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The Qur'ān's Detailed Knowledge of the Bible: The Explanatory Inadequacy of the “Conversational” or “Christian Missionaries” Models

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Abstract

The article demonstrates that the Qur'ān has knowledge of a wide scope of fine details of Biblical passages, including the Tanakh in Hebrew and Syriac (Masoretic Text and Peshitta) and the New Testament (Greek and Syriac Peshitta). Additionally, the Qur'ān has extensive knowledge of traditional Biblical intertexts and subtexts. The knowledge of details is too extensive to be explained plausibly by passing or occasional exposure via conversations with traveling Christian missionaries in marketplaces or in inns. Nor will brief and infrequent exposure to simple homilies and/or liturgical readings suffice as an explanatory model. It is not this essay's task to offer an explanation for how the Qur'ān could have arrived at its scriptural knowledge. The sole task of the present essay is to demonstrate the complexity of the Qur'ān's Biblical knowledge, which, *pace* various scholars, is profound rather than cursory or flawed.

Keywords: Qur'ān, Bible, Psalms, intertextuality, mimesis

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate clearly that the Qur'ān's level of knowledge of Biblical passages involves such a high degree of fine detail that we cannot explain said knowledge by invoking conversations at inns or marketplaces (e.g., Rowe Holbrook, 2021), or the overhearing of occasional missionary homilies (e.g., Decharneux, 2023).

It is not the purpose of this essay to provide an alternative historical explanation for how such knowledge was acquired by the Qur'ān. I will leave that problem to future scholarship and to theologians. This essay's burden is only to demonstrate the explanatory inadequacy of some currently prevailing models.

I will accomplish the above-stated goal by concentrating on the well-known example of Q 21:105's recognized citation of Psalm 37:29, together with Q 21:104, whose significance in this debate has been overlooked generally.

2. Theoretical Background

It seems a truism in Qur'ānic studies that Q 21:105 cites Psalm 37:29 (see Saleh, 2014). Part of the truism is that Q 21:105 is purportedly the only direct Biblical citation in the Qur'ān. This is sometimes invoked as essentially proof that the Qur'ān does not know the Biblical text directly (e.g., Said Reynolds, 2017; Sinai, 2017, pp. 139, 141; Vollandt, 2018), but only via brief phrases and the like, perhaps derived from the previously mentioned medium of conversations at inns or marketplaces, or from the Prophet of Islam occasionally overhearing homilies of Christian missionaries.

Surprising is the peculiar wording in the following claim in Said Reynolds (2017, p. 314), which he uses to buttress his thesis that the Qur'ānic author/s did not have direct access to the Bible:

The closest thing to a direct citation is likely 21:105: "Certainly We wrote in the Psalms, after the remembrance: 'Indeed My righteous servants shall inherit the earth,' a verse which may be a paraphrase of Psalm 37:9 ("For evil-doers will be annihilated, while those who hope in the Lord shall have the land for their own." But

cf. Psalm 37:11, 29); even this verse, however, does not definitively display knowledge of the Psalms.

It is disconcerting that Reynolds cites Psalm 37:9 as the purported main parallel to Q 21:105. The standardly listed parallel to Q 21:105 is Psalm 37 v. 29, not v. 9. Q 21:105 clearly and indisputably parallels Psalm 37:29, which Reynolds ironically references only in parentheses, but does not cite explicitly, in contrast to his quotation of the essentially irrelevant v. 9. One could grant that Q 21:105 does not prove the Qur'ān had direct access to the entire Book of Psalms, but one cannot, *pace* Reynolds, deny that Q 21:105 echoes specifically Psalm 37:29.

2-1. Citation versus Mimesis

The argument that because the Qur'ān generally paraphrases rather than literally cites the Bible, that therefore it knows the Bible only indirectly seems unaware of or at least unaffected by recent literary mimesis studies that document how ancient and Late Antique authors as a general rule preferred to echo their sources in creative paraphrase rather than use direct word-for-word citations. Naturally, the degree or extent of this mimetic praxis in a text depends on and varies with genre. We expect literal citations in genres such as theological treatises or scriptural commentaries. However, poetry and prophetic discourse, which is how I would generally classify the Qur'ān's genre, prefer creative mimesis.

