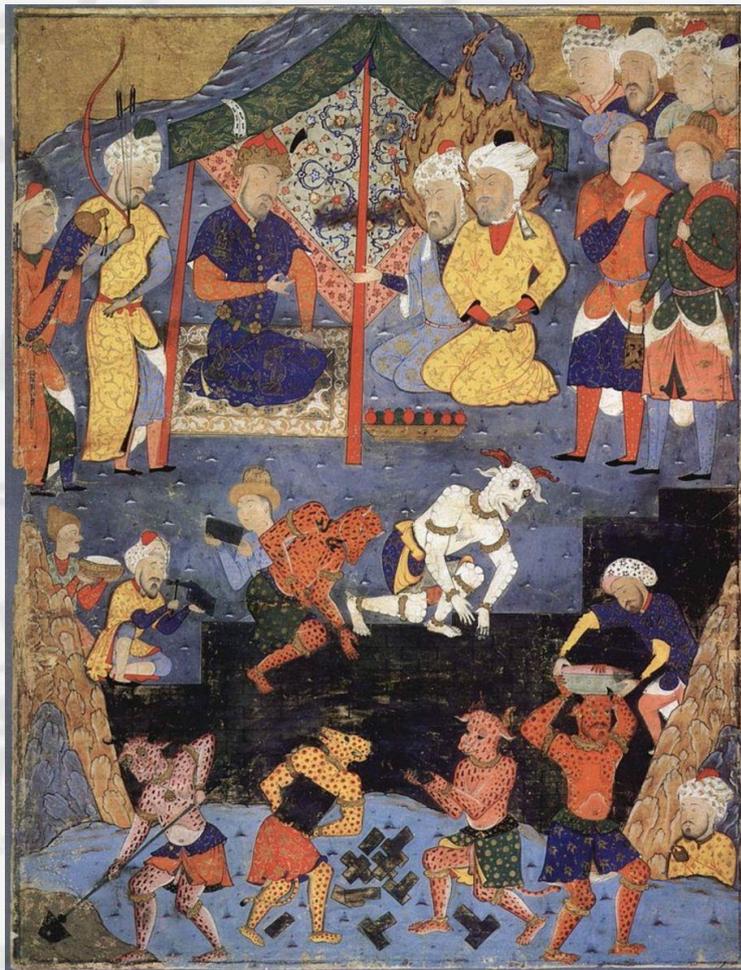




The Islam Research Group

Who Wrote the Qur'an?

II Quranic Themes and Sources



Dhu'l Qarnayn building a wall to restrain Gog and Magog

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1. Introduction

The Quran (literally the 'recitation', Popp suggests 'the lectionary') as it is encountered today is a collection of 114 bodies of text, surahs, each of which divided into a number of verses ('ayah').

The fact that the ayah tend, in the original Arabic, to rhyme demonstrates that these texts are carefully composed and intended to be read aloud. Some verses make reference to the composer's intention that they are memorised and that they should be regarded as forming part of a whole, although no verse ever specifically refers to a previously announced one.

Due to the facts that the surahs:

- can contain within a single surah, a wide range of subject matter and styles,
- repeat content frequently, often using the same refrains (less than 50% of the text of the Quran appears only once¹),
- vary greatly in length (from **Surah 12**'s twenty-four words to **Surah 2**'s 286 verses),
- often address an audience within the context of a specific situation they face, such as suffering exile, preparing to fight battles and coping with setbacks and victories, yet omit important information that would make its content comprehensible to later readers,
- on occasion clearly contradict one another, and
- are not arranged in an obvious order,

the Quran can give the impression of being badly disorganised. Scholars, such as **Nicolai Sinai**², have, however made progress in finding order within its chaos, and Sinai in particular makes a strong case that the Quran follows several subtle internal organisational principles and should properly be considered as a single work: albeit one with a very complex history and structure.

Following a complex stylometric analysis of the Quran's structure, **Benham Sadeghi** asserts that it can be demonstrated that, whatever the variety in the Quran's content, its form and use of language demonstrates to a high level of probability that the Quran in fact has one author.³

¹ *The Quran, A Historical-Critical Introduction* (2017) Nicholai Sinai

² Ibid

³ *The Chronology of the Qur'an: A Stylometric Research Program*, *Arabica* 58 (2011) 210-299. See **Who Wrote the Qur'an? III: The Structure of the Qur'an**.

