

The Qur'an Explains Itself: *Sūrat al-Rahmān*

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

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

This chapter also examines the views of some Western authors, Richard Bell and John Wansbrough (with reference also to Julius Wellhausen) about *Sūrat al-Rahmān* and various verses and sections within it, the views of some who found the whole *sūra* 'an imitation' of Psalm 136, and of others who held that material was added to the *sūra* at one stage or another and that there was juxtaposition of variant traditions or paraphrasing of versions

suggested that the 'four gardens' in this *sūra* are in fact two, and that dual – even in these two – was perhaps understood merely as singular. In addition, it has been suggested that the refrain in this *sūra* served the function of a litany although it was not clear to some why the refrain introduced after some verses and not others.

As will be seen in the course of the discussion, studying the *sūra* in light of context and internal relationships explains away such difficulty and removes any reasonable need for such conjectures. Moreover, the approach adopted in this chapter reveals inadequacies (and errors) even in some well-known English translations of certain verses in this *sūra*. It also explains the structure of this *sūra* more clearly than has been hitherto, and make, it is hoped, what will prove to be a useful contribution to the appreciation and exegesis of *Sūrat al-Rahmān*.

Context and Internal Relationships

As explained in Chapter 1, the Qur'an was the starting point of numerous branches of Arabic and Islamic studies. In his *Iqān*, Suyūṭī dedicates a chapter to *al-ʿulūm al-mustanbata min al-Qur'ān* in which he quotes from commentary of al-Mursī a passage listing various sciences based on Qur'an and developed to serve it, and to serve Islamic studies in general branches such as phonetics, grammar, *usūl*, *fihq*, *lafṣ*, *balagh*... and other. *Balagh* was undoubtedly one of the most important subjects for Qur'anic exegesis, and it began and developed around the central question of appreciation of the style of the Qur'an and its *ijāz* in particular, as witnessed by such titles as *Dalā'il al-ijāz* of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī.

The importance of *balagh*, especially *ilm al-ma'ānī* and *ilm al-bayān*, *lafṣ* in general is universally recognised and the attention paid to it by such commentators as Zamakhsharī and Rāzī, gives their work particular distinction.

One of the important contributions of scholars of *balagh* was their recognition of the concept of *maqām* (the context of the situation) and its role in determining the utterance and providing the criterion for judging its central issue in *ilm al-ma'ānī* *muḥtaṣat al-kalām li-muḥtaṣat al-ḥadīth* (the conformity of the utterance to the requirements of the situation).

Al-Khatīb al-Qazwī explains:

The context that demands the definition, generalisation, pre-positioning of a discourse, and inclusion (of particular words) differs from the context that demands the indefinite, specification, post-position and omission; the context

separation differs from that of joining; the situation that requires conciseness differs from that requiring expansiveness. Discourse with an intelligent person differs from discourse with an obtuse one. Each word with its companion is suited to a particular context. A high standard of beauty and acceptability of speech depends on its appropriateness to the situation and vice versa.

Tammām Ḥassān points out that when scholars of *balāgha* recognised the concept of *maqām*, they were a thousand years ahead of their time, since the recognition of *maqām* and *maqāl* as two separate bases for the analysis of meaning has been arrived at only recently as a result of modern linguistic thinking. When they said *li-kull maqām maqāl* and *li-kull kalima ma'shibatitha maqām* they hit on two remarkable statements that could equally apply to the study of other languages. When Malinowski coined his famous term 'the context of the situation' he had no knowledge of this work.³

Scholars of *uṣūl al-fiqh* have recognised the importance of the notions of *maqām* and *maqāl* for the study of the Qur'an. In his *Muwāḍa'at* Shāṭibī states:

The science of *ma'āni* [meaning] and *bayān* [factual and figurative expression] by which the *i'yāz* [limitability] of the Qur'an is recognised, revolves around knowing the requirements of the situation during the discourse from the point of view of the discourse itself, the discursant, the discourse or all of them together; for the same statement can be understood in different ways in relation to two different addressees or more. A question with one and the same form can imply other meanings, such as agreement, scolding, etc. Likewise, an imperative can have the meaning of permission, threat, incapacity/impossibility ...⁴

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

Utilisation of such relationships is considered by Ibn Taymiyya to be the most correct method (*asāḥi al-turuq*) of *tafsīr* – exegesis.⁵ He explains: 'What is given in a general way in one place is explained in detail in another place. What is given briefly in one place is expanded in another.' Shāṭibī states that many Qur'anic verses/passages can only be properly understood in the light of explanations provided in other verses or *sūras*.⁶

Certain themes have been treated in more than one place in the Qur'an, including, for instance, God's power and grace, the hereafter, stories of earlier prophets, etc. The conciseness or expansion in one place or another depends on *muqādaḍa ḥāl* (what the situation requires). Commenting on stories of earlier prophets, Shāṭibī again remarked that their purpose was

to strengthen the Prophet in the face of various forms of denial and obstinacy from his opponents at different times. The form of the story would echo a situation similar to that in which the Prophet was facing.

