

QS 4 Q 2:255 – 256

2.255 God,
There is no god but He,
Living and Everlasting.
Neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep.
To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what
is on earth.
Who shall intercede with Him except by His
leave?
He knows their present affairs and their past.
And they do not comprehend of His knowledge
except what He wills.
His throne encompasses the heavens and the
earth;
Preserving them is no burden to Him.
He is the Exalted, the Majestic.
2.256 There is no compulsion in religion.
Right guidance has been distinguished from
error.
He who repudiates idols and believes in God,
Has grasped a handle most firm, unbreakable.
God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

2.255 Allah! Point de divinité à part Lui, le Vivant, Celui qui subsiste par lui-même «Al-Qayyûm». Ni somnolence ni sommeil ne Le saisissent. A Lui appartient tout ce qui est dans les cieux et sur la terre. Qui peut intercéder auprès de Lui sans Sa permission? Il connaît leur passé et leur futur. Et, de Sa science, ils n'embrassent que ce qu'Il veut. Son Trône «Kursiy», déborde les cieux et la terre, dont la garde ne Lui coûte aucune peine. Et Il est le Très Haut, le Très Grand.
2.256 Nulle contrainte en religion! Car le bon chemin s'est distingué de l'égarement. Donc, quiconque mécroit au Rebelle tandis qu'il croit en Allah saisit l'anse la plus solide, qui ne peut se briser. Et Allah est Audient et Omniscient.

سورة البقرة
اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ (255) لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ (256)

Azaiez

Appliquons, ici, une lecture particulière du « verset du Trône » à l'appui de l'analyse rhétorique. Cette méthode, qui a été développée par Michel Cuypers pour les études coraniques consiste à déterminer les techniques d'écriture et de composition qui présidaient déjà à la rédaction des textes des scribes du monde sémitique ancien (Cuypers 2007, 2012b). Le terme « rhétorique » s'apparente ici à ce qu'Aristote entendait par l'une des parties de la Rhétorique qui s'intéresse à l'ordonnancement et au plan du discours: la *dispositio* (gr. *taxis*, *oikonomia*). Recherchant « l'art de la composition du discours », l'analyse rhétorique est fondée sur le repérage de symétries (parallélismes synonymiques, antithétiques ou complémentaires), de chiasmes (parallélisme inversé: AB/B'A') et de concentrismes (deux versants symétriques partagés par un centre: AB/x/B'A'). Appliquer cette méthode au célèbre verset du Trône révèle qu'il s'agit d'une structure parfaitement symétrique, dans laquelle les unités de texte sont disposées de façon concentrique (ABCD / x / D'C'B'A'). La

relation entre ces unités est celle de l'identité: les termes et les segments ont des significations analogues, et chaque segment répond ou correspond à un segment parallèle. Les premiers segments (A, A') présentent chacun trois mots. Les deux partagent un terme identique (*huwa*) et l'utilisation de synonymes qui correspondent aux attributs de Dieu (*al-ḥayy* "al-qayyūm" répond à *al-'aliyy* "al-'aẓīmu"). Les seconds segments (B et B') soulignent le rôle de Dieu comme celui qui maintient l'existence de l'Univers (*lā ta'ḥuḍuhu sinatun wa-lā nawmun/ lā ya'ūduhū ḥifẓuhumā*). Le parallélisme des troisièmes segments (C, C') fait référence à la cosmologie et à la souveraineté de Dieu (*lahū mā fī-l-samāwāti wa-mā fī-l-'arḍi / wasi'a kursiyyuhu as-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa*). Et enfin, le parallélisme des quatrième segments (D, D') attire l'attention sur la volonté de Dieu (*allaḍi yašfa'u 'indahū 'illā bi-'idnihi / wa-lā yuḥiṭūna bi-šay'in min 'ilmihī 'illā bi-mā šā'a*). Ces quatre attributs principaux de sujets-Dieu, la puissance de Dieu, la souveraineté de Dieu et la volonté de Dieu, convergent sur une idée centrale: la connaissance de Dieu embrasse toutes choses (*ya'lamu mā bayna aydihim wa-mā ḥalfahum*). Situé dans le centre de la structure, ce segment n'a pas de relation d'identité avec d'autres segments. Il en est le segment central et le pivot sémantique. Dans la perspective de l'analyse rhétorique, le centre donne le sens à toute la structure. Dans cette perspective, le sens général de ce verset peut être compris comme la glorification de la toute connaissance de Dieu.

