

QS 44 Q 90

90.1 No indeed!
I swear by the City,
90.2 While you live in this City!
90.3 By a begetter and what he begot!
90.4 We created man in hardship.
90.5 Does he imagine that none can overpower him?
90.6 He says: "I wasted abundant wealth."
90.7 Does he imagine that none has seen him?
90.8 Did We not give him two eyes?
90.9 A tongue and two lips?
90.10 And guided him to the two highways?
90.11 He did not storm the Steep.
90.12 But how can you know what is the Steep?
90.13 The freeing of a slave,
90.14 Or feeding, in time of famine,
90.15 An orphan near in kin,
90.16 Or a poor man, dirt-poor,
90.17 Then joined those who believe,
Who enjoin patience on one another,
Who enjoin mercy on one another.
90.18 They are the People of the hand dextral.
90.19 But they who blaspheme Our revelations,
These are the People of the hand sinistral,
90.20 Upon them a Fire, firmly padlocked.

90.1 Non!... Je jure par cette Cité!
90.2 et toi, tu es un résident dans cette cité -
90.3 Et par le père et ce qu'il engendre!
90.4 Nous avons, certes, créé l'homme pour une vie de lutte.
90.5 Pense-t-il que personne ne pourra rien contre lui?
90.6 Il dit: «J'ai gaspillé beaucoup de biens».
90.7 Pense-t-il que nul ne l'a vu?
90.8 Ne lui avons Nous pas assigné deux yeux,
90.9 et une langue et deux lèvres?
90.10 Ne l'avons-Nous pas guidé aux deux voies.
90.11 Or, il ne s'engage pas dans la voie difficile!
90.12 Et qui te dira ce qu'est la voie difficile?
90.13 C'est délier un joug [affranchir un esclave],
90.14 ou nourrir, en un jour de famine,
90.15 un orphelin proche parent
90.16 ou un pauvre dans le dénuement.
90.17 Et c'est être, en outre, de ceux qui croient et s'enjoignent mutuellement l'endurance, et s'enjoignent mutuellement la miséricorde.
90.18 Ceux-là sont les gens de la droite;
90.19 alors que ceux qui ne croient pas en Nos versets sont les gens de la gauche.
90.20 Le Feu se refermera sur eux.

سورة البلد
لَا أُقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (1) وَأَئْتَ جَلَّ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (2) وَوَالِهِ وَمَا وَلَدَ (3) لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبِيرٍ (4) أَيْحَسَبُ أَنْ لَنْ يَعْلَمْ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدٌ (5) يَبْقُوْلُ أَهْلَكُتُ مَالًا لُبْدًا (6) أَيْخُسْبُ أَنْ لَمْ يَرَهُ أَحَدٌ (7) أَلَمْ تَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ (8) وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَقَتَنِينِ (9) وَهَنَّيَاهُ التَّجَذُّبَيْنِ (10) فَلَا تَقْتَحِمُ الْعُقَبَةَ (11) وَمَا أَنْزَلَكَ مَا الْعُقَبَةُ (12) فَلَكَ رَقْبَةٌ (13) أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ (14) يَبْتَيِعَا ذَا مَقْرِبَةِ (15) أَوْ مَسْكِنَيَا ذَا مَنْزِبَةِ (16) ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاضَعُوا بِالصَّبَرِ وَتَوَاضَعُوا بِالْمُرْحَمَةِ (17) أَوْ لَذِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ (18) وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِأَيَّاتِنَا هُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْمَسْأَمَةِ (19) عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُّوْصَدَّةٌ (20)

Dye

Zellentin note à juste titre que la description du Jugement dernier en Matt/Mt 25:31–46 constitue un des sous-textes de cette sourate (l'auteur de la sourate semble bien combiner ce texte et Matt 7:13, ou des traditions parallèles). Outre la question des « Gens de la droite » et des « Gens de la gauche » (à rapprocher de Q 56:1–56, où il est cependant question de trois catégories de personnes ; cf. v. 7), on notera le point suivant : Matt 25:34–36 insiste sur l'amour du prochain, et c'est exactement ce que

font les vv. 13ss. Ces versets constituent la réponse à la question *wa-mā 'adrāka mā l-aqabat* (v. 12) : question brève (*wa-mā 'adrāka mā* revient à de nombreuses reprises dans le Coran : Q 74:27 ; 77:14 ; 83:8, 19 ; 86:2, 97:2 ; 101:3, 10 ; 104:5 ; très souvent dans un contexte eschatologique), située au centre de la sourate, après les reproches adressés à ceux qui ont choisi « la voie facile ».

