THE QURʾÂNIC DOUBLETS: 
A PRELIMINARY INQUIRY*

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“No one should underestimate the importance of the doublets.”
H. T. Fleddermann

Abstract
The present study involves a presentation and analysis of repeated phrases, or doublets, in the Qurʾān. I identify twenty-nine doublets of at least nine words (allowing for minor variation), the great majority of which are complete verses, found in different sūrah. To provide a methodological framework for the analysis of these doublets I consider the history of scholarship on doublets in the Synoptic Gospels, distinguishing between harmonizing interpretations and the classifications of redactional and source doublets. With four exceptions (Meccan-Medinan doublets), the units making up Qurʾānic doublets are both found within sūrah traditionally identified as Meccan (Meccan-Meccan doublets) or both found within sūrah traditionally identified as Medinan (Medinan-Medinan doublets). This distribution suggests the existence of pre-canonical texts, most likely one with Meccan material and one with Medinan material, which produced the doublets within each Qurʾānic subcorpus. That Meccan-Medinan doublets are so rare suggests that repeated material in the Qurʾān is not always due to a process of repeating or re-composition (where an earlier Qurʾānic phrase is redeployed, and possibly reshaped, for a later passage) but instead due to the redaction of discrete, pre-canonical texts.

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Introduction

That the Qurʾān is the product of Muḥammad’s oral proclamations in Mecca and Medina between the years 610–632 CE has long been the standard position among Western scholars of the Qurʾān. Theodor Nöldeke argued that the Qurʾān as codified by the caliph ʿUthmān contains nothing but Muḥammad’s words, although he allowed that Muḥammad might have forgotten or modified certain proclamations. Hartwig Hirschfeld (asking: “Now if omission was possible, why not addition?”) countenanced the possibility of interpolations in the years after Muḥammad’s death but before the codification of the Qurʾān, arguing that sayings of Muḥammad that he did not intend to be part of the scripture might have been included anyway in the final text. Nine years later Paul Casanova offered some examples of passages that he considered to be interpolations, many of which (he surmised) were meant to justify political maneuvers and institutions in the early caliphate. Nevertheless, it was the view of Nöldeke, and not that of

2. “Der Korân Uthmân’s enthält nur echte Stücke, freilich zum Theil in wunderlicher Ordnung.” Theodor Nöldeke, Orientalische Skizzen (Berlin: Verlag von Gebrüder Paetel, 1892), 56. Richard Bell, in the preface to his 1937 translation of the Qurʾān, proposes that the text of the Qurʾān was already in some sort of written form (“actually written by Muhammad himself, as I personally believe”) by the time the collectors or editors of the text began their work. Richard Bell, The Qurʾān: Translated with a Critical Re-Arrangement of the Surahs (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), 1.vi.

3. “Not only according to Muslim tradition, but even the evidence of the Koran shows that he himself had already forgotten some passages and had deliberately changed others.” GdQ 1.37.

4. Hartwig Hirschfeld, New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), 137. He continues: “There was no hard and fast rule to distinguish between divine revelations and occasional utterances of Muhammed, especially as many of the latter are quite Qoranic in tone and style.” A bit earlier Hirschfeld writes: “Considering the way in which the compilation was made, it would have been a miracle had the Qorân been kept free of omissions, as well as interpolations.”

5. Casanova identifies Q 4:59, which refers to obedience to “those in authority over you” (ulī ’l-amri minkum), Q 42:38, which refers to “their affair being counsel between them” (amruhum shūrā baynahum), and Q 9:29, which refers to the jīzyah. Casanova argues that all three of these were cases of “political interpolations” meant to justify obedience to authorities, ʿUmar’s appointment of a shūrā, and the imposition of the jīzyah respectively. See Paul Casanova, Mohammed et la fin du monde (Paris: Geuthner, 1911), 150–152. For a more recent proposal of an interpolation (regarding Q 25:30–34) in the Qurʾān, see Alfred-Louis de Prémare, Aux origines du Koran: Questions d’hier, approches d’aujourd’hui (Paris: Téraèdre, 2004), 128–133.
Hirschfeld or Casanova, which was widely accepted among later academic scholars of the Qurʾān.⁶

More recently Nicolai Sinai, in a dissertation published as *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation*, in a series of articles, and in his more recent book *The Qurʾān: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, has meticulously studied internal relationships within the Qurʾānic corpus, considering carefully earlier proposals for Medinan insertions in Meccan sūrah, and proposing some of his own.⁷ In a few limited cases Sinai allows for the possibility of post-Muḥammadan interpolations. He shows particular interest in the possibility that Q 3:7, or perhaps Q 3:7–9, might be a “post-prophetic insertion.”⁸

Many of those who advance the possibility of interpolations to the Qurʾānic text after the death of Muḥammad, including Hirschfeld, Casanova, and Sinai, do not disagree with the basic paradigm of Nöldeke (or, for that matter, the Islamic tradition) for the formation of the Qurʾānic corpus.⁹ They offer only select exceptions to the rule that the Qurʾān is Muḥammad’s words. A more fundamental challenge to this paradigm is presented by John Wansbrough’s 1977 *Qur’ānic Studies*. According to Wansbrough the Qurʾānic corpus was formed from certain *logia* that originally circulated independently.¹⁰

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9. After criticizing several assumptions of Nöldeke (notably the idea that Qurʾānic proclamations tended to become less poetic over time), Sinai writes in his *Historical-Critical Introduction*: “It should have become clear that in putting forward their chronological scheme both Weil and Nöldeke rely on a number of premises that can hardly be taken for granted anymore. Nonetheless, as this section will argue, the Archimedean point of their approach remains eminently defensible.” *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 113.

10. “Once separated from an extensive corpus of prophetical *logia*, the Islamic revelation became scripture and in time, starting from the fact itself of literary stabilization, was seen to contain a logical structure of its own.” John Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2004), 1. Wansbrough’s use of the term *logia* seems to reflect the well-known statement (preserved by Eusebius; d. ca. 320) of Papias (d. ca. 163 CE) in regard to the Gospel of Matthew: “Therefore Matthew put the *logia* in an ordered arrangement in the Hebrew
As Devin Stewart has shown in a recent article, Wansbrough’s formulation of this model depends substantially on the work of New Testament form critics, including Rudolf Bultmann, although Wansbrough does not refer to them or their works by name.11

As Stewart explains, form critics were interested in an early, pre-canonical stage in the history of Gospel formation. They sought to understand how individual pericopes—which only later were redacted to form the canonical Gospels—developed and circulated in the early Christian community. Form critics pay particular attention to the genre (Gattung) of material that circulated in pericopes, to the social context of those pericopes, and to the process by which they were augmented. However, the model for the development of the Gospel texts imagined by the form critics has come under extensive scrutiny since the flourishing of their work in the early twentieth century.12 So too


11. “Wansbrough’s approach fits most squarely in the tradition of German Protestant form criticism of the New Testament, which was developed in the first half of the twentieth century by Martin Dibelius (1883–1947) and Rudolf Karl Bultmann (1884–1976), both students of Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), the founding father of biblical form criticism. Like their teacher, these students were concerned with the identification of literary forms in the biblical text and understanding their original social setting (*Sitz im Leben*).” See Devin Stewart, “Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions in the Qurʾān,” in Angelika Neuwirth and Michael Sells (eds.), *Qur’ānic Studies Today* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 17–51, 20. As Stewart mentions (p. 21), Wansbrough does include Bultmann’s *Theology of the New Testament* in the bibliography of his later (1978) work, *Sectarian Milieu*. It is interesting to note that Nöldeke’s mentor (to whom he dedicates the first volume of *Geschichte des Qorans*) was the Old Testament scholar Heinrich Ewald (d. 1875). Unlike the form critics who influenced Wansbrough, Ewald, although a philologist, was also a theologian with a particular concern for salvation history as articulated in biblical narratives.

Wansbrough’s application of form criticism to the Qurʾānic text has not escaped criticism.\textsuperscript{13}

Devin Stewart, for example, criticizes John Wansbrough’s explanations in \textit{Qurʾānic Studies} for the parallel prophet narratives in the Qurʾān. In brief, Stewart holds that the variants in those narratives are not artifacts of multiple \textit{logia} that originally circulated independently. Instead they are the products of creative literary shaping according to particular \textit{sūrah}s. Through an analysis of several \textit{sūrah}s in which prophetic punishment stories are found (Q 7, 11, 26, 29, 54), Stewart argues regarding the accounts of the prophet Shuʿayb (which Wansbrough had taken as an example for his theory) that they reflect “the particular rhetoric of the suras in which they occur” and, furthermore, that they all likely originate in “a well-known legend or myth in pre-Islamic Arabia.”\textsuperscript{14} Stewart continues: “The legend was presumably oral and probably existed in a much longer and more detailed narrative form.”\textsuperscript{15} He adds that a consideration of the relationship of the biblical stories of Moses and Noah with the accounts of these two protagonists in the Qurʾān suggest that the Qurʾān generally condenses longer stories “to emphasize essential elements of the plot.”\textsuperscript{16} One should imagine, in other words, that a similar “condensing” process took place with originally longer oral legends of Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shuʿayb.

