jurists adhered to a bottom-line view of marriage as a transaction that conveyed to the husband, in exchange for a pecuniary consideration paid to the wife, a kind of power of dominion analogous to but more limited than a master's power over his female slave. It is*

> *this dominion over her that makes that makes intercourse between them lawful.*[229]

Moreover, the emancipatory effect of allowing the woman a free choice as to whether to agree to a marriage, was undermined from the start by Islamic jurists, who have overwhelmingly insisted that a first marriage contract be negotiated on behalf of a woman by her '*wali*' ('*guardian*').[230] This doctrine has no explicit basis in the Qurʾan, but for the reasons set out above is deeply rooted in the milieu from which the Qurʾan evolved and which it in turn reflects.

Child marriage

In **{2.228-229}**, a declaration by a man that he has divorced his wife is not to be treated as final until such time as the divorced wife has subsequently menstruated three times, a period known as the '*iddah*' **⟨63⟩**. In **{65.4}** the Qurʾan sets a substitute period of three (lunar) months for two classes of women who do not menstruate:

> **{65.4}** As for those of your women who no longer await menstruation, if you are unsure, then their waiting period is three months as it is for those who are yet to menstruate, but as for those who are pregnant, their term is until they deliver.
>
> And whosoever reverences God, He will appoint ease for his affair.

By regulating the divorce of '*those who are yet to menstruate*' the Qurʾan necessarily endorses marriage, and since no iddah would apply unless a marriage has been consummated (**{33.49}**) sexual intercourse, with premenarchal girls.

It is well known that Muhammad, in Islamic tradition, is said to have undergone a nikah contract with Aisha, the daughter of his friend Abu Bakr, when she was just six years old and they began living together three years later. These ages of Aisha at the time of her marriage contract and of the consummation of it, are cited by

Ibn Hisham in his earliest extant preserved biography of Muhammad, see **⟨D⟩**, and in both of the two hadith collections traditionally regarded as most reliable. In these, Aisha's youth is deliberately emphasised by the inclusion of references to her playing on a swing and with dolls.[231] However, as with all the episodes comprising the traditional life of Muhammad, these should be regarded with suspicion. Such a 'marriage' would be atypical for the Muhammad of the sira, each of who's dozen or so other 'main' wives except one (Maymuna) having been married previously. Moreover, there may well have been a strong motive for the writers of the sira and hadith to give her such a young age, in that this would increase the possible chains of transmission that hadith writers in the ninth century could claim as the source of their reports.

That **{65.4}** explicitly provides for marriage to a girl before her first period is, however, clear and until the twentieth century was undisputed. The novel interpretation of **{65.4}** is also now occasionally offered that the second category of women mentioned therein '*those who are yet to menstruate*' refers only to adult women who do not menstruate because they suffer from amenorrhea. However, such a subtle accommodation of such a rare medical condition would be a marked exception to the Qurʾan's general presumption of physical and mental health subject to references to specific infirmities.

61. Polygyny

Surah 4 (*Al-Nisā/Women*): 3

> **And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of (other) women, two or three or four.**
>
> **But if you fear that you will not be just, then (marry only) one or those your right hand possesses.**
>
> **That is more suitable that you may not incline (to injustice).**

[*The Qurʾan (Sahih International), 2010, (three female US converts)*]

This verse is the basis of the well-known Islamic rule that a man is permitted to have up to four wives concurrently. It is suggested that the tone not merely permits but invites believers to take multiple wives and that the incremental trajectory in the phrase '*two or three or four*', which omits, for those confident in their ability to act justly, the consideration of monogamy, reads as an idiom that might easily have carried the original meaning '*several*'. This would align the verse with Old Testament norms, under which Gideon had seventy sons by '*many*' wives (Judges 8.30), David had at least seven wives (1 Chronicles 30) and his son Solomon a hundred times that many (1 Kings 11.3). It would also be consistent with the tradition that Muhammad himself by the end of his life had over a dozen wives **⟨D⟩**.

This idiomatic understanding is supported by the only other occurrence of the phrase '*two or three or four*' in the Qurʾan, in **{35.1}** where it occurs in reference to the number of wings possessed by angels **⟨14⟩**. Here, a strictly literal interpretation of 'either two or three or four but no more' would contradict Isaiah's account of having seen seraphim with six wings (Isaiah 6.2) and the Third Book of Enoch's description of the mighty angel Metatron as

having seventy-two wings (coincidentally the number of 'wives' that are traditionally said to be provided for martyrs in Paradise.) It also conjures the absurd image of a class of angels endowed with three wings.

Notwithstanding this, the literalist reading of a four-wife maximum, was cemented by the production of a hadith in which a man with ten wives who converted to Islam o was instructed by Muhammad to choose four of his wives to retain, and to renounce the other six.[232] The apparent inconsistency, not to say hypocrisy, in this ruling given the accounts of Muhammad's own large hareem is avoided by reading **{33.50}** (produced at **⟨67⟩** below, see also **⟨79⟩**) as giving a personal exemption from this rule for Muhammad alone.

The cautionary words in **{4.3}** that a man ought not to take multiple wives if he fears that he will not be just between them, was later supplemented by an addendum at **{4.129}**, produced in response to queries referred to in **{4.128}** with: '*They seek a ruling from thee concerning women*'. **{4.129}** concedes to believers that: '*You will not be able to deal fairly between women, even if it is your ardent desire, but do not turn away from one altogether so that you leave her as if suspended*,' If this too were taken literally, it would effectively negate the potential for polygyny enthusiastically announced in **{4.3}**, since **{4.129}** reveals that the precondition for polygyny in **{4.3}**, i.e. the ability to treat multiple wives justly, can never be met. One must suppose that, as with the descriptions of Paradise, the Qurʾan became more nuclear family oriented as the community became more established and as Muhammad's dominion came to include a predominantly Christian population.

The connection that is drawn in **{4.3}** between the care of orphans and polygyny is obscure. It may have been intended as a comparison between the duty to act virtuously to orphans in one's care and a similar duty with regard to wives, or it may have been intended to point out to any men who might be tempted out of lust to abuse their position as the guardian of female orphans, that taking a wife would be better for them than that ignoble course.

A male slave is traditionally limited to only two wives.[233]

62. Beating one's wife for disobedience

Surah 4 (*Al-Nisā/Women*): 34

Men are caretakers (and maintainers) of women
because of what God has graced some over the
others, and for what they spend of their wealth.

So good women are loyal, looking after what God
takes care of in the absence (of their husbands).

And those whom you are afraid of their disloyalty
(in their marital duties) then advise them
and keep away from them in beds
and (if that or nothing else worked) then spank
them (fairly and not out of anger),
but if they agree with you then do not look for a
way against them.

God is superior and great.

[*The Holy Quran, Ostad Ghodratollah Bakhtiari Nejad*]

Notwithstanding the Qurʾan's hope that parties to a marriage will live together in amity, **{4.34}** establishes that domestic harmony is founded upon a wife's duty of obedience to her husband. **{4.34}** proposes two justifications for this. The first is that this is in accordance with the natural order as fixed by God: '*Because Allah has made one of them to excel the other*' (*c.f.* **{2.228}**: '*And men have a degree over (women)*'). This resembles God's address to Eve and her female descendants in Genesis 3.16: '*Your urge shall be for your husband and he shall be your master*.' The New Testament too contains exhortations to wives to obey their husband by St Peter (1 Peter 3.1) and St Paul (Ephesians 5.22-33, Colossians 3.18-22). However, these words from the book of Genesis follow shortly after a statement that a married couple are to form 'one body' (2.24), a passage quoted by St Paul in Ephesians as he links the duty of wifely obedience to a duty of affection from a husband to love his wife as his own body.

There is no equivalent statement of marriage as a permanent spiritual union in the Qurʾan where, as seen at **⟨60⟩** above, marriage is presented as a contract of which the essence is pecuniary rather than emotional. The second basis of the duty of devout obedience is the wife's presumed financial dependence on her husband - '*because (men) spend their wealth on (women)*'. This statement, which may reflect Exodus 21.10-11, could never, even in the most patriarchal society have been true for all marriages. It seems particularly incongruous, given Muhammad's own early reputed financial dependence upon his first wife, the successful businesswoman and his former employer, Khadija.

Where a wife fails to demonstrate the requisite level of obedience to her husband, **{4.34}** provides him with three sanctions of increasing severity. The first is admonishment, to be followed, if needs be, by a period of separation (deriving from 'h-j-r', for which see **⟨37⟩**), in practise '*sulking*'.[234] The third sanction is that the husband physically chastise his wife. The verb that is almost invariably translated as to '*strike*' or '*beat*' (to 'ˡ*smack*' per Qaribullah & Darwish, to '*scourge*' Pickthall) is a formation of '*ḍaraba*' (root ḍ-r-b) and from which English derives the verb to '*drub*'. This has one of the widest ranges of meanings of any Arabic word. The core meaning is to impact physically, but it is often used idiomatically, in ways comparable to the English phrases to '*strike a deal*' or to '*strike out*' on a journey. Within the Qurʾan it can carry such a non-violent meaning, for example when God '*sets forth*' a parable **{13.17}**, **{14.24-25 & 35}**, **{30.28}** or Moses is instructed to '*strike a path through the sea*' in **{20.77}**. However, it is also used with violent, and even deadly, meaning, such as **{8.12}**'s '*So strike at their necks and strike off every fingertip*' **⟨41⟩**. Most pertinently to its appearance in **{4.34}**, it is used to instruct Job to fulfil his pledge to drub someone, whom it is usually assumed must be his disloyal wife, with a bundle of rushes in **{38.44} ⟨25⟩**.

Whilst most translators render the verse as permitting physical chastisement, many qualify the verb used with some mitigating qualifier such as '*(lightly)*', '(*as a last resort*)' or '(*without harshness*)'. Such additions to the text are based upon several *aḥādīth* in which Muhammad is said to have instructed that a man should not beat his wife either with a weapon, or upon her face, or in the same manner in which he would beat a slave or camel, or immediately

before lying with her.[235] However, such limitations are themselves qualified by **{4.34}**'s most commonly cited narration hadith according to which the verse was sent down for the specific purpose of revoking a punishment Muhammad had ordered against a follower for having beaten his wife, so severely that, in Aisha's words, *'her skin was as green as her cloak'*; causing Muhammad to comment: *'I wanted one thing and God wanted another'*.[236] It is certainly utterly fanciful to imagine that this verse, as the final resort in an escalating regime of sanctions for enforcing obedience, was ever intended, as some claim, to permit only a symbolic tap.

63. Divorce

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah/The Cow*): 229

A divorce is only permitted two times: after that the parties should either stay together on just terms or separate with kindness.

It is not lawful for you (men) to take back any of your gifts (from your wives) except when both parties fear that they would be unable to keep the limits set forth by Allah.

If you (judges) do fear that they would be unable to keep the limits set forth by Allah, then there is no blame on either of them if she gives something for her freedom.

These are the limits set by Allah, so do not break them.

If any (person) does step beyond the limits set forth by Allah, such persons wrong (themselves as well as others).

[*Syed Vickar Ahamed, 1999 (Al Azhar, a simplified translation aimed at younger readers)*]

Zihar

{58.1-4} and **{33.4}** each refer to a practice that they call '*zihar*' (literally meaning a '*back*', as in the part of the body). The traditional explanation for the use of this term in these verses is that it had been an Arab custom for a man to say to his wife: '*You are like my mother's back to me*'. The effect of saying these words, appears to have been that, whilst the wife to whom the words were spoken might remain within the man's household, their conjugal relationship is thereafter terminated, and so the phrase operated as a form of divorce.

{58.1} God has indeed heard the words of she who disputes with thee concerning her husband and complains to God.

And God hears her.
Truly God is Hearing, Seeing.

{58.2} Those among you who commit *zihar* against their wives, those are not their mothers. None are their mothers save those who gave birth to them.

Truly they speak indecent words and calumny.

And truly God is Pardoning, Forgiving.

{58.3} As for those who commit *zihar* against their wives and then go back upon what they have said, let them free a slave before they touch one another; to that are you counselled.

And God is aware of whatsoever you do.

{58.4} And whosoever has not (the means) let him fast two consecutive months before they touch one another.
And whosoever is unable, let him feed sixty indigent people.

That is so that you may believe in God and His Messenger.

These are the limits set by God.
And the disbelievers shall have a painful punishment.

A believing woman is said to have complained to Muhammad that her husband had purported to perform the *zihar* divorce upon her, in response to which **{58.1-4}** was announced to declare that such a divorce should not be deemed to be legally effective. Moreover, uttering these words is a sin, since they amount to both making a false representation concerning a biological relationship (see **⟨67⟩** following) and presenting as *haram* something that has not been made unlawful in the Qurʾan. Consequently, the man who utters such words is told that they should make the penance prescribed in verses 3 and 4. Ironically, **{58.3}** rules that the husband's act of falsely asserting that his wife is *haram* to him, becomes temporarily self-fulfilling as the man is then forbidden from touching his wife until after he has completed the performance of his penance. The consequence for the two parties to the marriage should the husband not '*go back upon what they have said*' is not made clear.

Talaq

The Quranically approved approach to marital discord is that, prior to a divorce there should be a process of dispute resolution, whereby the cause of the argument is to be arbitrated upon by two individuals, one from '*his people*', the other from '*her people*', **{4.35}**. **{2.128}** strengthens this requirement that the parties try to reconcile with '*Those who foreswear their wives shall wait four months*' is read as imposing a maximum period of four months during which a man may refuse to have sex with his wife, before a divorce is required.

Should matters proceed to a divorce, certain rules concerning this are contained in **Surah 2**: **{2.226-232, 236-237 & 241}**. Of special note:

> **{2.228}** prescribes that whilst a man has the right to declare his wife divorced, the divorce is not final and may still be revoked by him at any time until the woman has undergone, since the declaration of divorce, three menstrual cycles.

This period, the '*iddah*, is qualified in three ways:

{33.49} disapplies **{2.228}** where no physical intimacy has occurred,

{65.4} substitutes a fixed period for women and girls who do not menstruate (see **⟨60⟩** above), and

{2.229} introduces a limitation on declaring and then revoking divorces under the preceding verse. Pursuant to **{2.229}**, where a man has declared his wife to be divorced for a third time - the so-called '*triple talaq*' - then he loses the right to revoke the divorce. This limitation was reportedly (*per* Ibn Kathir, author of the most frequently cited Qurʾan commentary) introduced in order to stop one particular Muslim man who was repeatedly divorcing his wife and thereafter revoking the divorce, thereby preventing her from ever remarrying. **{2.230}** specifies that once a divorce has become final, it is not lawful for the two to remarry until after the wife has married and divorced somebody else; a rule that can result in short 'marriages of convenience' ('*nikāḥ halāla*') to enable a reconciliation with the original husband to take place.

{65.1} establishes that during the course of the *'iddah*, the revocably-divorced wife may remain in the family home, unless she commits '*a flagrant indecency*'.

{2.234-237} sets a longer '*iddah* period, four months and ten days within which a widow may not remarry. Possibly the additional period of forty days is imposed as a mark of honouring the deceased husband.

Khulʿ

There is a consensus within Islam that Qurʾan should not be read as containing any equivalent right for a wife to declare her husband divorced. However, a wife may negotiate the terms of an agreed divorce (‘*kuhlʿ*’) with her husband, based upon:

> **{2.228}**: ‘*… If you fear that (the parties to an unhappy marriage) would be unable to keep the limits set forth by Allah, then there is no blame on either of them if she gives (her husband) something for her freedom …*’,

and

> **{4.128}**: ‘*…If a wife fears animosity or desertion from her husband, there is no blame upon them, should they come to an accord, for an accord is better…*’

The Qurʾan anticipates that a Khulʿ divorce may involve the wife paying her husband money in return for him releasing her from the marriage. It is also generally held that that should her husband fail to agree reasonable divorce terms, a wife may petition a sharīa court/tribunal that has power to impose its own terms - although this is not based upon any Quranic authority. The standard precondition for a judicially imposed divorce is that the applicant must show a serious fault or failing on the part of her husband, equivalent to the ‘*animosity or desertion*’ referred to in **{4.128}**. Accepted categories are a husband’s culpable failure to meet his obligation to maintain his wife, his impotence or his beating the applicant to a degree that exceeds that which is permissible **⟨62⟩**.

Child custody

{2.133} provides that in the event that a man divorces his wife whilst she has a young child by him, the mother shall ‘*nurse their children two full years, for such as desire to complete the suckling*’ during which period ‘*it falls on the father to provide for them and clothe them honourably.*’ A two-year weaning period is also cited in **{31.14}**: ‘*And We have enjoined man concerning his parents – his mother bore*

him, weakness upon weakness, and his weaning was two years', although in **{46.15}** a shorter period is given: '*And we have enjoined man to be virtuous unto his parents. His mother carried him in travail and bore him in travail, and his gestation and weaning are thirty months*'. Sharĭa jurists all agree that whilst a young child should be cared for by their mother, or in her absence another suitable female relative, custody over an older child may be later claimed by their father.

64. Modest Female Attire

Surah 33 (*Al-Ahzab/The Parties*): 59

O Prophet! Tell your wives, your daughters, and women of the believers that they should draw their outer garments over their person (when in public).

This is easy and proper, so that they may be recognized and not bothered.

Allah is Absolver of imperfections, Merciful.

[*Shabbir Ahmed, 2003 (Pakistani-US)*]

{33.59} is one of two Qurʾan passages addressing the permissible attire of women in general. The other, **{24.30-31}**, begins with instructions to both men and women to *'lower their eyes and guard their private parts'*, before proceeding to lay down a dress code for women. This specifies that women should:

{24.31} … not display their adornment, except that which is visible thereof.

And let them draw their kerchief over their breasts, and not display their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers [*and several male relatives*] or women, or those whom their right hands possess, or male attendants free of desire, or children who are innocent of the private areas of women.

> Nor let them stamp their feet
> such that the ornaments that they
> conceal become known.
>
> And repent unto God altogether,
> O believers, that haply you may
> prosper.

A third passage, **{33.33}**, is addressed specifically to the wives of the prophet, who are instructed: '*Abide in your homes and flaunt not your charms as they did flaunt them in the prior Age of Ignorance*' **⟨79⟩**.

Contrary to popular belief and customary practice, none of these verses explicitly requires a woman to conceal their face or even their hair, in the manner that has become iconic for Muslim women's and girls' attire. Whether the word '*jilbab*' in **{33.59}** implies a garment incorporating a head covering, hinges upon a question of seventh-century Arabian sartorial terminology that is now unanswerable with certainty. It is suggested that **{24.31}**, however, would naturally be read as permitting women an uncovered head. On the face of the text, the Qurʾan's instruction that women '*draw their kerchief* [*'khimār': a cloth garment*] *over their breasts*' addresses a low *décolletage* which one would not naturally associate with an assumption that the head must already be covered. There is an obvious circularity in **{24.31}** prohibiting the showing of something '*except that which is visible thereof*'. Several Qurʾan translations endeavour to make sense of the verse by qualifying '*visible*' (or whatever similar term is used) by inserting a condition of compliance with social norms, such as:

> '… *beyond what is (acceptably) visible*' (*per* Ali Qarai),
>
> '… *except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof*' (Yusuf Ali), and
>
> '… *except what is permitted by the law*' (Sarwar).

However, even if such a qualification is read into the text, the verse would still beg the question of what the verse was instructing, by

having the Qurʾan only prohibiting that which is deemed - by contemporary social standards - not to be *de rigueur*.

The linkage of the 'covering up' instruction in **{24.31}** with the instructions to both men and women to lower their eyes and '*guard (their) private parts*' (an idiom for chastity), the prohibition upon women jangling their anklets, and the exception of permitting a woman to appear lightly clad in front of some judged to be '*free of desire*' and '*innocent of the private areas of women*', all make it quite clear that **{24.31}** is concerned that women adopt concealing attire for reasons of modesty. A comparison might be drawn with St Paul's First Letter to Timothy (2.8-9):

> '*Women must deport themselves properly. They should dress modestly and quietly, and not be decked out in fancy hair-styles, gold ornaments, pearls or costly jewellery*.'

An even closer parallel may be seen in a fourth century guide to Christian living, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* which instructs:

> *If you want to become a believing woman, be beautiful for your husband only. And when you walk in the street, cover your head with your garment, that because of your veil your great beauty may be covered. And paint not the countenance of your eyes but have downcast looks. And walk being veiled.* [237]

In *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*, Holgar Zellentin notes that '*rather than condemning sexual attraction, as is common in the ascetic strands of the Christian tradition, both texts* [*i.e.* the Qurʾan and the *Didascalia*,] *channel it into the approved sphere of matrimony*.' In fact, it could be argued that the Qurʾan is more liberal in its terms than the *Didascalia*, since the former urges believing women to walk being veiled, and to reserve their beauty for their husbands only, whereas **{24.31}** lists a number of other people in front of whom a woman may properly appear without donning specially concealing attire.

Whereas **{24.31}**, in common with 1 Timothy and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, links concealing dress to modesty, **{33.59}** offers a different and more sinister reason for instructing women to draw

their outer garments over their person. This is so that '*it is likelier that they will be known and not disturbed*'. '*Known*' here must be read as meaning '*identifiable as a believer*' rather than capable of being recognised individually, which of course becomes harder the less of the person's skin and hair is on display. Consequently, the rationale being put forward in this verse is that women who are recognisable as believers, will be more likely to be spared being '*disturbed*' (or in other translations, probably more realistically '*harassed*' (*The Clear Qurʾan*), '*insulted*' (Abdel-Haleem), '*molested*' (*per* Yusuf Ali) or '*hurt*' (Arberry). The verse does not spell out how it is that being readily identifiable as a believer would protect a woman from being harassed but it is suggested that the only plausible explanation is that the Qurʾan author has in mind sexual harassment by believing men, whom, it is anticipated, would not disturb a member of their own community.

{24.60} permits '*elderly women who no longer anticipate marriage*' to '*doff their garments without displaying any ornaments*', although even for such women '*it is better for them to be modest*.'

65. The Testimony of Women

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah/The Cow*): 282

**O you who have believed, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down.
And let a scribe write (it) between you in justice.
Let no scribe refuse to write as Allah has taught him. So, let him write and let the one who has the obligation dictate.
And let him fear Allah, his Lord, and not leave anything out of it.**

But if the one who has the obligation is of limited understanding or weak or unable to dictate himself, then let his guardian dictate in justice.

And bring to witness two witnesses from among your men. And if there are not two men (available), then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses - so that if one of the women errs, then the other can remind her. And let not the witnesses refuse when they are called upon.

And do not be (too) weary to write it, whether it is small or large, for its (specified) term.

**That is more just in the sight of Allah and stronger as evidence and more likely to prevent doubt between you, except when it is an immediate transaction which you conduct among yourselves. For (then) there is no blame upon you if you do not write it.
And take witnesses when you conclude a contract. Let no scribe be harmed or any witness. For if you do so, indeed, it is (grave) disobedience in you.**

**And fear Allah. And Allah teaches you.
And Allah is Knowing of all things.**

[*Sahih International*]

{2.282}, which happens to be the longest verse in the Qurʾan, directs amongst other things that the record of a debt should be witnessed ideally by two men. In *the Qurʾan and Its Legal Environment*, David S Powers links this provision to a verse from the *Bava Batra* (part of the Mishna) 40a which, in a commentary upon Leviticus 19.14 '*You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in the way of the blind, but you shall fear your God*', directs that a record of a debt '*must be made in the presence of two persons, one of whom must say 'write'*.'

The Qurʾan states that only should two suitable men not be available, an attestation by one man and two women may suffice. The verse also provides a reason for this gender preference, namely that women have a greater tendency to forgetfulness than men. Although the scope of the rule is limited to records of debt, some schools of Islamic jurisprudence have drawn much broader evidential rules from this verse including the inadmissibility of a women's testimony on most justiciable matters and, where the testimony of a woman is admitted, a legal presumption that this is to be afforded half the weight of that of a man.

66. *'Women are a tilth to you'*

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah/The Cow*): 223

> **Your wives are as a tilth unto you,**
> **so approach your tilth when or how ye will,**
> **but do some good act for your souls beforehand, and fear God.**
>
> **And know that ye are to meet Him (in the Hereafter) and give (these) good tidings to those who believe.**

[*Yusuf Ali, 1938*]

The Qur'an is unapologetically written for a man's world. Several verses are phrased in a way that makes it clear that although they concern women they are addressed to an exclusively male audience:

> **{2.221}**: *'Marry not idolatresses… and marry none to the idolaters till they believe…'* **⟨60⟩**,
>
> **{2.231 & 237}**: *'…when you have divorced women… … if you divorce them … not having designated a bridewealth...'* **⟨63⟩**,
>
> **{2.240}**: *'… those who among you who are taken by death and leave behind wives…'* **⟨68⟩**,
>
> **{4.15}**: *'As for those of your women…'* **⟨69⟩**,
>
> **{4.19}**: *'It is not lawful for you to inherit women…* **⟨60⟩**,
>
> **{4.23}**: *'Forbidden unto you are your sisters…'* **⟨60⟩**,
>
> **{4.34}**: *'The righteous women are devoutly obedient… As for those from whom you fear discord … '* **⟨62⟩**.

No comparable verse addresses women concerning their menfolk. Nor is any verse expressed in a way that requires it to be read as having been addressed to an audience that includes women, save for **{33.30-34}** which are directed specifically at the wives and household of the Prophet **⟨79⟩**.

Other than for Mary the Qurʾan makes a point of never naming a woman. There is some precedent for this in the Bible. On the ark, Noah's three sons are named but not their wives, and biblical genealogies tend to record only the names of fathers. However, the Qurʾan's anonymising of all women except Mary is extreme degree, refusing to name a female character even where she plays a significant role in the story being told, as is the case with the wives of Adam, **{7.19}** and **{20.117-123}**, Abraham, **{11.71-72}** and **{51.29}**, Imran, **{3.35}**. In **{12.23-35}** the wife of al-Aziz (Potiphar) pays a pivotal over twelve consecutive verses without once being identified other than as '*the wife of al-Aziz*' or, on one occasion, '*she in whose house he (Joseph) was staying*'. In **{33.37}** the absence of a name for the wife of Zayd, reflects her entirely passive role concerning her own future:

> **{33.37}** 'And [remember] when thou said unto him whom God has blessed and whom thou hast blessed: 'Retain your wife for yourself…
>
> … Then when Zayd relinquished his claim upon her, We wed her to thee.

Surah 66 concludes with a call to reflect upon four biblical wives. The wives of Noah and Lot are cited as examples of those who disbelieve and are, as a result, consigned to the Hellfire. The wife of Pharaoh (the adoptive mother of Moses) by contrast is counted amongst the believers alongside Mary. When Adam was made God's viceregent upon the earth in **{2.30}**, there was no indication, as there is in Genesis 1.27-29, that his authority over the world should be shared with his wife, and it is to Adam alone that God speaks. Hagar, as the mother of Ishmael, is the supposed matriarch of the Arab race and crucial to the Qurʾan's claim that the Arabs are included in God's covenant with Abraham. Yet, one must

assume because Hagar was not Abraham's wife but a mere servant of Sarah, she lacked the standing to merit any reference in the Qurʾan whatsoever.

Four verses, **{16.57}**, **{37.149}**, **{43.16}** and **{52.39}**, rebut the notion of angels as the daughters of God on the basis that God would not have chosen a daughter over a son, and **{16.58}** drives home the point by inviting the audience to reflect upon how '*when one of them receives tidings of a female child, his face darkens and he is choked with anguish*'.

A '*tilth*' (see **{2.233}** produced above) is an archaic term for land used for crop-growing, sometimes translated as '*a ploughed field*'. '*Go unto your tilth as you will*' is clearly intended to permit men a degree of freedom to engage in sexual activity with their wives including the right to impregnate them. The metaphor of a woman as a field in which her husband may plant his seed is consistent with the Qurʾan writer's understanding of reproductive biology, whereby a human being develops entirely from a man's 'seed' – '*a drop emitted*' (per Yusuf Ali) that is produced from between his '*loins*' (alternatively '*backbone*') and ribs, **{86.6-7}**, in which process the mother's biological role is merely one of providing a womb within which the man's seed may germinate. The three types of sexual relationships that the Qurʾan permits for men – namely with their wives **⟨60⟩** and slaves **⟨59⟩** in this world and the houris of Paradise in the next **⟨99⟩** - all share the common feature that they give the male a position of complete authority over the female. None make reference to, and the latter two implicitly exclude, recognition of the female partner's rights of consent. Even with wives, *aḥādīth* interpret **{2.233}** as a requirement upon a woman to instantly comply whenever her husband desires intercourse, one employing the odd idiom (in this specific context) '*even if riding a camel*'.[238]

As seen elsewhere in this Part, the sharïa contains numerous legal provisions that give women less rights than men, such as the permissibility of polygyny **⟨61⟩**, the absence of a woman's right to divorce **⟨63⟩**, the recommendation to men to physically chastise their wives if they are disobedient **⟨62⟩**, a reduced inheritance for female relatives **⟨68⟩** and lifelong confinement of women guilty of

illicit sexual activity **⟨69⟩**. It also affords a lower evidential value given to the testimony of women **⟨65⟩** below.

Whilst the men of the Qurʾan are depicted as formulaic representations of a handful of types – such as excellent servants, those who cover the truth, and hypocrites – the Qurʾan author is at pains to deny women any recognition as autonomous individuals at all. Doubtless, the Qurʾan author, as a puritan reformer of the Judeo-Christian tradition, was recalling the gender inequality established in the laws and precedents of the Torah. However, even as the Torah had established the quintessential patriarchy, it did not deny named female characters such as Eve, Sarah, Hagar and Rebekah an active role in the unfolding of sacred history. The Hebrew Bible includes a female leader of Israel, Deborah (Judges 4 & 5) and prominent stories including both heroines - Judith, Esther, Ruth – and villainesses - Delilah, Jezebel. In the gospels Jesus is frequently depicted, scandalously, with women in his inner circle. With this broader scriptural context, the Qurʾan's exclusion of women from its addressees, the erasure of female names from its stories, the pervasiveness of gender-discrimination in its laws, and its sexual objectification of women, is one of its most conspicuous 'reformist' themes and even manages to exaggerate the male dominance of the ancient society its author was apparently seeking to recreate.

67. Adoption

Surah 33 (*Al-Ahzab/The Parties*): 4-5

4. God does not put two hearts within a man's breast. He does not turn the wives you reject and liken to your mothers' backs into your real mothers, nor does He make your adopted sons into real sons.

These are only words from your mouths, while God speaks the truth and guides people to the right path.

5. Name your adopted sons after their real fathers: this is more equitable in God's eyes – if you do not know who their fathers are (they are your) 'brothers-in-religion' and proteges. You will not be blamed if you make a mistake, only for what your hearts deliberately intend.

God is most Forgiving and Merciful.

[*Abdel-Haleem*]

Surah 33 contains a number of related verses that are traditionally associated with the story of Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh, the former wife of his adopted son, Zayd. According to the traditional narrative, this marriage was problematic for Muhammad in two ways. First, Zaynab would be his fifth concurrent wife, exceeding the maximum of four wives that most Islamic jurists believe is fixed in **{4.3}** (for which see **⟨61⟩** above). Second, and more scandalous, was the fact that the marriage was to the wife of his adopted son Zayd. In the traditional account both problems were avoided by a revelation that Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab was commanded by God for the purpose of demonstrating that adopted children were not to be treated as though they were biological offspring. The circumstances leading

up to this marriage are recounted in several *aḥādīth*, and in the following passage of *Annals of Prophets and Kings* written by al-Tabari:

> *The Messenger of God came to the house of Zayd bin Harithah (Muhammad's adopted son)…*
>
> *Perhaps the Messenger of God missed him at that moment, so as to ask: 'Where is Zayd?'…*
>
> *Zaynab bint Jahsh, Zayd's wife, rose to meet him. Because she was dressed only in a shift, the Messenger of God turned away from her.*
>
> *She said: 'He is not here, Messenger of God. Come in, you who are as dear to me as my father and mother!'*
>
> *The Messenger of God refused to enter.*
>
> *Zaynab had dressed in haste when she was told the Messenger of God is at the door. She excited the admiration of the Messenger of God, so that he turned away murmuring something that could scarcely be understood. He did say overtly: 'Glory be to God the Almighty! Glory be to God, who causes the hearts to turn!'*
>
> *When Zayd came home, his wife told him that the Messenger of God had come to his house. Zayd said: 'Why didn't you ask him to come in?' She replied: 'I asked him, but he refused.' He asked: 'Did you hear him say anything?' She replied: 'As he turned away, I heard him say: 'Glory be to God the Almighty! Glory be to God, who causes hearts to turn!'*
>
> *So Zayd left, and having come to the Messenger of God, he said: 'Messenger of God, I have heard that you came to my house. Why didn't you go in, you who are as dear to me as my father and mother? Messenger of God, perhaps Zaynab has excited your admiration, and so I will separate myself from her.'*
>
> *Zayd could find no possible way to (approach) her after that day. He would come to the Messenger of God and tell him so, but the Messenger of God would*

say to him: 'Keep your wife.' Zayd separated from her and left her, and she became free.

While the Messenger of God was talking with Aisha, a fainting overcame him. When he was released from it, he smiled and said: 'Who will go to Zaynab to tell her the good news, saying that God has married her to me?'

Then the Messenger of God recited: [239]

{33.37} And (remember) when thou said unto him whom God has blessed and whom thou hast blessed: 'Retain your wife for yourself and reverence God'?

Thou wast hiding in thyself that which God was to disclose, and thou didst fear the people, though God has more right to be feared by thee.

Then when Zayd relinquished his claim upon her, We wed her to thee, so that there should be no restriction for the believers in respect to the wives of their adopted sons when the latter have relinquished their claims upon them.

And the Command of God shall be fulfilled.

At about the same time **{33.50}** was also announced which read:

{33.50} O Prophet! We have made lawful for thee thy wives to whom thou hast given their bridewealth, as well as those whom thy right hand possesses of those whom God has granted thee as spoils of war … and any believing woman if she gives herself (in marriage)

> to the Prophet and if the Prophet desires to marry her—for thee alone, not for (the rest of) the believers.

It is this last verse that reputedly caused Aisha to sarcastically remark to Muhammad '*Your Lord hastens to fulfil your desires*'.[240]

These two verses sit within a complex surah that considers the Qurʾan's announcer and his wives in relation to the community he was addressing on a more fundamental level than suggested by Aisha's insinuation. To appreciate the overall scheme of **Surah 33**, a number of verses need to be considered together.

{33.4-5} (produced above) denounce the practice of *zihar* **⟨63⟩** and of treating an adopted child as though they were one's biological offspring.

{33.6} proclaims: '*The Prophet is closer to the believers than they are to themselves and his wives are their mothers*'.

{33.37} (also produced above) has God command his prophet to take Zayd's ex-wife as his own, when '*Zayd no longer wanted her*' (*per* Abdel-Haleem) or when '*Zaid had accomplished what he would of her*' (Arberry).

{33.40} states:

> Muhammad is not the father of any man amongst you. Rather he is the Messenger of God and the seal of the prophets.
>
> And God is Knower of all things.

{33.50-52} grant permission for the prophet alone to marry any believing woman whom he desires, but **{33.52}** adds a limitation: '*women are not lawful for thee* [in the singular i.e., addressed specifically to the Qurʾan announcer] *beyond that*'.

{33.53} lays down instructions for visitors to the Messenger of God's home **⟨79⟩** and also forbids anyone to marry his wives after his death.

{33.60-62} gives a command to seize and '*utterly slay*' those who spread false rumours as was '*the wont of God with those who passed before*'.

Finally, **{33.69}** contains an instruction that believers should not be as '*those who affronted Moses*', who was innocent of what they alleged.

When these verses are read together an overall theme emerges. The common element to the prohibition of both *zihar* in **{33.4}**, and of adoption in **{33.5}**, is that both verses condemn treating an artificial familial relationship as though it were a biological fact. **{58.2}** **⟨63⟩** describes a man calling a woman who did not give birth to him his mother as '*indecent words and calumny*' which is a similar message to that of **{33.4}**: '*These are only words from your mouths, while God speaks the truth.*'

However, the Qurʾan having twice rejected language that seeks to usurp nature, **{33.6}** proceeds to create a fiction of its own, by declaring Muhammad's wives to be '*the mothers of the believers*'. This is more than an attempt to inspire affection for them, the full significance of the declaration being revealed in **{33.52}**, namely that these are forbidden for believers to marry after Muhammad's death. The reader might have expected that if Muhammad's wives were the spiritual mothers of the believers, then it would follow that Muhammad himself would be as a spiritual father to them, but **{33.40}** expressly denies this: '*Muhammad is not the father of any man amongst you*'. For, if believers were forbidden to marry Muhammad's wives (their 'mothers') after his death, had Muhammad been the father of the believers, all of his marriages to believers **⟨D⟩** would have become Quranically incestuous.

{33.60-62} commands that expressions of discontent with this state of affairs be met with lethal force in the tradition of '*those who passed before*'. Given the reference to Moses a few verses later, this is likely

an allusion to an incident in chapter 12 of the Book of Numbers in which God struck Moses's sister Miriam down with leprosy for having presumed to criticise Moses's marriage to a Cushite woman. However, possibly to mollify any critics for whom such threats alone may not have been sufficient, **{33.52}** seems to guarantee that after Zayd's wife, there will be no further marriages between Muhammad and his female followers.

These passages have been the subject of a detailed exploration by David S. Powers, in *Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men, The Making of the Last Prophet*. Powers concludes that the traditional story of Zeynab and Zayd was not a scandalous historical event but in fact was a literary device to cast Muhammad in the role of King David **⟨24⟩**. By Muhammad then sending Zayd to almost certain death in battle, the composers of the traditional narrative sought to replicate for Islam the motif of the sacrificed son, familiar to Judaism and Christianity in the figures of Isaac and Jesus respectively. This dismissal of the standard explanation raises the question why these verses were actually announced. The double rejection of Zayd in the tradition – first by the renunciation of his adoption, then by Muhammad sending him to his death – Powers argues was motivated by a desire amongst the leaders of the community after Muhammad's death to prevent Zayd or his descendants from claiming leadership of the Islamic community as the heirs of Muhammad. The salacious story of Muhammad's temptation by the lightly clad Zaynab, was, he argues, an attempt to conceal the dynastic subterfuge behind the re-enactment of a biblical motif.

