

THE QUR'ĀNIC DOUBLETS: A PRELIMINARY INQUIRY*

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“No one should underestimate the importance of the doublets.”¹
H. T. Fleddermann

Abstract

The present study involves a presentation and analysis of repeated phrases, or doublets, in the Qur'ān. 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 *sūrahs*. 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 Qur'ānic doublets are both found within *sūrahs* traditionally identified as Meccan (Meccan-Meccan doublets) or both found within *sūrahs* 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 Qur'ānic subcorpus. That Meccan-Medinan doublets are so rare suggests that repeated material in the Qur'ān is not always due to a process of repeating or re-composition (where an earlier Qur'ānic 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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1. Harry T. Fledderman, *Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 60.

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,² although he allowed that Muḥammad might have forgotten or modified certain proclamations.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ Nevertheless, it was the view of Nöldeke, and not that of

2. “Der Korān Uthmān’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 *Qoran* 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 ʿl-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 *jizyah*. 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 *jizyah* 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 Coran: 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 Qur'ān.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 Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, has meticulously studied internal relationships within the qur'ānic corpus, considering carefully earlier proposals for Medinan insertions in Meccan *sūrahs*, 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 qur'ānic 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 qur'ānic corpus.⁹ They offer only select exceptions to the rule that the Qur'ān is Muḥammad's words. A more fundamental challenge to this paradigm is presented by John Wansbrough's 1977 *Qur'anic Studies*. According to Wansbrough the qur'ānic corpus was formed from certain *logia* that originally circulated independently.¹⁰

6. For a critical perspective on the paradigm of Nöldeke as based on a “presupposé” and not a “résultat d'un examen,” see Guillaume Dye, “Le corpus coranique: contexte et composition,” in Mohammad Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye (eds.), *Le Coran des historiens* (3 vols.; Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2019), 1.733–846, 1.748–755.

7. On this, see Nicolai Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur Frühen Koraninterpretation* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009); idem, “Processes of Literary Growth and Editorial Expansion in Two Medinan Surahs,” in Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook (eds.), *Islam and Its Past: Jāhiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 106–122; idem, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), henceforth cited as *Historical-Critical Introduction*.

8. See the discussion in Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 52–54.

9. After criticizing several assumptions of Nöldeke (notably the idea that qur'ānic 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 prophetic *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, *Qur'anic 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

language, but each person interpreted them as best he could.” Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.14–17. In addition to Wansbrough, a number of other scholars in recent decades have argued for substantial post-Muhammadan redactional work on the Qurʾān. These include Günter Lüling (whose first monograph was published before Wansbrough's *Qurʾānic Studies*), Alfred-Louis de Prémare, Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, and Guillaume Dye. See Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qurʾān* (Erlangen: Lüling, 1974); English translation: *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003); Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran*; Guillaume Dye, “Pourquoi et comment se fait un texte canonique? Quelques réflexions sur l'histoire du Coran,” in Christian Brouwer, Guillaume Dye, and Anja van Rompaey (eds.), *Hérésies: une construction d'identités religieuses* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2015), 55–104.

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.), *Qurʾānic 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.

12. Among other works we might mention that of Erhardt Guttgemans, *Candid Questions Concerning Form Criticism* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1979).

Wansbrough's application of form criticism to the qur'ānic text has not escaped criticism.¹³

Devin Stewart, for example, criticizes John Wansbrough's explanations in *Qur'anic Studies* for the parallel prophet narratives in the Qur'ān. In brief, Stewart holds that the variants in those narratives are not artifacts of multiple *logia* that originally circulated independently. Instead they are the products of creative literary shaping according to particular *sūrahs*. Through an analysis of several *sūrahs* in which prophetic punishment stories are found (Q 7, 11, 26, 29, 54), Stewart argues regarding the accounts of the prophet Shu'ayb (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."¹⁴ Stewart continues: "The legend was presumably oral and probably existed in a much longer and more detailed narrative form."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 Qur'ān suggest that the Qur'ān generally condenses longer stories "to emphasize essential elements of the plot."¹⁶ One should imagine, in other words, that a similar "condensing" process took place with originally longer oral legends of Hūd, Šāliḥ, and Shu'ayb.