A few examples will suffice. No scholar has ever doubted that the author of the *Odes of Solomon* had access to the written texts of the Bible, yet the *Odes of Solomon* always only very loosely paraphrase brief phrases from scripture. This situation has given rise to endless scholarly debate about which scriptural texts the *Odes* actually refer to (see Harris, Mingana 1920, p. 110; Lattke, 2009).

The Letter of James presents us with a second apt example. As Kloppenborg (2021, p. 254) explains, in ancient religious literature, “allusion and paraphrase are in fact more common than direct citation, unless there were specific reasons to quote authoritative sources precisely.”

Kloppenborg (2021, p. 259) refers to Josephus as another example: “The technique of paraphrase of source material was in fact the norm, not the exception. Although Josephus clearly relied on the LXX for

much of his *Antiquities*, the low percentage of the LXX's words that are preserved is striking. . . . Paraphrase is everywhere.”

We can also mention the example of Ben Sira. As Schipper (2021, p. 293) explains by citing Wright (2013, pp. 165-166): “When starting with the book of Ben Sira, one must first state that ‘torah’ for Ben Sira meant the Mosaic Torah. ‘Although Ben Sira might refer to the Torah..., he famously does not make formal citations of Torah and is not bound to the letter of the Torah.’”

By contrast, the genre of homily invites frequent scriptural citations. One thinks, e.g., of *2 Clement*. When, however, we contrast the homiletical *2 Clement* with the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which represents the apocalyptic genre, then again the ancient penchant for frequent mimesis comes into clear view.

2-2. Q 21:104-105: Biblical Intertexts and Subtexts

The singular noun *zabūr* occurs thrice in the Qur’ān, in Q 4:163; Q 17:55; Q 21:105. In the first two verses God gives the *zabūr* to David. I see no reason to doubt therefore that Q 21:105’s *zabūr* refers to the same scripture given to David, despite his name’s absence in Q 21:105. We should not complicate the situation by bringing to bear the Qur’ānic cognate terms *zubar* (1x, pl.) and *zubar* (7x pl.).

I am not aware of previous studies which recognize that Q 21:105 combines elements of Psalm 37:29 together with a neglected parallel in Isaiah 65:9’s second half. The parallelism between these two Hebrew texts brings to mind Fishbane’s 1985 contribution on the topic of inner-Biblical allusions. Although Fishbane does not explore the relationship between Psalm 37 and Isaiah 65, his study is important methodologically. Fishbane’s work has been profitably integrated in Galadari 2020 (pp. 22, 44, 50, 54). In the present context, what is most important is not to determine which of these two Biblical texts has literary priority, but to recognize the technique of inner-Biblical allusions. More recently, Berges (2022) has explored and documented shared similarities between the Psalms and Isaiah. In some cases, similarities between the Psalms and Isaiah may not involve textual dependence, but independent expressions of coinciding concerns. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of some degree of inner-Biblical allusions is not in dispute.

The present example of Q 21:105's echoes of Psalm 37:29 together with Isaiah 65:9 would seem to indicate that the Qur'ānic praxis of alluding to similar texts in earlier scriptures is congruent with Biblical precedents. To demonstrate Q 21:105's combination of elements of Psalm 37:29 together with Isaiah 65:9's second half we begin by comparing Q 21:104, Psalm 37:29, and Isaiah 65:9 (Table 1).

First we notice that Q 21:105 lacks Psalm 37:29's concluding idiom לְעַד עֲלֵיָהּ, "forever," which is also lacking in the Isaiah 65:9 parallel, both in MT and in the Targum Jonathan of Isaiah (hereafter *TJon Isa*). The shared lack of "forever" in Q 21:105 and Isaiah 65:9 speaks in favor of an allusion to the latter text on the former text's part.