The consequences of this complex surah today is that, under sharīa law, a child that is looked after by an adoptive family, retains their biological father's name and, for the purposes of inheritance, an adopted child stands to inherit from their biological relatives, and not from their adoptive family. This abolition of adoption reflects a broader approach to kinship to kinship in the Qurʾan. Whilst reference is made to God's promise to the Holy Land to the progeny of Abraham, in a marked contrast to Judaism, with its absorption with bloodlines and tribes and the children of Israel's self-perception as a chosen race, the inadequacy of lineage to make up for a lack of righteousness is repeatedly stressed by prophets

having to renounce close relatives. At the same time, in contrast with Christianity, the notion of all humanity as the beloved children of God, is also eschewed:

> **{5.18}** And the Jews and Christians say:
> 'We are the children of God and
> his beloved ones.'
>
> Say: 'Why then does He punish
> you for your sins?'
>
> Nay, but you are mortal of His
> creating…

For Muhammad, whose claims to descent from Ishmael were tenuous at best, natural and artificial lineage are both underplayed. It is only unswerving loyalty to God and His Messenger by the individual that will help them.

68. Inheritance

Surah 4 (*Al-Nisā/Women*): 11

Allah enjoineth you in the matter of your children; the male will have as much as the portion of two females, but if they be females more than two, then they will have two-thirds of that which he hath left, and if only one, she will have a half;

and as far as his parents, each of the twain shall have a sixth of that which he hath left if he have a child, but if he hath no child and his parents be his heirs, then his mother shall have a third; but if he have brothers, then his mother shall have a sixth: all after paying a bequest he may have bequeathed or a debt.

Your fathers and your sons - ye know not which of them is higher unto you in benefit: an ordinance this from Allah, verily Allah is Knowing, Wise.

[*The Glorious Qur'an, Abdul Majid Daryabadi*]

Bequests

In **{2.180}** bequeathing one's property amongst '*parents and kinsfolk, in an honourable way*' is '*an obligation upon the reverent*.'**{2.240}** requires that such bequests should include at least a year's subsistence to the testator's widow(s), and **{5.106-108}** specifies who should witness such bequests: '*two just men amongst you*', or, '*if it is discovered that the two of them are guilty of sin*', then two others '*from those most entitled as claimants*'. However, **{4.11-12}**, introduced by **{4.7-9}** and at a later time supplemented by **{4.176}** (clearly tagged onto the end of **Surah 4**, and traditionally said to be the last verse of the Qur'an to be announced) prescribe a rigid

mathematical formula for dividing an estate between relatives. It would appear that the provisions concerning bequests in **Surah 2** and the 'ordained shares' in **Surah 4** exist in parallel with one another. **{4.11-12}** are expressed as being subject to '*any bequests that may have been bequeathed*' but this limits rather than removes the conflict between the two regimes. This is because God's command to allocate an estate according to certain shares He had ordained, would be hollowed of any meaning if it were to be applied only to the residual estate after the major assets were disposed of by a will.

{4.33} may hint at a recognition of the inconsistency:

> **{4.33}** To each We have appointed heirs for what parents and kinsfolk leave. Those to whom you have given your oath, give them their share.
>
> Truly God is Witness over all things.

That is to say, testators are instructed to bequeath only a 'share' of the estate to non-relatives, to avoid denying family heirs their appointed due. However, a hadith was required to reconcile the two regimes in a more satisfactory manner, and one was duly forthcoming,[241] recording that Muhammad permitted a maximum of one third of an estate to be bequeathed, with the balance to be distributed according to the divinely ordained shares.

Ordained shares

{4.11-12} and **{4.176}** between them create four rules for the distribution of a deceased person's estate.

1. A husband should receive a quarter of his deceased wife's estate if there are living children of the marriage, or a half if there are not. A similar provision applies to the wife of a deceased husband, but with the aforesaid shares reduced to an eighth and a quarter respectively.

2. If the deceased has left children, then the deceased's parents should each inherit one sixth of the estate, but if there are no children and the deceased has no brothers, this share, for the deceased's mother, increases to a third.

3. After the above fixed shares have been allocated, any residual estate should be divided between the deceased's children so that sons receive twice as much as daughters, but if the deceased person leaves only daughters then those daughters should inherit only two thirds of the estate divided into equal shares, whilst if there is a single daughter, she receives only a half of the estate.

4. If there are no living descendants nor parents, the deceased's siblings will share a third of the estate, with brothers taking twice the amount of sisters.

Subject to the option of making a bequest of a part of the estate, this regime allows no accommodation of individual circumstances. It lacks the flexibility to reflect, for example, relatives' needs or the affection in which they were held by the deceased during the latter's lifetime. The formula is also open to purely technical criticisms. It does not address important issues such as whether, in the event that a deceased's child has predeceased them, that child's children (i.e., the deceased's grandchildren etc) should receive the share that would otherwise have gone to their parent. Nor does it identify the beneficiary of the residual estate where a deceased leaves either only daughters, or where the deceased leaves no children, parents or siblings. Awkwardly, situations can arise in which the ordained shares aggregate to more than the totality of the estate.[242] The process is also complicated and is likely to be especially so within the elaborate family structures that must inevitably result from the practices of polygyny and consanguineous marriages. Administering these provisions is often credited as having provided the incentive for the Muslim world's greatest contribution to secular learning, algebra.

To a modern audience, perhaps the most conspicuous aspect of the ordained shares formula is its inequality between males and

females. Under **{4.11-12 & 176}**, a daughter receives half as much as a son would, a sister half as much as her brother, and a widow half the share in her husband's estate as he would have received in hers. **{4.11}** and **{4.176}** use the same phrase, '*unto the male, a share equal to that of two females*' to emphasise the consistency of the principle. This gender inequality in the distribution is traditionally justified on the basis that throughout her life a woman is usually provided for by either her birth family or by her husband, in accordance with the principle that '*men are the protectors and maintainers of women*', **{4.34}** **⟨62⟩**. It is also often argued that a woman will typically acquire a substantial asset from her husband upon their marriage in the form of the *mahr* **⟨60⟩**. These factors, it is said, will usually more than compensate a woman for a reduced inheritance share. However, it must be noted that this Quranic scheme makes no allowance for women who choose not to marry, or who are unable to find a husband, or who marry husbands who, for any reason, may be unable to provide sufficient maintenance for them to compensate for the reduced inheritance compared with what she would have received from an equal share in the estate of a wealthy family member.

As noted in **⟨60⟩** above, the widows of the deceased do not form part of his estate.

F. Punitive sanctions in the Qurʾan

The Qurʾan does not prescribe a comprehensive and coherent system for identifying and punishing wrongdoing. Three types of misconduct are allocated fixed punishments (conventionally known as '*ḥudūd*', literally the *'limits'*). These are:

Offence	**Fixed punishment**
Illicit sexual activity	Flogging and, for women, lifelong confinement in their homes **⟨69⟩**
Making an unsupported allegation of sexual impropriety	Flogging **⟨70⟩**
Theft	Hand amputation **⟨71⟩**

If there is a guiding principle to be seen in these sentences it is that sin should be met with harsh physical chastisement or incapacitation. However, the Qurʾan asserting that these punishments are God's limits, leaves ambiguous whether these are to be read as exemplar punishments to be extended by analogy to other offences, or whether the specification of these three offences and their punishments in particular indicates that they are a special category, the overt imitation of which be a heretical intrusion of man-made law.

In addition:

- Sharīa jurists generally hold that, although no sentence is specifically fixed for engaging in homosexual acts **⟨75⟩**, the consumption of alcohol or gambling **⟨77⟩**, since such conduct is forbidden in the Qurʾan, these offences must call for similar

sanctions to those laid down for illicit sexual activity, unsupported accusations and theft,

- Based upon the hadith, some schools of sharĭa law also include blasphemy and apostasy, as *ḥudud* offences, normally deemed to carry a capital sentence **⟨48⟩**.

- For the more loosely defined offences of '*waging war upon God*' and '*working corruption on the earth*', a Muslim ruler may choose from a list of four measures that are set out in **{5.33}**, namely execution, a measure referred to by the word '*yuṣallabū*' (hereafter generally referred to as *ṣalb*) to be addressed at **⟨72⟩** below, the amputation of limbs from opposite sides and exile **⟨72⟩**.

- The infliction of injuries is dealt with by a system of *qiṣāṣ*: the inflicting, at the discretion of the victim or their family, of an injury upon the perpetrator equivalent to the harm suffered by the victim **⟨73⟩**.

69. Fornication and adultery

Surah 4 (*Al-Nisā/Women*): 15

As for those of your women who may commit whoredom, call against them four witnesses from among them if they testify, confine you them to their houses till death complete their turn of life, or Allah appoint for them some other way.

[*Daryabadi,*]

Two verses in separate surahs deal with the punishment of illicit heterosexual activity. It has been seen that the Qurʾan understands marriage as a man's exclusive right of intercourse with his wife **⟨60⟩**, but that the right of a man to multiple wives **⟨61⟩** and to intercourse with his captured or purchased slaves **⟨59⟩** demonstrates that there is no reciprocal expectation for the woman that her husband will observe sexual exclusivity to her in return. Therefore, since **{24.2}** specifically refers to men as well as women, the mischief that the verse was announced to deter should be understood as the contravention of rules set in place for the ordering of society rather than a public denunciation of infidelity to a spouse.

In **{24.2}** a sentence of one hundred lashes is fixed for men or women who commit the crime of being a '*zānī*' (derived from the Hebrew word '*zanah*' meaning fornication or adultery). By contrast, in **{4.15}** (produced above) a sentence of confinement until death is fixed for a woman who commits the sin of '*fahisha*' (which literally translates as '*strong desire*'). Where flogging is required, the number of lashes is halved for slaves **{4.25}** but doubled for the wives of Muhammad, **{33.30} ⟨79⟩**. What conduct constitutes *zina* and *fahisha*, is not explicitly stated, nor whether there is any difference between the two. Since the two offences carry different sanctions, it may be wondered if the two may be

differently defined or else if one verse abrogated the other. However, since **{4.15}** relates only to women it is unlikely that it abrogates **{24.2}** as this would leave male defilers of one another's wives and daughters unpunished. Rather, the lifelong confinement of unchaste women in their homes would appear to be a supplemental sanction for the purpose of removing them from society, to be served in addition to the principal punishment of flogging. Although this is expressed as potentially lasting until the woman's death, the measure does not involve bringing about her death, and with a sympathetic husband a woman may continue to live in her home for many decades. It should be noted that the verse could well be addressed to the cuckolded husbands ('*confine you them to their houses*').

Conflicting with these two verses, numerous *aḥādīth* [243] describe Muhammad ordering those guilty of adultery to be stoned to death. This is a sentence that appears frequently in the Bible but nowhere in the Qurʾan, and yet it has now become arguably the best-known sharĭa punishment. One of these *aḥādīth* presents Muhammad as ordering the punishment, not from any revelation or inspiration, of his own, but from discovering it in the Torah:

> *The Jews brought to the Prophet a man and a woman from among them who had committed illegal sexual intercourse. The Prophet said to them: 'How do you usually punish the one amongst you who has committed illegal sexual intercourse?'*
>
> *They replied: 'We blacken their faces with coal and beat them'.*
>
> *He said: 'Don't you find the order of al-rajm* [i.e. stoning to death] *in the Torah?'*
>
> *They replied: 'We do not find anything in it.'*
>
> *Abdullah bin Salam said to them: 'You have told a lie! Bring here the Torah and recite it if you are truthful.'*
>
> *And the religious teacher who was teaching it to them, put his hand over the Verse of al-rajm and started reading what was written above and below the place*

> *hidden with his hand, but he did not read the verse of al-rajm.*
>
> *Abdullah bin Salam removed his hand from the verse of al-rajm and said: 'What is this?'*
>
> *So, when the Jews saw that verse, they said: 'This is the verse of al-rajm.'*
>
> *So, the Prophet ordered the two adulterers to be stoned to death, and they were stoned to death near the place where biers used to be placed near the Mosque. I saw her companion (i.e., the adulterer) bowing over her so as to protect her from the stones.*[244]

Since the Jews had brought '*a man and a woman from among them*', *i.e.* a man and a woman from the Jewish community, this hadith is in accordance with the many Quranic verses that confirm the continuing validity of the Torah as God's revealed word for the Jewish people. The element that the person who was reading from the Torah scroll attempted to conceal from others present that he was omitting a section (probably Deuteronomy 22.20-24) by covering it with their hand, lacks any logic. It is included, no doubt, as a visual depiction of the commonplace Quranic motif of Jews as the devious corrupters of God's commands **⟨88⟩**. To this same end, the entire scene of the adulterers dragged before Muhammad for his judgment was obviously told in order to contrast Muhammad's faithfulness to the Torah with Jesus, who when faced with precisely the same situation (John 8.7) allowed the woman to leave unpunished with the words: '*Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.*' However, other *aḥādīth* record Muhammad ordering his non-Jewish followers to be stoned to death for illicit sexual activity whilst they were married, or to be flogged for such activity if they were not. This strikes a middle way between the Torah, which ordered for the Israelites stoning for extramarital sex regardless of the actor's marital status, and Jesus's teaching of unlimited mercy. Similar Quranic compromises can be seen in its provisions for dealing with assaults causing injury **⟨73⟩** and in its dietary laws **⟨76⟩**.

However, such a conclusion cannot have been the Qurʾan author's purpose. We know that the flogging of *zānī* must, at least at one time, have extended to offences by married women because the standard punishment is doubled for the wives of the Qurʾan announcer in **{33.30}** which is of course impossible for a capital sentence. No hadith has Muhammad explain why it should be that the Torah punishment should be applicable to Muhammad's non-Jewish followers at all, when the Qurʾan itself prescribes different penalties.

All this presents a knotty problem for sharĭa jurists. One possible explanation is that the Qurʾan abrogated **{4.15}** and **{24.2}** with a verse instructing stoning for married offenders, the record of which has subsequently been lost. This is suggested in the following hadith:

> *… Umar bin Khattab sat on the pulpit of Allah's Messenger and said: 'Verily Allah sent Muhammad (may peace be upon him) with truth and He sent down the Book upon him, and the verse of stoning was included in what was sent down to him.*
>
> *We recited it, retained it in our memory and understood it. Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) awarded the punishment of stoning to death (to the married adulterer and adulteress) and, after him, we also awarded the punishment of stoning, I am afraid that with the lapse of time, the people (may forget it) and may say: 'We do not find the punishment of stoning in the Book of Allah', and thus go astray by abandoning this duty prescribed by Allah. Stoning is a duty laid down in Allah's Book for married men and women who commit adultery when proof is established, or it there is pregnancy, or a confession.*[245]

Elsewhere the precise wording of this lost verse is said to have been preserved in men's memories:

> *'When a married man or woman commits adultery,*
> *stone them to death as a deterrence from God.*
> *And God is Most Merciful and Wise.'*[246]

One hadith, attributed to Aisha, even describes the moment that the '*stoning verse*' was lost, the papyrus upon which the crucial passage was written having been eaten by a goat as Muhammad lay dying.[247] However, this scenario is awkward for those who regard other verses of the Qurʾan as pledges that God will protect the Qurʾan's transmission **⟨7⟩**. The thesis of a lost stoning verse also fails to explain why this verse, if it could be exactly remembered, would not have been promptly written down again and included in the first Qurʾan canon. It is suggested that a more likely scenario is that the Qurʾan prescribed only two measures for illicit sexual activity: flogging for both parties involved and lifelong home detention for women. The Pentateuchal sanction of stoning appears to have been informally adopted or retained by the Qurʾan-following community as a matter of their own preference, and later justified by *aḥādīth*, notwithstanding the contrary text of the Qurʾan itself.

70. Making an unsupported allegation of sexual impropriety

24 (*Al-Nur/Light*): 4-5

> **4. And as for those who accuse chaste women (of adultery), and then are unable to produce four witnesses (in support of their accusation), flog them with eighty stripes and ever after refuse to accept from them any testimony - since it is they, they that are truly depraved!**
>
> **5. Excepting (from this interdict) only those who afterwards repent and made amends.**
>
> **For, behold, God is much forgiving, a dispenser of grace.**

[*Asad*]

A narration account[248] relates this rare and virtually unachievable Quranic rule of evidence to the story of an accusation made against Muhammed's young wife Aisha **⟨D⟩**. Aisha, so the account goes, had been accompanying Muhammad on an expedition when she found herself stranded alone in desert, having slipped away from the camp unnoticed to search for a lost necklace. Fortunately for her, she encountered a Muslim scout who accompanied her until they were able to rejoin the main group, but upon their arrival at the camp together, three people gossiped that Aisha and the man had committed adultery. This same incident is also said to have prompted the announcement of **{24.11-24}**.[249]

A rational purpose for **{24.4}** is impossible to discern. Whilst it is in principle unobjectionable for a legal system to impose particularly stringent evidential requirements for certain offences, and there is an argument in natural justice for giving the maker of a false

accusation the penalty that they sought to have had imposed upon an innocent party, **{24.4}** achieves neither of these ends. Since illicit sexual activity was considered such a serious cause of concern as to require confinement till death, flogging and possibly stoning (see **⟨69⟩** in the preceding part), it is illogical that the Qurʾan should impose an evidential requirement that could barely ever be met even in a fairly blatant case. If the concern had been to protect women from slanderous accusations, then the logical solution would been the punishment only of those accusations that could be demonstrated to be false. Common sense dictates that the requirement that a complainant be capable producing four eyewitnesses as a perquisite for making an allegation is as likely to encourage witness collusion and perjury as it is to achieve reliable findings of fact. In any event, for the Qurʾan to require a sharĭa judge to sentence a person to flogging for the honest reporting of a fact, which may well be demonstrable from other evidence to be correct, is absurd. Great caution should generally be used in using *aḥādīth* written down long after the Qurʾan to explain the circumstances in which any given verse came to be announced. Nevertheless, in this case the capricious nature of the rule does support the explanation that **{24.4}** was produced to halt the spread of one particular inconvenient rumour, such as that described in the story of Aisha's necklace.

{24.6-7} creates an exception to the 'four witness' requirement that one may suspect was added shortly afterwards when the full implications of effectively criminalising any accusation of adultery had come to be appreciated. Under **{24.6-7}**, should a man accuse his own wife of adultery, '*then the testimony of one of them (i.e., the husband) shall be four witnesses*', '*swearing by God that he is among the truthful*' and '*the curse of God shall be upon him if he is amongst the liars*.' Needless to say, there is no equivalent right given to wives to accuse their husbands of illicit sex, reflecting once again the fundamental Quranic understanding of marriage **⟨60⟩** as well as the Qurʾan's reluctance to recognise the credibility **⟨65⟩** and rights **⟨66⟩** of women in general.

Although the 'four witness rule' is specifically imposed for '*those who accuse a chaste women*', when this rule is extended by analogy to give protection to men against accusations by women, it results

in an especially unjust and tragic, although unintended, consequence. Should a woman report that a man other than her husband has raped her, without having the required four eyewitnesses to corroborate her account, she finds herself in the legal position of having admitted that intercourse has occurred between her and a man other than her husband, whilst her accusation against her attacker is to be disregarded. This places her in jeopardy of either being whipped for the offence of fornication and under some regimes whipped a second time for the offence of having made an unsubstantiated allegation, or alternatively stoned to death for adultery, depending upon her marital status. Meanwhile, the man whom she has accused is protected from any sanction or even the repetition of the accusation, however compelling the circumstantial evidence of his guilt may be.

71. Theft

Surah 5 (*Al-Maʾidah/The Table Spread*): 38

Cut off the hands of a male or female thief as a punishment for their deed and a lesson for them from God.

God is Majestic and All-wise

[*Sarwar*]

The Qurʾan's prescribed sanction for theft is expressed as having been fixed by God, with no discretion for a human judge to disapply. This punishment, in the canonical Qurʾan, is unambiguously that the '*hands*' of a male or a female '*thief*' – i.e. both hands – should be taken, although the variant Qurʾan n manuscript of Ibn Masʿud required only that a thief's right hand be taken, and all four Sunni schools of jurisprudence also declare that only a right hand should be amputated for a first offence and the left foot for a second.[250] Of course, judges must also determine what act constitutes a theft ('*sariqa*') and in practice judges have from the earliest records set limits upon the limits set by God. *Aḥādīth* state that Muhammad instructed that amputation should be applied strictly to anybody who stole an item worth as little as the value of an egg or a length of rope.[251]

Since **Surah 5** includes several passages concerning Jesus (taking its name '*The Table*' or '*The Table Spread*') from Jesus' miracle of the feast **⟨26⟩**, it was likely announced when the Qurʾan author was coming into regular contact with Christians, and at **⟨45⟩** above it was proposed that the structure of the first part of **Surah 5** suggests that this was announced at the start of Muhammad's Palestinian campaign in the 630s (for which see also **⟨50⟩**). Without its proper historical context these first thirty-eight verses seem to flit between ritual laws, the condemnation of Jews and Christians, biblical stories and criminal sanctions, without any overarching structure

theme or purpose. When, however, they are read from the perspective of the Qurʾan author leading a religiously motivated invasion of Syria and Palestine, a coherent thread emerges. So long as the Qurʾan's audience is scrupulous concerning the purity of their conduct, they are promised that the land previously promised to the children of Israel and later occupied by the Christians, each of whom had proved themselves unworthy, would be granted to them. At this moment, as when Moses had commanded his people to enter Canaan, the only things that would betray them would be than their lack of attention to piety or their lack of faith. Within this scheme, the need to severely punish those who resist God's righteous rule or who spread corruption or who steal is presented as a part of the cleansing of the land from sin **⟨90⟩**.

Limb amputation for theft has no precedent in the Old Testament. Instead, along with the four general sanctions prescribed five verses earlier at **{5.33}**, namely execution, the punishment referred to with the word *'yuṣallabū'*, the amputation of two limbs, one from each side, and banishment from the land (for which see **⟨72⟩** following) **Surah 5** reflects a different legal tradition, the *Corpus Juris Civilis* compiled under the Emperor Justinian (ruled 527-565).

Close to the start of his long reign Justinian had ordered the codification of all pre-existing imperial edicts, and thereafter, until his death five years before the reported birth of Muhammad, he amended and added to the corpus with new laws ('*novels*'). Justinian's Novel 134, precept 13, includes the following provision:

> *As it is necessary for Us to make allowance for human weakness, We abolish the amputation of both hands, as well as that of both feet, and the imposition of the punishment by which the joints are separated, which is a much more serious penalty than the amputation of the hands.*
>
> *Hence, We order that, if anyone commits a crime for which the laws inflict the death penalty, those who are guilty shall undergo it, and if the crime is one for which the culprit does not deserve to be put to death, he shall be scourged, or sent into exile. Where the offence is such as*

> *demands the amputation of a limb, one hand only shall be cut off.*
>
> *We forbid the amputation of a limb because of an ordinary theft, or the culprit to be put to death for this reason, but we desire him to be punished in some other way ...*

When the punishments of **{5.33}** and **{5.38}** are compared with Justinian's Novel 134.13. show an association may be observed:

	Novel 134.13	**{5.33-38}**
Theft	Double hand amputation abolished. Hand amputation abolished for ordinary theft.	Double-hand amputation (right hand amputation only *per* Ibn Masʿud variant)
Offending in general	Death, scourging, exile or amputation of a hand	Death, *ṣalb*, exile or amputation of limbs from alternate sides.

Not only are punishment for theft in particular and offending in general approached in the same way but, in both cases the main difference of the canonical Qurʾan to Novel 134.13 is to replace a single limb amputation, or in the case of an ordinary theft, no amputation at all, with a double limb amputation. It would appear that as the Qurʾan's author sets out to conquer and govern former Byzantine territory, not only does **Surah 5** respond to the Byzantine laws that its author finds in force there, but it reverses a (fairly) recent relaxation in those laws. In imposing the more draconian punishments he makes a point that the return of righteous rule will involve a zealous intolerance of moral laxity.

72. *'Working corruption upon the earth'*

Surah 5 (*Al-Maʾidah/The Table Spread*): 32-33

32. On account of (his deed), We decreed to the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person - unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land - it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind. Our messengers came to them with clear signs, but many of them continued to commit excesses in the land.

33. Those who wage war against God and His Messenger and strive to spread corruption in the land should be punished by death, crucifixion, the amputation of an alternate hand and foot, or banishment from the land: a disgrace for them in this world, and then a terrible punishment in the Hereafter.

[*Abdel-Haleem*]

{5.32}

{5.32} is amongst the most quoted – and misquoted – verses of the Qurʾan, all too often given without the following verse that completes its meaning. In **{5.32}** the Quranic author, speaking as in God's voice, purports to recall instructions that He had given previously to the Israelites. In fact, however, the phrase that follows- '*if anyone kills a person, unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land, it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind*' - come not from God's words in the Torah at all, but from a passage that appears in both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud.[252] This text reflects upon Cain's murder of Abel **⟨16⟩** and reasons that the act of killing a person who is still capable of begetting children has the has the effect of depriving of life, not just the immediate victim, but

also the infinite number of potential descendants whose existence he might otherwise have brought about. On this basis, the rabbinic scholar mused, a single slaying must one day affect the whole of humanity, an early articulation of what today might be called 'the butterfly effect':

> *For so we have found concerning Cain that he slew his brother, for it is written: 'The bloods of your brother cry'. It says not 'the blood of your brother' but 'the bloods of your brother'; his blood and the blood of his posterity…*
>
> *Therefore, man was created as a single being in the world in order to teach that anyone who causes a single life to perish is considered to have caused an entire world to perish and anyone who preserves a single life is considered to have preserved an entire world.*

If this sophisticated meaning was known to the Qurʾan's author, this is not conveyed by **{5.32}** which reads merely as an extravagantly expressed condemnation of murder.

{5.33}

That **{5.32}** is presented in historical terms - *'We decreed for the children of Israel…'* - contrasts with **{5.33}** which delivers the instruction for the Qurʾan's audience to follow. In this verse, two offences are specified, that are generally translated as '*waging war against God and His Messenger*' and '*endeavouring to work corruption upon the earth*'. Faced with a person guilty of either of these offences, a judge is authorised to choose from four prescribed punishments:

- execution,
- *ṣalb*,
- the amputation of an alternate hand and foot, and
- banishment from the land.

A proposed historical context to this verse, and its relationship to the laws of Justinian, has been set out at **⟨71⟩** preceding.

The second of these sanctions, *ṣalb*, (in **{5.33}** '*yuṣallabū*') is formed from the root ṣ-l-b, which carries a general meaning of hardness (with a particular usage in respect of bones and the process of extracting of bone marrow). As referred to above **⟨26⟩**, the verb, when it the Qurʾan, is traditionally rendered as '*to crucify*' because in **{4.157}** the Qurʾan uses this verb in refuting the boasts of the Jews for having caused the death of Jesus. However, the word contains no inherent reference to a cross shape and in **{4.157}** '*ṣalabūhu*' follows the verb '*to kill*' as though it is an additional, posthumous process. When is read in the context of the Talmud passage that **{4.157}** likely references with '*And for their saying, "We slew the Messiah, Jesus…*', the word is most likely intended to refute the claim that the Jews had hung Jesus's body in public, having first stoned him to death.

In addition to **{4.157}** and **{5.33}**, the verb is also used in two other Quranic depictions of biblical scenes, each of which involves the anticipation of punishments being meted out by a pharaoh against his staff. In one, Joseph son of Jacob, whilst in prison, predicts it as the fate of one of his cellmates, the pharaoh's former baker, **{12.41} ⟨22⟩**. In the other, a later pharaoh threatens his court magicians, should they fail to prevail against Moses **⟨23⟩**. On both of these occasions the punishment of *ṣalb* is combined with the third **{5.33}** sanction, namely amputation of limbs from opposite sides. Since in neither case is execution otherwise mentioned, *ṣalb* here cannot involve merely the display of a corpse but must mean something done to a living person. Sean W Anthony has suggested that in the ancient world 'crucifixion' carried a broad definition '*the act of fastening a body, living or dead, to a piece of wood fashioned for the purpose f execution and/or suspension, for ignominious display*.'[253] In these two scenarios this is unlikely to have be a 'classic' crucifixion, if for other reasons than the practical awkwardness and confused visual messaging of crucifying a person after having amputated two of their limbs. One conclusion that can be drawn from the two punishments' appearance in **{5.33}**, however, is that whatever other faults may have attached to the Jewish authorities of Jesus's time and to the pharaohs long before them, at least they were all orthodox in their chosen methods of torture.

Corruption and Rebellion

The sanctions in **{5.33}** are prescribed for two categories of miscreant:

- '*muḥāribūn*' (literally '*those who wage war*') against God and His Messenger **⟨86⟩**, and
- '*ifsād*', interpreted as '*workers of corruption*' (*per* Arberry and Pickthall), alternatively rendered as those '*making mischief*' (Yusuf Ali).

It is suggested that the two types of misconduct might reasonable be read together as either opposing the Qurʾan -believing community from without through violent opposition or undermining it from within through decadent behaviour. Several *aḥādīth* record the circumstances in which two verses were announced as relating to some Bedouins who had killed a Muslim camel herder and stolen his livestock. The culprits were captured and brought before Muhammad, who announced the revelation of **{5.32-33}**, before he then exceeded even these severe measures, as on his instructions, his men '*cut off (the Bedouins') hands and feet and gouged their eyes*' and '*they were left in this state in Medina until they died.*'[254]

Based upon the divine authority that these verses gave caliphs to torture and kill their opponents, jurists of all sharĭa schools have sought to limit the verses' scope by interpreting the sanctions as applicable only against certain offences. Thus '*ḥāribah*' has subsequently come to attract a precise legal definition, amounting to armed banditry. However, the terms '*wage war against God and his Messenger*' and '*spreading corruption in the land*' were undoubtedly worded by the announcer of the Qurʾan, to give himself the widest possible discretion in imposing draconian punishments whenever he saw fit. The latter of the two phrases, in particular, is used in several other verses of the Qurʾan as a generic term for the human propensity to wickedness. It is contrasted with virtue in **{2.27 & 230}** and **{13.25}**. In **{2.30}** the angels predict that it will be the inevitable consequence of the creation of man. It is condemned in the calls to righteousness in the preaching of Shuayb, **{7.85}** and **{11.85}**, and of Saleh, **{26.152}**. It appears in the

general phrase '*Behold how the workers of corruption fared in the end!*' used in relation to the people of Pharaoh, **{7.103}**, and of Midian, **{11.86}**, and in a similar phrase applied to the rebellious children of Israel, **{17.4}** (produced at **⟨35⟩** above). It is impossible that the term could have meant the specific offence of brigandage in all these instances. On two occasions, it is used in a way that encompasses merely the holding of erroneous views:

{2.11} And when it is said unto them: 'Do not work corruption upon the earth,' they say 'We are only working righteousness'.

{2.12} Nay it is they who are the workers of corruption though they know not.



{3.62} This [*a summary of Jesus's prophethood*] is indeed the true account. There is no god, but God, and truly God is the Mighty, the Wise.

{3.63} And if they turn away, then God knows well the workers of corruption.

73. *Qiṣāṣ*

Surah 5 (*Al-Maʾidah/The Table Spread*): 45

And We ordained for them in (the Torah):
a life for a life,
and an eye for an eye,
and a nose for a nose,
and an ear for an ear,
and a tooth for a tooth,
and a (similar) retribution for wounds,
but he who shall forgo it out of charity will atone thereby for some of his past sins.
And they who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed, they are the evildoers!

[*Asad*]

For offences of physical violence, the Qurʾan, at **{2.178}** and **{5.45}**, adopts a variation upon the ancient principle of *lex talionis*, that a victim of violence, or their heir, should be permitted to inflict upon an assailant an injury equivalent to the harm caused by the original aggression. **{5.45}** allows the victim to forgive the wrong out of charity. In **{2.178}** this basic rule is expanded upon in relation to causing a death:

{2.178} O you who believe! Retribution is prescribed for you in the matter of the slain.

Freeman for freeman,
slave for slave,
female for female.

> But for one who receives any pardon from his brother, let it be observed honourably, and let the restitution be made to him with goodness. That is an alleviation from your Lord and a mercy. Whoever transgresses after that shall have a painful punishment.

As **{5.45}** acknowledges, the system of retributive justice is based upon that in the Torah, where variants of it appear in three passages: Exodus 21.22-25, Leviticus 24.19-21 and Deuteronomy 19.16-21. However, the principle, and even the precise wording, dates back approximately a thousand years prior to the Hebrew scripture to the human race's earliest known set of laws, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi. This reads (on the Hammurabi Stele):

> *If a superior man should blind the eye of another superior man, they shall blind his eye,*
>
> *If he should break the bone of another superior man, they shall break his bone,*
>
> *If he should blind the eye of a commoner or break the bone of a commoner he shall weigh and deliver sixty shekels of silver.*
>
> *If he should blind the eye or break the bone of a slave of a superior man or he shall weigh and deliver one half the slave's value.*[255]

It is reasonable to suppose that the phrase '*an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*' became integrated into Jewish culture, along with aspects of the Creation story and the Gilgamesh myths that became the biblical tales of Adam and Eve and Noah's Ark, during the Babylonian Captivity (sixth century BC). Of the three versions that appear in the Torah, cited above, it is only in the Book of Exodus that the rule is stated as having varied applicability to injured slaves, making this the version closest to the Qurʾan's regime:

> 22. *When men have a fight …*

> 23. *… if an injury ensues you shall give life for life,*
>
> 24. *Eye for eye, tooth for tooth,*
> *hand for hand, foot for foot,*
>
> 25. *Burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.*
>
> 26. *When a man strikes his male or female slave in the eye in the eye and destroys the use of the eye, he shall let the slave go free in compensation for the eye.*
>
> 27. *If he knocks out the tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let the slave go free in compensation for the tooth,* (Exodus 21.22-25).

Oddly, the Qurʾan's versions of the regime share a feature in common with the Code of Hammurabi that is not present in any of the Torah passages. After the passage quoted above, Hamurabi had continued that in a case of homicide, proportionate retribution may involve killing a person who had an equivalent value to the victim, even if that person had had no individual responsibility for the original injury:

> *If a superior man strikes a woman of superior class and … if that woman should die, they shall kill his daughter.*

In this provision, the code treats people as assets of their clan such that the life of a child may have to be forfeited to restore the good standing of their parent. This element is absent in the Torah, but it is what we find in **{2.178}**: '*Freeman for freeman, slave for slave, female for female*.' In practice, this verse of the Qurʾan has invariably been read down to mean merely that a person should not face death in *qiṣāṣ* for having taken a life that is deemed less valuable than their own according to the freeman-slave-female hierarchy. However, the Qurʾan's actual wording raises the prospect that the Qurʾan author may have had access to and followed a more authentic version of the Hammurabi Code, than that which appears in the Bible.

In contrast to what would become for Christians the Old Testament, Jesus had taught a radically different ethic in the Gospel of St Matthew:

> *You have heard the commandment 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. But what I say to you is offer no resistance to injury. When a person offers you their right cheek, turn and offer him the other*, (Matthew 5.38-39).

As with the punishment for illicit sexual activity **⟨69⟩** and dietary laws **⟨76⟩** the Quranic system of retributive justice may be seen as pursuing a middle way between the strictness of the Torah and Jesus's exhortation to unqualified forgiveness. Under a sharïa regime, a victim, or their heir, is traditionally offered a formal election whether to inflict the proportionate injury ('*qiṣāṣ*') or to take compensation in lieu ('*diyya*'). The practical effect of this middle way, though, is unsatisfactory from the perspective of deterring violence through sanctions. If *qiṣāṣ* retribution is performed, then the sharïa state is engaged in the mutilation or killing of offenders, which may well be disproportionate where an assailant had caused an unintended injury or where the context of the original incident is disregarded. On the other hand, by offering an offender the opportunity to avoid the disabling punishment through the payment of '*blood money*', effectively allowing a wealthy person to buy their way out of trouble. A further disadvantage becomes evident when one considers how the decision to insist upon *qiṣāṣ* or accept *diyya* may fall to be considered by a victim's heirs. **{17.33}** states that, wherever a person is slain unjustly, '*We have appointed authority unto his heir*'. This has the practical consequence that an heir will have to balance the public interest and the restoration of family honour by insisting upon *qiṣāṣ* against their own material self-interest of accepting compensation.

The wording of **{17.33}** also raises a specific conundrum where one person stands simultaneously in the position of both killer and heir. In a hadith, Muhammad is said to have ruled that '*the son is to suffer retaliation for* [killing] *his father but the father is not to suffer retaliation for* [killing] *his son*'[256] and this was the position taken, at least in relation to capital punishment, by all the major early jurists.

For '*honour killing*' see the story of al-Khidr at **⟨29⟩** above. For an additional punishment for homicide see **⟨74⟩** following.

74. Homicide

Surah 4 (*Al-Nisāʾ/Women*): 92

It is not for a believer to kill another believer, except that it is by error.

Whosoever kills a believer in error, let him free a believing slave, and ransom is to be handed to his family, unless they forgo being charitable.

If he belonged to a people who are your enemies and is a believer then, the setting free of a believing slave.

If he belonged to a people in which there is between you and them a treaty, then a ransom is to be handed to his family and the setting free of a believing slave.

But, if he does not find (the means) let him fast two consecutive months in repentance to Allah.

And Allah is the Knower, the Wise.

[*Qaribullah*]

{4.92} commences by forbidding that a believer should deliberately kill another believer, and proceeds to provide sanctions to deal with the situation should an accidental killing occurs. **{4.93}** reverts briefly to the issue of intentional killings but states only that the recompense for one who kills a believer is Hell. A killing that could be categorised as warfare against God's messenger or as spreading corruption in the land could attract one or more of the harsh punishments listed in **{5.33} ⟨72⟩**. However, the only provision within the Qurʾan for dealing with a murder, that is one not aggravated by a political motivation or the promotion of immorality, is the system of *qiṣāṣ* described in the preceding section.

In **{4.92}**, an accidental homicide may attract one of three specific sanctions, depending upon the category of victim. Where the deceased is a believer or belonged to a people with whom the Islamic community had a treaty the guilty party is to release a slave and pay compensation to the deceased's heirs. The only exception to this is if the guilty person and the deceased had been enemies, in which case the former need merely release a slave. Since **{17.33}**, which concerns payments to a deceased person's relatives in *diyya*, relates only to those killed '*unjustly*', it would be a reasonable interpretation, although it could have been stated more clearly, that **{4.92}** only operates instead of, rather than in addition to *qiṣāṣ*.