The particular form of the narrative varies according to the situation while all of it is true, factual, with no doubt about its being correct.⁷

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

wa lamāla nū'matun rabbī la-kuntun min al-muḥḍarīn
[Were it not for the favour of my Lord, I too would have been brought]

37:5

with reference to:

ulā ihka fī ḥ-adhābi muḥḍarūn
[those who will be brought to punishment]

34:31

and:

yayanna ḥ-ṭanādi
[the day of calling out]

40:31

with reference to:

wa-nādā asṭabhu ḥ-yannatī asṭāba ḥ-nārī
[and the people of paradise will call out to the people of the fire]

7:4

Readers of the Qur'an recognise this feature clearly. Take for example: a verse from the *Fāṭiha*, that practising Muslims recite many times daily: *ṣinā al-ladhīna an'amta 'alayhim* 'the path of those You have blessed' (1:7) and how it is clarified with reference to *al-ladhīna an'amta-lāhu 'alayhim min al-nabiyyīna wa ḥ-siddīqīna wa ḥ-shuhadā'i wa ḥ-sāliḥīna* 'those whom God has blessed: the prophet, the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous' (4:69) More examples will be met in the discussion of *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*.

The importance of context in determining the meaning of any discourse Qur'an or otherwise, is now established beyond doubt. The style of the Qur'an being self-referential, the importance of internal relationships in understanding the text of the Qur'an cannot be seriously challenged

Context, with the expression it demands, and intertextuality both focus our attention on the Qur'anic text itself which must surely take priority over any other approach to understanding and explaining the Qur'an. A study of *Surat al-Rahmān* in the light of context and internal relationships will, it is hoped, show the benefit of this approach.

Al-Rahmān

The title of this *sūra* is *al-Rahmān*, for which most translators give 'The Merciful'. Arberry gives 'The All-Merciful'; Pickthall and Muhammad 'Alī give 'The Beneficent', while Yūsuf 'Alī gives '(God) Most Gracious'.

Those who choose 'The Merciful' have clearly observed the lexical general meaning of the root word *rahma* (mercy) while those who opted for 'The Beneficent/Bounteous/Gracious' apparently observe the manifestations of mercy in the root meaning, manifestations they saw listed in this *sūra*. We may adopt the Merciful as a translation of *al-Rahmān* along with most translators, but in the sense of the One who extends His mercy in the form of the bounties listed in the following verses. The choice of this meaning for *al-Rahmān* is borne out by the context of this *sūra*.

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

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

Section I: God's Bounties in This World

al-Rahmān 'allama 'l-Qur'ān [The Merciful taught the Qur'an]

Vv.1–2

This *sūra* is unique in the Qur'an in that it begins with one of the names of God, *al-Rahmān*, standing as it is, as one separate verse which, it will be seen, summarises the *sūra* and governs the following material both by its significance and its sound. It has been noted that when the name of God

occurs in the Qur'an as a subject followed by a predicate verb as in *al-Rahmān* such an order signifies restriction in the sense of 'it is He who did such an such'.⁸ In our *sūra* we have a series of predicate verbs following each other without conjunction, in the main all dependent on the word *al-Rahmān* the sense being: it is *al-Rahmān* who taught the Qur'an, who created man and taught him how to communicate, who ... who ... etc. Since it is through the Qur'an that we are told about God and all the manifestations of His mercy and beneficence, teaching the Qur'an comes as the first predicate of *al-Rahmān*, stressing also the priority and more lasting effect of spiritual benefit.⁹ His beneficence in teaching the Qur'an is so important that it was pointed out in the first verses of the book to be revealed:

Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught ...

as well as on other occasions such as:

96:3–

He taught you what you did not know before: God's bounty to you is ever great.

4:11

Since the context of our *sūra* relates to His bounty, 'taught the Qur'an' is used rather than the normal 'sent it down' which is used scores of times elsewhere, so the context here governs the choice of vocabulary.

The effect of *al-Rahmān* on the meaning of the following material is further emphasised by the effect of its sound, since, standing as a separate verse ending in a long *alif* and *nūn*, it sets the pattern for the *fāṣiḥa* or rhythm at the ends of the following verses which consist mainly of *-ān*, and on a few occasions of *-ān*, which does not alter the pattern much since 'n' and 'm' are both nasal voiced resonant sounds. (Vv.1–6 are transliterated to indicate this effect.)¹⁰ This results in a pleasing resonance in Arabic that enhances the effect produced by the enumeration of God's bounties. The uniform sound in the close succession of rhymes helps transfer the effect of *Rahmān* to *Qur'an* to *bayān*, *bī-hukmān*, *yasūdān*, etc. Since the Qur'an *bayān* etc. are manifestations of the mercy of *al-Rahmān*, the rhyme helps to build the cumulative effect of *rahma* and maintains it throughout, with ever the challenge to deny the obvious benefits (itself in the same rhyme) no cancelling (if not enhancing) the beneficent order established by *al-Rahmān* in the first line.