2. Indications as to when the Qur'an was written

'The Romans have been defeated'

The only reference in the Qur'an to a purportedly contemporary historical event is contained in **{30.2-5}**:

- {30.2}** *The Romans ('al-Rūm') have been defeated*
- {30.3}** *In a land nearby. Yet after being defeated they will prevail.*
- {30.4}** *Within a few years – unto God belongs the affair before and after, and on that day the believers shall rejoice*
- {30.5}** *In God's help. He helps whomsoever He will and He is the Mighty, the Merciful.*

This is clearly a reference to the war between the Byzantine and Sassanian (Persian) Empires that lasted from 602-628 and which saw the Sassanians make sweeping gains in 610s, capturing Damascus in 613 and Jerusalem in 614. The Byzantine army retreated to Constantinople which the Sassanian emperor, Kusrau II, besieged, refusing the Byzantine Emperor (Heraclius's) offer of submission, and so, if these verses were composed immediately after the aforesaid Sassanian victories their predictions of a Byzantine comeback would have seemed unlikely to come to pass. As it happened, Heraclius withstood the siege of Constantinople and in 622 launched one of the greatest comebacks in military history, launching a surprise counter attack on Kusrow's Iranian heartland via Armenia that precipitated Kusrow's overthrow and the offering by his successor of favourable peace terms. So unlikely was Heraclius's recovery that it is probable that **{30.2-5}** was added to the Qur'an after the event as an apparently fulfilled prediction.

The tale of Dhu'l Qarnayn

In **{18.83-98}** the Qur'an tells the story of Dhul Qarnayn (literally '*the man with two horns*') who travels first to the land where the sun sets, then to the land where the sun rises and finally to a land where he builds a wall of iron and bronze across a valley to protect a village from Yajuj and Majuj (normally anglicised in translation to Gog and Magog). All three destinations of Dhul Qarnayn, and the building of a wall to restrain Gog and Magog, matches closely the adventures of Alexander the Great in a Syriac text, ***Neṣḥānā d-leh d-Aleksandrōs, The Victory (or Heroic Deeds) of Alexander***. This was composed to act as imperial propaganda to celebrate Heraclius' victory over the Sassanian Empire in the 628 and culminates in the agreeing of a treaty between Alexander and his nemesis in the work, a Persian king, Tubarlaq.⁴

⁴ ***The Alexander Legend In The Qur'an 18:83-102***, Kevin van Bladel, citing ***The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation***, 2002, and ***Alexander the Great in the Seventh-Century Syriac 'Apocalyptic' Texts***, 2003, both by G J Reinink.

Since the Qur'an's story of Dhu'l Qarnayn so clearly takes elements from *The Victory of Alexander*, and as we know that *The Victory of Alexander* must have been composed after 628, we can know with certainty that the Qur'an was not completed prior to 628.

Lack of mention of the Umayyad empire or the succession

It is notable that the Qur'an, whilst addressing the specific situation of its announcer and audience, including responses to questions and criticisms, exhortations to fight and accusations of disloyalty, makes no reference, to it being the foundational document of a powerful state, such that the Umayyad Caliphate became by 700 (establishing its rule over Damascus in 636, Jerusalem in 637-638, and Alexandria and Ctesiphon by 640). Nor does the Qur'an ever address the one thing that a later ruler would have been most likely to have wanted to have seen inserted into the text: an indication (favourable to themselves) how the succession to Muhammad as the leader of the Qur'anic community should be determined.

These features are indicative that the Qur'an was not amended after the rise of the Arab state in the Middle East in the 630s.

3. Indications as to where the Qur'an was written

The Qur'an is extremely short on clearly identifiable place names that may give clues to where it was composed.

The Masjid al-Haram

Central to the Qur'an's narrative is a place that it calls the '*Masjid al-Haram*'. (literally '*the Forbidden Place of Prostration*') This place also referred to as: '*the House*', '*the Sacred House*', '*the Ancient House*', (in the divine voice) '*My House*', the '*station*' or '*standing place*' of Abraham, and '*the Ka'aba*' (literally '*The Cube*'), and linked to '*the first house created for mankind ... at Bakka*'. This is a place that was believed to have been built by Abraham and Ishmael. It was a place that the Qur'an's audience had been expelled from, which they fought to recapture and from which in time they were able to exclude their enemies. It was also the place where they made pilgrimage to and came to pray in the direction of.