The three classes of victims, by necessary implication, anticipates that a believer who erroneously kills a non-believer with whom the community does not have a specific covenant, should face no sanction. If a believer is not to be punished for accidentally killing a non-believer, it takes only a small step to infer that they should not face punishment for the deliberate killing of an unbeliever either. Such an interpretation is consistent with numerous expressions of intense hostility to unbelievers set out in **Part VII** below. In particular, it accords with the following verse forming part of the same passage:

{4.94} O you who believe! When you go
forth in the way of God be
discerning and say not unto him
who offers you peace
'You are not a believer'
seeking the ephemeralities of the
life of the world, for with God are
abundant spoils.

Thus were you yourselves
beforehand but God has been
gracious to you.

Therefore, be discerning.
Truly God is aware of whatsoever
you do.

Aḥādīth[257] state that this verse was revealed after either one or more than one incident in which Muslims had been found to have

robbed and killed victims who had offered the greeting of peace. **{4.94}** urges believers faced with this situation to '*be discerning*' and not to lightly reject professions as with the words '*you are not a believer*', prompted by a desire for '*the ephemeralities of this world*' *i.e.*, loot. These verses appear within a particularly militant section of the Qurʾan, from **{4.71}** to **{4.104}**, that contains many exhortations to fight and two other references to obtaining a '*bounty*', **{4.73}** and **{4.83}**. Within this textual context, it is implicit in the instruction to exercise due discernment not to kill a believer, that the act of killing a known non-believer would be regarded as unobjectionable.

Infanticide

The killing of children is condemned in four verses of the Qurʾan: **{6.137, 140 & 151}** and **{17.31}**. Across these verses three separate reasons for the prohibition are offered.

> In **{6.137}**, the forbiddance is specifically of the killing of a child as a human sacrifice to an idol ('*their partners (false deities or possibly jinn, have) made the slaying of their children seem fair to them*').
>
> In **{6.151}** and **{17.31}** killing a child '*for fear of poverty*' is condemned as revealing a lack of faith in God to provide sustenance.
>
> In **{6.140}**, the most widely drafted of the four verses, the killing of one's own child is denounced as a rejection of God's will in having created that child.

Whilst this last verse amounts to a general prohibition upon killing one's child, no punishment for infanticide prescribed, and a killer-parent would, on the face of the Qurʾan, be in a position to waive their own *qiṣāṣ* **⟨73⟩** (*c.f.* the apparent endorsement of the killing of a rebellious and unbelieving child in the story of al-Khidr **⟨29⟩**.)

75. Homosexuality

Surah 26 (*Al-Shuʿaraʾ/The Poets*): 165-166

165. What! Among all the creatures,
you commit the immoral acts with men?

166. And leave the wives your Lord has
created for you? In fact, you are people
who exceed the limits.

[*Ahmed Raza Khan, 1910, subsequently translated from Urdu to English by Faridul Hacque (Khan is a key figure in the Barelvi movement, the largest Pakistani Sufi tradition*)]

In Genesis, chapter 18, two angels who visited Abraham, walk away to visit Abraham's nephew Lot whilst their companion, who is then identified as God, explains to Abraham that the angels' purpose is to investigate '*the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah*', and to assess if '*their sin is so grave*' as had been reported **⟨22⟩**. Abraham pleads with the Lord for the sparing of the cities if good people can be found there, even if they are far outnumbered by evil doers. God grants this concession, with the number of righteous people needed to be found to avert the cities' destruction reduced by stages until it is just ten.

When the two angels arrive at Lot's house in chapter 19, Lot shelters them. The house is then besieged by a crowd of men from the nearby city of Sodom who are intent upon committing homosexual rape upon them. At dawn, Lot is warned to leave the place to avoid God's anger which the two cities have now called down upon themselves, and as he flees, Sodom and neighbouring Gomorrah are destroyed by fire and brimstone for the wickedness of their inhabitants. Lot's wife disobeys the angels' command not to look back and, in a surreal detail, is transformed for her disobedience into a pillar of salt.

The Qurʾan contains accounts of the destruction of Lot's people at **{7.80-84}**, **{11.77-83}**, **{15.59-77}**, **{26.160-172}**, **{27.54-58}**, **{29.28-35}**, **{37.133-138}**, and more briefly at **{21.74-75}**, and **{54.33-38}**. The story generally follows the biblical narrative although unlike the story in Genesis several of these accounts have Lot preaching to his people in order to fit the Qurʾan's standard punishment-narrative motif **⟨27⟩** - and one has the townspeople threatening to expel him, possibly to draw a comparison with Muhammad's situation. The smiting in the Qurʾan of Lot's wife is referred to in all seven substantive accounts, although in each of these her sin is described merely '*lagging behind*'. No expression of grief for her is registered by Lot, (in contrast to Noah **⟨21⟩** and Abraham **⟨22⟩** who had interceded without success for their relatives in similar situations). In fact, in two of the accounts, **{26.171}** and **{37.135}**, the figure who is recognisable from the other versions of the story as Lot's wife is not referred to as such at all but merely as '*an old woman*'. One must assume that this was intended to impress the original audience with Lot's total detachment of family ties in his acceptance of God's judgment.

In its telling of the story in **Surahs 7**, **26**, **27** and **29**, the Qurʾan contains no reference to the plan by the townspeople to rape the angels, which was the sin for which, in the Book of Genesis, the cities were ultimately destroyed. Instead, these surahs each have Lot ask and then answer a rhetorical question, which in each case draws attention to the homosexuality of the townspeople and presents this as, in itself, a perversion of God's planned natural order, without any reference to the issue of consent.

{7.80} When Lot said to his people:
'What! Do you commit an
indecency such as none in the
world committed before you?

{7.81} Verily you come with desire unto
men instead of women. Indeed,
you are a prodigal people!'

{27.54} And (We sent) Lot when he said to his people: 'Do you commit indecency though you see?

{27.55} Do you really come with desire unto men instead of women? Nay but you are an ignorant people!'



{29.28} [*As* **{7.80}** *above*]

{29.29} 'What do you come unto men, cut off the way and commit reprehensible deeds in your gatherings?...'

and **{26.160-172}** (including the passage produced above, being words spoken by Lot). Lot's expressions of shocked outrage echo verses of the Book of Leviticus:

> '*You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination*.' (Leviticus 18.22; c.f. 20.13).

Two of the accounts which do not mention homosexuality refer to the hostility of the crowd towards the angels, **{11.78-80}** and **{15.67-72}**, but even here the words of Lot, upon offering them his daughters instead - '*they are purer for you*', **{11.78}** – can only be sensibly understood as implying that homosexuality is impure and a graver sin than rape of a female.

In addition to the telling of the story of Lot, some also consider that **{4.16}** - '*And if two of those among you are guilty thereof,* (*i.e.,* of indecency) *punish them both, but if they repent and make amends, then let them be*' - may have been intended to refer to homosexual acts. The argument goes that the phrase '*two of those amongst you*' may be interpreted to relate to two men, since the Qur'an would appear to have been exclusively addressed to a male congregation **⟨4⟩**.

Although no sentence is fixed for homosexuality in the Qur'an, most Muslim jurists consider homosexual acts to be comparable with either fornication, in which case it would fall to be dealt with under sharia law by flogging or else adultery (stoning to death)

⟨69⟩. A hadith relates Muhammad considering an accusation of homosexuality and ordering his followers '*to kill the one who does it, and the one to whom it is done*'.[258] Another hadith attributes to Ali, Muhammad's son in law and the fourth caliph, the practice of killing homosexuals by throwing them from tall buildings - in his case, the minaret of a mosque.

76. Dietary Rules

Surah 5 (*Al-Maʾidah/The Table Spread*): 3

Forbidden to you (for food) are carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, what has been (slaughtered) in the name of any other than that of Allah, and the beast strangled, beaten to death, killed by a fall, the gored to death by a horn, and that which some wild beast has begun to eat, (all are unlawful), except what you slaughter (in accordance with the prescribed law).

And (also forbidden to you) what has been slaughtered before idols, or that you divide by the arrows: (all) that is ungodliness.
Today those who disbelieve have despaired of your religion, so do not dread them but dread Me.

Today have I perfected your religion for you, and completed My favour on you, and I have chosen for you Islam as a religion.

But whoever is helplessly forced by hunger, without inclining to sin, (can enjoy of the forbidden food), then verily Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

[*Sayyed Abbas Sadr-ameli*]

{5.3-5}, one verse of which is produced above, is the fullest passage of the Qurʾan to set out dietary rules. Others include:

identically worded provisions in **{2.172-173}** and **{16.114-115}**: *Eat of the good things that We have provided you … He has forbidden you only carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and what has been offered to other than God…'*,

a more complex passage, **{6.142-147}**, that commences with a condemnation of pagan practices but concludes with a similar rule to that in **Surahs 2** and **16**:

> **{6.145}** Say 'I do not find in that which is revealed unto me anything forbidden to one who would eat thereof, save carrion or blood poured forth, or the flesh of swine – for surely that is a defilement – or a sinful offering made to other than God.'

{6.118-119} which requires, in common with **{5.4}**, that God's name to be invoked over whatever is eaten,

{5.96} which, within the context of pilgrimage requirements, permits the consumption of '*the game of the sea and the food thereof*', and

{22.36} which, in a similar context, permits the consumption of sacrificed, and therefore presumably all, camel meat (which is forbidden in the Torah, at Leviticus 11.4 and Deuteronomy 14.7).

In addition to the above, **{16.8}** describes the creation of '*horses, mules, and asses, that you may ride them, and as adornment*' in contrast with the creation of cattle '*whereof you eat*', **{16.5}**, implying that the consumption of horsemeat is, if not forbidden, at the very least a deviation from natural law.

{24.61} mysteriously, declares that there is no blame upon a person '*that you eat from your houses, or your fathers' houses or your mothers' houses or your brothers' houses or your sisters' houses or your paternal uncle's houses or your paternal aunts' houses or your maternal uncles' houses or your maternal aunts' houses or those whose keys you possess, or (those of) your friends*'; nor is there blame '*whether you eat separately or together*'. It is unclear what purpose this wide-ranging permission to eat '*separately or together*' in a variety of places was intended to serve, especially since it is hard to read it as prohibiting the consumption of food in other places.

The Qurʾan's middle way between the Mosaic Law and Christianity

The prohibition upon consuming porcine meat products, animals found as carrion, blood and food that has been offered to idols all reflect laws in the Torah, although other, more restrictive, requirements of Jewish dietary laws do not appear in the Qurʾan and are generally deemed not to apply to Muslims.[259] In **{6.146}** the Qurʾan recognises that it contains only some of the restrictions of the Torah, and explains that the Jews had previously been given stricter rules than those that were being declared, as a punishment for them:

> **{6.146}** And unto those who are Jews,
> We forbade every animal with
> claws; and of oxen and sheep
> We forbade them the fat thereof,
> save that upon their backs, or
> their entrails, or that which is
> mingled with bone.
>
> Thus We did recompense them
> for their wilful disobedience, and
> surely We are Truthful.

{2.172-173}, **{6.145}** and **{16.114-115}** are all phrased in a way that is remarkably similar to the judgment of St James the Just at the Council of Jerusalem, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, 15.6-19. This gathering of the elders of the early church occurred about twenty years following the crucifixion of Jesus. By this time, St Paul

had been gaining many converts to Christianity who were not Jews and a dispute had risen over whether these gentile converts should be required to abide by Jewish laws, and in particular dietary laws. In a pivotal moment in the development of Christianity, the Council determined that non-Jewish Christians were not generally bound by the Mosaic law, other than for a small number of the dietary prohibitions and the prohibition of '*illicit marriages*'. This ruling by St James is recorded:

> '*… It is my judgment … that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead, we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood*' (Acts 15.19).

{2.172-173} and **{16.114-115}**'s '*Eat of the good things that We have provided you*', **{5.5}**'s '*This day all good things are made lawful unto you… '* and **{5.87}**'s '*Do not forbid the good things that God has made lawful for you*' all reflect the generally permissive tone of the council's decision. The context appears to be that the Qurʾan's audience had previously been observing a more restrictive diet. Oddly, in **{6.145}** **t**he Qurʾan author has God instruct him to present the dietary ruling as though it was his own decision rather than a command from God ('*Say 'I do not find in that which is revealed unto me anything forbidden to one who would eat thereof, save …*') which replicates St James's introduction to his decision: '*It is my judgment, therefore…'* **{5.5}** continues, after the words quoted above to make the far from obvious connection between permissible food and permissible marriages, again reflecting James' judgment: '*The food of those who have been given the Book is lawful unto you, and your food is lawful unto them. And likewise, the chaste women of the believers, and the chaste women of those who were given the Book before you …*'

The only major difference between the dietary requirements retained by James and those in the Qurʾan, is the latter's inclusion of pork, the consumption of which, in **{6.145}** is described as '*a defilement*'. It is within the context of this adoption but variation of dietary rules that the Qurʾan makes its famous declaration at **{5.3}**: '*Today I have perfected your religion for you*.' By adopting part of the Pentateuchal law, the Qurʾan may be seen as pursuing a 'middle

way' between the strictness of the Torah and the permissiveness of Christianity (a phenomenon noted in relation to the punishment of illicit sexual activity **⟨69⟩**, and the retributive justice **⟨73⟩**.)

Means of slaughter

Contrary to popular belief, there is no positive instruction in the Qurʾan concerning the method for killing livestock for slaughter, other than for the obligation of '*mentioning the name of God over it*'. Early jurists formed a consensus, however, that the only reliably *halal* ('*permitted*') method of dispatching an animal was the slitting of its throat so that it dies from loss of blood. The prohibition on eating animals that have been '*beaten to death*' etc, is the dubious scriptural basis proposed to oppose the electric stunning of animals to unconsciousness before slaughter, due, so it is claimed, to concern lest an animal die of shock in the seconds between the stun rather than through exsanguination.

77. Drinking Wine and Gambling

Surah 5 (*Al-Maʾidah/The Table Spread*): 90-91

90. O you who believe! Intoxicants, gambling, idolatry and divination are abominations of Satan's doing. Avoid them, so that you may prosper.

91. Satan wants to provoke strife and hatred among you through intoxicants and gambling, and to prevent you from the remembrance of God, and from prayer. Will you not desist?

[*Itani,*]

The Qurʾan's approach to alcohol appears to have become progressively censorious.

In **{16.66-67}** *'strong drink'* made *'from the fruits of the date palm and the vine'* was proclaimed as a *'goodly provision'* from God.

{4.43} warns against attending prayers whilst drunk **⟨54⟩**, implying that the consumption of alcohol was when these verses were announced still tolerated.

In **{2.219}** drinking alcohol seems to appear alongside gambling as associated activities, of which, on balance, the sin outweighs the benefit:

> They ask thee about *khamr* [*'wine'*, the word used for wine served to Pharaoh by his servant in **{12.36 & 41}** and flowing through Paradise in **{47.15}]** and *maysir* [understood as *'games of chance'*]

> Say: 'In them there is great sin
> and (some) benefits for mankind,
> but their sin is greater than their
> benefit'.

Finally, in **{5.90-91}**, produced above, '*khamr*' and '*maysir*' (the consumption of wine and gambling) appear in tandem again, the two vices this time bracketed with idolatry (literally 'altars') and '*azlāmu*' (understood as the use of diving arrows) as '*abominations of Satan's doing*'.

Aḥādīth record Muhammad ordering drunkards to be flogged.[260]

Islam universally interprets the final version, **{5.90-91}**, as imposing an absolute prohibition on the consumption of alcohol. It may, however, be argued that even in this final, most restrictive form, a complete ban is not strictly necessary from the text which is concerned with the consumption of wine in such a way as is liable to lead to '*strife and hatred*'. Since neither Judaism nor Christianity disapprove of the consumption of alcohol generally, it might be thought that these four passages, when they are read as a sequence, trace a period of time in which the Qurʾan was establishing independence from the prior scripture, possibly following riotous evenings amongst Muhamad's followers.

The identification of *maysīr* as gambling is not entirely certain. The word literally means '*ease*' and is used in this general sense throughout the Qurʾan. In **{2.219}** and **{5.90-91}** this may well express disapproval of gambling as unearned '*easy money*', but this, one may think, is closer to the sin of *rība* (usury) than to alcohol consumption, which gambling may accompany, but with which it actually has little in common.

78. Usury

Surah 2 (*Al-Baqarah/The Cow*): 275

Those who swallow usury will not rise, except as someone driven mad by Satan's touch. That is because they say 'Commerce is like usury.'

But God has permitted commerce and has forbidden usury.

Whoever, on receiving advice from his Lord, refrains, may keep his past earnings, and his case rests with God.

But whoever resumes—these are the dwellers of the Fire, wherein they will abide forever.

[*Itani*]

'*Riba*', literally '*growth*', is in this context invariably translated as meaning usury. It is condemned in the Qur'an at **{2.275-280}** (one verse of which is produced above), **{3.130}** ('*Devour not usury, doubling and multiplying*') and in the context of its practice by the Jews, **{4.161}**.

It is customary to explain this prohibition as a response to the practice of charging of excessive and exploitative interest. This pejorative meaning of '*usury*' is suggested by **{3.130}**, but **{2.275}** is composed to rebut a specific argument that '*growth*' through the charging of interest upon loans was a legitimate practice through a comparison with trading goods: '*They say commerce is like usury*'. This argument was rejected with the drawing of a clear distinction between loans and trade – '*God has permitted commerce, and forbidden usury*', with no indication that ethical commercial lending was a possibility.

{30.39}, is probably the earliest reference to usury in the Qurʾan and the only such reference from a surah traditionally regarded as Meccan, noticeably does not present usury as a sin, but only as an activity that, in contrast to almsgiving, will not bring rewards on the Last Day:

> **{30.39}** That which you give in usury that it might increase through other people's wealth, does not increase with God. But that which you give in alms desiring the Face of God – it is they who receive a manifold increase.

Thus, when the verses seen in their likely chronological order, they show an increasing intolerance of interest loans, similar to the gradual tightening of rules on alcohol consumption and gambling ⟨77⟩.

79. Muhammad's Domestic Affairs

Surah 33 (*al-Ahzab/The Parties*): 53

O you who believe! Enter not the houses of the Prophet unless invited there for a meal, but then go not there too early as to wait for the meal to be ready. But enter at the time you are invited, and as soon as you have finished your meals, disperse!

And linger not for a customary talk. This does indeed cause inconvenience to the Prophet, but he is too embarrassed to tell you. And Allah is not embarrassed to express the truth.

And when you ask for anything from them (ladies of the Prophet's household), ask of them from behind a curtain. This would be better for the purity of your hearts and of theirs.

And it behoves you not to cause inconvenience to the Messenger of Allah, nor to marry his wives after him.

This is indeed a matter of great significance with Allah.

Surahs 33, **49** and **66** each contains several verses that are exclusively concerned with the domestic affairs of its announcer. A series of connected verses from this surah, namely **{33.4-5, 37, 40, 50-53, 60-62 & 69}**, have already been considered at **⟨67⟩** above in connection with an envisaged marriage, traditionally between Muhammad and his adopted son Zayd's wife, Zaynab bint Jhash, and the prohibition on any believer from marrying the Qur'an announcer's wives after his death.

Surah 33 contains several other provisions that are specifically limited to Muhammad's domestic affairs. In **{33.28-33}** the Qurʾan prescribes a number of special rules for the wives of Muhammad who as '*People of the House*' ('*ahl al-bayt*') are declared to be '*not like other women*'.

{33.30} doubles the punishment for any wife of the prophet that commits a '*flagrant indecency*' **⟨69⟩**.

{33.33} advises these wives of a special duty to demonstrate the modesty and decorum appropriate to their position, and to '*abide in their homes*':

> O wives of the Prophet! You are not like other women. If you are reverent, then be not overly soft in speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease be moved to desire; and speak in an honourable way.
>
> Abide in your homes and flaunt not your charms as they did flaunt them in the prior Age of Ignorance. Perform the prayer, give the alms, and obey God and His Messenger.
>
> God only desires to remove defilement from you, O People of the House, and to purify you completely.

It may be mentioned here that some see in the reference to the '*prior Age of Ignorance*', a reference to an age of ignorance that had existed before the age of ignorance that the Qurʾan had been sent to correct, that is to say, a reference to the time before the Flood, when Jewish literature describes the angel Azazel[261] teaching women the application of

eye-shadow and other make-up techniques **⟨14⟩**.

{33.53} (produced above) prescribes house rules for guests attending dinner parties hosted by Muhammad. Attendees are told only to speak to Muhammad's wives only across a veil, and in an assertion that seems at odds with all other indications of his character, Muhammad is described as being '*embarrassed*' to ask that his guests depart his house immediately after a meal, rather than lingering to chat. Fortunately for Muhammad, he is spared the social awkwardness of having to do so by being required to announce a revelation from God who is '*not embarrassed*' to lay down these rules on his prophet's behalf.

Surah 49 begins with similar a list of rules for followers to observe in order that the announcer of the Qurʾan be shown special deference:

{49.1} You who believe! Advance not before God and His Messenger, and reverence God.

Truly God is Hearing, Knowing.

{49.2} O you who believe! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor address him in the manner that you address one another, lest your deeds come to naught, while you are unaware.

{49.3} Truly those who lower their voices before the Messenger of God, they are the ones whose hearts God has tested for reverence. Theirs shall be forgiveness and a great reward.

{49.4} Truly those who call thee from behind the apartments, most of them understand not.

{49.5} Had they been patient until thou camest out unto them, it would have been better for them.

And God is Forgiving, Merciful.

In perhaps the most personal provisions of all, **{66.1-2}** permits Muhammad to break an oath that he had made to his wives: '*God has already ordained for you the absolution of your oaths*'. The following verses allude to some incident in which one of the announcer's wives had stood accused of having broken his confidence. The verse declares that it was God Himself who had revealed this breach of trust, and it is purportedly from God that a warning is given to his wives that they may readily be replaced with more devoutly obedient wives should they incline against him.

{66.3} When the Prophet confided a certain matter to one of his wives, but she divulged it, and God showed it to him, he made known part of it and held back part of it. When he informed her of it, she said 'Who informed thee of this?' He replied: 'The Knower, the Aware informed me.'

{66.4} If you both repent unto God for your hearts did certainly incline, and if you aid one another against him, then truly God, He is his Protector, as are Gabriel and the righteous among the believers, and the angels support him withal.

{66.5} It may be that if he divorces you, his Lord will give him wives in your stead who are better than

> you, submitting, believing,
> devoutly obedient, penitent,
> worshipping, and given to
> wayfaring—previously married,
> and virgins.

A story exists in two forms to account for these verses, both of which involve jealousy on the part of Hafsa, daughter of Umar, towards Maryam, Muhammad's concubine from Egypt. In one of these accounts, Hafsa had complained to her co-wives that Muhammad had had intercourse with Maryam on the day that had been allocated to Hafsa, and in Hafsa's apartment. In the other, probably a later version of the first amended to make it more reputable, Hafsa and Aisha had conspired to try to make Muhammad believe that Maryam's honey made his breath smell, in order to sow discord between the two of them.[262] Neither explanation seems especially plausible.

VI

Virtuous Conduct

80. Honesty

Surah 83 (*Al-Mutaffifin/The Defrauders*): 1-6

1. Woe unto the scrimpers.

2. Those who, when they take by measure from mankind, exact the full,

3. And who, when they measure unto them or weigh for them, diminish.

4. Imagine such men not that they shall be raised up,

5. On a Mighty Day,

6. A Day whereon mankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds?

[*Daryabadi*]

The Quran instructs honesty mostly by reference to two practical transactions, the giving of full measure and dealing equitably with property held on trust. Four verses instruct believers to give full measure: **{6.152}**, **{17.34-35}** (*'Give full measure when you measure and weigh with the straight balance'*), **{55.8-9}** and **{83.1-6}** above. The giving of false measure was singled out as the principal sin of the people of Midian, who, before their destruction, were reproached for it by the prophet Shuayb at **{7.85}**, **{11.84}** and **{26.181-183} ⟨27⟩**. The Qurʾan also contains a more general call for fair trading practices in:

{4.29} O you who believe! Consume not each other's wealth falsely, but trade by mutual consent and slay not yourselves.

Truly God is merciful unto you.

The duty to honour trusts concerning the property of orphans in particular appears at **{2.220}**, **{4.2-10}** **⟨61⟩**, **{4.127}**, and, recalled as an instruction to the children of Israel in times past, **{2.83}** (*'I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, those who defraud the hired man of his wages, those who defraud the widows and orphans and those who turn aside the stranger and do not fear me'*, Malachi 3.5). Whilst the traditional accounts that Muhammad had himself been an orphan are not to be relied upon **⟨5⟩**, the closeness of the cause of orphans to the Qurʾan author's heart is undeniable. Honouring trusts, **{2.283}**, **{4.58}**, **{8.27}**, and oaths, **{2.177}**, **{23.8}**, **{70.32}**, more generally is also instructed. **{5.89}** prescribes a penance to be performed for the breach of an oath that has been '*pledged in earnest*', namely that the oath-breaker must feed or clothe ten indigent people or else free a slave, and if these measures are beyond their means, that they must fast for three days.

{2.282-283}, produced at **⟨65⟩** above in relation to the value of a woman's testimony, prescribe that debts should be written down and witnessed. These verses also include safeguards for '*the feeble minded and weak*', and also a recommendation that '*if you are on a journey and cannot find a scribe*' some property should be transferred as a pledge of the debt. These are sensible methods indicating that in addition to revelations concerning religious matters, the Qurʾan is also addressing the practical issues of equitably managing property transactions, within a free market context. The fact that in each of **{6.152}** and **{17.34-35}** the instruction to give full measure appears within a list of ethical instructions that resembles the Ten Commandments **⟨84⟩**, is a good reason to interpret this command as symbolic of a wider duty to act equitably, for example in all one's personal interactions.

81. Respect for Others

Surah 49 (*Al-Hunjurat/The Private Apartments*): 11-12

11. O You who have chosen to be graced with belief! No folk shall make mockery of other folk, for they may be better than they are. Nor shall any women ridicule other women, for they may be better than they are.

And neither shall you defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames. Bad is the immoral name after attaining faith.

And whoever turns not, such are wrongdoers.

12. O You who have chosen to be graced with belief! Avoid much suspicion and guesswork. For, behold, some of such suspicion and guesswork deplete your communal energy. And spy not upon one another, nor shall you backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would detest it!

Be mindful of Allah. Verily, Allah is Relenting, Merciful.

[*Shabbir Ahmed, 2003 (Pakistani-US)*]

Believers are called to shun slander, insults, gossip and spying on one another. In **{26.221}** shaytans are said to descend upon liars, poets and eavesdroppers. To preserve privacy, **Surah 24** sets out an etiquette to be observed when visiting another person at their home. **{24.27-28}** instructs believers not to enter houses without having first sought the occupant's permission and offered a greeting, which should be a '*salutation from God*', which has been returned by the householder, **{24.61}**. On the same theme, **{2.189}** prohibits entering another person's house by the back door.

The Qurʾan imposes a particular duty to be virtuous towards one's parents: '*when one or both of them reaches old age say not to them 'Uff!' nor chide them*'). On two occasions, at **{6.151}** and **{17.23}**, this appears as the second item within a list of short ethical instructions that resembles the Ten Commandments, of which the second is '*Honour your father and your mother that you may have a long life in the land which the lord, your God, is giving you*' **⟨84⟩**.

The call to respect parents is also made at **{2.83}**, **{4.36}** (produced in **⟨82⟩** following), **{29.8}**, **{31.14-15}** and **{46.15}** – although **{29.8}** makes an exception for those parents that incite *shirk*, and the Qurʾan's final surah **{9.23-24}** instructs believers to '*take not your fathers and your brothers as protectors if they prefer disbelief to belief*.'

82. Generosity

Surah 4 (*Al-Nisāʾ/Women*): 36

And worship none but God and raise none to His Divine level.

Show kindness to and help your parents, the relatives, the orphans, the needy ones, the neighbors (related or non-related to you), the stranded traveller and your slaves.

Know that God does not like the arrogant show-offs who are stingy, reproach people for being charitable and hoard what God has blessed them out of His kindness.

[*Bijan Moeinian, 2005 (Iranian-US)*]

Calls to freely give alms in charity, are made at **{2.177 & 215}**, **{23.4}**, **{4.36}** (produced above), **{24.22}**, **{27.3}**, **{30.38-39}**, **{31.4}**, **{51.19}**, **{69.31-34}**, **{74.43-44}**, **{76.8}**, **{90.6-16}** (produced below) and **{93.10}**. The duty is also referred to indirectly, as part of God's covenant with the people of Israel, **{2.43 & 83}**, **{5.12}** and **{7.156}**, and through exhortations that are placed in the mouths of Ishmael, **{19.55}**, and the infant Jesus, **{19.31}** (*c.f.* **{21.73}**).

Since by the time of the Qurʾan's completion, believers were obligated to pay a fixed sum in the form of *zakat* **⟨54⟩** as an essential requirement of being a believer, the duty to give discretionary alms should now be seen as a separate, but more flexible obligation. The list of those to whom **{4.36}** (above) instructs that charity be given mirrors the list of *zakat* beneficiaries in **{9.60}**. Similar, although not identical, lists appear at **{2.177 & 215}** and **{30.38}** and indirectly (again as a recalled past instruction to the Children of Israel) at **{2.83}**. These five lists specify the appropriate recipients of charity by one of three criteria:

relationship to the donor: relatives, neighbours, '*the companion at your side*' and one's slaves;

membership of four specific categories of people:

widows, orphans, (see also **⟨54⟩** above), travellers (similar to Leviticus 19.33-34: '*You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you, have thee same love for him as for yourself, for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt*', *c.f.* Exodus 23.9), and the *muhajirūn* **⟨38⟩**, or

dire need.

This model is also evident in verses without such lists.

{51.19}: '*And in (the reverent's) wealth was a due for the beggar and the deprived.*'

{69.31-34} and **{74.43-44}**: The inhabitants of Hell will be there because they did not pray or feed '*the indigent*' (*c.f.* **{89.17-18}**).

{93.10}: '*And as for one who requests* (commonly rendered as '*the beggar*') *repel not*'.

{90.6} (Man) says: 'I have squandered vast wealth'.

{90.7} Does he suppose that no one sees him?...

{90.12} And what will apprise thee of the steep pass?

{90.13} (It is) the freeing of a slave,

{90.14} Or giving food in time of famine

{90.15} To an orphan near of kin,

{90.16} Or to an indigent clinging to the dust…

83. Forbearance

Surah 41 (*Fussilat/Expounded*): 34

The good deed and the bad deed are not equal! Repel (the bad) with that which is best...

Then you will see, the person who had enmity towards you will be like as though he was a devoted friend!

[*Hulusi, 2013 (Turkish Sufi)*]

A handful of verses of the Qur'an encourage patience and forbearance in the face of poor treatment. These include **{41.34}** above, also, specifically directed at the People of the Book/Jews:

{2.109} Many of the People of the Book wish to turn you back into disbelievers after your having believed, out of envy in their souls, even after the truth has become clear to them.

So pardon and forebear, until God comes with his Command. Truly God is powerful over all things.



{3.186} You will surely be tried in your wealth and your souls and you shall hear much hurt from those who were given the Book before you and from those who are idolaters.

> But if you are patient and reverent, then that is indeed a course worthy of resolve.

and

> **{5.13}** Then for their breaking of their covenant, We cursed them and hardened their hearts ...
>
> Thou wilt not cease to discover their treachery, from all save a few of them. So pardon them and forebear. Truly God loves the virtuous.

It should be noted, however, that in **{2.109}** patience is enjoined only pending the punishment that God will impose for those who reject his message, which distinguishes the verse from an encouragement to genuine forgiveness. However, **{41.34}** (above) and also **{60.7}** are worded as giving a rule for life, expressing the hope that through patience may come reconciliation.

84. '*Repel evil with good*'

Surah 5 (*Al-Maʾidah/The Table Spread*): 48

And unto thee [O Prophet] have We vouchsafed this divine writ, setting forth the truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein.

Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high, and do not follow their errant views, forsaking the truth that has come unto thee. Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto, you.

Vie, then, with one another in doing good works!

Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ.

Many verses of the Qurʾan use words and phrases that imply that human conduct falls to be judged according to a single moral standard. The Qurʾan frequently encourages its audience to be '*muḥsinīn*', literally '*those who beatify*', frequently, but perhaps misleadingly, rendered '*the virtuous*'. Such people are assured that they are loved by God, **{2.195}**, **{3.134 & 149}** and **{5.19 & 94}**, and that God is with them, **{16.129}**. They are promised '*glad tidings*', **{22.38}** and **{46.13}**, mercy, **{7.57}**, **{9.91}**, **{31.4}**, and on many occasions a reward, using phrases such as '*We suffer not the reward*

of the virtuous to perish', **{9.120}**, **{11.115}**, **{12.56 & 90}** and **{18.30}** (*c.f* **{2.112}**, **{4.126}**, **{5.86}**, **{7.162}**, {33.29} and **{39.34}**).

Another word used to characterise an action as morally '*good*' or '*right*', is '*ma'rūf*', from the root ʾ-r-f literally meaning '*known*', in context meaning '*as made known by God*'. In **{7.199}** this appears contrasted with lack of knowledge: '*Take to pardoning and enjoin right and turn away from the ignorant*,' In later surahs it is several times contrasted with '*munkar*' (from n-k-r) meaning '*unfamilar*' or '*that which is rejected*'.

> **{3.104}** Let there be a community
> amongst you calling to the good,
> enjoining right and forbidding
> wrong;

A third classification of deeds as '*good*' uses the root k̲-y-r. Both **{2.148}** and **{5.48}** encourage believers to '*vie with one another in good deeds*', as John and his parents are said to have done in **{21.90}**. In the same competitive spirit, **{23.61}** and **{35.32}** urge listeners to hasten to be '*foremost*' in good deeds. Believers are told that they should '*repel evil with good*', **{13.22}** and **{28.54}**, or '*by that which is better*', **{23.96}** and **{41.34}** or to '*pardon and set matters aright*', **{42.40}**.

The Quranic Commandments

But how is one to know what actions are good? The previous four sections addressed the most frequently extolled Quranic virtues of honesty, generosity, respect for others' privacy and reputations and forbearance. At two places, **{6.151-153}** and **{17.22-39}**, the Qurʾan sets out longer sets of briefly expressed precepts that show unmistakeable signs of having been deliberately formulated to act as a Quranic equivalent to the Ten Commandments revealed to Moses in Exodus 20.1-17 and Deuteronomy 5.4-21 (mentioned in the Qurʾan as binding upon the Children of Israel at **{2.83-84}** and **{7.142-145}**).

84. 'Repel Evil with Good'

The Quranic Commandments

6.151-153	**17.22-39**
'Ascribe nothing as partner (unto God)',	*'Do not set up another god along with God…'*
'Be virtuous to parents',	*'Be virtuous to parents',*
'Slay not your children for fear of poverty…' ,	*'Give unto the kinsman his right',*
'Approach not the indecencies, whether outward or inward,'	*'Give unto the indigent and the traveller',*
'Slay not the soul that God has made inviolable, save by right.'	*'Do not squander',*
'Approach not the orphan's property, save in the best manner',	*'Let not thine hand be shackled to thy neck, nor let it be entirely open…'*
'Observe fully the measure and the balance with justice,	*'Slay not your children for fear of poverty',*
'When you speak be just, even if it be against a kinsman',	*'Approach not adultery',*
'Fulfil the pact of God'	*'Slay not the soul that God has made inviolable,'*
	Approach not an orphan's property save virtuously',
	'Fulfil the pact',
	'Give full measure … weigh with the straight balance',
	'Pursue not that whereof you have no knowledge',
	'Walk not exultantly upon the earth.'

That these lists are modelled upon the biblical Ten Commandments is clear from the fact that in each of the two lists the first two items relate to the prohibition of idolatry and the duty to honour one's parents, which appear as the first and third commandments of the biblical decalogue. The second of the ten, the duty to observe the sabbath, is the only biblical commandments that has no equivalent in the Qurʾan. These codes between them contain thirteen instructions of which the meaning of nine is fairly clear:

- not to commit the sin of *shirk* **⟨11⟩**,
- to respect one's parents **⟨81⟩**,
- not to kill children for fear of poverty **⟨74⟩**,
- not to slay without right,
- to respect the rights of orphans and other relatives and give full measure **⟨80⟩**,
- not to approach adultery/indecencies **⟨69⟩**,
- to give to the indigent and traveller **⟨82⟩**,
- not to be wasteful, and.
- not to be boastful

Two of the 'Quranic Commandments' are more general, namely being just when speaking and '*fulfilling the pact with God*', whilst the final two - to not have one's hand '*shackled to thy neck nor … entirely open*' and not to '*pursue that whereof you have no knowledge*' are really too obscure to be of any use as a guide.

Other shorter, but broadly similar lists occur at **{23.1-11}** and **{25.63-74}**.

Morality in the Qurʾan

As with the Ten Commandments, these lists of rules specify examples of approved or disapproved conduct rather than setting out a broad ethical principle. A believer is clearly encouraged to take such short lists of instructions as illustrative, but what it is that makes any particular action virtuous or wicked is far from clear. This may be thought to allow individual believers a wide discretion to form their own conclusion concerning what God may consider to be '*beautifying*' and '*good*' conduct in any given situation. This assumption appears to be mistaken. There is no indication in the Qurʾan that the correct action may be a subjective matter of conscience. On the contrary, the Qurʾan consistently preaches an austere, restrictive meaning to right conduct, often with unpredictable outcomes, with little or no concession for well-intentioned deviance from the correct path. Four verses, **{4.79}**. **{6.108}**, **{17.16}** and **{92.5-10}**, state explicitly that a person shall be punished for sin, even if what they did '*seemed fair*' to them at the time. **{2.11-14}** makes clear that the road to Hell may be paved with good intentions:

{2.11} And when it is said unto them, 'Do not work corruption upon the earth', they say, 'We are only working righteousness'.

{2.12} Nay, it is they who are the workers of corruption, though they are unaware

{2.13} When it is said unto them, 'Believe as the people believe', they say, 'Shall we believe as fools believe?' Nay, it is they who are the fools, though they know not.