Khalaqa 'l-insān. 'Allamahu 'l-hayyān

[He created man and taught him how to communicate]

vv.3-4

Creating man and teaching him *bayān* are two of the manifestations of the bounty of *Rahmān*. *Bayān* is the ability to express oneself and to understand the expression of others:

It is He who has brought you into being, and given you ears, eyes and hearts: little thanks you show.

67:23

Have We not given him two eyes, a tongue, and two lips?

90:8-9

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

al-shamsu wa'l-qamaru bi-hisābān

[The sun and the moon pursue their calculated course]

v.5

The statement is expanded to show the benefits of the sun and the moon and the exact way they follow their course in such verses as (10:5) (6:96) and (36:40), in the intertextual way explained earlier.

wa'l-najmu wa'l-shajaru yesjudān

The plants and the trees submit [to God's purpose for them]

v.6

Najm in this context means plants that have no stem/trunk as opposed to those that have. Both submit to God in following the course He created them for, as believers submit in prayer,¹¹ as we see in greater detail in 22:18. Many commentators, referring to the above verse, give for *najm* the alternative meaning of 'stars' and most English translations follow this. However, what we have in vv.5-6 is a contrast between two celestial objects: the sun and the moon, then two earthly ones: trees and stemless plants. The context here dictates the meaning 'plants'.

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

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

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

*And the heavens He has uplifted and set up the Balance
that you might not transgress in the Balance.*

Weigh with justice and skimp not in the Balance.

And Earth – He set it down for [His] creatures

Therein fruits, and palm-trees with sheathed clusters

Husked grain, and fragrant plants.

vv.7-

Here we have the manifestation of His grace in the way He keeps the heavens up and the earth stable – the duality and contrast being maintained. The heavens are raised high so that they do not fall on His creature cf. 13:2; 21:32; 22:65, 'Uplifted the heavens', rather than 'created then which is usual, suits the context. He raised them high but did not cut them off from them, sending down from them the scripture and its balance (42:17).

The Qur'an having already been mentioned (v.2), only the balance mentioned here, between heaven and earth: even before the earth is mentioned, the balance is set up. The passage stresses the importance of keeping just balance with no excess or deficiency, a fitting introduction to the repeated question to follow – 'Which of your Lord's bounties will you deny – since justice demands that the addressees recognise (without skimping the bounties of the Merciful with which He surrounds them from every direction. Skimping in the balance elsewhere in the Qur'an has a concrete significance; in this context it carries the additional, metaphorical meaning of due recognition for God's bounties.

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

not transgress ... skimp not in the Balance are later insertions.' However, the equivalent of 'that you might not ...' can be observed in combination with *mīzān* in Q. 57:25 where it cannot be assumed to be a later insertion, and the emphatic repetition with *mīzān* is also observed in such instances as 11:84-85; 26:181-83; 83:1-3.

The repetition of the word *al-mīzān* is particularly effective in this context, coming soon after *bi-husnān* (perfectly calculated courses) to reinforce the sense of exactitude and balance in God's creation, and in the ordered structure of this *sūra*, heightening the demand for just dealing. In this context, the verb *wadda'a* (set up) is used with *al-mīzān* rather than *anzala* (brought down), as in 42:17, to emphasise the significance of the balance here, and using the same verb (*wadda'a*) with *al-ard* highlights the crucial importance of maintaining the balance on Earth.

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

If We will, We can make the earth swallow them or cause fragments of the sky to fall upon them.

34:9

and:

He set firm mountains upon the earth lest it quake with you.

16:15

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

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

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

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

Fa-bi 'ayyi ālā'i rabbihimna tukaththibūn?
[Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?]

The change here, *illijān*, from 'His' third person pronoun to the not 'your Lord' is significant, and since *rabb* is related to *rabbā* (to bring up care for), His lordship is caring lordship. The 'Which, then ...?' comes after the surrounding benefits is a cornering challenge, and makes a denial futile, 'your caring Lord' showing its folly and ingratitude.