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا
 A هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ
 B لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ
 C لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ
 D مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ
 يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ
 D' وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ
 C' وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ
 B' وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا
 A' وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

Dye

V. 255 : hymne au Dieu souverain, à la puissance et à la connaissance insondables pour les hommes. L'expression « vivant et subsistant », qui apparaît trois fois dans le Coran (ici même, et en Q 3:2 et Q 20:111), est le calque d'une formule araméenne (qui reprend Ps 121:4) que l'on rencontre dans le livre de *Daniel* araméen (6:27) et dans le targum (palestinien) du Pseudo-Jonathan (Tg. Ps-Jon. sur Gen 16:6 – 16 et 24:62, « le Vivant et le Subsistant, qui voit et qu'on ne voit pas ») : comparer *allāhu lā ilāha illā huwa al-ḥayyu l-qayyūm*, et Dan 6:27, *dī-huwa ēlāhā ḥayyā w-qayyām le-'alēmīn* (« c'est Lui le Dieu vivant et subsistant pour toujours »). L'influence du livre de *Daniel* sur le développement des premières communautés musulmanes (et du Coran)

est un sujet qui n'a pas reçu l'attention qu'il mérite (voir cependant De Prémare 2000b).

Ya'lamu mā bayna aydihim wa-mā ḥalfahum : les traductions oscillent entre un sens temporel (avant/après) ou spatial (devant/derrrière). Si on relie le verset à Ps 121:4, qui parle du Dieu gardien d'Israël, on préférera le sens spatial.

Par son genre littéraire, ce verset n'a que peu de rapport avec les versets qui le précèdent et qui le suivent, même s'il s'intègre assez bien au propos des vv. 254–257. J'y vois un texte ayant une unité forte, et qui était sans doute récité dans des cérémonies liturgiques avant même la compilation du Coran.

V. 256 : ce célèbre verset a fait l'objet des interprétations les plus diverses, aussi bien dans la tradition musulmane que chez les historiens (cf. Crone 2009). La question (politique) de la liberté religieuse ne me semble pas abordée ici. Par *dīn*, je comprends plutôt le jugement (autrement dit, le jugement, ou la décision, que l'on doit prendre sur la voie à suivre). Le texte explique que ce choix est naturel, pour ne pas dire évident (ni contraint, ni répugnant, cf. Q 9:32–33 et le champ sémantique de la racine *K-R-H*), puisque la différence entre le droit chemin et l'égaré est claire (comme celle entre les ténèbres et la lumière, cf. v. 257), et que le soutien de Dieu pour les croyants est assuré (cf. v. 255 / Ps 121:4).

El-Badawi

This striking verse is generally in dialogue with numerous illustrations of God's majesty in the Bible and—if reliable—the poetry of Umayyah b. Abi al-Salt al-Thaqafi (d. ca. 1/623). More specifically Q 2:255 is in dialogue with teachings from the Hebrew Bible concerning the seriousness of 'swearing an oath' (2 Chronicles 9:18; Isaiah 66:1). However, this dialogue is mediated through the Syriac, CPA versions of Matthew 5:33–35; 23:20–22, where 'in the heavens' (*ba-šmayā*) God sits upon 'his throne' (*kürsyā... d-alāhā*), and where 'on earth (*b-ar'ā*)' is His 'footstool beneath his feet.' The simultaneous use of *arš* (cf. Aramaic *arsā*, "bed") and *kursī* (Syriac *kürsyā*, "chair, throne") may be a result of separate traditions from which each word has come to us (cf. Q 27:38 vv. 38:34). Also, is Q 2:255 in dialogue with Gnostic literature?