The location of this critically important place is addressed in a separate document: ***Who wrote the Qur'an? VIII: The Masjid al-Haram.***

Mecca

Setting to one side references to the 'Masjid al-Haram' etc, the actual word '*Mecca*' appears just once in the Qur'an at **{48.24}**:

{48.24} *He (God) it is Who restrained their hands from you and your hands from them in the valley of Makkah, after having made you victorious over them*

And God sees whatsoever you do.

There are strong reasons to doubt that this is the city in Saudi Arabia currently called Mecca.

- ❖ Qur'anic Mecca appears to be the name of a geographical feature, '*the valley of Makkah*', rather than a human settlement. Present day Mecca lies in an area of lowland several miles from the nearest mountain and would not be described as a valley.
- ❖ The verse referring to it, mentions it in passing as a place where some fighting did not take place after a victory, but contains no indication that the place was significant, still less that it was - as the traditional narrative relates - the prize over which the Quranic community and their enemies were fighting.

- ❖ There is no reliable historical evidence for the existence of Mecca prior to 741.

It is not mentioned in any accounts either before or during the life of Muhammad or during the first century after his reported death. This is especially remarkable given Mecca's supposed importance to the Islam story and the supposed obligations upon all Muslims to prostrate towards it five times each day in prayer and visit it once in their lifetime.

Despite – or, for the more conspiratorially-minded, because of - extensive modern building work around the Ka'aba to accommodate the vast numbers of pilgrims making the annual Hajj pilgrimage, not one single archaeological object or trace of habitation from Muhammad's time or earlier has ever been discovered there.

In 1987 Patricia Crone published *Meccan Trade And The Rise Of Islam* which challenged the notion that Mecca, in a desert hollow with a poor water supply, far from any coast, major town or trade route, could have possibly sustained a significant trading centre in the seventh century.

The Qur'an author can be surprisingly flexible with his forms of expression. One example of this creativity can be seen in his particular fondness for giving pairs of characters in a story, names that are identical other than for the first letter. So:

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

Just as the Qur'an substitutes Saul's name with that of Goliath but with a different initial, one may wonder, whether the Qur'an's unknown '*valley of Makkah*' may have been given a name that bears no relationship to its actual name, but which was adapted from the name of Bakkah that appears in {3.96} and may refer to the '*Valley of Bacca*' in **Psalm 84**). If so, the artificially created name Makkah would have been particularly liable to have been seized upon by later generations who wished to 'Arabise' the story of the Qur'an's revelation by redirecting it away from the predominantly Judeo-Christian Middle East, towards the 'blank canvas' anonymity of the Hijaz.

Yathrib / Medina

As with the word '*Mecca*', Yathrib is mentioned only once in the Qur'an, in its case at **{33.13}**, but unlike with Mecca, Yathrib has a well attested pre-Quranic existence, having been mentioned (as '*Jathrippa*') in **Claudius Ptolomy's** second century **Geography**. Since members of the Qur'anic community, albeit uncommitted ones, address their fellow fighters as '*O people of Yathrib*', this supports the traditional Islamic view that the Qur'an community was, at least for a time, based in Yathrib.

The siting of the Qur'an's revelation in Yathrib is also corroborated by the only document from Islamic history that is likely as old as the Qur'an, a treaty commonly known as the **Constitution of Medina**. This document draws up the rights and obligations of several Yathrib tribes, and the Jewish members thereof, whilst investing the power to decide whether to go to war and the resolution of disputes with Muhammad.

Elsewhere, the Qur'an refers to its community as comprising the people of '*al-Madīnah*', see **{9.101 & 120}**, **{33.60}** and **{22.26 & 29}**. In **{63.8}**, the Qur'an author imagines '*hypocrites*' amongst its community, who in fact resent the believers in their midst, saying to one another: '*If we return to al-madīnah, the mightier will surely expel the weaker therefrom*'. The traditional Islamic narrative is that al-madīnah and Yathrib are one and the same place. This is not implausible. Usually '*al-madīnah*' is translated in its modern usage of '*the city*', but etymologically it is likely derived from the word '*dīn*', meaning '*religion*', so that its original meaning may have been '*the people of religion*' or, with a little extrapolation, '*the place of religious rule*', i.e. the Quranic community's base.

Other locations referred to in the Qur'an

Besides Yathrib, the only three unambiguous place names referred to in the Qur'an are:

Rome, **{30.2}** (see above),

Mount Sinai, **{95.2}** and **{23.20}**,

and (several times) **Midian**, located on the Jordan Plain.