Here it is worth adding an observation regarding Stewart's critique of Wansbrough and his thoughts regarding the Qur'ān'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 Qur'ān. Instead he alludes to a process much closer to that proposed by Stewart himself: "Analysis of the qur'ānic 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."¹⁷

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

14. Stewart, "Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions," 41.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. Wansbrough, *Qur'anic 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 *sūrahs* 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 *sūrahs*.¹⁸

The present paper takes an approach to the study of the Qur'ān'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 Qur'ān, 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 *Sitze im Leben* of the pre-canonical qur'ānic pericopes and their role in what he calls *Gemeindebildung* ("community formation").

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 Qur'ān 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 Qur'ān in Recent Scholarship: Challenges and Desiderata," in Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.), *The Qur'ān 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 qur'ānic *sūrahs*) that the Qur'ān was generally composed in an oral "mode" (and that the Medinan *sūrahs* are especially formulaic). See Andrew Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'ān* (Lanham: Lexington, 2014). Stewart's comparison between the middle Meccan *sūrahs* and the genre of sermon involves an argument that these *sūrahs* 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.¹⁹ I intentionally excluded strophic repetitions such as those that we find in Sūrat al-Qamar (Q 54) and Sūrat al-Raḥmān (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).²⁰

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.

Doublet number	Verses (classification)
1	Q 2:35/7:19 (Medinan/Meccan)
2	Q 2:47-48/2:122-23 (Medinan)
3	Q 2:49/7:141/14:6b (Medinan/Meccan/Meccan)
4	Q 2:62/5:69 (both Medinan)
5	Q 2:134/2:141 (both Medinan; exact correspondence)
6	Q 2:162/3:88 (both Medinan; exact correspondence)
7	Q 2:173/16:115 (Medinan/Meccan)
8	Q 3:51/19:36/43:64 (Medinan/Meccan/Meccan)
9	Q 4:48/4:116 (both Medinan)
10	Q 5:10/5:86 (both Medinan; exact correspondence)
11	Q 6:10/21:41 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)
12	Q 7:22/20:121 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)
13	Q 7:45/11:19 (both Meccan)
14	Q 7:65/11:50 (both Meccan)
15	Q 7:85/11:84 (both Meccan)
16	Q 8:13/59:4 (both Medinan)
17	Q 9:32-33/61:8-9 (both Medinan)
18	Q 9:73/66:9 (both Medinan; exact correspondence)
19	Q 11:96/40:23 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)
20	Q 11:110/41:45 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)
21	Q 16:14b/35:12b (both Meccan)
22	Q 16:43/21:7 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)
23	Q 17:48/25:9 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)
24	Q 23:5-8/70:29-32 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)
25	Q 23:83/27:68 (both Meccan)
26	Q 24:61a/48:16a (both Medinan; exact correspondence)
27	Q 27:80-81/30:52-53 (both Meccan; exact correspondence)
28	Q 41:8/84:25/95:6 (all Meccan)
29	Q 57:1/59:1/61:1 (all Medinan; exact correspondence)

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).²¹ Even then the number of doublets identified in the Qur'ān is significant. John Hawkins identifies twenty-two doublets in Matthew, ten in Luke, and only one in Mark.²² Geert Van Oyen uses more general standards and identifies thirty-six doublets in Matthew and twenty doublets in Luke (two doublets in Mark).²³ It is true that the Qur'ān is longer than either Matthew or Luke (the Qur'ān has approximately 73,597 Arabic words, whereas Matthew has 18,346 Greek words and Luke 19,482 Greek words).²⁴ However, with standards similar to those which Hawkins and Van Oyen apply to the Gospels one could list considerably more doublets in the Qur'ān. In other words, doublets are a salient feature of the Qur'ān.

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 Qur'ānic Studies to the question of formulas in the Qur'ān with his work *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'an*.²⁵ 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 Qur'ān.²⁶ Through a statistical analysis of Qur'ānic

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.