The Qurʾan's ethical framework

The three general, positive moral principles that are the basis of Christian ethics are conspicuously absent from the Qurʾan. One of these is the imperative that is often referred to as the Golden Rule, namely the principle that an individual is under a moral obligation to act in all matters towards others as they would wish to be treated themselves. This appears in the Book of Leviticus 19.18 and was singled out be Jesus as being the most important commandment of the law, after loving God (Matthew 7.12, 9.7-9 & 22.34-40, Luke 6.31).[263] Some claim to see a Quranic variant of this rule in the instruction to give '*full measure*' **⟨80⟩**, or in **{28.93}**'s '*(Paradise) is the Abode of the Hereafter, which We ordain for those who desire neither dominance upon the earth, nor corruption*,' but these fall well short of a clearly expressed imperative to assist others at every opportunity where this is possible. A statement of the golden rule is attributed to Muhammad in two collections of *aḥādīth*, the tenth century Shia compendium *Kitab al-Kafi*,[264] and in the thirteenth century *Forty Hadith* of Abu Zakaria Yahya Ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, the latter of which reads:

> *'None of you [truly] believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.'*

However, since this saying escaped inclusion in any of the voluminous collections of the sayings of Muhammad compiled in the eighth and ninth centuries, both of these can safely be dismissed as late inventions.

Nor does the Qurʾan contain any statement of that which one raised in a Christian culture might refer to as the Good Samaritan principle, *i.e.*, that those to whom one owes a responsibility to assist extends equally to every person likely to be affected by one's actions or inaction. Whenever an instruction given in the Qurʾan is readily recognisable as resting upon sound ethical principles, it is expressed in limited terms. Duties of generosity and respect are owed towards parents, travellers, orphans, slaves, the indigent, fellow believers and so on. Far from exhorting kindness to one and all without discrimination, many verses seem to be directed towards the goal of consolidating a rightly ordered community, that is united by its shared belief and which is encouraged to treat

non-members with distrust or hostility, *c.f.* **Part VII**. **{4.92}**, as has been seen, even makes a point of effectively denying that unbelievers in general have a right to life **⟨74⟩**.

A third ethical principle lacking from the Qurʾan is the ultimate primacy of compassion over the over the strict application of the law. Jesus had repeatedly stressed in his ministry, that every directive from the law and the prophets was subsidiary to the overarching call to love one's neighbour as oneself. This is expressed most fulsomely in his repeated condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees of his day, seen for example, in Matthew 23:

> *23. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you frauds!*
> *You pay the tithes on mint and herbs and seeds whilst neglecting the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and faithfulness. It is these you should have practised whilst neglecting the others.*
>
> *24. Blind guides! You strain out the gnat and swallow the camel.*
>
> *25. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you frauds!*
> *You cleanse the outside of cup and dish and leave the inside filled with loot and lust. First cleanse the inside of the cup so that its outside may be clean*. (23.23-25)

Whilst Jesus pardoned the woman brought before him charged with adultery **⟨69⟩** the Qurʾan makes a specific point of excluding any mitigation of the penalty: *'Let not pity for them overcome you concerning God's Judgment'*, **{24.2}**.

The human examples that the Qurʾan extols as being '*virtuous*', Noah, Abraham and Moses, **{37.80, 105, 110 & 121}**, Lot and his family, **{37.131}**, and Joseph son of Jacob, **{12.22}**, earn this plaudit through their obedience to God and by their proclamation of His Word. None exhibit any directly altruistic conduct or sympathetic disposition concerning their fellow men. If they show compassion to their respective peoples, it is the very specific compassion of calling upon them to turn to God's path before punishment is inflicted.

Since, as we have seen, the Qurʾan provides no basis for a general discretion to the believer to disapply rules on obligatory or prohibited conduct, due to a perceived clash with the Quranic virtues considered in this and the preceding sections, etc, deeds are commonly categorised in Islam as falling into one of five ethical categories:

'*farḍ*':	positive obligations on believers as individuals (effectively the 'five pillars of Islam', see **⟨E⟩** and **⟨53⟩** to **⟨57⟩** above),
'*mustahab*':	recommended, *i.e.*, virtuous, conduct,
'*mubah*':	actions that are morally neutral,
'*makruh*':	actions that are discouraged, but nevertheless permitted ('*ḥalāl*'),
'*ḥarām*':	actions that are forbidden.

Seen within this framework complying with obligations and avoiding prohibitions, constitute a first tier of strict rules. Principles that guide discretionary actions form a second, subsidiary tier. Firebrand Islamic preachers are known to make such provocative assertions as the claim that for a Muslim it would be a graver sin to forget one's prayers than it would be to commit murder, yet this would appear to accord with the ethical framework drawn from the wording of the Qurʾan (and even such an extreme conclusion is not without support from some classical Islamic sources.) Less dramatically, a devout believer might comply meticulously with each of their *fard* obligations, avoid to the best of their ability any *haram* act, and even habitually perform copious '*mustahabb*' acts, and yet still find plenty of scope for behaviour that modern standards would find reprehensible, but against which contravenes no specific prohibition, nor any of the examples given in the Qurʾan of virtuous conduct.

85. Justice

Surah 4 (*Al-Nisāʾ/Women*): 135

O you who believe, be upholders of justice - witnesses for Allah, even though against (the interest of) your selves, your parents, and your kinsmen. One may be rich or poor, Allah is better caretaker of both.

So do not follow desires, lest you should swerve. If you twist or avoid (the evidence), then, Allah is all-aware of what you do.

[*The Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qurʾan in the English Language, 2007, Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, former judge of Federal Shariʿat Court, Pakistan (Deobandi)*]

The Qurʾan uses two terms for '*justice*': '*qist*' (literally '*a portion*', suggesting a due share) and ''*adl*' (literally '*flat, even or well-balanced, as seen in the proper position of the saddlebags on each side of the camel or the load on its hump*'.[265]) These two terms appear in the Qurʾan frequently and virtually interchangeably. The Qurʾan announcer, sitting in judgment, is urged to determine disputes that are brought before him in justice:

{4.58}: '*If you judge between men do so with justice; excellent indeed is the instruction God gives you*',

{5.42-43}: '*If they come to thee then judge between them or turn away from them ... But if thou judgest, judge between them with justice.*'

{5.48}: '*… So judge between them in accordance with what God has sent down and follow not their caprices away from the truth that has come not thee…*'

> **{42.15}**: '*Follow not their caprices and say:*
> *'I believe in that which God has sent down from a Book, and I have been commanded to establish judgment amongst you …','*

{49.9} urges that where two parties among the believers fight, believers should '*make peace between them with justice and act equitably*' for '*God loves the just*'. Other verses declare that '*God loves the just*' to promote a virtue to be exercised by people more generally than within dispute resolution. These include **{5.42}** and:

> **{60.8}** God does not forbid you with regard to those who did not fight you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes, from treating them righteously and being just towards them.
>
> Truly God loves the just.

C.f. **{5.8}**, **{16.90}** and **{57.25}**.

The Qurʾan links *'justice'* to truth in **{39.69}** and **{45.22}** and contrasts it time and again with the word '*hawā*', which might be rendered as '*caprice*' (*per The Study Quran* and Arberry), '*desires*' (Abdel-Haleem) or '*passing whims*' (Ahmad Ali), but has a literal meaning of '*to drop, fall, sink or collapse*' and appears chosen to draw invoke the fallibility of man's own faculties of judgment. At various places, justice is expressed as the avoidance of the '*caprices*' of those who are falsely guided: those who call upon a party other than God, **{6.56}**, those who deny God's signs, **{6.150}**, those who '*reject some of (the Book)*', **{13.36-37}** and '*those who know not*', **{45.18}**. The specific caprices of Jews and Christians are condemned, '*in accordance with what God has sent down*', **{5.48-49}**/ '*after knowledge has come to thee*', **{2.120 & 145}**. In all these verses, a familiar theme is seen to assert itself. Quranic justice, like Quranic morality, lies in complete obedience to God's revealed instructions and the suppression of human judgment (a.k.a. '*caprice*') where this conflicts with it. Believers are urged to '*follow not your caprice that*

you may act justly', **{4.135}**. To do otherwise is to be '*one who takes caprice as his god*', **{45.23}**: a form of *shirk*. Quranic justice then is found in the strict application of inflexible rules.

Justice, as it is understood in modern secular society, involves at least three core elements: natural justice (an individual or tribunal approaching a dispute with impartiality and fairness), the requirements of the rule of law (so that in order to be capable of fair application, a rule must be prospective, discoverable, clear and universally applicable) and the principle of 'just desserts', so that, as far as it is possible, a person should only suffer a sanction or liability that is proportionate to their conduct. The requirement of natural justice is expressed clearly in **{4.135}**, produced above, and the bribing of judges is expressly forbidden in **{2.188}**. However, the legal provisions of the Qurʾan contain many provisions that should be considered manifestly unjust by secular standards.

- Whilst the Qurʾan includes some specific concessions to human frailty in relation to ritual requirements (so for instance prayers may be shortened and fasting postponed when a believer is travelling or ill, **⟨54⟩**, **⟨56⟩**; necessity will excuse the eating of normally haram food **⟨76⟩**, and duress, the making of a false statement about God **⟨92⟩**), severe mandatory punishments are to be imposed for some offences **⟨69⟩**, **⟨70⟩**, **⟨71⟩** with no allowance for extenuating circumstances.

- The system of *qiṣāṣ* puts an offender's fate in the hands of his victim or their heir. It is inevitable that on occasion the latter will be motivated by interests other than justice. In particular the system will inevitably tend to permit a person of means to escape the corporal or capital punishment that would be imposed upon a poorer person **⟨73⟩**.

- Inequality of rights exists between:

  free people and slaves **⟨58⟩**,

  men and women **⟨66⟩**,

  and

  believers and unbelievers (stated both as a principle - '*not equal are…the blind and the seeing … the living and the dead*', **{35.19-22}**, similarly **{13.16}**; '*are those who know and those who know not equal?*', **{39.9}**; and also in the lack of legal recognition of an unbelievers general right to life in **⟨74⟩**).

  By implication, the Qurʾan's anti-homosexuality verses must also give divine sanction to inferior, and possibly no, rights for homosexuals **⟨75⟩**.

- The rules of evidence that a 'half value' be given to a woman's witness **⟨65⟩** and that a person is to be whipped for making an accusation of sexual impropriety without having four witnesses in support (other than for a husband accusing his wife) **⟨70⟩** are themselves both manifestly capricious.

Some see in the Qurʾan's mandating of fair trading and honouring of trusts **⟨80⟩**, obligatory and discretionary almsgiving, **⟨54⟩** and **⟨82⟩**, and obligations to respect the privacy and reputation of others, the genesis of a regime of individual rights and 'social justice' that is a radical departure from the earlier clan-based 'time of ignorance'. The desert warlord behind the Qurʾan is in modern times increasingly portrayed as a social justice warrior of his day. Encountered in the speeches of American Islam apologist Linda Sarsour:[266] Muhammad was '*a human rights activist, a racial justice activist an environmental justice activist, an animal rights activist, and a feminist in his own right who uplifted the women in his community*.'

The extent to which the Qurʾan's regime mighty be considered a reform of the pre-Islamic mores in Arabia, is impossible to fairly

assess given the uncertainty over the Qurʾan's historical context **⟨1⟩** and geographical setting **⟨2⟩**. However, it is a matter of fact that the Qurʾan's rules on family law, inheritance and the definition and punishment of crimes, are rudimentary and haphazard contrasted with those of the regimes that it replaced in the Middle East: the extensive *Corpus Juris Civilis* that had been promulgated throughout the Byzantine Empire by the emperor Justinian a hundred years earlier - which in at least one respect, the Qurʾan specifically reverses **⟨71⟩**, **⟨72⟩** - and the contemporary Sasanian legal code *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* ('*The Book of a Thousand Judgments*'). Nor does the Qurʾan ever express justice as an overarching ideal that might justify deviation from the strict application of its explicit provisions. On the contrary, Quranic references to justice – to people's '*due share*' or the dispassionate assessment of their rights - are consistently expressed as the rigid adherence to God's straight path, the sharīa, as set out in the Qurʾan, in opposition to man's inherently wayward intuition.

VII

Believers, Muslims and Others

86. Islam

Surah 3 (*Al-ʿImrān/The House of Imran*): 19

True Religion, in God's eyes, is islam (devotion to Him alone).

Those who were given the Scripture disagreed out of rivalry, only after they had been given knowledge - if anyone denies God's revelations, God is swift to take account.

[*Abdel-Haleem, 2004 (published in the Oxford World Classics series)*]

The Arabic '*salām*', like the Hebrew '*shalom*', is normally translated as meaning '*peace*', sometimes with broader connotations of wholeness, unity and safety. Unlike Hebrew, however, Arabic developed a verb form of the s-l-m root, '*aslāma*', meaning to submit oneself. This is seen in the Qurʾan verses:

> **{2.131-132}**: '*And when his Lord said to him: 'Submit' (Abraham) said: 'I submit to the Lord of worlds…' and enjoined the same upon his children as did Jacob: '…die not except in submission','*
>
> **{6.71}**: '*Say: 'Indeed the Guidance of God is the true guidance, and we are commanded to submit to the Lord of the worlds'.'*

From this verb is derived the noun '*islām*', meaning '*submission*', and, with the addition of the pronoun prefix '*mu-*' (here meaning '*a person characterised by…*'), this yields '*muslim*' or '*one who submits*'.

The word '*islām*', appears throughout the Qurʾan and on five of these occasions, **{3.19}** (produced above) and the following four verses, it is used to summarise the Qurʾan's core ethical principle:

> **{2.208}**: '*Enter into submission (islām) all together…*',
>
> **{3.85}**: '*Whosoever seeks a religion other than submission (islām) it shall not be accepted …*',
>
> **{5.3}**: '*… This day I have perfected for you your religion … and have approved for you as religion submission (islām) …*', see **⟨76⟩**,
>
> **{6.125}**: '*Whomsoever God wishes to guide, he expands his breast for submission (islām)…*' (similarly **{39.22}**).

A recurring theme of the Qurʾan is that God's will has always been made known to communities through human messengers. The personal nature of the messenger's authority is emphasised particularly forcefully in **Surah 26**, where the phrase '*Fear God and obey me*' is recited by no less than five prophets: Noah, **{26.108}** **⟨21⟩**, Lot, **{26.163}** **⟨75⟩** and Hud, **{26.126}**, Saleh, **{26.144}** and Shuayb, **{26.179}** **⟨27⟩**. Naturally, this sequence of prophets who must be obeyed culminates in the announcer of the Qurʾan himself. Each of verses **{3.32 & 132}**, **{4.13, 59, 69 & 79}**, **{5.92}**, **{8.20}** and **{24.54}** employ the formula '*Obey God and obey the Messenger*', in **{4.80}**, '*Whosoever obeys the messenger obeys God*', as though, for practical purposes, the two claims upon a person's obedience were to be regarded as synonymous. This conflation of the authority of God and that of His messenger is also evident in:

> **{48.10}** in which the divine voice assures its speaker that '*those who pledge allegiance unto thee pledge allegiance only unto God*',
>
> **{9.29}** which commands believers to fight those '*who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden*' **⟨51⟩**,
>
> **{5.33}** which prescribes harsh punishments for those who '*wage war on God and His Messenger*' **⟨72⟩**,

{5.55} which proclaims: '*Your protector is only God and His Messenger*', and

{8.1}, announced in connection with the ownership of the booty seized through warfare: *'The spoils (of war) belong to God and His Messenger'* **⟨41⟩**,

{24.51-54} hammers home the point that following orders is the ultimate, indeed ultimately the only, virtue, upon which we will be judged:

> **{24.51}** The only words of the believers, when they are called unto God and His Messenger, that He may judge between them, will be to say: 'We hear and we obey.' And it is they who will prosper.
>
> **{24.52}** Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger and who fears God and reverences him, it is they who shall triumph.
>
> **{24.53}** And they swear by God with their most solemn oaths that wert thou to command them they would surely go forth.
>
> Say: 'Swear not! But give honourable obedience! Surely God is aware of whatsoever you do.'
>
> **{24.54}** Say: 'Obey God and Obey the Messenger'…

{4.136}, **{24.62}**, **{48.9 & 13}**, **{49.15}**, **{57.7 & 21}**, **{58.4}**, **{61.11}**, **{64.8}** even use the provocative phrase '*believe in God and His Messenger*', having the messenger positioned alongside God as a living article of faith, whilst in **{57.28}** - '*fear God and believe in His Messenger*' – the messenger even seems to supplant God as the

primary focus of piety. In *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, David Marshall observes that when the phrase '*God and his Messenger*' is followed by the pronoun '*he*', the text can sometimes be ambiguous as to which of the pair the pronoun refers back to.

The absolute duty to abide by the Messenger's rulings is naturally applied - particularly in **Surah 4** verses **{4.59, 65, 83 & 105}** - to his judicial as well as executive pronouncements:

> **{4.65}** …By thy Lord, they will not believe until they have made thee the judge between them in their disputes, and find no resistance in their souls to what thou hast decreed, and surrender with full submission.

In **{4.59}**, the duty of obedience to the Messenger personally is extended to those who exercise authority on his behalf:

> **{4.59}** O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you.
>
> And if you differ among yourselves concerning any matter refer it to God and the Messenger if you believe in God and the Last Day.
>
> That is better and fairer in outcome.

The caveat that any dispute concerning instructions issued by '*those in authority*' should be referred back to the messenger to resolve, shows that this verse is referring to obedience to Muhammad's lieutenants during the course of his lifetime.

The motif of a righteous person being a submitter to God's will would not have been in any way novel in Quranic times. The name ʿAbd Allah has been found in pre-Islamic inscriptions and was, so it is said, the name of Muhammad's own father. As noted above **⟨58⟩**, past prophets and the Qurʾan's own author are frequently

referred to as thankful or excellent servants/slaves. The Qurʾan expresses obedience to the divine will as incorporating human power structures. Wives are instructed to be devoutly obedient to their husbands **⟨62⟩**, slavery is endorsed as God's blessing to the slave owner **⟨58⟩**, and the believers are presented as having a duty to fight unbelievers until they pay the *jizya 'with willing hand, being humbled*' **⟨51⟩**. The clear expectation is that rulers of the Qurʾan -following community will be authorised to enforce sharīa law with the Qurʾan -prescribed sanctions. However, the Qurʾan sets out no model for the selection of rulers to exercise power after the death of the prophet, nor any mechanism for dealing with a husband, slave owner or ruler that uses their God-given power unreasonably. Consequently, the effect of the unqualified exhortation from God to believers that they obey '*those in authority among you*', is to sacralise not merely voluntary submission by the individual as a pious act of humility, but also the unfettered dominion of one person over another.

87. Belief and Unbelief

Surah 49 (*Al-Hujarat/The Apartments*): 14

The Arabs (often mistranslated as nomads or Bedouins) said 'We believed'.
Say 'You did not believe but say
"We submitted/became Moslem"
and the faith/belief did not enter in your hearts/minds.

And if you obey God and His messenger He does not reduce/diminish you a thing from your deeds, that truly God (is) Forgiving, Merciful'.

[*Muhamed Ahmed and his daughter Samira, 1994 (Canadian)*]

One of the most prevalent themes of the Qurʾan is the binary division of humanity into believers (*'al-mu'min'*) and infidels. Throughout its pages, these two categories of people are lauded and denounced, promised rewards or threatened with punishment, both in this world and the next, respectively. *'Al-mu'min'* derives from the root word '*imān*', which in turn derives from the Jewish and Christian '*amen*' and carries a meaning of '*assent*'. So, for example, Ibn Ishaq tells us that, even prior to his marriage to Khadija, Muhammad had been nicknamed al-Amin (*'the Faithful'*), to reflect his renown as an honest man. In most, if not all, of the occasions upon which *'al-mu'min'* is used in the Qurʾan it should be thought of as meaning one who is a committed and faithful follower, rather than merely one who considers certain propositions to be true.

It is the word Muslim that has become the prevalent term for those who follow the Qurʾan as the word of God, possibly pursuant to **{22.78}** *('(God) named you muslims aforetime'*). However, as Fred M. Donner points out in *Muhammad and the Believers* that variations of

the root s-l-m **⟨86⟩** appear in only seventy-five verses of the Qurʾan compared with *'al-mu'min'* who are addressed over a thousand times. One might expect that any person who believes would tend also to submit but the inverse is not true. In **{49.14}**, above, and also **{33.35}** (*'For submitting men* ['*muslims'*] *and submitting women, and for believing men* ['*mu'min'*] *and believing women…'*) a distinction is drawn between true believers and mere submitters. As Donner writes, in relation to the former verse:

> *Belief obviously means something different (and better) than 'submission' (islam); and so we cannot simply equate the Believer with the Muslim, though some Muslims may qualify as believers.*
>
> *The Qurʾan's frequent appeal to the Believers, then – usually in phrases such as 'O you who believe' – forces us to conclude that Muhammad and his early followers thought of themselves above all as being a community of Believers rather than one of Muslims.*[267]

From the Qurʾan it would seem that in order to qualify as a believer one must:

- intellectually assent to the articles of faith set out at **⟨53⟩** above,
- submit to the *dīn* out of genuine desire to obey God, rather than for some ulterior motive, such as fear of punishment or self-interest, and
- engage with God on an emotional or spiritual level, since **{8.2}** states: '*only they are believers whose hearts quake with fear when God is mentioned*'; see also **{39.23}**, and **{49.14}** (produced above).

Entry to the Gardens of Paradise is promised to believers, at least in general terms since, as will be seen, the precise criteria for admission is more complex and uncertain than this simple statement on its own would indicate **⟨97⟩**. However, the clear implication of **{49.14}** is that this reward will also be received by those who merely submit to the Qurʾan author's authority and will

not be diminished by the submitter's failure to fulfil the criteria of a 'true believer'. **{49.14}** Consequently, it is suggested that the religion of Islam is correctly named, in the sense that it is submission that opens the way to Paradise rather than genuine faith.

Unbelief

No concession whatsoever is granted in the Qurʾan to those who fail to submit to its terms because they are unpersuaded by its claims to divine authorship. Where non-submitters are not otherwise specified, they are often referred to as '*al-kuffār*' (literally '*buriers*', meaning '*those who conceal the truth*', but with a specific meaning of rejection or ingratitude). The word has a Hebrew root, but it is in the Aramaic gospels that the use of a word from this root most closely reflects that in the Qurʾan:

> '[Jesus said] *but, whoever that might deny* ['*kaphar*'] *Me before the sons of men, I also will deny him before My Father, who is in the Shmaya* [the Heavens]', (Matthew 10.33)

> *Eshu* [Jesus] *said unto him, 'Truly I say to you, that in this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny* ['*kaphar*'] *me three times*.' (Matthew 26.34).

The rationale behind the use of this word is clear. The Qurʾan is itself '*a clear proof*' of its divine origin and authority, **{2.187 & 242}**, **{3.103}**, **{4.176}**, **{24.58-61}** and **{98.1-5}**. Those who refute it have can have no contradictory proof, **{2.111}**, **{21.24}**, **{23.117}**, **{27.64}** and **{28.75}**, and so denial of the Qurʾan's authenticity constitutes '*fabricating a lie against God*', **{10.17 & 69}**, **{16.116}** (see also **{23.90}**) by '*guilty people*', **{10.13}**, **{46.25}** and **{77.18}**. Eight times the Qurʾan poses the rhetorical question: '*Who does a greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God?*' **{5.104}**, **{6.21 & 144}**, **{7.37}**, **{10.17}**, **{11.18}**, **{29.68}** and **{61.7}**.

When the possibility of a sincere error is acknowledged, this is explicable by the person making it having been led astray by Satan, **{6.121}** and **{7.27, 30 & 175}**. A reverie, clearly much-loved by the

Qurʾan's author, is the scene on the Last Day as the unbelievers discover to their horror, their terrible mistake:

> **{7.37}** When our messengers come to take them away they will say: 'Where is that which you used to call upon apart from God?'
>
> (The unbelievers) will respond: 'They have forsaken us'. And they bear witness against themselves that they were unbelievers.
>
> **{7.38}** He will say: 'Enter the Fire…'

C.f. **{6.24, 31 & 94}**, **{7.53}**, **{10.30}**, **{11.21}**, **{16.87}**, **{25.29}**, **{28.75}** and **{40.73-74}**. On other occasions, it is God Himself that has led the unbeliever astray **⟨19⟩** or rendered them incapable of perceiving the truth **⟨53⟩**.

Sometimes the accusation that an unbeliever has both lied and believe what they say are combined in a way that is not entirely logical:

> **{2.146}**: ' … *but a group of them knowingly conceal the truth. The truth is from thy Lord, so be not amongst the doubters.*'
>
> **{3.24}**: '*That which they used to fabricate has deluded them in their religion.*'

In the end, it matters little. In the Qurʾan, failing to submit, whether through an incorrect assessment of the evidence, falling victim to Satan's trickery or wanton lying, all fall to be treated the same. *Dīn* cannot be compelled **⟨43⟩**, but those who have been led, whether by God, Satan or their own caprice, to reject the truthfulness of the Qurʾan's message have no place, other than possibly as a sub-class, in this world, **⟨90⟩**, **⟨91⟩** and **⟨93⟩**, and as fuel for the Hellfire in the next.

88. Jews and Christians

Surah 9 (*Al-Tawbah/Repentance*): 30-33

30. The Jews say that Ezra is the son of God and the Christians say the Messiah is the son of God. Those are words from their mouths. They resemble the words of those who disbelieved before.

God curse them!
How they are perverted!

31. They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords apart from God, as well as the Messiah, son of Mary, though they were only commanded to worship one God.

There is no god but He! Glory be to Him above the partners they ascribe.

32. They desire to extinguish the Light of God with their mouths. But God refuses to do aught but complete His Light though the disbelievers be adverse.

33. He it is who sent his messenger with guidance and the religion of Truth to make it prevail over all religion though the [*mushrikūn*] be averse.

The Jews

The Qurʾan refers frequently to communities around it who are not counted amongst the believers. It is significant that it never dignifies other monotheist religious traditions with recognition as belief systems. It talks of, and sometimes to, people who must have

been Jews or Christians but it never speaks of Judaism or Christianity. The identification of these groups, and how the Qurʾan depicts them, is far from being clear cut. Most commonly, Jews are referred to, and addressed by, the title '*children of Israel*' ('*banī Isrāʾīl*'), a term that stresses their biological descent from the patriarchs and consequently their role within a biblical world view. In later verses and with more negative associations, Jews appear as '*al-yahūd/yahūdī*' from '*Judean*' (**{2.113 & 120}**, **{3.67}**, four verses in **Surah 5** listed below and **{9.30}**). Salime Leyla Gürkan in *Jews in the Qurʾān: An Evaluation of the Naming and the Content* suggests that this latter term carries '*more of a religious than an ethnic meaning*'. It may also have had a geographical significance, contrasting the descendants of Jacob who were invading the Promised Land under the leadership of the Qurʾan announcer with the residents of Judea who had chosen to live there under corrupt Byzantine rule. Most curiously Jews appear three times in **Surah 2** as '*Hūd*' (the same name as the prophet of ʿAd **⟨27⟩**), **{2.111,135 & 140}** and ten times across seven surahs as '*alladhīna Hādū*': '*those who are*', or possibly '*those who have become*', '*Jewish*', **{2.62}**, **{4.46 & 160}**, **{5.41, 44 & 69}**, **{6.146}**, **{16.118}**, **{22.17}** and **{62.6}**.

A pan-Abrahamic movement

As has been seen, in many passages the Qurʾan presents itself as the culmination of a revelation history that had previously centred upon the Jewish people and to this end it incorporates very many Jewish figures, stories, themes and laws as its own. It also came to revere Jesus as occupying a uniquely exalted, semi-divine, status as God's Spirit and Word, a far more impressive figure than the Qurʾan's own announcer **⟨26⟩**. A question that would inevitably arise from the Qurʾan's reliance upon the Jewish and Christian legacy to promote unqualified obedience to its announcer was the status of Jews and Christians after the sending down of the Qurʾan. If Paradise is promised to those who submit to God's messengers, and the Hellfire to those who do not, how should Muslims regard those who believe and submit to the confirmed pre-Quranic revelations but reject the authenticity of the Qurʾan and its announcer? This parallels a similar debate in Christianity

concerning Jews who continued to rely upon what the followers of Jesus came to regard as the Old Covenant.

In some passages on the issue, the Qurʾan reads as an ecumenical document. Abraham's faith as a '*hanif*' is held up as a unifying paradigm of pure monotheism before God's people became divided by the scourge of sectarianism: '*Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian*' **⟨22⟩**. Both the Torah and the gospel were confirmed as not only having been once '*sent down*' from God, but also as continuing to be authoritative to the communities that they were sent to even after the announcement of the Qurʾan. **{2.62}** and **{5.69}** each identify four confessional groups: normally translated as '*those who believe, those who are Jews* ['*alladhīna hādū*', '*those who are/became Hūd*'], *Christians* ['*naṣāra*', to be considered below] *and Sabeans, who believe in God and the Last Day and who work righteousness*'. These four groups are assured that on the Day of Judgment, '*no fear shall come upon them nor shall they grieve*', with the former verse inserting the additional encouragement that they '*shall have their reward with their Lord*.'

The identification of the '*Sabaʾiyyūn*' (commonly anglicised to '*Sabeans*') is not certain. In Islamic tradition they have often been supposed to be a people of Sheba, a sect that, it was supposed, had lingered in Arabia preserving the monotheism from their erstwhile queen's visit to Solomon, just as the hanifs had preserved the faith of Abraham via Ishmael in the Hijaz. As with the hanifs, there is little or no evidence of such a people ever having existed. It is more likely that the term had referred to the Mandeans, followers of a non-Christian religious tradition in which John the Baptist features prominently (the label '*sabean*' likely related to the Aramaic word for baptism, '*subba*'; *i.e.*, '*the Baptists*').[268]

It should be noted that **{2.62}** and **{5.69}** each lists the '*alladhīna hādū*', '*naṣāra*' and Sabeans as separate categories to '*those who believe*'. One can deduce from this that '*belief*' here means not belief in God, angels, past prophets and the Last Day but specifically acceptance of the authority of the Qurʾan announcer. Nevertheless, the Qurʾan seems to acknowledge in theses verses that a failure to recognise its announcer as a prophet does not preclude Jews, Christians and Sabeans from God's grace: '*For each among you We have appointed a law and a way. And had God willed he would have made*

you one community', **{5.48}** (see also **{16.124}**, and **⟨97⟩** below). Like the submitting Bedouins of **{49.14}**, adherents of these three traditions will receive a reward for the faith that they hold.

Jews and Christians are regarded as one broad community, '*the People of the Book*' and a sense of '*more that unites us*' permeates passages such as:

> **{29.46}** … Say: 'We believe in that which was sent down unto us and was sent down unto you (People of the Book).
>
> Our God and your God are one, and unto Him are we submitters.'

The two are addressed either jointly or in parallel at **{2.111**, **113** (produced below) **120 & 135}**, **{5.18}**, (produced at **⟨67⟩** above) **{9.30-31}**. Other than for the Christian beliefs in the incarnation and the Holy Trinity, concerns over doctrinal inconsistencies are brushed away with the platitude that that wherein people differ in this life will be revealed on the Last Day:

> **{2.113}**: The Jews say: 'The Christians stand on nothing',
> and the Christians say: 'The Jews stand on nothing'
> though they recite the Book
> …
> God will judge between them on the Day of resurrection concerning that wherein they differed.

In **{16.92}** the Qurʾan author appeals for a unity between different groups to be maintained, employing the metaphor of a person unravelling a yarn into its different threads, warning that each would be the weaker for having been separated from the whole.

Jews and Christians in the Qurʾan's sacred history

The Qurʾan recognises the Children of Israel as a people who had in the past been graced with God's special favour:

> **{2.47 & 122}** O children of Israel!
> Remember My Blessing
> which I bestowed upon you
> and that I favoured you
> above the worlds.

The blessings received by them had included the Torah, the ark of the covenant and the many prophets that the Qurʾan devotes so many of its pages to recalling. Moreover, God had specified this favour by conferring upon the Children of Israel the right to live in Holy Land:

> **{5.21}**: *(Moses said:) 'O my people! Enter the Holy Land which God has prescribed for you'*, and
>
> **{17.104}**: *'And We said thereafter unto the Children of Israel: 'Dwell in the land…'*

See also **{5.12}** and **{10.93}**. However, the Israelites had rebelled against God and had thereafter been smitten by three divine punishments with a fourth now threatened. The first of these punishments had been inflicted for their worship of the golden calf prior to their entry into Canaan and had taken the form of either a thunderbolt, **{2.55}** and **{4.153}**, or an earthquake, **{7.155}**. A second punishment was prompted by some Jews having broken their sabbath by gathering fish that God sent to tempt them, as recalled in **{7.163-168}**. For this, the offenders were apparently turned by God into apes **⟨90⟩**. At **{17.5}**, the Qurʾan refers to an unspecified third occasion of divine punishment, during which the dwellings of the Jews had been destroyed for their having caused corruption. These three punishments of the Jewish peoples had each been a mere chastisement, limited in its scope and intended to act as a lesson for those who were spared and for subsequent generations. **{17.4}**, however, forms part of a larger passage that it has been suggested at **⟨35⟩** above describes some Jews' recent expulsion

from Jerusalem as an escape prior to its imminent devastation. **{17.7}** contains an ominous suggestion that the punishment that is to come may be a final annihilation, as the Jews amongst the Qurʾan's audience are told that they now face '*utter ruin*'.

The Qurʾan makes less reference to Christians in history, but in **{61.14}** it talks of those Jews who believe in Jesus coming to prevail over those who did not.

> **{61.14}** … Just as Jesus son of Mary said to the apostles: 'Who are my helpers unto God?' The apostles replied: 'We are helpers unto God.'
>
> Then a group from the Children of Israel believed and a group disbelieved. So We strengthened those who believed against their enemies, and they came to prevail.

This apparently fulfilled the promise made by God to Jesus at **{3.55}**: '*I shall … place those who followed thee above those who disbelieved until the Day of the Resurrection*.' This is, of course, the opposite of the Easter story as it is told in the New Testament. In the Acts of the Apostles, following the crucifixion of Jesus, the apostolic church is scattered and in hiding until they are emboldened by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, to preach openly. Acts concludes with the Christian community growing in numbers and strength in spite of its persecution by Rome, but from an earthbound perspective Jesus's disciples have not, by the conclusion of the New Testament, 'prevailed' over anything other than their own doubts and fears. They take solace that the kingdom they aspire to enter is not of this world and look forward to the resurrection and the ife of the world to come. In **{61.14}**, those who '*believed in*' (i.e., professed loyalty to) Jesus prevailed over those who did not. This is probably a reference to the diaspora of the Jewish people at the hands of the Romans followed by the fourth century conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity. These two events had had the consequence of placing Christians in a position of dominance over Jews in the Byzantine Empire of the Qurʾan's day. This is not how one might have expected the Qurʾan

author to have seen things.[269] Unlike the Jews who had strayed from the right path, the Qurʾan is explicit in condemning the essential trinitarian Christian doctrine as utterly false. Its apparent association of a gentile empire that zealously promoted this and many related blasphemies with *'a group that believed'* represents a significant, albeit temporary, goodwill gesture in its messaging.

The estrangement from the Jews

It has been seen that the *Armenian History of Pseudo-Sebeos* describes Muhammad having attracted to himself émigré Jews expelled from Byzantine Empire keen to recapture Jerusalem. This likely provides the historical context for the Qurʾan's many passages addressing itself to the Children of Israel and confirming the validity of the Torah. It even invites Arab listeners who may doubt the Qurʾan's authenticity to confirm them through consultation with the Jews: *'So if thou art in doubt concerning that which We have sent down unto thee, ask those who were given the Book before thee'*, **{10.94}** (similarly **{17.101}**, **{21.7}**, **{26.197}** and **{53.36}**). Later, one can easily imagine after discrepancies between the Qurʾan and the Torah have come to light, or in the face of Jewish scepticism concerning the Qurʾan author's claim to the receipt of revelations from Gabriel, the Qurʾan's embracing of Jews becomes more qualified. References are made to '*disbelievers amongst the People of the Book*', **{2.105}**; those (sometimes '*many*', sometimes '*a group*') amongst the People of the Book who '*wish to turn you back into disbelievers*', **{2.109}**; '*wish to make you go astray*', **{3.69}**, '*knowingly conceal the truth*' **{2.146}** and '*have lost their souls*', **{6.20}**. The Jewish community may still be welcome allies, but the growing tension is palpable.

> **{3.76}** Among the People of the Book is one whom were you to entrust to him a quintal [*presumably something of great value*] would render it back to you. And among them is one who, were you entrust to him a dinar would not render it back to

> you, unless you were standing over him.

C.f. **{3.78, 113-115 & 199}**.

In later surahs, the Qurʾan comes to turn against Jews generally. From being the '*People of the Book*', they become a people who have been given merely '*a portion of the Book*', **{3.23}** and **{4.44 & 51}**. Whereas in earlier surahs Jews in the Qurʾan's audience had been addressed as the Children of Israel, but now the term '*al-yahūd*' comes into use, distancing the perfidious Jews of current times from their idealised ancestors. In **Surah 5** this dual terminology is particularly evident.

> **{5.12}** refers to God's covenant with the Children of Israel.
>
> **{5.18}** explains why God punishes '*l-yahūdu*' and '*naṣāra*' for their sins.
>
> **{5.32}** introduces the famous saying about slaying a soul with the words '*We prescribed for the Children of Israel*' **⟨72⟩**.
>
> **{5.41}** counsels the Qurʾan announcer not to grieve because of '*those who are Jews* ['*alladhīna hādū*'] *who listen to lies…*'; **{5.51}** urges the believers not to take '*l-yahūda*' and '*naṣāra*' as allies, and **{5.64}** curses the Jews ('*l-yahūdu*') for saying that God's Hand is shackled.
>
> **{5.69}**, as referred to above, includes '*those who are Jews* ['*alladhīna hādū*'] within the four denominations that will be rewarded if they work righteousness; but when, in the following verse, God's covenant is again recalled, this is said to have been made with the Children of Israel.
>
> **{5.78}** describes those amongst the Children of Israel who had disbelieved in ancient times having been cursed by David and Jesus,

{5.82} contrasts the hostility of Jews (*'l-yahūda'*) to the affection of the Christians.

The accusations given above of Jews listening to lies and saying God's Hand is shackled form part of a larger litany of generalised accusations against the Jews. The Jews are said to:

- engage in usury (*'devour wealth'*), **{4.161}**, and their avarice is such that they *'would not give men so much as the speck on a date stone'*, **{4.53}**;
- be hypocrites and unreliable allies, **{59.11-12}**;
- have *'turned away'* from their covenant with God, **{2.64, 83, 93 & 100}**, **{4.155-157}** and **{5.13 & 70}**;
- have hidden or distorted with their tongues the revelation that had been given to them, **{2.75 & 79}**, **{3.78}**, **{4.46}** and **{5.81-82}**,
- desire to turn believers away from belief, **{2.109}**, and wish them ill, **{3.120}**,
- have killed their prophets, **{2.61, 87 & 91}**, **{3.21, 112, 181 & 183}**, **{4.155}** and **{5.70}** (this being an accusation taken from Jesus's words reported in Matthew 23.34-38 and Luke 11.47-51 - see also Romans 11.3 - for which the Hebrew bible contains little or no justification),
- falsely boast of having killed Jesus **{4.157}**, slander Mary, **{4.158}**, and -
- in apparent conflict with **{2.47 & 122}** – falsely claimed to be favoured by God, **{62.5}**.