Here it is worth adding an observation regarding Stewart’s critique of Wansbrough and his thoughts regarding the Qurʾān’s “condensing” of narratives. It is true in regard to the Gospels that most form critics propose an augmentation or accretion of smaller pericopes as part of the process that led to the development of the canonical Gospels. However, Wansbrough (even while employing many of the German terms of form criticism) does not seem to have conceived of a similar process as concerns the Qurʾān. Instead he alludes to a process much closer to that proposed by Stewart himself: “Analysis of the Qurʾānic application of these [the “schemata of revelation”] shows that they have been adapted to the essentially paraenetic character of that document and that, for example, originally narrative material was reduced almost invariably to a series of discrete and parabolic utterances.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{13} A more recent exploration of the insights of form criticism to the study of the Qurʾān is Karim Samji, \textit{The Qurʾān: A Form-Critical History} (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018). Most of this book is occupied with a classification of Qurʾānic passages into five different forms: prayer, liturgy, wisdom, narrative, proclamation. See also de Prémare, \textit{Aux origines du Coran}, 37–45.


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Wansbrough, \textit{Qurʾānic Studies}, 1.
On the other hand, a real difference between Stewart and Wansbrough is the former’s insistence on the coherence of the *sūrah* as a literary unit, at least those *sūrah*ls that involve the punishment stories, many of which are categorized as middle Meccan, along with Stewart’s interest in the category of “sermon” to describe the nature of these *sūrah*ls.18

The present paper takes an approach to the study of the Qurʾān’s internal relationships that effectively departs from the traditional Nöldekian model. It also departs from Wansbrough’s form-critical approach. As mentioned above, in New Testament studies form criticism generally involves a concern with categories or genres (*Gattungen*) of the pieces or pericopes that were ultimately joined to form the Gospels. Wansbrough demonstrates an analogous concern in the first part of *Qur’anic Studies*, where he examines themes or schemata in the Qurʾān, identifying retribution, sign, exile, and covenant. A second concern in New Testament form criticism is with the social setting, or *Sitz im Leben*, of individual pericopes as they developed in different contexts. (New Testament form critics generally identified three strata contexts: that of Jesus, that of the nascent Church, and that of the evangelists.) Wansbrough, not surprisingly perhaps, shows an analogous concern with the *Sitz im Leben* of the pre-canonical qurʾānic pericopes and their role in what he calls *Gemeindebildung* (“community formation”).

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18. Stewart’s interest in the “sermon” form involves a critique of “oral performance theory,” that is, the idea that the variant narratives in the Qurʾān reflect the “ad hoc creation of literary forms using oral formulas and common structures that could be modified through improvisation according to particular audiences, settings, and issues” (Stewart, “Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions,” 45). Fred Donner famously compared the scenario imagined by this theory to a “stump speech”: “But, might such similar passages not just as cogently be viewed as transcripts of different oral recitations of the same story made in close succession, something like different recordings of a politician’s stump speech delivered numerous times over a few days or weeks?” Fred Donner, “The Qurʾān in Recent Scholarship: Challenges and Desiderata,” in Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.), *The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 29–50, 34. Since then Andrew Bannister has published a book dedicated to the argument (supported with statistical data on the “formulaic density” of qurʾānic *sūrah*ls) that the Qurʾān was generally composed in an oral “mode” (and that the Medinan *sūrah*ls are especially formulaic). See Andrew Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qurʾān* (Lanham: Lexington, 2014). Stewart’s comparison between the middle Meccan *sūrah*ls and the genre of sermon involves an argument that these *sūrah*ls have a tripartite structure: introduction and conclusion (often in the present tense) surrounding a body of prophetic exempla (often in the past tense). Distinguishing his model from the “stump speech,” he explains: “The process of producing the sermon may involve written, oral, or mental preparation rather than an impromptu performance” (p. 45).
In what follows I address neither of these concerns. The following is instead a modest exercise of source criticism, with some comments towards the end regarding redaction. I will present and discuss a significant feature of the Qur’ānic text, namely, the doublets therein. After considering scholarship on the meaning and importance of doublets in New Testament scholarship, I will propose that the distribution of doublets in the Qur’ān might point to two pre-canonical sources for the Qur’ānic corpus. If this proposal is correct, it might still be adapted to fit any of the approaches discussed above (which involves what Stewart rightly calls redaction criticism). It would, however, require adding a new stage in our understanding of the process by which the Qur’ān went from composition (whether written or oral) to canonical text.

The Qur’ānic Doublets

To establish my list of doublets I looked for two corresponding passages of at least nine words or lemmata, allowing for variation of a single word, a difference in case, or the reverse order of two words within the passages. I intentionally excluded strophic repetitions such as those that we find in Sūrat al-Qamar (Q 54) and Sūrat al-Rahmān (Q 55) (as they are clearly products of literary style). The result was a list of twenty-nine doublets (four of which are triplets). I classified each verse as Meccan or Medinan according to Nöldeke’s categorization of the sūrah in which it occurs (although, as the reader will see, this is a preliminary step).

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19. I gathered an initial and shorter list of doublets through my own reading. These were supplemented by a machine-based search allowing for strings of words to be compared using the online tool Qur’an Gateway (https://info.qurangateway.org/). Other doublets were pointed out to me by colleagues, notably Hythem Sidky and an anonymous reader.

20. In this table and what follows I refer to “Meccan” and “Medinan” passages of the Qur’ān. As will become clear, I use these terms as labels. I do not mean to imply that the verses so labelled can be safely identified as quotations of what was once really said in Mecca 610–622 or in Yathrib/Medina 622–632. For more on the question, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, “Le problème de la chronologie du Coran,” Arabica 58 (2011): 477–502. See also the arguments of Sinai in defense of the categories “Meccan” and “Medinan”: Nicolai Sinai, “The Unknown Known: Some Groundwork for Interpreting the Medinan Qur’an,” MUSJ 66 (2015–2016): 47–96; idem, Historical-Critical Introduction, ch. 5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doublet number</th>
<th>Verses (classification)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Q 2:35/7:19 (Medinan/Meccan)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Q 2:47–48/2:122–23 (Medinan)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Q 2:49/7:141/14:6b (Medinan/Meccan/Meccan)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Q 2:62/5:69 (both Medinan)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Q 2:134/2:141 (both Medinan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Q 2:162/3:88 (both Medinan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Q 2:173/16:115 (Medinan/Meccan)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Q 3:51/19:36/43:64 (Medinan/Meccan/Meccan)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Q 4:48/4:116 (both Medinan)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Q 5:10/5:86 (both Medinan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Q 6:10/21:41 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Q 7:22/20:121 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Q 7:45/11:19 (both Meccan)</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Q 7:65/11:50 (both Meccan)</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Q 7:85/11:84 (both Meccan)</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Q 8:13/59:4 (both Medinan)</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Q 9:32–33/61:8–9 (both Medinan)</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Q 9:73/66:9 (both Medinan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Q 11:96/40:23 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Q 11:110/41:45 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Q 16:14b/35:12b (both Meccan)</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Q 16:43/21:7 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Q 17:48/25:9 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Q 23:5–8/70:29–32 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Q 23:83/27:68 (both Meccan)</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Q 24:61a/48:16a (both Medinan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Q 27:80–81/30:52–53 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Q 41:8/84:25/95:6 (all Meccan)</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Q 57:1/59:1/61:1 (all Medinan; exact correspondence)</td>
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Fourteen of the twenty-nine doublets match exactly. The remaining fifteen doublets have only minor variations, usually involving a preposition or an added pronoun. The amount of variation that I allowed in identifying doublets is considerably less than what is typically allowed for in the standards for identifying doublets in the Gospels (where significant discrepancy is often found between members of a doublet, as will be shown below). Even then the number of doublets identified in the Qurʾān is significant. John Hawkins identifies twenty-two doublets in Matthew, ten in Luke, and only one in Mark. Geert Van Oyen uses more general standards and identifies thirty-six doublets in Matthew and twenty doublets in Luke (two doublets in Mark). It is true that the Qurʾān is longer than either Matthew or Luke (the Qurʾān has approximately 73,597 Arabic words, whereas Matthew has 18,346 Greek words and Luke 19,482 Greek words). However, with standards similar to those which Hawkins and Ven Oyen apply to the Gospels one could list considerably more doublets in the Qurʾān. In other words, doublets are a salient feature of the Qurʾān.

In establishing nine words as a minimum threshold, I mean to avoid the possibility of obtaining brief formulaic phrases among the results. Andrew Bannister has introduced Qurʾānic Studies to the question of formulas in the Qurʾān with his work *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qurʾān*. Bannister applies the ideas of Milman Parry (d. 1935) and Parry’s student Albert Lord (d. 1991), who studied orality in the Homeric corpus and in the live performances of Yugoslavian singers, to the Qurʾān. Through a statistical analysis of Qurʾānic

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21. One advantage for New Testament scholars undertaking this sort of source criticism is that sayings doublets are understood to reflect a process by which originally Aramaic sayings were translated into Greek. This means that the parameters to establish a doublet might be broader, since differences in wording might be ascribed to translation, and not necessarily to two originally separate traditions.


26. Bannister, *Oral-Formulaic Study*, 272: “Searching the Homeric corpus for ‘formulaic language,’ Parry was able to identify not merely repeated phraseology saturating the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but whole systems of formulas, built as generations
formulas, Bannister develops two principal arguments: first, that the Qurʾān generally was composed in an oral-formulaic (rather than written) mode and, secondly, that the “Medinan” Qurʾān shows even more oral-formulaic traits than the “Meccan” Qurʾān, meaning that it displays a higher “formulaic density.”