Second, Q 21:105's "My righteous servants" is lacking in Psalm 37:29, which has instead "the righteous." However, we have a perfect match in the reading וְעַבְדֵי צְדִיקָא, "and My righteous servants," in *TJon Isa* 65:9, which expands MT's וְעַבְדֵי, "and My servants." In fact, the phrase וְעַבְדֵי צְדִיקָא occurs six times in this chapter of *TJon Isa* (1x in v. 8; 1x in v. 9; 3x in v. 13; 1x in v. 14), with "His righteous servants" appearing 1x in v. 15. "His righteous servants" occurs later in *TJon Isa* 66:14. There is no occurrence of "righteous servants" in *TJon Isa* chapters 40-43; 45-62; 64. "His righteous servants" occurs 1x in *TJon Isa* 44:26, and there is one instance of "Your righteous servants" in Isaiah 63:17. Clearly, "righteous servants" is a phrase that proliferates in *TJon Isa* 65 more than anywhere else in the Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah chapters in this Targum.

The dating of the Targums is disputed, ranging between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages. For the sake of argument, the main point to bear in mind in the present context is that even if we accept the later datings for final redactions, this surely would not exclude the presence in the Targums of considerably earlier materials dating back not only to pre-Islamic times, but even to Antiquity. Studies such as the present one indeed point in this direction. For a discussion of the datings of the Targums, see Flesher, Chilton (2011, especially pp. 169-198). The question of the dating of the latest of the Targums, the so-called Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, has been recently renewed, giving rise to arguments for a twelfth-century origin in Italy (McDowell, 2021).

Table1: Psalm 37:29	Isaiah 65:9 MT	Q 21
<p>The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.</p> <p>וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ לְעַד עָלְיָהּ (BHS)</p> <p>Peshitta:</p> <p>מִיִּשְׁכְּנוּ לְעַד עָלְיָהּ כִּי יִשְׁכְּנוּ לְעַד עָלְיָהּ (Brill Peshitta)</p>	<p>And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor (יִרְשׁ) of My mountains; and Mine elect shall inherit it (וְיִרְשׁוּהָ), and My servants shall dwell there (וְעַבְדֵי יִשְׁכְּנוּ).</p> <p>Targum Jonathan:</p> <p>“and mine elect shall inherit it (וְיִרְשׁוּהָ), and my righteous servants (וְעַבְדֵי צְדִיקָא) shall dwell there.”</p> <p>Peshitta:</p> <p>מִיִּשְׁכְּנוּ לְעַד עָלְיָהּ כִּי יִשְׁכְּנוּ לְעַד עָלְיָהּ</p>	<p>105 And surely we have written (كَتَبْنَا) in the Psalms, after the Message [i.e., the Torah], that:</p> <p>‘My righteous servants shall inherit the land/earth.’</p> <p>الأَرْضُ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ</p> <p>(My translation from the Arabic Ḥafṣ text at tanzil.net).</p>

Regarding Q 21:105, I understand it is currently fashionable to render كَتَبْنَا with “prescribed,” but there is Rabbinic precedent for the custom of God citing God’s own scripture. See, e.g., *Genesis Rabbah* 55 בתורה הוא אָנִי כְּתַבְתִּי בַתּוֹרָה, “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: ‘I wrote in the Torah’” (Lev 19:18 is then cited). See *bBerakhot* 20b, God speaking with the angels, בַּתּוֹרָה לָהֶם כְּתַבְתִּי לָהֶם בַּתּוֹרָה, “as I wrote to/for them in the Torah.” I am unable to find any English translations of these passages that do not render the verb כתב with “write.”

A Late Antique Greek version of Q 77:5 understands the Arabic text’s ذكرا, which it renders with μνήμην, not as “reminder” or “memory,” but in the sense of “message” or “record,” a meaning both ذکر and μνήμη often bears. “Message”/“record” can bear the legal sense of an “affidavit.” This is likely how Q 21:105 understands the Torah as الذِّكْر, that is, a divinely promulgated attestation (see Høgel, 2010).