Grodzki

The expression from v. 255 *Allāhu lā ilāha illā huwa al-ḥayyu al-qayyūmu* is reminiscent of Isa 43:11 ("I, I am the Lord, and there is no deliverer besides me"), apart from Deuteronomy. As for "neither drowsiness overtakes Him or sleep" it is a reference to Ps 121:4 in inversed order. Also *kursiyyuhu al-samāwāti* is interesting. In Isa 66:1 there are similar words in use, only in the reversed order: "The heavens are my throne, and the earth is my footstool (*ha-šamayim kis'i*)."

Hilali

This passage constitutes in my view the most important example of the transformation process of religious texts during their recitation by the believers. The use of this very well-known verse in a variety of social and ritual contexts gives it an almost independent status. This verse is an autonomous fragment. Its fragmentary aspect allows its mobility and its citation in a variety of literary genres. This verse has a value almost independent of the Qur'ān itself.

Imbert

Commentaire concernant le verset 255 dit āyat al-Kursī. C'est dans le palais omeyyade de Qaṣr al-Ḥarrāna (Jordanie) que nous avons relevé la plus ancienne mention épigraphique connue du verset *āyat al-Kursī*. Il s'agit du verset entier écrit à l'encre noire à même la paroi du palais. Le graffiti, strictement coranique, compte 11 lignes et se trouve dans un contexte daté: il est en effet placé sous un autre graffiti portant la date de 92 / 710 et signé d'un certain 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Umar (les deux écritures sont similaires). Le texte est entouré d'un cadre noir intégrant un prolongement décoratif sous la forme d'une saillie rectangulaire. Cet encadrement d'un verset est rare durant le premier siècle et semble rappeler l'importance emblématique que va prendre cet extrait coranique, vers les années 90 de l'Hégire (cf. Imbert 1995: 407).

Ce n'est pas un hasard si nous retrouvons le début du même verset sous la forme d'un isolat coranique (un verset gravé isolément) immédiatement suivi d'une signature, en 93 / 712 au *Ġabal 'Usays* (sud-est de Damas, Syrie) : *Allāh, lā ilāh illā huwa al-ḥayy al-qayyūm wa-kataba 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh fī šawwāl sanat 93*, "[...] écrit par 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh en *šawwāl* 93." Le verset, cité isolément, est "incomplet" en comparaison de son développement dans le *muṣḥaf*. Ces citations correspondent sans doute à la période de mise en place des éléments fondamentaux du *credo* autour desquels le Coran semble s'être constitué. Leur apparition au sein des graffiti montre le degré d'expansion de ces formules ou versets dans les sphères privées de la première société musulmane. Quelques années plus tard, en 127/744 en Arabie, un autre graffiti évoque une malédiction faisant suite à la citation du même verset 2/255: *la'ana man maḥā hādā l-kitāb aw ḡayyara-hu*, "que soit maudit celui qui aura effacé cette inscription ou l'aura changée!" (Inscription inédite de Ġibāl Banū Šihr en Arabie. Voir également la même malédiction datant du i^{er} siècle de l'Hégire sur le site palestinien de 'Ayn Zurayb. Cf. Sharon 2004, 167, n° 11, fig. 39). La présence de ces malédiction après des citations coraniques nous rappelle que jusqu'à la fin de l'époque omeyyade, l'unanimité n'était sans doute pas encore faite autour d'une version unifiée et standardisée du texte: des amalgames ou des citations adaptées du Coran étaient encore courantes sur les pierres. Certains, semble-t-il, ne les appréciaient pas.

Pregill

Overflowing with epithets and attributes, a kind of monotheist manifesto glorifying divine majesty, with conspicuous parallels in Biblical and especially psalmic imagery. The tripartite emphasis on omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence seems to reflect the concerns of late antique Christian philosophical theology (i. e., the synthesis of Israelite-Judaic monotheism and Greek philosophical imperatives), anticipating the later emergence of *kalām*. It is interesting to me that the Qurʾānic acknowledgement and appropriation of aspects of this discourse does not extend to an avoidance of anthropomorphism elsewhere in the text, since Jews and Christians had already been problematizing scriptural descriptions of the divine (references to affective or physical manifestations, God’s anger, God’s hands, etc.) for centuries by the time of the Qurʾān’s revelation. Intriguingly, both intermediation and incarnationism – conspicuous aspects of late antique Judaism and Christianity respectively – are decisively rejected here.