The audience is repeatedly warned by references to the punishments that have previously been meted out to the inhabitants of '**Ad**', '**Thamud**' and '**Iram**'. The only clearly identifiable geographical markers in these early surahs are, and some uninhabited rock hewn dwellings, said to be well known to the Qur'an's audience, that it seems reasonable to associate with the ruined city of Petra.

In a similar way **{37.137}** warns of the consequences of sin by drawing their attention to some unspecified sign of God's destruction of the people of Lot, which the Qur'an's listeners are reminded that they '*pass by ... in the morning, and at night*', possibly a site associated with the destruction of **Sodom** near the **Dead Sea**.

References to topography, weather, vegetation and the sea in the Qur'an

It seems inconceivable that some verses of the Qur'an could have been composed with a desert audience in mind. Several verses including **{2.164}**, **{6.99}**, **{6.141}**, **{13.12}**, **{32.27}** and **{80.24-32}** invite its audience to reflect upon the blessings of abundant rainfall and a fertile land as visible signs of God's providence. See for example, **{6.99}**:

{6.99}

He (God) it is Who sends down water from the sky.

*Thereby We bring forth the shoot of every plant,
and from it We bring forth vegetation,
from which We bring forth grain in closely packed rows,
and the date palm, and from its sheaves We bring forth
clusters of dates hanging low, and gardens of grapes,
olives and pomegranates, like unto one another and yet not
alike.*

*Look upon their fruits as they grow and ripen!
Truly in that are a sign for a people who believe.*

The Qur'an condemns idolaters for 'slitting the ears of cattle', **{4.199}**, which we must assume was some sort of pagan ritual, and **{80.32}** refers to the audience's flocks, demonstrating that the Qur'an's first audience included livestock farmers.

The Qur'an contains eight references to ships and their navigability as gifts from God, the 'darkness of a fathomless sea, covered by waves', **{24.40}**, and 'the mixing of two seas', **{55.19}**, and to its audience calling upon Allah during storms at sea - , **{10.22}**,

{10.22}

*He (God) it is Who carries you over land and sea,
even when you are sailing in ships till when they sail
with them upon a favourable wind, and rejoice therein,
there comes upon them a violent gale and the waves come
at them from every side, and they think that they shall be
encompassed by them.*

*They call upon God, devoting religion entirely to Him:
'If Thou savest us from this we shall surely be amongst the
thankful!'*

All of the above verses suggest that the Qur'an was addressed to livestock and arable farmers in a fertile land and (not necessarily during the same period) to sea-farers. It is self evidently highly unlikely that these verses were directed at the inhabitants of Mecca, one of the most arid places on earth, nor even the desert oasis of Yathrib (Medina).

4. Major Quranic themes

The Qur'an's pervasive themes include:

❖ The promotion of **strict monotheism**, and a repeated rejection of the sin of '*shirk*', the association of worldly things with God,

❖ **subservience** of the individual to divine authority. God's Will can be known by:

the Sharia (literally '*path*', commonly '*law*') set out in the Qur'an including:

- precise, although not always clear, laws on marriage, divorce, inheritance, and the prohibition and punishment of certain conduct,
- ritual obligations (fasting, pilgrimage, prayers, etc)
- a social hierarchy of relationships in which:
 - slavery is regulated and praised,
 - women are consistently afforded a subservient role to men (and sexual intercourse consistently presented as the satisfaction of male lust over women with no autonomy over their participation),
 - and justice can comprise the private exacting of retribution and can be family based;

and the instructions and imitation of the '*prophet*' or '*Messenger*' of God.

❖ General exhortations to its audience to show certain **virtues** - such as generosity, honesty (especially in trusts and commercial transactions), respect for one another's privacy, forbearance and forgiveness - in their personal relationships with others.

❖ **enmity to unbelievers** described generically as:

1. *kuffar* –literally '*those who cover up (the truth)*',
2. '*mushrikun*' – literally '*those who associate (worldly things with God)*',
3. '*munafiqun*' - hypocrites

whom believers are repeatedly forbidden from taking as allies or treating them equally with fellow believers, who are described in dehumanising language '*the vilest of animals*' **{8.55}**, and against whom believers are instructed in over a hundred and fifty verses to fight/wage 'jihad'

the Qur'an also contains numerous reference to Jews and Christians, both separately and together as '*People of the book*', also mentioning Sabians and Magi. The relationship between the Qur'anic community to the People of the Book is complex and addressed separately below.