Besides Q 21:105, there are only two other instances of the phrase “righteous servants” in the Qur’ān, and they both refer to Biblical characters. In Q 29:19 Solomon, the son of David, prays to be among *عِبَادِكَ الصَّالِحِينَ*, “your righteous servants.” Q 66:10 refers to Noah and Lot as *عِبَادِنَا صَالِحِينَ*, “our righteous servants.” To be complete, two other passages bear mentioning, although they do not contain our phrase. Q 42:23 makes the general statement *عِبَادَهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ*, “his servants, who believe/are faithful and do righteous deeds.” Lastly, Q 24:32 refers to the marrying off of servants or slaves of humans, *وَالصَّالِحِينَ مِنْ عِبَادِكُمْ وَإِمَائِكُمْ*, “and the righteous among your male servants/slaves and your female servants/slaves.”

The three Qur’ānic verses with the phrase “righteous servants” (of God) are thus all related to passages in the Hebrew Bible. Significantly, two of these three verses pertain respectively to David and to his son Solomon. We are thus justified if we suspect the phrase “righteous servants” reflects Biblical parlance. Isaiah 53:11 has the singular *עַבְדִּי צַדִּיק*, which could be parsed as “my righteous servant,” that is, the nation of Israel. The Targums frequently use the plural phrase *עַבְדֵי צַדִּיקָא*, “my righteous servants,” e.g., in Psalms 135:14; Deut 32:36,43; Isaiah 44:26; 63:17; 65:8,13-15; 66:14. “His righteous servants” is also attested, e.g., *TJon 1 Sam 2:8*.

Another notable connection between Q 21:105 and Isaiah 65 is the parallel between “And surely we have written (كَتَبْنَا)” and Isaiah 65:6’s introductory “Behold, it is written before Me,” *הִנֵּה כְתוּבָה לְפָנַי (TJon הָא כְתִיבָא קְדָמַי)*.

2-3. Q 21:104 and Isaiah 34 and 65

That Q 21:105 echoes elements of both Psalm 37:29 and Isaiah 65:9 together is further confirmed by the Q 21 context. I refer to the immediately preceding verse, Q 21:104, which mentions the topos of the first and new creation. This thematically matches the nearby Isaiah 65:17, which famously announces the creation of a new heavens and a new earth (Table 2). This naturally indicates that Q 21:105’s inheritance

of the earth is eschatological (cf. Q 23:10-11: “Those – they are the inheritors / who will inherit Paradise”), not historical:

Table 2:

Isaiah 65

Q 21

<p>17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.</p> <p>[Isaiah 66:9 Targum I have created the world from the beginning, מְבָרַח עֲלֵמָא מִבְּרָאשִׁית]</p> <p>6 Behold, it is written before Me הִנֵּה הָאָז כְּתוּבָא קְדָמִי לְפָנֵי יְיָ; OG ἰδοὺ γέγραπται ἐνώπιόν μου)</p> <p>9 And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor (יִירָשׁ) of My mountains; and Mine elect shall inherit it (וִירְשׁוּהָ), and My servants shall dwell there (וְעָבְדוּי אֶשְׁכְּנוּ).</p>	<p>104: The Day we will fold (نَطْوِي) the sky like the folding (كَطَى) of a scroll for writings (السَّجِلُّ لِلْكِتَابِ). Just as we began the first creation, we will repeat it, a promise (binding) upon us. We will do it! (Droge 2013, modified)</p> <p>105 And surely we have written (كَتَبْنَا) in the Psalms, after the Message [i.e., the Torah], that: ‘My righteous servants shall inherit the land/earth.’ الأَرْضُ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ</p>
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Q 21:104’s remaining wording which is not paralleled in Isaiah 65:17 is in fact attested elsewhere in Isaiah (Table 3):

Table 3:

Isaiah 34

Q 21

<p>Isaiah 34:4a And the skies shall be rolled together as a scroll וְנִגְלְדוּ כְּסֵפֶר הַשָּׁמַיִם</p> <p>OG Heaven shall roll up like a scroll και ἐλιγίσηται ὁ οὐρανὸς ὡς βιβλίον (Rahlfs-Hanhart)</p> <p>Peshitta ܩܠܡܬܗܘܢ ܫܘܝܒܘܢ ܟܝܘܢ ܗܘܢ ܫܘܒܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ جلاهم (cal.huc.edu)</p>	<p>104 The Day we will fold (نَطْوِي) the sky like the folding (كَطَى) of a scroll for writings (السَّجِلُّ لِلْكِتَابِ). Just as we began the first creation, we will repeat it, a promise (binding) upon us. We will do it.</p>
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Echoed in Revelation 6: 14: the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up και ὁ οὐρανὸς ἀπεχωρίσθη ὡς βιβλίον ἐλισσόμενον Peshitta حَامُوتٌ رُفُحَتْ حَامُوتٌ	
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Q 21:104's السَّجِّلِ لِلْكِتَابِ echoes the Peshitta, combining Isaiah 34:4's singular emphatic حَمْلًا, "scroll," and Revelation 6:14's plural emphatic حَامُوتٌ, "scrolls/books." Once again, the Qur'ān knows both a Tanakh verse and its echo in the New Testament. Q 21:104 contains the Qur'ān's only mention of the word السَّجِّلِ, "scroll." I doubt that in السَّجِّلِ what is usually understood to be the preposition ل with the sense "for" actually bears this meaning. Instead, this prefixed ل may be emphatic. The emphasis could highlight the plurality of books in what is nevertheless but a single divine scroll in some sense. The emphasis would be necessary because generally one scroll contains only one book or composition. Cf. the phrase "the roll/scroll of a book" in Psalm 40:8, מְגַלֵּת סֵפֶרָא; Targum מְגַלְתָּ סֵפֶרָא.

2-4. Q 21:104, Psalm 102, and Hebrews 1

It is well known that Hebrews 1:12 assimilates Isaiah 34:4 into Psalm 102:26-27, which the Old Greek renders more or less literally (Table 4):

Table 4:

Hebrews 1	MT Psalm 102
11 they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment, 12 like a mantle thou wilt roll them up (ἐλίξεται), and they will be changed. (JPS 1917)	26 Of old Thou didst lay the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. 27 They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall pass away.

It is well known that Hebrews 1:12's application of Isaiah 34:4's verb *roll up* (like a scroll) to Psalm 102's garments creates an odd imagery, given that one doesn't *roll up* garments. Instead, one changes garments, and garments wear out, as in MT and OG Psalm 102.

Q 21:104's cosmic scroll that is folded reflects Psalm 102:27's garment that is *changed*, but via Hebrews 1:11-12's citation of Psalm 102:27, where Hebrews replaces the cosmic garment that is "changed" with Isaiah 34:4's cosmic scroll that is "rolled."

Isaiah 34:4 seems to have a curious echo in *I Enoch* 90:26-29, where in an allegorical vision the Jerusalem temple is rolled up. There is a debate or discussion on whether to render the Gə'əz text's two terms *täwämo* (90:28) and *tätäblälät* (90:29) as "folded up" or "rolled up." Dugan (2023, p. 110), against Charles, Knibb, and Nickelsburg, opts for "rolled up," in order to highlight the parallel form III verb *tätäwmät* in the Gə'əz text of Revelation 6:14. Dugan refers to the correlation between *I Enoch* 90:28 and Revelation 6:14 in Dillmann (1865, col. 1239), where we learn that the same verb in a different sense (*duplicari*) appears in the Gə'əz version of Ezekiel 40:12 and 41:21, both involving a description of the messianic temple. The form I structure of the same verb is used in the Gə'əz text's echo of Isaiah 34:4 in Hebrews 1:12. *I Enoch* 90's odd metaphorical use of the verb "roll up" for the temple would seem to have something to do with its use in the Gə'əz version of Ezekiel 40-41's description of the temple. As Dugan notes, *I Enoch* 90:28's verb *täwämo* may bear the reputed idiomatic sense of "vanished," as Bairu Tafla suggested to Siegbert Uhlig. Dillmann (1865, col. 1238) also lists Isaiah 34:4, but Dugan oddly leaves this reference unmentioned, focusing solely on Revelation 6:14. This oddity reflects Dugan's theory that the relevant portion of the *I Enoch* text dates from the time of the First Jewish War.