Je partage les analyses de Younes 2010 sur les problèmes de composition de cette sourate, concernant notamment les ruptures de rime et de rythme des vv. 5–7, ainsi que les difficultés sémantiques attachées à certains termes, à savoir *fī kabad* (v. 4) et *al-nağdayn* (v. 10). Pour reprendre une image récemment proposée par Segovia (2012: 235–239), le Coran fonctionne comme un *palimpseste*, arrangeant, retravaillant, des textes préexistants (dans le même ordre d'idée, cf. Kropp QS 46). Il n'y a donc rien de surprenant à ce que l'on puisse trouver différentes strates de composition à l'intérieur de nombreuses sourates.

Vv. 1–2 : sur *lā 'uqsimu*, voir mon commentaire du QS 42. Si on ne se contente pas des réponses de la tradition musulmane, la grande question est de savoir à quoi exactement peut faire référence *al-balad...*

El-Badawi

This *sūra* is about Jerusalem, and the prophet Muḥammad's entitlement to it.

The opening of Q 90 is probably a response and reversal of Matt 25:34–36 (cf. in relation to Gabriel Reynolds' comments on Q 75; cf. further comments on Q 38), which states “But I say to you, *Do not swear at all*, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, *or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King*” (NRSV). Vv. 1–2 state (I use Munther Younes' translation), “I truly swear by this city, and you are a rightful dweller in this city.”

There is an echo in v. 3 of the ‘Qur’ānic creed’ (Q 112:3). Also, I wonder if vv. 4–7 can be translated/interpreted as the following:

V. 4 – We have indeed created man in [a state of] respect/power? (cf. Syr. *K-B-D*)

V. 5 – Does he think that no one can overpower him? [Because God can!]

V. 6 – He says ‘I have given away sizeable wealth.’ [...which is a lie!]

V. 7 – Does he think that no one can see him? [Because God can!]

The duality of *kabad* and *labad* is a play on words conveying the sense of “thick.”

The quintessential Qur’ānic themes found this *sūra*—especially the judgment of two people (*ashāb al-maymana* vs. *ashāb al-maṣ'ama*) and charity—are in dialogue with Matthew 25, perhaps even through the intermediaries proposed by Holger Zel-lintin. In this respect Q 90 should be considered along with Q 56; 74. For more on this see El-Badawi 2013: ch. 6.

Grodzki

In the shorter, Meccan *sūras* it's always inspiring to observe the rhyme and rhythm structure of subsequent verses, especially patterns of (dis)continuity, structural subdivisions, rhetorical conventions, inserted repetitions or other efforts made to match the rhyme, as well as other syntactical and morphological peculiarities. For example, as once argued by Lüling (2003: 167–168), the repetition of *bi-hādha al-balad* in the first two verses may be “charged (...) to the account of the editorial reworking of the text to make out of the strophic text a prosaic one or: to simplify the poetically cross-wise joined clauses.” Also, as Lüling saw it, the Qur’ānic oath formula of v.1 should be rather understood as an Islamic interpretation of an older formula of prohibition of swearing. He reads Q 90:1–4 after cancelling these allegedly editorial alterations as:

90:1–2 Do not swear, where you are dwelling, by this land.

90:3 And not by a father and by what he begot!

90:4 Truly, He has created man in holy seriousness.