Such a challenge to deny the obvious blessings and signs of God is referred to in other places in the Qur'an, cf. 53:55; 40:81; 16:83; 14:34; 56:8 6:2. In our *sūra* the challenge to men and *jinn* is made thirty-one times which has given rise to much speculation, largely far-fetched and missing the point. Rāzī (and others) sought the explanation in the value of specific numbers of 3 and 10 etc., stating, among other things, that the number with 'bounty' is ten times that with 'punishment' mentioned the preceding *sūra*, (cf. 'He that does a good deed shall be repaid tenfold (6:160). Bell observed that the refrain occurred 'first at v.12, then at intervals of two verses, and then from v.23 onwards at intervals of one, except 43-44 which should probably form one verse'. He further suggests that the refrain might have been added later, 'when also the eschatological portents from 31 onwards may have been composed'.¹³ Bell does not support the suggestion that the material was at one time used without the refrain. Comparison with other instances of challenge cited above shows that the enumeration of bounties could not have been left without a comment on the refrain. As for his comment on the frequency and location of the refrain, our analysis of the context and structure of this *sūra* will, it is hoped, explain why the refrain occurs thirty-one times, why it could not have started earlier, or occurred more times than it does, whether at the end or in the body of the text. Commenting on the refrain, Wansbrough states:

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

describe employment of the device in this passage.¹⁴

Reference to Psalm 136 will be discussed later. Wansbrough rightly observes that the function of the refrain in the Qur'an is that of a concluding formula but does not agree that this adequately describes the employment of the device in our *sūra*. Our analysis will show that the question ('Which then ...' etc.) is used as exactly that – a concluding formula. As regards litany, this means either: '(1) a form of public prayer, usually penitential, consisting of a series of petitions, in which the clergy leads and the public respond. It may be used as part of a service or by itself, in the latter case often in procession, or (2) (transf.) A form of supplication representing a litany.'¹⁵ Even in a vague sense, then, a litany is quite alien to the Qur'an and the way it is recited in Islamic ritual prayer. There, if a person (an *imām* in prayer or otherwise) reads aloud, all others have to listen attentively, and there is no leader/response form:

When the Qur'an is recited, listen to it and be silent so that mercy may be shown to you.

7:204

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

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

*He created man of sounding clay, like the potter's,
And created the jinn of smokeless fire,
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?*

V.14–16

The statement is so condensed here that the bounties may not be apparent. Comparison with other instances in the Qur'an clarifies the process of creation. In these other instances, both humans and *jinn* are reminded of their origin, and how God, in his bounty, developed them into what they now are, human rather than clay and *jinn* rather than fire (3:27–9; 95:4;

36:77; 16:78; 38:76). Were it not for His bounty, they would not have arrived at their present state, nor would the sky have been kept aloft, nor the earth remain stable; the two types of water would not have been kept distinct from each other, nor would the ships have floated and sailed. This reveals a further duality: origin and present state.

*Lord of the two easts
And Lord of the two wests
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?*

V.17–18

The reference here is to the two extreme points where the sun rises in the winter and the summer; and where it sets in the winter and in the summer (rather than where the sun rises and sets and the moon rises and sets as suggested by some commentators). This shows His grace in the variation of seasons and of the length of the day and night. The selection of the extreme points brings them nearer to the realisation of His mercy in not making the night time, nor the day time, perpetual for them, as explained in 28:71–73. Verse 17 is so condensed by the structure and the demands of the context that its full significance can only be appreciated by comparison with 28:71–3; 73:9 (Lord of the East and West) and 70:40–41 (Lord of the Easts and Wests) which show how the selection and forms of the material serve the context and are determined by it.

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

*He let forth the two seas that meet one another,
Between them is a barrier they do not overpass,
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?*

V.19–21

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

*From them come forth pearls of two kinds
Large ones, and small, brilliant ones,
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?*

V.22–23

This is the second of the three cycles of bounties related to the sea. Translators, perhaps with one or two exceptions, translate the second kind (*marjān*) as 'coral', while the majority of commentators explain that it denotes small pearls which are much more brilliant. This is supported by an author on gems who cited verses of Imru' al-Qays.¹⁶ Some commentators give the alternative of 'red beads', and some modern ones (S. Qutb, for instance) talk of coral. We shall see at v.58 that reference to other instances in the Qur'an confirm the meaning we have opted for. In 16:14 and 35:12 the fish that come from the seas also appear, whereas in our *sūra* they are not mentioned: the given pairs are complete without them – another example of how the selection of material suits the context.

Many commentators have experienced a problem with v.22. According to their knowledge, pearls come only from salt water whereas the verse states that they come from both salt and fresh water. An early writer who faced the problem was Abū 'Ubayda (d.210/825) in his *Maqāz al-Qur'ān*.¹⁷ He insisted that pearls come only *min al-hayḥ* from one, i.e. salt water, not both (*min ḥayḥ*) and explains the Qur'anic expression 'both of them' as being analogous to the expression: 'I ate bread and milk', applying 'ate' to drinking milk as well as to eating bread when in fact it refers only to one. His suggestion that pearls come from 'one' of them only is refuted by Qur'anic usage elsewhere. *Min ḥayḥ* was not a freak or a 'slip of the tongue' in the Qur'an and Abū 'Ubayda's attempt to explain it away does not advance his assertion. If we compare Qur'an 35:12, for instance, we have an explicit statement confirming that pearls come *min ḥayḥ* from each of the two kinds of water. Indeed Abū 'Ubayda dealt with this verse (II. p. 153) but, faced with the fact that it goes against his assertion about *al-hayḥ*, he passed it over without comment. Doubt has been expressed about Abū 'Ubayda's ability to read the Qur'an without making mistakes.¹⁸ Wansbrough comments on Abū 'Ubayda's statement: "yakhruju min ḥayḥ min al-hayḥ" could not seriously be interpreted as figurative usage or even stylistic option. Its presence can only be justified by a principle of inclusion, which took account of passages requiring textual emendation."¹⁹