Q 21:104 may or may not involve the creation of an intentionally similar odd imagery. This would depend on the intended meaning of طوى in the passage. Most English translations likely choose the rendering "roll" in order to avoid producing in Q 21:104 the odd image of a scroll that is *folded up* rather than the more natural *rolled up*.

A few translators understand it as *fold*, including Bewley, Durkee, corpus.quran.com, Ghālī (Faculty of Languages and Translation 'Al-'Azhar University), Saheeh International, and Talal Itani. If the intended meaning in Q 21:104 is *fold*, then the passage could indicate recognition of Hebrews 1:11-12's unevenly mixed metaphor, namely,

a *garment* that is *rolled like a scroll*, which in Q 21:104 would become a *scroll* that is *folded like a garment*.

The Arabic lexica ascribe to طوى not only the meaning “fold,” but also “roll.” In Hebrew, the adjectival substantive גָּלִיל, *a folding, a turning*, is derived from גָּלַל, *to roll* (the verb used in Isaiah 34:4). Nevertheless, גָּלִיל does not mean “a rolling.” In Lane’s entry on طوى, “roll” is a secondary definition, and a piece of paper or a letter is said to be “folded,” not “rolled.” Lane (5, col. 1898) also uses “fold” as the default or primary translation of طوى in Q 21:104: “*on the day when we shall fold, or roll up, the heavens.*”

Arabic طوى has the Hebrew cognate טוה, *to spin*, that is, *to draw out and twist*, and Aramaic cognates mean *to turn, spinning, spider* (Zammit, 2002, pp. 274-275). To express rolling up a scroll in Arabic one could use أَلَفَّ, form IV of the root ل ف ف, as did Van Dyck in his Isaiah translation. In Peshitta Isaiah 34:4 we find ܐܠܦܦܘܢܐ. The echo in Peshitta Rev 6:14 uses the same verb, ܐܠܦܦܘܢܐ.

In light of the Arabic lexica and Semitic cognates, we cannot be entirely sure that the intended meaning of Q 21:104’s طوى was not “roll.” If the intended meaning was “roll,” then we would have a faithful echo of the equivalent verb/s in Isaiah 34:4, Hebrews 1:12, and Revelation 6:14. In favor of this scenario would be that Q 21:104 indeed echoes these Biblical passages. Alternatively, if Q 21:104’s intended meaning is “fold,” then it could reflect a creatively modified play off of Hebrews 1:11-12’s unevenly mixed metaphor, namely, a *garment* is *rolled like a scroll*. In either case, Q 21:104 would involve an echo of a Biblical trope.

It is of course possible that Q 21:104 intentionally uses طوى in both senses of *fold* and *roll*. This could be the case in order simultaneously to achieve both a modified and a literal echo of the Biblical trope under discussion, the inspiration being the odd metaphor in Hebrews 1:12 and its reworking of Psalm 102 and Isaiah 34.

The term طوى in Q 21:104's sense is used elsewhere only in Q 39:67, where in the apocalypse the heavens and the earth will be folded in God's right hand: "They do not measure God according to correct measurement, when, day of resurrection, the earth will be entirely held in his hand, and the heavens will be folded in his right hand. . . ." The cognate noun طوى famously occurs in Q 20:12 and Q 79:16.

The Ethiopic *Book of the Rolls* parallels Q 21:104 and Q 39:67 in a single passage: "I noticed that He stretched His hand and lengthened His arm to the height of heaven, and He folded the heaven and the earth as parchment is folded, and as one folds the roll of a book. He collected them and placed them in the palm of His hand." (Mingana, 1931, p. 124). If this is derived from the Qur'ān, the Christian author would have had an extraordinary knowledge of Islam's sacred text, for in the days before concordances, he managed to place together allusions to the only two Qur'ānic verses with forms of طوى with the meaning "fold." Of course, the author may have had access to a list of key Qur'ānic verses linked by shared themes and language.