Hawting

The warning against a false sense of self-sufficiency (vv. 5–9), the exhortation to works of charity (vv. 10–17), and the promise of reward and threat of punishment according to whether one has listened to the exhortation or rejected the signs (vv. 18–20) are traditional, and a number of colleagues have pointed to similarities with concepts in the Gospel of Matthew (*aṣḥāb al-maymana/mash’ama*; *al-nağdayn*; *al-‘aqaba*). But the initial oath (vv. 1–3) is difficult. What is the *balad*, who is the *hill al-balad*, and what does the phrase mean? It seems to imply that for others the *balad* is *ḥaram*. One expects such oaths to invoke God, and v. 3 uses terms that inevitably remind us of Q 112:3, except, of course, that the latter denies that God “begot or was begotten.” What is being invoked here is puzzling.

Pregill

In support of the revisionist reading of this *sūra* proposed by Younes, I note the following: if vv. 17–20 are interpreted as an allusion to Matthew 25:31–46 (the sheep and the goats), or at least as an appropriation of its basic imagery, that would seem to confirm Younes’ exegesis of the *hapax legomenon kabad* in v. 4 not as “toil, hardship” as traditionally held, but rather as “glory, dignity” (cf. the cognates in Hebrew and other Semitic languages), for a very specific reason. Matthew 25:31 states that the Final Judgment – the separation of the sheep and the goats – will occur when Christ returns ἐν τῇ δόξῃ, that is, *in glory*. Jesus is no longer the agent of the Eschaton as he is in Christianity; rather, reduced to the status of a mortal being – who is actually himself subject to judgment at the end (see Q 5:116–118, QS 9 above) – he is equated with Adam, both being created directly through divine fiat. In ancient Christianity, Christ’s Second Coming in glory is sometimes understood

as a restoration of Adam's original glorified state, spoiled by the Fall. In echoing Matt 25 here, the Qur'ān seems to recognize this equation on some level, except that creation in glory is not the legacy simply of Adam, but of all people – *laqad ḥalaqnā l-insān fī kabādīn*. This would thus reinforce Younes' argument, especially insofar as the creation of all humanity in glory, greater even than the angels (cf. Q 2:30 – 39, QS 2), fits well with the overarching positive tone of the passage as it was originally conceived before the interpolation of the more pessimistic verses forced a reinterpretation of *kabād* as denoting something negative.

Rippin

The way in which rhyme has been used and has constrained the vocabulary in this *sūra* is particularly noticeable in vv. 18 and 19. The phrases Companions of the Left and Companions of the Right appear elsewhere frequently but with left designated by *śimāl* (used in total 8 times plus twice in the plural) and right, *yamīn* (a word used about 65 times in total, including 6 times when it is used in the phrase Companions of the Right). The words used in these verses are *maš'ama* and *maymāna*, otherwise only used (twice each) in Q 56, where they are used interchangeably with *śimāl* and *yamīn* for Companions of the Left and Companions of the Right. This choice of vocabulary is clearly driven by the constraints of the rhyme (which is marked by a final 'a' sound). [This observation is derived from Rippin 2013 which studies this *sūra*].

Stefanidis

V. 6 (*yaqūlu ahlaktu mālan lubadan*) should perhaps be understood in reference to potlatch type of practices known under the name *mumāğada* or *taqā'ur* and alluded to many times in early Arabic poetry. During these self-destructive feasting competitions, two opponents would strive to surpass one another in terms of camel slaughtering and wine offerings (Bonner 2003: 19 – 21). More specific references relevant to this *sūra* can be found in Neuwirth (2011: 241 – 2).

Tengour

Si le mot *balad* sur lequel est prêté le serment qui inaugure la sourate *al-Balad* renvoie bien à la cité mecquoise, il ne serait pas vain de mettre ce passage en chronologie avec celui de Q 95:3 où l'expression coranique « *balad amīn* », territoire sûr, est employée pour désigner La Mecque. On retrouve la même expression dans Q 2:126 et Q 14:35 dans deux séquences relative à Abraham.

Une recherche pourra aussi être entreprise à partir de l'expression coranique *qarya āmina*, cité sûre, employée aussi pour désigner La Mecque comme étant une cité protégée par son Seigneur local, *Rabb al-Bayt*, celui-là même autour duquel l'homme Muḥammad a cherché à rallier les siens de manière préférentielle.

