

QS 43 Q 85

85.1 By the sky, with its constellations!
 85.2 By the Day portended!
 85.3 By a witness and what is witnessed!
 85.4 Perish the People of the Trench,
 85.5 With its fire and its faggots,
 85.6 As they sat above it,
 85.7 Witnessing what they did to the faithful!
 85.8 All they held against them was their belief
 in God,
 Almighty, All-Praiseworthy,
 85.9 He to whom belongs sovereignty over the
 heavens and the earth;
 And God is Witness over all things.
 85.10 They who oppress faithful men and faith-
 ful women,
 And do not repent,
 There awaits them the punishment of hell,
 And the punishment of the Blaze.
 85.11 But they who believe and do righteous
 deeds,
 There awaits them Gardens beneath which riv-
 ers flow,
 And that is the greatest of triumphs.
 85.12 Harsh is your Lord in might!
 85.13 It is He who originates and restores,
 85.14 He who is All-Forgiving, All-Kind,
 85.15. August Lord of the Throne,
 85.16 Ever accomplishing what He wishes.
 85.17 Has the story of the troops reached you?
 85.18 Of Pharaoh and Thamud?
 85.19 And yet the unbelievers continue to deny,
 85.20 As God encompasses them from behind.
 85.21 In truth, this is an august Qur'an,
 85.22 In a well guarded Tablet.

85.1 Par le ciel aux constellations!
 85.2 et par le jour promis!
 85.3 et par le témoin et ce dont on témoigne!
 85.4 Périront les gens de l'Uhdûd,
 85.5 par le feu plein de combustible,
 85.6 cependant qu'ils étaient assis tout autour,
 85.7 ils étaient ainsi témoins de ce qu'ils fai-
 saient des croyants,
 85.8 à qui ils ne leur reprochaient que d'avoir
 cru en Allah, le Puissant, le Digne de louange,
 85.9 Auquel appartient la royauté des cieux et
 de la terre. Allah est témoin de toute chose.
 85.10 Ceux qui font subir des épreuves aux
 croyants et aux croyantes, puis ne se repentent
 pas, auront le châtimement de l'Enfer et le supplice
 du feu.
 85.11 Ceux qui croient et accomplissent les
 bonnes œuvres auront des Jardins sous lesquels
 coulent les ruisseaux. Cela est le grand succès.
 85.12 La riposte de ton Seigneur est redoutable.
 85.13 C'est Lui, certes, qui commence (la créa-
 tion) et la refait.
 85.14 Et c'est Lui le Pardonneur, le Tout-Affec-
 tueux,
 85.15 Le Maître du Trône, le Tout-Glorieux,
 85.16 Il réalise parfaitement tout ce qu'Il veut.
 85.17 T'est-il parvenu le récit des armées,
 85.18 de Pharaon, et de Thamûd?
 85.19 Mais ceux qui ne croient pas persistent à
 démentir,
 85.20 alors qu'Allah, derrière eux, les cerne de
 toutes parts.
 85.21 Mais c'est plutôt un Coran glorifié
 85.22 préservé sur une Tablette (auprès d'Al-
 lah).

سورة البروج
 وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ (1) وَالْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُودِ (2) وَشَاهِدٍ وَمَشْهُودٍ (3) قُلْ أَصْحَابُ الْأُخُودِ (4) النَّارِ ذَاتِ الْوُفُودِ (5) إِذْ هُمْ
 عَلَيْهَا قُعُودٌ (6) وَهُمْ عَلَى مَا يَفْعَلُونَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ (7) وَمَا نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ (8) الَّذِي لَهُ
 مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ (9) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَتَلُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا فَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ
 وَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ الْحَرِيقِ (10) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيرُ (11) إِنَّ
 بَطْشَ رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيدٌ (12) إِنَّهُ هُوَ يُبْدِي وَيُعِيدُ (13) وَهُوَ الْعَفُورُ الْوَدُودُ (14) ذُو الْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدُ (15) فَعَالٌ لِمَا يُرِيدُ (16) هَلْ
 أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْجُنُودِ (17) فِرْعَوْنُ وَثَمُودُ (18) بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي تَكْذِيبٍ (19) وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ (20) بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ
 مَجِيدٌ (21) فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ (22)

