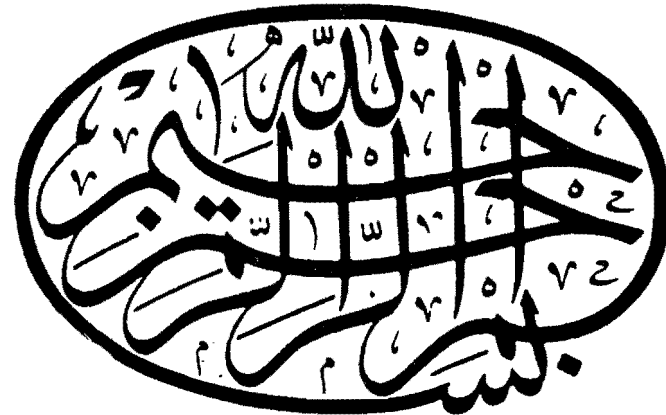


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# International Congress for the Study of The Qur'an

Australian National University, Canberra

8-13 May 1980

*Canberra 1982*

*Australian National University*

Series 1

Find the kind of comfort in their labours that this offers to all of "those who study and teach the Qur'an"?

- 1 Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, *Kitāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, book 66, Section 21. Numerous other occurrences are cited in A.J. Wensinck, et al., *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (7 vols. Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1936-69), s.v. "Taḥallama".
- 2 'Abd Allāh al-Darīmī, *Sunan*, ed. 'Abd Allāh al-Yamanī al-Madanī, Cairo 1386/1966, *Muqaddima*, section 18, *ḥadīth* 8.

Born in Ayr (Scotland), in  
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HOLY SCRIPTURES, LECTIONARIES AND THE QUR'AN

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The Qur'an does not deny the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures prior to it and alluded to in its pages. It is the Western Christian and Jewish scholars throughout the ages who have denied the divine inspiration of many of them. Western Christians and Jews have restricted their Canon of Holy Scriptures. By the end of the first century A.D. the Canon of the Hebrew Scriptures was fixed by Jewish Rabbis at Yabneh in Palestine; but the Dead Sea Scrolls show that there were Jews who had a wider Hebrew Canon of Scripture as indeed to a lesser extent had the Greek-speaking Jews of Egypt.

After the foundation of Constantinople<sup>1</sup> c.332 A.D. Constantine requested Eusebius to provide 50 copies of the Scriptures for the churches of that new city. We do not know their contents. Was Eusebius' drawing up a list of what Christian Scriptures were canonical - the present day New Testament - and what were disputed and in addition what others were in his opinion to be utterly rejected, associated with the fulfilling of this request? Did the Emperor want something definitive? The word *Bible* is a late usage. It was originally the Books. Too many people tend to regard it as a unity. In the Western Church we have to wait till the sixteenth century till The Council of Trent for an official Catholic pronouncement on the Canon of Holy Scripture. Trent included the Old Testament Apocrypha in the *Bible* on a level with the rest of the Old Testament and New Testament. The Church of England Article XX recognised the Old Testament Apocrypha but assigned it lesser importance. The Protestants accepted only the books in the Palestinian Hebrew Canon for their Old Testament. It is of interest to note that in the Epistle of Jude in the New Testament the Book of *Enoch*, (i.e. Idris) the Antedeluvian is quoted with approval. This particular book of Enoch in a Slavonic translation re-emerged to scholarly knowledge at the end of the nineteenth century but had been accepted by several Eastern Churches during the first five hundred

years of Christianity. It and other apocalyptic pseudepigraphical Jewish writings in actuality belong to the first few centuries before and after the Christian Era. Among such are books of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc. But in addition to apocryphal books excluded from the Old Testament, there are many apocryphal books which were excluded from the New Testament. In 1924, M.R. James gathered this material in what he entitled *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford, 1924. The finds at Nag Hamadi in the last 30 years require an enlarged edition of the Apocryphal New Testament.

George Sale's statement<sup>2</sup> in his introduction to his English rendering of the Qur'an that the Qur'an drew more from the Apocryphal than the Biblical sources testifies to his narrow view of Holy Scripture. The Syriac-speaking churches of the Middle East which were represented in Arabia before and during the Prophet's lifetime took a very relaxed view of the Canon of Holy Scripture both then and later. In fact they never had a definitive Canon of Scripture like the Western Church. In the late 13th century Abd Yeshua drew up a list<sup>4</sup> of the books of the Old and New Testaments. His Old Testament contains not only the books of the Apocrypha of the Greek and Latin Churches but also part of the first century A.D. Jewish Historian Josephus' Jewish War Book IV and the pseudepigraph Joseph and Asenath (the daughter of Potiphar). This last was Egyptian Jewish work of the first few centuries B.C. For the Nestorian Syriac Christians Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were as divinely inspired as the Law of Moses. The apocryphal work IV Ezra part of the Syriac Old Testament showed that Ezra or Uzai<sup>5</sup> was not a mere scribe but a prophet. To him the Most High said, IV Ezra 14:45, 46, "The 24 books that thou hast written publish that the worthy and unworthy may read therein: but the seventy last thou shalt keep, to deliver to the wise among thy people". The 24 were the books to be read openly to the Jews in the Synagogue, the seventy last were apocalypses which were secret books and withheld. The Qur'an 6:92 makes this complaint against the Jews about what they withheld. It is important to remember that before printing, the ordinary individual did not possess a bible. It was at public worship that they heard it read. But even so they did not hear all of the Holy Scriptures, but only selections. Already by the 1st century A.D.<sup>6</sup> there was a long established tradition of reading the Torah in Jewish Synagogues which has continued to this day.