22. John Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae: Contributions to the Study of the Synoptic Problem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 65–86. Hawkins (p. 81) identifies only one doublet for Mark: 9:35/10:43–44, as he considers the expression “He who has ears to hear” (Mark 4:9/4:23) to be a “well known proverbial phrase” (p. 87).

23. Including also Mark 9:1/13:30. See Geert Van Oyen, “The Doublets in 19th-Century Gospel Study,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 73 (1997): 277–306, 278.

24. For the Qur'ān I consulted Muḥammad Ḥusayn Abū 'l-Futūḥ, *Qā'imah muḥamīyah bi-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1410/1990). For Matthew and Luke I consulted <https://overviewbible.com/word-counts-books-of-bible/>.

25. Bannister, *Oral-Formulaic Study*. Bannister's work might be read together with the critical review of Marianna Klar in *JQS* 19.1 (2017), 102–136.

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.”²⁷ 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.”²⁸ 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,”²⁹ through a pattern that Lord calls “adjustment.”³⁰

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).

of poets had created new formulas by analogy with existing ones.” Bannister, *Oral-Formulaic Study*, 75. He quotes Parry: “The highest sort of oral verse-making achieves the new by the best and the most varied and perhaps the fullest use of the old.” See Milman Parry, “Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making: II. The Homeric Language as the Language of an Oral Poetry,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 43 (1932): 1–50, 13; Bannister, *Oral-Formulaic Study*, 100.

27. James T. Monroe, “Oral Composition in Pre-Islamic Poetry,” *JAL* 3 (1972), 1–53, 8; Parry, “Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making I,” 80; Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 30. The quotation by Monroe is found in Klar’s review of Bannister, 112, as are the other two references. As suggested by the Monroe quotation, another complication for the application of oral-formulaic theory to the Qurʾān is the question of meter, a feature generally not found in the qurʾānic text.

28. Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae*, 168.

29. Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, trans. Uwe Vagelpohl (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 106.

30. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 37.

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-An'ām 6:10 (complete verse) = Q al-Anbiyā' 21:41 (complete verse)

وَلَقَدْ أَسْنَهْنُورِي بِرُسُلٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَحَاقَ بِالَّذِينَ سَخِرُوا مِنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ

Certainly messengers have been mocked before you, but those of them who ridiculed (were) overwhelmed (by) what they were mocking.³¹

2 Meccan/Meccan

Q al-A'rāf 7:45 (complete verse) = Q Hūd 11:19 (complete verse)

الَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنِ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَيَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ كُفْرُونَ

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

الَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنِ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَيَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كُفْرُونَ

who keep (people) from the way of God and desire (to make) it crooked, and they are disbelievers in the Hereafter.³²

3 Meccan/Meccan (exact correspondence)

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

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ فَاخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِن رَّبِّكَ لَفُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَفِي 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.

31. All translations are from A. J. Droge, *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013).

32. Note that this doublet begins a bit earlier—both Q 7:44 and Q 11:18 end with the same clausula: *la 'natu 'llāhi 'alā 'l-zālimīn*, “The curse of God is on the evildoers.”

4 Meccan/Meccan

Q al-Nahl 16:14b = Q Fāṭir 35:12b

وَهُوَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ الْبَحْرَ لِتَأْكُلُوا مِنْهُ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُوا مِنْهُ حَبْلًا مَّوْجًا وَنَثَرَى الْفُلُوكَ مَوَاجِرَ فِيهِ وَلِيَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلِعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

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 يَسْتَوِي الْبَحْرَانِ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٍ سَائِغٌ شَرَابُهُ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ وَمَنْ كُلٌّ تَأْكُلُونَ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُونَ حَبْلًا مَّوْجًا تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى الْفُلُوكَ فِيهِ مَوَاجِرَ لِيَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلِعَلَّكُمْ 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

Q al-Naml 27:80–81 (complete verses) = Q al-Rūm 30:52–53 (complete verses)