❖ Repeated warnings of **divine punishment**:

- on the Last Day, which in the earlier surahs is frequently expressed as imminent, with graphic depictions of the Hellfire, and corresponding blessings on earth and rewards in Gardens of Paradise,
- on earth prior to the Last Day in the form of some form of smiting from God, and
- in later surahs, administered by the believing community through jihad exacted upon those who defy God's authority.

5. Biblical allusions

The Qur'an frequently confirms the authority of the **Torah** and **Injeel** (normally translated as '**gospel**') as having been 'sent down' by God.

It contains very many references to Biblical figures and stories including from the Hebrew Bible: Adam, Noah, Lot, Abraham, Isaac, Ismail, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Aaron, Solomon, David, Jonah and Job and from the New Testament, Zacharias, Mary and Joseph, John the Baptist and, clearly of special significance, Jesus. It appears to be no coincidence that no women are named in the Qur'an other than for Mary the mother of Jesus, even where their name would be expected from the role they play in the text (eg Eve). Unlike the Hebrew and Christian bibles that place these figures into a chronological context, the Qur'an does not tell these characters' stories in a continuous narrative (with the sole exception of Joseph who has his story told from beginning to end in **Surah 12**). Instead the biblical allusions are partial and fragmentary.

Noncanonical Sources

The Qur'an author was clearly familiar, not merely with the Bible itself, but with a wide range of non-canonical Jewish and Christian texts. These include:

✦ **rabbinic commentaries** on the Hebrew Bible, including:

Pirqa de-Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus

(in which a raven teaches Adam how to bury Abel after the first death, alluded to in the Qur'an at **{5.27-32}**),

Genesis Rabbah and the ***Apocalypse of Abraham***

(Abraham smashing his father's idols, see **{21.52-67}**), and Jacob telling his sons to enter Pharaoh's palace by different gates, **{12.67}**),

Tamid, (Moses' escaped fish of **{18.60-64}**),

the ***Second Targum*** (a translation of Jewish scripture into Aramaic with commentary) ***of Esther***

(the Queen of Sheba mistaking a shiny floor at Solomon's palace for a pool of water, see **{27.44}**, a story that had its origins in the ***Tosefta***),

the ***Pesitka*** (a translation of Jewish scripture into Syriac, with commentary) ***of Rav Kahana***,

(a parable that was the basis of the Quranic story of Al-Khidr, **{18.65-82}**)

Gittin and the ***Testament of Solomon***

(in which a demon Ashmedai supplants Solomon as king,

the apparent basis of God's placing a corpse on his throne in **{38.30-40}**,

and

Misnah Sanhedrin

(which includes the famous statement that a person who takes a life kills the whole world, and one who saves a life saves the whole world, reproduced in **{5.32}**)

❖ **mystical Jewish texts** including:

the **Books of Enoch**

(the story of fallen angels teaching men ,magic, in the Qur'an Harut and Marut of **{2.102}**) and

the **Book of Jubilees**,

(Abraham's father owning an idol shop – see above - and the existence of a heavenly tablet)

❖ ***The Life of Adam and Eve***, a document that likely had Jewish origins but which circulated amongst Christians from the first century, with its account of Iblis refusing to bow down to Adam, retold seven times in the Qur'an.

❖ **apocryphal gospels:**

the ***Infancy Gospel of Thomas***

(the child Jesus making clay birds come to life, **{3.49}** and **{5.110}**),

the ***Infancy Gospel of Matthew/the Gospel of pseudo-Matthew***

(a date palm offering its fruit to Mary, **{19.24-26}**),

the ***Protoevangelium of James***

(Mary's being raised in the Jewish temple where she was fed by angels and Joseph's selection to be her husband by a drawing of lots , **{3.37 & 44}**, and Jesus's birth in a remote place, **{19.22-23}**),

❖ **Christian**, especially Syriac Christian, **devotional texts** including:

The Questions of Bartholomew,

(Satan saying the words: *'I am fire of fire. I was the first angel to be formed and shall I worship clay and matter* that are almost identical to those of Iblis in **{7.12}**),

The Cave of Treasures (the Iblis/Adam story, see above)