However, our doublets are too long to be formulas. Parry defines a formula as “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.” In New Testament scholarship formulas are “short sentences, or collocations of two or more words, which recur mainly or exclusively in one or other of the Synoptic Gospels, so that they appear to be favourite or habitual expressions of the writer of it.” Formulas generally are the starting point of an oral composition that continues differently in different performances, thereby forming distinct blocks of language. These blocks in oral-formulaic language notably do not exhibit the length or the word-for-word fixity that we find with our qurʾānic doublets. Indeed, the very point of the Parry-Lord theory is the creativity with which oral singers, or poets, join together formulas to produce different lines, to “facilitate improvisation,” through a pattern that Lord calls “adjustment.”

None of the doublets above appear to be cases of oral-formulaic language. Instead I will argue that they point to a process of written composition and of redaction leading up to the canonical qurʾānic text. What is more, the particular distribution of qurʾānic doublets might point to a particular scenario of written composition. Of the twenty-nine doublets I have studied thirteen are “Meccan/Meccan,” twelve are “Medinan/Medinan,” and only four are Meccan/Medinan (more on this distribution below).
For the sake of the analysis that will follow I will provide here the text for twelve of our doublets: five Meccan/Meccan doublets, four Medinan/Medinan doublets, and three Meccan/Medinan doublets. Any variations between members of a doublet are represented by underlining in the Arabic text.

**1 Meccan/Meccan (exact correspondence)**

Q al-Anʿām 6:10 (complete verse) = Q al-Anbiyāʾ 21:41 (complete verse)

وَلَقَدِ أَسْتُهْزِئَ بِرُسُلٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَحَاقَ بِٱلَّذِينَ سَخَرُوا۟ مِنْهُم مَّا كَانُوا۟ بِهِۦ يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ

Certainly messengers have been mocked before you, but those of them who ridiculed (were) overwhelmed (by) what they were mocking.  

**2 Meccan/Meccan**

Q al-Aʿrāf 7:45 (complete verse) = Q Hūd 11:19 (complete verse)

ٱلَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّـهِ وَيَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَهُم بِٱلَْخِرَةِ كَٰفِرُونَ

who keep (people) from the way of God and desire (to make) it crooked, and they are disbelievers in the Hereafter.

ٱلَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّـهِ وَيَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَهُم بِٱلَْخِرَةِ هُمْ كَٰفِرُونَ

who keep (people) from the way of God and desire (to make) it crooked, and they are disbelievers in the Hereafter.

**3 Meccan/Meccan (exact correspondence)**

Q Hūd 11:110 (complete verse) = Q Fuṣṣilat 41:45 (complete verse)

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى ٱلْكِتَٰبَ فَٱخْتُلِفَ فِيهِ وَلَوْلَ كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِن رَّبِّكَ لَقُضِىَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَفِى شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مُرِيبٍ

Certainly We gave Moses the Book, and then differences arose about it. Were it not for a preceding word from your Lord, it would indeed have been decided between them. Surely they are in grave doubt indeed about it.

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32. Note that this doublet begins a bit earlier—both Q 7:44 and Q 11:18 end with the same clausula: *laʾnatu ʾllāhi ʿalā ʾl-ẓālimīn*, “The curse of God is on the evildoers.”
4 Meccan/Meccan

Q al-Nahl 16:14b = Q Fāṭir 35:12b

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِي سَخَّرَ ٱلْبَحْرَ لِتَأْكُلُوا۟ مِنْهُ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُوا۟ مِنْهُ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى ٱلْفُلْكَ مَوَاخِرَ فِيهِ

He (it is) who subjected the sea, so that you may eat fresh fish from it, and bring out of it an ornament which you wear, and you see the ship cutting through it, and (it is) so that you may seek some of His favor, and that you may be thankful.

وَمَا يَسْتَوِى ٱلْبَحْرَانِ هَٰذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ سَآئِغٌ شَرَابُهُۥ وَهَٰذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ وَمِن كُلٍّ تَأْكُلُونَ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُونَ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى ٱلْفُلْکَ فِيهِ مَوَاخِرَ لِتَبْتَغُوا۟ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

The two seas are not alike: this one is sweet, fresh, good to drink, and this (other) one is salty (and) bitter. Yet from each you eat fresh fish, and bring out of it an ornament which you wear, and you see the ship cutting through it, so that you may seek some of His favor, and that you may be thankful.

5 Meccan/Meccan (exact correspondence)33


إِنَّكَ لَ تُسْمِعُ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ وَلَ تُسْمِعُ ٱلصُّمَّ ٱلدُّعَآءَ إِذَا وَلَّوْا۟ مُدْبِرِينَ * وَمَآ أَنتَ بِهَٰدِى ٱلْعُمْىِ عَن ضَلَٰلَتِهِمْ إِن

Surely you cannot make the dead to hear, nor can you make the deaf to hear the call, when they turn away, withdrawing. * Nor can you guide the blind out of their straying. You cannot make (anyone) hear, except the one who believes in Our signs, and so they submit.

6 Medinan/Medinan

Q al-Baqarah 2:62 (complete verse) = Q al-Mā′idah 5:69 (complete verse)

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَٱلَّذِينَ هَادُوا۟ وَٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰ وَٱلصَّٰبِـِٔينَ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّـهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلَْخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَ خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَ هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians—whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and does righteousness—they have their reward with their Lord. (There will be) no fear on them, nor will they sorrow.

33. There is a spelling variation in the orthography of the Cairo edition regarding the word hādī/hādi in Q 27:81/30:53 and the addition of the particle fa- at the opening of Q 30:52.
Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Sabians, and the Christians—whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and does righteousness—(there will be) no fear on them, nor will they sorrow.

7 Medinan/Medinan (exact correspondence)

Q al-Baqarah 2:134 (complete verse) = Q al-Baqarah 2:141 (complete verse)

خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

That community has passed away. To it what it has earned, and to you what you have earned. You will not be questioned about what they have done.

8 Medinan/Medinan

Q al-Nisāʾ 4:48 (complete verse) = Q al-Nisāʾ 4:116 (complete verse)

إِنَّ ٱللَّـهَ لَ يَغْفِرُ أَن يُشْرَكَ بِهِۦ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَمَن يُشْرِكْ بِٱللَّـهِ فَقَدْ ٱفْتَرَىٰٓ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا

Surely God does not forgive (anything) being associated with Him, but He forgives what is other than that for whomever He pleases. Whoever associates (anything) with God has forged a great sin.

إِنَّ ٱللَّـهَ لَ يَغْفِرُ أَن يُشْرَكَ بِهِۦ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَمَن يُشْرِكْ بِٱللَّـهِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَٰلًۢ بَعِيدًا

Surely God does not forgive (anything) being associated with Him, but He forgives what is other than that for whomever He pleases. Whoever associates (anything) with God has gone very far astray.

9 Medinan/Medinan

Q al-Tawbah 9:32–33 (two complete verses) = Q al-Ṣaff 61:8–9 (two complete verses)

يرَوِيدُونَ أَن يُطْفِـُٔوا۟ نُورَ ٱللَّـهِ بِأَفْوَٰهِهِمْ وَيَأْبَى ٱللَّـهُ إِلَّٓ أَن يُتِمَّ نُورُهُۥ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ * هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُۥ بِٱلْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ ٱلْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُۥ عَلَى ٱلدِّينِ كُلِّهِۦ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْمُشْرِكُونَ

They want to extinguish the light of God with their mouths, but God refuses (to do anything) except perfect His light, even though the disbelievers dislike (it). * He (it is) who has sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, so that He may cause it to prevail over religion—all of it—even though the idolaters dislike (it).

يرَوِيدُونَ أَن يُطْفِـُٔوا۟ نُورَ ٱللَّـهِ بِأَفْوَٰهِهِمْ وَيَأْبَى ٱللَّـهُ إِلَّٓ أَن يُتِمَّ نُورُهُۥ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ * هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُۥ بِٱلْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ ٱلْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُۥ عَلَى ٱلدِّينِ كُلِّهِۦ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْمُشْرِكُونَ

They want to extinguish the light of God with their mouths, but God will perfect His light, even though the disbelievers dislike (it). * He (it is) who has
sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, so that He may cause it to prevail over religion—all of it—even though the idolaters dislike (it).

10 Medinan/Meccan

Q al-Baqarah 2:173 (complete verse) = Q al-Naḥl 16:115 (complete verse)

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْمَيْتَةَ وَٱلدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ ٱلْخِنزِيرِ وَمَا أُهِلَّ بِهِ لِغَيْرِ ٱللَّـهِ فَمَنِ ٱضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَا

He has only forbidden to you: the dead (animal), and the blood, and swine's flesh, and what has been dedicated to (a god) other than God. But whoever is forced (by necessity), not desiring or (deliberately) transgressing—no sin (rests) on him. Surely God is forgiving, compassionate.

وَقُلْنَا يَٰٓـَٔادَمُ ٱسْكُنْ أَنتَ وَزَوْجُكَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ فَكُلَ مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَ تَقْرَبَا هَٰذِهِ ٱلشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ

And We said, “Adam! Inhabit the Garden, you and your wife, and eat freely of it wherever you please, but do not go near this tree, or you will both be among the evildoers.”

And We said, “Adam! Inhabit the Garden, you and your wife, and eat freely of it wherever you please, but do not go near this tree, or you will both be among the evildoers.”

11 Medinan/Meccan

Q al-Baqarah 2:35 (complete verse) = Q al-Aʿrāf 7:19 (complete verse)

وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنَٰكُم مِّنْ ءَالِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوٓءَ ٱلْعَذَابِ يُذَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَآءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَآءَكُمْ وَفِى ذَٰلِكُم

And We said, “Adam! Inhabit the Garden, you and your wife, and eat freely of it wherever you please, but do not go near this tree, or you will both be among the evildoers.”

وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنَٰكُم مِّنْ ءَالِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوٓءَ ٱلْعَذَابِ يُذَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَآءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَآءَكُمْ وَفِى ذَٰلِكُم

And We said, “Adam! Inhabit the Garden, you and your wife, and eat freely of it wherever you please, but do not go near this tree, or you will both be among the evildoers.”

12 Medinan/Meccan/Meccan

Q al-Baqarah 2:49 (complete verse) = Q al-Aʿrāf 7:141 (complete verse) = Q Ibrāhīm 14:6b

وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنَٰكُم مِّنْ ءَالِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوٓءَ ٱلْعَذَابِ يُذَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَآءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَآءَكُمْ وَفِى ذَٰلِكُم

And We said, “Adam! Inhabit the Garden, you and your wife, and eat freely of it wherever you please, but do not go near this tree, or you will both be among the evildoers.”

وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنَٰكُم مِّنْ ءَالِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوٓءَ ٱلْعَذَابِ يُذَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَآءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَآءَكُمْ وَفِى ذَٰلِكُم

And We said, “Adam! Inhabit the Garden, you and your wife, and eat freely of it wherever you please, but do not go near this tree, or you will both be among the evildoers.”
(Remember) when We rescued you from the house of Pharaoh. They were inflicting on you the evil punishment, killing your sons and sparing your women. In that was a great test from your Lord.

Although this is only a partial list of our twenty-nine doublets, it provides enough examples to make some initial observations. I have included three doublets that include a verse from a Meccan and a Medinan sūrah (nos. 1, 3, and 7 in the table above). Notably, one of these (no. 7) includes a verse (Q 16:115) from a section of the Meccan Sūrah 16 that is considered by many scholars to be a Medinan insertion. This opinion is summed up by Alan Jones:

The traditional view is that this sūra is mainly late Meccan, with the final section (verses 106–128) being added at Medina. It is difficult to judge what Medinan content there is in the rest of the sūra: more, one might guess, than is normally held to be the case, but less than was suggested by Bell ...34

If we accept this assessment, this would leave us with only three Meccan/Medinan doublets. Two of these doublets (Q 2:35/7:19; 2:49/7:141/14:6) include a verse from Sūrah 2 and a verse from Sūrah 7. All three remaining

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34. See Alan Jones (trans.), *The Qurʾān* ([Cambridge]: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007), 249. Nöldeke: “One is tempted to assign the entire section from verses 111 to 125 [in the Cairo numbering 110–124] to this [Mединan] period, since, besides verse 124 [123], verses 111 [110], 119 [118], and 120 [119] are definitely Medinan, as well as, possibly, verses 113 to 118 [112–117].” *GdQ*, 1.145. Bell writes of the entire section of Q 16:106–128: “Against backsliding; fairly early Medinan.” Bell, *The Qurʾān*, 1.259. Sinai comments: “This Medinan supplement to Q 16 would appear to include a promise of divine forgiveness and mercy for ‘those who have emigrated’ (v. 110) and a list of dietary prohibitions followed by a brief comment on Jewish dietary law (vv. 114–118, see Sinai, ‘Dietary Tetralogue’). That the end of Q 16 underwent Medinan expansion is already posited in Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 300–1, who also draws attention to Q 16:41–42.” Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 134–135, n. 49.
Meccan/Medinan doublets—unlike all of the other twenty-six doublets—are parts of narratives involving a biblical prophet.35

Overall, the distribution of qur’ānic doublets provides a new, and significant, argument for the distinctive nature of Meccan and Medinan material in the Qurʾān (more on this below). It is also worth observing that the doublets tend to consist of complete verses. Of the twenty-nine doublets in the table only three involve portions of a verse (Q 2:49/7:141/14:6b = no. 3 in the table and no. 12 in the list above; Q 16:14b/35:12b = no. 21 and no. 4 in the list above; Q 24:61a/48:16a = no. 26). Likewise only two doublets involve members of two, as opposed to one, verses (Q 9:32–33/61:8–9 = no. 17 and no. 8 in the list above; Q 27:80–81/30:52–53 = no. 27 and no. 5 in the list above). This suggests that verses were the units or building blocks that the qurʾānic authors/editors/redactors used to construct the text (a point that is evident as well from the preponderant tendency of verses to rhyme).36

The Meaning of Doublets in Synoptic Gospel Scholarship

To my knowledge qurʾānic doublets have not been systematically analyzed. Indeed, they are often passed over in qurʾānic scholarship. For example, the Study Qur’an contains robust cross-references but generally makes no explicit mention of doublets in the footnotes. The same can be said for Rudi Paret’s Kommentar, which also has an extensive system of cross-references. Salwa El-Awa, in her article “Linguistic Structure” for the second edition to the Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Qurʾan, does not mention doublets. In their article “Language and Style” in the Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾan Claude Gilliot and Pierre Larcher also make no mention of doublets. There is no entry for “doublet” in the Dictionnaire du Coran of Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi.

On the other hand, there is a long history of the study of doublets in the Gospels. In the context of scholarship on the Gospels, doublets are considered statements, found within the same Gospel, that closely resemble each other in wording without necessarily matching each other verbatim. John C. Hawkins defines doublets as “repetitions of the same or closely similar sentences in the same Gospel.”37 Most New Testament scholars are interested in Gospel doublets for the sake of the “Synoptic Problem,” namely, the various ways in

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35. Q 2:35/7:19 on Adam; 2:49/7:141/14:6 on Moses; Q 3:51/19:36/43:64 on Jesus. I will not elaborate on this point here, but I believe it deserves further attention.
36. On qurʾānic rhyme, see Sinai, Historical-Critical Introduction, 16–20. Sinai writes: “Rhyme, however, or rather a periodically recurrent word-final assonance, is a feature of the Qurʾan throughout, and it naturally partitions the surahs into a total of approximately 6,200 verses (āyāt)” (p. 17).
37. Hawkins, Horae Synopticae, 64.
which the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke overlap (or do not overlap) and what this may tell us about the source-critical relations among them. In particular, the appearance of doublets in Matthew and Luke (both of which have a significantly higher number of doublets than Mark) is often cited as an argument in favor for the two-source hypothesis, according to which Matthew and Luke both drew on Mark (or an earlier version of Mark) and on a lost source of sayings labelled Q (generally held to be an abbreviation for German *Quelle*). That most of the doublets in Luke and Matthew involve sayings of Jesus and not narrative material is thought to provide additional evidence for this scenario, although there are narrative doublets in Matthew (four of them, by Hawkins’ count). There is also at least one notable doublet in the Gospel of Mark (9:35/10:43–44). Here I will provide four examples of Gospel doublets: a sayings doublet from Matthew, a narrative doublet from Matthew, a sayings doublet from Luke, and the doublet from Mark just referred to.

1 Matthew Sayings Doublet

Matt 5:29–30 = Matt 18:8–9 (cf. Mark 9:43.45.47)

εἰ δὲ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου ὁ δεξιὸς σκανδαλίζει σε, ἔξελε αὐτὸν καὶ βάλε ἀπὸ σοῦ· συμφέρει γάρ σοι ἵνα ἀπόληται ἓν τῶν μελῶν σου καὶ μὴ ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου βληθῇ εἰς γέενναν. * καὶ εἰ ἡ δεξιά σου χείρ σκανδαλίζει σε, ἔκκοψον αὐτὴν καὶ βάλε ἀπὸ σοῦ· συμφέρει γάρ σοι ἵνα ἀπόληται ἓν τῶν μελῶν σου καὶ μὴ ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου εἰς γέενναν ἀπέλθῃ.

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. * And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.38

Εἰ δὲ ἡ χείρ σου ἢ ὁ πούς σου σκανδαλίζει σε, ἔκκοψον αὐτὸν καὶ βάλε ἀπὸ σοῦ· καλὸν σοί ἐστιν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν κυλλὸν ἢ χωλὸν ἢ δύο χεῖρας ἢ δύο πόδας ἐχόντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον. * καὶ εἰ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου σκανδαλίζει σε, ἔξελε αὐτὸν καὶ βάλε ἀπὸ σοῦ· καλὸν σοί ἐστιν μονόφθαλμον εἰς τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελθεῖν ἢ δύο ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐχόντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός.

And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. * And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

38. All Bible translations are from the Revised Standard Version
2 Matthew Narrative Doublet


And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people.

Καὶ περιῆγεν ὅ Ἰησοῦς τὰς πόλεις πάσας καὶ τὰς κώμας διδάσκοντας ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσοντας τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύοντας πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν.

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity.

3 Luke Sayings Doublet


No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, that those who enter may see the light.

4 Mark Sayings Doublet

Mark 9:35 = Mark 10:43–44

καὶ καθίσας ἐφώνησεν τοὺς δώδεκα καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· εἴ τις θέλει πρῶτος εἶναι, ἔσται πάντων ἔσχατος καὶ πάντων διάκονος.

And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”
But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

In early New Testament scholarship, through the beginning of the nineteenth century, most scholars argued that an evangelist recorded doublets such as those above because he believed that Jesus had said (or done) essentially the same thing on two occasions, an approach that Frans Neirynck names a “harmonistic” reading. Eventually, however, scholarly opinions were shaped by the work of Christian Weisse, who argued that the evangelists often worked with two sources. When the evangelists encountered a saying reported in a particular context in source A, and essentially the same saying in a different context in source B, they included the relevant passages from both source A and source B, resulting in a doublet. This sentiment is adopted and nicely summed up by H. J. Holtzmann in his 1863 work Die synoptischen Evangelien. Thus scholars concluded that many doublets in Matthew and Luke reflect their two sources, Mark and Q.