Ibn Qutayba faced the same problem with 55:22, but cited with it 35:12. He still insisted that pearls came only from salt water and even claimed that Abū Dhū'ayb al-Hudhali was wrong in a verse he composed, in thinking probably after Qur'anic usage, that pearls exist in fresh water.²⁰ Believing that pearls came only from salt water and trying to justify the Qur'anic statement, commentators suggested, for instance, that pearls came from places where sea and fresh water meet, as in Shatt al-'Arab or that mussels lived in the sea but came up and opened their mouths to receive raindrops

which then went into the making of pearls!²¹ However, Rāzī's first and preferred interpretation was to accept 'the manifest meaning of the Word o. God' (i.e. pearls come from both waters), 'which is more worthy of being followed than the word of some men whose word cannot be trusted. And who knows that pearls do not come from fresh water? And supposing divers did find them or bring them out only from sea water, this does not necessarily mean that they don't exist somewhere else'. Rāzī would perhaps have been pleased to know what we know today about freshwater pearls:

Freshwater mussels in the temperate zone of the Northern Hemisphere have produced pearls of great value ... Pearlting is still a carefully fostered industry in central Europe, and the forest streams of Bavaria, in particular, are the source of choice pearls. Freshwater pearlring in China has been known from before 1000 BC.²²

The Qur'anic statement in our *sūra*, then, stands with its manifest meaning, supported by other Qur'anic references, and in harmony with the duality of the context, without need of emendation or forced interpretations, and in spite of the belief current amongst commentators, that pearls come only from salt water.

His are the ships that run,

Raised up in the sea like mountains;

Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?

v.24-25

This is the third and last pair of bounties connected with the sea. In spite of their size and weight, ships do not sink but sail along. The condensed description, *al-fajāriṭ ṭunūshā ṭā'* ('running' and 'raised') – two words in Arabic – is expanded in 42:32-34 which brings out its full significance – one part of the Qur'an explaining another.

This principle of intertextuality helps us to understand how the part of our *sūra* already discussed relates to the next. We often find elsewhere in the Qur'an that when people are on a journey by sea or on land they are reminded of their final return to God (10:23; 36:44; 43:14). Comparison (e.g. with 10:24) also reveals that just when the earth looks at its best and becomes 'adorned and its people think they are its masters', all this can vanish away. This leads on to an explanation of the relative permanence of the next life. The eschatological part of this *sūra*, therefore, follows logically in the same way as in other *sūras* and need not (as Bell suggested without any substantiation) have been composed at a later time.

*All that dwells on the earth is perishing
Yet the Face of your Lord shall remain, Glorious, bestowing Honour
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?*

VV:26-28

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

Verses 26-31 here conclude the earlier part of the *sūra* and preface what remains of it – Majesty and Honouring – reiterating the qualities of God mentioned in the first and again in the last verses of the *sūra*. Translators render *al-ḥam* inadequately as 'honour'. Its root verb, *ahrama* is, however, in the causative form, meaning 'to give honour and bounty'. The contrasting pair in 26-27 is composed of the world perishing and God's face abiding. A further pair is made up of Majesty on the one hand and bestowing of honour on the other (cf. 17:70; 21:26; 37:40-43). Indeed, the structure of the rest of the *sūra* is determined by this particular pair: the passing away of those on earth and the permanence of God necessarily mean, as witnessed elsewhere in the Qur'an, that all will return to Him for judgement. 'All things shall perish except His Face, His is the judgement and to Him you shall return' (28:88; also 10:23-30). Indeed *jald* and *ihram* herald the variety of fates resulting from the judgement to which the repeated *ālā* (bounties) and *ṭibāḥḥihān* (do you deny) was bound to lead. This reinforces our statement that Bell's conclusion, that the eschatological section was added later, cannot stand.

*All who dwell in heaven and earth entreat Him,
Every day He attends to some matters;
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?*

VV:29-30

The pairing here is between the entreaties and God's attention to them. This particular bounty is described in more detail in *Sūra* 14: v.34, which similarly concludes an enumeration of God's bounties in this world. The entreaties and God's answer in our *sūra* follow the part dealing with this world and precede the one leading to the next (a further pairing), to suggest

that the needs and His attention to them exist in both worlds.