Because the state of critical textual scholarship on the *Book of the Rolls* is barely even in its infancy, it is presently impossible to determine whether or not this passage is a later interpolation. Similarly, even if it were original we cannot currently make a judgment as to whether or not it echoes the Qur'ān or vice versa. Presumably it echoes the Qur'ān, but we cannot yet absolutely exclude the opposite scenario, unlikely as that might be.

2-5. Q 21:104, Q 22:47 and 2 Peter 3

To be complete, we return to Q 21:104's detail that the new creation is "a promise" of God. This is striking in view of 2 Peter 3:13's remark that the new creation is "his promise." Even more striking is that in the very next *sūra* (which tradition holds to be chronologically later than Q 21), in Q 22:47 we have a lexical link between these two Qur'ānic verses (وَعْدَةٌ وَعْدًا) and 2 Peter 3:13 (ἐπάγγελμα αὐτοῦ). See Cuypers, 2015 on the rhetorically based intentional literary structure and sequence of the Qur'ānic chapters. It could be the case that even though Q 21 and Q 22 were widely separated chronologically, but that when

placed consecutively they were edited in a way to produce or highlight similarities shared between them.

Not only that, but Q 22:47 echoes several elements of 2 Peter 3:8-13. These include an echo of Psalm 90:4, “For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday” (OG “because a thousand years in your sight are like the day of yesterday” NETS). However, it is manifest that Q 22:47 echoes not Psalm 90:4 directly but indirectly via 2 Peter 3:8’s paraphrasing version, “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Note Q 22:47’s “with your Lord” and 2 Peter 3:8’s “with the Lord,” a feature lacking in MT Psalm 90:4 and its OG version. Q 22:47’s “hasten” and “as you count” also echo wording in 2 Peter 3:9-12 (Table 5):

Table 5:

Q 21 Q 22	2 Peter 3
<p>Q 21:104: The Day we will fold (نَطْوِي) the sky like the folding (كَطَى) of a scroll for writings (السَّجِلِّ لِلْكِتَابِ). Just as we began the first creation, we will repeat it, a promise (وَعْدًا) (binding) upon us. We will do it.</p> <p>Q 22:47: And they ask you to hasten the punishment. وَيَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِالْعَذَابِ And God will not break his promise. وَلَنْ يُخْلِفَ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ And indeed a day with your Lord is as a thousand years وَإِنَّ يَوْمًا عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ كَأَلْفِ سَنَةٍ as you count. مِمَّا تَعْدُونَ</p>	<p>2 Peter 3:13: “But according to his promise (κατὰ τὸ ἐπάγγελμα αὐτοῦ) we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”</p> <p>2 Peter 3: 8 with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness. . . . 10 But the day of the Lord will come. . . 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God. . . . 13 But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.</p>

We must not overlook Q 21:104’s “promise” (which is anticipated in v. 103’s concluding statement, “This is your Day which you were promised”), which we can now recognize as an echo of “his promise”

in 2 Peter 3:9,13. What this indicates is that Q 21 here is aware that the Isaiah 65 passage is echoed in 2 Peter 3, and Q 21 knows the details of these echoes in 2 Peter 3.

It is well known that the Qur'ān is also aware that the origin of the trope of inheriting the earth/land is from the Torah's topos of the Promised Land (e.g., Q 7:128 and 137). This Torah trope is in fact the original inspiration for Psalm 37:29's inheriting and dwelling in the land. This brings full circle the Qur'ān's knowledge of earlier scriptural exegesis and associations. This knowledge is both wide-ranging and intimately detailed. This is demonstrated or illustrated by the Qur'ān's knowledge of the reuse of Tanakh texts in the New Testament.