- the **homilies of Narsai**,
(various aspects of the telling of the story of Joseph son of Jacob, including Potiphar discovering Joseph's innocence of having molested Potiphar's wife by Joseph's tunic having been torn from behind, **{12.28}**),
- the **pseudo-Clementine Homilies**,
(the refrain: '*there is no god but God, there is no other*'),
- the **Syriac History of Joseph** attributed to Basil of Caesarea,
(Jacob becoming blind upon hearing that Joseph had been killed, see **{12.84}**),
- the **homilies of Jacob of Serugh** (451-502)
(the earliest known account of **the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus**, the sleepers in the cave of **{18.9-26}**)
- Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron**
(Potiphar's wife's confession to her husband of having lied about Joseph attacking her **{12.32}**) and
- Ephraim's hymns** (especially the similarity of **Nativity Hymn XIV to Surah 97**)

Biblical phrases and imagery

The Qur'an also replicates biblical phrases and imagery. About three dozen biblical turns of phrase have been identified in the Qur'an by Gabriel Said Reynolds which include the following⁵.

- ❖ A Quranic parable of the righteous prospering like crops, **{2.261-265}**, that reads remarkably like Jesus' parable of the sower (Matthew 13.18-23, Luke 8.15 and Mark 13.20.)
- ❖ **{57.13}**'s reference to a gate being closed upon those who were unable to borrow a light replicating the parable of the of the bridesmaids from Matthew 25.9:
- ❖ Jesus's memorable metaphor of a camel passing through the eye of a needle to describe the unlikelihood of a rich man entering the kingdom of heaven, appears in the Qur'an at **{7.40}** and use of a mustard seed as an example of something tiny (Matthew 13.31-32, 17.20, Mark 4.30 and Luke 13.18-19) appears in the Qur'an at **{21.47}** and **{31.16}**.
- ❖ In Matthew 18.21-22 Jesus's answer to St Peter's question whether he must forgive his neighbour as many as seven times - '*Not seven times. I say seventy*

⁵ *Light upon light, Essays in Islamic thought and history in honour of Gerhard Bowering*, 2019, chapter 3
Biblical turns of phrase in the Qur'an,

times seven times – is inverted in **{9.80}** ‘s: *‘If (believers) seek forgiveness for (those who had reproached them) seventy times, God will not forgive them.’*

- ❖ In **{7.157}** and **{4.155}**, the Jews are said to declare that their *‘hearts are uncircumcised’*, an admission that would have been familiar to them through Deuteronomy (10.16) and Jeremiah (4.4 and 9.24-25); and possibly also the New Testament’s Acts of the Apostles 7.51, Romans 2.28-29, Philippians 3.3 and Colossians 2.1.
- ❖ The Qur’an’s description of God as *‘the First and the Last’*, **{57.3}**, appears four times in the Bible (Isaiah 44.6 and 48.12 and Revelations 1.17 and 22.13);
- ❖ The equation of a day for God with a thousand years on earth appears in **{22.47}**, as well as the Second Letter of St Peter (3.8).

It is an interesting feature of the Qur’an that whilst it makes much greater use of stories from the Old Testament than it does to those from the New, its use of language owes far more to Jesus and the early church than to Judaism. However, whilst at several points the Qur’an comes close to replicating the precise wording of the Bible, it never accurately produces a whole verse.

6. Jews and Christians

A pan-Abrahamic movement

The Qur'an consistently presents itself as the culmination of a revelation history that had previously centred upon the Jewish people and the Qur'an incorporates many Jewish figures, stories, themes and laws. It several times addresses the 'Children of Israel' directly and asks that '*the Torah be brought*' indicating that there were Jews amongst its audience, although they are distinguished from '*believers*'. In the earlier surahs:

❖ God's covenant with the children of Israel is confirmed and the Qur'an author accepts that the Torah contains separate, but still valid, laws to the Qur'an, implying a special relationship between God and the Jews: eg **{5.48}** and **{16.124}**,

❖ The Qur'an recognises the Children of Israel as a people who had received His particular favour:

{2.47 & 122}: '*O children of Israel! Remember My Blessing which I bestowed upon you and that I favoured you above the worlds,*' and

❖ God had specified this favour by conferring upon them the right to live in Holy Land: **{5.21}** and **{17.104}**.

In many passages the Qur'an reads as an ecumenical, interfaith movement with Abraham's faith, as a 'hanif', is held up as a unifying paradigm of pure monotheism.

{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.'*

God's punishment of the Jews

On other, apparently later, surahs, the Qur'an is more distinguishing, referring to:

'the disbelievers amongst the People of the Book', **{2.105}**,

'many of the People of the Book ' who 'wish to turn you back into disbelievers' **{2.109}**,

'a group amongst the People of the Book who) wishes to make you go astray', **{3.69}**,

{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.'