Younes

A careful examination of the language of Q 90 shows that certain verses are well written while others suffer from unnecessary repetition, vagueness, and lack of a rhythmic structure, as is shown by a comparison of vv. 1–4 and 8–16 on the one hand and with vv. 5–7 and 17–20 on the other.

Another striking feature of the *sūra* is the existence of elements that show God's favors to man in a generally positive context side by side with a strongly negative portrayal of man as an arrogant braggart.

Due to space limitations, I will restrict my comments to the first half of the *sūra*. A new reading of the whole *sūra* is found in Younes (2011).

Two terms in particular, both *hapax legomena*, attracted my attention as I examined vv. 1–10: *fī kabād* “in toil and suffering” (v. 4) and *al-naǵdayn* “the path of good and the path of evil” (v. 10). Thinking that they might provide the key to a better understanding of the *sūra* and remove some of the contradictions in it I consulted the earliest Qur’ān commentaries available. These include Muǵāhid (d. 104/722), al-Dahhāk (d. 105/723), Muqātil (150/767), al-Farrā’ (d. 207/822), Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 210/825), ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827), all pre-Ṭabarī commentators.

For *fī kabād* the traditional meaning of “in toil and suffering” is given by Muǵāhid (2005:337), Al-Farrā’ (2002, III:264), Abū ‘Ubayda (1962, II:299), and ‘Abd al-Razzāq (1999, III:428), while another completely different meaning, “upright, straight,” is given as an alternative by Muǵāhid (2005:337), Al-Farrā’ (2002, III:264), and ‘Abd al-Razzāq (1999, III:428) and the only meaning by al-Dahhāk (1999, II:967) and Muqātil (1988, IV:701). For *al-naǵdayn*, all six commentators give the traditional “the paths of good and evil,” while two (al-Dahhāk 1999, II:968 and ‘Abd al-Razzāq 1999, III:429) give “the two breasts.”

There is strong evidence to suggest that the meanings of “upright, straight” and “the two breasts” are the original meanings of these two terms. A comparison of Q 95:4 with Q 90:4 supports a positive interpretation of *fī kabād*. Compare Q 95: v. 4: *la-qad ḥalaqnā al-insāna fī ’ahsani taqwīm* “we created man in the best form,” and Q 90: v. 4: *la-qad ḥalaqnā al-insāna fī kabād* “we created man upright, straight.”

Interpreting *al-naǵdayn* as the (mother’s two) breasts is supported by internal linguistic evidence. The Arabic root *N-Ğ-D* and its derivatives revolve around a rise in the ground. The meaning of “the path of good and evil” seems to have been created for the context of this *sūra* only; it doesn’t exist in the language outside of it.

If the traditional meanings of these two terms are replaced by the meanings I am proposing here and the parenthetical verses 5–7, which I believe to be insertions whose purpose is to elaborate on the negative meaning of *fī kabād* created by the commentators, are removed, then Q90: vv. 1–10 look like a hymn about God’s creation and his favors to man, as follows:

I truly swear by this city, And you are a rightful dweller in this city. And by the begetter and the begotten, Verily We have created man upright (in a unique form), Have We not made for him a pair of eyes? And a tongue, and a pair of lips? And guided him to [his mother's] breasts,	<i>la-uqsimu bi-hāda al-balad</i> <i>wa-anta ḥillun bi-hādah al-balad</i> <i>wa-wālidin wa mā walad</i> <i>la-qad ḥalaqnā al-insāna fī kabad</i> <i>a-lam naḡ’al lahu ‘aynayn</i> <i>wa-lisānan wa-shafatayn</i> <i>wa-hadaynāhu al-naḡdayn</i>
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Zellentin