They are a people who instead of saying *'We hear and we obey'* say *'We hear and disobey'* and boast that their hearts *'are uncircumcised'* **⟨20⟩**; these same hearts *'have been made hard'*, **{5.13}** (*c.f.* **{2.74}**) and *'sealed with disbelief'* by God, **{2.7}**, **{4.155}**. As a result of this the Jews have been cursed by God *'with wrath upon wrath'*, **{2.88-90}**,

and compared by God to asses and (even for an unfortunate few, transformed into) apes **⟨90⟩**.

The '*naṣāra*'

Christians are never subject to the same level of vitriol as that visited upon the Jews. Their doctrines may be condemned, but the sin for which Christians are reproached is their division (a fair criticism given the recent history), which is presented in **{5.14}** as God '*stirring up enmity and hatred*' between them to punish them for forgetting their covenant with Him. In **Surah 5** believers are warned against taking either Jews or Christians as their allies: '*They are friends one to another. Lo! Allah He among you who taketh them for friends is (one) of them,*' **{5.51}**. But a little later in the same surah – reading somewhat cynically considering what has gone before it - comes the advice in **{5.82-83}** (produced below) that if help is needed, it is the Christians who are '*the nearest in affection towards those who believe*'.

{5.82} Thou wilt surely find the most hostile of men towards those who believe to be the Jews and those who ascribe partners unto God. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection towards those who believe to be those who say: 'We are Christians.' That is because amongst them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant.

{5.83} And when they hear that which was sent down unto the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognise. They say: 'O Lord We believe so inscribe us amongst the witnesses.'

One means through which the Qurʾan may have justified its tolerance of Christian worship (an implicit comparison between Jesus and Adam as both recipients of the spirit of God and therefore appropriate figures to be bowed to) has been discussed at **⟨26⟩** above. Understanding why the Qurʾan took this relatively indulgent approach may be assisted by an analysis of the word that is used in the Qurʾan to refer to Christians, '*nasāra*'.

The name of Jesus is frequently associated in the gospels with the words '*Ναζαρηνός*' ('*Nazarēnos*') and '*Ναζωραῖος*' ('*Nazōraios*'). All four gospels explain these epithets with the fact that Jesus was raised in the town of Nazareth in Galilee,[270] and consequently these words are commonly understood as meaning '*of Nazareth*' and '*the Nazarene*', although the term is afforded a prominence in the gospels that seems to carry a greater significance than merely identifying Jesus by reference to his hometown.[271] In the Acts of the Apostles, 24.5, St Paul is accused as being '*a troublemaker … a ringleader of the sect of the Nazoreans*'. St Epiphanius of Salamis sought to cast a little light on the term and explained how, after the establishment of the early church, it came to be used to describe a particular group of Jewish-Christians:

> *At that time (after Jesus's resurrection but before the writing of the gospels) all Christians were called Nazoraeans in the same way. They also came to be called Jessaeans for short while before the disciples began to be called Christians at Antioch... So in that brief period when they were called Jessaeans … certain other persons seceded though they were followers of the apostles. I mean the Nazoraeans whom I am presenting here. They were Jewish, were attached to the law and had circumcision…*
>
> *By hearing just the name of Jesus, and seeing the miracles the prophets performed, they came to faith in Jesus themselves. But they found that he had been conceived in Nazareth and brought up in Joseph's home and for this reason is called Jesus the Nazoraean in the gospels as the apostles say 'Jesus the Nazoraean, a man approved by signs and wonders.' Hence they adopted this name so as to be called Nazoreans.*

The existence of a Jewish-Christian sect called the Nazareans, that venerated Jesus as the Messiah but not the Son of God, whilst observing the Jewish law including circumcision, is known from St Jerome to have existed until the early fifth century, since reference is made to *'the gospel that the Nazareans use.'*[272] Some have speculated that either a secret community Nazareans had survived in Arabia until the seventh century when it had been a source of inspiration for Muhammad's religious movement. Alternatively, that Muhammad had come by its teachings in some other form, perhaps by reading a copy of the Nazarean gospel.[273] It is suggested, however, that the simpler explanation is that the Qurʾan's author chose the term because it was the term that had been applied to the followers of Jesus (albeit by their opponents) within the Bible, and because it allowed him to embrace them as fellow hanifs without endorsing belief in Jesus as the Son of God.

There was a second layer of meaning in the adoption of the term. Islamic tradition has it that after making the hijra, Muhammad and his followers arrived in Yathrib as destitute refugees. Here they were supported by the Medinan-based converts whom Ibn Ishaq refers to collectively as the '*anṣār*' meaning '*helpers*' (the plural of '*naṣīr*'). The word used implies that these 'helpers' were not believers themselves, but nevertheless gave the believers practical assistance. This makes little sense, within Ibn Ishaq's narrative, for why should Muhammad's Yathrib benefactors not have been recognised as full members of his community? These *'anṣār'* may be referred to twice in the Qurʾan, both in the final surah, **Surah 9**:

{9.101} (As for) the foremost, the first
among the emigrants
['*muhājirūn'*] and the helpers
['*anṣār*'] and those who
followed them with virtue
God is content with them…

{9.117} God indeed has relented
unto the Prophet and the
emigrants ['*muhājirūn'*] and
the helpers ['*anṣār*'] who
followed him in the difficult

hour after the hearts of a
group of them nearly
swerved.

The fact that the root n-ṣ-r, that in **{9.101 & 117}** is traditionally read as '*anṣār*' ('*helpers*'), is the same root that elsewhere yields the word '*naṣāra*' is clearly something that the Qurʾan author is aware of and plays upon. In both **{3.52}** and **{61.14}** (produced above), Jesus asks his disciples: '*Who are my helpers unto God?*' to which they reply, in the latter instance: '*We are helpers unto God*'; in the former instance: '*We are God's helpers. We believe in God. Bear witness that we are submitters* ['*muslim*']'. The wordplay raises two possibilities. It may have been a means of including within the People of the Book followers of Jesus who were not descended from Abraham, but who might nevertheless be included in the Abrahamic covenant by dint of their obedience to God's Will. It may also be the case that the lexical correlation between Christians and helpers is connected to assistance that the Qurʾan author himself had received or hoped to receive from the Christians of seventh century Palestine. The clues are present in the Qurʾan that its author had, at some stage, received support from a Christian community, for example the advice in **{5.82-83}** that Christians are closest in affection to the Qurʾan-following community. This may well be why he largely overlooked his doctrinal differences with the Christians whom he had accommodated in latter surahs with the incorporation of honorific titles, stories and doctrines concerning Jesus. Later, the identity of this group was disguised in Islamic tradition by their remembrance only as anonymous '*helpers*' of Yathrib. At the time of the Qurʾan's announcement though, the pun may have carried an ominous clue that Christians were being tolerated only for reasons of pragmatism.

The later theology of the People of the Book

In **{22.17}** a third list of religious affiliations appears which has some similarities in its structure to those of **{2.62}** and **{5.69}**, referred to above but which has a fundamentally different meaning. On the two earlier occasions four groups, believers, Jews, Christians and Sabeans were all found to be acceptable and

promised a reward. **{22.17}** adds two further categories. One is the '*mushrikūn*', those who associate partners unto God, who were definitely not accepted. The other is the '*Majusa*' (usually rendered Magians or Magi). Since **{22.17}** is the Magians' only appearance in the Qurʾan, their identification, like that of the Sabeans, is uncertain, but the word is very likely an allusion to the Magi of the Gospel of St Matthew, and by association - in the shared interest in star-gazing and their coming from the east - with Zoroastrians. At the conclusion of the **{22.17}** list, there is no assurance of salvation for all, but only an ominous warning that '*God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection*'. Based upon **{2.62}**, **{5.69}** and **{22.17}** read together, it is often said that in Islam, the People of the Book for whom salvation is promised, although they are not believers, comprise Jews, Christians, and the unknown Sabeans; with Zoroastrians occupying a precariously uncertain position. However, it may be more accurate to think of **{22.17}** as part of a process of walking back from earlier guarantees of heavenly rewards for adherents of any of the Abrahamic creeds.

In **{2.134-140}** the '*hanif*' faith of Abraham is not seen as a unifying foundation upon which believers, Jews and Christians all stand, but rather as the pure faith '*of a community that has passed away*'. The audience is warned that the fidelity of their past prophets will not avail the current generation of their descendants:

> **{2.135}** And they say: 'Be Jews or Christians and you shall be rightly guided'.
>
> Say: 'Rather ours is the hanif of Abraham and he was not one of the idolaters'

Verses **{2.136}** and **{3.84}** are virtually identical: each requiring the audience to recite the following list of past prophets: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Jesus; and then, in their names to make a commitment to submit, presumably to the Qurʾan author. The ecumenical sense has almost completely evaporated, as the former is followed by:

{2.137} And if they believe the like of
what you believe in, then
they shall be rightly guided.

And if they turn away then
they are merely in schism
and God will suffice you
against them…

However, in **{3.110}** it is said that salvation is still possible for individual People of the Book who believe, even though '*most are iniquitous*'. The condemnation is not absolute until the very end.

'The Jews say that Ezra is the son of God'

The culmination of this growing enmity comes with the twin denunciations in **{9.30}**, that '*the Jews say that Uzair is the son of God and the Christians say that the Messiah is the son of God*.' This cannot be realistically read as other than an accusation of the sin of associating partners unto God. Both denominations are consequently condemned as '*mushrikūn*', and subject to the treatment prescribed in **Surah 9**. Given the Qurʾan's earlier denunciation of belief in Jesus as the Son of God, the charge of *shirk* against Christians is the less surprising of the two. In fact, this had been heavily implied at **{3.64}** (produced below) and the more remarkable feature is not that such an accusation was made, but that is had not been made explicit from the outset. But for fourteen centuries, the accusation that this verse levies against the Jews has caused genuine bemusement.

The name Uzair (from the rasm ʿ-z-r) is frequently rendered Ezra but although Ezra is revered in Judaism as a wise and devout scribe, there is no historical account of any Jew ever having asserted that he was anything other than a mortal man.

The most likely explanation may be that the Qurʾan author had used the name of Ezra in place of that of Enoch or one of the *bene Elohīm*. At least three of the latter are said to have had names that are fairly similar to Uzair: Uza, Azael (the angel of death) and Azazel (the teacher of make-up) **⟨14⟩**. The title used for these in the

Book of Genesis, '*bene Elohīm*', does literally mean '*sons of God*', but one might have expected an accusation based upon the wording of the Torah to have been problematic for the Qurʾan announcer since the Torah is repeatedly confirmed in the Qurʾan. The accusation of idolatrous veneration for Enoch would have been much easier to establish. It has already been seen **⟨14⟩** that a Jewish mystical movement had developed focussed upon the Enoch, who is described in apocryphal scripture as having ascended to heaven. Following the destruction of the Jewish Temple by Rome, a second Book of Enoch had been produced, and by the time of the Qurʾan a Third Book developed his persona to even grander levels, describing Enoch as transformed by God into the most powerful angel of all and now, as Metatron, sat upon a throne ruling the heavens and the earth as God's vice-regent. Scandalously, in Enoch 3, he was even described, as a '*Lesser Yahweh*'. It is easy to imagine that seeing Jews revering a book containing such a passage might have outraged the composer of **{9.30}** as much as paganism or the Christian doctrine of the incarnation.[274]

'*A common word*'

In 2007, as a response to a controversial lecture addressing Islam and Byzantium given by Pope Benedict XVI the previous year, an open letter entitled '*A Common Word Between us and You*' was signed by 138 prominent Islamic scholars, said to represent '*every denomination and school of thought in Islam*', addressed to the world's Christian leaders. This letter sought to '*declare the common ground*' between Christianity and Islam. The letter begins with an English translation of **{3.64}**, a verse that is traditionally believed to have been revealed when Muhammad was visited by a delegation of Christians from Najran, in Yemen.

> **{3.64}** Say: 'O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God.'

> And if they turn away, then say
> 'Bear witness that we are they who
> have surrendered (unto Him)'.

It has been objected that the word '*sawā*' that is here rendered as '*common*', in fact has a literal meaning of '*level*', '*sound*' or '*central*', and idiomatically means '*the right way*', rather than a shared '*common ground*' as the letter implies.[275] The verse seems to be an invitation to the hearer to renounce error and to join the Quranic community upon the correct path, as rendered by Pickthall:

> '*Come to an agreement between us and you that we shall worship none but Allah…*'

This rendering accords with the verse's rejection of '*ascribing any partner unto*' God – a clear reference to a repudiation of Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus. It is also consistent with **{3.61}**:

> **{3.64}** And to whomsoever disputes with
> thee over [*the truth from thy Lord*] it,
> after the knowledge has come unto
> thee, say: 'Come! Let us call upon
> our sons and your sons, our
> women and your women ourselves
> and yourselves. Then let us pray
> earnestly so as to place the curse of
> God upon those who lie.'

It follows then that the reassuringly ecumenical interpretation put upon the verse by the Muslim scholars could not have been the meaning that had been originally intended by the verse's author.

89. Hypocrites, Sectarians and Rebels

Surah 33 (*Al-Ahzab/The Parties*): 18-19

18. Surely God knows those among you who hinder and those who say to their brethren: 'Come hither unto us.'
Yet they come not to battle save a little,

19. Greedy toward you. But when fear comes, thou seest them looking at thee with eyes rolling like one whom death overwhelms. Then, when fear subsides, they assail thee with sharp tongues, greedy for good things.

Later verses of the Qurʾan address consequences of success that the initial community of devout followers did not have to concern themselves with, hypocrisy, factionalism and rebellion.

Hypocrisy

The '*munāfiqūn*', that is to say those who show duplicity ('*nīfāq*'), almost invariably translated as '*hypocrites*', are condemned repeatedly in the Qurʾan, most extensively in **Surahs 4**, **9** and **33**:

{4. 61-68, 88-89 & 138-145},
{9. 64-69, 73-78, 93-97 & 101}, and
{33. 1, 12-20, 24, 48 & 60-61}.

Hypocrites are frequently and not unreasonably bracketed together with unbelievers, **{4.40}**, **{9.64}** and **{33.1 & 48}**, and with '*those in whose hearts is a disease*', **{8.49}**, **{33.12 & 60}**, and as with the overt unbelievers, their lack of faith is explained as a seal having been set upon their hearts, **{2.7}** and **{63.3}** **⟨19⟩**.

In many of the above verses, '*hypocrite*' seems to carry its general English meaning. The *munafiqun* are chastised for their inconstancy ('*…those who believe, and then disbelieve, and then believe, and then disbelieve*', **{4.137}**), for falsely pretending to believe that which they do not ('*And when they meet those who believe they say 'We believe', but when they are alone with their shaytans they say we are with you, we were only mocking'*, **{2.14}**), for taking disbelievers as friends rather than fellow believers, **{4.139}**, for mocking, **{8.64}**, - or being around those who mock, **{4.139}** - the Qurʾan, and for laxness in abiding by what has been forbidden and prescribed. In **{57.13-15}**, the term is illustrated through the Qurʾan's version of the parable of the unprepared bridesmaids **⟨20⟩**.

In other verses the term takes on a specific meaning of those who refuse to fight as they have been directed. One motive for their treachery would appear to be that such people had agreed to join Muhammad's fighting force in the hope of a share in the booty, but proved unreliable when they considered that a particular expedition was too risky:

{4.71} O you who believe! Take your precautions, then go forth in companies or go forth all together.

{4.72} Among you indeed is one who would tarry. Then if misfortune should befall you, he would say 'God has blessed me in that I did not accompany them.'

{4.73} But should bounty come to you from God, he would surely say - as if there had been no affection between you and him – 'O, would that I had been with them, so that I had attained a great triumph.'

C.f. **{9.74}**, **{29.10-11}**, **{33.18-19}** (produced above) and **{33.24}**.

Alternatively, **{63.1-8}** states that some hypocrites '*took their oaths as a shield*', probably a reference to those submitting out of fear that if they did not 'voluntarily' submit to the new regime, a less easy submission would be forced upon them. Short shrift is given to excuses, which should be met with harsh words:

> **{4.62}** …Then they will come to thee, swearing by God: 'We sought naught but virtue and harmony.'
>
> **{4.63}** They are those who God knows what is in their hearts. So turn away from them and admonish them and speak to them about their souls with penetrating words.

C.f. **{2.12}**.

These verses are clearly issued in response to particular events. In **{33.13}**, said to have been announced as Muhammad marched his fighters out to do battle with the Meccans at Mount Uhud **⟨42⟩**:

> **{33.13}** … a group among them said: 'O people of Yathrib. There is no stand for you, so turn back'.
>
> And a group among them sought permission from the prophet saying: 'Truly our houses are exposed' though they were not exposed: they wanted naught but to flee.

Bedouins ('*Arabi*) are invariably presented as tending to be particularly weaselly, **{9.90, 93-97 & 101}** and **{48.11, 15-16}**. In **Surah 63**, called ***The Hypocrites***, following an extended denouncement of the moral failings of those who are as reliable as '*leaning timbers*', the Qurʾan seems to reveal a plot by an enemy within to turn upon the believers and to expel them from Medina. Central to this is traditionally believed to be Yathrib tribal chief and serial hypocrite Abdullah ibn Ubayy **⟨42⟩**, **⟨43⟩**:

{63.7} There are ones who say: 'Do not spend on those who are with the Messenger of God, that they may disperse.'

Yet to God belongs the treasuries of the heavens and the earth, but the hypocrites comprehend not.

{63.8} They say: 'If we return to Medina the mightier will surely expel the weaker therefrom.'

Yet unto God belongs the might and unto His Messenger and the believers, but the hypocrites know not.

{58.7} (produced at **⟨20⟩** above) warns the Qurʾan's audience against treacherous plotting.

As the Quranic community grows in strength, it is able to order the execution of deserters and rumourmongers:

> **{4.89}**: '*… But if they turn their backs, then seize them and slay them wherever you find them*' **⟨93⟩**, and
>
> **{33.60-61}**: '*If the hypocrites do not desist … as well as those who spread false rumours in the city, We shall surely spur you against them. Then they will not be your neighbours therein but for a short while. Accursed! They will be seized wheresoever they are found, and utterly slain*.'

Naturally, following their dispatch from the world, hypocrites destined to be consigned to the Hellfire, indeed they will occupy '*the lowest depths of the Fire*', **{4.145}**.

Factionalism

Four passages suggest a greater level of disunity, even amongst apparently genuine believers in the Qurʾan, than one might expect

to find from the traditional Islamic narrative. **{4.92}**, as has been seen in **⟨74⟩** above, sets down sanctions that must be observed in the event of an accidental killing which sanctions vary according to the classification of the victim. One of these categories is that of believer, and another is unbelievers with whom one has a covenant. Between these two, is a category: '*If he belonged to a people who are your enemies and is a believer…* 'Here the Qurʾan appears to go beyond a prudent recognition of occasional disharmony as a regrettable fact of life. In formally prescribing a distinct legal sanction for the scenario where one group of believers is in a state of enmity of another group of people, the Qurʾan institutionalises the fragmentation of the community of believers into factions. It is likely that this verse reflects divisions that were already resulting in deadly, or potentially deadly, violence, that had formed within the Muslim community even during the lifetime of its founder. This impression is strengthened by:

{49.9} If two parties among the believers
fall to fighting, make peace
between them.

If one of them aggresses against the
other, fight those who aggress until
they return to God's Command.
And if they return make peace
between them with justice and act
equitably.

Truly God loves the just.

It seems unlikely that such an instruction – for one group of believers to fight other believers to counter the latter's aggression – would have been thought necessary if there was not serious discord, enough to justify violence, within the early Muslim community, that could not be resolved through referring the contested issue to God's messenger for arbitration.

Rebellion

Whilst in the above verses the Qurʾan author sets out rules for managing conflicts which may have nothing to do with religion, in **{15.90-91}** he addresses a group who '*make division*' (either of the Qurʾan itself or of the believing community), '*who made the Qurʾan into fragments*' ('*shreds*' per Yusuf Ali). In **{9.107-108}** the founders of a mosque are denounced as schismatic.

> **{9.107}** And as for those who established a mosque for harm and disbelieve, and to divide the believers and to be an outpost for those who made war on God and His Messenger before, they will surely swear: 'We desire only what is best.' But God bears witness that truly they are liars.
>
> **{9.108}** Never stand therein! Truly a mosque founded upon reverence from the first day is worthier of thy standing therein. Therein are men who love to purify themselves and God loves those who purify themselves.

Ibn Ishaq offers the following background for this verse:

> *The apostle went on until he stopped in Dhu Awan, a town an hour's daylight journey from Medina. The owners of the mosque of opposition had come to the apostle as he was preparing for Tabouk,* [*v.s.* **⟨50⟩**] *saying:*
>
> *'We have built a mosque for the sick and needy and for nights of bad weather, and we should like you to come and pray for us there'. (Muhammad) said that he was on the point of travelling and was preoccupied or words to that effect and that when he came back if God willed it, he would come to them and pray for them in it.*

> *When he stopped in Dhu Awan news of the mosque came to him and he summoned Malik bin al-Dukhshum, brother of Salim bin Auf, and Ma'n ibn Adiy, or his brother Asim, brother of al-Ajlan, and told them to go to the mosque of those evil men and destroy and burn it.*
>
> *They went quickly to Banu Salim bin Auf who were Malik's clan and Malik said to Ma'n: 'Wait for me until I can bring fire from my people.' So he went in and took a palm branch and lighted it, and then the two of them ran into the mosque where its people were and burned and destroyed it and the people ran away from it. A portion of the Qurʾan came down concerning them: 'Those who chose a mosque in opposition and unbelief…* **[{9.107}]**.[276]

This passage offers no clue as to why it was that the mosque was destroyed or in what way these mosque founders were evil men. Later commentaries, including that of Ibn Kathir, would try to fill this lacuna by suggesting that the mosque was built by a Christian, Abu ʿAmir al-Rahib (not mentioned in Ibn Ishaq's list of twelve mosque founders) to foment rebellion in the Islamic community, but six centuries after the event this is far too late in the historical record to be considered to be reliable.

90. Unbelievers are '*the worst of creatures*'

Surah 8 (*Al-Anfal/The Spoils of War*): 55

Surely the vilest of animals in Allah's sight are those who disbelieve, then they would not believe.

[*Shakir, 1968 (Al Azhar Univ., Cairo, Shia-orientated*)]

Reference has already been made to Daud Rahbur's survey of the Qurʾan's references to God leading unbelievers astray or otherwise preventing them recognising the authenticity of the Qurʾan and its announcer **⟨19⟩**. Rahbur concludes that these verses are consistently linked to the notion that those whom God misleads were already sinful and God acts not arbitrarily but upon His deeper knowledge of affairs than man can possibly comprehend. This interpretation, which it is suggested is correct, acquits the God of the Qurʾan from the accusation of arbitrarily creating some humans in order that he might led them astray and then punish them for what he has brought about. However, it follows from this understanding, that for believers, the scepticism of unbelievers is not the result of a failure of the intellect that might be rectified by evidence and reason. If not a sin itself, it is a sign of their guilt of some other grave, if unknown, sinfulness that has led to them being cursed by God with disbelief.

Whilst those who believe are celebrated as '*the best community brought forth unto mankind*', **{3.110}**, references in the later Qurʾan to those who do not believe are clearly designed to elicit contempt. **{8.55}**'s description of unbelievers as '*the vilest of animals*', above, is one of several verses that dismisses those who reject the Qurʾan's message with dehumanising insults. On three occasions they are compared to cattle:

90. Unbelievers are 'the worst of creatures'

{7.179}: 'We have indeed created for Hell, many among jinn and men: they have hearts with which they understand not …

Such as these are like cattle.
Nay, they are even further astray,

{25.44}, which uses the same wording as the last two lines of **{7.179}**, and

{47.12}: '*… Whilst those who disbelieve enjoy themselves and eat as cattle*'.

Twice (once with specific reference to Jews) rejectors are compared to asses:

{62.5}: '*the parable of those who were made to bear the Torah then did not hear it is that of an ass bearing books*', and

{74.50}: on the Last Day those led astray shall '*flee like frightened asses*'.

In other verses, the scene described in **{74.50}** describes unbelievers as being scattered like '*moths*' and '*locusts*' **(96)**.

A final beastly insult employed in the Qurʾan is one that was apparently directed by God at a specific person in **{7.175-176}**:

{7.175} And recite unto them the account of the One to whom We gave Our signs but he cast them off. So Satan made him his follower and he became one of the deviant ...

{7.176} Thus, his parable is that of a dog. If you attack him, he lolls his tongue and if you leave him alone, he lolls his tongue.

That is the likeness of the people who deny Our signs.

Cattle, asses, dogs all have natural roles in God's creation **⟨13⟩**, **⟨28⟩**, but in **{5.59-60}** the Qurʾan moves beyond mere insults and claims that God has, in the past, turned some of the people of the Book into '*apes and swine*', animals that have no positive Quranic associations:

> **{5.59}** Say: 'O People of the Book! Are you vengeful towards us for no other reason than that we believe in God and in that which hath been sent down to us and in that which was sent down before, and because most of you are iniquitous?
>
> **{5.60}** Say: 'Shall I inform you of something worse than that by way of recompense from God? Whomsoever God has cursed and upon whom is his wrath and among whom he has made some to be apes and swine, and who worship false deities, such are in a worse situation and further astray from the right way.'

This reference to God apparently having turned some People of the Book into apes and swine is almost certainly connected in some way to verses **{2.65}** and **{7.166}**, in each of which God recalls having cursed Jewish sabbath-breakers with the words '*Be ye apes, outcast*' **⟨88⟩**. If Jews had been turned into apes, this may imply that the People of the Book who had been turned into swine in **{5.60}** were pork-eating Christians. **{8.6.}** (produced above) and **{98.6.}** locate unbelievers upon the very lowest rung of creation:

> Truly the disbelievers among the People of the Book and the idolaters are in the fire of Hell, abiding therein.
>
> It is they who are the worst of creation.

The message from all these verses is clear enough. Disbelievers are unclean, **{9.28} ⟨51⟩**, and hated by God **⟨11⟩**. Their disbelief is not to be seen as a mental attitude but as a sign that they have been cursed by God for some past or innate wickedness, and those who are thus condemned should be perceived by believers as being less than human, of lower status even than livestock and beasts of toil. These polemic verses underpin the Qurʾan's denial of rights, including the right to life, to unbelievers (see **⟨73⟩** and **⟨93⟩**). The elimination of those damned by God is not portrayed as a conflict of ideas and piety between morally equivalent beings but an exercise in purging the Holy Land from defilement.

91. '*Al-wala wal bara'* (Loyalty and Rejection)

Surah 48 (*Al-Fath/The Victory*): 29

> **Muhammad is the apostle of God,**
> **and those who are with him are strong against**
> **unbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst**
> **each other….**
>
> [*Yusuf Ali, 1938*]

On multiple occasions, the Qur'an requires believers to maintain a clear division between themselves and infidels. Ten times it instructs believers not to take unbelievers as '*walīy*' ('*friends*' *per* Arberry and Pickthall; '*protectors*', *The Study Quran*, or, probably most authentically, '*allies*', Abdel-Haleem) in preference to other believers:

{3.28} (produced in **⟨92⟩** following),

{4.88-89} (see **⟨89⟩** and **⟨93⟩**),

{4.139 & 144}, **{8.73}** and **{13.16}** and

with specific reference to Jews and Christians, **{5.51-52}** **⟨88⟩**,

with specific reference to those who mock the signs of God, **{5.57}**,

with specific reference to family members, **{9.23}**,

The Qurʾan also contains two, similarly formulated, calls for believers to apply a double standard to others depending upon their faith or lack thereof: **{48.29}** (produced above), and **{5.54}**:

> **{5.54}** O you who believe! Whosoever among you should renounce his religion, God will bring a people whom He loves and who love him, humble toward to believers, stern toward unbelievers, striving in the way of God ['*waging jihād*'] and fearing not the blame of any blamer...

This doctrine of confessional self-segregation within society is sometimes referred to with the Arabic maxim '*al-wala wal bara*' ('*loyalty and rejection*').

Through these verses the author no doubt hoped to build those who believed in his prophethood into an exclusive and mutually supportive community, a '*party of God*', **{5.56}**, **{58.22}**, distinguished by its separation from the '*party of al-Shaytan*', **{58.19}**. Within the context of a society based upon clan loyalty and an ongoing conflict, this no doubt made pragmatic sense. Nevertheless, even allowing for the historical setting, these repeated instructions promoting confessional sectarianism are in marked contrast with most other religions' core texts that tend to preach the virtues of inclusivity and even-handedness.

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92. *Taqiyyah*

Surah 3 (*Al-ʿImrān/The House of Imran*): 28

> **Let not the believers take the disbelievers for friends rather than believers.**
> **And whoever does this has no connection with Allah - except that you guard yourselves against them, guarding carefully.**
> **And Allah cautions you against His retribution. And to Allah is the eventual coming.**

[*The Holy Qurʾan, English Translation and Commentary Maulana Muhammad Ali, 2010, (Lahore Ahmadiyya)*]

The above verse is sometimes cited by critics of Islam as the approval of deceit as a hostile strategy against unbelievers. This understanding of '*taqiyyah*', however, is based less upon the text of this passage, than upon the exegesis of it by Ibn Kathir, in the most widely read Qurʾan commentary:

> ('*...except that you guard yourselves against them, guarding carefully*') *means 'except those believers who in some areas or times fear for their safety from the disbelievers.' In this case, such believers are allowed to show friendship to the disbelievers outwardly, but never inwardly.*
>
> *For instance, al-Bukhari recorded that Abu Ad-Darda* [a companion of Muhammad] *said: 'We smile in the face of some people although our hearts curse them*'.

C.f. **{16.106}** which excuses those who pretend not to believe if as a result of coercion.

93. *Jihād*

Surah 9 (*Al-Tawbah/Repentance*): 19

Do you consider providing water to the pilgrims and the maintenance of the Sacred Mosque are equal to the piety of those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do Jihad in Allah's way?

In Allah's sight the two things are not equal; and Allah does not guide the wrongdoers.

[*The Majestic Qurʾan, Dr Musharraf Hussain OBE, (British-Pakistani anti-radicalisation adviser to UK government)*]

The highly charged word '*jihād*' ('*struggle*') occurs four times in the Qurʾan, although the associated verb '*jāhada*' occurs many more times. In some of the contexts in which they appear, including **{16.110}**, **{22.78}** and **{29.6}**, the word is intended to carry a general meaning of striving. In two instances it is used in respect of those who strive against the Qurʾan-believing community. However, on other occasions, and especially when used in the phrases '*to strive in God's way*' or '*to strive with one's wealth and one's self*', it carries the more specific sense of engaging in holy warfare. For example:

> **{2.218}**: '*Truly those who believe, and those who emigrate and strive in the way of God* ['*jāhadū fī sabīli l-lahi*'] *it is they who hope for the mercy of God*',
>
> which follows immediately after **{2.216 & 217}**'s '*Fighting has been prescribed for you, though it is hateful to you*' and the approval of fighting during in the sacred months, on the basis that '*fitna is worse than slaying*' **⟨38⟩**;

{3.142}: '*Or did you suppose that you would enter the Garden without God knowing those amongst you who strived…* [*'jāhadū'*]

which occurs within a long series of verses reproaching believers for their lack of discipline, traditionally associated with the Battle of Uhud **⟨42⟩**;

three uses of the words derived from the j-h-d root that occur in close proximity in **{8.72, 74 & 75}** within the context of celebrating a military victory, traditionally the Battle of Badr **⟨41⟩**,

{5.35}: '*Reverence God and seek the means to approach him and strive in His way* [*'wajāhidū fī sabīlihi'*],

which follows closely upon **{5.33}**, prescribing death, torture, mutilation and exile as the proper punishments for those who wage war against God and His Messenger and making mischief in the land **⟨72⟩**, and **{5.34}**'s caveat *'… save for those who repent before you overpower them*'; and

{5.54} which requires believers to be '*humble towards the believers, stern towards the disbelievers, striving in the way of God* [*'yujāhidūna fī sabīli l-lahi'*]'

Other verses instruct religious-military action without using the word '*jihād*' but employing the more direct '*qitâl*', to '*fight*' or '*slay*'.

Several of the passages to use these words, are more than mere grants of permission or even instructions to wage war, but read as rallying exhortations to motivate and embolden fighters prior to battle:

{8.65} O Prophet! Rouse the believers to fight. If there be twenty steadfast amongst you, they shall overcome

two hundred. And if there by one hundred of you they shall overcome one thousand of those who disbelieve, because they are a people who understand not.



{9.36} … And fight the idolaters all together, just as they fight you all together.

And know that God is with the reverent.



{9.123} O you who believe! Fight those disbelievers who are near to you and let them find in you harshness.

And know that God is with the reverent.



{47.34} Truly those who disbelieve and turn from the way of God, then die while they are disbelievers, God will not forgive them.

{47.35} So do not falter and call for peace while you have the upper hand.

God is with you and will not deprive you of your deeds.



{61.4} Truly God loves those who fight in his way in ranks as if they were a solid structure.

Many similar verses have been cited in the telling of the traditional life of Muhammad in **Part IV** above. These include the supposed first permissions to fight **⟨37⟩**, and reflections upon the raid at Naklah **⟨38⟩**, the battles of Badr **⟨41⟩**, Uhud **⟨42⟩** and the Trench **⟨44⟩**,

the punishment raids upon the Jewish tribes of Yathrib **⟨43⟩** and **⟨45⟩**, the capture of Kaybar **⟨47⟩**, the battles of Hunayn **⟨49⟩** and Tabouk **⟨50⟩** as well, of course, as the especially notorious 'sword verse' **⟨52⟩**.

An oft-cited hadith has Muhammad contrast the '*lesser*' military *jihād* with the '*greater jihād*' of '*striving against inner desires*' (sometimes called '*jihād al-nafs*', literally '*jihād of the soul*' or '*jihād with oneself*'). However, this saying is not contained within any of the early biographies of Muhammad, nor in any of the major Sunni collections of *aḥādīth* and can only be traced back as early as the eleventh century, making it a certain forgery.[277] A spiritual *jihād* is referred to in one verse, **{29.6}**, as is '*jihād* '*by means of*' the Qurʾan, **{25.52}**, but in direct contradiction to the proposed saying of Muhammad that mastery of oneself is the '*greater jihād*', **{9.19}** produced above, unambiguously lauds participation in *jihād* of the sword as superior to providing non-combat service. The same point is also made in **{4.95}**, which states that those believers who '*stay behind*' are not equal with those who '*strive in God's way*', '*save for those that are disadvantaged*' (*i.e.* infirm), demonstrating that the phrase '*jihād in God's way*' refers to physical rather than spiritual struggles.

Reasons for *Jihād*

It has been seen that some verses of the Qurʾan encourage patience and forbearance in the face of opposition **⟨83⟩**. However, these are far outnumbered, and, if surahs are read in their traditional chronological order, qualified or superseded by those verses instructing violence in response to provocation.

The Qurʾan provides at least eleven distinct reasons for fighting:

1. Righteous retribution:

> **{22.39-41}**: '*…Permission (to fight) is granted to those who are fought, because they* (the believers) *have been wronged, who were expelled from their homes without right*' **⟨37⟩**.

2. The rescue of a specific people from an unnamed town (traditionally treated as an instruction to conquer Mecca):[278]

> **{4.74-76}**: '*What ails you that you fight not in the way of God and for the weak and oppressed - men, women and children – who cry out 'Lord bring us forth from this town whose people are oppressors…'*.

3. The removal of an obstacle to, or the prevention of disrespect to, the practice of religion (*dīn*) taught by the Qurʾan:

> **{2.217}** (see **⟨37⟩**),
>
> **{9.12}**: '*But if they renege on their oaths after having made their treaty, and vilify your religion* [*dīn*]*, then fight the leaders of disbelief ... that they might desist*'.

4. The punishment of oath-breaking and desertion:

> **{9.12}** (see above),
>
> **{4.89}** They wish that you should disbelieve even as they disbelieve, that you may be on a level with them. So take them not as protectors till they migrate in the way of God.
>
> But if they turn their backs, then seize them and slay them wherever you find them and take no helper or protector from amongst them.

5. As a demonstration of God's power:

   {8.7-8}: '*God desires to verify the truth through his words and to cut off the last remnant of the unbelievers*',

   {8.57}: '*If thou comest upon them (unbelievers) in war, use them to scatter those who will come after them that haply they might be reminded*',

   {8.67}: '*It is not for a prophet to take captives until he has overwhelmed his enemies in the land*' (see **⟨41⟩** above),

   and **{48.18-20}** (see **⟨48⟩** above);

6. As a test for believers:

   {47.4}: '*…And if God willed, he would take vengeance upon them, but that He may test some of you by means of others….*' and

   {47.31}: '*And We shall test you until We know those amongst you who strive and those who are patient, and We shall test your proclamations*',

7. To reward believers with the spoils of war:

   {3.145}: *'Whosoever desires the reward of this world, We shall give him of it ... And we shall reward the thankful'* **⟨41⟩**,

   {8.68-69}: *'Were it not for a decree that had already gone forth from God, a great punishment would have befallen you for what you took. So consume the spoils you have taken lawfully and in a good way and reverence God'*,

{33.27}: '*And He bequeathed unto you their land, their homes, their property and a land you have not trodden*',

(traditionally related to the annihilation of the Banu Qurayza **⟨45⟩** and the future capture of Kaybar **⟨47⟩**),

{48.15-20}: '*Those who stayed behind will say, when you set out to capture spoils … God has promised you abundant spoils that you will capture*',

(traditionally related to the capture of Kaybar **⟨47⟩**).

8. Confrontation of believers who oppress their fellow believers:

{49.9} (see **⟨89⟩** above).

