

UNDERSTANDING THE QURAN
THEMES AND STYLE “
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CHAPTER 12:
THE QURAN EXPLAINS ITSELF: SURAH REHMAN

This chapter argues that a most relevant and fruitful approach to understanding the text of the Qur'an is by means of two key concepts developed by Muslim scholars in the Classical period: context and internal relationships. The importance of context (*maqam*) was recognized and formulated for the study of the text of the Qur'an by Muslim linguists whose work in this respect anticipated by many centuries modern linguistic thinking about the crucial importance of context in understanding discourse. Internal relationships were encapsulated in the dictum: *al-Qur'an yufassir ba'Duhu ba'Da* (some parts of the Qur'an explain others) – in modern linguistic terms 'intertextuality' – which, given the structure of Qur'anic material, was argued to provide the most correct method of understanding the Qur'an.

In this chapter one complete *sira* of the Qur'an, no. 55, *al-Ra'man* is examined in the light of context and internal relationships. It will be demonstrated that commentators who lost sight of these two concepts, or did not pay due regard to them, made erroneous assumptions, gave inadequate explanations, or arrived at conclusions which proved to have been without foundation and which will be shown to contradict the spirit of the *sira*.

This chapter also examines the views of some Western authors, Richard Bell and John Wansbrough (with reference also to Julius Wellhausen) about *Sirat al-Ra'man* and various verses and sections within it, the views of some who found the whole *sira* 'an imitation' of Psalm 136, and of others who held that material was added to the *sira* at one stage or another and that there was juxtaposition of variant traditions or paraphrasing of versions which may have had a liturgical or exegetical origin. It has also been suggested that the 'four gardens' in this *sira* are in fact two, and that the dual – even in these two – was perhaps understood merely as singular. In addition, it has been suggested that the refrain in this *sira* served the function of a litany although it was not clear to some why the refrain was introduced after some verses and not others.

As will be seen in the course of the discussion, studying the *sira* in the light of context and internal relationships explains away such difficulties and removes any reasonable need for such conjectures. Moreover, the approach adopted in this chapter reveals inadequacies (and errors) even in some well-known English translations of certain verses in this *sira*. It will

hitherto, and make, it is hoped, what will prove to be a useful contribution to the appreciation and exegesis of *Sirat al-Ra'man*.

Context and Internal Relationships

As explained in Chapter 1, the Qur'an was the starting point of numerous branches of Arabic and Islamic studies. In his *Itqan*, Suyuṭī dedicates a chapter to *al-'ulim al-mustanbaḥa min al-Qur'an*¹ in which he quotes from the commentary of al-Mursī a passage listing various sciences based on the Qur'an and developed to serve it, and to serve Islamic studies in general: branches such as phonetics, grammar, *uṣūl*, *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *balagha* ... and others. *Balagha* was undoubtedly one of the most important subjects for Qur'anic exegesis, and it began and developed around the central question of the appreciation of the style of the Qur'an and its *i'jaz* in particular, as witnessed by such titles as *Dala'il al-i'jaz* of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī.

The importance of *balagha*, especially *'ilm al-ma'ani* and *'ilm al-bayan*, for *tafsir* in general is universally recognised and the attention paid to it by such commentators as Zamakhshari and Rāzī, gives their work particular distinction.

One of the important contributions of scholars of *balagha* was their recognition of the concept of *maqam* (the context of the situation) and its role in determining the utterance and providing the criterion for judging it. A central issue in *'ilm al-ma'ani* is *muṭabaqat al-kalam li-muqtada 'l-'al hal* (the conformity of the utterance to the requirements of the situation). Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī explains:

The context that demands the definition, generalization, pre-positioning of part of a discourse, and inclusion (of particular words) differs from the context that demands the indefinite, specification, post-position and omission; the context of separation differs from that of joining; the situation that requires conciseness differs from that requiring expansiveness. Discourse with an intelligent person differs from discourse with an obtuse one. Each word with its companion is suited to a particular context. A high standard of beauty and acceptability of speech depends on its appropriateness to the situation and vice versa.

Tammam ḥasan points out that when scholars of *balagha* recognised the concept of *maqam*, they were a thousand years ahead of their time, since the recognition of *maqam* and *maqal* as two separate bases for the analysis of meaning has been arrived at only recently as a result of modern linguistic thinking. When they said *li-kull maqam maqal* and *li-kull kalima ma' tha'ibatiha maqam* they hit on two remarkable statements that could equally apply to the study of other languages. When Malinowski coined his famous term 'the context of the situation' he had no knowledge of this work. Scholars of *uthul al-fiqh* have recognized the importance of the notions of *maqam* and *maqal* for the study of the Qur'an. In his *Muwafaqat* Shāṭibī

states:

The science of *ma'ani* [meaning] and *bayan* [factual and figurative expression] by which the *ijaz* [inimitability] of the Qur'an is recognized, revolves around knowing the requirements of the situation during the discourse from the point of view of the discourse itself, the discursant, the discurssee or all of them together; for the same statement can be understood in different ways in relation to two different addressees or more. A question with one and the same form can imply other meanings, such as agreement, scolding, etc. Likewise, an imperative can have the meaning of permission, threat, incapacity/impossibility ...

The other key tool of Qur'anic exegesis is the internal relationships between material in different parts of the Qur'an, expressed by Qur'anic scholars as: *al-Qur'an yufassir ba'duhu ba'da*.

Utilisation of such relationships is considered to be the most correct method (*atha'' al-turuq*) of *tafsir* – exegesis. He explains: 'What is given in a general way in one place is explained in detail in another place. What is given briefly in one place is expanded in another.' Shaṭibi states that many Qur'anic verses/passages can only be properly understood in the light of explanations provided in other verses or *siras*.

Certain themes have been treated in more than one place in the Qur'an, including, for instance, God's power and grace, the hereafter, stories of earlier prophets, etc. The conciseness or expansion in one place or another depends on *muqtada 'l-'al hal* (what the situation requires). Commenting on stories of earlier prophets, Shaṭibi again remarked that their purpose was to strengthen the Prophet in the face of various forms of denial and obstinacy from his opponents at different times. The form of the story would echo a situation similar to that which the Prophet was facing.

The particular form of the narrative varies according to the situation while all of it is true, factual, with no doubt about its being correct.

Suyūṭi mentions a feature of Qur'anic style that further illustrates the internal relationships of Qur'anic passages, namely *al-iqti'a'*, where a single word in one verse is expanded and clarified in another. Examples were given, such as the following:

wa lawla ni'matu rabbi la-kuntu min al-mu'ṣarin

وَلَوْلَا نِعْمَةُ رَبِّي لَكُنْتُ مِنَ الْمُحْضَرِينَ

for had it not been for my Sustainer's favour, I would surely be [now] among those who are given over [to suffering]!37:57

with reference to:

ula'ika fi'l-'adhabi mu'ṣarin

وَالَّذِينَ يَسْعَوْنَ فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُولَئِكَ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُحْضَرُونَ

whereas all who strive against Our messages, seeking to defeat their purpose, shall be given over to suffering.
34:38

and:

yawma 'l-tanadi

وَيَا قَوْمِ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ يَوْمَ التَّنَادِ

"And, O my people, I fear for you [the coming of] that Day of [Judgment - the Day when you will be] calling unto one another [in distress] –

40:32

with reference to:

wa-nada a°°abu 'l-jannati a°°aba 'l-nari

وَنَادَى أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ أَنْ قَدْ وَجَدْنَا مَا وَعَدَنَا رَبُّنَا حَقًّا فَهَلْ وَجَدْتُمْ مَا وَعَدَ رَبُّكُمْ حَقًّا ۖ قَالُوا نَعَمْ ۖ فَاذْنَبُوا مُؤَذِّنٌ بَيْنَهُمْ أَنْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ

And the inmates of paradise will call out to the inmates of the fire: "Now we have found that what our Sustainer promised us has come true; have you, too, found that what your Sustainer promised you has come true?" [The others] will answer, "Yes!"-whereupon from their midst a voice will loudly proclaim: "God's rejection is the due of the evildoers

7:44

Readers of the Qur'an recognise this feature clearly. Take for example a verse from the *Fati'a*, that practising Muslims recite many times daily: *'iraf al-ladhina an'amta 'alayhim* ' (1:7

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

The way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings, not of those who have been condemned [by Thee], nor of those who go astray!") and how it is clarified with reference to *al-ladhina an'ama-llahu 'alayhim min alnabiyyina wa'l-'iddiqina wa'l-shuhada'i wa'l-'ali'ina* (4:69

وَمَنْ يُطِعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ ۖ وَحَسُنَ أُولَئِكَ رَفِيقًا

For, all who pay heed unto God and the Apostle shall be among those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings: the prophets, and those who never deviated from the truth, and those who [with their lives] bore witness to the truth, and the righteous ones: and how goodly a company are these!).

More examples will be met in the discussion of *Sirat al-Ra'man*.

The importance of context in determining the meaning of any discourse, Qur'an or otherwise, is now established beyond doubt. The style of the Qur'an being self-referential, the importance of internal relationships in understanding the text of the Qur'an cannot be seriously challenged. Context, with the expression it demands, and intertextuality both focus our attention on the Qur'anic text itself which must surely take priority

over any other approach to understanding and explaining the Qur'an. A study of *Sirat al-Ra'man* in the light of context and internal relationships will, it is hoped, show the benefit of this approach.