إِنَّكَ لَا تَسْمَعُ الْكَلِمَاتِ لَوْ سَمِعَ الْأَعْمَىٰ إِذَا وَلَّوْا مُدْبِرِينَ * وَمَا أَنْتَ بِهَادِي الْعُمْيِ عَنِ ضَلَالَتِهِمْ إِنْ تَسْمَعُ إِلَّا مَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا فَهُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

Surely you cannot make the deaf 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 الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ وَالصَّبِيَّانَ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلُوا صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا 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 *fā-* at the opening of Q 30:52.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصْرِيَّةَ وَالنَّصْرِيَّةَ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

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)

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُمْ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

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

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ افْتَرَىٰ 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 اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا 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-Şaff 61:8–9 (two complete verses)

يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَيَأْبَىٰ اللَّهُ إِلَّا أَنْ يُتِمَّ نُورَهُ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ * هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

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).

يُرِيدُونَ لِيُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ مُتِمُّ نُورِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ * هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

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-Nahl 16:115 (complete verse)

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةَ وَالْدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ الْخَنزِيرِ وَمَا أُهْلَ بِهِ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ اضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

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.

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةَ وَالْدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ الْخَنزِيرِ وَمَا أُهْلَ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ فَمَنْ اضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

He has only forbidden 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—surely God is forgiving, compassionate.

11 Medinan/Meccan

Q al-Baqarah 2:35 (complete verse) = Q al-A'rāf 7:19 (complete verse)

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

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.”

وَيَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ فَكُلَا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ
“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-A'rāf 7:141 (complete verse) = Q Ibrāhīm 14:6b

وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكَ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يُدَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَهُمْ وَفِي ذَلِكَ بَلَاءٌ مِّنْ رَبِّكَ عَظِيمٌ

(Remember) when We rescued you from the house of Pharaoh. They were inflicting on you the evil punishment, slaughtering your sons and sparing your women. In that was a great test from your Lord.

وَإِذْ أَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يُقْتُلُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ وَفِي ذَلِكَ بَلَاءٌ
مَنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ

(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.

إِذْ أَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ وَيُذَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ وَفِي ذَلِكَ
بَلَاءٌ مَنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ

... when He rescued you from the house of Pharaoh. They were inflicting on you the evil punishment, and slaughtering 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 *sūrah* 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 *sūrah*: 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

34. See Alan Jones (trans.), *The Qur'an* ([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 [Medinan] 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 Qur'an*, 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 Qur'ān (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 qur'ānic 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 qur'ānic doublets have not been systematically analyzed. Indeed, they are often passed over in qur'ānic 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 Qur'an*, does not mention doublets. In their article “Language and Style” in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* 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

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 qur'ānic 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 Qur'an 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 ὀφθαλμὸς 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 βληθῆ εἰς γέενναν. * καὶ εἰ ἡ δεξιὰ σου χεὶρ σκανδαλίζει σε, ἔκκοφον αὐτήν 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 χεὶρ σου ἢ ὁ πούς σου σκανδαλίζει σε, ἔκκοφον αὐτὸν καὶ βάλε ἀπὸ σοῦ· καλὸν σοὶ ἐστὶν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν κυλλὸν ἢ χωλὸν ἢ δύο χεῖρας ἢ δύο πόδας ἔχοντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον. * καὶ εἰ ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς σου σκανδαλίζει σε, ἔξελε αὐτὸν καὶ βάλε ἀπὸ σοῦ· καλὸν σοὶ ἐστὶν μονόφθαλμον εἰς τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελθεῖν ἢ δύο ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντα 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

Matt 4:23 (cf. Mark 1:39, Luke 4:44) = Matt 9:35 (cf. Mark 6:6b)

Καὶ περιῆγεν ἐν ὄλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρῦσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν ἐν τῷ λαῷ.

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 ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὰς πόλεις πάσας καὶ τὰς κώμας διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρῦσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων 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

Luke 8:16 (cf. Matt 5:15, Mark 4:21) = Luke 11:33

Οὐδεὶς δὲ λύχνον ἄψας καλύπτει αὐτὸν σκεύει ἢ ὑποκάτω κλίνης τίθησιν, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ λυχνίας τίθησιν, ἵνα οἱ εἰσπορευόμενοι βλέπωσιν τὸ φῶς.