Neuwirth has illustrated that the present *sūra* reflects a (likely oral) echo of Matt 25:31–46, in which we learn about the separation of two peoples, one on the right hand, and one on the left hand (2010:702). In Matthew, in turn in dialogue with Isaiah 58:6–7, the themes of hunger, food, and charity for a brother—a close of kin—are also discussed, as is eternal fire. While such a close cluster of correspondences is suggestive on its own, all of these themes, and especially the imagery of right and left hand groups, and the specific acts of charity, are of course very traditional (on left and right peoples see e. g., Platon’s *Politeia* 10:614, and, as pointed out by Dye, *Apocalypse of Abraham* 21; they occur throughout the Qur’ān, see Rippin’s commentary on this passage). Intriguingly, however, the Qur’ān introduces themes to its Matthean echo that are found only in Isaiah: whereas Matthew speaks of visiting prisoners (Matt 25:36), the Qur’ān specifies the “freeing of a slave,” or literally, of a “neck,” (*fakku raqabatin* v. 13), evocative of Isaiah’s breaking of the yoke (58:6). It thus reads the Gospel in light of the Torah.

A closer look at what the Judaeo-Christian tradition *adds* to Matthew leads to an even more specific context in which to read the Qur’ān. Namely, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* quotes almost the *entirety* of the Matthean passage that is pertinent for the Qur’ān (namely Matt 25:34–40 and 46, see DA XIX 186.14–187.15, see also DA XI.128.22–129.1 and DA XV.168.15). A few verses before, moreover, the *Didascalia* instructs its audience to engage in the following catalogue of good deeds reminiscent of that of Isaiah, yet specifically in the context of freeing a slave: to bestow for buying off, or ransoming of the faithful (*mhymn’*); and to redeem slaves and captives and prisoners and those who suffer violence. The *Didascalia* hence features a combination of Matthew and Isaiah similar to that of the Qur’ān, thereby providing us with a numerically suggestive (albeit painfully modular) argument that the Qur’ān here stands in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, without any trace of direct textual influence.

Neuwirth has rightfully argued that the Qur’ān’s language and conceptuality of *hadaynāhu n-naḡdayni*, “we have guided [humankind] on the two paths,” evokes Matthew’s description of the easy road that leads to destruction, and the hard road that leads to life (Matt 7:13f). We can confidently follow tradition when translating the Qur’ānic hapax legomenon *naḡdayni* as “two paths” since this meaning of *ngd*

is well attested in Jewish and Christian Palestinian Aramaic. (No association with a high place is necessary.) As mentioned in my commentary on the cognate two paths in Q 1, the motif of “two paths” is widespread throughout the Qur’ān and beyond (see e.g., *Didache* 1–6, *Mishna Avot* 2:9, *Genesis Rabbah* 21:5, or Is 40:3, quoted in turn in Matt 3:3). Yet the Judaeo-Christian tradition, as recorded by the *Clementine Homilies* (7.6–8), is again the most pertinent context in which and against which to understand how the Qur’ān hears the Matthean passage. For the Qur’ān again shares much with the *Clementine Homilies* that is *not* to be found in Matthew.

In all *three* texts, namely, humankind is shown two alternatives, one of which is called the “steep,” or “narrow and rugged one” (*l-‘aqabata*, v. 11), and in all *three* texts the easy choice leads to damnation. Yet it is the *Clementine Homilies* that, just like the Qur’ān, and unlike Matthew, emphasize God’s “guidance” as well as His omniscience in this context, which in the Qur’ān becomes the key message directed to the squanderers amongst the townspeople. Most importantly, the *Clementine Homilies* *here* express the opposition of the two paths as corresponding to the juxtaposition of *apistis kai pistis*, of “unbelief and faith” in the same way that the Qur’ān juxtaposes *alladina kafarū* (v. 19) and *alladīna āmanū* (v. 17). As Shlomo Pines points out, the terms “believing” and “unbelieving,” while part of late antique discourse in general, are especially crucial in the Clementine literature, and in its Syriac witnesses, just like in the Qur’ān, they are denoted by the lexemes *hmn/āmn* and *kpr* (1984:136, see also Zellentin 2013a:162). While the Qur’ān, hence, has general affinities with the many general Jewish and Christian themes, it arranges them in a way particularly close to the Judaeo-Christian tradition which maintains a dense web of intertextual references within and against which it expects to be heard.