The paucity of doublets in Mark seemed to imply the originality of the Gospel. In order to explain the few doublets therein (9:1/13:30 is also a possible doublet), Weisse considered the harmonistic explanation of Jesus’ having said the same thing twice. However, he also considered the possibility that these are “redactional” doublets, whereby the evangelist, working with one source, chose to deploy the same saying or passage in two different narrative contexts. Narrative doublets in Matthew are also often classified

39. Frans Neirynck, Duality in Mark: Contributions to the Study of Markan Redaction (Leuven: Peeters, 1988), 17. Compare also the remark of Van Oyen: “Before the rise of historical criticism it had been common to say that the evangelist, who wrote twice the same saying of Jesus, was convinced that Jesus had spoken these words on two different occasions.” Van Oyen, “The Doublets,” 278.


42. More recent scholarship has noted considerably more duality in Mark. See Neirynck, Duality in Mark.

43. “Sei es nun, daß der Herr sie wirklich bei beiden Veranlassungen gesprochen,
as “redactional” (as one of the Gospel’s two sources, Q, was thought to be exclusively composed of sayings).

The Meaning of the Qur’ānic Doublets

While New Testament scholars have been considering the meaning of Gospel doublets for (at least) the past two hundred years, very few Qur’ān scholars have noticed, let alone sought to work with, the Qur’ānic doublets. It is true that Richard Bell had a certain interest in them. Bell argued that Muḥammad occasionally revised his earlier sayings, resulting in older and newer versions thereof. He posits that those early Muslims responsible for the editing of the Qurʾān, finding these two versions (at times on the same parchment), tended to include them both, resulting in a “doublet” whereby similar material is repeated in close proximity in the Qurʾānic text. Yet the sort of doublet that Bell considers is different from those at stake in this paper. Bell’s doublets do not have the word-for-word fixity of our doublets, and none of our twenty-nine doublets are found sequentially in the Qurʾānic text.

Other scholars, of course, have been interested in larger parallel or variant passages in the Qurʾān, such as the punishment stories mentioned above in regard to the work of John Wansbrough and Devin Stewart. Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, in his Die Entstehung des Korans, considers carefully the various passages in the Qurʾān on the fall of Iblīs, the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh, and on Mary and Jesus, without, however considering doublets. Many other scholars, including Joseph Witztum, Nicolai Sinai, and Angelika Neuwirth have considered these and other parallel narratives in the Qurʾān. None of these studies, however, are concerned with the very particular cases

44. On this see Van Oyen, “The Doublets,” 281.
45. Although Angelika Neuwirth argues that Bell “labels” this feature of the text “doublets,” she does not give a precise reference and I have not found where Bell uses the term. See Angelika Neuwirth, The Qurʾān and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage, trans. Samuel Wilder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 141.
46. Pohlmann, Die Entstehung des Korans.
of doublets whereby material that may not be found in the same narrative context is repeated in the Qurʾān verbatim or almost verbatim.

Because so few scholars have noticed the Qurʾān’s doublets it is difficult to speak of a state of the question. However, the standard model (introduced at the opening of this paper) by which the Qurʾānic text reflects a collection of Muḥammad’s preaching (albeit out of chronological order), with no intervening stage or *Sitz im Leben* between preaching and collection, would suggest a harmonistic explanation of the doublets. Nöldeke seems to allude to this sort of explanation when he writes: “Muḥammad, who did not hesitate either to repeat verses or to change or to abrogate passages, and whose work concentrated to a great extent on the immediate circumstances, was not at all inclined to arrange the sūras according to chronology or subject.”

We can, in any case, imagine what a harmonistic explanation for the Qurʾānic doublets would look like: Muḥammad said one thing on a certain occasion and then, on another occasion, perhaps years later, said exactly or almost exactly the same thing. When the time came to collect the Qurʾān, the collectors included the same saying twice because Muhammad had said it twice. This may mean that they did not recognize that Muḥammad, on the second occasion, was simply repeating or reciting something that had been revealed to him (years) earlier. Alternatively, it could mean that they assumed that God had revealed the same thing, or roughly the same thing, to him on two separate occasions (perhaps because that saying plays a particular role in each context). Thus, repeated sayings do not point to any pre-canonical text(s) whatsoever.

While I think it is probably impossible to offer a compelling proof for or against the harmonistic explanation for Qurʾānic doublets, it still might be worth analyzing two cases a bit more closely with it in mind. Let us take one Meccan/Meccan (no. 11) and one Medinan/Medinan (no. 4) example and examine each verse in its context, beginning with Q 6:10/21:41 (no. 11). I present the excerpt from Sūrah 21 first, following the supposed chronological order of revelation:

Q 21:40–42:

40 No! It will come upon them unexpectedly and confound them, and they will not be able to turn it back, nor will they be spared.

41 Certainly messengers have been mocked before you, but those of them who ridiculed (were) overwhelmed (by) what they were mocking.

42 Say: “Who will guard you in the night and the day from the Merciful?” No! They (still) turn away from (any) reminder of their Lord.

Q 6:9–11:

9 Even if We had made him an angel, We would indeed have made him a man, and have confused for them what they are confusing.

10 Certainly messengers have been mocked before you, but those of them who ridiculed (were) overwhelmed (by) what they were mocking.\(^{49}\)

11 Say: “Travel the earth and see how the end was for the ones who called (it) a lie.”

According to Nöldeke’s chronology, Sūrah 21 is middle Meccan and Sūrah 6 is late Meccan (indeed one of the latest Meccan sūrah(s)). The passage in Sūrah 21 is eschatological. The Qurʾān here speaks both before and after the doublet phrase (Q 21:41) of the threat of divine punishment on the Day of Judgment. The passage in Sūrah 6, on the other hand, addresses the expectation of the Qurʾān’s opponents that a messenger should be an angel and not a man (v. 9). The doublet phrase (v. 10) is followed by a reflection not on the Day of Judgment but on earlier peoples who were destroyed by God’s wrath (alluding to the possibility that the ruins of these “cities of wrong,” as one might call them alluding to Q 21:11, are still visible). In both cases the doublet phrase acts as a response to incredulity. unbelievers deny the Prophet’s predictions of a Day of Judgment. The divine voice of the Qurʾān promises the Prophet that they will be destroyed on that day for their denial of it. By a harmonistic reading one imagines that Muḥammad was first preaching in the middle Meccan period (say, around 615 or 616 CE, somewhere in Mecca) and proclaimed in the midst of an eschatological reflection: “Messengers indeed have been mocked before you, but those of them who ridiculed (were) overwhelmed (by) what they were mocking.” Thereafter, some years later (perhaps 620 or 621 CE, still in Mecca), he heard an objection that a messenger should be an angel and in response proclaimed the same phrase.

This scenario should be compared with the possibility of Q 6:10/21:41 being either a redactional or source doublet, an instance where one saying was initially preserved in two sources, both of which were included in the final text.\(^{50}\) If it were a redactional doublet, one could imagine that the phrase in question—“Certainly messengers have been mocked before you, but those of them who ridiculed (were) overwhelmed (by) what they were mocking”—existed in a pre-canonical sayings source (Logienquelle) and was subsequently

\(^{49}\) One might also note the ending of v. 5 (with some resemblance to v. 10): “the story of what they were mocking will come to them.” I am grateful to Saqib Hussain for this reference.

\(^{50}\) Another scenario is suggested by an anonymous reviewer, namely, that one unit of a doublet is an instantiation of the other unit. See also n. 51.
deployed in two places in the formation of the canonical Qur’ānic text: once to articulate a response to a certain kind of incredulity (regarding the Day of Judgment) and the second to another sort of incredulity (regarding humans as divine messengers).\footnote{I can also imagine a modified version of this redactional scenario in which there is no Logienquelle per se but rather a written record of Muhammad’s earlier proclamations, in this case Q 21:41 (or 21:40–42), redeployed for use in Q 6:10. I am grateful to Nicolai Sinai for this suggestion.} If Q 6:9/21:41 is a source doublet one would imagine that two pre-canonical texts existed, each one with a version of the doublet phrase. Both were considered important, perhaps because they were already embedded in different contexts (21:40–42 and 6:9–11) and accordingly both were preserved in the canonical text.\footnote{The doublet phrase in question here is related to a cluster of other verses in the text related to the mocking of prophets/messengers. The tenth form verb istahza’a (“to mock”) occurs twenty-one times in the Qur’ān. On eight of these occasions, including the two doublet phrases discussed immediately above, the Qur’ān refers to those who mock messengers (Q 6:10, 9:64, 9:65, 13:32, 15:11, 36:30, 43:78). Interestingly, the Qur’ān employs the formulaic phrase wa-hāqa bihim mā kānū bihi yastahziʿūn (“and they [were] overwhelmed [by] what they were mocking”) on six occasions: Q 11:8, 16:34, 39:48, 40:83, 45:33, and 46:28. This is related to the phrase fa-hāqa bi-‘lladhīna sakhirū minhum mā kānū bihi yastahziʿūn (“those of them who ridiculed [were] overwhelmed [by] what they were mocking”) that appears at the end of Q 6:10 and 21:41.} 

A similar analysis might be made of the Medinan doublet (no. 6 in the list of examples given above) Q 2:62/5:69:

Q 2:61–63:

61 (Remember) when you said, “Moses! We cannot endure just one kind of food. Call on your Lord for us, that He may bring forth for us some of what the earth grows: its green herbs, its cucumbers, its corn, its lentils, and its onions.” He said, “Would you exchange what is worse for what is better? Go (back) down to Egypt! Surely you will have what you ask for.” Humiliation and poverty were stamped upon them, and they incurred the anger of God. That was because they had disbelieved in the signs of God, and killed the prophets without any right. That was because they disobeyed and went on transgressing.