2-6. Q 5:45

At the beginning of this essay I referred to the truism that Q 21:105 is the only direct Biblical citation in the Qur'ān. This claim is in fact not entirely correct. Q 5:45 supplies a citation explicitly attributed to “the Torah” (v. 44): “We prescribed for them in it: ‘The life for the life, and the eye for the eye, and the nose for the nose, and the ear for the ear, and the tooth for the tooth, and (for) the wounds retaliation.’” (Droge) The three Biblical versions of the *lex talionis* are in Exodus 21:23-27, Leviticus 24:19-22, and Deuteronomy 19:21. Q 5:45's “The life for the life, and the eye for the eye, . . . and the tooth for the tooth” echoes Exodus 21 (and/or Deut 19:21), while Q 5:45's “and wounds,” وَالْجُرُوحَ echoes Leviticus 24:20's מִוּמָה. The Exodus 21 version reads “wound for wound,” whereas Lev 24:20 mentions the word “wound” once, without the two mentions in the idiom “wound for wound”: “Just as another person has received injury from him, so it will be given to him.” This agrees with Q 5:45's “and (for) the wounds retaliation.” Q 5:45's “and the nose for the nose, and the ear for the ear” has no parallels in the two Biblical passages, nor in their Targumic versions.

Q 5:45 ends with the following qualification: “But whoever remits it as a freewill offering, it will be an atonement for him. Whoever does not judge by what God has sent down, those – they are the evildoers.” (Droge) This qualification overlaps, though less radically so, with the spirit of Jesus' well-known teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:

38 You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

39 But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (RSV)

We must not overlook that Exodus 21's *lex talionis* is about protecting and compensating injured pregnant women. Q 5:45 may refuse to adopt Jesus' teaching on the *lex talionis* completely because to overturn it outright would thus deprive injured pregnant women of any chance at legal protection and compensation.

What we learn from Q 5:45 is that, once again, the Qur'ān knows both a Torah verse directly (in fact in both its Exodus and Leviticus versions, combining and omitting elements of both) and its New Testament echo.

2-7. Summary

We can summarize the results of this essay as follows:

- Q 21:105's Psalm citation combines elements of Psalm 37:29 with Isaiah 65:9 (including the latter's *TJon* Isaiah version). This is a well-known ancient literary praxis. Indeed, one of its famous examples is precisely Hebrews 1:12's combining of wording from Psalm 102:27 and Isaiah 34:4.

- The Qur'ān is aware of its combination of cited Biblical texts. This is indicated by Q 21:105's allusion to a nearby verse in the same Isaiah chapter, the famous Isaiah 65:17.

- Q 21:104 combines elements of Isaiah 65:17 with Isaiah 34:4. These two texts are then linked to Hebrews 1:11-12, via the latter's echo of Isaiah 34:4. Hebrews 1:12 imports Isaiah 34:4 into a Psalm 102:26-27 citation, producing an odd mixture of metaphors, *rolling* instead of *folding* a cosmic *garment*. Q 21:104 intentionally avoids correcting the odd metaphor to "*folding* (instead of the expected *rolling*) a cosmic *garment*" and instead employs mimesis to produce an equivalent overlapping odd metaphor, i.e., *folding* (instead of the expected *rolling*) a cosmic *scroll*.

- Q 21:104 directly knows both Hebrews 1:11-12 and its Isaiah 34:4 subtext, despite the fact that Hebrews 1:11-12 obscures the fact of an Isaiah echo by embedding it in a Psalm 102 citation.

• Q 21:104 demonstrates knowledge of several texts: Isaiah 34:4; Isaiah 65:17; Psalm 102:26-27; Hebrews 1:11-12; and Peshitta Revelation 6:14.

3. Conclusion

The wide scope and the attention to fine details in the above list cannot be best explained plausibly by passing or occasional exposure via conversations with traveling Christian missionaries in marketplaces or in inns. They would seem instead to require frequent scriptural exposure over prolonged periods of time. The form of exposure could not be only occasional simple homilies and/or liturgical readings. A plausible objection would involve the question of whether we could explain the evidence by exposure to homilies over prolonged time spans. This might be possible, but it may not be the most probable model given that the knowledge involved is both wide-ranging and detailed, encompassing passages and key words from several Biblical books in Hebrew, Targumic and Peshitta versions (the latter including some NT books).

As stated at this essay's beginning, it is not my place to offer an explanation for how the Qur'ān arrived at its impressive scriptural knowledge. My only task was to document the complexity of said knowledge. Again, the question of whether a *prolonged* exposure to homilies could explain the evidence seems possible but not the most probable model. Perhaps future individual case studies will supply further light on this question.

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