Cuypers

Les versets suivants (85:4–7) ont suscité des interprétations très diverses: « Ils ont péri les Gens d'*al-Uḥdūd*, du feu pourvu de combustible, tandis qu'ils sont sur lui assis, et témoins de ce qu'ils faisaient aux croyants .» Qui sont en effet ces Gens d'*al-Uḥdūd* (*aṣḥāb al-uḥdūd*) ? Deux lignes d'explication s'affrontent, selon que l'on prend les v. 4–7 en un sens historicisant (position de la tradition islamique et de quelques orientalistes) ou un sens purement eschatologique (position d'autres orientalistes).

Selon l'interprétation la plus courante chez les commentateurs musulmans, le texte ferait allusion à la persécution des chrétiens de Nağrān par le roi juif ḥimyārite Dū Nuwās, en 523. Ils auraient été brûlés vifs dans « une fosse » (*uḥdūd*). Toute une série de savants occidentaux (e.g., Grimme 1895: II, 77, n. 4; Horovitz 1926: 11–12, 92–93; Bell 1950: II, 646; Paret 1986: 505–6) ne voient, au contraire, dans ces versets qu'une scène du Jugement dernier : les *aṣḥāb al-uḥdūd* seraient des incroyants qui sont précipités dans la fosse de l'Enfer pour leurs exactions envers les croyants (v. 7). Ces deux lignes d'interprétation ne sont en réalité pas exclusives l'une de l'autre.

La sourate est composée de trois morceaux, disposés en concentricité (ABA') : vv. 1–9, 10–11, 12–22. Le sens global de la sourate doit être compris à partir du centre (vv. 10–11), comme c'est le plus souvent le cas des compositions concentriques : « En vérité, ceux qui éprouvent les croyants et les croyantes, puis ne se repentent, à eux le châtiment de la Géhenne et à eux le châtiment de la calcination. » Encadrant cette assertion centrale, plusieurs exemples historiques sont donnés, dans les morceaux extrêmes A et A' : les Gens d'*al-Uḥdūd*, qui, après avoir persécuté les chrétiens, se retrouvent en Enfer (premier morceau, vv. 1–9), mais aussi les armées de Pharaon, englouties dans la mer alors qu'ils poursuivaient les Israélites, et les Ṭamūd qui, selon la tradition coranique, persécutèrent le prophète arabe Ṣāliḥ (dernier morceau, vv. 17–18). Autrement dit, ceux qui s'opposent aux croyants subiront la destinée des cités rebelles châtiées par Dieu, thème classique du Coran.

Il faut donc comprendre les versets 4–7, comme le propose G. Gobillot (2006 : 366, 2^e col.), de manière très synthétique, chose tout à fait courante dans le style coranique : ceux qui ont jeté les chrétiens dans le feu sont déjà virtuellement dans le feu de l'Enfer, où ils contemplent ce qu'ils ont fait.

Dye

La sourate est composée de trois parties distinctes, aisément identifiables par les changements thématiques ou rythmiques.

Vv. 1–9 : rythme rapide, surtout au début ; contexte de prédication orale. Le passage est obscur. Qui sont les *'aṣḥābu l-uḥdūd* ? Quels sont les référents des pronoms personnels ? On a souvent vu, à tort, une allusion au massacre de Nağrān. Il s'agit plutôt d'une imprécation : plus précisément, un discours adressé aux croyants mais maudissant les incroyants (voir le commentaire de Kropp).

Vv. 10–11 : rythme plus lent. Il s'agit de la partie centrale de la sourate, qui en résume l'enseignement eschatologique.