Al-Ra'man

The title of this *sira* is *al-Ra'man*, for which most translators give 'The Merciful'. Arberry gives 'The All-Merciful'; Pickthall and Mu'ammad 'Ali give 'The Beneficent', while Yisuf 'Ali gives '(God) Most Gracious'. Those who choose 'The Merciful' have clearly observed the lexical general meaning of the root word *ra'ma* (mercy) while those who opted for 'The Beneficent/Bounteous/Gracious' apparently observe the manifestations of mercy in the root meaning, manifestations they saw listed in this *sira*. We may adopt the Merciful as a translation of *al-Ra'man* along with most translators, but in the sense of the One who extends His mercy in the form of the bounties listed in the following verses. The choice of this meaning for *al-Ra'man* is borne out by the context of this *sira*.

The *sira* consists of 78 short verses beginning with the name *al-Ra'man* and ending with, 'Blessed is the name of your Lord, the Lord of Glory and Bestower of Honour', containing three sections:

1. Verses 1–30 deal with bounties in this world. V.13 challenges the addressees (men and *jinn*) – 'Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?' – repeated afterwards as a refrain.
2. Verses 31–45 contain a challenge for the addressees to escape the judgement – the guilty will not be able to escape the punishment whose existence they had denied.
3. Verses 46–77 deal with bounties in the rewards of two classes of believers.

Section I: God's Bounties in This World

al-Ra'man 'allama 'l-Qur'an [The Merciful taught the Qur'an]

vv.1–2

الرَّحْمَنُ
عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ

THE LAST HOUR draws near, and the moon is split asunder! (1) But if they [who reject all thought of the Last Hour] were to see a sign [of its approach], they would turn aside and say, "An ever-recurring delusion!" – (2)

This *sira* is unique in the Qur'an in that it begins with one of the names of God, *al-Ra'man*, standing as it is, as one separate verse which, it will be seen, summarises the *sira* and governs the following material both by its signification and its sound. It has been noted that when the name of God occurs in the Qur'an as a subject followed by a predicate verb as in *al-Ra'man*

such an order signifies restriction in the sense of 'it is He who did such and such'. In our *sira* we have a series of predicate verbs following each other without conjunction, in the main all dependent on the word *al-Ra'man*, the sense being: it is *al-Ra'man* who taught the Qur'an, who created man and taught him how to communicate, who ... who ... etc. Since it is through the Qur'an that we are told about God and all the manifestations of His mercy and beneficence, teaching the Qur'an comes as the first predicate of *al-Ra'man*, stressing also the priority and more lasting effect of spiritual benefit. His beneficence in teaching the Qur'an is so important that it was pointed out in the first verses of the book to be revealed:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ
خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ
اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ
الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ
عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

READ in the name of thy Sustainer, who has- (1) created man out of a germ-cell (2) Read - for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One (3) who has taught [man] the use of the pen – (4) taught man what he did not know! (5)
96:1-5

as well as on other occasions such as:

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَهَمَّتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُضِلُّوكَ وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ إِلَّا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ۖ وَمَا يَضُرُّونَكَ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۖ وَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَكَ مَا لَمْ تَكُنْ تَعْلَمُ ۖ وَكَانَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ عَظِيمًا

And but for God's favour upon thee and His grace, some of those [who are false to themselves] would indeed endeavour to lead thee astray; yet none but themselves do they lead astray. Nor can they harm thee in any way, since God has bestowed upon thee from on high this divine writ and [given thee] wisdom, and has imparted unto thee the knowledge of what thou didst not know. And God's favour upon thee is tremendous indeed. (113)

4:113

Since the context of our *sira* relates to His bounty, 'taught the Qur'an' is used rather than the normal 'sent it down' which is used scores of times elsewhere, so the context here governs the choice of vocabulary. The effect of *al-Ra'man* on the meaning of the following material is further emphasised by the effect of its sound, since, standing as a separate verse ending in a long *alif* and *nin*, it sets the pattern for the *fathila* or rhyme at the ends of the following verses which consist mainly of *-an*, and on a few occasions of *-am*, which does not alter the pattern much since 'n' and 'm'

are both nasal voiced resonant sounds. (Vv.1–6 are transliterated to indicate this effect.) This results in a pleasing resonance in Arabic that enhances the effect produced by the enumeration of God's bounties. The uniform sound in the close succession of rhymes helps transfer the effect of *Ra'man* to *Qur'an* to *bayan*, *bi-'usban*, *yasjudan*, . Since the *Qur'an*, *bayan* etc. are manifestations of the mercy of *al-Ra'man*, the rhyme helps to build the cumulative effect of *ra'ma* and maintains it throughout, with even the challenge to deny the obvious benefits (itself in the same rhyme) not cancelling (if not enhancing) the beneficent order established by *al-Ra'man* in the first line.

Khalaqa 'l-insan. 'Allamahu 'l-bayan

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ
عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ

He has created man: (3) He has imparted unto him articulate thought and speech. (4)/ vv.3–4

Creating man and teaching him *bayan* are two of the manifestations of the bounty of *Ra'man*. *Bayan* is the ability to express oneself and to understand the expression of others:

قُلْ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْشَأَكُمْ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ ۖ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ

SAY: "[God is] He who has brought you [all] into being, and has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and hearts: [yet] how seldom are you grateful!"
67:23

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ
وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ

Have We not given him two eyes, (8) and a tongue, and a pair of lips, (9)
90:8–9

The *Qur'an* describes itself as being *mubin* – clarifying its teachings so that they are easy to understand.

al-shamsu wa'l-qamaru bi-'usban

الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ بِحُسْبَانٍ

At His behest] the sun and the moon run their appointed courses; (5)
v.5

The statement is expanded to show the benefits of the sun and the moon

and the exact way they follow their course in such verses as in the intersexual way explained earlier 10:5

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ الشَّمْسُ ضِيَاءً وَالْقَمَرَ نُورًا وَقَدَرَهُ مَنَازِلَ لِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْحِسَابَ ۚ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ ۚ يُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ

He it is who has made the sun a [source of] radiant light and the moon a light [reflected], and has determined for it phases so that you might know how to compute the years and to measure [time]. None of this has God created without [an inner] truth. Clearly does He spell out these messages unto people of [innate] knowledge: (6:96)

فَالِقُ الْإِصْبَاحِ وَجَعَلَ اللَّيْلَ سَكَنًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ حُسْبَانًا ۚ ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ

[He is] the One who causes the dawn to break; and He has made the night to be [a source of] stillness, and the sun and the moon to run their appointed courses: [all] this is laid down by the will of the Almighty, the All-Knowing.) and (36:40)

لَا الشَّمْسُ يَنْبَغِي لَهَا أَنْ تُدْرِكَ الْقَمَرَ وَلَا اللَّيْلُ سَابِقُ النَّهَارِ ۚ وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ

[and] neither may the sun overtake the moon, nor can the night usurp the time of day, since all of them float through space [in accordance with Our laws]. (40)

wa'l-najmu wa'l-shajaru yasjudan

وَالنَّجْمُ وَالشَّجَرُ يَسْجُدَانِ

[before Him] prostrate themselves the stars and the trees. (6)

v.6

Najm in this context means plants that have no stem/trunk as opposed to those that have. Both submit to God in following the course He created them for, as believers submit in prayer,¹¹ as we see in greater detail in 22:18

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَسْجُدُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ وَالنُّجُومُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَالشَّجَرُ وَالدَّوَابُّ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ ۚ وَكَثِيرٌ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِ الْعَذَابُ ۚ وَمَنْ يُهِنِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُكْرِمٍ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ ۝

“ART THOU NOT aware that before God prostrate themselves all [things and beings] that are in the heavens and all that are on earth the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and the beasts? And many human beings [submit to God consciously], whereas many [others, having defied Him,] will inevitably have to suffer [in the life to come]; and he whom God shall scorn [on Resurrection Day] will have none who could bestow honour on him: for, verily, God does what He wills. (18) .

Many commentators, referring to the above verse, give for *najm* the alternative meaning of ‘stars’ and most English translations follow this. However, what we have in vv.5–6 is a contrast between two celestial objects: the sun and the moon, then two earthly ones: trees and stemless plants. The context here dictates the meaning ‘plants’.

It is clear from the first two verses and throughout that our *sira* is built on dualism: 'God the Gracious taught the Qur'an; created man and taught him how to communicate; the sun and the moon pursue their calculated course .

Contrast and dualism are the obvious feature throughout. The context of this *sira* clearly requires the enumeration of the bounties *ala'* of *al-Ra'man* that surround the addressees (dual: men and *jinn*) on both sides, and above and below, so that they are challenged to deny any of them. This context will be seen to govern the choice of material as well as the meanings of words and expressions.

There is one further point about verses 5 and 6. The change of structure in these two sentences, singling out the four items they contain to make them subjects rather than objects of verbs, suggests that, in addition to their being examples of God's bounties, they are placed at this early stage in the *sira* as a model of submission to God (cf. 22:18 ABOVE) for the addressees, who may deny the bounties.

وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ
أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ
وَأَقِيمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ
وَالْأَرْضَ وَضَعَهَا لِلْأَنَامِ
فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَالنَّخْلُ ذَاتُ الْأَكْمَامِ
وَالْحَبُّ ذُو الْعَصْفِ وَالرَّيْحَانُ

And the skies has He raised high, and has devised [for all things] a measure, (7) so that you [too, O men,] might never transgress the measure [of what is right]: (8) weigh, therefore, [your deeds] with equity, and cut not the measure short! (9) And the earth has He spread out for all living beings, (10) with fruit thereon, and palm trees with sheathed clusters [of dates], (11) and grain growing tall on its stalks, and sweet-smelling plants.(12) .

vv.7–12

Here we have the manifestation of His grace in the way He keeps the heavens up and the earth stable – the duality and contrast being maintained. The heavens are raised high so that they do not fall on His creatures, cf. 13:2

اللَّهُ الَّذِي رَفَعَ السَّمَاوَاتِ بِغَيْرِ عَمَدٍ تَرَوْنَهَا ۖ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ۚ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ ۖ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۖ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ يُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّكُمْ تُوقِنُونَ

It is God who has raised the heavens without any supports that you could see, and is established on the throne of His almightiness; and He [it is who] has made the sun and the moon subservient [to His laws], each running its course for a term set [by Him]. He governs all that exists. Clearly does He spell out these messages, so that you might be certain in your innermost that you are destined to meet your Sustainer [on Judgment Day].; 21:32

وَجَعَلْنَا السَّمَاءَ سَقْفًا مَحْفُوظًا ۖ وَهُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِهَا مُعْرِضُونَ

and [that] We have set up the sky as a canopy well-secured? And yet, they stubbornly turn away from [all] the signs of this [creation].; 22:65

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالْفُلْكَ تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِ وَيُمْسِكُ السَّمَاءَ أَنْ تَقَعَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ

Art thou not aware that it is God who has made subservient to you all that is on earth, and the ships that sail through the sea at His behest - and [that it is He who] holds the celestial bodies [in their orbits], so that they may not fall upon the earth otherwise than by His leave? Verily, God is most compassionate towards men, a dispenser of grace –.

‘Uplifted the heavens’, rather than ‘created them’

which is usual, suits the context. He raised them high but did not cut the addressees off from them, sending down from them the scripture and the balance (42:17)

اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ وَالْمِيزَانَ ۖ وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّ السَّاعَةَ قَرِيبٌ

[for] it is God [Himself] who has bestowed revelation from on high, setting forth the truth, and [thus given man] a balance [wherewith to weigh right and wrong]. And for all thou knowest, the Last Hour may well be near!).

The Qur’an having already been mentioned (v.2), only the balance is mentioned here, between heaven and earth: even before the earth is mentioned, the balance is set up. The passage stresses the importance of keeping just balance with no excess or deficiency, a fitting introduction to the repeated question to follow – ‘Which of your Lord’s bounties will you deny?’

– since justice demands that the addressees recognise (without skimping) the bounties of the Merciful with which He surrounds them from every direction. Skimping in the balance elsewhere in the Qur’an has a concrete significance; in this context it carries the additional, metaphorical meaning of due recognition for God’s bounties.

Bell makes the unexplained and unsubstantiated claim:12 ‘That you may

not transgress ... skimp not in the Balance are later insertions.' However, the equivalent of 'that you might not ...' can be observed in combination with *mizan* in Q. 57:25

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ ۖ وَأَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَنْفَعٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ وَرُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ

Indeed, [even aforetime] did We send forth Our apostles with all evidence of [this] truth; and through them We bestowed revelation from on high, and [thus gave you] a balance [wherewith to weigh right and wrong], so that men might behave with equity; and We bestowed [upon you] from on high [the ability to make use of] iron, in which there is awesome power as well as [a source of] benefits for man: and [all this was given to you] so that God might mark out those who would stand up for him and His Apostle, even though He [Himself] is beyond the reach of human perception. Verily, God is powerful, almighty!

where it cannot be assumed to be a later insertion, and the emphatic repetition with *mizan* is also observed in such instances as 11:84–85

وَإِلَى مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا ۚ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ ۖ وَلَا تَنْقُصُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ ۚ إِنِّي أَرَاكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ وَإِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ مُحِيطٍ

وَيَا قَوْمِ أَوْفُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ بِالْقِسْطِ ۖ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

AND UNTO [the people of] Madyan [We sent] their brother Shu'ayb. He said: "O my people! Worship God [alone]: you have no deity other than Him; and do not give short measure and weight [in any of your dealings with men]. Behold, I see you [now] in a happy state; but, verily, I dread lest suffering befall you on a Day that will encompass [you with doom]! (84) Hence, O my people, [always] give full measure and weight, with equity, and do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs, and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption. (85); 26:181–83

أَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ وَلَا تَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُخْسِرِينَ

وَزِنُوا بِالْقِسْطَاسِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ

وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

"[Always] give full measure, and be not among those who [unjustly] cause loss [to others]; (181) and [in all your dealings] weigh with a true balance, (182) and do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs; and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption, (183); 83:1–3

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْفَطَرَتْ
وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ انْتَثَرَتْ
وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ

WOE UNTO THOSE who give short measure: (1) those who, when they are to receive their due from [other] people, demand that it be given in full – (2) but when they have to measure or weigh whatever they owe to others, give less than what is due! (3).

The repetition of the word *al-mizan* is particularly effective in this context, coming soon after *bi-`usban* (perfectly calculated courses) to reinforce the sense of exactitude and balance in God's creation, and in the ordered structure of this *sira*, heightening the demand for just dealing. In this context, the verb *wa{a'a* (set up) is used with *al-mizan* rather than *anzala* (brought down), as in 42:17

اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ وَالْمِيزَانَ ۖ وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّ السَّاعَةَ قَرِيبٌ

[for] it is God [Himself] who has bestowed revelation from on high, setting forth the truth, and [thus given man] a balance [wherewith to weigh right and wrong]. And for all thou knowest, the Last Hour may well be near!, to emphasise the significance of the balance here, and using the same verb (*wa{a'a*) with *al-ar{* highlights the crucial importance of maintaining the balance on Earth.

The Merciful keeps the sky from falling down on His creatures and makes the earth stable underneath them. One is made to appreciate the significance of the condensed statement here by reference to such expanded versions as in:

أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ إِنَّ نَشَأَ نَحْصِفُ بِهِمُ الْأَرْضَ أَوْ نُسْقِطُ عَلَيْهِمْ كِسَفًا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ ۖ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُنِيبٍ

Are they, then, not aware of how little of the sky and the earth lies open before them, and how much is hidden from them? [or that,] if We so willed, We could cause the earth to swallow them, or cause fragments of the sky to fall down upon them? In all this, behold, there is a message indeed for every servant [of God] who is wont to turn unto Him [in repentance].

34:9

and:

وَأَلْقَى فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ وَأَنْهَارًا وَسُبُلًا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

And he has placed firm mountains on earth, lest it sway with you, and rivers and paths, so that you might find your way, .

16:15.

Al-anam (the creatures) for whom He set the Earth up are men and *jinn* and other creatures that move on it. Bell translates v.10 as: 'The earth He has set up for the cattle' and says in a footnote 'or all living creatures'. His preferred version is contradicted by the other Qur'anic references just cited, and gives no sense of the fruits, palm-trees and fragrant plants. In the contents of the earth we have the balance of fruits and palm-trees, grain and fragrant plants (*ray'an*). Some commentators take *ray'an* as grains that men eat as opposed to the husk eaten by animals, but this would make it redundant (grain having already been mentioned) and would disturb the balance. The luxury in fragrant plants is counterbalanced later by that in pearls.

Dhat al-akmam (sheathed) and *dhi 'l-'a'f* (with grains) are two nicely balanced details showing the fruits of palm and corn still in the stage of promise, still dependent on the grace of God to bring them to fruition, which again suits the context.

Men and *jinn*, included among the 'creatures' in v.10 and mentioned in v.14, have been shown the bounties of God and the manifestations of His mercy and beneficence surrounding them from above, below and on either side.

They are now addressed in the dual with the challenging question:

Fa-bi'ayyi ala'i rabbikuma tukadhdhiban?

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow?
v.13

The change here, *iltifat*, from 'His' third person pronoun to the noun 'your Lord' is significant, and since *rabb* is related to *rabba* (to bring up, care for), His lordship is caring lordship. The 'Which, then ...?' coming after the surrounding benefits is a cornering challenge, and makes any denial futile, 'your caring Lord' showing its folly and ingratitude.

Such a challenge to deny the obvious blessings and signs of God is referred to in other places in the Qur'an, cf. 53:55 ARABIC About which, then, of thy Sustainer's powers canst thou [still] remain in doubt?; 40:81

وَيُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِهِ فَأَيِّ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ تُنْكِرُونَ

And [thus] He displays His wonders before you: which, then, of God's wonders can you still deny?; 16:83

يَعْرِفُونَ نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُنْكِرُونَهَا وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

They [who turn away from it] are fully aware of God's blessings, but none the less they refuse to acknowledge them [as such], since most of them are given to denying the truth.; 14:34

وَأَتَاكُمْ مِنْ كُلِّ مَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُ ۚ وَإِنْ تَعَدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تَحْصُوهَا ۚ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَظَلُومٌ كَفَّارٌ

And [always] does He give you something out of what you may be asking of Him; and should you try to count God's blessings, you could never compute them. [And yet,] behold, man is indeed most persistent in wrongdoing, stubbornly ingrate!; 56:83

فَلَوْلَا إِذَا بَلَغَتِ الْحُلُقُومَ

Why, then, when [the last breath] comes up to the throat [of a dying man];, 6:2

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ طِينٍ ثُمَّ قَضَىٰ أَجَلًا ۚ وَأَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّىٰ عِنْدَهُ ۚ ثُمَّ أَنْتُمْ تَمْتَرُونَ

He it is who has created you out of clay, and then has decreed a term [for you] - a term known [only] to him. And yet you doubt –.

In our *sira* the challenge to men and *jinn* is made thirty-one times, which has given rise to much speculation, largely far-fetched and missing the point. Razi (and others) sought the explanation in the value of the specific numbers of 3 and 10., stating, among other things, that the number with 'bounty' is ten times that with 'punishment' mentioned in the preceding *sira*, (6:160

مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا ۚ وَمَنْ جَاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَىٰ إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

Whoever shall come [before God] with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof; but whoever shall come with an evil deed will be requited with no more than the like thereof; and none shall be wronged.).