9. to expand, without limit, the territory wherein the '*dīn*' of Islam prevails and to enforce God's commands therein:

{2.191, 193 & 217}: '*Fitna is worse than slaying*' **⟨37⟩**,

{8.12-17}: '*I shall cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve, ...that is because they are in schism with God and His Messenger*' **⟨41⟩**,

{8.39}: '*And fight them until there is no fitna and religion is wholly for God*',

{24.55}: '*God has promised those among you who believe and perform righteous deeds that He will surely make them vice-regents upon the earth*',

{48.28}: '*He it is who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all religion*', and

{59.4}: '*That is because they* [the Banu Nadir? **⟨43⟩**] *defied God and his Messenger*';

10. Compulsion of the payment of the *jizya* in submission:

{9.29}: '*Fight those who believe not in God … and who follow not the Religion of Truth among those who were given the Book till they pay the jizya with a willing hand being humbled*' **⟨51⟩.**

11. Most frequently, the punishment of unbelievers for their disbelief:

{3.141}: '*So that God may assay those who believe and blight the unbelievers*',

{4.102}: '*Surely God has prepared for the unbelievers a humiliating punishment*',

{4.141}: '*God will not grant the disbelievers a way over the believers*',

{9.5}: '*Then … slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them, capture them, besiege them and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush*' **⟨52⟩**,

{9.26}: '*Then God sent down His Tranquillity upon His messenger and upon the believers and sent down hosts whom you saw not and punished those who disbelieved*' **⟨12⟩**, **⟨49⟩**,

{9.29 & 123} (see above),

{33.25}: '*And God turned back those who disbelieved in their rage … God sufficed the believers in battle*',

{47.4}: '*When you meet those who disbelieve, strike at their necks; then when you have overwhelmed them tighten their bonds...*' (see **⟨94⟩** following),

and

{66.9}: '*O prophet, strive against the unbelievers and the hypocrites and be harsh with them. Their refuge is Hell*'.

This last rationale is to be read within the context of the Quranic doctrine that unbelievers are active concealer of the truth **⟨87⟩** and already cursed by God **⟨90⟩**, whilst to be an idolater is to be guilty of the gravest sin of all, for *'Who does a greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God?'* **⟨87⟩**.

Offers of peace

Several verses instruct that believers should cease fighting if their opponents offer peace:

{2.192-193}: '*But if they desist, then truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. …But if they desist there is no enmity save against the wrongdoers*' **⟨37⟩**,

{4.89-91}: '*If they turn their backs then seize them and slay them* [see above] *... Save those who seek refuge with people with whom you have a covenant, or those who come to you with hearts reluctant to fight you or to fight their own people …*

So if they withdraw from you and do not fight you and offer peace, God allows you no way against them',

{8.38-39}: '*Say to the disbelievers that if they desist what is past will be forgiven them but if they relapse the wont of those of old has already passed And fight them until there is no strife and religion is wholly for God. But if they desist then truly God sees whatsoever they do.*'

{8.58-61}: '*And if thou fearest treachery from a people, withdraw from them in a just way. Truly God loves not the treacherous… And if they incline towards peace incline thou towards it and trust in God.*'

{9.5 & 7 & 11}: '*If they repent and perform the prayer and give the alms then let them go their way …*

If they remain true to you remain true to them. Truly God loves the reverent…

But if they repent and perform the prayer and give the alms then they are your brother in religion'.

It might be thought that since these verses prohibit fighting a people who have communicated an unwillingness to fight, one must necessarily infer from them that fighting is only permitted in the first instance as a response to an aggression. This, however, is unsound reasoning. In **Surahs 4**, **8** and **9** verses instructing the acceptance of peace terms are inserted amongst those instructing war so as to give passages a schizophrenic quality. In the case of **Surah 9** it is reasonable to doubt that they were originally composed in the textual setting in which they now appear. But looking at the '*jihād*' verses in the round, it would be quite unrealistic to prioritise the handful of war-limiting verses from the background of calls for the slaying of infidels and to draw from the former a message of peaceful and tolerant co-existence. Such a benign interpretation must be weighed against the eleven reasons given for waging *jihād* in the first place, all except two of which are inconsistent with fighting only being permitted against those who aggress first. Furthermore, the verses urging the acceptance of offers of peace are, with the exception of **{9.5 & 11}**, silent as to terms that may or must be required of an enemy in order to treat them as having '*desisted*' from opposition to or '*inclined towards peace*' with the Quranic community. It would be illogical for the Qurʾan to require the acceptance of peace terms that do not achieve the objective that was the justification in the first place. Consequently, any interpretation that reconciles the verses of war with those of peace must assume that the duty to desist only applies if the other party agrees, at the very least, to accepting the believers' administration amongst themselves of the laws and punishments of sharïa, to pay the *jizya* '*with a willing hand having been subdued*', and not to act in a way that the Quranic ruler would regard as mischievous.

More fundamentally, the search within these verses for an objective and coherent regime for determining when violence is

justified must not overlook the crucial factor that the Qurʾan invariably couches this issue in terms of religious exceptionalism. The rationale for violence is never expressed in terms of the behaviour of its opponents *per se*. Rather the Qurʾan's audience is urged to '*strive in the way of God*' against an enemy that is invariably defined and condemned by their lack of belief in, and therefore defiance of, God. Twice they are called '*the allies of Satan*', **{3.175}** and **{4.76}**. It is the securing of obedience to God's will that is the ultimate goal of Quranic violence and which lies behind **Surah 47**'s instructions to:

> '*Do not falter and call for peace until you have the upper hand*', **{47.35}**, and
>
> '*Then, when you have overwhelmed them, tighten their bonds*', **{47.4}** (see **⟨94⟩** following),

and **{8.67}**'s *'It is not for a prophet to take captives until he has overwhelmed his enemy in the land.*' The Qurʾan does not at any stage present a justification of violent *jihād* according to any general regime of rights that might, in some circumstances, work to the benefit of a non-believer against a believer. Rather, it appears to comprise a series of rhetorical declarations of divine authority to the command decisions taken by its author. According to the traditional Islamic narrative, Muhammad began his military campaign as a robber of caravans in which he seems to have not concerned himself with the culpability of the owners of the property he seized nor of those charged with its protection. He is then said to have engaged in campaigns against neighbouring Bedouin tribes and Jewish settlements that had done him no harm, to prepare for the assault upon Mecca. Even after the surrender of Mecca, he persisted with campaigns of conquest to the south and north, always in the name of a God-ordered holy war against accursed and vile infidels. The example that this story offers would appear to be to speak virtuously to opponents when one is weak and to become increasingly militant as one's power grows.

In truth, this traditional narrative is entirely unreliable, and the historical context for the Qurʾan's war verses that is proposed in this book is considerably less repugnant than the traditional Islamic account. Yet there can be no doubt on any reasonable

reading of the text that the Qurʾan was composed by a man who was not merely a religious leader but a political and military leader too, who seized loot, permitted his fighters to enslave and rape captives and used violence to deal with the issues of unwilling fighters and deserters. The earliest historical accounts of Muhammad are written by those who experience him as a warlord, rather than as a man of God **⟨50⟩**.

94. Rules of War and Treatment of Captives

Surah 47 (*Muhammad*): 4

**When you meet those who disbelieve,
strike at their necks. Then when you have
overwhelmed them, tighten the bonds.
Then free them graciously or hold them for
ransom till war lays down its burden.
Thus (shall it be). And if God willed, He
would take vengeance upon them, but that He
may test some of you by means of others.
And for those who are slain in the way of God
he will not make their deeds go astray.**

[*The Study Quran*]

{2.190} (see **⟨37⟩**) instructs:

> And fight in the way of God
> against those who fight
> against you but do not
> transgress.
>
> Truly, God loves not the
> transgressors.

The Qurʾan itself contains no rules of war but concerning the '*transgressions*' that **{2.190}** instructs Muslims to avoid, the *Al-Muwatta* of Malik bin Anas recalls two accounts of Abu Bakr, the first caliph, giving instruction to his commanders prior to the invasion of Syria. One of these contains the following:

> *You will find a people who claimed that they devoted themselves totally for Allah's sake. So leave them with their claim.*

> *Further you will find a people who shaved the middle of their heads, therein strike with the sword what they have shaved of the middle of their heads.*
>
> *And I entrust you with (the hereinafter):*
> *You should not kill a woman, a child or an old person,*
> *you should not cut down fruitful trees.*
> *Neither should you devastate a flourishing area,*
> *slaughter a sheep or a camel except for food, burn bees or scatter them, misappropriate war booty or be a coward.* [279]

The second account is similar but makes the mutilation of the bodies of their slain enemies an additional prohibition. Summaries of these rules are frequently cited in Islamic sources. A further restriction concerning the acceptable way of prosecuting war, is contained in a hadith of Abu Dawood which records Muhammad saying: '*It is not proper to punish with fire, except the Lord of Fire*'. This is sometimes treated as a prohibition on the use of fire as a weapon (although such a rule would conflict with Ibn Ishaq's account that Muhammad himself tortured Kinana with fire after his capture of Kaybar **⟨47⟩**.) It should be noted that Abu Bakr's instruction not to kill '*a woman, a child or an old person*' does not prohibit, and therefore must be taken as implicitly permitting, the killing of male adult prisoners after a battle (see **⟨41⟩** and **⟨45⟩**). Nor could it prohibit the enslavement of captives **⟨58⟩**, and, in the case of females, their rape by their captors and those to who they may eventually be sold, **⟨49⟩** and **⟨59⟩**.

The spoils of war

{8.1} declares that '*The spoils (of war) belong to God and His Messenger.*' **{8.41}** amends this blanket claim to: '*Whatsoever you take as spoils, a fifth is for God and His messenger, and for kinsfolk, orphans the indigent and the traveller*' suggesting a transition from a simple religiously justified dispossession of infidels by God's prophet, to a formalised economy of plunder.

95. Martyrdom

Surah 61 (*Al-Saff/The Ranks*): 10-12

10. O You who believe! Shall I guide you to a commerce that will save you from a painful torment?

11. That you believe in Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad, blessings of God be upon him), and that you strive hard and fight in the Cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives, that will be better for you, if you but know!

12. (If you do so) He will forgive you your sins, and admit you into Gardens under which rivers flow, and pleasant dwelling in Gardens of Eden: Eternity, that is indeed the great success.

[*Hilali & Khan*]

{61.12} is one of several verses, that promise forgiveness and entry to Paradise to those who fight in God's way, and which express this in the language of a commercial transaction:

{2.244-245}: '*So fight in the way of God…*
Who shall lend God a goodly loan which He will multiply for him many times over ...
And unto Him shall you be returned'.

{9.111}: '*Truly God has purchased from the believers their souls and wealth in exchange for the Garden … And who is truer to his pact than God? So rejoice in the bargain you have made…*'

In **{3.157-158 & 195}** (see **⟨38⟩**), **{4.74}** and **{22.58-59}**, Paradise is also promised to '*mujahedīn*' but in theses verses the promise extends not to all fighters but only to those who die or are slain.

{2.154-157}, **{3.169-171}** and **{3.195}** go further than these simple promise of eventual admission to Paradise, as illustrated in the following passage:

{3.169} And deem not those slain in the way of God to be dead. Rather they are alive with their Lord provided for,

{3.170} Exulting in what God has given them of His Bounty, and rejoicing in those who have not yet joined them from among those who remain behind – that no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve,

{3.171} Rejoicing in Blessing and Bounty from God, and that God neglects not the reward of the believers.

Surah 47 appears to have Muhammad taking upon himself forgiving sins in a verse that appears within a martial context:

{47.2} And those who believe and perform righteous deeds, and believe in what has been sent down unto Muhammad—and it is the truth from their Lord—He has absolved them of their evil deeds and set their state aright.

{47.3} That is because those who disbelieve follow falsehood and because those who believe follow the truth from their Lord. Thus does God set forth for mankind their likenesses.

{47.4} When you meet those who disbelieve, strike at their necks; then, when you have overwhelmed them, tighten the bonds...

It has been suggested above **⟨5⟩** that '*Muhammad*', here and elsewhere in the Qurʾan, may have been used as an epithet for Jesus. If so, it is possible that these verses may have been revealed to motivate a continent of Christian fighters during the Palestine campaign. Whether it is so or not, the underlying concept of forgiveness in return for martyrdom is a Quranic variation upon an established Christian doctrine. In the Book of Revelation (6.9-11) St John the Divine describes his vision of '*the spirits of those who were martyred*' beneath God's altar where he sees that they have been given white robes. He hears them call out: '*How long will it be O Master, holy and true, before you judge our cause and avenge our blood among the inhabitants of the earth?*' Based upon this passage the early church preached that those who were martyred for their belief in Christ, by voluntarily forsaking the world in order to participate in Christ's suffering, must have had all their sins absolved at the moment of their death. As a result, they must be alive and conscious, awaiting the Day of Judgment, rather than dead and awaiting resurrection. A similar idea appears to lie behind the Qurʾan's assurance that whilst most people, believers and unbelievers alike, will spend the time after their death in a state of conscious death until they are raised and judged by God on the Last Day **⟨96⟩**, those who are '*slain in the way of God*', avoid death and judgment in **{2.154-157}** and **{3.169-171 & 195}**.

The word '*martyr*', from the Greek '*martus*', literally means '*witness*' as does the Islamic equivalent word '*shahīd*'. However, the

historical context gives the two doctrines a quite different application. In the first century of church history, prior to the book of Revelation, the correlation between being a witness for one's faith and dying for it has a more specific connotation than does '*shahīd*' in Islam. During the persecution of Christianity by the Roman Empire, a Christian's refusal to honour the pagan gods of Rome and their confession of their Christian faith often led directly to their execution. Notwithstanding the painful manner in which they were tortured and killed, the Christian martyrs of the first century are invariably recorded going peaceably and cheerfully to their deaths for proclaiming their faith. In the Qurʾan and Islamic tradition, by contrast, martyrdom is presented as dying in battle, for *jihād*, often engaged in taking the fight to the unbelievers.

VIII

The End of Days

96. The Last Day

81 (*Al-Takwir/The Enfolding*) 14

1. When the sun shall be darkened,
2. When the stars shall be thrown down,
3. When the mountains shall be set moving,
4. When the pregnant camels shall be neglected,
5. When the savage beasts shall be mustered,
6. When the seas shall be set boiling,
7. When the souls shall be coupled,
8. When the buried infant shall be asked
9. For what sin she was slain,
10. When the scrolls shall be unrolled,
11. When heaven shall be stripped off,
12. When Hell shall be set blazing,
13. When Paradise shall be brought nigh,
14. Then shall a soul know what it has produced.

[*Arberry*]

The Imminence of the Last Day

Very many Qurʾan verses refer to '*the Last Day*', '*the Day of Judgment*' or simply '*the Day*' or '*the Hour*'. A number of these are emphatic that the end of the world is imminent:

{16.77}: '*The matter of the Hour is as the blinking* [or '*twinkling*'] *of an eye, or nearer still*',

{53.57}: '*The imminent is nigh*', and

> **{75.34-35}**: *'So nearer to you! And nearer!*
> *Then nearer to you! And nearer!'*

C.f. **{40.18}**, **{70.6-7}** and **{78.40}**. In particular, it is repeatedly said of those who mocked the prophet that their disbelief would soon be confounded by the Hour in a way that implies that this would occur before the end of their expected lifespan:

> **{15.3}**: '*Leave them to eat and enjoy themselves and to be beguiled by hopes, for soon they will know*',
> (*c.f.* **{40.70}**),
>
> **{24.6}**: '*Indeed they have denied it but there shall come to them tidings of that which they used to mock*',
>
> **{36.48-49}**: *'They await naught but a single Cry that will seize them while they dispute among themselves*'.

When it is asked of the Qurʾan's announcer: '*When will this promise come to pass if you are truthful?'* the following is the reply:

> **{67.25}**: *'The knowledge lies with God alone … And when they see it close at hand the faces of those who disbelieved shall be stricken and it shall be said 'This is that which you called for',*

So close is the end of days that a number of verses announce that '*the Word of thy Lord*' or '*the Word of punishment'* has *'come due*', **{10.33}**, **{16.1}**, {**22.18}**, **{36.7}**, **{39.71}** and **{40.6}**. **Surah 97** appears to give an account of the descent of God's command to bring the peace of earthly night to an end and initiate the dawn of the Day of Judgement **⟨4⟩**.

In other, probably later-revealed, verses however, the references to the imminence of the apocalypse have become equivocal:

> **{17.51}**: '*And they will shake their heads at thee and say when will it be?*
>
> *Say: 'It may well be nigh*',
>
> **{27.72}**: '*Say: 'It may be that some of what you seek to hasten is close behind you',*' and

{33.63} and **{42.17}**: '*Say: 'Knowledge thereof [i.e., of the Last Day] lies only with God … Perhaps the Hour is nigh'.*'

In **{30.4}** '*that Day when the believers will rejoice*' (for which see **⟨1⟩** above) is still '*a few years*' away. Ultimately, in **{72.25}**, the Qurʾan refuses to affirm that the Last Day is even close at all:

> **{72.25}** Say: 'I know not whether that which you are promised is nigh or whether my Lord has appointed a term.'

In possibly the last direct Quranic reference to the timing of the Hour, the eager anticipation of those who prayed to God to '*hasten the punishment*' is dampened with the observation that '*truly a day with your Lord is a thousand years of that which you reckon*', **{22.47}**, **{32.4}**; or even fifty thousand years, **{70.4}**.

Warnings of an imminent apocalypse, if believed, would be a powerful factor in the Qurʾan author gaining the attention of his audience and persuading them to examine their consciences and make amends, but if he had really expected that the end was nigh come what may, it is hard to see his motivation to fight to regain the Masjid al-Haram and expand the territory of Dar al-Islam. Nor what purpose would have been served by the announcement of laws for governing a community that included the regulation of inheritance, the settling of disputes, the collection of taxation and the division of booty and divorces; for prescribing a period for the weaning of children and requiring believers to write wills. As the Quranic community grew in numbers and strength, it is easy to see that maintaining constant anxiety over an imminent apocalypse would have become increasingly unhelpful in organising this community to thrive in the medium to long term. Such warnings would also, inevitably, have become less credible with the passage of time. One may infer that it is for these reasons, the Qurʾan author, at some stage in the narration history, shifted his emphasis from warnings of global apocalypse to threats of localised punishment-narratives **⟨27⟩**, and, as his community grew stronger still, increasingly undertook the role of the instrument of divine wrath himself **⟨93⟩**.

The Events of the Last Day

Shortly before it does eventually arrive, the Qurʾan tells us that the Last Day will be preceded by the return of Jesus as '*a portent of the hour*', **{43.61} ⟨26⟩**. Some hadith accounts attributed to Muhammad, prophesy of two other supernatural figures, referred to as the '*Masīh al-Dajjāl*' (the '*False Messiah*' or the '*Antichrist*'[280]) who will rule the world from Constantinople, and the Mahdi[281] who will arrive with Jesus to defeat the Masih al-Dajjal and to drive evil from the world prior to the Last Day. Others describe a great pre-apocalyptic war between Muslims and Jews, in which the natural world will assist the former in achieving the latter's annihilation:

> *The Hour will not begin until the Muslims fight the Jews and the Muslims will kill them, until a Jew hides behind a rock or a tree, and the rock or tree will say: 'O Muslim, O slave of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him'; except the gharqad (a thorny tree), for it is one of the trees of the Jews.*[282]

For most Shia Muslims, the Mahdi is also identified with the twelfth and final imam, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Askari, who is believed to have disappeared from human view c. 940.

Descriptions of the Last Day itself draw much from the apocalypses of the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Revelation. That Day will dawn with the breaking loose of Gog and Magog from behind the wall built to contain them by Dhu'l Qarnayn **⟨30⟩**. A fearsome creature, the '*dābbat al-arḍ*' ('*the Beast of the Earth*') will also roam free '*who will speak to unbelievers of how they were uncertain of God's signs*,' **{27.82}** – and, some believe, brand them upon the nose to remind them of their faithlessness.[283] One may assume that the Quranic Beast of the Earth is the same entity as the Beast of the Earth that appears in the Book of Revelation (13.11-18), to mark men with its number, 666, although the Qurʾan has, though, no equivalent of this beast's aquatic counterpart, the Beast of the Sea (Revelation 13.1-10).

Mankind will experience the Hour in the shaking of the earth **{19.90}**, **{27.88}**, **{56.4-6}**, **{69.14}**, **{73.14}**, **{89.21}** and **{99.1}**. (*c.f.* Amos 8.9). In the heavens above him, man will see the sky '*like*

molten lead', **{70.8}**, '*churn with great churning*' ('*spin dizzily*' *per* Arberry), **{52.9}**, before the stars are dispersed, **{77.8-9}** and **{82.1}**, and it is '*cleft asunder*'. The sky shall '*bring forth manifest smoke covering the people*', **{44.10-11}** and the sun shall be '*darkened*', literally '*enfolded*' (*per The Study Quran*) or '*shrouded*' (Abdel-Haleem), *c. f.* Joel 2.2, 3.3-4 Amos 5.18 & 8.5, Zephaniah 1.15). Alternatively, '*the sun and the moon will join together*', **{75.9}**. God shall then take the earth and heavens in His Right Hand, **{39.67}**, and '*roll up the sky like the rolling of scrolls for writing*', **{21.104}** (an image drawn directly from Isaiah 34.4 and Revelation 6.14).

'*On that Day*', as they realise what is occurring people's reaction shall show in their faces, which shall be either '*shining radiant, laughing glorious*' in the case of believers or '*covered with dust, overspread with darkness*', **{80.38-41}** (*c.f.* **{3.106}**, **{75.22-24}**, **{88.2}**) '*as if their faces ware covered by dark patches of night*', or, *per* al-Muntakhab:

> **{10.27}**. '*Their faces shall be coated with gloom,*
> *a painful distressing darkness they will have to assume.*'

Many will respond with panic so that '*a man will flee from his brother, and his father and his mother and his spouse and children*', **{80.34-36}**; scattered abroad like moths, **{101.4}**, or ashes, **{20.105}** (*c.f.* Zephaniah 2.2: '*before you are driven away like chaff passes on*'). Others will try to ransom themselves by their kin and even by all who dwell upon the earth, **{70.11-14}**. '*Every nursing woman will forget what she nurses, and every pregnant woman deliver her burden, and you will see mankind drunk though drunk they will not be*', **{22.2}**.

The dead

Contributing to this scene of pandemonium, those who have died will '*with eyes humbled, emerge from their graves like scattered locusts*', **{54.7}** (*c.f.* **{23.100}**, **{39.68}** and **{99.6}**; also Revelation 20.13: '*the sea gave up its dead, then death and the netherworld gave up their dead. Each person was judged according to his conduct*'). This will be so even for those whose bodies have, since their death, turned to stone or iron, **{17.50}**. The status of the deceased in the period between their

death and their resurrection appears to involve some consciousness and feeling of regret:

{23.99} Till when death comes to one of [*the wrongdoing people*] he says 'My Lord return me,

{23.100} That haply I may work righteousness with regard to that which I left.'

Nay indeed. These are his words but behind him is a barrier till the Day they are resurrected.

C.f. **{6.27}**, **{7.53}**, **{14.44}**, **{23.107}**, **{32.12-15}**, **{35.36-37}**, **{39.58}**, **{42.44}**, **{63.10}**. These accounts of consciousness in the grave recall recall some of the Hebrew Bible's references to Sheol, used as an epithet for death *e.g* Job 10.21 ('*Before I go whence I shall not return to the land of darkness and of gloom*'), Psalm 88.6 ('*… like the slain who lie in the grave, Whom you remember no longer and who are cut off from your care*') and Psalm 94.17 ('*Were not the Lord my help, I would soon dwell in the silent grave*')[284]. In particular, the expressions of remorse for sins committed in life and a forlorn desire to return to the land of the living to put matters aright has similarity to the pleas of the rich man in a parable told by Jesus who sees his former destitute neighbour Lazarus resting in the bosom of Abraham (Luke 16.19-31, also referred to at **⟨100⟩** below). Because Lazarus asks that a warning be sent to his brothers who are at that time still alive, the conversation between him and Abraham must be supposed to be taking place prior to the Last Day. Consequently, the 'abyss' that Abraham refers to when he tells the rich man '*Between you and us there is fixed a great abyss so that those who might wish to cross from here to you cannot do so, nor can anyone cross from your side to us*'[285] (below) must be a division between the gloomy Sheol and the more comfortable abode of the righteous dead (see **⟨99⟩**). It is debateable how literally either Jesus or his audience may have taken the idea of consciousness in the grave prior to the resurrection. As a parable, the setting of the story, as well as the conversation, may well have been entirely imaginal. The author of the Qurʾan,

however, appears to treat the period of living death literally, for he asserts that for the deceased in this state time will have passed quickly and they will think that they had tarried '*but an hour of a day*', **{10.45}**, **{30.55}**, **{46.35}** or '*but a short while*', **{17.52}**.

The gathering for judgment

As the revived dead join the living, the mountains will pass away, **{18.47}**, '*like clouds*', **{27.88}**, or '*tufts of wool*', **{101.5}**, (*per* Abdel-Haleem, Muhammad Asad). This flattening of the earth shall create a great plain, **{84.3-4}**, on which there is '*no curvature nor crookedness*', **{20.102-108}**. This is the Plain of Qiyamah. Here, a trumpeter will summons a great gathering with a fanfare, **{6.73}**, **{18.99}**, **{20.102}** and **{39.68}**, reflecting Joel 2.1:

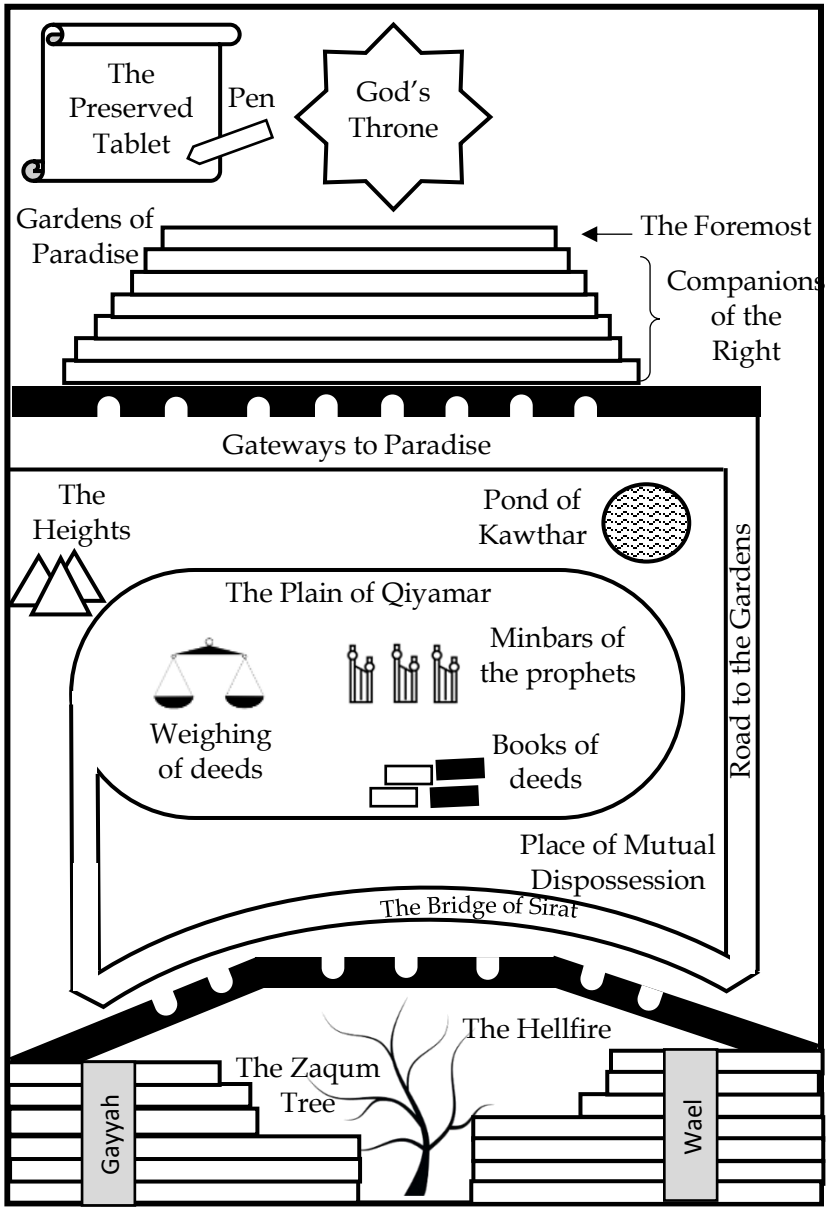
> *Blow the trumpet in Zion,*
> *Sound the alarm on my Holy Mountain!*
> *Let all who dwell in the land tremble,*
> *For the day of the Lord is coming,*

and Zephaniah 1.16 (*c.f.* the '*mighty trumpet blast*' that Jesus warns will herald the coming of the Son of Man in Matthew 24.31, and the seven angelic trumpeters in the Book of Revelation, chapters 8-11). Thereupon, every person, **{3.25}**, **{4.87}**, **{18.47-48}**, **{79.14}** (save apparently for the *shahīd* **⟨95⟩** and the prophets), and every jinni, **{6.128}**, and animal, **{6.38}**, **{81.5}**, that has ever lived will be driven forward together to face judgment; *c.f* Joel 4.2:

> '*I will assemble all the nations,*
> *and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat*
> [literally '*Yahweh judges*']
> *And I will enter into judgment with them there.*'

G. The Eschatology of the Qurʾan

Based upon *Marifetname, Ibramhim Hakka, 1753*



97. Judgment

Surah 99 (*Al-Zalzalah/The Earthquake*): 4-8

4. That Day she [*the earth*] shall convey her chronicles,

5. For the Lord inspired her.

6. That Day mankind shall issue forth upon diverse paths to witness their deeds.

7. So whosoever does a mote's weight of good we shall see it,

8. And whosoever does a mote's weight of evil we shall see it.

[*The Study Quran*]

On the Day of Judgment, those facing judgment shall be propelled forward '*with a driver and a witness*', **{50.21}**. These witnesses, God shall have raised up '*from every community*', **{4.41}** and **{16.84}** (*c.f.* **{57.19}**). Only two are identified. Jesus is named as witness for all the People of the Book:

> **{4.159}** There is not one of the People of the Book but will surely believe in (Jesus) before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them.

Muhammad shall be a witness for the community of those that believe in him, **{2.143}** and **{22.78}**.

There are four possible outcomes. A basic division is made between the '*companions of the right*', who shall be admitted to the

Gardens of Paradise **⟨99⟩** and '*the companions of the left*', who are consigned to the Hellfire **⟨100⟩**, **{56.7-56}** and **{90.18-19}**. This right-saved, left-damned symbolism directly recalls the words of Jesus in the Gospel of St Matthew (25.31-40):

> *When the Son of Man comes in glory, escorted by all the angels of heaven, he will sit upon his royal throne and all the nations will be assembled before him. Then he will separate them into two groups as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The sheep he will place on his right hand, the goats on the left.*

However, in the Qurʾan it is not God's Hands that dictate this division but rather the hands of the person being judged. It will be recalled that throughout a person's life their virtuous and sinful deeds will have been meticulously recorded in books by angels on their right and left shoulders **⟨14⟩**. **Surah 83** tells us that '*the book of the profligate*' is kept in Sijjin (literally '*a prison*'), **{83.7}**, sometimes imagined to lie deep in the earth, whilst the books of the pious are in Illiyun, **{83.18}**, (literally '*high places*') At judgment, these books shall be scrutinised and audited, (c.f. Daniel 7.9: '*As I watched, the court was convened and the books were opened*') and each person shall be handed their individual judgment. **{17.71}** and **{69.19 & 25}** state that these books shall be proffered to the recipient to take in either their right or their left hand. **{84.7-12}** expresses this moment slightly differently: here, the book is given for a person to receive either in their right hand or '*from behind his back*'. The inference from this would appear to be that all people will be made to await their verdicts with their left hands bound behind their backs. It is, of course, the hand to which the book is delivered that shall convey to the recipient whether it contains a preponderance of good or evil deeds. '*Whosoever is given his book in his right hand*' shall then be called '*by their imam*', **{17.71}**, and joyfully rejoin his people, **{84.9}**. Those who find themselves holding a book in their left hand will cry out for their own destruction, **{84.9}**.

None will be permitted to present any defence, **{16.85}**, **{30.57}**, **{45.35}**. Instead, those being damned will stand helpless as '*their tongues, their hands and their feet*', **{24.24}**, or in **{41.19-24}** '*their ears, their eyes and their skins*', '*shall give witness against them for that which*

they used to do.' In any event, any speech would be futile since, as the Qurʾan ominously warns:

> **{50.16}** We did indeed create man,
> and We know what his soul
> whispers to him, and We are
> nearer to him than his
> jugular vein.

C.f. **{8.24}**: '*God comes between a man and his heart*'.

Although most will receive a judgment that they are a companion either of the right or the left, two further disposals are possible. A few of those who receive books in their right hand will be judged to be amongst '*the foremost*'. These exalted ones shall enjoy rewards in Paradise that are superior to those granted to the companions of the right simpliciter. A fourth category is that of those destined for the Heights (see **⟨98⟩** following) whose ultimate fate the Qurʾan does not disclose.

Quranic soteriology

There is no consensus in Islam as to the criteria either for salvation or for inclusion within the foremost, the latter being described as '*many from those of old, and few from those of later times*', **{56.13-14}**. Throughout the Qurʾan the promise of heaven and threat of hell are frequently directed towards '*believers*' and '*unbelievers*' respectively, in verses such as:

> **{10.103}**: '*We save our messengers and those who believe. Thus, is it incumbent upon Us to save believers*',
>
> **{3.116}**: '*Truly those who disbelieve neither their wealth nor their children will avail them aught against God. They are the inhabitants of the Fire, abiding therein*',
>
> **{5.72}**: '*They certainly disbelieve, those who say: 'Truly God is the Messiah, son of Mary ...*
>
> *Surely whosoever ascribes partners unto God, God has forbidden him the Garden, and his refuge*

> *shall be the Fire. And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers.*'

Other verses, such as **{99.7-8}** (produced above), describe a careful balancing of deeds, so that *'every soul is held in pledge for what it has earned'*, **{52.21}** and **{74.38}**, similarly **{13.33}**. Moreover, as stated in **{49.14}** (produced at **⟨87⟩** above) God appears to offer admission to Paradise for mere submission even where this is unaccompanied by actual belief. None can be certain how this tallying of good and bad deeds will be conducted. It may seem to be implicit from the metaphor of 'weighing' that a person's good deeds, including prayer, might outweigh their bad. This appears to be the meaning of '*Truly good deeds remove those that are evil*', **{11.114}**. However, a number of verses imply that where believers '*mix righteous deeds with others that are evil*' the good do not outweigh or remove the bad, **{5.65}**, **{8.29}**, **{29.7}**, **{47.2}** **{48.5}**, **{64.9}** and **{65.5}**, although for those sinners who try to reform '*it may be that God will relent unto them*', **{9.102}**.

{66.8} introduces a further element into the process, familiar to Christians, of forgiveness in response to repentance:

> **{66.8}** O you who believe! Repent unto
> God with sincere repentance.
> It may be that your Lord will
> absolve you of your evil deeds and
> cause you to enter the Gardens
> with rivers running below – the
> Day when God will not disgrace
> the Prophet and those who believe
> with him, with their light
> spreading before them and on their
> right, while they say 'Our Lord
> complete our light for us and
> forgive us.

Logically, forgiveness should only be necessary where a good person's good deeds are outweighed by their evil deeds, and God's forgiveness in the Qurʾan is expressed as being more sparingly granted than is the case in the gospels:

{4.17} God only accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and then turn quickly in repentance. These are the ones unto whom God relents and God is Knowing, Wise.

In order to emphasise God's absolute power, His forgiveness in response to repentance, as with His balancing good deeds against bad, is always couched as a residual discretion rather than a promise: God '*forgives whomsoever He will and punishes whomsoever he will*', **{48.14}**, also **{2.105 & 284}**, **{3.129}** and **{5.18}**. Some of these aforesaid verses adopt an encouraging, reassuring tone:

{5.65}: '*Had the People of the Book believed and been reverent, We would surely have absolved them of their evil deeds and caused them to enter the Gardens of bliss*', and

{8.29}: '*O you who believe! If you reverence God He will make for you a criterion and absolve you of your evil deeds and forgive you. And God is possessed of Tremendous Bounty*'

None, however, quite amounts to a promise. The words of **{4.31}**:

> If you shun the grave sins that you are forbidden, we shall absolve you of your evil deeds and cause you to enter at a noble gate.

may be encouraging but must also leave a worrying uncertainty as to what God may consider to be '*the grave sins*' that He will never forgive.

Seeking intercession from intermediaries on the Last Day is repeatedly dismissed as being of no assistance, **{2.48 & 123}**, **{39.43-44}** and **{74.48}** ('*the intercession of the intercessors will avail thee not*'). These apparently absolute statements, though, are detracted from by other verses that add provisos:

'*save (from) the one who has made a pact with the Compassionate*', **{19.87}**,

'*…save by His Leave*', **{2.255}**, **{20.109}**., **{21.28}**, **{34.23}** and **{53.26}**,

'*save (from) such as have borne witness to the truth*', **{43.86}**,

and the throne-bearer angels of **{40.7}** are permitted to seek forgiveness of believers only, **⟨14⟩**.

How select this group of intercessors is is illustrated by the fact that Noah **⟨21⟩** was chastised for seeking forgiveness of his son and even Abraham was only excused his intercession for his father (which is apparently unsuccessful) on the basis that it had been made in order to fulfil an oath **⟨22⟩**. Needless to say, the Qurʾan's announcer himself has been granted leave to intercede for believers prior to judgment upon them being pronounced, **{9.113}**; also **{3.159}** and **{24.62}**. Indeed, in **{4.64}** he assures his followers that his word will carry significant weight: '*If the Messenger had sought forgiveness for them they would surely have found God Relenting, Merciful*'.

All of the above verses lead to obvious scope for confusion over whether salvation is gained by faith, works, both faith and works together (as implied by the reference to '*those who believe and do good works*', **{4.124}**, **{5.9}**, **{16.97}**, **{42.26}** and **{103.3}**) submission or repentance, and in what circumstances one might hope that intercessions or throwing oneself upon God's mercy will be effective. Given the extraordinarily graphic descriptions of Paradise **⟨99⟩** and the Hellfire **⟨100⟩**, the issue of salvation to a believing Muslims with a sinful past could hardly be of more urgent anxiety.