62 Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians—whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and does righteousness—they have their reward with their Lord. (There will be) no fear on them, nor will they sorrow.
(Remember) when We took a covenant with you, and raised the mountain above you: “Hold fast what We have given you, and remember what is in it, so that you may guard (yourselves).”

Q 5:68–70:

Say: “People of the Book! You are (standing) on nothing until you observe the Torah and the Gospel, and what has been sent down to you from your Lord.” But what has been sent down to you from your Lord will indeed increase many of them in insolent transgression and disbelief. So do not grieve over the people who are disbelievers.

Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Sabians, and the Christians—whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and does righteousness—(there will be) no fear on them, nor will they sorrow.

Certainly We took a covenant with the Sons of Israel, and We sent messengers to them. Whenever a messenger brought them what they themselves did not desire, some they called liars and some they killed.

According to Nöldeke’s chronology, Sūrah 2 is an early Medinan sūrah, indeed the first sūrah proclaimed at Medina, while Sūrah 5 is the very last Medinan sūrah. Both examples of the doublet phrase (Q 2:62/5:69) in these passages are embedded in passages that deal with the history of divine revelation and the failure of the Jews (and the Christians, in Q 5:68) to remain faithful to the revelation given to them. Certain scholars, including Mahmud Ayoub and Mun’im Sirry, have shown some interest in this doublet as it seems to imply that the Qurʾān, or Muḥammad, continued to have an inclusive approach to other religions throughout the Medinan period. According to the harmonistic reading they assume, Muḥammad would have proclaimed the doublet phrase first soon after his arrival to Medina (say, in 623 CE) and then toward the very end of his time there, perhaps after the farewell pilgrimage (632 CE).

It seems to me that a harmonistic reading for this doublet is particularly doubtful. The inclusivistic doublet phrase may be seen to match Muḥammad’s disposition in the earliest Medinan period (around the time of the Constitution

of Medina). It would not match his disposition suggested by much of Sūrah 5. Q 5:51 (by one interpretation at least) seems to prohibit Muslims from befriending Jews and Christians.\textsuperscript{54} Q 5:13 speaks of God’s “cursing” the Israelites for their perfidy.\textsuperscript{55} Q 5:17 and 5:72 seem to accuse Christians of disbelief for deifying Christ; indeed, v. 72 seems to condemn them to hell for this sin.\textsuperscript{56} This is not the only example of material tension within Sūrah 5.\textsuperscript{57} Accordingly, those supportive of the harmonistic explanation would have to explain why Muḥammad would choose to repeat a phrase from (approximately) ten years earlier, promising salvation in heaven to Jews and Christians (and Sabians), while around the same time he was implying that God had cursed them and condemned them to hell. Alternatively, if Q 2:62/5:69 is seen as a redactional or source doublet one might assume that it was deployed in two places, or that both versions of the saying were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} “You who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are allies of each other. Whoever of you takes them as allies is already one of them. Surely God does not guide the people who are evildoers.”
\item \textsuperscript{55} “For their breaking their covenant, We cursed them and made their hearts hard. They alter words from their positions, and have forgotten part of what they were reminded of. You will continue to see treachery from them, except for a few of them. Yet pardon them and excuse (them). Surely God loves the doers of good.”
\item \textsuperscript{56} Q 5:17: “Certainly they disbelieve who say, ‘Surely God—He is the Messiah, son of Mary.’ Say: ‘Who could do anything against God if He wished to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother, and whoever is on the earth—all (of them) together? To God (belongs) the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and whatever is between them. He creates whatever He pleases. God is powerful over everything.’” Q 5:72: “Certainly they have disbelieved who say, ‘Surely God—He is the Messiah, son of Mary,’ when the Messiah said, ‘Sons of Israel! Serve God, my Lord and your Lord. Surely he who associates (anything) with God, God has forbidden him (from) the Garden, and his refuge is the Fire. The evildoers have no helpers.’”
\item \textsuperscript{57} In his article “Processes of Literary Growth and Editorial Expansion in Two Medinan Surahs,” Nicolai Sinai argues that part of Q 5:3 (namely, what he calls 5:3b–d, that is, from \textit{al-.mulkhanāqah} to \textit{al-islāma dīnan}) and all of verses 4 and 5 are insertions. For our purposes the most interesting argument he develops relates to v. 5 and in particular its declaration that the food of the People of the Book is lawful for Muhammad’s community (\textit{ṭaʿāmu ‘lladhīna ūtū ‘l-kitāba ḥillun lakum}). After reviewing various attempts to render this phrase consistent with the prohibition of pork in v. 3 (while Christians, who are among the People of the Book, eat pork), Sinai argues: “I would thus be inclined to construe v. 5 as substantially qualifying the dietary prohibitions set out in v. 3 and as maintaining that whatever is considered licit food by Christians and Jews is thereby also licit to the qur’ānic Believers.” See Sinai, “Processes of Literary Growth,” 87. It is also interesting to note that Sinai recognizes another tension in Sūrah 5, namely, the permission to marry women of the People of the Book in v. 5 and the prohibition of befriending the People of the Book in v. 51. See Sinai, “Processes of Literary Growth,” 87–88.
\end{itemize}
included, perhaps to counterbalance the anti-Jewish/anti-Christian sentiment in the corresponding passages of Sūrah 2 and 5. Close examination of these two doublets thus seems to render a harmonistic reading less likely.

I would add that the neat distribution of Qurʾānic doublets into Meccan/Meccan and Medinan/Medinan categories does the same. Why, one might ask in this regard, are there are so few mixed doublets, only three of twenty-nine (10.3%)? If doublets are simply cases where the Prophet said one thing on one occasion and the same thing on another occasion, why would he not have repeated things said in Mecca while he was in Medina? We have seen one case (Q 2:62 and 5:69) of a doublet from, supposedly, the beginning and the end of the Medinan period, and indeed there are cases of Meccan/Meccan doublets involving early and much later Meccan verses, such as 70:29–32 and 23:83. Why should there not be cases of, say, late Meccan and early Medinan doublets?

One might propose, I imagine, that the experience of the hijrah was so traumatic that Muḥammad effectively began anew in Medina and did not seek to reuse sayings from the Meccan period. (Perhaps he forgot them, or simply took on a new personality in Medina.) It seems to me more likely that the doublets reflect the existence of two different sets of pre-canonical material: “Meccan” and “Medinan.” The length of the doublets, which are too long to be formulas, strongly suggests that these would be written texts, no direct testimony of which has come down to us. They would, in other words, be analogous to the reconstructed texts proposed for the pre-canonical history of the Synoptic Gospels (whether “Q,” “Proto-Matthew,” etc.).

As introduced at the beginning of this article, the traditional approach to the Qurʾān imagines only two stages of the scripture’s development: an oral stage of proclamation and a second stage at which these oral proclamations were assembled into the canonical text (traditionally associated with work directed by the caliph ʿUthmān). It is important to add to this that many critical scholars have considered models for the literary formation of the Qurʾānic text that involve written composition and/or editing. I have addressed some of these towards the opening of this article, but here I would like to draw further attention to the recent approaches of Angelika Neuwirth and Nicolai Sinai, both of whom find cases of Medinan insertions into Meccan passages and

58. This idea is close to that proposed by Sinai (“Processes of Literary Growth,” 87–88) that later material inserted into Sūrah 5 rendered the regulations governing the nascent Islamic community more permissive both in regard to eating with Jews and Christians and with marrying their women.

59. One might also compare this scenario with the absence of companion musḥafūs. I have discussed the written versus the oral transmission of pre-canonical Qurʾānic material in: “Intratextuality, Doublets, and Orality.”
recognize a complex and layered structure in Medinan sūrahs (especially the long Sūrahs 2–5). Sinai in particular has developed this interpretive insight in a series of works, and it is worth addressing how his argument might inform our interpretation of the doublets.

As opposed to the harmonistic view presented above, Sinai proposes a more nuanced model of Qurʾānic text formation, involving a process of editing. He notes cases of conspicuous insertions of Medinan material in Meccan passages (notably Q al-Muzzammil 73:20 and Q al-Muddaththir 74:31) and of insertions, or interpolations, of later material in Medinan passages. In other words, by his model the Qurʾān is not simply the product of materials collected and codified, all at once, as part of a project traditionally associated with ʿUthmān. Sinai’s perspective is indeed in line with the conclusions suggested by the doublets, namely, that the Qurʾān developed through a

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61. Sinai’s method involves identifying passages with “stylistic and lexical peculiarities” and/or passages that generate propositional, stylistic, or compositional inconsistencies. A prerequisite of either (or both) is that the proposed inserted text can be removed without leaving a hole or disruption in the resulting text and, ideally, an argument for the advantage sought by an editor or redactor in adding the insertion. See Sinai, “Processes of Literary Growth,” 70–71. One might add that the redaction of texts is not always as simple as the addition of one block of text into another but can involve a multi-phase process of “reworking.” Thus Robert Fortna: “Redaction is the conscious reworking of older materials in such a way as to meet new needs. It is editing that does not simply compile or retouch but creatively transforms.” Robert Fortna, “Redaction Criticism,” in Keith Crim (ed.), Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible Supplement (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 733–735, 733; quoted in John Van Seters, The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the “Editor” in Biblical Criticism (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 284.