Vv. 12–22 : retour à un rythme plus rapide. Les vv. 13–16 constituent une eulogie divine. Les vv. 21–22 posent plusieurs problèmes. Le v. 21 commence par *bal*, comme le v. 19. Le *bal* du v. 19 est logique : il existe un récit, ou des récits bien connus, de la puissance de Dieu et du châtement qui attend les incroyants, et malgré cela, certains persistent à ne pas croire. En revanche, les vv. 21–22 s'intègrent moins harmonieusement au propos, et il semble que le *bal* du v. 21 serve à connecter ces deux versets à ceux qui précèdent.

Il est question d'un coran (*Qur'ānun*) et non pas du Coran (*al-Qur'ān*). Est-il donc certain que la « table » soit la place où est conservé *le Coran* ? C'est ainsi que la tradition musulmane comprend ce passage, mais ce n'est peut-être pas si simple : quel est l'antécédent de *huwa* dans *bal huwa Qur'ānun mağīdun* ? Manifestement, c'est seulement le récit (*ḥadīth*) dont parle le v. 17.

Comment lire le dernier mot de la sourate : *maḥfūzin* ou *maḥfūzun* ? Les deux lectures sont possibles : soit c'est un « coran » qui est dans (*sic* !) une *table bien conservée*, soit il est *conservé dans une table*. Noter que Q 56:77–78 parle aussi d'un coran (*Qur'ānun*) et non du Coran.

Enfin, l'usage de *fī* (v. 22). Une table étant une surface (bidimensionnelle, et non tridimensionnelle), on s'attendrait à *'alā*. L'usage de cette préposition avec le terme « table » m'évoque un passage d'Éphrem où Marie est identifiée à la Table : « Moïse avait porté les tables de pierre que son Seigneur avait écrites ! Joseph escortait la Table pure en laquelle (*b-lūḥā dkyutā*) habitait le Fils du Créateur » (*Hymnes sur la Nativité* XVI: 17).

Grodzki

Referring to Dye's remark, also for J. Wansbrough, *bal huwa qur'ānun mağīdun fī law-ḥin maḥfūzin* (Q 85:21–22) evokes a celestial archetype being part of “an ancient and well-attested tradition, in which of course the referent was the word of God as injunction, law, even register, but not ‘scripture’ in the sense of record of revelation” (1977: 83). It seems to make sense when juxtaposing it with other verses of the Qur'ān speaking of the *qur'ān* but not of the Qur'ān (cf. Q 56:77–78) as if equated with the Mosaic law, and/or – as Wansbrough wants it – “with the Rabbinic concept of the pre-existent Torah as the immutable word of God” (*ibidem*). It was also suggested by other scholars (inter alia, Stein 2010, 261) that the expression “heavenly tablet” – *lawḥ maḥfūz* – might be linked to the idea of representative metal tablets hung in (South) Arabian temples which might have been known also to visitors from other regions of the peninsula

Hawting

This *sūra* seems designed to reassure the believers, in a situation of perceived persecution, that they will eventually be successful. Three *exempla* are offered to comfort them: the *aṣḥāb al-uḥdūd*, the armies of Pharaoh, and Tamūd, all of whom perished as a result of their treatment of the believers. The identity of the *aṣḥāb al-uḥdūd* is not obvious. Although it is tempting to read the initial *qutla* (v. 4) as a simple past tense, and hence to identify the *aṣḥāb al-uḥdūd* as victims, if we take into account the 3rd person plural subjects in vv. 6–8, and remember that the armies of Pharaoh and Tamūd were destroyed because of their behaviour, then it becomes plausible to read *qutla* as an optative and hence the *aṣḥāb* as the persecutors. Some sort of play of words involving the root *Ṣ-H-D* seems to be taking place in this part of the *sūra* (vv. 3, 7 and 9), and one wonders if this is connected with the use of that root to convey the notion of martyrdom.

In v. 21, is it a glorious *qur'ān* preserved in a tablet, or in a preserved tablet? Whatever the answer, *qur'ān* here seems to refer to something other than the Qur'ān.