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.

Οὐδεὶς λύχνον ἄψας εἰς κρύπτῃν τίθησιν [οὐδὲ ὑπὸ τὸν μῶδιον] ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὴν λυχνίαν, ἵνα οἱ εἰσπορευόμενοι τὸ φῶς βλέπωσιν.

No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but 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."

οὐχ οὕτως δὲ ἐστὶν ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀλλ' ὅς ἂν θέλῃ μέγας γενέσθαι ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος, * καὶ ὅς ἂν θέλῃ ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι πρῶτος ἔσται πάντων δοῦλος·

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 Neiryck names a “harmonistic” reading.³⁹ Eventually, however, scholarly opinions were shaped by the work of Christian Weisse,⁴⁰ 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*.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.⁴³ Narrative doublets in Matthew are also often classified

39. Frans Neiryck, *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.

40. Christian H. Weisse, *Die evangelische Geschichte* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1838) and later idem, *Die Evangelienfrage in ihrem gegenwärtigen Stadium* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1856).

41. “... so dass die Duplicität der Redestücke also in einer Duplicität der Quellen ihren Grund hat.” Heinrich J. Holtzmann, *Die synoptischen Evangelien: Ihr Ursprung und geschichtlicher Charakter* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1863), 257. Quoted by Van Oyen, “The Doublets,” 280. Earlier Holtzmann writes (p. 256): “Hauptsächlich ... versteht man unter Doubletten solche, in demselben Evangelium doppelt stehende, Sentenzen, welche für die Duplicität der Quellen, aus welchen das Evangelium zusammengearbeitet ist, unwiderstehliches Zeugnis ablegen.”

42. More recent scholarship has noted considerably more duality in Mark. See Neiryck, *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).⁴⁴

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 Qur’ān, 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 Qur’ānic text.⁴⁵ 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 Qur’ānic text.

Other scholars, of course, have been interested in larger parallel or variant passages in the Qur’ān, 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 Qur’ān on the fall of Iblīs, the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh, and on Mary and Jesus, without, however considering doublets.⁴⁶ Many other scholars, including Joseph Witztum, Nicolai Sinai, and Angelika Neuwirth have considered these and other parallel narratives in the Qur’ān.⁴⁷ None of these studies, however, are concerned with the very particular cases

oder daß der Erzähler sie das einermal in Folge einer von ihm begangenen Verwechslung hinzugefügt hat.” Weisse, *Die Evangelienfrage*, 153.

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 Qur’an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*, trans. Samuel Wilder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 141.

46. Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*.

47. Joseph Witztum, “Variant Traditions, Relative Chronology, and the Study of Intra-Quranic Parallels,” in Behnam Sadeghi, Asad Ahmed, Robert Hoyland, and Adam Silverstein (eds.), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1–50; Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*; Angelika Neuwirth, “The House of Abraham and House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism,” in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (eds.), *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’ānic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 499–531.

of doublets whereby material that may not be found in the same narrative context is repeated in the Qur'ān verbatim or almost verbatim.

Because so few scholars have noticed the Qur'ān'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 qur'ānic 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: "Muhammad, 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."⁴⁸

We can, in any case, imagine what a harmonistic explanation for the qur'ānic 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 Qur'ān, the collectors included the same saying twice because Muḥammad 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 qur'ānic 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.

48. *GdQ* 1.47 (emphasis mine).

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 *sūrahs*). The passage in Sūrah 21 is eschatological. The Qur’ān 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 Qur’ān’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 Qur’ān 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).⁵¹ 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.⁵²

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.

51. 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 Muḥammad'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.

52. 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 bihūm mā kānū bihi yastahzi'ūn* (“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 sakhīrū minhum mā kānū bihi yastahzi'ūn* (“those of them who ridiculed [were] overwhelmed [by] what they were mocking”) that appears at the end of Q 6:10 and 21:41.