Jews 'cursed by God'

By the later stages of the Qur'an's announcement, surahs describe the Jewish people collectively as having breached their covenant with God and four episodes of divine punishment of the Jews are cited:

- ❖ the episode of the golden calf (which is said to have taken place prior to the foundation of Israel, **{2.55}** and **{4.153}**),
- ❖ a party of Jews having been turned into apes for their having eaten fish upon the sabbath, **{7.163-168}**, and
- ❖ at **{17.4-7}**, the Qur'an describes the two occasions upon which the Jerusalem Temple had been destroyed (by the Babylonians and by the Roman Empire) and in **{61.14}**, it refers to a group of Jews who followed Jesus having prevailed over those Jews who did not, apparently referring to the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity which has placed Christians in a position of power over the Jews.

The Qur'an comes to levy against Jews - often referring to them as Jews ('*al-yahūd'*) rather than using the term Children of Israel ('*banu Isrā'il'*) that associates them with the patriarchs of the Torah, - a litany of accusations. The Jews are said to:

- ❖ engage in usury, **{4.161}** and make illicit gains, **{5.41}**, and 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}**
- ❖ falsely boast of having killed Jesus **{4.157}**, slander Mary, **{4.158}**, and say that '*God's hand is shackled*', **{5.64}**,
- ❖ and - in apparent conflict with **{2.47 & 122}** – falsely claimed to be favoured by God, **{62.5}**.
- ❖ They are a people who say '*We hear and disobey*', **{2.93 & 285}**, **{4.46}** and **{24.51}**. They boast that their hearts '*are uncircumcised*' **{2.88}**, and these

same hearts *'have been made hard'* **{5.13}** and *'sealed with disbelief'*, **{2.7}**, **{4.155}**, by God. As a result of this they 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.

Jesus

Although the appearance of Old Testament figures is common throughout the Qur'an, reference to Jesus are more concentrated.

The Qur'an confirms many key Christian beliefs concerning Jesus, including:

- ❖ that Jesus was born of a virgin, **{3.47}** and **{19.20}**,
- ❖ that he performed miracles including *'heal(ing) the blind and the leper' (and giving) life to the dead by God's leave'*
- ❖ that Jesus shall return to earth to herald the imminent judgment of God - *'(H)e is indeed a portent of the Hour'*, **{43.61}** following which Jesus *'will be a witness against'* the people of the book, **{4.159}**.

It refers to him eight times, **{3.45}**, **{4.171-172}**, **{5.17, 72 & 75}** and **{9.30-31}**, as *'the Messiah'* (although no significance is attached to this title), twice, **{3.45}** and **{4.171}** as being *'Word of God'* itself, and in **{4.171}**, *'a Spirit from God'*:

It four times associates him with the Holy Spirit, but never explains what the Holy Spirit is or how it fits in with the Qur'an's teaching of the oneness of God.

However, the Qur'an appears to deny that Jesus was crucified **{5.72}**, and it utterly rejects, including at **{4.171}**, **{5.17, 72-77 & 116-8}**, **{9.30-31, 17.111, 19.34-38, 43.57-59}** and **{112.1-4}**, the Christian belief in the divinity in Jesus, and (**{5.73}** and **{4.171}**) the Holy Trinity.

It refers to no episode of the life of Jesus from the gospel in any detail and contains no hint of Jesus' core ethical teachings of universal and unqualified compassion and forgiveness.

Christians

Christians are referred to in the Qur'an using the term *'nasara'*, probably derived from the term *'Nazarene'* that is used (against them by their opponents) in the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.

Although the Qur'an condemns Christian belief in the Holy Trinity, which is a far greater theological difference to Islam than any Jewish belief, the Qur'an contains none of the detailed condemnations of Christians that it uses for the Jews, and in **{5.82-83}**, the Qur'an, presents Christians as *'closest in affection'* to the Quranic community:

{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.'*

{9.30} and the **Sword Verse**

The culmination of this growing enmity comes with the twin denunciations in **{9.30}**, that *'the Jews say that Ezra is the son of God and the Christians say that the Messiah is the son of God.'* Both denominations are consequently *'mushrikun'*: associators of partners unto God.