Section II: Eschatology: Punishment

*We shall surely find the time to [judge] you -
You two weighty armies (of men and jinn);
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?*

VV:31-32

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

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

The pairing here is of the army of men and the army of *jinn* gathered, and God attending to deal with them. Commentators had to ask themselves: where is the bounty here and in the following verses, about punishing the sinners (and, even in 26-28), in which the refrain is maintained after each pairing? Zamaḥsharī's answer is typical. There is a blessing in the judgement for those who are saved from punishment, and a blessing for everybody in being warned beforehand: out of His benevolence He did not leave them in darkness about the fate that awaits sinners. However, we need not necessarily take this view. The punishment will be for those who deny (77:15 *passim*), and the challenge: 'Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?' is in fact for those who may deny the encompassing bounties. It is ungrateful and futile to deny such encompassing bounties. It is, moreover, foolish to deny and rebuff such a bounteous and powerful Lord who will certainly judge them, where denial will have due punishment. The bounties in the section (31-45) can, I suggest, be understood to be the bounties God has given them in the world. Had the question in this section been 'which of these two bounties...' we would have been forced to interpret what is in every pair in this section as bounties. The refrain is maintained in

the punishment section to emphasise their foolishness in addition to their ingratitude, and the challenging question carries threat and mockery in it (cf. 44:47–50; and 53:50–56). Twice in this *sūra*, *al-Rahmān* is described as being *Ḍhu l-jalāl wa l-ikrām*. Punishing the sinners has to do with *jalāl* (majesty), while *ikrām* shows itself in the bounties He has shown men and *jinn* in this world and will show the believers in the next.

*O company of jinn and men, if you have power to penetrate the confines of heaven and earth, penetrate them:
You shall not penetrate them except with (Our) authority;
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?
Against you shall be loosed a flame of fire and molten brass,
And you shall not be helped;
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?
And when heaven is split asunder
And turns to crimson like red leather -
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?
The guilty shall be known by their mark,
And they shall be seized by their forelocks and their feet;
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?
This is the Hell which the guilty deny,
They go round between it and hot, boiling water;
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?*

vv 33–45

With all their might men and *jinn* cannot run away when God attends to their judgement. The context requires the introduction of the *jinn* first, since they seem to have more power to penetrate heaven and earth (cf. 17:88). The heavens which He has raised up and made firm and comely in this world will split and redden in the new order of things in the next. In this world they have been asked again and again in this *sūra*. Which of your Lord's bounties do you deny? – in the next they will no longer be asked: the guilty will be known by their marks. The pairing structure is maintained throughout: the guilty will be seized by the forelocks and the feet, and will wander between hell-fire and boiling water. There is no refrain between 43 and 44 because the pair has not been completed (cf. Bell). It is important to note that the context of *Sūrat al-Rahmān* has affected the way the treatment of the guilty is presented. They are surrounded: held by forehead and feet and roam 'between ... and ...'; in other contexts they are 'in' hell (cf. 18:29; 56:41). Being surrounded in this way calls to mind their being surrounded in this world from all

directions by the bounties they presumed to deny. It will be observed that their treatment is dealt with briefly in this *sūra*, unlike in many others, before a longer description of what is a more important matter in *Sūrat al-Rahmān*: the reward of the believers.

Section III: Eschatology: Rewards

*But for him who fears the time when he will stand before his Lord;
There are two gardens;
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?
Wherein are two fountains flowing;
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?
Wherein of every fruit there are two kinds.
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?
Sitting²⁴ on couches lined with brocade,
The fruit of both gardens above them within reach;
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?
Therein maidens restraining their glances,
Untouched before them by men or jinn;
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?
As though of ruby
And brilliant pearls
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?
Shall the reward of good work be anything but good?
Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?*

vv 46–60

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

We have seen in the earlier part of this *sūra* that the Lord's bounties surround them from above and below (heaven raised, with the Qur'an and

the balance 'coming down' from it and earth stabilised with plants coming up from it), from east and west, on land and sea. Here the two gardens are on the right and left; from above them there are abundant branches for shade and fruits (cf. 76:14). Each has a running fountain from below (cf. 85:11) and in each garden every fruit is of two kinds. The inhabitants sit on couches under them with the fruit of both gardens hanging within reach above them. The lining of the couches is brocade, and the exterior is left to the imagination. They will be there with their spouses (cf. 36:36). The spouses are chaste and untouched by any before them, and they have the lustre of ruby and the whiteness of brilliant pearls.²⁵ Verse 58 here and its parallel (56:23) confirm that *mayīn* here, as in v.22, means small pearls, not corals as thought by most translators.

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

And below these two

There are two [other] gardens

Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?

Two green, green gardens;

Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?

Therein are two fountains of bubbling water;

Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?

Therein are fruits,

Pale-palms and pomegranates;

Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?

Therein goodly, beautiful ones;

Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?

Dark-eyed, sheltered in pavilions;

Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?

Untouched before them by man or jinn;

Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?

Sitting on green cushions and fine carpets;

Which, then, of your Lord's bounties do you deny?