Bell observed that the refrain occurred 'first at v.12 ABOVE, then at intervals of two verses, and then from v.23 Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? onwards at intervals of one, except at 43–44 This will be the hell which those who are lost in sin [now] call a lie: (43) between it and [their own] burning-hot despair will they wander to and fro! (44) which should probably form one verse'. He further suggests that the refrain might have been added later, 'when also the eschatological portion from 31 onwards may have been composed'. Bell does not support his suggestion that the material was at one time used without the refrain. Comparison with other instances of challenge cited above shows that the enumeration of bounties could not have been left without a comment like the refrain. As for his comment on the frequency and location of the refrain, our analysis of the context and structure of this *sira* will, it is hoped, explain why the refrain occurs thirty-one times, why it could not have started earlier, or occurred more times than it does, whether at the end or in the body of the text. Commenting on the refrain, Wansbrough states:

Structurally, it produces the effect of a litany, and its similarity to *ki le-'olam hasdo*, which performs the same function in Psalm 136 has been noted. should like here to insist upon the term litany rather than refrain. The role of the latter in the Qur'an and elsewhere, is that of concluding formula, which does not adequately describe employment of the device in this passage.

Reference to Psalm 136 will be discussed later. Wansbrough rightly observes that the function of the refrain in the Qur'an is that of a concluding formula but does not agree that this adequately describes the employment of the device in our *sira*. Our analysis will show that the question ('Which then ...') is used as exactly that – a concluding formula. As regards litany, this means either: '(1) a form of public prayer, usually penitential, consisting of a series of petitions, in which the clergy leads and the public respond. It may be used as part of a service or by itself, in the latter case often in procession, or (2) (transf.) A form of supplication representing a litany.' Even in a vague sense, then, a litany is quite alien to the Qur'an and the way it is recited in Islamic ritual prayer. There, if a person (an *imam* in prayer or otherwise) reads aloud, all others have to listen attentively, and there is no leader/response form:

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

Hence, when the Qur'an is voiced, hearken unto it, and listen in silence, so that you might be graced with [God's] mercy.

7:204

In our *sira*, contrary to Wansbrough's and Bell's perception, after the first instance the formula always marks the end of a pair. We have here a series of paired bounties surrounding the addressees geographically – above, below, east, west – or qualitatively – fresh and salt water, the ships that float and move over the water etc. Even in the punishment of the guilty later on the pairing structure is maintained. Only when a pair is completed do we have the concluding refrain: 'Which then of your Lord's bounties do you deny?'

It is introduced for the first time just before the addressees – men and *jinn* – hitherto referred to in the word *al-anam*, make a clear appearance.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ صَلْصَالٍ كَالْفَخَّارِ

وَخَلَقَ الْجَانَّ مِنْ مَارِجٍ مِنْ نَارٍ

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

He has created man out of sounding clay, like pottery, (14) whereas the invisible beings He has created out of a confusing flame of fire. (15) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (16)

vv.14–16

The statement is so condensed here that the bounties may not be apparent. Comparison with other instances in the Qur'an clarifies the process of creation. In these other instances, both humans and *jinn* are reminded of their origin, and how God, in his bounty, developed them into what they

now are, human rather than clay and *jinn* rather than fire (32:7–9 “Who perfected everything which He created and began the creation of man from clay. (7) Then He made his posterity out of the extract of a liquid disdained. (8) Then He proportioned him and breathed into him from His [created] soul and made for you hearing and vision and hearts; little are you grateful. (9)”; 95:4 We have certainly created man in the best of stature; ; 36:77 Does man not consider that We created him from a [mere] sperm-drop - then at once he is a clear adversary? ; 16:78 And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect that perhaps you would be grateful. ; 38:76 He said, "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay."). Were it not for His bounty, they would not have arrived at their present state, nor would the sky have been kept aloft, nor the earth remain stable; the two types of water would not have been kept distinct from each other, nor would the ships have floated and sailed. This reveals a further duality: origin and present state.

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَاهَا مَذْمُومًا مَدْحُورًا

ARABIC [He is] Lord of the two sunrises and Lord of the two sunsets. (17) So which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?
vv.17–18

The reference here is to the two extreme points where the sun rises in the winter and the summer; and where it sets in the winter and in the summer (rather than where the sun rises and sets and the moon rises and sets as suggested by some commentators). This shows His grace in the variation of seasons and of the length of the day and night. The selection of the extreme points brings them nearer to the realization of His mercy in not making the night time, nor the day time, perpetual for them, as explained in 28:71–73 Say, "Have you considered: if Allah should make for you the night continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you light? Then will you not hear?" (71) Say, "Have you considered: if Allah should make for you the day continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you a night in which you may rest? Then will you not see?" (72) And out of His mercy He made for you the night and the day that you may rest therein and [by day] seek from His bounty and [that] perhaps you will be grateful. (73).

Verse 17 is so condensed by the structure and the demands of the context that its full significance can only be appreciated by comparison with 28:71–3 ABOVE; 73:9 [He is] the Lord of the East and the West; there is no deity except Him, so take Him as Disposer of [your] affairs. (Lord of the East and West) and 70:40–41 So I swear by the Lord of [all] risings and settings that indeed We are able (40) To replace them with better than them; and We are not to be outdone. (41) (Lord of the Easts and Wests) which show how the selection and forms of the material

serve the context and are determined by it.

So far God's bounties have been shown on land; the following passage deals with water:

مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ يَلْتَقِيَانِ
بَيْنَهُمَا بَرْزَخٌ لَا يَبْغِيَانِ
فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

He released the two seas, meeting [side by side]; (19) Between them is a barrier [so] neither of them transgresses. (20) So which of the favors of your Lord would you deny? (21)

vv.19–21

Fresh and salt water, in rivers and seas, meet but do not overrun each other. Unlike in the preceding passage, the end of the first verse does not complete a pair of bounties, so the refrain comes after the second verse: running waters that meet but are kept distinct, as will be explained below.

يَخْرُجُ مِنْهُمَا اللُّؤْلُؤُ وَالْمَرْجَانُ
فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

From both of them emerge pearl and coral. (22) So which of the favors of your Lord would you deny? (23)

vv.22–23

This is the second of the three cycles of bounties related to the sea. Translators, perhaps with one or two exceptions, translate the second kind (*marjan*) as 'coral', while the majority of commentators explain that it denotes small pearls which are much more brilliant. This is supported by an author on gems who cited verses of Imru' al-Qays. Some commentators give the alternative of 'red beads', and some modern ones (S. Quṭb, for instance) talk of coral. We shall see at v.58 that reference to other instances in the Qur'an confirm the meaning we have opted for. In 16:14

وَهُوَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ الْبَحْرَ لِتَأْكُلُوا مِنْهُ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُوا مِنْهُ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ مَوَاجِرَ فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

And it is He who subjected the sea for you to eat from it tender meat and to extract from it ornaments which you wear. And you see the ships plowing through it, and [He subjected it] that you may seek of His bounty; and perhaps you will be grateful. and 35:12

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْبَحْرَانِ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ سَائِغٌ شَرَابُهُ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ ۖ وَمِنْ كُلٍّ تَأْكُلُونَ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُونَ
حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا ۖ وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ فِيهِ مَوَازِرَ لِيَتَّبِعُوا مِنَ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

And not alike are the two bodies of water. One is fresh and sweet, palatable for drinking, and one is salty and bitter. And from each you eat tender meat and extract ornaments which you wear, and you see the ships plowing through [them] that you might seek of His bounty; and perhaps you will be grateful. the fish that come from the seas also appear, whereas in our *sira* they are not mentioned: the given pairs are complete without them – another example

of how the selection of material suits the context.

Many commentators have experienced a problem with v.22. According to their knowledge, pearls come only from salt water whereas the verse states that they come from both salt and fresh water. An early writer who faced the problem was Abi 'Ubayda (d.210/825) in his *Majaz al-Qur'an*. He insisted that pearls come only *min ahadihima* from one, i.e. salt water, not both (*minhuma*) and explains the Qur'anic expression 'both of them' as being analogous to the expression: 'I ate bread and milk', applying 'ate' to drinking milk as well as to eating bread when in fact it refers only to one. His suggestion that pearls come from 'one' of them only is refuted by Qur'anic usage elsewhere. *Minhuma* was not a freak or a 'slip of the tongue' in the Qur'an and Abi 'Ubayda's attempt to explain it away does not advance his assertion. If we compare Qur'an 35:12 ABOVE, for instance, we have an explicit statement confirming that pearls come *min kullin* from each of the two kinds of water. Indeed Abi 'Ubayda dealt with this verse (II. p. 153) but, faced with the fact that it goes against his assertion about *a'adihima*, he passed it over without comment. Doubt has been expressed about Abi 'Ubayda's ability to read the Qur'an without making mistakes. Wansbrough comments on Abi 'Ubayda's statement: "*yakhruju minhuma [min a'adihima]*" could not seriously be interpreted as figurative usage or even stylistic option. Its presence can only be justified by a principle of inclusion, which took account of passages requiring textual emendation'.

Ibn Qutayba faced the same problem with 55:22 ABOVE, but cited with it 35:12 ABOVE. He still insisted that pearls came only from salt water and even claimed that Abi Dhu'ayb al-Hudhali was wrong in a verse he composed, in thinking, probably after Qur'anic usage, that pearls exist in fresh water. Believing that pearls came only from salt water and trying to justify the Qur'anic statement, commentators suggested, for instance, that pearls came from places where sea and fresh water meet, as in Shatt al-'Arab or that mussels lived in the sea but came up and opened their mouths to receive raindrops which then went into the making of pearls! However, Razi's first and preferred interpretation was to accept 'the manifest meaning of the Word of God' (i.e. pearls come from both waters), 'which is more worthy of being followed than the word of some men whose word cannot be trusted. And who knows that pearls do not come from fresh water? And supposing divers did find them or bring them out only from sea water, this does not necessarily

mean that they don't exist somewhere else'. Razi would perhaps have been pleased to know what we know today about freshwater pearls: Freshwater mussels in the temperate zone of the Northern Hemisphere have produced pearls of great value ... Pearling is still a carefully fostered industry in central Europe, and the forest streams of Bavaria, in particular, are the source of choice pearls. Freshwater pearling in China has been known from before 1000 bc. The Qur'anic statement in our *sira*, then, stands with its manifest meaning, supported by other Qur'anic references, and in harmony with the duality of the context, without need of emendation or forced interpretations, and in spite of the belief current amongst commentators, that pearls come only from salt water.