62. Note also the remarks of Guillaume Dye on an approach to the “synoptic problem” raised by variant passages in the Qurʾān: “On en vient donc à une quatrième tentative d’explication [of the synoptic problem]: celles de révisions et de reprises successives d’une même histoire, qui peut être réutilisée, adaptée, éventuellement modifiée dans le cadre d’une nouvelle composition. On a ici affaire à un travail scrival, que certains savants vont situer, en totalité ou en quasi-totalité, du vivant de Muhammad, impliquant également son cercle de scribes (Neuwirth, Sinai), alors que d’autres chercheurs (van der Velden, Pohlmann, Dye), tout en admettant la possibilité d’un tel travail à l’époque de Muhammad, considéreront qu’une partie plus significative de ce travail a pu avoir lieu durant les années qui séparent la mort
written process. However, the doublets suggest something more about that process, namely, that a pre-canonical text, or, more likely two pre-canonical texts, existed which served as sources (although not the only sources) for the development of the canonical Qurʾān text.

The evidence of the doublets—and notably their distribution into Meccan/Meccan and Medinan/Medinan groups—suggests a three-stage process:

A. Oral (or potentially written) composition
B. The formation of two pre-canonical texts, one “Meccan” and one “Medinan”
C. The redaction of these texts (and likely other material) into the canonical Qurʾān

This model has the advantage of explaining why doublets appear almost exclusively within Meccan sūrah or within Medinan sūrah. An alternative explanation would be that doublets are cases where one verse from an already complete sūrah is repurposed for a later sūrah. One would have to explain, however, why a verse from a Meccan sūrah was never (or almost never) redeployed for a Medinan sūrah. In other words, the neat distribution of doublets into Meccan-Meccan and Medinan-Medinan categories strongly argues for the existence of pre-canonical texts and against a model in which the Prophet (or another editor) was drawing from earlier sūrah and using verses therefrom in later sūrah.

One interesting question raised by this model, however, is how the doublets appeared within the pre-canonical “Meccan” and “Medinan” texts of stage B. One would need carefully to consider each doublet to determine if it represents a source doublet (and thus the preservation of two versions of the same saying from stage A), a redactional doublet (and thus the double deployment of the same saying from stage A), or a doublet that reflects a historically repeated saying. It is possible that any combination of these explanations can be proposed for particular qurʾānic doublets. However, if one were to argue that the doublets in stage B are at least in part source doublets, this would imply a total of four original corpora at stage A. That repeated sayings in the Qurʾān tend to be doublets (our table includes only three triplets, and no material that is repeated four times or more) is a reasonable argument for the presence of two sources as an explanation for the doublets.

On the other hand, a simpler explanation for the duality in stage B begins with redactional doublets formed from two corpora of distinct written or

oral material in stage A. That there are in fact some cases of triplets (nos. 3, 8, 28, 29) in the Qurʾān is a case in favor of the redactional scenario. In light of the greater simplicity of this argument, I propose that the doublets within the pre-canonical texts (stage B) should be seen as redactional doublets unless proven otherwise. This would distinguish the history of the Qurʾān’s formation from that of the Synoptic Gospels, as most doublets in Matthew and Luke are categorized by New Testament scholars as source doublets.

This scenario also provides a different explanation for the three exceptions in our list of doublets (nos. 1, 3, and 8 in the table), the only narrative doublets in our list, two of which involve Sūrahs 2 and 7 (while the triplet no. 3 also involves Q 14). Under our scenario, these doublet phrases are not cases where Muḥammad said the same thing in Mecca and Medina (or twice in Mecca and once in Medina). Instead they belonged to the same individual corpus of pre-canonical material in stage A but were exceptionally deployed in both “Meccan” and “Medinan” pre-canonical texts (stage B), perhaps because they involved a narrative, and in roughly the same places.

The Doublets and Nicolai Sinai’s “Evolutionary Model”

Further light might be shed on the suggestion that the distribution of qurʾānic doublets signals two (“Meccan” and “Medinan”) pre-canonical written sources by the work of Nicolai Sinai in a series of publications meant to show that there is “Meccan” and “Medinan” material in the Qurʾān. Sinai does not seek to prove that these two categories of material necessarily correspond precisely with Muhammad’s preaching in Mecca and Medina (although he advances some arguments in defense of locating, with the tradition, Islam’s origins in the Ḥijāz). Instead, he seeks to show the distinctive nature of Meccan and Medinan material in terms of their content and literary features. He does hold that “Medinan” material is chronologically later than “Meccan” material, in part because he argues that Muḥammad used longer verses over time.

In his article “The Unknown Known” Sinai develops the notion of a “Medinan Constellation,” that is, certain features or elements of the Qurʾān, generally found within the same series of sūrah (traditionally identified as “Medinan”), which seem to constitute a coherent or discrete stratum of the corpus. He begins by noting that the Qurʾan refers in these sūrah to al-madīnah (“the city” or “the town”; see Q 9:101.120, 33:60–62, 63:8) and a place called


64. Sinai, “The Unknown Known.” Sūrah 16 is traditionally classified as a “Meccan” sūrah. It is possible that Sinai considers both 16:41 and 16:110 to be Medinan insertions.
Yathrib (Q 33:12–13). He continues by drawing attention to those passages which suggest that the believers had earlier been expelled from a previous dwelling place (Q 2:191, 3:195, 9:13, 22:39–40, 60:1, 60:8–9) and to others which refer to some of the followers as “emigrants” (al-muhājrūn or alladhīna hājarū; see Q 2:218, 3:195, 8:72–75, 9:20–22, 9:100, 9:117, 16:41, 16:110, 24:22, 33:6, 59:9). Sinai draws particular attention to Q 8:30–34, which has God remind the messenger how he used to be among the unbelievers (Q 8:33) and how they bar access to al-masjid al-ḥarām. Sinai outlines a number of other narrative features of Medinan sūrahs that correspond well with the traditional narrative, something which he elsewhere names the “tale of two cities.” This initial set of observations, I suggest, is vulnerable to the critique that the “tale of two cities,” the traditional narrative, was written to explain these very elements of the Qurʾān. Accordingly, Sinai’s line of argumentation would be circular. He does, however, provide additional evidence, noting that the same Medinan sūrahs which contain the elements outlined above also have an impressive list of common stylistic and literary features, namely:

Systic features:
1. longer verse length; 2. higher formulaic density.

Literary features:
1. absence of a tripartite sūrah structure; 2. absence of punishment stories; 3. concern for “quasi-legal regulation of human behaviour”; 4. sustained anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemics; 5. an elevated notion of Muḥammad’s prophetic authority.

65. Sinai adds that Yathrib is used “for what appears to be the same place,” perhaps because its “hypocrites” (munāfiqūn; v. 12), who are a feature in al-madīnah (see Q 9:101), are also located in Yathrib (v. 13).

66. On this point it should be noted that the Qurʾān seems to associate hijrah generally with leaving a place of persecution and going out to fight unbelievers (Q 2:218, 3:195, 8:72, 8:74–75, 9:20, 16:41, 16:110), and not particularly with a journey from Mecca to Medina. Note especially Q 4:89 where, in the midst of a “Medinan” sūrah, the Qurʾān demands that the hypocrites “emigrate.”

67. Elsewhere (Q 5:2.97) the Qurʾān refers instead to al-hayt al-ḥarām or simply al-hayt (Q 2:125). In Q 5:97 al-hayt al-ḥarām is also called the Kaḥbah. In one place the Qurʾān speaks of the “valley” (or “hollow/interior,” baṭn) of makkah (Q 48:24) and in another passage of bakkah (Q 3:96), where the first house (bayt) was placed (wuḍiʿa).

68. Sinai, Historical-Critical Introduction, 49.


I will not enter into details here on these points, all well-articulated and elaborated by Sinai (who carefully notes as well how certain surahs—notably Q 22—with Meccan and Medinan material complicate or problematize his analysis). Overall, the argument Sinai builds for a “Medinan constellation” is coherent and convincing. The evidence presented in the present article seems to contribute another piece of evidence to the case he builds, since the Qurʾān’s doublets overwhelmingly consist of Meccan/Meccan or Medinan/Medinan pairs. This indeed suggests that the Qurʾān includes a “Meccan” subcorpus and a Medinan subcorpus, to use Sinai’s term.  

But what is the best explanation for the presence of two subcorpora?

The standard explanation, and that to which Sinai largely subscribes (although, as mentioned above, he does raise the possibility of limited post-Muḥammadan interpolations), is that the Qurʾān is essentially the work of one author that developed over time, and according to the different contexts of the Meccan stage and the Medinan stage. He writes: “My preferred model is an evolutionary scenario according to which the Medinan texts are preceded by, and develop out of, the non-Medinan ones.” Noting both continuity and discontinuity between the Meccan and Medinan corpora, and arguing that the mean verse length of surahs increases gradually for later surahs, Sinai also argues that material in “Meccan” surahs that includes elements of the “Medinan Constellation” can be explained as “secondary insertions.”

However, Sinai also acknowledges that the discontinuity between Meccan and Medinan material might possibly be explained otherwise:

The alternative scenario would be a Qurʾānic two-source hypothesis, based on the idea that the Meccan and the Medinan corpus originated separately.