Rippin

A major description of God. Nöldeke (*GdQ*¹: 184, n. 2), suggests a number of Biblical sources. The divine royal-warrior imagery dominates here but the issue of divine materiality seems to be troubling the author. The extent to which this was an issue in ancient times has been treated very well in Sommer (2009) and the presence of these assertions in the Qurʾān suggests that it was still alive as a topic of concern. The “fluidity” of God’s body is clearly rejected (there is only one God) but his embodiment is important, reflecting a long standing tension between God as having both a heavenly body and an earthly one (or more than one). What we tend to dismiss as “anthropomorphism” or attempts to use language to express ideas about the divine can perhaps be seen to reflect more literal ideas about the way God was conceived.

Sirry

This passage along with other “throne verses” has been the subject of much discussion especially in regard to the anthropomorphic expression of the Qurʾān. However, there is a certain tension in this passage. God’s transcendence is expressed in terms of what he is not (*via negativa*), the passage also describes God’s throne in such a worldly manner on which He, as in other verses (e.g. Q 10:4; 13:2; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4), reclines (*istawā*). One may understand this passage as being polemical in nature because it seems to polemicize the Biblical notion that “God rested on the seventh day.” Like Genesis, the Qurʾān holds that God created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then took a seat on a throne. However, nowhere in the Qurʾān is it written that he rested on the seventh day. The passage rejects any possibility of associating human attributes such as slumber and sleep with God. Can we infer that the Qurʾān addresses an audience with a tendency of making comparison and anal-

ogy? The phrase “No slumber can seize him nor sleep” is striking not only because it suggests that God is not subject to physical limitations. Of the twenty-two verses, known as “throne verses” (Q 7:54; 9:129; 10:3; 11:7; 13:2; 17:42; 20:5; 21:22; 23:86; 23:86, 116; 25:59; 27:26; 32:4; 39:75; 40:15; 43:82; 57:4; 69:17; 81:20; 85:15), it is the only passage to use *kursī*, an Aramaic loanword, instead of the Arabic ‘*arš*, for God’s throne.

The Qur’ānic phrase *wasi‘a kursiyyuhu l-samāwātī wa-l-arḍ* (His chair encompasses the heavens and the earth) is intriguing because in other places (Q 40:7) it is God himself to whom it is said: *wasi‘ta kulla šay* (“You encompass everything”). This echoes the description of the throne in Jewish apocryphal and rabbinic literature (1 Enoch 25–4; 22:2; 4 Ezra 8:21) in which although created, it there possesses qualities that raise it above other creatures and bring it closer to God: it is made from light; it originates before the world begins; it is inaccessible and endowed with a certain transcendence. Based on this, O’Shaughnessy argues that “the throne in the Qur’ān confirms its scriptural and rabbinic origins” (1973: 205). However, as noted above, like other “throne” verses, the passage under discussion is polemical in nature in such that it is preceded by an argument for the unicity and transcendence of God, the two most important concepts of the nature of God in the Qur’ān.

Tesei

The adjectives *al-ḥayyu al-qayyūmu* (“the Living, the Everlasting”) at v. 255, recall the description of God in Dan 6:26: *ḥayyā waqayyām* (“Living and Enduring”). Furthermore, the following Qur’ānic statement: *lā ta’ḥuḍuhū sinatun wa-lā nawmun* (“slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep”) evokes the sentence of Ps 121:4: *lō-yanūm wālō yīšān* (“[God] will neither slumber nor sleep”). Thus, the verse seems to be characterized by the use of Biblical vocabulary and phraseology.

Toorawa

This verse appears to me to be a response, or reaction, to a number of doctrinal positions from which the Qur’ānic speaker wants to distance himself. This distancing is accomplished by asserting the following: the deity’s oneness (as opposed to multiplicity); everlastingness (as opposed to perishability or death); not being subject to human-like tendencies (as opposed to being in need of rest or upkeep); being fully in control of both terrestrial and otherworldly realms (as opposed to being subject to them); intercession by the deity’s will (as opposed to intercession through offerings or sacerdotal authority); true knowledge of past and future (as opposed to divination); limiting and delimiting human capacity (which is not something humans can do). As for the throne, it may be that similar descriptions are found in Christian and Jewish texts, but it strikes me that the refutations in the characterizations and epithets employed in the verse are equally applicable to other religious groups

and to pagans. It is a rare belief system that does not imagine its deity on a throne and on high.