الْجَوَارِ الْمُنشَآتُ فِي الْبَحْرِ كَالْأَعْلَامِ
فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

And to Him belong the ships [with sails] elevated in the sea like mountains. (24) So which of the favors of your Lord would you deny? (25) vv.24–25

This is the third and last pair of bounties connected with the sea. In spite of their size and weight, ships do not sink but sail along. The condensed description, *al-jawari 'l-munsha'at* ('running' and 'raised') – two words in Arabic – is expanded in 42:32–34

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ الْجَوَارِ فِي الْبَحْرِ كَالْأَعْلَامِ
إِنْ يَشَأْ يُسْكِنِ الرِّيحَ فَيَظْلَلْنَ رَوَاكِدَ عَلَى ظَهْرِهِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ
أَوْ يُوقِفَهُنَّ بِمَا كَسَبُوا وَيَعْفُ عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

And of His signs are the ships in the sea, like mountains. (32) If He willed, He could still the wind, and they would remain motionless on its surface. Indeed in that are signs for everyone patient and grateful. (33) Or He could destroy them for what they earned; but He pardons much. (34) which brings out its full significance – one part of the Qur'an explaining another.

This principle of intertextuality helps us to understand how the part of our *sira* already discussed relates to the next. We often find elsewhere in the Qur'an that when people are on a journey by sea or on land they are reminded of their final return to God (10:23

فَلَمَّا أَنْجَاهُمْ إِذَا هُمْ يَبْغُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ ۚ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّمَا بَغْيُكُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِكُمْ ۚ مَتَاعَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۚ ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

But when He saves them, at once they commit injustice upon the earth without right. O mankind, your injustice is only against yourselves, [being merely] the enjoyment of

worldly life. Then to Us is your return, and We will inform you of what you used to do.;
36:44 **ARABIC** Except as a mercy from Us and provision for a time.; 43:14

وَأِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا لَمُنْقَلِبُونَ

And indeed we, to our Lord, will [surely] return."). Comparison (e.g. with 10:24

إِنَّمَا مَثَلُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَاءٍ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَاخْتَلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتُ الْأَرْضِ مِمَّا يَأْكُلُ النَّاسُ وَالْأَنْعَامُ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا
أَخَذَتِ الْأَرْضُ زُخْرُفَهَا وَازَّيَّنَتْ وَظَنَّ أَهْلُهَا أَنَّهُمْ قَادِرُونَ عَلَيْهَا أَتَاهَا أَمْرُنَا لَيْلًا أَوْ نَهَارًا فَجَعَلْنَاهَا حَصِيدًا كَأَن لَّمْ
تَغْنِ بِالْأَمْسِ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَفْصِلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

The example of [this] worldly life is but like rain which We have sent down from the sky that the plants of the earth absorb - [those] from which men and livestock eat - until, when the earth has taken on its adornment and is beautified and its people suppose that they have capability over it, there comes to it Our command by night or by day, and We make it as a harvest, as if it had not flourished yesterday. Thus do We explain in detail the signs for a people who give thought.) also reveals that just when the earth looks at its best and

becomes 'adorned and its people think they are its masters', all this can vanish away. This leads on to an explanation of the relative permanence of the next life. The eschatological part of this *sira*, therefore, follows logically in the same way as in other *siras* and need not (as Bell suggested without any substantiation) have been composed at a later time.

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ

وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

Everyone upon the earth will perish, (26) And there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor. (27) So which of the favors of your Lord would you deny? (28)

vv.26–28

One would have expected this statement to read 'all of you, men and *jinn*, are perishing', but the reference to earth makes this encompassing statement more emphatic and recalls the earlier reference to earth, in v.19 as stabilised and provided with all that is necessary for life. This binds the structure firmly in keeping with the Qur'anic pattern noted above, where the flourishing of the earth is followed by reference to the Last Day (cf. 10:24 ABOVE; 57:20

اعْلَمُوا أَنَّهَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهُوَ وَزِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ ۖ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَامًا ۖ وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٌ ۚ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ

KNOW [O men] that the life of this world is but a play and a passing delight, and a beautiful show, and [the cause of] your boastful vying with one another, and [of your] greed for more and more riches and children. Its parable is that of [life-giving] rain: the herbage which it causes to grow delights the tillers of the soil; but then it withers, and thou canst see it turn yellow; and in the end it crumbles into dust. But [the abiding truth of man's condition will become fully apparent] in the life to come: [either] suffering severe, or God's forgiveness and His goodly acceptance: for the life of this world is nothing but an enjoyment of self-delusion.).

Verses 26–31 All that lives on earth or in the heavens is bound to pass away: (26) but forever will abide thy Sustainer's Self, full of majesty and glory. (27) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (28) On Him depends all creatures in the heavens and on earth; [and] every day He manifests Himself in yet another [wondrous] way. (29) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (30) [ONE DAY] We shall take you to task, O you sin-laden two! (31) here conclude the earlier part of the *sira* and preface what

remains of it – Majesty and Honouring – reiterating the qualities of God mentioned in the first and again in the last verses of the *sira*. Translators render *al-ikram* inadequately as 'honour'. Its root verb, *akrama* is, however, in the causative form, meaning 'to give honour and bounty'. The contrasting pair in 26–27 is composed of the world perishing and God's face abiding.

A further pair is made up of Majesty on the one hand and bestowing of honour on the other (cf. 17:70 NOW, INDEED, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam, and borne them over land and sea, and provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favoured them far above most of Our creation; 21:26 And [yet,] some say, "The Most Gracious has taken unto Himself a son"! Limitless is He in His glory! Nay, [those whom they regard as God's "offspring" are but His] honoured servants; 37:40–43 Not so, however, God's true servants: (40) [in the hereafter,] theirs shall be a sustenance which they will recognize (41) as the fruits [of their life on earth]; and honoured shall they be (42) in gardens of bliss, (43)).

Indeed, the structure of the rest of the *sira* is determined by this particular pair: the passing away of those on earth and the permanence of God necessarily mean, as witnessed elsewhere in the Qur'an, that all will return to Him for judgement. 'All things shall perish except His Face, His is the judgement and to Him you shall return' (28:88 and never call upon any other deity side by side with God. There is no deity save Him. Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] self. With Him rests all judgment; and unto Him shall you all be brought back.; also 10:23–30 Yet as soon as He has saved them from this [danger], lo! they behave outrageously on earth, offending against all right! O men! All your outrageous deeds are bound to fall back upon your own

selves! [You care only for] the enjoyment of life in this world: [but remember that] in the end unto Us you must return, whereupon We shall make you truly understand all that you were doing [in life]. (23) The parable of the life of this world is but that of rain which We send down from the sky, and which is absorbed by the plants of the earth whereof men and animals draw nourishment, until -when the earth has assumed its artful adornment and has been embellished, and they who dwell on it believe that they have gained mastery over it -there comes down upon it Our judgment, by night or by day, and We cause it to become [like] a field mown down, as if there had been no yesterday. Thus clearly do We spell out these messages unto people who think! (24) AND [know that] God invites [man] unto the abode of peace, and guides him that wills [to be guided] onto a straight way. (25) For those who persevere in doing good there is the ultimate good in store, and more [than that]. No darkness and no ignominy will overshadow their faces [on Resurrection Day]: it is they who are destined for paradise, therein to abide. (26) But us for those who have done evil deeds - the recompense of an evil, deed shall be the like thereof: and - since they will have none to defend them against God - ignominy will overshadow them as though their faces were veiled by the night's own darkness: it is they who are destined for the fire. therein to abide. (27)

For, one Day We shall gather them all together, and then We shall say unto those who [in their lifetime] ascribed divinity to aught but God, "Stand where you are, you and those [beings and powers] to whom you were wont to ascribe a share in God's divinity! -for by then We shall have [visibly] separated them from one another. And the beings to whom they had ascribed a share in God's divinity will say [to those who had worshipped them], "It was not us that you were wont to worship;(28) and none can bear witness between us and you as God does: we were, for certain, unaware of your worshipping [us]. (29) There and then will every human being clearly apprehend what he has done in the past; and all will be brought back unto God, their true Lord Supreme, and all their false imagery will have forsaken them. (30)).

Indeed *jalah* and *ikram* herald the variety of fates resulting from the judgement to which the repeated *ala'* (bounties) and *tukadhdhiban* (do you deny) was bound to lead. This reinforces our statement that Bell's conclusion, that the eschatological section was added later, cannot stand.

يَسْأَلُهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ
فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

On Him depends all creatures in the heavens and on earth; [and] every day He manifests Himself in yet another [wondrous] way. (29) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (30)

vv.29-30

The pairing here is between the entreaties and God's attention to them.

This particular bounty is described in more detail in *Sira* 14, v.34

وَأَتَاكُمْ مِنْ كُلِّ مَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُ ۚ وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تَحْصُوهَا ۚ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَظَلُومٌ كَفَّارٌ

And [always] does He give you something out of what you may be asking of Him; and should you try to count God's blessings, you could never compute them. [And yet,] behold, man is indeed most persistent in wrongdoing, stubbornly ingrate!, which similarly concludes an enumeration of God's bounties in this world. The entreaties and God's answer in our *sira* follow the part dealing with this world and precede the one leading to the next (a further pairing), to suggest that the needs and His attention to them exist in both worlds.