Hilali

The core of the passage is about the very act of belief and it is built on the contrast between bearing witness (the root: *Ṣ-H-D*, vv. 3, 7, 9) and disclaiming (*takdhīb* v. 19). There is a superposition of witnesses: God himself swears: (vv. 1, 2, 3) and declares himself as witness over everything '*alā kulli šay'in šahīd* (v. 9). The unbelievers bear witness of themselves (v. 7). The passage mentions two categories of evidence to support the act of belief: the reported narrative (*ḥadīṭ*) about the people of the past without any precision of the origin of the narratives even if we understand that there is an issue of transmission and witness *hal atāka ḥadīṭu...?* (have you not heard...?). The second evidence is the Qur'ān itself even if the word Qur'ān in v. 21 is mentioned without any reference to the book. There is an ambiguity about the Qur'ānic character of the word *ḥadīṭ* (v. 17) since the pronoun *huwa* (he) in (v. 22) could refer to the word *ḥadīṭ* mentioned (v. 17). The passage (vv. 18–22) is intriguing because the Qur'ān refers to its own capacity to narrate events from the past as evidence of its capacity to narrate the crucial event of the future: the day of resurrection.

Kropp

This time I will start with the principal remarks and then come to the specific case.

Religious discourse and its literary forms offer quite an astonishing number of typological similarities and parallels to schizophrenic and psychopathic discourse (as does political discourse). Thus reading through a collection of materials as Schmidt-Knaebel 1983 (similar text collections and studies are available in English, I presume) offers plenty of ideas for interpreting texts from the religious sphere. As a review of Schmidt-Knaebel rightly pointed out, though, the author did not deepen her study by discourse analysis and speech act theory which furnishes the theo-

retical basis for understanding distinct peculiarities: masking (concealing, hiding) of actants (speaker, addressee, public), use of impersonal actants, euphemistic or opposite metaphors, multiple addressed speech etc.). These are the most useful instruments even for interpreting the text collection of the Qur'ān. My first attempts of application are documented in French (Kropp 2008) and in German (Kropp 2009b). As, perhaps, both languages are not so widely read anymore, I try to resume the results for vv. 1–9:

After “purging” the concealed speakers and addressees the passage appears to be an enraged outburst of a frustrated missionary directed to his followers, but primarily to or against his opponents.

1 By the heaven with constellations,

2 and by the promised Day,

3 and by absolute witness (remark: *per merismum!*):

4 To hell with (you) the people of the glazing flame (*uḥdūd* corrected into *uḡdūd*, foreign, Aramaic term adapted to Arabic)

5 (explanation:) the fire always fed with fuel

6 where you will remain forever! (*qa'ada* “to sit” as – grammatical – verb of temporal duration “to remain”).

7 You exactly know what you are doing to us, the believers,

8 who only eagerly (or angrily) urged (*naqamū*) you to believe in God, the Sublime, the Praiseworthy,

9 to whom belongs the realm of heavens and the earth. ...

Explanatory details are given in the aforesaid articles and, hopefully soon, in a revised English version.

Pregill

In contrast to Q 75 (QS 42), the underlying structure of this *sūra* is rather elusive, as the rhyme scheme is complex and seems to evade simple analysis.

Even if we discount the anomalously lengthy vv. 10–11, the underlying logic of the rhyme scheme is still not readily discernible, unless we break the *sūra* up into four discrete, non-symmetrical sections:

Vv. 1–7: A A A A A A A

Vv. 8–13: B B B B B B (or B B [B B] B B)

Vv. 14–17: A B B A

Vv. 18–22: A B B B A

This is acceptable enough on the face of it, and the alternation between A and B in the shifting rhyme pattern makes for a very compelling experience of the *sūra* as an auditory phenomenon. The problem, however, is that we do not seem to gain anything in our understanding of the conceptual structure (or compositional and redactional history) of the *sūra* by breaking it into these four units, since the thematic continuities and symmetries overlap the boundaries of the sections as divided according to rhyme.

V. 4: *Aṣḥāb al-Uḥdūd*: the “People of the Trench.” Typically taken to refer to the Yemenites who persecuted the Christians of Najrān during the Dū Nuwās affair in the early sixth century, though this passage can also be read in such a way that this group is the persecuted and not the persecutors (see my comments on QS 47 below).