The one and only certainty in Quranic soteriology would seem to be that the *shahīd,* i.e., those who fight *jihād*, will be admitted to Paradise, and that those who die whilst so engaged will be so admitted from the moment of their death **⟨95⟩**.

98 The Heights

Surah 7 (*Al-Aʿrāf/The Heights*): 44-47

44. The inhabitants of the Garden will call out to the inhabitants of the Fire:
'We have found that which our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found that which your Lord promised to be true?

They will respond: 'Yes'.

Thereupon a herald shall proclaim in their midst: 'The curse of God be upon the wrongdoers'.

45. Those who turn from the way of God and seek to make it crooked, disbelieving in the Hereafter,

46. And there shall be a veil between them.
And upon the heights are men who know all by their marks. They will call out to the inhabitants of the Garden: 'Peace be upon you'.

They will not have entered it, though they hope.

47. And when their eyes turn towards the inhabitants of the Fire, they will say:
'Our Lord, place us not among the wrongdoing people'.

Surah 7 *(The Heights)* takes its name from an area of high ground ('*al-aʿrāf*') that serves as a '*barrier*' or '*veil*' (in the original Arabic a '*hijab*') between the Gardens of Paradise and the Hellfire. The Qurʾan does not state who it is who will occupy this place. It has been suggested that it may be those people whose evil and good deeds are finely balanced, Muslims who have committed no major

sins but who have been negligent in performing their religious obligations, or possibly those lacking moral responsibility such as the very young or mentally ill.

{7.45-47}, (produced above) describes those atop the Heights as hoping to enter Paradise but fearing the Hellfire. Both of these possible destinations are visible to them, they are able to hold conversations with their occupants. These verses suggest that this state of limbo is to be temporary, but whether this is so for all on the Heights, the duration and purpose of the waiting period and where it is that individuals are destined to find themselves eventually are all left undisclosed.

The Road to Paradise

A popular Islamic image that emerges from the *aḥādīth*, is that of the Bridge of Sirat (literally '*street*' from the Latin '*strata*'). This is said to pass above the Hellfire, and to be '*as thin as a hair and as sharp as a sword*'. It must be traversed by all in order to reach the Gardens:[286]

> *It is a slippery (bridge) on which there are hooks like a thorny plant that is wide at one side and narrow at the other and has thorns with bent ends ....*
>
> *Some of the believers will cross the bridge as quickly as the wink of an eye, some others as quick as lightning, a strong wind, fast horses or she-camels.*
>
> *So some will be safe without any harm; some will be safe after receiving some scratches, and some will fall down into Hell.*
>
> *The last person will cross by being dragged over the bridge.*[287]

This tradition is clearly linked to the Zoroastrian Bridge of Chinvat which also is also sharp underfoot and leads, for those able to cross it, to a union with Ahura Mazda in Paradise.[288] For those who make it to the far side of the Sirat, there is a final ordeal to be undergone before one may make one's way to the Gardens: the

Day of Mutual Dispossession. This is mentioned without any elaboration in **{64.9}**, but a hadith explains it as a settling of old scores:

> *When the believers pass safely over (the bridge across) Hell, they will be stopped at a bridge in between Hell and Paradise where they will retaliate upon each other for the injustices done among them in the world,*
>
> *When they get purified of all their sins, they will be admitted into Paradise.*[289]

A third step to Paradise is the more pleasant phenomenon known as '*al-kawthara*' (commonly translated '*the Abundance*'). Based upon **{108.1}**'s *'We have given thee abundance*', this is imagined to be a body of water such as a river or pond, granted to Muhammad in Paradise. In the fertile imagination of the exegetes, its '*banks are gold and it flows over pearls and rubies, its scent finer than musk and its water sweeter than honey and whiter than milk*'.[290] At this delightful spot, those who have completed what must have been a testing series of challenges, will be permitted to refresh themselves before finally entering the Gardens.

99. Gardens of Paradise

Surah 55 (*Al-Raḥmān/The Compassionate*): 47-76

47. And for him who feareth the tribunal of his Lord there are two gardens,

49. Dowered with branches.

51. In each of them two fountains flow.

53 In each of them are of every fruit two kinds.

55. They recline upon couches of which the inner lining is of brocade; and the fruit of the two gardens hangs low.

57. In them are [maidens] restraining their glances, whom neither man nor demon hath approached before them.

59. They are as it were rubies and pearls.

61. Is the recompense for kindness other than kindness?...

62. & 64. And besides these two there are two [other] gardens, dark green.

66. In each of them are two fountains, flowing abundantly.

68. In each of them are fruits and palms and pomegranates.

70. In each are [maidens] good, beauteous,

72.-74. Huris enclosed in pavilions, whom neither man nor demon hath approached before them.

76. [The Just] recline on green pillows and beautiful carpets.

[*The Original Sources Of The Qurʾan, Its Origin In Pagan Legends and Mythology, W. St. Clair Tisdall, 1905 AD*]

Paradise is described in the Qurʾan as either one garden ('*jannah*' or '*ḥadāiqa*') or two, four or an unspecified number of gardens, on one occasion with vineyards, **{78.32}**. The Gardens are mentioned in many of the Quran's surahs, and described in particular detail in **{37.40-49}**, **{38.52}**, **{44.54}**, **{52.17-27}**, **{55.56-78}**, **{56.11-40}** and **{78.31-37}**. They are called the Gardens of Eden ('*jannāt ʿadni*') in **{9.72}**, **{13.23}**, **{16.31}**, **{18.31}**, **{19.61}**, **{20.76}**, **{35.33}**, **{38.50}**, and **{40.8}**, making it clear that this is the same garden from whence Adam and his wife, were expelled at the start of the human story **⟨16⟩** and, since the Kaaba is believed to have been the '*First House*' of **{3.96}** **⟨2⟩** Paradise is sometimes envisaged to be suspended directly above modern Mecca.

The gardens are portrayed as an abode of sensual pleasure. Fruit, and fowl are mentioned as food there, **{56.21}**. Dozens of verses refer to them as gardens '*gardens with rivers running beneath*'. On the surface it is literally a land flowing with milk and honey (*c.f.* Exodus 3.8, Numbers 14.8, Deut. 31.20 & Ezekiel 20.15), water and wine, **{47.15}**. Another beverage, water that is seasoned with '*zanjabīl*' (ginger or, *per* Ali Qarai, camphor) emerges from a spring called Salsabil, **{76.5-6}**. Believers are enrobed in green silk that is embroidered with gold, **{44.53}** and **{76.12 & 21}**, and are further adorned with pearls and more gold, **{18.31}**, **{22.23}** and **{35.33}**. Famously, men shall have houri ('*ḥūriyyah* possibly '*fair ones*') provided for their pleasure. These supernatural creatures are referred to as '*wide-eyed maidens*', **{44.54}**, **{52.20}**, **{56.22}**, or as '*maidens of modest gaze*', **{38.52}**, **{55.56}**, endowed with eyes, '*like concealed pearls*', **{56.24}**, or '*hidden eggs*', **{37.49}**. In the celestial vineyards of **{78.31-34}**, overwhelmingly likely to have been the houri's earliest appearance in the Qurʾan, a brief reference to well matched and '*kawāʿiba*' companions is placed between allusions to a vineyard and to a full cup. '*Kawāʿiba*', from the same root as '*kaaba*' meaning cube, poses some difficulty in translation: it can hardly have meant 'cubic companion' but is generally translated in a way that means full-bodied. The sensual association of vines and womanliness in Paradise in **Surah 78** may have been intended to recall the Song of Songs:

> '*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!*
> *More delightful is your love than wine.*'

or Ephrem's **⟨1⟩** description of a monk's bliss in heaven in *Hymn on Paradise VII*:

> *The man who abstained,*
> *with understanding from wine,*
> *Will the vines of Paradise*
> *rush out to meet, all the more joyfully,*
> *as each one stretches out and proffers him its clusters,*
> *or if any has lived a life of virginity,*
> *him too they welcome into its their bosom,*
> *for the solitary such as he,*
> *has never lain in any bosom,*
> *nor upon any marriage bed.*

In later surahs these creatures of delight are described in more unambiguously erotic terms. **{55.56}** tells its audience that they are those '*whom neither man nor jinn has ever touched*', (some translations add '*sexually*'; Hilali and Khan, with rather too much detail, '*has opened their hymens with sexual intercourse*'). In **{56.35-38}** they are '*virgins, amorous peers*' ('*lovers and friends*', *per* Pickthall, '*passionately loving and young*', per Maududi). In **{44.54}** and **{52.20}** the houri are described as available for men to marry and in **{4.57}** they are presented as '*spouses made pure*', the distinction between a wife and a '*ḥūr*' apparently being, if anything, less important in heaven than it is on earth **⟨60⟩**. Islamic scholars have speculated that the houri are completely hairless, transparent, created without the need to urinate, defecate or menstruate, and even that they remain virgins despite repeated intercourse.[291] No number of houri is ever given in the Qurʾan, the popular belief that martyrs will receive seventy-two being based upon a hadith.[292] Informed by these later verses and exegesis, translators have frequently translated '*kawāʿiba*' in **{78.33}**, to portray an alluring curvaceousness. The companions are '*buxom*' *per The Study Quran*, or '*full breasted*', Sahih International; for Sarwar they have been endowed '*with pear-shaped breasts*'; to Ibn Manzur they appear in the form of '*young girls whose breasts are beginning to appear*'.[293]

For the foremost there will be heavenly boys ('*ghilān*') in Jannah too. Unlike their female counterparts, these are not presented in explicitly sexual terms, and in one verse they provide a practical service, waiting upon believers' pleasure with '*goblets, ewers, and a*

cup from a flowing spring', **{56.17-18}**. However, the references to their being '*immortal youths*' ('*youths of perpetual freshness*', per Yusuf Ali) resembling hidden, **{52.24}**, or scattered **{76.19}**, pearls, is perhaps suggestive of their provision of services in addition to the mere dispensing of refreshments.

In Jannah, believers will be reunited with '*those who were righteous from amongst their fathers, their spouses and their progeny*', **{13.23}**, **{25.74}**, and **{52.20-21}**, whereupon they shall sit on couches facing one another, **{15.47}** and **{37.44}**, and partake in '*no idle talk*' but will say to one another only '*Peace, peace*', **{19.61}**. Timekeeping is unclear. Since the sun and moon are to be joined and dimmed on the Last Day **⟨96⟩** it comes as no surprise that those in Jannah above the heavens see '*neither sun nor bitter cold*' although the absence of the sun does not prevent there being mornings and evenings.

The Gardens are accessed through gates, **{7.40}** and **{39.73}**, that are traditionally said to be eight in number. *Aḥādīth* report Muhammad saying that there is a hierarchy of seven or a hundred levels of Paradise, but **{56.7-40}** describes a binary division, a standard class paradise for '*the companions of the right*' and a superior one for '*the foremost*' **⟨97⟩**. In **Surah 55** a four-garden scheme is laid out with one pair of gardens, described in verses **{55.48-60}**, the other pair in **{55.62-76}**. In both **Surahs 55** and **56** the Garden(s) occupied by the foremost is described as more enticing in every way than the ordinary companions of the right.

Garden feature	The Garden for the foremost	The Garden for companions of the right
Foliage	'*Abounding in green branches*', **{55.48}**.	'*Thornless lote trees, clustered plantains and extended shade*', **{55.28-30}**.
Seating	'*Beds lined with rich brocade*', **{55.54}**.	'*Green cushions*', **{55.76}**.
Fountains	'*Flowing*', **{55.50}**.	'*Bubbling*', **{55.66}**.
Food	'*Two kinds of every fruit*', **{55.52}**, and '*the meat of birds*', as desired **{56.21}**	'*Fruit, date palms and pomegranates*', **{55.68}**
Service	'*Immortal youths wait upon them with goblets, ewers and a cup*', **{56.17-19}**.	Occupants must pick their own fruit that is '*neither out of reach nor forbidden*' **{56.33}**.
Houris	'*Maidens of modest gaze whom neither man not jinn has ever touched, like ruby and coral stone*' , **{55.56-58}**, '*wide-eyed, like concealed pearls*, **{56.56-58}**.	'*Maidens in secluded pavilions, untouched by men and jinn*', **{55.64}**, '*amorous*' **{56.37}**.

The descriptions of Jannah, more than any other single topic of the Qurʾan, shows a strong Persian influence. Twice, at **{18.107}** and **{23.11}**, the gardens are called Firdaus, from the Avestic (Persian) '*pairidaeza*', from which is derived the Hebrew '*pardes*' and, ultimately the English word '*paradise*'). The green silk that the Qurʾan describes the righteous in Paradise donning, in contrast with the white robes of the martyrs seen by St John the Divine in the Book of Revelation 3.5, 4.4, is a Persian trapping, green being indicative of the worship of Mithra. As noted in the previous section, the belief that those who enter the garden must do so by crossing over a bridge is a Zoroastrian image; and the Zoroastrian description of a person reaching the far side being welcomed by '*a woman shape, well-shaped with white garments, fifteen years old and beautiful from all sides at which the soul is gladdened*'[294] demonstrates a sure precedent for the houris.

The Persian word '*pairidaeza*' literally means a walled enclosure, particularly associated with walled gardens, orchards or parks. The Hebrew form '*pardes*') occurs three times in the Hebrew bible (Song of Songs 4.13, Ecclesiastes 2.5, Nehemiah 2.8) but in none of these is it applied to any specific place. In its Greek form it is used in the Septuagint, the classic Greek translation of the Hebrew bible relied upon by the gospel writers and St Paul, is used to refer to the Garden of Eden in the Book of Genesis (notwithstanding that Eden would have had no need of walls). Since the Qurʾan uses the name Eden to refer to the gardens of Jannah, it may be for this reason that it also refers to them as Paradise also. Jesus uses the word 'paradise' just once in the gospels when he promises the Penitent Thief: '*I assure you today you will be with me in Paradise*' (Luke 23.43, *c.f.* 2 Corinthians 12.4, Revelation 2.7). However, there is a substantive difference between the Paradise referred to by Jesus and the Qurʾan's Paradise. Since Jesus promises the thief that he will be in Paradise that very day, he would seem to have been referring to the temporary abode of the righteous dead pending his return to earth and the general resurrection. This is a different symbolism for the same state that Jesus describes as '*the bosom of Abraham*, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. This latter phrase, in turn, is an extension upon the phrase used to refer to the deaths of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron and others in the Hebrew bible, namely that that were '*gathered unto their kin*'

(Genesis 25.8 & 17, 35.29, 49.33; Deuteronomy 32.50; Judge 2.10, 2 Kings 22.20), whilst these passages probably lie behind the Qurʾan's references to spending one's afterlife in the company of one's ancestors and progeny. In the Qur'an, however, as described at **⟨96⟩**, the significance of Paradise is different to its purpose in the Bible. Whilst in the Bible, Paradise/the Bosom of Abraham/being gathered to one's kin are symbolic terms for the death of the righteous, death becoming, in later books, a temporary state pending the resurrection, in the Qur'an, all of the dead are conscious in the grave pending the Last Day, at which those whose conduct is judged to be satisfactory may enter the Garden of Jannah. This is then described in far too much detail to have been intended figuratively. There is no indication that one's presence there will be a temporary state. Moreover, whilst Christians hope after death to finally experience the beatific vision, and to see God '*face to face*' (1 Corinthians 15.12, Revelations 22.4) the Qurʾan contains no suggestion that God will Himself be present in the Garden. That one shall be called upon to prostrate before His Shin on the Last Day **{68.42}**, indicates that what is promised to the righteous after death thereafter is a place of reward for the obedient, but no more. It does not involve admission into God's presence.

For many, the attractions described in the Qurʾan even of the *de-luxe* Garden of the Foremost seem underwhelming. A picnic with friends and family in a shaded garden with plentiful fruit and fowl, is a reality that for many could have been created upon the earth even in the Qurʾan's day. The added characteristics that the pleasant scene will last for eternity, and the additional lure of unlimited emotion-free alfresco intercourse with ever-virginal houri, will inevitably carry more appeal for some people than for others. But it is hard to deny that the Qurʾan author's rather stylised tableaux of the allure of Jannah lacks the imagination and passion that he invested in his terrifying depictions of the Hellfire.

100. The Hellfire

Surah 22 (*Al-Ḥajj/The Pilgrimage*): 19-22

19. … For the unbelievers garments of fire shall be cut out, and scalding water shall be poured over their heads,

20. Melting all that is in their bellies and their skin.

21. In addition, there will be whips of iron for them.

22. Whenever, in their anguish, they try to get out, they are returned there, and will be told: 'Taste the torment of fire!'

[*Sayyid Qutb*]

The Qurʾan refers frequently to a place of eternal punishment, seventy-seven times by the name '*Jahannam*'. This is derived from the name of a valley bordering the Old City of Jerusalem (Gehenna or Gehinnom, literally the Valley of Hinnom) appearing in the Hebrew bible many times but always as a place of ill repute. The name was also employed more than a dozen times by Jesus in the gospels (as '*the fires of Gehenna*', Matthew 5.22, 18.9, '*Gehenna, where the fires are never extinguished*', Mark 9.46) to describe the ultimate fate of the wicked. However, it is unlikely that Jesus intended the valley to indicate a destination where the wicked would permanently dwell. Jesus generally alludes to the destiny of sinners as being annihilation: the gate that leads to damnation rather than life (Matthew 7.14), the darnel incinerated in the '*fiery furnace*' in the parable of the weeds (Matthew 3.12, 13.24-30 & 37-42) and the fish caught but cast back in the parable of the net (Matthew 13.48-50).

> *Do not fear those who deprive the body of life but cannot destroy the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.* –Matthew 10.28
> (*c.f.* Luke 12.5)

In Matthew 13.50, those cast upon the fire '*wail and grind their teeth*'. These actions are symbolic of bitter regret, but which, within context, they may possibly be read also as an indication of physical pain. The early church fathers fixed this moment of anguish as a permanent state, '*an eternal death with punishment*' (*per* the Epistle of Barnabas) and being cast into the '*unquenchable fire*' quickly came to be interpreted as an endless physical torment by immolation. This provides the imagery that the Qurʾan so enthusiastically adopts and expands upon in some of its most vividly descriptive passages. The Quranic '*Jahannam*' is a dungeon, **{17.8}**, of eternal physical torture, almost always associated with fire or boiling liquid. Particularly gruesome descriptions found at **{4.55-57}**, **{14.49-50}**, **{36.63-67}**, **{40.70-72}**, **{56.90-94}** and **{67.7}**. Occupants will be burned or broiled in multiple different types of fire including '*al-jahīm*', the '*fierce fire*', **{26.91}**, '*latha*', '*a fire that burns to the skull*', **{70.15-16}**, '*hutamah*', the '*crushing fire*' that towers over '*backbiters*' in **{104.4-7}** and '*saqar*', an '*unsparing*', '*blackening fire*', **{74.27-29 & 42}**: the fires of Hell forming a conflagration that is so intense that '*its fuel is men and stones*', **{2.24}**. Around this inferno, the damned led around on their knees, **{19.68}**, fettered with shackles and with chains around their necks, **{40.71}**, **{69.30-32}** and **{76.4}**, clad in '*garments made of pitch*', **{14.50}**, or of fire, **{22.19}** (produced above). The Hellfire will be within earshot of the Gardens of Paradise far above it for '*the inhabitants of the Fire shall call to the inhabitants of the Garden: 'Pour water down upon us, or some of that which God has provided for you'*, **{7.50}**. This recalls Jesus's parable of the rich man and Lazarus (for which see also **⟨96⟩** and **⟨99⟩** above) in which a man who was in life wealthy but selfish is imagined after his death imploring Abraham: '*Send Lazarus* [a beggar that the rich man had ignored during his life] *to dip the tip of his finger in water to refresh my tongue, for I am torture in these flames*' (although, as referred to previously, in the parable this scene is features souls in Hades/Sheol prior to the resurrection). In '*Jahannam*' such pleas for mercy will be to no avail. Indeed, the tormenters are under instruction to taunt their victims over their suffering:

{44.47} Seize him and thrust him into the midst of the hellfire.

{44.48} Then pour the punishment of boiling liquid upon his head.

{44.49} 'Taste! Surely you are the mighty, the noble!'

God explains how He is able to maintain the pain level:

{4.56} As often as their skins are consumed, We shall replace them with other skins that they may taste the punishment.

Inhabitants' only food shall be '*a vile thorn*', **{88.6-7}**, the fruit of the *zaqum* tree that '*emerges in the depth of the hellfire, its spathes ... as the heads of satans*', **{37.66-67}**, and '*oozing pus*', **{14.16}**. This unappealing emittance may be the same substance as '*ghislin*' mentioned in **{69.36}**, the meaning of which is unknown, allowing commentators full scope to speculate on the most horrid substance imaginable to them. Although the heat renders the occupants '*like diseased camels raging with thirst*', **{56.55}** (*per* Yusuf Ali) their only drink shall be a boiling liquid that '*tears apart their bowels*', **{47.15}**. As with the descriptions of the Gardens of Paradise reviewed in **⟨99⟩** above, so with the descriptions of the Hellfire, the attention to such practical matters as what inhabitants of the realms shall wear and consume and how they spend their days, serves to emphasise that the descriptions are intended to be understood literally - and to tempt or horrify accordingly.

Although several verses depict a judgment in which some are consigned to the Hellfire whilst others are admitted to Paradise, one passage, **{19.68-72}** suggests that both those who will ultimately be saved and the permanently damned, will be sent to Hell to atone for their sins, from whence God will pluck out the reverent, leaving the wrongdoers to their eternal torment. The same hadith that describes the Bridge of Sirat as '*as thin as a hair and as sharp as a sword*', gives one particularly macabre account of what to expect should one fail to make it to the other side:

(Muhammad asked:) 'Have you seen the thorns of Saʿdan?' The people answered 'Yes'.

He said: 'These hooks will be like the thorns of Saʿdan, but nobody except Allah knows their greatness in size and these will entangle the people according to their deeds. Some of them will fall and stay in Hell forever; others will receive punishment and will get out of Hell. Allah intends mercy on whomever He likes amongst the people of Hell. He will order the angels to take out of Hell those who worshipped none but Him alone.

The angels will take (believers) out by recognizing them from the traces of prostrations [the *zabiba*: hardened skin on the forehead from repeatedly touching it to the ground, *c.f.* **{48.29}**] *for Allah has forbidden the Hellfire to eat away those traces. So they will come out of the Fire, which will eat away from the whole of the human body except the marks of the prostrations.*

At that time, they will come out of the Fire as mere skeletons. The Water of Life will be poured on them and as a result they will grow like the seeds growing on the bank of flowing water.[295]

Such a purgation is also hinted at in **{2.80}** and **{3.24}**'s reference to those who say '*the Fire will touch us save for days numbered*', although these verses are cagey about confirming or denying whether this belief is correct. Hell is said to be entered by seven entrances:

> **{15.44}** Seven gates (Hell) has,
> and for each gate is appointed a
> separate portion of them.

This is generally understood to represent seven entrances, each leading to a separate level of hell with different degrees of suffering for different types of sinner. Some interpret the promise of particular punishments, that are in represented by the words '*gayyah*' (literally '*error*') or '*wayl*' ('*woe*') for those who have been neglectful of their prayers, **{19.59}**, **{107.4-6}**, the forgers of revelations, **{2.79}** and '*slandering backbiters*', **{104.1}**, as two specific valleys in Hell where one then encounters additional punishments,

beyond the standard seven tiers. Into the latter of these, it is said, one might plummet for forty years without reaching the bottom. If so, this is likely the final abode of hypocrites, about whom we are told:

> **{4.145}** Surely (they) will be in the lowest depths of the Fire, and thou wilt not find for them any helper.

[1] In the Babylonian Talmud the books of the latter prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Book of the Twelve (*i.e.* twelve other prophets, treated as a single book) are addressed in decreasing length order, as are 'the three great writings': the Book of Psalms, Job and the Book of Wisdom *per* Goswell, G, *The Order of the Books in the Hebrew Bible.* In the New Testament the same pattern is applied to the epistles of St Paul.

[2] Cuypers, M, *The Composition of the Qurʾan: Rhetorical Analysis*, 2015.

[3] Reda, N, *The Al-Baqara Crescendo, Understanding the Qurʾan's Style, Narrative Structure and Running Themes*, 2017.

[4] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 6.60.201, *c.f.* 9.89.301.

[5] Charles I was executed in the same year that the *Alcoran* was published, The book was immediately banned by parliament and its printer briefly imprisoned for blasphemy.

[6] The earliest use of the word '*caliph*' appears upon a South Arabian stele, CSAI (Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions) CIH 541, in which '*xalīfah*' appears as the title of a governor of Abraha.

[7] The earliest dated complete Qurʾan is said to be a manuscript catalogued in the Bibliotheque nationale de France) as BnF Arabe 399. This is dated 182 AH (ie 182 Islamic calendar years, lasting 355 days each, after the Hijrah) i.e. AD 799. However, the date appears in a page written in a different hand to the main manuscript. The next earliest dated complete manuscript is 860.

[8] Al-Shdaifat, Y, Al-Jallad, A, al-Salameen, Z & Harahsheh, R, *An early Christian Arabic Graffito Mentioning 'Yazīd the king'*, 2017.

[9] Foss, C, *Arab Byzantine Coins,* 2008.

[10] An addendum to a *Chronicle of 640*, in which a monk, describing himself as of Bet Hale (an unknown location) recounts for Christian apologetic purposes, a dispute he had had with an Arab notable.

[11] An apocalyptic text, *The Edesene Apocalypse*, composed during the Second Fitna (680-92) refers to the civil war, stating:

> '*There will arise a difference after the death of a caliph and a man of the people of Medina will go forth fleeing to Mecca. Then some of*

the people of Mecca will come to him and will make him rise in revolt against his will … An expedition will be sent against him from Syria but will be swallowed up in the desert between Mecca and Medina'.

The *Apocalypse* predicts the rise of a great Christian king that will drive back the Ishmaelites and:

'*pursue them to the city of Mecca (where) their dominion shall end*',

(translations from Hoyland, R G, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, (pages 332-333), and Penn, M P, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (p. 134, 136).

The first source to offer information concerning Mecca's location is offered in the *Continuato Byzantia Arabica*, 741, but this locates it in south-west Mesopotamia:

'… at Mecca, Abraham's house, as they (the Arabs) believe, which lies between Ur in Chaldea and Carras, a city in Mesopotamia, in a wasteland.'

[12] The orientation of early Islamic buildings is mapped out by Dan Gibson on https:sacredcity.ca. In March 2020, only three structure that could possibly have predated 750 faced Mecca, including the ruined Bambhore Mosque, which bears an inscription date of 727.

[13] A survey demonstrating the likely reliability of early isnad chains appears in Motzki, H & others, *Analysing Muslim Traditions, Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghazi Hadith*, 2010.

[14] An example of an early Islamic legalistic argumentation can be seen in the practise of adult suckling in order to evade restrictive on men and women meeting in private: **⟨60⟩** and associated endnote.

[15] Crone, P, *Two Legal Problems Bearing on the Early History of the Qurʾan*, 1995.

[16] A phrase coined by Jenkins, J P, in *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years.*

[17] Al-ʿAli, S A, *Muhadarat fi Tarikh al-Arab*, 1960.

[18] Reynolds, G S, *On the Qur'anic accusation of scriptural falsification (tahrif) and Christian anti-Jewish Polemic*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 2010.

[19] Chapter 24.

[20] Vol II, XI.

[21] Segovia, C A, *The Jews and Christians of Pre-Islamic Yemen (Himyar) and the Elusive Matrix of the Qurʾan's Christology in Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam*, 2015.

[22] Robin, C, *Abraha et la reconquête de l'Arabie déserte: un reé xamen de l'inscription Ryckmans 506 = Murayghan 1*, 2012, cited in Segovia C A *The Jews and Christians of pre-Islamic Yemen (Himyar) and the elusive matrix of the Qurʾan's Christology*, 2015.

[23] *Dialogues* III 38.

[24] Van Bladel, K, *The Alexander Legend In The Qurʾan 18:83-102*, citing Reinink, G J, *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation*, 2002, and *Alexander the Great in the Seventh-Century Syriac 'Apocalyptic' Texts*, 2003.

[25] Shoemaker, S J, *The Apocalypse of Empire Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, 2018, p. 86.

[26] *Al-Jāmi al-Tirmidhi*, 5.3152. To the author's knowledge the only English language printed Qurʾan to feature this variant is *The Message - A Translation of the Glorious Qurʾan* published by The Monotheist Group.

[27] Shoemaker, S J, *The Apocalypse of Empire Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, 2018, page 153.

[28] Silverstein, A J, *Q 30: 2–5 in Near Eastern Context*.

[29] A phrase first coined by Tannous J in *Syria between Byzantium and Islam, Making Incommensurables Speak*, 2010, and used in turn by Dye G's *Jewish Christianity the Qurʾan and early Islam* and Akyol, M, *The Islamic Jesus, How the King of the Jews became a Prophet of the Muslims*.

[30] See Kerr, R, *The Original Islamic Hajj To Jerusalem*, 2021.

[31] Hoyland, R G, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, 1997.

[32] *Pseudo-Sebeos' History of Armenia*, which is believed to have been written around 660, i.e. thirty years prior to the decoration of the Dome of the Rock shrine, and cites as its informants '*men wo had been taken captive from Arabia to Khuzestan*' who had been eyewitness to the events they described.

[33] Hoyland, R G, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, 1997.

[34] The relevant section of the *Khuzestan Chronicle* is contained in English translation in Penn, M P, *When Christians first met Muslims*, 2020. A recension of the *Syriac common source,* was made by Shoemaker S J, in *The Death of A Prophet,* 2012.

[35] *Tafsir ibn Kathir* re **{63.8}**.

[36] Townsend, P, *The Mecca Mystery, Probing the Black Hole at the Heart of Muslim History*, 2018.

[37] Examples from Sinai, N, *the Qurʾan, A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 2017.

[38] *Commentary on Q 30:2–6*, in ed. Azaiez, Reynolds, Tesei & Zafer, *The Qurʾan Seminar Commentary: A Collaborative Analysis of 50 Select Passages*.

[39] Published as part of, ed. Zellentin, H, *The Qurʾan's Reformation of Judaism and Christianity, Return to the Origins*, 2019.

[40] Al-Qasim, Abu Ubaid (d.c.770), *Kitab Fada'il al- Qurʾan*, cited in Burton, J, *Linguistic Errors in the Qurʾan*, 1988.

[41] The proposed dialect of the Quranic Arabic has been called Old Hijazi. For a recent treatment of this topic see al-Jallad, A, *The Damascus Psalm Fragment, Middle Arabic and the Legacy of Old Ḥigāzī*, 2020.

[42] Dye, G, *Traces of Bilingualism/Multilingualism in Qur'ānic Arabic.*

[43] Ibn Warraq, *What the Koran Really Says.*

[44] Kerr, R M, *Islam, Arabs and the Hijra*, 2013.

[45] Reynolds, G S, *Arabian languages as a source for the Qur'anic vocabulary* (in *New Perspectives on the Qurʾan, The Qurʾan in its Historical context 2*, ed. Said Gabriel Reynolds, 2011. Hani Hayajneh suggested that the term '*shirk*' referred to share-cropping, referring to a practise whereby several farmers would work a parcel of land together, allocating a share of their produce to God (via His priests) or a god.

[46] I have borrowed this phrase which was used by Marijn van Putten to describe the consonantal Arabiyyah (*'close – if not identical – to what eventually came to be thought of as Classical Arabic'*) in *The Status Quaestionis of Arabiyyah, Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Qurʾan*, 2017.

[47] For a 2011 review of the topic, see Stewart, D J, *The Mysterious Letters and Other Formal Features of the* Qurʾan *in the Light of Greek and Babylonian Oracular Texts*, in *New Perspectives on the Qurʾan, The Qurʾan in its historical Context 2*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds.

[48] This list based upon one compiled by Wild S, in *Why Self-referentiality?* in *Self-referentiality in the* Qurʾan, 2006.

[49] Luxenberg, C, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Qurʾan,* 2009.

[50] No doubt inspired by the Talmud's:

> *'If all the seas were ink and reeds pens, heavens parchment and all men writers, they would not suffice to write down the intricacies of government'*,

and the Gospel of St John at 21.25:

> *'If (the deeds of Jesus) were written down there would not be room enough in the entire world to hold the books to record them.'*

[51] The somewhat arcane issue as to whether the Preserved Tablet was created by God or emanated from his nature became a question of great political importance in the ninth-century dispute between the Muʿtazila and the traditionalists led by Ahmad bin Hanbal.

[52] Madigan, *The Qurʾan's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, 2001.

[53] Anthony, S W, *Muhammad and The Empires of Faith*, 2020.

[54] These were reconstructed in 1972 by Habib al-Rahman al-'Azmi, but other than those accounts of Muhammad's Medinan years written

by Maʿmar ibn Rashid and translated by Anthony, S W, in *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muhammad*, they are yet to be published in an English translation.

[55] *The Book of Main Points* by John bar Penkaye, published in Penn, M P, *When Christians First met Muslims*, 2020.

[56] It is likely that the earliest dateable reference to Muhammad from an Arab source was the appearance of the motto '*Muhammad rasul Allah*' upon a silver coin that, as with all the early Arab silver coins, still bore the traditional symbols of Sasanian rule: the shah's head in profile and a Zoroastrian fire altar. The coin carries the information that it was struck in the year '66' at Bisapur in the province of Fars, southern Iran. If, as most historians conclude, 66 refers to the 66th year after the Hijra, this would date the coin to 687 or 688. However, according to later histories, during these years southern Iran was a battleground of the Second Fitna and Bisapur changed hands at least twice. Why it might have been that a local governor, whether he was loyal to the Umayyads, the Zubayrids, or the supporters of Ali (who were also active in the war) should have introduced a new religious formula to his coinage in the midst of this volatile situation has not, to date, been convincingly explained. Nevo Y & Koren J, in *Crossroads to Islam, The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (p. 250-251) offers the view that it is unlikely that any minting of coins at all could have been taking place at Bisapur in this period. He concludes that the year 66 derives from a different calendar, the years since accession of the last Sasanian shah, Yazdegird (converting to 77-78 AH or c. AD 699-700).

[57] Penn, M, *When Christians First met Muslims*, 2020.

[58] The *Chronicle of Tung Tien* (801) describes envoys of '*Ta-shih*' (the Tayyaye) visiting the court of T'ang in 34th year of their kingdom. Hoyland, R G, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It …* (pages 243-254). Diplomatic archives contained within the New Book of Tang date this first visit to 651. The story that is told reads as a myth involving a Persian who received the help of a spirit to obtain edged weapons. Later envoys must have elaborated upon this theme, because in the *New Book of T'ang* (1060) a more elaborate version of the story appears involving three caves and an inscribed black stone with writing on. The Youtube channel *Sneakers Corner* has produced several videos on the Chinese sources in which a

convincing case was proposed for the story to be linked to the account of the Battle of Dhu Qar in *The History of al-Tabari*, *Vol. V The Sasanids, The Byzantines, The Lakhmids and Yemen*, page 363. Muhammad ('*Mo-ki-mo*') appears in this story, but only apparently after the third Tayyaye diplomatic delegation which the Chinese received in 726.

[59] The *Armenian History of pseudo-Sebeos* (c.660) introduces Muhammad with the words '*A man from amongst the Sons of Ishmael whose name was Muhammad , a merchant, as if by God's command appeared to them as a preacher…*'. Jacob of Edessa, writing c.692 described Muhammad, prior to the establishment of his kingdom, '*going down on business to the lands of Palestine and of the Arabians, the Phonecians and of the Tyrians*', whilst several chronicles, draw upon what is known as the Syriac Common Source that includes: '*Therefore, this Muhammad, while in the measure and stature of youth, began to go up and down from his city Yathrib to Palestine for the business of buying and selling. And whilst he was engaged in this region, he encountered the belief in the one God, and it was pleasing to his eyes.*'

[60] Beck, D, *Evolution of the Early Qurʾan, From Anonymous Apocalypse to Charismatic Prophet*, 2018 (chapter 6, note 160). See also Anthony, S W, *Muhammad an the Empires of Faith, The Making of the Prophet of Islam*, 2020, Chapter 2 *Muhammad the Merchant.*

[61] Beck, D points out that the word '*rasul*', the Qurʾan's most common term for referring to its announcer, appears only once in the surahs 75-114, *Evolution of the Early Qurʾan, From Anonymous Apocalypse to Charismatic Prophet*, 2018 (p.121).

[62] Reynolds, G S, *Remembering Muhammad*, 2011.

[63] Ahmad al-Jallad has recently observed that although the word that is represented by the consonants '*mhmd*' is now conventionally rendered '*Muḥammad*' or '*Mohammad*', in its the earliest Umayyad documents to be written in Greek the word is transliterated as '*Μαμετ*', '*Μααμετ*' and '*Μααμεδ*', indicating that it was originally pronounced '*Mahammad*', al-Jallad, A, *The Arabic of the Islamic Conquests*.

[64] Gallez, E, *References to Muḥammad in the Koran: Lost Years since 1949? History of a Research*, 2020.

[65] Gallez, E, *References to Muḥammad in the Koran:Lost Years since 1949? History of a Research*, 2020.

[66] Beck, D, *Evolution of the Early Qurʾan, From Anonymous Apocalypse to Charismatic Prophet*, 2018, page 308.

[67] The first chapter of *Structural Dividers in the Qurʾan*, ed. Klar M., 2021.

[68] *Al-Muwatta* of Malik bin Anas, 15.4.5.

[69] Sahih Bukhari 6.61.510. The original material used by Zayd were said to have been destroyed by the sixth caliph, Marwan I, for the unconvincing reason that he '*was afraid that after a time, people would be suspicious of (Uthman's Qurʾan) or they will say there is something in it that wasn't written*', *per* Salim ibn Abdullah, quoted in Abu Dawood's *Kitab al-Masahif*.

[70] Nasser, S H, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qurʾan, The Problem of Tawatur and the Emergence of Shawadhdh*, 2013, footnote 11.

[71] A phrase used by Islamic commentator Yasir Qadhi in an interview broadcast on Youtube in July 2020 (original video now deleted).

[72] Sahih Bukhari 6.61.509.

[73] *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al- Qurʾan*, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (Jalaluddin); the *Musnad* of Ahmad bin Hanbal 21245.

[74] Sunan Majah 3.9.1944.

[75] *Per Kitab Fada'il-al- Qurʾan*, of Abu Ubayd al-Qasim bin Sallam (d. 956), first published in *The Muslim World* 28 (1938).

[76] Jeffrey A, *The Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾan, The Old Codices*, 1937.