The Law/Torah was read Sabbath by Sabbath so that originally in 3 years, now in 1 year the reading of the whole Torah was completed. In the case of the Prophets, i.e. the historical books and the writings of the prophets<sup>7</sup> a selected section was read after the reading from the Torah. But the weekly selection<sup>8</sup> therefrom never covered the whole as the selections or lections became fixed. The third division of the Hebrew Bible apart from the Psalms of David received scant attention. However, at the Jewish Feast of Purim the whole book of Esther was read. Since the 6th century B.C. Aramaic was better understood by the Jewish masses. It was customary to supply an Aramaic Translation, The Targum, in Aramaic of the reading of the Law and Prophets in Hebrew. The second Targum to Esther with its story of Solomon and the visit of the Queen of Sheba, cf. Qur'an 27:22-44 to him would be known to the Jews of Arabia.

The Christian Churches followed the Jewish custom of reading publicly the Holy Scriptures<sup>9</sup>. But they chose to follow the lectionary<sup>10</sup> principle such as the Jews applied to the Prophetic division of the Old Testament. So the whole of the Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments were never read to the congregation. The Syriac Nestorian<sup>11</sup> Christians in their Sunday Eucharist service read, like the Jews a lesson from the Torah, then another from the Prophets (i.e. the historical books and the prophets' writings). These two readings were called the *Qaryane*. In a very old manuscript of the Syriac New Testament belonging to a village called Khoyyi on the coast of Lake Urmi, I saw the Gospels had in the margin sections marked off as *Qaryane*, and sub-divided into *Surata*. Manuscripts of the Syriac Holy Scriptures bound up into one volume are rare<sup>12</sup>. The Law (Syriac *Uraitha*) tended to be in one volume, the Prophets in another and the Psalms in still another, and the Gospels, Acts and Pauline epistles in still yet another. But very few Syriac Churches possessed this. What was usual was the *Kitaba d'Qaryane* consisting of fixed lections from the Law and the Prophets and the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>13</sup> Likewise the Evangelion which consisted of selected lections from the Four Gospels. For the hearer this was the Gospel. There was another volume called the *Shliha* containing fixed lections from selected Pauline Epistles. A further volume was the *David* or the *Psalter*; this was complete. It was the one biblical book read through completely, e.g. usually twice in the week at daily evening and

morning prayers. Last but not least was a volume called Turgama which would contain metrical homilies read after the *Qaryane* and the *Shliha*. Jacob<sup>14</sup> of Serug 451-521 A.D. on the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, cf. Qur'an 18:9-26, or his discourse on Alexander the Great and his building the gate, cf., Qur'an 18:83-98, to keep Gog and Magog out, expected his compositions to be read in Church presumably as a Turgama. These last would be received by their hearers<sup>15</sup> as every bit the word of God as the Law and the Gospel. On the feasts of Mary the story of her being born free of sin and her ascension to heaven would be read from *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary*,<sup>16</sup> a work put on the banned list by Pope Gelasius of Rome in 484 A.D. From the same source came stories of the wonderworking infant and child Jesus read at Christmas and the Epiphany. Canon of Scripture even in the West before the invention of printing and the eventual availability of Bibles in the Vernacular, was only an ecclesiastical concern. What was proclaimed in the Church from a book was Scripture or Gospel truth. It was even more so in the Syriac speaking Churches of the Middle East. Though technically only the first two lessons in the Sunday Service were *Qaryane*, the term could be applied to all, even to the Gospel, witness the Khoyyi MS marginal notes.