V. 8: Transitional, referring to “those who took revenge on them solely because they believed in the Mighty, the Most-Praised,” with following verses an encomium of the divine. One wonders why exactly revenge is specified.

Vv. 10–11: These are the two verses it would be tempting to exclude based on their slightly anomalous length. Thematically they fit the context at hand well, but insofar as they are rather generic reflections on divine retribution for persecutors and reward for the persecuted using stock phraseology found throughout the Qurʾān, it is quite possible that these two lines are interpolations.

Vv. 17–18: A brief reference to the forces gathered by Pharaoh and Ṭamūd. Some have claimed that this brief reference to narratives recounted elsewhere is incongruous, but it seems to me to parallel the reference to the *Aṣḥāb al-Uḥdūd* at the beginning (which thus reinforces the identification of these people as the persecutors and not the persecuted).

Rippin

Verses 17–18, “Has the story of the hosts [*ḡunūd*], Pharaoh and Ṭamūd, reached you?” follows a passage about the torments of hell that will repay those who take revenge on and persecute the believers. It is a simple invocation of the past, with absolutely no narrative or context provided before or after. The names themselves stand as exemplars of tyranny as performed by an individual and by a community. In other contexts, simple names of people of the past are invoked as well (e.g., Q 14:9) but those tend to come in the context of the recounting of other prophet stories. The introductory phrase “Has the story of... reached you?” is used elsewhere (Q 20:9, Q 38:21, Q 51:24, Q 79:15, Q 88:1 [non-prophet related]). *Ḡunūd*, hosts/troops, is used in relationship to Pharaoh at least four other times. This invocation of the past, such an important overall motif of the Qurʾān, is thus provided here in its shortest possible form.

Stefanidis

Bell (1939: 646) understands the verb *qutila* as a past tense and identifies the *aṣḥābu l-uḥdūd* as referring to Qurayš opponents finally being defeated by the early Muslim community, possibly during the battle of Badr. His Medinan dating of this short and overall lyric *sūra* might have led him to reconsider the hitherto accepted principle, established by Nöldeke, that the Qurʾān’s style evolved from a passionate and ecstatic to a more prosaic expression. He points out that “it is inherently probable that Muḥammad varied his style according to subject and the effect he aimed at producing,” and that any stylistic evolution was unlikely to have been strictly irreversible

because of the continual recalling, among the believers, of previous recitations (Bell 1939: 690).

Tengour

Le mot *burūġ*, *burġ* au singulier, donné comme titre à la présente sourate, provient du grec *πύργος* qui signifie « tour ». Il désigne d'une part la muraille d'une cité sur laquelle sont construites des demeures fortifiées, et de l'autre les douze constellations zodiacales. Pour les Arabes des tribus, celles-ci revêtaient une importance particulière, dans la mesure où elles leur servaient de repaires – aussi fixes qu'une construction fortifiée justement – lors des déplacements nocturnes sur les pistes. Le serment prononcé dans le v. 1 sur ces « Tours célestes » puise sa force de persuasion dans ce sens très concret du mot *burūġ*.

Bien que considérée comme étant mecquoise, cette sourate comprend des thèmes de facture médinoise. Le v. 4 évoque ainsi *'aṣḥāb al-'uḥdūd*, « les Compagnons de la fosse de feu ». Il s'agirait, selon les plus anciens commentateurs du Coran, des Chrétiens de *Naġrān* persécutés par le roi yéménite, *Dū Nuwās*. Celui-ci, après avoir embrassé le judaïsme, les aurait fait brûler vifs en les jetant dans une fosse de feu. Selon toute vraisemblance historique, l'événement se situerait en l'an 523.

Younes

Vv. 10 – 11 fit into what can be described as a punishment-reward insertion or addition. I have pointed out such insertions/additions in my comments on QS 1, 17, 20, 21. They appear to have a number of features in common such as the following: 1. They all include the promise of a reward for those who do good deeds in combination (following or preceding) with a threat of punishment for wrong-doers. 2. They interrupt the flow of a story or a prayer or are inserted between different parts of it. 3. They frequently have a different rhyme scheme and are longer than adjacent verses.