Section II: Eschatology: Punishment

سَنَفْرُغُ لَكُمْ أَيُّهَ الثَّقَلَانِ
فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

[ONE DAY] We shall take you to task, O you sin-laden two! (31) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (32)
vv.31–32

The previous pair might have suggested to them that God is engaged every day in attending to entreaties; this one stresses that He will make time to judge men and *jinn*. He has the power over them, even if they gather all together as two massive armies. This echoes the challenge in *Sira* 17, v.88: 'if all the men and *jinn* were to gather to... they would not be able to ...'.

Arberry translates *al-thaqalan* as 'you weight and you weight', but *thaqal* also means a massive, heavily-moving army (see Lane's *Lexicon*). The challenge supports this. Being weighty is an element of strength for men and *jinn* here, but it will prove a hindrance in the following verse where they are shown to be too cumbersome to escape. The shift (*iltifat*) from talking about God, to Himself challenging them, speaking in the first person divine plural makes the challenge awesome and all the more effective.

The pairing here is of the army of men and the army of *jinn* gathered, and God attending to deal with them. Commentators had to ask themselves: where is the bounty here and in the following verses, about punishing the sinners (and, even in 26–28), in which the refrain is maintained after each pairing? Zamakhshari's answer is typical. There is a blessing in the judgement for those who are saved from punishment, and a blessing for everybody in being warned beforehand: out of His benevolence He did not leave them in darkness about the fate that awaits sinners. However, we need not necessarily take this view. The punishment will be for those who deny (77:15

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ

Woe on that Day unto those who give the lie to the truth! (passim), and the challenge:

‘Which, then, of your Lord’s bounties

do you deny?’ is in fact for those who may deny the encompassing bounties.

It is ungrateful and futile to deny such encompassing bounties. It is, moreover,

foolish to deny and rebuff such a bounteous and powerful Lord who

will certainly judge them, where denial will have due punishment. The bounties

in the section (31–45) can, I suggest, be understood to be the bounties

God has given them in the world. Had the question in this section been

‘which of these two bounties...’ we would have been forced to interpret

what is in every pair in this section as bounties. The refrain is maintained in

the punishment section to emphasise their foolishness in addition to their

ingratitude, and the challenging question carries threat and mockery in it

(cf. 44:47–50)

خُذُوهُ فَاعْتِلُوهُ إِلَىٰ سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ

ثُمَّ صُبُّوا فَوْقَ رَأْسِهِ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْحَمِيمِ

ذُقْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْكَرِيمُ

إِنَّ هَذَا مَا كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تَمْتَرُونَ

[And the word will be spoken:] “Seize him, [O you forces of hell,] and drag him into the midst of the blazing fire:(47) then pour over his head the anguish of burning

despair! (48) Taste it - thou who [on earth] hast considered thyself so mighty, so

noble! (49) This is the very thing which you [deniers of the truth] were wont to call in question!” (50) ; and 53:50–56 and that it is He who destroyed the ancient [tribes of]

Ad (50) and Thamud, leaving no trace [of them], (51) as well as the people of Noah

before them - [since,] verily, they all had been most willful in their evildoing and most

overweening – (52) just as He thrust into perdition those cities that were

overthrown (53) and then covered them from sight forever. (54) About which, then, of

thy Sustainer’s powers canst thou [still] remain in doubt? (55) THIS IS a warning like

those warnings of old: (56)). Twice in this *sira*, *al-Ra`man* is described as

being *Dhi ’l-jalali wa’l-ikram*. Punishing the sinners has to do with *jalal* (majesty),

while *ikram* shows itself in the bounties He has shown men and *jinn* in

this world and will show the believers in the next.

O you who live in close communion with [evil] invisible beings and humans! If you [think that you] can pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth, pass beyond them!

[But] you cannot pass beyond them, save by a sanction [from God]!(33) Which, then, of

your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow? (34) A flash of fire will be let loose upon you,

and smoke, and you will be left without succour!(35) Which, then, of your Sustainer’s

powers can you disavow? (36) And when the sky is rent asunder and becomes red like

[burning] oil (37) which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (38) For on that Day neither man nor invisible being will be asked about his sins. (39) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (40) All who were lost in sin shall by their marks be known, and shall by their forelocks and their feet be seized! (41) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (42) This will be the hell which those who are lost in sin [now] call a lie: (43) between it and [their own] burning-hot despair will they wander to and fro! (44) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (45) vv.33-45

With all their might men and *jinn* cannot run away when God attends to their judgement. The context requires the introduction of the *jinn* first, since they seem to have more power to penetrate heaven and earth (cf. 17:88

قُلْ لَّيِّنَ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَى أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا
Say: "If all mankind and all invisible beings would come together with a view to producing the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce its like even though they were to exert all their strength in aiding one another!". The heavens which He has raised up and made firm and comely in this world will split and redden in the new order of things in the next.

In this world they have been asked again and again in this *sira*: 'Which of your Lord's bounties do you deny?' – in the next they will no longer be asked: the guilty will be known by their marks. The pairing structure is maintained throughout: the guilty will be seized by the forelocks and the feet, and will wander between hell-fire and boiling water. There is no refrain between 43 and 44 because the pair has not been completed (cf. Bell). It is important to note that the context of *Sirat al-Ra'man* has affected the way the treatment of the guilty is presented. They are surrounded: held by forehead and feet and roam 'between ... and ...'; in other contexts they are 'in' hell (cf. 18:29

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۖ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ ۚ إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ نَارًا أَحَاطَ بِهِمْ سُرَادِقُهَا ۚ وَإِنْ يَسْتَغِيثُوا يُغَاثُوا بِمَاءٍ كَالْمُهْلِ يَشْوِي الْوُجُوهَ ۚ بِئْسَ الشَّرَابُ وَسَاءَتْ مُرْتَقًى

And say: "The truth [has now come] from your Sustainer: let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it." Verily, for all who sin against themselves [by rejecting Our truth] We have readied a fire whose billowing folds will encompass them from all sides; and if they beg for water, they will be given water [hot] like molten lead, which will scald their faces: how dreadful a drink, and how evil a place to rest! ; 56:41

وَأَصْحَابُ الشِّمَالِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الشِّمَالِ

BUT AS FOR those who have persevered in evil - what of those who have persevered in evil?). Being surrounded in

this way calls to mind their being surrounded in this world from all directions by the bounties they presumed to deny. It will be observed that their treatment is dealt with briefly in this *sira*, unlike in many others, before a longer description of what is a more important matter in *Sirat al-Ra'man*: the reward of the believers.

Section III: Eschatology: Rewards

BUT FOR THOSE who of their Sustainer's Presence stand in fear, two gardens [of paradise are readied] - (46) which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? – (47) [two gardens] of many wondrous hues. (48) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (49) In [each of] these two [gardens] two springs will flow. (50) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (51) In [each of] these two will two kinds of every fruit be [found]. (52) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (53) [In such a paradise the blest will dwell,] reclining upon carpets lined with rich brocade; and the fruit of both these gardens will be within easy reach. (54) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (55) In these [gardens] will be mates of modest gaze, whom neither man nor invisible being will have touched ere then. (56) Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (57) [When you are promised splendours] as though [of] rubies and [of] pearls – (58) which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (59) Could the reward of good be aught but good? (60)
vv.46–60

The believers are divided into two classes: the first is the pious with whose rewards we will deal now. The structure of pairs is maintained, and so is the refrain. As the guilty who deny the judgement and punishment will suffer between the two torments of fire and boiling water, those who fear standing before their Lord for judgement will enjoy two gardens. (In his Companion to Arberry's translation, W. M. Watt comments, 'Why two, it is not clear' [II, p.250].) The bounties are shown on two sides of the believers, as an example of perfect bliss. In discussing the significance of the dual we should compare such expressions as: *labbayka wa-sa'dayka* (I respond to you twice) and *'ananayka!* (be kind/have pity twice) where it is used as an intensive to express fullness and completeness.

We have seen in the earlier part of this *sira* that the Lord's bounties surround them from above and below (heaven raised, with the Qur'an and the balance 'coming down' from it and earth stabilised with plants coming up from it), from east and west, on land and sea. Here the two gardens are on the right and left; from above them there are abundant branches for

shade and fruits (cf. 76:14 since its [blissful] shades will come down low over them, and low will hang down its clusters of fruit, most easy to reach.). Each has a running fountain from below (cf. 85:11 [But,] verily, they who attain to faith and do righteous deeds shall [in the life to come] have gardens through which running waters flow - that triumph most great!) and in each garden every fruit is of two kinds. The inhabitants sit on couches under them with the fruit of both gardens hanging within reach above them. The lining of the couches is brocade, and the exterior is left to the imagination. They will be there with their spouses (cf. 36:56 in happiness will they and their spouses on couches recline;). The spouses are chaste and untouched by any before them, and they have the lustre of ruby and the whiteness of brilliant pearls.²⁵ Verse 58 here and its parallel (56:23 like unto pearls [still] hidden in their shells) confirm that *marjan* here, as in v.22, means small pearls, not corals as thought by most translators.

The guilty will suffer from above and below, seized by the forelocks and the feet, and suffer from two sides hell-fire and boiling water. The pious will find enjoyment on both sides – in the two gardens – and from above and below. Whereas the guilty will ‘roam’ between hell-fire and seething water, the pious will be ‘sitting’. There are no spouses for the guilty, and the contrast with the pious is obvious. The rewards for pious souls are concluded with the testimony of their Lord that they have done good work: ‘Shall the reward of good work be anything but good?’