The Arabic word Qur'an and the Syriac Qaryan are akin. When the Qur'an says: *sūra* 39:28 (It is) A Qur'an in Arabic, or *sūra* 42:7 "Thus we sent by inspiration to thee an Arabic Qur'an"; is one not reminded of the fact that the Nestorian Qaryan was in Syriac? *sūra* 41:44 was "Had we sent this as a Qur'an in a language other than Arabic, they would have said: "Why are not its verses explained in detail? What! (a Book) not in Arabic and (a Messenger) an Arab?" *sūra* 34:31 says: "The Unbelievers say: 'We shall neither believe in this Qur'an nor in any that (came) before it.'" One is left with the feeling that this Qur'an was given to the Arabs to replace the Syriac Qaryane. Montgomery Watt in Bell's *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, University Press, Edinburgh, 1970, writes (p. 137) "The purpose of an Arabic Qur'an was to give the Arabs a body of lessons comparable to those of the Christians and the Jews. It is known too, not only from Tradition and continuing practice, but also from the Qur'an itself that it was thus used

liturgically (17:78/80; 73:20). It is also implied that this Arabic Qur'an was not merely comparable but essentially identical with the previous revelations, for it confirmed these (10:37/8). Its teaching was to be found in them (26:196; 53:36/37; 87:18f.), and this agreement was a proof that Muhammad was a messenger (20:133)". I for one would not have quite expressed the argument in these words, though admitting to general agreement with the essential points. The Revelation of Islam coming as it did from the one God who had inspired previous prophets demanded for its acceptance if it were to be accepted that its Prophet be led to take into account not only the previous revelations but their liturgical developments.<sup>17</sup>

Where I part company with Bell and his editor is on the distinction between Qur'ān and *Kitāb*, e.g. p. 143 "The Qur'an being limited to certain passages suitable for liturgical recitation", and later the Book containing revelations to "a community fighting for its life against external enemies" and answering "the constant demand for administrative decisions about its internal affairs and the structure of its social life" (*ibid.*). The *Taurat* of the Jews contains much legal matter affecting religion and conduct private and social and even international relations but this has never prevented such passages from being used liturgically. The whole *Law/Taurat* is read liturgically by the Jews.

One notices in the Qur'an so far from Qur'an being set over against *Kitāb* that the identification of Qur'an and *Kitāb* is clearly affirmed e.g. *sūra* 41:3 "A book whereof the verses are explained in detail: a Qur'an in Arabic for people who understand". Also *sura* 27:1. "These are verses of the Qur'an - a book that makes (things) clear: *ayāt al-Qur'ān wa Kitābin mubīn*; so also *sura* 15:1. *Yūsuf*, *sūra* 12:1,2. "These are Symbols of the Perspicuous Book. We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an." Bell p.143 would have regarded these verses (cf. also v.3) as belonging to the stage when Bell's limited Qur'an was being sutured into the Book. If however we recollect that Syriac Qaryane were read from *Kitāb d'Qaryane*, the Qaryane were for the Syriac Christians the Book. Anyone who heard the Qaryane saw them read from the Book, the Qaryane and

Book were one. We put the cart before the horse when we think of the Book as the Bible. The term Bible was first used by Wycliffe in England and Luther in Germany and that was about seven or eight hundred years after the revelation of the Qur'an. When the Qur'an has the Jewish Scripture in mind it mentions the *Taurat*. But the Jews had only part<sup>18</sup> of the Revelation. The Syriac Christians had the Gospel and the *Kitaba d'Qaryane* which includes both Law and Prophets. In some Nestorian lectionaries the Gospel is included along with the Qaryane. The *Kitab* referred to in the Qur'an as revealed to Christians and Jews is more likely to be a lectionary than the Bible per se. The same applied to the *ahl al-kitāb*.

The Qur'an is the proclamation of the Muslim *Kitab d'Qaryane* as it were. For the Qur'an the Book already exists; it is revealed to and proclaimed by the Messenger, (Qur'an 17:106). "(It is) a Qur'an which we have divided (into parts from time to time) in order that thou mightest relate it to men at intervals. We have revealed it by stages" (Qur'an 25:32). "Those who reject Faith say, 'Why is the Qur'an not revealed to him all at once?' Thus (it is revealed) that we may strengthen thy heart thereby and we have rehearsed it to thee in slow, well arranged stages, gradually." During the Prophet's lifetime there was the Qur'an being revealed but the heavenly book which it proclaimed was not seen in its totality. But with the Prophet's death and the end of the Revelation the Book was seen to be the Qur'an.

If the Qur'an be the Arabic equivalent of the Syriac Qaryane it would have allowed for diversity of subject, restatement of key Biblical events of sacred history, Law, Wisdom, Ethics, Theology, etc. all of which matters occur in both Syriac *Kitaba d'Qaryane* and the Qur'an. It allowed also for the inclusion of matters relating to Festivals, the *ḥajj*, *Ramaḍān*, and *ṣalāt* and the *gibla* to make it a truly Arabic Qur'an. The Biblical history in the Qur'an is liturgical history as in the *kitaba d'Qaryane* or any liturgical lections, history which sees the past as eternally present. Coming as it did after long developed religious traditions, the Revelation of Islam using the Qaryane method was able to

make a masterful selection of events and teaching with which to illustrate its own central theology thus building on the old and also free to initiate by making use of the medium used by the Syriac Christians to popularise the Divine Revelation with maximum effect. The Qur'an is the Book just as the Syriac *Qaryane* were the *Kitaba d'Qaryane*. But the Qur'an is first and foremost the proclamation.