Surah 9 is generally regarded as the final complete surah of the Qur'an to be announced, and includes:

{9.5} (the *'sword verse'*) the instruction that all *'mushrikun'* should be slayed wherever they can be found, and

{9.29} also including instruction to require people of the book to be fought until they pay the jizya infidel tax *'in willing submission.'*

7. Paganism

Although the Qur'an's overriding theme is Judeo-Christian or Arabic monotheism, some verses seem to express beliefs or encourage practices that seem likely to have pagan origins:

The jinn are referred to in several verses of the Qur'an. Although belief in such independent supernatural creatures can be found in Jewish lore, the jinn, with their eavesdropping into heaven, and capacity to eat, engage in sexual intercourse, work, suffer pain and humiliation, sin or be virtuous and make mistakes, appear more pagan in than any equivalent creature in the Hebrew bible – and inconsistent with mainstream Christianity.

8. Jihad

Many verses of the Qur'an are clearly written during a time of war. The cause of the fighting is several times stated as the Qur'an's audience's exclusion from their homes **{22.39-41}** and from a place described as the '*Masjid al-Haram*' (literally: '*forbidden place of worship*'⁶), **{22.39-41}** and **{2.192-193}**

Many verses are clearly intended to act as exhortations to fight:

{8.65}: '*O Prophet! Rouse the believers to fight. If there be twenty steadfast amongst you, they shall overcome two hundred. And if there be 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*',

{47.35}: '*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*', and

{61.4}: '*Truly God loves those who fight in his way in ranks as if they were a solid structure*'.

Reluctance to fight, **{2.216 & 217}**, weariness, **{9.38-39, 42-47, 57-58 & 81-84}**, and attempts to substitute military with non-military service **{4.95}**, **{9.19}** are condemned.

Moreover, despite some setbacks the war is generally depicted as going well. **Surah 8** in particular concerns itself with victors' problems: the division of the spoils of war, **{8.1}** and **{8.41}**, see also **{59.7}**, and the fate of prisoners ('*When you meet those who disbelieve, strike at their necks, then when you have overwhelmed them tighten their bonds*', **{47.4}**). **{8.67}** states (we do not know in what context, but can make reasonable speculation) that '*It is not for a prophet to take captives until he has made slaughter in the land*'. **Surah 48** celebrates one great victory whilst promising further spoils to come.

⁶ See *Who wrote the Qur'an? VIII The Masjid al-Haram*

Conclusions

1. **The inclusion of the story of Dhu'l Qarnayn in Surah 18 proves that the Qur'an was completed after 628.**
2. **The Qur'an shows no sign of having been amended for political purposes after the conquest of Damascus in 636.**

This may have been out of deference for its sacred character or it was not seen as a significant source of authority for the Arab rulers until after its text had become settled and canonised.

3. **Some verses of the Qur'an were composed for an audience including farmers living in a fertile land, probably around the Mediterranean, and others for an audience that included sea-farers. The few clear geographical references that do exist: Sinai, Petra, the Dead Sea suggests a north-western Arabian setting.**
4. **For part of the period during which it was being composed the Quranic community was based at Yathrib (Medina) in the Hijaz, although this is unlikely to be the fertile land of abundant rainfall the early surahs. There is no evidence from its text that any of it was composed in Mecca in present Saudi Arabia, and indeed there is no evidence that such a settlement even existed in Quranic times.**
5. **The Qur'an's author was familiar with the contents of a very wide array of both Jewish and Christian non-canonical works. He presents both communities as separate to the main Quranic audience but also presents the Qur'an as a 'pure' version of the faith of Abraham, in which the Quranic audience, Jews and Christians together form an ecumenical movement.**

Later the Qur'an's author has clearly become hostile to the Jews in particular, presenting the destruction of the Jewish Temple five centuries earlier as God's punishment upon them, and producing extensive antisemitic polemic against them.

6. The Qur'an's phraseology owes more to the New Testament than the Old, but it is the Jewish people with whom its author is most concerned. Many statements are made demonstrating reverence for Jesus, although the core Christian belief is condemned. Despite this condemnation Christians are not subjected to the abuse that is given to the Jews, but rather they are described as helpers and closest to the Quranic community in affection, suggesting that, until the announcement of Surah 9, the Quranic author may have been dependent upon or seeking to foster Christian goodwill.

7. The Quranic community had become engaged in a military campaign, the principal object of which was to gain control of a place it calls the Masjid al-Haram. In this conflict, they appear to prevail, capturing the Masjid al-Haram and both making a peace treaty there and expelling their enemies from there. At about the same time that this is achieved, both Jews and Christians are jointly condemned as '*mushrikun*' (polytheists) and condemned to slaying or required to pay an infidel tax in submission.