The two gardens described here are for the second class of believers and are lower in rank or quality – *min dūnīhimā* – as shown by the comparison these gardens are 'green'; the first are 'abounding in branches'. The water here is 'bubbling', not 'flowing'; there is only 'fruit' here, whereas in the other there is 'of every fruit two kinds'. The descriptions of the damsels²⁶ and the cushions, too, are of a lesser order.²⁷ The bounties in the earlier gardens are more encompassing from above and below. There are couches rather than cushions, and the fruit in the branches above them is within reach rather than simply being fruits in the garden: the divine testimony of their having done well is reserved for those in the first gardens. The pairing structure is, nevertheless, maintained throughout, as is the refrain.

That there are two classes of gardens, for two classes of believers, fits the pairing scheme evident in this *sūra*. It is also confirmed by the next *sūra* (56:10–38) where there is a parallel description of two classes of garden, one for 'those nearest to God' and the other for 'the Companions of the Right Hand'. Some commentators²⁸ have thought that the four gardens in our *sūra* could be for the same believers. This is refuted by the categorical distribution in *Sūra* 56. Moreover, it does not make sense: how can the Lord (*dhū 'l-jalālī wa 'l-īkrāmī*) say to a favoured believer: 'I have given you these two excellent gardens as a reward for your good work' (46–60) and in addition: 'I am giving you these two inferior ones' (63–77)? Wansbrough questioned the 'two gardens' in v.46 and suggested that the total number in this *sūra* should be halved. This was based on a quotation from the early commentator al-Suyūṭī attributing to al-Farrā' the view that the dual form *jannatān* was demanded by the rhyme-scheme, but in fact represented the singular *janna* as in 79:41.²⁹ However, at the end of the same paragraph in Suyūṭī, from which Wansbrough took this quotation, there is another statement attributed to Farrā' to the effect that it was *jannat* in the plural (not dual) that was meant.³⁰ By comparing what Farrā' had actually said with what Suyūṭī and earlier authors have attributed to him it becomes clear that he was in fact misrepresented. Commenting on v.46 he said:

Commentators have said they are two of the gardens [*bustānātān*] of Paradise *wa-qad yuktam fi 'l-'arḍiyya janna tulḥamīnā 'l-'arab fi 'ash-ṭābiā*. In Arabic you may come across the word '*jannat*' which the Arabs in their poetry put in the dual [two lines of verse quoted]: *wa-dhāḥānā ana 'l-shi'r labu qumāḡin yugmīnā 'l-ẓayḥānā wa 'l-nuḡṣān fa-yatḥamīnā mā lā yḥāmīnūh al-ḥādīn*. Because verse has rhyme which can be produced by addition and omission. Thus it allows situations not normally allowed in prose.³¹

Farrā' did not state that the dual was inserted 'for the rhyme', nor did he

state that the gardens were plural *jannāt*. He also misunderstood the meaning of the lines of verse he quoted. The dual is, in fact, intended by the poet, the point being that the character in the poem exaggerates the value of his tree, seeing it not just as a whole garden but as two, the notion of two gardens obviously representing perfect bliss. In any case Farrā's original statement about v.46 is, at most, very tentative and it is clear that authors after him blew it out of proportion.

Moreover, in discussing the number of gardens and whether there are one or two in vv.46–67, we must not lose sight of two important factors. First, the context of the whole *sūra* which has been demonstrated from the beginning to be of bounties encompassing from above and below, right and left, semantically, and not, as claimed by Wansbrough, grammatically; for verse juncture this demands two encompassing gardens. Second, internal relationships in the Qur'an confirm that two gardens are intended here. As in the line quoted by Farrā, two encompassing gardens in this world,³² one on the right and one on the left, represent perfect bliss. Such bounties should be met with gratitude; denial and ingratitude incur punishment (cf. 34:15–17, and 18:32–43).³³

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

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

It has already been stated that vv.46–61 and 62–77 represent two sets of gardens for two classes of believers. Wellhausen, however, suggested that in these two more or less similar descriptions of two gardens we have a case of duplication due to varying recollections on the part of those from whom the compilers got the *sūra*.³⁵ Commenting on Zamakhsharī's statement that the descriptive components of the second set 'version B' are inferior to those of 'version A', Wansbrough states:³⁶

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

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

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

In *Sūra* 55 the guilty are dealt with first, together with the challenge to escape the judgement. That group is dispensed with quickly (three verses and refrains), in order to get back to speak at length of bounties of *al-Rahmān*, the Bountiful One – an example of how the context affects the treatment of the material. In *Sūra* 56, on the other hand, the foremost in the race, 'those who will be brought near', are dealt with first, clearly to highlight their distinction, followed by those on the right hand.³⁷ In *Sūra* 56 the treatment of those on the left hand comes last. This fits the sequence of the verses that follow. They are dealt with there in a much longer passage than that of the guilty in our *sūra*, again context affecting the treatment and order of material. In fact Wansbrough himself refers, in another context, to the verses cited above as evidence: 'The notion of propinquity to God as a reward for piety is clearly conveyed, expressed in 56:7–11 as a tripartite distribution of benefit, of which *muqarrabūn* (those brought near) represents the highest order.' (p. 30)