[77] Anthony, S W, *Two Lost Surahs of the Qurʾan: Surat al-Khal and Surat al-Hafd, between textual and ritual canon*, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 2019.

[78] See Lecker, M, *Zayd b. Thabit, 'A Jew with two sidelocks' Judaism and Literacy in Pre-Islamic Arabia*, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 1997.

[79] In 1972, sacks containing over 12,000 individual fragments of ancient Qurʾan s were discovered in the eaves of a mosque undergoing renovation in Sana'a, Yemen. From these fragments, 926 separate Qurʾan manuscripts have been identified. 38 fragments were identified as belonging to the palimpsest, catalogued as DAM 01-27.01, see Sadeghi B & Goudarzi M, *Ṣana'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qurʾan*, *Der Islam*, 2012; Hilali, A, *The Sanaa Palimpsest: The Transmission of the Qurʾan in the First Centuries AH*, 2017.

[80] Eg. Shah Waliyullah, *Al-Fauz al-Kabir Fi Usul al-Tafsir* (*The Principles of Qurʾan Commentary*) (18th century).

[81] Sinai, N, *The Qurʾan, A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 2017 (p 126-127).

[82] *Rendered the Qurʾan int Cadenced Rhyming English Prose: Process and Outcome in a Translation of Surat al-Ghashiya (Q.88)*, *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 2015, 103-117.

[83] This observation was first made by the nineteenth century orientalist Sir William Muir who identified eighteen surahs '*composed before Mahomet had conceived the idea of a Divine mission, or of a Revelation communicated to him direct from heaven*'; Muir, Sir W, *The Coran, Its Composition and Teaching and the Testimony it bears to the Holy Scriptures*, 1878, *c.f.* Sinai, N, *The Qurʾan, A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 2017.

[84] Nöldeke, T, *Geschichte des Qorâns,* 1860.

[85] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 29-41.

[86] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 233.

[87] *The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 4*, ed. R N Frye.

[88] Most oaths appear at the beginning of a surah, but in four instances they appear in the midst of a surah: **{69.38-39}, {81.15-18}, {84.16-18}** and **{86.11-12}**.

[89] Neuwirth, A, *The Qurʾan and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*, 2019.

[90] Sinai, N, *The Qurʾan, A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 2017.

[91] Genesis 9.25 (servants), Exodus 31.15 (sabbaths), Exodus. 26.33-34, 1 Chronicles, 23.13, 2 Chronicles 4.22, 3.8, 3.10, 4.22, 5.7, 1 Kings 6.16, 7.50, 8.6, Daniel 9.24, Ezekiel 4.5, 41.4 (holies), Ecclesiastes 1.2 (vanities), Deuteronomy 10.17 and Psalm 136 (gods), Daniel 2.37, Ezra 7.12 (kings) and Philippians 2.9-10 Timothy 6.15, and Revelation 19.16 (kings and lords).

[92] CSAI (Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions), Ry 508, CIA 541 and FA74 respectively.

[93] Al-Jallad, A, *The pre-Islamic basmala: Reflections on its First Epigraphic Attestation and its Original Significance*, 2020.

[94] Sinai, N, *Rain Giver, Bone Breaker, Score settler: Allah in Pre-Quranic Poetry*, 2019.

[95] Wellhausen, cited in Hawting, G R, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam, From Polemic to History*, 1999.

[96] *Sunan an-Nasa'i* 5379, Book 49.

[97] *Al-'Awasim min al-Qawasim*, 2.283.

[98] Rahbur, D, *God of Justice, A Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qur'ān*, 1960.

[99] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 3.50.894, 8.75.419, 9.93.489*; Sahih Muslim* 6475-6; *Jami al-Tirmidhi* 3506, 3508 and *Sunan ibn Majah* 3860.

[99] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 8.75.419 and 9.93.483.

[100] Redhouse, J W, *On the Most Comely Names, i.e. the laudatory Epithets or the titles of praise bestowed upon God in the Qur`an or Muslim Writings*, 1880. Admittedly, Redhouse seems to have strained to maximise his tally with several words entered multiple times in slightly different forms. A more modest but acceptable list, still over two hundred long, appears in Molla-Djafari, *Gott hat die schönsten Namen … Islamische Gottesnamen, ihre Bedeutung, Verwendung und Probleme ihrer Übersetzung* [*God Has the most Beautiful Names. God's Names in Islam, their Meaning, Use, and Problems with their Translation*], 2009.

[101] Reynolds, G S, *Allah, God in the Quran*, 2020.

[102] Dawkins, R, *The God Delusion*, 2006.

[103] Rahbur, D, *God of Justice, A Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qurʾān*, 1960 (p 226).

[104] Coined by St Hippolytus of Rome (170-235).

[105] Crone, P, Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾān (Part I), 2015.

[106] One suggestion that might cast light upon these verses is that they relate to a passage found in the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, a now-lost gospel (or possibly more than one gospel) used by Jewish Christian sects known as the Nazoreans and the Ebionites. Origen of Alexandria (184-c.253), in his commentary on the Gospel of St John 2.12 which reads:

> '*After this (Jesus) went down to Capernaum along with his mother and brother but they stayed there only a few days*'

makes a reference to a variant at this point in '*the gospel according to the Hebrews*', writing:

> *If anyone accepts the gospel according to the Hebrews, where the Saviour himself says: 'Just now my mother, the Holy Spirit, took me by one of my hairs and carried me up to the great mountain, Tabor.'*

Because there is no evidence of a Jewish-Christian sect surviving into the sixth century, this apparent identification of Mary as the Holy Spirit, seems unlikely as the source of the heresy that the Qurʾan rebuts, although, unlikely or not, it is arguably the best explanation yet to be proposed for these verses.

[107] *Sahih Muslim* 7134.

[108] Harut and Marut: the Armenian Zoroastrian demonic twins in the Qurʾan who invented fiction, James R. Russell, *Commentationes Iranicae,* ed. S. Tokhtasev and P. Luria.

[109] Lumpkin, J B, *The Books of Enoch*, 2011.

[110] Black, M, *The Origin of the Name Metatron*, 1951,

[111] Chapter 12.

[112] Greenblatt, *The Rise and Fall of Adam & Eve*, 2018 (chapter 3).

[113] In *The Qurʾan and Its Biblical Subtext*, 2010. Gabriel Said Reynolds draws attention to rabbinic traditions that Adam and Eve were not initially naked in Paradise but clothed in heavenly raiment 'a garment of light' Genesis Rabbah 20.12. This clothing fell from them upon their sin, causing their actual nakedness, not merely their awareness of a pre-existing nudity.

[114] *A Homily on Cain and Abel* by Isaac of Antioch (fifth century), the *Life of Abel* by Symmachus (late firth/early sixth centuries) and a Syriac dialogue poem on Cain and Abel, see Bock, S, *Selected Dialogue Poems*, 2009, *per* Reynolds, G S, *The Qurʾan and the Bible*, 2018.

[115] El Zein, *Islam Arabs and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 2009, offers two other classical sources for these battle stories: *Tafsir al- Qurʾan ibn Kasthir* and *The Tales of the Prophets,* Muhammad ibn Ali al-Kisa'i.

[116] Al-Baydawi, Abdullah (d.1286), *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Taw'il*, via El-Zein, A, *Islam, Arabs and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 2009.

[117] The story also appears in the sixth century Syriac church text *The Cave of Treasures*, which is more likely that the *Questions of Bartholomew t*o have been the Qurʾan writer's original source.

[118] *Kitab al-Tawasin*, c. 922, *per* Awn, P J, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology*.

[119] Silverstein, A, *On the original meaning of the Qur'anic term al-Shaytan al-Rajim*, 2013.

[120] Hebrew biblical references to a heavenly book include, per Paul, S, *Heavenly Tablets and the Book of Life*: Exodus 32.32-33, in which God says to Moses '*He who has sinned against Me, him only will I erase from My roster*'; Psalms 40.8, 56.9, 69.29, 87.6 and 139.16; Isaiah 4.3, 34.16-17, and 65.6; Jeremiah 17.13 and 22.30; Malachi 3.16; and Daniel 7.10, 10.21. and 12.1. The heavenly tablet is also a prominent theme in the second century Jewish text the Book of Jubilees.

In the New Testament the concept is employed once by Jesus:

> '*Do not rejoice so much in the fact that the devils are subject to you as that your names are inscribed in heaven*' (Luke 10.20);

and appears in St Paul's Letter to the Philippians (4.3), the Letter to the Hebrews (12.23) and the Book of Revelation (3.5 and 13.8). Shalom Paul links these with a number of ancient inscriptions of Sumerian prayers: '*My life is inscribed before you*', '*May (you) inscribe the days of his life) for long duration in a tablet*' and '*On your unchangeable tablet, which established the boundaries of heaven and earth, proclaim a length of days for me, inscribe long life*'.

121 *'Aisha narrated… ' Magic was worked on Allah's Apostle so that he used to think that he had had sexual relations with his wives while he actually had not. Then one day he said: 'Aisha, do you know that Allah has instructed me concerning the matter I asked him about? Two men came to me and one of them sat near my head and the other sat near my feet. The one near my head asked the other: 'What is wrong with this man?' The latter replied: 'He is under the effect of magic.' The first one asked: 'Who has worked magic on him?' The other replied: Labid bin al-Asam', a man from the Banu Zuraiq who was an ally of the Jews and a hypocrite. The first one asked: 'What material did he use?' The other replied: 'A comb and the hair stuck to it.'*

Sahih al-Bukhari, 8.75.400. See also 4.54.490, 8.75.400 and Sahih Muslim 26.5428 and 5429.

122 Eg the *Asbab ul-Nuzul* of Ali ibn Ahmad al-Wahidi (d.1075).

123 *Light upon light, Essays in Islamic Thought and History in Honour of Gerhard Bowering*, chapter 3 *Biblical Turns of Phrase in the Qurʾan*, 2019.

124 These three are:

{24.35}: the metaphor for God of an oil lamp in a niche **⟨11⟩**	2 Peter 1.19: *'Keep your attention closely fixed upon (the prophetic message) as you would on a lamp shining in a dark place'*
{24.39-40}: the metaphor, for the deeds of	2 Peter 2.17:

disbelievers', of a mirage in the desert: '*which a thirsty man supposes is water till he does not find it to be anything.*'	'*(Evil doers) are waterless springs, mists whipped by the gale.*'
{24.45}: '*And God created every beast from water…*'	2 Peter 3.5: '*There were heavens and earth drawn out of the waters … all brought into being by the word of God.*'

[125] Silverstein, A, *Haman's transition from Jahiliyya to Islam*, 2008, , *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*. Silverstein also notes that the Book of Esther has a strong similarity with the story of Joseph in Genesis – a disadvantaged Israelite rising to an exalted position in a foreign royal court by virtue of a demonstration of their trustworthiness, and using this success to help the wider Jewish community – which makes Haman's transition from Esther to Pharaoh's court, albeit in the time of Moses, less incongruous than it may appear at first sight.

[126] Nimrod appears in Genesis 8.10-11. He may have been employed in *Genesis Rabbah* to represent Persia and, by association, Zoroastrianism, leading to the fire symbolism.

[127] Unpublished, cited in Brock, *Genesis 22 in Syriac Tradition*, and in Powers, D S, *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men*.

[128] *On Abraham and his types*, stanza 90 Jacob of Serugh.

[129] Bell, R, *Who were the Hanifs?*, 1930.

[130] Reynolds, G S, *The Qurʾan and Its Biblical Subtext*, 2010., page 84

[131] Book VI.

[132] *Tatian's Diatassaron* is a harmonising paraphrase of the four gospels made c.160-175. A commentary upon it by the fourth century St Ephrem the Syrian, was discovered in 1957.

[133] *Shabbat* 88a.

[134] Reynolds, G S, *The* Qurʾan and *the Bible*, 2018.

[135] *Hagigah* 14b.

[136] *Tafsir al-Jalalayn.*

[137] 4.1, 7.3-8.1 and 17.3-19.2, respectively.

[138] Shoemaker, S J, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, 2003,. This story was included in the apocryphal *Gospel of pseudo-Matthew/The Infancy Gospel of Matthew* but Shoemaker concludes that it is unlikely that this gospel influenced or was influenced by the Qurʾan due to its time and place of composition.

[139] Shoemaker, S J, *Christmas in the* Qurʾan*: The Quranic Account of Jesus' Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition.*

[140] Luxenberg, C, argued in *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* , 2007, based upon a German work of 2000, that large parts of the Qurʾan were in fact mistranslated and Arabised sections of now lost Syiac-Christian lectionaries, a theme that was also taken up by Sawma, G, in *The Qurʾan: Misinterpreted, Mistranslated, and Misread. The Aramaic Language of the Qurʾan*.

[141] The name '*Atlantis of the Sands*' is here taken from the title of a book by Ranulph Fiennes, which seeks to identify Iram as an archaeological site in Oman.

[142] Savignac, M. R, *Le sanctuaire d'Allat à Iram*, 1933.

[143] Farès-Drappeau, S & Zayadine F, *Two North-Arabian inscriptions from the temple of Lât at Wady Iram**, 1998.***

[144] Marshall, D, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, 1999.

[145] Anderson, M R, *The Qurʾan in Context, A Christian Exploration*.

[146] *Islam Critiqued*.

[147] *Taanit* 23a, (Babylon) 3.9 (16b) (Jerusalem).

[148] *Targun Jonathan*, Exodus, 13.17. The Targum gives no reason why the Qurʾan might have described the Ephraimites as having '*left their homes … fearing death*', but a satisfying explanation for this detail has been suggested by an independent scholar, Ian David Morris (Twitter, 30.1.21). If the Ephraimites had left Egypt thirty years before the exodus led by Moses, Morris points out, then their premature departure may have been a response to Pharaoh's massacre of the Israelites' new-born male children that Moses had narrowly escaped.

[149] Appearing in the 4th-5th century Greek *Alexander Romance*, and the Syriac *Song of Alexander* although this latter version is broadly contemporaneous with the Qurʾan.

[150] *Tamid*, 32b; Jacob of Serugh's Discourse on Alexander the Great.

[151] Paret records this discovery in *Un Parallele Byzantin a Coran XVIII* 59-81, this information and the summary, taken from Reynold, G S, *The Qurʾan and the Bible,* re**: {18:65-82}.**

[152] In *The Antiquities of the Jews* II, 6.

[153] Tesei, T, *The prophecy of Ḏū-l-Qarnayn (Q 18:83-102) and the Origins of the Qurʾānic Corpus*, 2013–2014.

[154] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 152-153.

[155] Anthony, S W, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith, The Making of the Prophet of Islam*, 2020.

[156] Book 4, Chapter 24.

[157] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 153.

[158] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 183-184.

[159] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraph 205.

[160] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 235.

[161] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 239.

[162] Hawting, G R, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam, From Polemic to History*, 1999,

[163] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraph T. 1192.

[164] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 263-268.

[165] *Muhammad's night journey in its Palestinian context – a perfect solution to a forgotten problem (Q17.1)*, Daniel Beck

[166] Sahih Bukhari 5.58.208.

[167] Musnad, V. 1, p. 447.

[168] Beck, D, *Evolution of the Early Qurʾan, From Anonymous Apocalypse to Charismatic Prophet*, 2018, page 199.

[169] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 313-314.

[170] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 313-314.

[171] Chapter 30.

[172] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 341-344.

[173] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 341-344.

[174] Page 9.

[175] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs.423-425.

[176] 1 Kings 8.44-49:

> *'Whatever the direction in which you may send your people forth to war against their enemies, if they pray to you O Lord, towards the city you have chosen, and the temple I*

have built in their honour, listen in heaven to their prayer and petition and defend their cause …If with their whole heart and soul they turn back to you in the land of the enemies who took them captive, pray to you toward the land you gave their fathers, the city you have chosen and the temple I have built in your honour , listen from your heavenly dwelling',

and Daniel 6.11:

'*Even after Daniel heard that this law (prohibiting prayers to an but King Darius) had been signed, he continued his custom of going home to kneel in prayer and give thanks to God in the upper chamber, three times a day, with the windows open towards Jerusalem.'*

[177] *Tuhfat al-Ahwadih Sharh Jami al-Tirmidhi*, *per* Abdarrahman al-Mubarakfuri, reported in *Praying towards al-Aqsa Mosque, A Study on Muslim Classical Sources*, 2017, Abdullah Marouf Omar.

[178] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraph 125.

[179] Crone, P & Cook, M, *Hagarism*, 1977.

[180] *A Short Chronicle on the End of the Sasanian Empire and Early Islam, 590-660 AD*, 2016.

[181] Hoyland, R, '*Islam as others saw it …*' and Ward-Perkins, B & Whitby, M, *The Cambridge ancient history, Vol XIV Late antiquity: empire and successors, 425-600*, 2001.

[182] https://www.nabataea.net.

[183] Herodian, *History of the Roman Empire*, V.3.5.

[184] Dio C, *Roman History,* 219.

[185] Herodian, *History of the Roman Empire*, VI.1.3.

Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 427-428.

[187] Published in *Christmas in the Qur'an*, ed. Ibn Warraq, 2014.

[188] *Asbab Nuzul* al-Wahidi.

[189]Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 570-571.

[190] P. 122. In the shouted conversation with Muhammad, Abu Sufyan dissociated himself from the mutilation of the Muslim dead that was occurring on the battlefield, of which by far the most gruesome was apparently his own wife's chewing of the liver of Muhammad's uncle, Abu Hamza - who had killed her father and brother at the Battle of Badr - and her making jewellery out of Hamza's and others' ears and noses, *per* paragraph 581. Abu Sufyan also challenged Muhammad to meet again for a third battle in a year's time at Badr (a rendezvous he would be unable to meet). In the view of Gabriel, R A, in *Muhammad, Islam's First Great General*, 2007:

> '*Abu Sufyan must have known that Muhammad was nearby. He could easily have ordered the cavalrymen with him to seek him out and kill him and put an end to the whole nasty business. But in Abu Sufyan's view, war was sport and honour was central to its practice. To kill Muhammad now that the battle was over and he had already been beaten was not the valiant thing to do. And so Muhammad survived*.'

[191] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 351.

[192] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 545-547.

[193] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 689.

[194] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 684-693.

[195] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 746-750.

Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 761-763.

[197] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 763 and 764.

[198] *Per* the ninth century biography of Muhammad by Ibn Sa'd. Her story, and the stories of all Muhammad's wives are well told in a trilogy of books forming the series: MacArthur, T, *Unveiled, The Nineteen Wives of Muhammad,* 2014.

[199] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 814.

[200] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs, 818-820.

[201] Sahih Bukhari 3.658, 5.584 and 6.244.

[202] Gabriel, R A, *Muhammad, Islam's First Great General*, 2007, chapt. 12.

[203] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 840-876.

[204] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 668.

[205] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 791--802.

[206] Powers, D S, *Muhammad is not the father of any of your men*, page 73.

[207] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs, 791-802.

[208] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs, 894-906.

[209] Nöldeke T, *Geschichte des Qorâns,* 1860.

[210] *Doctrina Jacobi* ('*Teachings of Jacob*') c. 634-640.

[211] The *Khuzestan Chronicle*, the *Armenian History of pseudo-Sebeos* (both c.660), *The Book of Main Points* by John bar Penkaye (before 691), a life of Patriarch Benjamin (before 717), the 'Spanish eastern source' (per Shoemaker in *Death of a Prophet*; before 741), the *Arab Byzantine Chronicle* (741), the Syrian common source (before 750) and the *Zuqnin chronicle*.

[212] See, in particular, Reda, N's detailed structural analysis of **Surah 2** in '*The Al-Baqara Crescendo, Understanding the Qurʾan's Style narrative Structur and running Themes*, 2017, and **Surah 3** in *The Poetics of Sūrat Āl ʿImrān's Narrative Structure (Q 3)* in *Structural Dividers in the Qurʾan* ed. Klar, M, 2021. With both surahs, Reda demonstrates a lateral division into themed sections/subsections by use of repeated phrases, but also a different set of pervasive themes following an independent pattern, either as a symmetrical ring structure (**Surah 3**) or in recurring but non-repeating sets (**Surah 2**), in the latter case with the same themes being replicated in miniature within individual verses.

[213] Hoyland, R, *In God's Path,* page 159.

[214] Ibn Ishaq, as arranged by Guillaume, A, in *The Life of Muhammad*, paragraphs 919-929.

[215] *Ktâbâ d-rêš mellê* (Summary of the History of the World), Book 15

[216] *Sunan al-Sughra al-Narsa'i*, 5004.

[217] Such as the ill-fated expedition of six sent to the Banu Hudad, five of whom were ambushed and killed by the Banu Lahyan, whose chief was later tricked into going for a walk with a Muslim assassin (Ibn Ishaq 638-648). Or the forty or seventy missionaries killed by the Banu Salem (Ibn Ishaq 649-651) - again save for a sole survivor to carry the news back to Yathrib – prompting multiple raids in retaliation. When, before the hijra, Muhammad had sought to preach in Taʾif he had been chased away with curses and thrown stones, but after the conquest of Mecca he would besiege the town and eventually secure by force of arms, a submission that had not been achievable by persuasion.

[218] Winkler, 1928, cited in Abdel-Haleem's, *Understanding the Qurʾan, Themes and Style*, 2011.

[219] The *Didache* or *The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*.

[220] Torrey, C C, *The Jewish Foundations of Islam*, 1933.

[221] Goitein, S D, *Studies in Islamic History and Traditions,* 2010.

[222] Zeitlin, I, *The Historical Muhammad*, 2007 citing G D Newby.

[223] See also Exodus 23.14 & 17, 34.23, 2 Chronicles 8.13 and 1 Kings 9.25.

[224] *Antiquities of the Jews*, Flavius Josephus, Chapter 8, paragraph 5.

[225] *Sunan Abu Dawood*, 2.2150.

[226] In the particular circumstances of that case, the man, Salim, had been adopted by the woman concerned, Sahla bint Suhail, when he had been a child but they found themselves unable to continue living in the same house after the Qurʾan abolished adoption **⟨67⟩**. According to the hadith (*Al-Muwatta* 1288):

> *'Aisha, mother of the faithful* [ie Muhammad's wife] *proceeded upon this when she wanted to let some men enter upon her. She asked her sister, Umm Kulthum bint Abu Bakr al-Saddiq … and her brothers' daughters to suckle whoever of men she liked to enter into her presence. Yet the remainder of the prophet's wives refused to let anyone enter upon them due to suckling and said 'No, by Allah, we did not view what Allah's Messenger commanded Sahla bint Suhail to do, except as a concession to suckle Salim alone.'*

The following hadith addresses the case of a woman who suckled her female slave in order to make intercourse with the slave haram to her husband. Regardless of the authenticity of these accounts, they demonstrate that the rulings of the Qurʾan and the sayings of Muhammad were sufficiently embedded in Arab society by the eighth century, that people were seeking loopholes in order to achieve what they wanted within the letter of the law.

[227] *Sahih Muslim*, 17.33:

> *Aisha …reported that Sahla bint Suhail came to Allah's Apostle… and said: 'Messenger of Allah, I see on the face of Abu Hudhaifa (signs of disgust) on entering of Salim into (our house)', whereupon Allah's Apostle said: 'Suckle him.' She said: 'How can I suckle him as he is a grown-up man?' Allah's Messenger smiled and said: 'I already know that he is a young man'…*

Sahih Muslim, 17.36:

> *(Aisha said:) 'The wife of Abu Hudhaifa said: 'Messenger of Allah, Salim comes to me and now he is a (grown-up) person, and there is something that (rankles) in the mind of Abu Hudhaifa about him, whereupon Allah's Messenger said: 'Suckle him (so that he may*

become your foster-child), and thus he may be able to come to you (freely).'

For Aisha's account of the loss of the verses, see *Al-Muwatta* 30.1.8 and 30.2.12, and Sahih Muslim 3597, 3598, 3600 and 3605. For a fuller discussion of this story, see David Wood ('*Acts17Apologetics*') '*The Sheepgate Conspiracy*', Youtube.

228 Smith, W R, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, 1905 (page 105). The spreading of the cloak as a symbolic dominion over an inherited kinswoman has biblical precedent: Ruth 3.9.

229 Ali, K, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, 2010.

230 '*The Hanafites* [Abu Hanafi gave his name to one of the four main schools of Sunni jurisprudence, the other three being named after Malik bin Annas, al-Sha'afi and Ahmad bin Hanbal] *were alone in permitting a free woman, who is compos mentis and who has reached the age of maturity, to conclude her own marriage contract without a guardian. The Twelver-Shi'ites largely shared Hanafite doctrine but some of their jurists added the condition that the woman, in order to enjoy this right, could not be a virgin (i.e. she must have been previously have been married) ... The Malakites, Shafi'ites and Hanbalites* [the other three schools of jurisprudence] *required a guardian to represent every woman, even those who were free, compos mentuis and of legal age … Except for the Hanbalites, all schools insisted on the need for the guardian to secure the approval of the bride, thud s creating what they termed 'wilayat musharaka', namely a 'guardian-partnership', whereby the woman and her guardian function as partners in deciding on the marriage*'

Hallaq, W B, *Sharïa: Theory, Practicw Transformation,* 2009, (page 274).

231 (Re: dolls) *Sahih al-Bukhari* 8.73.151; (re: ages) *al-Bukhari* 5.58.234,236; 7.62.64, 65 and 88; Sunan Abu Dawood 4915.

232 *Jami at-Tirmidhi* 1128 and *Sunan ibn Majah* 1953.

233 *Kitab al-Athar Abu Hanifa*, ruling 393.

234 *Per* Abdel-Haleem, page 55.

[235] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 7.62.132, and 8.73.68 and *Sunan Abu Dawood* 2137, 2138 and 2139. *Sunan Abu Dawood* (2142) contains a report that Muhammad ruled: '*A man shall not be asked why he beat his wife*'.

[236] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 7.72.715.

[237] *Didascalia Apostolorum*, III, 26, 5–11. The similarity is discussed fully in Zellentin, H, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*, 2013.

[238] *Sunan Ibn Majah* 1926, Al Adad Al Mufrad (6.120). The term is also included in Abu Hanifa's *Kitab al Athar* (443), the earliest book of sharĭa judgments.

[239] *The History of al-Tabari*, *Vol. VIII The Victory of Islam*, p 2-3.

[240] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 60.311.

[241] Sahih al-Bukhari 3.4.56.6 and 7, 7.64.266; Sahih Muslim 3996, 4000, and Sunna ibn Majah 2711.

[242] The example of a man, leaving three daughters and survived by his wife and both his parents is given by Peter Townsend in *Questioning Islam, Tough Questions and Honest Answers About the Muslim Religion*:

- The wife would be entitled to an eighth of the estate ('*If you have a child then unto them (your wives) an eighth of what you leave*', **{4.12}**),
- the daughters would be entitled to two thirds of the estate in equal shares ('*if there are only daughters, two or more, then unto them is two-thirds of what (the testator) leaves*', **{4.11}**),
- and the parents to one sixth each('*And unto his parents – each of the two – a sixth of what he leaves if he has a child*'),

leaving the executor with the problem of dividing an estate between twenty-seven twenty-fourths.

[243] From just the two '*sahih*' (most trusted) collections: *Sahih al-Bukhari* 2.23.413, 3.34.421, 3.49.860, 3.50.885, 4.56.829, 6.60.79, 7.63.195, 196 and 230, 8.78.629, 8.82.803, 805, 806, 809, 810, 813, 816 and 842, 9.89.303, 9.92.432, 9.93.633 and *Sahih Muslim* 4191, 4194, 4196,

4198, 4199, 4201, 4202, 4205-4207, 4209, 4211, 4212, 4216, 4483. *Jami al-Tirmidhi* 1431; also the *Musnad of Ahmad Hanbal*, 157, assert that Umar considered writing the verse into the Qur'an, so convinced was he that Muhammad's practise should be recorded as God's command.

[244] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 6.60.79.

[245] *Sahih Muslim* 17.4194 see also *Sahih al-Bukhari* 8.82.816.

[246] Kamali, M H, *Crime and Punishment in Islamic law, A fresh interpretation* (page 75).

[247] It was narrated that Aishah said:

> '*The verse of stoning and of breastfeeding an adult ten times was revealed, and the paper was with me under my pillow. When the Messenger of Allah died, we were preoccupied with his death, and a tame sheep came in and ate it.*'

per Sunan Ibn Majah 1944, a tradition also reported in the *Musnad of Ahmad Hanbal.*

[248] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 3.48.829.

[249] The story is told by Ibn Ishaq at paragraph 732-740 and hadiths from both of the most reliable *sahih c*ollections: *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 5:59:462 and *Sahih Muslim*: 37:6673. The fact that Ali had accused Aisha led to permanent ill feeling between the two. When Ali became the fourth caliph (656) Aisha is said to have been instrumental in fomenting a rebellion against him, and played a leading role in the first major confrontation between the rebels and Ali, the Battle of the Camel. Thus, the necklace incident may be regard, according to the traditional narrative, as the origin of the Sunni-Shia divide that persists to the present day.

[250] Thereafter, the schools differ. Abu Hanifa, from whom developed the most widely followed Islamic school of law which tends to permit the greatest scope for judicial discretion, ruled that no further limbs should be forfeit for third or subsequent theft, which further offending would inevitably become more difficult to carry out with two missing limbs; however, the more conservative Sha'afi and Hanbali schools, apply no such bar, considering that **{5.38}** may theoretically require that all four limbs be chopped

should a persistent offender fall to be sentenced for theft on four separate occasions.

[251] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 8.81.774, 780-782.

[252] *Sanhedrin* 37a.

[253] Anthony, S W, *Crucifixion and Death as Spectacle, Umayyad Crucifixion in Its Late Antique Context*, 2014.

[254] The incident is recorded in no less than seventeen hadith including: *Sahih al-Bukhari* 1.4.242, 5.59.505, 7.71.623, 8.82.794 and 797; and *Sahih Muslim* 4131.

[255] Taken from the Hammurabi Stele.

[256] *Jami al-Tirmidhi* 1399. See also *Sunan ibn Majah* 2662.

[257] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 6.60.115 and *Sunan Abu Dawood* 3963.

[258] *Sunan Abu Dawood* 4447, *Jami al-Trimidhi* 152 and *Sunan ibn Majah* 2561.

[259] Leviticus 7,26-27, all of chapter 11 and 17.10-14; Deuteronomy chapter 14; and also (relating to restrictions on consuming meat and dairy products together, which do not appear in the Qur'an) Exodus 23.19 and 34.26.

[260] Muhammad is reported as having ordered flogging for the first one or two offences of being intoxicated but death for a '*third or fourth*' offence; but then to have relented and ordered flogging to remain the sentence, even for repeat offenders, *per Sunan Abu Dawood* 4470. In *Sahih al-Bukhari* (8.81.768, 771 and 772) Muhammad is said to have ordered a habitual drunkard whose nickname was Donkey to be flogged but warned his companions not to curse him as despite his failings he still loved Allah.

[261] Azazel is mentioned three times in the Book of Leviticus 16.6-10 as the entity to whom scapegoats are dedicated.

[262] *Sahih Muslim* 1474 (honey); *Tafsir al-Tabari* 66.1 (intercourse with Maryam).

[263] It also appears in the Zoroastrian text *Shayest na-shayest* (13.29), and in Hindu (*Taittiriya Upanishad*, the *Mahabharat: Shanti Parva* 167.9),

Jain, Buddhist, Taoist and Confucianist texts. It is possible that the rule may have originated as a positive version of the rule of proportionality in punishments - '*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*' - in the Code of Hammurabi, which does appear in the Quran. See ⟨73⟩.

[264] *Al-Kitab al-Kafi*, vol.2: 145:

> *'A Bedouin came to the prophet, grabbed the stirrup of his camel and said: O the messenger of God! Teach me something to go to heaven with it. Prophet said: 'As you would have people do to you, do to them; and what you dislike to be done to you, don't do to them. Now let the stirrup go!''*

[265] Quoted from Bailey, C, in Hourani, G, *Reason and tradition in Islamic Ethics*, 1985.

[266] Speaking at the Salem Community Center, Sacramento, December 2018, (slightly paraphrased).

[267] Donner, F, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 2010.

[268] Alternative denominations include Elcesaites, possibly a faction of the Ebionites, or even Manicheans.

[269] From 537 to 752 the Byzantine Empire exercised effective control over the papacy. The Great Schism between Catholic and Orthodox churches occurred in 1054.

[270] Matthew 2.23, 4.13; Mark 1.9; Luke 1.26, 2.4, 2.39, 2.51, 4.16 and John 1.46

[271] Two alternative explanations for the word are commonly supposed. The Hebrew word '*netzer*' (literally '*separation*' or '*consecration*') is used for the anointing of priests, who, pursuant to Leviticus 21.12, must be born of the tribe of Levi. Chapter 6 of the Book of Numbers institutes the nazirite vow, whereby an Israelite from any of the twelve tribes may commit, either temporarily or permanently, to live a life according to some of the Torah's priestly restrictions. These include avoiding the consumption of wine, any contact with corpses and the cutting of one's hair. The two most prominent Old Testament figures to have taken this vow are Samuel and Samson, and the existence of nazirite oath takers is attested in the Bible as

late as the first century BC (1 Maccabees 3.49). Whilst one would not initially associate Jesus with the avoidance of wine, some have pointed to his statement to his disciples at the Last Supper '*I tell you, I will not drink this fruit of the vine from now until the day that I drink it new with you in my Father's reign*' (Matthew 26.29, Luke 22.18) as resembling the nazarite oath.

The same word may mean '*branch*' and is used by Isaiah 4.2, 11.1 to refer to the blessings of God upon Israel, by Jeremiah and Zechariah to represent the messiah ('*I shall raise up a righteous shoot from David*', Jeremiah 23.5 *c.f.* Zechariah 3.8, 6.12).

[272] St Jerome (347-420) too refers to '*the gospel that the Nazareans and Ebionites use*', *per Commentary on Matthew* 12.13, and '*the gospel according to the Hebrews which was actually written in the Chaldean script or Syriac language but with Hebrew letters, which the Nazareans still use today*', *Against the Pelagians* 3.2.

[273] See Aziz, J, *The Priest and the Prophet*, 2005; also Akyol, M, *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam*, 2015, and *The Islamic Jesus* 2017, , which refers to post-Quranic South Arabian rock inscriptions appealing to '*The God of Moses and Jesus*' or '*The God of Aaron and Jesus*', which may be clues to the survival of a Jewish-Christian (but non-Islamic) religious tradition, into the Islamic age.

[274] Crone P, in *The Book of Watchers in the Qurʾan*', proposed an ingenious alternative solution to the Ezra problem. She adopts the suggestion made by P Casanova in *Ifris et Ouzair Journal Asiatique*, 1924, that Ezra (who in Arabic appears as Uzayr or, pre-vowelisation, 'z-y-r') may have been originally intended to indicate not Enoch, but the angel Azeal (whose name would have appeared as 'z-y-l'). The mystery of the last consonant, Crone suggests, may be found in its significance as a reference to God. It is a frequent occurrence in angel names that they reflect an aspect of God – for example Gabriel means '*God is my strength*', Michael: '*Who is like God?*' and Raphael: '*It is God who heals*'. The allegation of idolatry through associating an angel with God might, Crone proposed, have appeared confusing if the angel's name identified an aspect of God. So, she proposed, at some stage the final consonant was removed, only to be replaced with an 'r'. 'z-y-r' led later scribes and commentators, looking for a suitable biblical character to place in the verse, to settle upon Ezra.

[275] *Per The Study Quran.*

[276] Paragraph 906.

[277] First recorded in *The History of Baghdad*, by al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (1002-1071).

[278] The traditional understanding of the '*town*' from whence people cry to be saved in {**4.75**} (eg Ibn Kathir).

[279] Paragraphs 982-983.

[280] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 3.30.106, 9.88.241, 246 and 248, 9.93.565; *Sahih Muslim* 7005, 7017, 7019 and 7034.

[281] *Sunna ibn Majah* 4083 and 4086; *Jami al-Trimidhi* 2232 and *Sunan Abu Dawood* 4271-2.

[282] *Sahih Muslim* 2922, also 2921; *Sahih al-Bukhari* 4.56.791.

[283] *Sunna ibn Majah*, quoted by Ibn Kathir describes the beast as follows:

> *'It's head is like the head of a bull, it's eyes like the eyes of a pig, its ears are like the ears of an elephant, its horns are like the horns of a stag, its neck is like the neck of an ostrich, its chest is like the chest of a lion its colour is like the colour of a tiger, its haunches are like the haunches of a cat, its tail is like the tail of a ram and its legs are like the legs of a camel… It will bring with it the staff of Moses and the ring of Solomon. And there will be no disbeliever left without it making a black spot on his face, which will spread until all his face is black as a result, then when the people trade with one another in the marketplace, they will say, `How much is this, O believer' `How much is this, O disbeliever' And when the members of one household sit down together to eat, they will know who is a believer and who is a disbeliever. Then the beast will say: `O so-and-so, enjoy yourself, for you are among the people of Jannah.' And it will say: `O so-and-so, you are among the people of Jahannam'. '*

[284] Sometimes Sheol is referred to as though a beast or demon: Hosea 13.14 ('*I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from Death. Where, O Death, are your plagues? Where, O Sheol, is your sting? c.f.* Psalm 49.16, Proverbs 27.20 ('*Sheol and the abyss are never satisfied*') and Isaiah 5.14 ('*Sheol enlarges its throat and opens its maw*

without limit.') This beastification of Sheol may suggest that the descriptions of Sheol as a place were also intended figuratively.

[285] Tesei, T, *The Barzakh and the Intermediate State of the Dead in the Quran*, 2016.

[286] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 1.12.770.

[287] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 9.93.532.

[288] '*As thou dost desire, O holy one! So shalt thou be: holy shalt thou cause the soul to pass over the Chinvat Bridge, holy shalt thou come into heaven*', Yasna 71.

[289] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 3.43.620.

[290] A composite made by *The Study Quran* of longer descriptions contained in the tafsir of Ibn Kathir of **{108.1}**.

[291] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 55.544.

[292] *Jami al-Trimidhi* (3834), approved by Ibn Kathir, which states that:

> '*The smallest reward for the people of Heaven is an abode where there are eighty thousand servants and seventy-two houri, over which stands a dome decorated with pearls, aquamarine, and ruby, as wide as the distance from al-Jabiyyah to San'a.*'

[293] Cited in *Understanding the Qurʾan, Themes and Style*, 2011, Abdel-Haleem.

[294] *Bundahishnih* (*Creation*) 30.14.

[295] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 1.12.770.