Younes

[1] The spelling of the word *al-qayyūm* suggests a Syriac origin with the pronunciation *qayyōm*.

[2] The word *ya'ūduhū*, a *hapax legomenon* in the Qur'ān, and written in the *rasm* as *ywdh*, is probably a forced reading of the word *yu'dīhi* “to hurt or harm him.” According to the standard rules of *i'rāb*, the word in that position would be spelled with *yā'*: يُونِيه, not يُوْدِه since it is in the declarative mood. يُوْدِه would be the spelling in the jussive mood. Since the grammarians did not have the option of adding the letter *yā'* to the *rasm*, they inserted a *hamza* before the *wāw*. The insertion of *hamza* in the *rasm*, along with points and diacritics, was of course a wide-spread practice, hence the reading *ya'ūduhū*, a word probably coined to solve a spelling problem.

Zellentin

The theme that neither drowsiness nor sleep befall God is well attested in the Bible already, an illuminating parallel is Isa 40:28 (the Hebrew original and its Syriac translation are quite similar here): “The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, nor is he weary. There is no searching of his understanding.” The Biblical verse combines God’s lack of weariness with an emphasis that humans cannot access his knowledge. The Qur’ān likewise states that God does not grow weary, that his is the earth and that his creatures, heavenly or earthly “do not comprehend anything of his knowledge.” The text indeed builds up to the concession, perhaps in response to ideas such as Isaiah’s summary dismissal of any understanding of the divinity, that humans *can* understand what God wants us to—such as, for example, the Qur’ānic revelation. If there is any dialogue here with “gnosticism,” the broader discourse of salvific knowledge, then we should think about the Jewish anti-gnostic tendencies in texts such as exemplified in the *Clementine Homilies* (see my comments on QS 19) and in *Genesis Rabbah*, the latter of which prohibits to discuss “what is above (the heavens) and what is below (the earth), what is before (creation) and what is after (its end, *Genesis Rabbah* 1:10).” God alone, the Qur’ān states, as if to assent to the rabbis’ law, “knows that which is before them, and that which is behind them,” and He not only knows, but owns and governs “whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth (v. 255).”

The economy of divine knowledge, here as in many other passages (see my comments on QS 3), is thus paramount to the Qur’ān’s theology. Moreover, I would always leave open the possibility that the text, as much as being in dialogue with Syriac and rabbinic traditions, often echoes a likely oral direct engagement of the Hebrew Bible (or its Syriac or Palestinian Aramaic translation). Given the density of Biblical allusions, this seems very likely in the poetic passage at hand. To the ref-

erences mentioned by others we can also add (see Speyer 1931:311) 1 Chr 29:11, which addresses God with *kl b-šmym w-b'rš l-k'*, “all that is in heavens and on earth is yours,” quite close to the Qur'ānic *lahū mā fī as-samāwāti wa-mā fī al-'arḍi*.

Of course the Qur'ān's evocation of “heaven and earth” are testimony to its broadly perceivable Scriptural culture before constituting its specific “use” of particular Biblical verses. Yet the density of the references to various verses may have a clear hierarchy; intriguingly, also in passage from Dan 6:27, mentioned by Dye, Darius declares God's never ending reign and announces God's working of miracles and wonders *b-šmyā w-bār'ā*, “in heaven and on earth,” pointing to the prominence of this intertext for the Qur'ānic passage at hand (perhaps read by employing the lens of Jewish anti-gnosticism). Is the passage then “about” Chronicles or “about” Daniel? The layering of multiple allusions may lead the uninitiated to perceive any “chasing” of such intertexts as confusing and confused, but multi-vocal intertextuality is part of the Qur'ān's theology: its embarrassment of intertextual riches continues the Biblical, rabbinic, and Christian tradition of alluding thickly and simultaneously rehearsing many texts—or many aspects of the one perceived divine text.