As in *Sūra* 55, the proportion of excellence in the descriptions of the abodes of the two classes of believers is kept in *Sūra* 56. Parallel descriptions and contrasts are also evident. A few examples will ...

the better class; 2 to the second).³⁸

Sūra 55

Sūra 56

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | <i>min kull fākihātin zaʿfān</i>
Of every fruit two kinds | <i>wa fākihātin minmā yataḥyayrūn</i>
with fruits, any that they may select |
| 2. | <i>fākihātin wa-nakhlun wa-rumḥān</i>
fruits, palm trees and pomegranates | <i>wa fākihātin kathīrā</i>
and plenty of fruit |
| 1. | <i>wa-jannā ʿajjinnatayn dān</i>
the fruit of the two gardens
near at hand | <i>wa-yutūf ʿalayhim... bi... wa fākihātin</i>
youths will go round serving them with fruit |
| 2. | <i>fihimā fākihātin</i>
in both gardens there is fruit | <i>wa-fākihātin</i>
and fruit |
| 1. | <i>hal jazīʾ al-ḥisn illā ʾal-ḥisn</i>
Shall the reward of good work
be any but good? | <i>jazīʾan bi-mā kānā yaʾmalūn</i>
a reward for what they have done |
| 2. | none | none |

The select class has a special reward – 'Shall the reward of good work be anything but good?' (55:60) – that is paralleled by 'a reward for what they used to do' (56:24). This comment is not made on the rewards of class II in either *sūra*. This 'extra' reward is confirmed by such Qur'anic statements as 10:26 *li-ʾlādhinā aḥsanu ʾlḥsunā wa zayādā* 'For those who do right is a goodly reward, and more!' Such a comment does not always, or often, come as a rhetorical question (cf. 76:22; 77:44; 78:36 and *passim*). The above theory of the juxtaposition of different versions appears to imply that at some stage, before the second pair of gardens, there was inserted the mention of reward in v.60 at the end of the *sūra*. However, evidence from other places in the Qur'an, such as those cited here, show that this could not have been the case. Wansbrough's suggestion that the question of v.60 'would belong to the exegetical tradition ...' (p.29) lacks any support from Qur'anic usage. His suggestion of the possibility of a cultic context or liturgical origin is like his insistence upon the term 'litany' rather than 'refrain'.

prayer. The result of Wansbrough's earlier suggestions would be to reduce the four gardens to two and to reduce the two to one. Qur'anic references cited earlier leave such a conclusion without support.

Commenting on Wellhausen's suggestion that the description of two sets of gardens was a case of duplication due to varying recollections, Bell says: 'The frequent use of the plural "gardens" in the Qur'an, and the plural pronoun, here in vv.56 and 70, suggest that Muhammad did think of a number of Gardens, perhaps through confusion with the four rivers of the Garden of Eden mentioned in Genesis.' His 'perhaps through confusion ...' etc. is so extraordinary that it does not warrant any consideration.

A single verse (v.78) concludes the *sūra*: 'Blessed is the name of your Lord, the Lord of Glory and Bestower of Honour.' It is addressed in the second person singular to the Prophet/reader/listener; accordingly it is not followed by the refrain addressed in the dual to both men and *jinn*. As already stated, the first time the refrain was introduced was when men and *jinn* – to whom it was addressed – were referred to in the word *al-ʿālam* v.10. The only factors that decided that the occurrences of the refrain would number thirty-one were the pairing scheme and the sequence of the specific themes developed within the context of the *sūra*. The sequence having been completed within the pairing scheme, the refrain need not occur any more (or less) times. The final verse is a comment glorifying God's name *al-Raḥmān* above their denial of His bounties. Such a comment is observed in the Qur'an in other similar situations such as 96:83; 37:180–82; 56:96. Even in this final comment we find a pair of adjectives maintaining the scheme to the last: Lord of Majesty and Honouring (Honouring with bounties in this world and the next, Majesty shown in His creation and in disciplining those that deny His encompassing bounties). Verse 1, verse 27 and this final verse 78 fuse the whole *sūra* into one solid unity.

Al-Raḥmān and Psalm 136

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

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

Without wishing to make a comparison between the two scriptures or faiths, I will examine some points of similarity and difference between the two texts, which could be taken as a comment on the conjecture of imitation.

In the Qur'an, the name 'The Merciful' occurs only once, in v.1 in the *sūra*, while 'His Mercy' is repeated throughout the psalm, twenty-six times in all. In any case 'the Merciful' occurs in the *basma* of every *sūra* in the Qur'an (except *Sūra* 9) as well as in other places.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

etc.

Compare these punishments with those in the *sūra*, where the basis on

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

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