And besides those two will be yet two [other] gardens - (62) which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow? – (63) two [gardens] of the deepest green. (64) Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow? (65) In [each of] these two [gardens] will two springs gush forth. (66) Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow? (67) In both of them will be [all kinds of] fruit, and date-palms and pomegranates. (68) Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow? (69) In these [gardens] will be [all] things most excellent and beautiful. (70) Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow? (71) [There the blest will live with their] companions pure and modest, in pavilions [splendid] - (72) which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow? – (73) [companions] whom neither man nor invisible being will have touched ere then. (74) Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow? (75) [In such a paradise will they dwell,] reclining upon meadows green and carpets rich in beauty. (76) Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow? (77)

vv.62–77

The two gardens described here are for the second class of believers and are lower in rank or quality – *min dinihima* – as shown by the comparison: these gardens are ‘green’; the first are ‘abounding in branches’. The water here is ‘bubbling’, not ‘flowing’; there is only ‘fruit’ here, whereas in the

other there is 'of every fruit two kinds'. The descriptions of the damsels and the cushions, too, are of a lesser order. The bounties in the earlier gardens are more encompassing from above and below. There are couches rather than cushions, and the fruit in the branches above them is within reach rather than simply being fruits in the garden; the divine testimony of their having done well is reserved for those in the first gardens. The pairing structure is, nevertheless, maintained throughout, as is the refrain. That there are two classes of gardens, for two classes of believers, fits the pairing scheme evident in this *sira*. It is also confirmed by the next *sira* (56:10–38) where there is a parallel description of two classes of garden, one for 'those nearest to God' and the other for 'the Companions of the Right Hand'. Some commentators²⁸ have thought that the four gardens in our *sira* could be for the same believers. This is refuted by the categorical distribution in *Sira* 56. Moreover, it does not make sense: how can the Lord (*dhi 'l-jalali wa'l-ikram*) say to a favoured believer: 'I have given you these two excellent gardens as a reward for your good work' (46–60) and in addition: 'I am giving you these two inferior ones' (63–77)? Wansbrough questioned the 'two gardens' in v.46 and suggested that the total number in this *sira* should be halved. This was based on a quotation from the early commentator al-Suyiṭi attributing to al-Farra' the view that the dual form *jannatan* was demanded by the rhyme-scheme, but in fact represented the singular *janna* as in 79:41

فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى

paradise will truly be the goal!. However, at the end of the same paragraph in Suyiṭi, from which Wansbrough took this quotation, there is another statement attributed to Farra' to the effect that it was *jannat* in the plural (not dual) that was meant. By comparing what Farra' had actually said with what Suyiṭi and earlier authors have attributed to him it becomes clear that he was in fact misrepresented. Commenting on v.46 he said: Commentators have said they are two of the gardens [*bustanan*] of Paradise *wa-qad yakin fi'l-'arabiyya janna tuthanniha 'l-'arab fi ash'ariha*: In Arabic you may come across the word '*janna*' which the Arabs in their poetry put in the dual. [two lines of verse quoted]: *wa-dhalika ana 'l-shi'r lahu qawafin yuqimuha'l-ziyada wa'l-nuq'an fa-ya tamil ma la ya tamiluh al-kalam*: Because verse has rhyme which can be produced by addition and omission. Thus it allows situations not normally allowed in prose. Farra' did not state that the dual was inserted 'for the rhyme', nor did he state that the gardens were plural '*jannat*'. He also misunderstood the meaning of the lines of verse he quoted. The dual is, in fact, intended by the poet, the point being that the character in the poem exaggerates the value of his tree, seeing it not just as a whole garden but as two, the notion of two gardens obviously representing perfect bliss. In any case Farra's original statement about v.46 is, at most, very tentative and it is clear that authors after him blew it out of proportion. Moreover, in discussing the number of gardens and whether there are one or two in vv.46–67, we must not lose sight of two important factors.

First, the context of the whole *sira* which has been demonstrated from the beginning to be of bounties encompassing from above and below, right and left, semantically, and not, as claimed by Wansbrough, grammatically, for verse juncture this demands two encompassing gardens. Second, internal relationships in the Qur'an confirm that two gardens are intended here. As in the line quoted by Farra', two encompassing gardens in this world, one on the right and one on the left, represent perfect bliss. Such bounties should be met with gratitude; denial and ingratitude incur punishment (cf. 34:15–17

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ آيَةٌ ۖ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ ۚ كُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ ۖ بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبٌّ
غَفُورٌ

فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتِي أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِنْ سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ
ذَلِكَ جَزَايَاهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا ۖ وَهَلْ نُجَازِي إِلَّا الْكَفُورَ

INDEED, in [the luxuriant beauty of] their homeland, the people of Sheba had an evidence [of God's grace] two [vast expanses of] gardens, to the right and to the left, [calling out to them, as it were:] "Eat of what your Sustainer has provided for you, and render thanks unto Him: a land most goodly, and a Sustainer much-forgiving!" (15) But they turned away [from Us], and so We let loose upon them a flood that overwhelmed the dams, and changed their two [expanses of luxuriant] gardens into a couple of gardens yielding bitter fruit, and tamarisks, and some few [wild] lote-trees: (16) thus We requited them for their having denied the truth. But do We ever requite [thus] any but the utterly ingrate? (17), and 18:32–43 ARABIC AND PROPOUND unto them the parable of two men, upon one of whom We had bestowed two vineyards, and surrounded them with date-palms, and placed a field of grain in-between. (32) Each of the two gardens yielded its produce and never failed therein in any way, for We had caused a stream to gush forth in the midst of each of them. (33) And so [the man] had fruit in abundance. And [one day] he said to his friend, bandying words with him, "More wealth have I than thou, and mightier am I as regards [the number and power of my] followers!" (34) And having [thus] sinned against himself, he entered his garden, saying, "I do not think that this will ever perish! (35) And neither do I think that the Last Hour will ever come. But even if [it should come, and] I am brought before my Sustainer, I will surely find something even better than this as [my last] resort!" (36) And his friend answered him in the course of their argument: "Wilt thou blaspheme against Him who has created thee out of dust, and then out of a drop of sperm, and in the end has fashioned thee into a [complete] man? (37) But as for myself, [I. know that] He is God, my Sustainer; and I cannot attribute divine powers to any but my Sustainer." (38) And [he continued:] "Alas, if thou hadst but said, on entering thy garden, `Whatever God wills [shall come to pass, for] there is no power save with God!' Although, as thou seest, I have less wealth and offspring than thou, (39) yet it may well be that my Sustainer will give me something

better than thy garden -just as He may let loose a calamity out of heaven upon this [thy garden], so that it becomes a heap of barren dust (40) or its water sinks deep into the ground, so that thou wilt never be able to find it again!" (41) And [thus it happened:] his fruitful gardens were encompassed [by ruin], and there he was, wringing his hands over all that he had spent on that which now lay waste, with its trellises caved in; and he could but say, "Oh, would that I had not attributed divine powers to any but my Sustainer!" (42) -for now he had nought to succour him in God's stead, nor could he succour himself. (43)).

In view of these examples one cannot understand the difficulty Wansbrough finds in having two gardens, one on the right and one on the left. It is clear that there is a difference between *janna*, and *al-janna* in the next life. The first means a garden, *bustan* as in Farra's passage. The second means Paradise, as opposed to Hell. In this sense we can talk about the believers being contained, all of them in *al-janna*, each one of them having within it *al-Janna* or *jannatayn* or *jannat*. As witnessed by a glance at any concordance, the Qur'an itself speaks in scores of instances about the believers being in *al-Janna* or in *jannat* (or *jannatayn* in our *sira*).

Thus, the two factors of the context (duality and encompassing bliss), and intertextuality (confirmation in *Sira* 56), in addition to our discussion of what has been attributed to Farra', lead to a conclusion contrary to Wansbrough's. 'It may well be that the dual *jannatani* of Q.55, 46, and 62 was, implicitly, never understood as anything but singular.'³⁴ The dual is meant in the Qur'an to be a dual, not just a rhyming device.

It has already been stated that vv.46–61 and 62–77 represent two sets of gardens for two classes of believers. Wellhausen, however, suggested that in these two more or less similar descriptions of two gardens we have a case of duplication due to varying recollections on the part of those from whom the compilers got the *sira*. Commenting on Zamakhshari's statement that the descriptive components of the second set 'version B' are inferior to those of 'version A', Wansbrough states:

That implied, of course, acceptance of the canonical order of the two descriptions, but from the same evidence it could be argued that version 'A' represents an elaboration of version 'B', both by rhetorical device and exegetical gloss. Whether the embellishment is to be understood as purely literary or as a reflex of what may have been the liturgical function of these verses, is difficult to determine. If a cultic context can be envisaged, it would seem that the descriptions of paradise were recited in inverse order to the canon. More likely, however, is juxtaposition in the canon of two closely related variant traditions, contaminated by recitation in identical contexts, or produced from a single tradition by oral transmission.

Like all translators, Wansbrough translates *min dinihima* as 'besides them'. This suits a juxtaposition theory but it is difficult to see from the context or Qur'anic reference the basis for such a translation.

The speculation of Wellhausen and Wansbrough, however, disregards

Qur'anic evidence concerning this matter. Such evidence occurs no further away than the beginning of the next *sira*, two and a half lines down the page. There we have a division of three groups: those on the right, those on the left, and the foremost in the race who will be brought near. Speculation about juxtaposition of material deriving from variant transmissions, or version A elaborating version B, cannot stand: there is a governing sentence announcing from the beginning that there are three divisions: *wa-kuntum azwajan thalathatan* – and you are three classes. Then it deals with the three groups in detail – **56:7–44ff; 88–95**.