⁶³ (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:

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ 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.

⁷⁰ 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 Qur’ān, or Muḥammad, continued to have an inclusive approach to other religions throughout the Medinan period.⁵³ 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

53. Sirry writes: “The fact that such ‘ecumenical’ verses occur at the beginning and end of Muhammad’s prophetic career at Medina means that neither the words nor the purport of these two identical verses were abrogated.” Mun’im Sirry, “Other Religions,” in Andrew Rippin and Jawid Mojaddedi (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken: Wiley, 2017), 320–332, 326. See also Mahmoud Ayoub, “The Qur’ān and Religious Pluralism,” in Roger Boase (ed.), *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 273–281, 277.

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.⁵⁴ Q 5:13 speaks of God's "cursing" the Israelites for their perfidy.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.⁵⁶ This is not the only example of material tension within Sūrah 5.⁵⁷ 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

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."

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."

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.'"

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 *al-munkhāniqah* to *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 Muḥammad's community (*ta'āmu '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'anic 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.

included, perhaps to counterbalance the anti-Jewish/anti-Christian sentiment in the corresponding passages of Sūrahs 2 and 5.⁵⁸ Close examination of these two doublets thus seems to render a harmonistic reading less likely.

I would add that the neat distribution of Qur'ānic 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.).⁵⁹

As introduced at the beginning of this article, the traditional approach to the Qur'ān 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 Qur'ānic 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 *mushafs*. I have discussed the written versus the oral transmission of pre-canonical Qur'ānic 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,⁶⁰ 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 Qur'ānic 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.⁶¹ In other words, by his model the Qur'ān is not simply the product of materials collected and codified, all at once, as part of a project traditionally associated with 'Uthmān.⁶² Sinai's perspective is indeed in line with the conclusions suggested by the doublets, namely, that the Qur'ān developed through a

60. See Sinai, *Fortschreibung*; idem, "Processes of Literary Growth"; also idem, "The Qur'an as Process," in Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx, *The Qur'an in Context*, 407–439. For Neuwirth's method, see Angelika Neuwirth, "Meccan Texts—Medinan Additions? Politics and the Re-reading of Liturgical Communications," in Rüdiger Arnzen and Jörn Thielmann (eds.), *Words, Texts and Concepts Cruising the Mediterranean Sea: Studies on the Sources, Contents, and Influences of Islamic Civilization and Arabic Philosophy and Science* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 73–93.

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 Qur'ān: "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 scribal, 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 *sūrahs* or within Medinan *sūrahs*. 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 *sūrahs* and using verses therefrom in later *sūrahs*.

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

de Muḥammad de la constitution du codex coranique.” Dye, “Le corpus coranique,” 809.

oral material in stage A. That there are in fact some cases of triplets (nos. 3, 8, 28, 29) in the Qur'ān 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 Qur'ān'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 Qur'ānic 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 Qur'ān. Sinai does not seek to prove that these two categories of material necessarily correspond precisely with Muḥammad's preaching in Mecca and Medina (although he advances some arguments in defense of locating, with the tradition, Islam's origins in the Hijāz).⁶³ 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 Qur'ān, generally found within the same series of *sūrahs* (traditionally identified as "Medinan"), which seem to constitute a coherent or discrete stratum of the corpus.⁶⁴ He begins by noting that the Qur'an refers in these *sūrahs* to *al-madīnah* ("the city" or "the town"; see Q 9:101.120, 33:60–62, 63:8) and a place called

63. See Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, 59–72.

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).⁶⁵ 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-muhājirūn* 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).⁶⁶ 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*.⁶⁷ 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.”⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ 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:

Sylistic 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.⁷⁰

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-bayt al-ḥarām* or simply *al-bayt* (Q 2:125). In Q 5:97 *al-bayt al-ḥarām* is also called the Kaʿbah. In one place the Qurʾān speaks of the “valley” (or “hollow/interior,” *batn*) 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.

69. On this see Reynolds, “Le problème.” I revisit this point briefly in Gabriel S. Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 4–5.