71. Ibid., 62.
72. Ibid., 74.
73. See figure 2 at the end of “The Unknown Known” and Historical-Critical Introduction, 119–120 (figures 11 and 12, involving all Qurʾānic surahs). The data shows that most Medinan surahs have longer verse lengths than most Meccan surahs. It should be noted, however, that this ordering of surahs differs considerably from that established by Nöldeke. For example, the last ten surahs, according to Nöldeke’s estimation (ending with the last) are: 24, 58, 22, 48, 66, 60, 110, 49, 9, 5. The last ten surahs in terms of mean verse length are: 57, 48, 24, 2, 58, 4, 66, 5, 65, 60. In other words, the “gradual” increase in mean verse length is created only once the surahs are taken out of the order established by Nöldeke and arranged according to mean verse length. Sinai, however, emphasizes that with this re-ordering the rate of increase in verse length is “smooth” (without any dramatic shifts from one surah to another) and argues that its smoothness implies one author gradually changing his style over time. His argument depends in part on the “stylometric” analysis of Behnam Sadeghi, “The Chronology of the Qurʾān: A Stylometric Research Program,” Arabica 58 (2011): 210–299.
74. Sinai, “The Unknown Known,” 74.
and were only subsequently combined into the received version of the Qur'an. Although I would consider such a model to be much less capable of accommodating the evidence just listed, I shall here confine myself to pointing out a further problem that such a two-source model would face. It consists in the fact that at least certain Medinan passages seem to refer back to non-Medinan ones and thus to be familiar with them. For instance, Q 9:114 comments on Abraham’s intercession for his idolatrous father, which is reported in various non-Medinan texts (Q 14:41, 19:47, and Q 26:86), and attempts to neutralise the irenic implications of this act. Another case in point is the Medinan identification of the angel transmitting the Qur’anic revelations to the Messenger with Gabriel, which is also plausibly seen as alluding to and updating earlier non-Medinan statements (cf. Q 2:97–98 with 16:102 and 26:193–196). The preliminary impression arising from such examples is that the Medinan corpus is at least partly familiar with the non-Medinan one.75

In a footnote Sinai acknowledges that the “alternative scenario” imagined here might be more nuanced: “It is not impossible that an originally independent non-Medinan corpus was secondarily embedded in the latter and that in the course of this process Medinan texts were expanded by references to passages from the non-Medinan corpus.”76

Here it is pertinent to add that the experience of New Testament scholarship strongly suggests that two scriptural sources are almost never simply joined together (as theorized in the long block quotation above) but instead reshaped in the process of redaction. Accordingly, the three-stage process proposed here in light of the evidence from Qur’anic doublets would involve redaction at stage C, and not the mere joining, or even embedding, of the Meccan and Medinan stage B texts. Indeed, the very notion of redaction criticism means attention to the intention of the redactors, to the purpose of the particular arrangements of material, and to their shaping of that material, and not merely to the original Sitz im Leben of a scripture.

In the context of New Testament scholarship, redactional critics such as Günter Bornkamm (a student of Bultmann), Hans Conzelmann, Willi Marxsen, and Georg Strecker thought carefully about how the redactors integrated and shaped the material with which they worked according to their own theological (or other) concerns.77 As Stewart explains, they held that

75. Ibid., 74–75.
76. Ibid., 75, n. 89.
77. Two key articles of Günther Bornkamm on Matthew are translated in the volume: Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew. See Günther Bornkamm, “The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew,” in G. Bornkamm, G. Barth and H. J. Held (eds.), Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew (London: SCM Press, 1963), 52–57; idem, “End-Expectation and Church in Matthew,” in Bornkamm, Barth, and Held, Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew, 15–51. The German original is Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäus-
the redactors “formed the text to convey particular ideas and arguments and did not merely splice together earlier fragments without an agenda.”

Norman Perrin writes that redaction criticism “is concerned with studying the theological motivation of an author as this is revealed in the collection, arrangement, edification, and modification of traditional material, and in the composition of new material or the creation of new forms within the traditions of early Christianity.”

If redaction criticism can be validly applied, mutatis mutandis, to the traditional material of early Islam, then one would expect that a stage of redaction in the development of the Qurʾānic text (stage C in the scenario we have outlined) would similarly involve an active editorial process. In other words, a scenario according to which two sources were redacted should provide both continuity (produced in part by redaction) and discontinuity, the latter being saliently represented by the distinct distribution of doublets.

Conclusion

In New Testament studies the harmonistic view of Gospel doublets did not disappear in the twentieth century. Marie-Joseph Lagrange, Leon Vaganay, and others, continued to argue that pairs of sayings or narrative reports do not represent true doublets but instead reflect different episodes in the life of Christ. This view still exists today, primarily among conservative, confessional scholars. In Qurʾānic Studies doublets have been hardly


addressed. Nevertheless, the standard model of the Qurʾān as a record, or transcript, of Muḥammad’s preaching that was later rearranged but not edited (or redacted) suggests that many would opt for a harmonistic view of the Qurʾān’s doublets. The present preliminary inquiry, by emphasizing the existence of doublets in the Qurʾān and highlighting the distribution of the doublets into Meccan/Meccan and Medinan/Medinan categories, suggests that the Qurʾān’s doublets are likely redactional doublets. Accordingly, they point to a stage in between the Qurʾān’s original composition and its final redaction, a stage involving two subcorpora. Whether the doublets also point to a particular scenario for stage A ("composition") is a question for future research. It seems to me possible in principle to advance the traditional scenario of oral proclamation at that stage. Alternative scenarios, involving written composition, would also be possible. Another question for future research is the matter of primitivity. As least for those doublets which show some discrepancy, careful study of those variations could inform at least a conjecture regarding which form of the doublet represents a more ancient, or "primitive" version.

One theoretical objection to my three-stage scenario is that different data, leading to different interpretations, would be produced if one analyzed the doublets not according to their distribution in Meccan and Medinan sūrahs but rather some other division or arrangement. Richard Bell, for example, proposed that the Qurʾān could be divided into a “Sign” period, a “Qurʾān” period (overlapping the end of the Meccan and the beginning of the Medinan period), and a “Book” period (beginning towards the end of Muḥammad’s second year in Medina). It seems to me in principle possible that different, and potentially interesting, results could be achieved by analyzing the doublets according to Bell’s, or another, alternative system for dividing the Qurʾān’s sūrahs. Nevertheless, the arguments which Sinai presents for the coherence

81. See for example, Bell, The Qurʾān, 1.vi–vii.

82. Another possible alternative system of dividing the Qurʾān’s sūrahs, with reference to exclusively literary characteristics, is offered by a recent article of Andreas Kaplony: “Comparing Qurʾānic Suras with Pre-800 Documents,” Der Islam 95 (2018): 312–366. Therein Kaplony catalogues certain features at the opening of qurʾānic sūrahs (while comparing them to other early Arabic documents, principally papyri). For example: twenty-four sūrahs begin (after the basmalah) with a form of a title (not identical to the titles which later tradition gave to sūrahs); another twenty-four sūrahs begin instead with an oath; fourteen sūrahs begin with a hymn in praise of God; nineteen sūrahs begin with a reference to eschatology; eleven sūrahs begin with questions; eighteen sūrahs begin with admonishments (either to Muḥammad or to the audience generally); and four sūrahs begin with a threat or a curse. Kaplony also concludes, noting that the sūrahs themselves bear traits of the early Arabic documents, that the sūrahs have independent histories. He writes: “The Qurʾān is no monograph,
of the Medinan subcorpus of ṣūrah is substantial. The evidence of the distribution of doublets is also substantial. Accordingly, significant alternative evidence would be necessary to call in into question the standard division of the Qurʾān’s ṣūrah into “Meccan” and “Medinan.” Before concluding, it is perhaps worth clarifying that the two subcorpora I am proposing, which perhaps might be named “proto-Meccan” and “proto-Medinan,” would not be limited to the doublets. They would each include much of the Meccan and Medinan (respectively) material that is now found in the Qurʾān (although it is certainly possible that other material would have entered the scripture at stage C). The doublets are likely markers or signals pointing to the existence of these subcorpora, and not the only remnants thereof.

The most important point about doublets in the Qurʾān, perhaps even more important than their salient distribution into two groups, is that they exist at all. The relatively significant number of the doublets and the notable word-for-word fixity thereof seem to tell us a story about a written process by which the canonical Qurʾānic text was achieved. That story seems to be more complicated, and more interesting, than that which scholars have long told about the history of the Qurʾān.

but a compilation of autonomous Suras each claiming to preserve Muḥammad’s revelation. Terms for ‘God’, ‘Heaven,’ and ‘Hell’ and also the Mysterious Letters make the Suras fall into three groups. This diversity probably points to the diverse provenance of the Suras” (p. 342). Kaplony’s groups are: A (marked by the use of al-rahmān, among other things): Q 13, 16–21, 25, 34–36, 38, 42, 50, 55, 61, 67, 78, 98. B (marked by the use of rabb al-ʿālamīn, among other things): Q 2, 3, 5–7, 10–12, 14, 15, 26–32, 37, 39–46, 52, 56, 57, 68–70, 79, 81–83, 102. C (marked by the use of allāh, among other things): the remaining sūrah. For further detail see pp. 342–343. Kaplony’s interest in the independence of Qurʾānic sūrah might be seen to converge with Stewart’s observations regarding the sūrah-specific nature of the punishment stories in the Qurʾān. While Kaplony allows for variations in the Qurʾān from the form in which Muhammad originally proclaimed the sūrah, he assigns such to the period of oral transmission (and not to a pre-canonical textual history). He concludes the article by stating: “Before the officials had the texts written down, the peculiar rules of mostly oral transmission, with its constant reworking, must therefore have left their traces” (p. 343).