In *Sira* 55 the guilty are dealt with first, together with the challenge to escape the judgement. That group is dispensed with quickly (three verses and refrains), in order to get back to speak at length of bounties of *al-Ra'man*, the Bountiful One – an example of how the context affects the treatment of the material. In *Sira* 56, on the other hand, the foremost in the race, 'those who will be brought near', are dealt with first, clearly to highlight their distinction, followed by those on the right hand.³⁷ In *Sira* 56 the treatment of those on the left hand comes last. This fits the sequence of the verses that follow. They are dealt with there in a much longer passage than that of the guilty in our *sira*, again context affecting the treatment and order of material. In fact Wansbrough himself refers, in another context, to the verses cited above as evidence: 'The notion of propinquity to God as a reward for piety is clearly conveyed, expressed in 56:7–11

أَزْوَاجًا ثَلَاثَةً
فَأَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ
وَأَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ
وَالسَّابِقُونَ السَّابِقُونَ
أُولَئِكَ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ

[on that Day,] then, shall you be [divided into] three kinds. **(7)** Thus, there shall be such as will have attained to what is right: oh, how [happy] will be they who have attained to what is right! **(8)** And there shall be such as will have lost themselves in evil: oh, how [unhappy] will be they who have lost themselves in evil! **(9)** But the foremost shall be [they who in life were] the foremost [in faith and good works]: **(10)** they who were [always] drawn close unto God! **(11)** as a tripartite distribution of benefit, of which *muqarrabin* (those brought near) represents the highest order.' (p. 30)

As in *Sira* 55, the proportion of excellence in the descriptions of the abodes of the two classes of believers is kept in *Sira* 56. Parallel descriptions and contrasts are also evident. A few examples will suffice: (1 refers to the better class; 2 to the second).

Sira 55 *Sira* 56

1. min kull fakihatin zawjan wa fakihatin mimma yatakhayyarin

Of every fruit two kinds with fruits, any that they may select

2. *fakihatun wa-nakhlun wa-rumman wa fakihatin kathira*

fruits, palm trees and pomegranates and plenty of fruit

1. *wa-jana 'l-jannatayn dan wa-yuṭuf 'alayhim...bi...wa fakihatin*

the fruit of the two gardens youths will go round serving them with fruit
near at hand

2. fihima fakihatun wa-fakihatin

in both gardens there is fruit and fruit

1. *hal jaza' al-i'san illa 'l-i'san jaza'an bi-ma kani ya'malin*

Shall the reward of good work a reward for what they have done

be any but good?

2. none none

The select class has a special reward – ‘Shall the reward of good work be anything but good?’ (55:60) – that is paralleled by ‘a reward for what they used to do’ (56:24

جَزَاءَ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

[And this will be] a reward for what they did [in life].). This comment is not made on the rewards of class II in

either *sira*. This ‘extra’ reward is confirmed by such Qur’anic statements

as 10:26 *li'lladhina a'sanu'l'usna wa ziyada* ‘For those who do right is a goodly reward, and more!’ Such a comment does not always, or often, come as a rhetorical question (cf. 76:22

إِنَّ هَذَا كَانَ لَكُمْ جَزَاءً وَكَانَ سَعْيُكُمْ مَشْكُورًا

[And they will be told:] "Verily, all this is your reward since Your endeavour [in life] has met [God's] goodly acceptance!" ; 77:44

إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Thus, behold, do We reward the doers of good; ; 78:36

جَزَاءَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ عَطَاءً حِسَابًا

[All this will be] a reward from thy Sustainer, a gift in accordance with [His Own] reckoning and *passim*). The above theory of the juxtaposition of different versions appears to imply that at

some stage, before the second pair of gardens, there was inserted the mention of reward in v.60 at the end of the *sira*. However, evidence from other places in the Qur’an, such as those cited here, show that this could not have been the case. Wansbrough’s suggestion that the question of v.60 ‘would belong to the exegetical tradition ...’ (p.29) lacks any support from Qur’anic usage. His suggestion of the possibility of a cultic context or liturgical

origin is like his insistence upon the term 'litany' rather than 'refrain' which we said was quite alien to the Qur'an and the way Muslims read it in prayer. The result of Wansbrough's earlier suggestions would be to reduce the four gardens to two and to reduce the two to one. Qur'anic references cited earlier leave such a conclusion without support.

Commenting on Wellhausen's suggestion that the description of two sets of gardens was a case of duplication due to varying recollections, Bell says: 'The frequent use of the plural "gardens" in the Qur'an, and the plural pronoun, here in vv.56 and 70, suggest that Muhammad did think of a number of Gardens, perhaps through confusion with the four rivers of the Garden of Eden mentioned in Genesis.' His 'perhaps through confusion ...' etc. is so extraordinary that it does not warrant any consideration. A single verse (v.78) concludes the *sira*: 'Blessed is the name of your Lord, the Lord of Glory and Bestower of Honour.' It is addressed in the second person singular to the Prophet/reader/listener; accordingly it is not followed by the refrain addressed in the dual to both men and *jinn*. As already stated, the first time the refrain was introduced was when men and *jinn* – to whom it was addressed – were referred to in the word *al-anam* v.10. The only factors that decided that the occurrences of the refrain would number thirty-one were the pairing scheme and the sequence of the specific themes developed within the context of the *sira*. The sequence having been completed within the pairing scheme, the refrain need not occur any more (or less) times. The final verse is a comment glorifying God's name *al-Ra'man* above their denial of His bounties. Such a comment is observed in the Qur'an in other similar situations such as 36:83

فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي فِي يَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

Limitless, then, in His glory is He in whose hand rests the mighty dominion over all things; and unto Him you all will be brought back!; 37:180–82

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ الْعِزَّةِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ

وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ

وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

LIMITLESS in His glory is thy Sustainer, the Lord of almightiness, [exalted] above anything that men may devise by way of definition! (180) And peace be upon all His message-bearers! (181) And all praise is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds! (182); 56:91

فَسَلَامٌ لَّكَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ الْيَمِينِ

[he, too, will be welcomed into paradise with the words,] "Peace be unto thee [that art] of those who have attained to righteousness!"

Even in this final comment we find a pair of adjectives maintaining the scheme to the last: Lord of Majesty and Honouring (Honouring with bounties in this world and the next, Majesty shown in His creation and in disciplining those that deny His encompassing bounties). Verse 1, verse 27 and this final verse 78 fuse the whole *sira* into one solid unity.

***Al-Ra'man* and Psalm 136**

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, it has been conjectured³⁹ that *Sira* 55 is an imitation of Psalm 136. Such conjecture seems to be based on three things:

1. The *sira* is entitled *The Merciful* and the psalm repeats 'for His Mercy endureth for ever';
2. The 'bounties' in the *sira* seems to parallel the 'great wonders' in the psalm;
3. There is a refrain in both.

Without wishing to make a comparison between the two scriptures or

faiths, I will examine some points of similarity and difference between the two texts, which could be taken as a comment on the conjecture of imitation. In the Qur'an, the name 'The Merciful' occurs only once, in v.1 in the *sira*, while 'His Mercy' is repeated throughout the psalm, twenty-six times in all. In any case 'the Merciful' occurs in the *basmala* of every *sira* in the Qur'an (except *Sira* 9) as well as in other places.

The bounties in *Sira* 55 are also listed in other places in the Qur'an, e.g. 14:32–34; 16:10–18; 27:60–64; 30:20–27. Eschatological bounties – of which there are none in the psalm – are abundant in the Qur'an. The refrain device, too, is used in other *siras* of the Qur'an (e.g. 26, 37, 54, 77). In the psalm, the refrain occurs at the end of every verse, while in the *sira* it starts after verse 12 and, as has been explained, does not occur at the end of every verse nor at the end of the *sira*. In the psalm it takes the form of an assertion, while in the *sira* it is a question. The addressees in the psalm are the Israelites – a limited group of men – while in the *sira* it is all men and *jinn*.

Compare also 'raising the heaven up' (so that it does not fall down on them) and 'stabilising the earth' (under them) (*Sira*, vv.7–10) with 'made the heavens' and 'stretched out the earth' (Psalm, vv.5–6). As we have seen, the bounties in the *sira* are encompassing throughout. They are not only for Arabs or Muslims, or even for mankind alone, but universal. The eschatological bounties are for the believers among all men and *jinn*.

In the psalm that is not the case. The universal bounties are confined to the creation of heaven-earth, sun-moon etc. (vv.4–9), and then v.25 'giveth food to all flesh' – separated as it is from the earlier universal group. For the most part, the psalm expresses the concerns of the specific group of people it addresses. Accordingly the list includes:

(v.10)'To Him that smote Egypt in their first-born; for His mercy endureth

for ever.'

(v.11)'And brought out Israel from among them: for His Mercy endureth for ever ...'

(v.16)'To Him which led His people through the wilderness: for His mercy endureth for ever ...'

(v.17)'To Him which smote great kings: for His mercy endureth for ever.'

(v.19)'Shi'hon, King of Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever.'

(v.20)'... and Og the King of Ba'shan: for His mercy endureth for ever ...'
etc.

Compare these punishments with those in the *sira*, where the basis on the qur'an explains itself 183

which punishment is inflicted is – as always in the Qur'an – identified: it is the fate of those who deny the bounties of God (*yukadhdhib biha 'l -mujrimin* – which the guilty deny).

As we have seen in our discussion of the *sira*, the material relates firmly to the specific context there and to other parts of the Qur'an. In the *sira*, the bounties start with the spiritual and educational, which is not the case in the psalm. The psalm consists of twenty-six verses, the first and last of which are didactically imperative, 'give thanks', whereas the *sira* consists of seventy-eight verses, the first and last of which are celebratory: '*al-Ra'man*' and 'Blessed is the name of your Lord, Lord of Majesty and Bestower of Honour.'