70. Sinai, “The Unknown Known,” 66–69.

I will not enter into details here on these points, all well-articulated and elaborated by Sinai (who carefully notes as well how certain *sūrahs*—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 Qur’ān’s doublets overwhelmingly consist of Meccan/Meccan or Medinan/Medinan pairs. This indeed suggests that the Qur’ān includes a “Meccan” subcorpus and a Medinan subcorpus, to use Sinai’s term.⁷¹ 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 Qur’ān 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.”⁷² Noting both continuity and discontinuity between the Meccan and Medinan corpora, and arguing that the mean verse length of *sūrahs* increases gradually for later *sūrahs*,⁷³ Sinai also argues that material in “Meccan” *sūrahs* that includes elements of the “Medinan Constellation” can be explained as “secondary insertions.”⁷⁴

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

The alternative scenario would be a Qur’anic 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 qur’ānic *sūrahs*). The data shows that most Medinan *sūrahs* have longer verse lengths than most Meccan *sūrahs*. It should be noted, however, that this ordering of *sūrahs* differs considerably from that established by Nöldeke. For example, the last ten *sūrahs*, according to Nöldeke’s estimation (ending with the last) are: 24, 58, 22, 48, 66, 60, 110, 49, 9, 5. The last ten *sūrahs* 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 *sūrahs* 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 *sūrah* 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 Qur’ān: 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 Matthäusevangelium*.

the redactors “formed the text to convey particular ideas and arguments and did not merely splice together earlier fragments without an agenda.”⁷⁸ 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.”⁷⁹ 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 qur'ānic 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.⁸⁰ This view still exists today, primarily among conservative, confessional scholars. In Qur'ānic Studies doublets have been hardly

Evangelium (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960). See also Hans Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit: Zur Theologie des Lukas* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1954); English trans.: *The Theology of St. Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); W. Marxsen, *Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959); English trans. *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969); Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchungen zur Theologie des Matthäus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959).

78. Stewart, “Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions,” 43.

79. Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1969), 1. Emphasis mine. Larry Hurtado similarly comments that Redaction Criticism “focused on the authors of the Gospels as editors with individual theological aims and emphases, and not the somewhat more passive collectors of tradition that some form critics seemed to posit.” Larry Hurtado, “New Testament Studies in the 20th Century,” *Religion* 39 (2009): 43–57, 50.

80. Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Luc* (Paris: Gabalda, 1921); Léon Vaganay, *Le problème synoptique: Une hypothèse de travail* (Tournai: Desclée, 1954), 190. See the refutation of this view in Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 13–27. I am grateful to one of the two anonymous reviewers for this reference.

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 *sūrah*s 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).⁸¹ 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 *sūrah*s.⁸² 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 *sūrah*s, 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 *sūrah*s (while comparing them to other early Arabic documents, principally papyri). For example: twenty-four *sūrah*s begin (after the *basmalah*) with a form of a title (not identical to the titles which later tradition gave to *sūrah*s); another twenty-four *sūrah*s begin instead with an oath; fourteen *sūrah*s begin with a hymn in praise of God; nineteen *sūrah*s begin with a reference to eschatology; eleven *sūrah*s begin with questions; eighteen *sūrah*s begin with admonishments (either to Muḥammad or to the audience generally); and four *sūrah*s begin with a threat or a curse. Kaplony also concludes, noting that the *sūrah*s themselves bear traits of the early Arabic documents, that the *sūrah*s have independent histories. He writes: “The Qurʾān is no monograph,

of the Medinan subcorpus of *sūrahs* 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 Qur'ān's *sūrahs* 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 Qur'ān (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 Qur'ān, 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 Qur'ānic 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 Qur'ān.

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-raḥmān*, 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 *sūrahs*. For further detail see pp. 342–343. Kaplony's interest in the independence of Qur'ānic *sūrahs* might be seen to converge with Stewart's observations regarding the *sūrah*-specific nature of the punishment stories in the Qur'ān. While Kaplony allows for variations in the Qur'ān from the form in which Muḥammad originally proclaimed the *sūrahs*, 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).

