

THE QUR'AN: SCRIPTURE IN ISLAM

Qur'an - literal word of Allah

evidence - the miraculous quality of the language of the Qur'an

cf H.A.R. Gibb "no man in fifteen hundred years has ever played on that deep-toned instrument with such power, such boldness, and such range of emotional effect as Muhammad did."

translatability of Qur'an?

114 suras (chapters), divided up into ayas (verses)

n.b. aya also means sign, so each verse of the Qur'an serves as a "sign" of God

chronology of chapters not clear

al-Fatiha (opening chapter)

R. Bell and T. Noldeke

4 periods - early/middle/late Meccan + Medinan

text collected by 'Uthman

Allah/tawhid (unity of God)

bism allah al-rahman al-rahim

Shirk (association)

Mala'ik and shayatin

Jinn (cf genie of the Arabian Nights)

Shaitan/Iblis (cf Satan/diabolos)

Prophets (nabi/rasul) + scriptures

Torah (Moses)

Zabur (David)

Injil (cf evangel) (Jesus - Arabic name 'Isa)

Qur'an

Muhammad as "seal of the prophets"/Qur'an as final scripture

Judgement - firdaws (paradise) or al-nar (the fire)?

Sources of ideas? Arabian? Jewish? Christian? Originality?

cf Christian Bible

a) Qur'an more homogeneous

b) Qur'an assembled over far shorter time-scale

c) Different concepts of inspiration

dictation or suggestion

consequences for translation and interpretation

d) Different functions of revelation

scripture as revelation or testimony to revelation

revelation as primarily scriptural or personal

See Muslim-Christian Research Group *The Challenge of the Scriptures - Bible and Qur'an*, a very interesting example of Christian-Muslim dialogue concerning scripture, and several volumes edited by Michael Ipgrave recording the discussions of the Archbishop of Canterbury's annual 'Building Bridges' seminar, *Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims studying the Bible and the Qur'an together* (Church House Publishing, 2004), *Bearing the Word: Prophecy in Biblical and Qur'anic Perspective* (Church House Publishing, 2005), *Justice and Rights: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Georgetown University Press, 2009), and *Humanity: Texts and Contexts* (with David Marshall, Georgetown University Press, 2011).

OUTLINE OF SURAS 2 AND 5 OF THE QUR'AN

(from *The Qur'an: a new translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, OUP, 2005*)

Sura 2, al-Baqara "The Cow"
(pp 4-33)

[probably an early sura from the Medina period, within 2 years of the hijra; name comes from vs 60-69, the story of the cow which the Israelites were ordered to sacrifice]

4 main sections

1) vs 1-39 - Introduction - miscellaneous subjects, contrasting believers and unbelievers

e.g. vs 21 - true vocation of humankind
vs 34-39 - story of Adam and Iblis' refusal to bow down before him

2) vs 40-121 - Accusations against the People of the Book [Jews and Christians]

e.g. vs 40-110 - the Jews (stories of Moses and Solomon)
vs 111-121 - Jews and Christians together

3) vs 122-167 - Abraham

e.g. vs 135 - hanif

4) vs 168-286 - Regulations

e.g. vs 172-173 - diet
vs 219 - wine and arrow-shuffling
vs 275 - riba (interest)

vs 226ff divorce and the position of women
vs 282ff debt and witnesses to it

vs 177 - true piety
vs 255 - throne verse
vs 286 - final prayer

Sura 5, al-Ma'ida "The Feast"
(pp 67-79)

[possibly the last sura to be delivered to Muhammad; name comes from vs 112ff, the story of Jesus' disciples asking for a feast to be sent down from heaven]

4 main sections

1) vs 1-11 - Regulations

e.g. vs 3 - diet

2) vs 12-86 People of the Book

cf. vs 17 (&73) & 69
cf. vs 51 & 82

3) vs 87-108 - More regulations

e.g. vs 90-91 - wine, arrow-shuffling, idols and divining arrows
vs 38 - theft

4) vs 109-120 - Jesus

a) birth
b) miracles
c) status/identity

FIVE EXTRACTS FROM THE QUR'AN

The "Fatiha" [Opening Chapter] (1:1-9)

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being,
The All-Merciful, the All-compassionate,
The Master of the Day of Doom.

Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for succour.
Guide us in the straight path,
The Path of those whom Thou hast blessed,
Not of those against whom Thou art wrathful,
Nor of those who go astray.

The Qur'an on True Piety (2:171)

It is not piety, that you turn your faces
To the East and to the West.
True piety is this:
To believe in God, and the Last Day,
The angels, the Book, and the Prophets,
To give of one's substance, however cherished,
To kinsmen, and orphans,
The needy, the traveller, beggars,
And to ransom the slave,
To perform the prayer, to pay the alms.

The Qur'an on God (2:256)

God,
There is no god but He,
The Living, the Everlasting.
Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep:
To Him belongs
All that is in the heavens and the earth.
Who is there that shall intercede with Him
Save by His leave?
He knows what lies before them
And what is after them,
And they comprehend not
anything of His knowledge
Save such as He wills.
His Throne comprises the heavens and earth;
The Preserving of them oppresses Him not:
He is the All-high, the All-glorious.

A prayer from the Qur'an (2:286)

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.

The Qur'an on God (59:22-24)

He is God;
There is no god but He.
He is the knower of the Unseen
and the Visible;
He is the All-merciful, the All-compassionate.

He is God;
There is no god but He.
He is the King, the All-holy,
the All-peaceable,
the All-faithful,
the All-preserver,
the All-mighty,
the All-compeller,
the All-sublime.
Glory be to God, above that they associate!

He is God,
the Creator, the Maker, the Shaper.
To Him belong the Names Most Beautiful.
All that is in the heavens and the earth magnifies Him;
He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.

(all quotations from A.J. Arberry *The Koran Interpreted*, OUP, 1964)