- 1 The article on Canonical Books in Smith and Cheetham's *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, John Murray, London, 1880.
- 2 See *The Koran*, Frederick Warne and Co., London and New York, 1891.
- 3 See George Percy Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, vol. II, pp. 361-363, Joseph Masters, London, 1852.
- 4 Badger *ibid.* states: "I have not been able to find a Church canon, or any other authoritative decree determining what books are canonical and which are not. Mar Abd Yeshua speaks of all as having been written under the direction of the Holy Spirit, but by this, he evidently does not mean inspiration in its more restricted sense, since he uses the same expression when speaking of the writings of the primitive Fathers".
- 5 Uzair in the Qur'an 9:30. He is one of the twenty eight prophets said to occur in the Qur'an.
- 6 Acts 15:21.
- 7 cf. Luke 2:16-20, also Acts 13:27.
- 8 Called Haftarah. For the selections for each Sabbath in the year see art. "Haftarah" vol. VI *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Funk and Wagnall, New York and London, 1916.
- 9 Justin Martyr 140 A.D. in his Apology i, 67 makes it clear that the readings from the Holy Scriptures were connected with the Eucharist.
- 10 On the extreme antiquity of the use of this in the Christian Church see art. "Lectionary" in Smith and Cheetham's *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, John Murray, London, 1880.
- 11 It was the special mark of the Nestorians to have retained liturgical readings from the Law and the Prophets which were dropped by Melchites and Jacobites; see Smith and Cheetham *ibid.* art. "Prophecy", "Liturgical".
- 12 See Badger *ibid.* p. 87 on this, and the constituent parts of Holy Scriptures in four volumes, with their respective titles.
- 13 On this and the other Church service books see Badger, *ibid.* p. 19.
- 14 Jacob of Serug (bishop of Batnan in the district of Serug in the province of Mesopotamia from 519 A.D. till his death in 521 A.D.) wrote a homily *de Pueris Ephesinis* in Syriac; see Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* ch. XXXIII who relies on *Assemanni Bibliot.* Oriental tom. 1, pp. 335-339. Jacob also wrote: *A Discourse upon Alexander, the Believing King*, and upon the Gate which he made against Gog and Magog; for this latter see E.A. Wallis Budge: *The History of Alexander the Great*. C.U.P. 1889, claims Alexander was a prophet upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rested as upon Jeremiah, and who wrote and showed everything that was to come like Daniel. Pages 182-4 deal specifically with the building of the gate of brass and iron against Gog and Magog. Significantly enough the topics of both these homilies of Jacob of Serug feature in *sura* 18 of the Qur'an. If it be objected that productions by a Jacobite would not be used in

- Nestorian services, it is essential to remember that Jacobite Syriac Churches were in Arabia as well as those of the Nestorians. See my article: "The Debt of Islam to Monophysite Syrian Christianity" in *Essays in Honour of G.W. Thatcher*, edited by E.C.B. Maclaurin, University Press Sydney, 1967, pp. 191-216.
- 15 "Hearers" in the technical sense meant those who were not baptised. Theoretically anyone could be present whether Christian or not at the first part of the Eucharistic service when the Scriptures were read.
- 16 See *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary* translated by F.A. Wallis Budge, London, 1899. *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary* incorporates in it much of the *Protevangelium of James* mentioned by Origen, Commentary on St. Matthew X, S. 17. Besides it is based on the *Nativity of Mary*, and *Infancy of the Saviour*, and the *Assumption of Mary*. From the account of the birth of Mary, her parents, her guardian and interview with angels: see Qur'an 3:33037, 42-44. For the annunciation to Mary of the birth of Jesus see Qur'an 3:45-48; 19:16-21. For his birth: Qur'an 19:22-28. For the speeches of the new-born babe: Qur'an 19:29-32.
- 17 In *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* edited by Professor Montgomery Watt the statement is made p. 136 "the noun *qur'an* almost certainly came into Arabic to represent the Syriac *qeryana*, meaning the scriptural reading or lesson in church". I applaud this deduction, but I feel that if the nature, character and function of the Syriac *Qaryana* had been researched by the author and editor of that book some of their inferences on the Qur'an and its relationship to the *Kitāb* would have been different.
- 18 Qur'an 4:44. Hast thou not seen those to whom We have given a portion of the Scriptures. cf. also Qur'an 3:23 in this article A. Yusuf Ali's translation is followed, from his *The Holy Quran, Text, Translation and Commentary*, Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1938.