

QS 29 Q 30:1–7

30.1 Alif Lam Mim
30.2 The Byzantines have been defeated
30.3 in the nearer part of the land, and yet, after their defeat, they shall be victorious –
30.4 in a few years.
It is God who decides – as it was in the past, so it shall be in future.
That day the believers shall rejoice
30.5 at God's victory, for He grants victory to whomever He wishes. He is Almighty, Compassionate to each.
30.6 This is God's promise, and God does not renege on His promise. But most people are ignorant.
30.7 They know only the externals of this present life, but as for the hereafter they are totally heedless.

30.1 Alif, Lâ, Mîm.
30.2 Les Romains ont été vaincus,
30.3 dans le pays voisin, et après leur défaite ils seront les vainqueurs,
30.4 dans quelques années. A Allah appartient le commandement, au début et à la fin, et ce jour-là les Croyants se réjouiront
30.5 du secours d'Allah. Il secourt qui Il veut et Il est le Tout Puissant, le Tout Miséricordieux.
30.6 C'est [là] la promesse d'Allah. Allah ne manque jamais à Sa promesse mais la plupart des gens ne savent pas.
30.7 Ils connaissent un aspect de la vie présente, tandis qu'ils sont inattentifs à l'au-delà.

سورة الروم
الم (1) غَلِبَتِ الرُّومُ (2) فِي أَدْنَى الْأَرْضِ وَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ غَلَبِهِمْ سَيَغْلِبُونَ (3) فِي بَعْضِ سِنِينَ لِلَّهِ الْأَمْرُ مِنْ قَبْلِ وَمِنْ بَعْدِ وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ (4) يَنْصُرُ اللَّهُ يَنْصُرُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ (5) وَعَدَ اللَّهُ لَا يُخْلِفُ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ وَلَكِنْ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (6) يَعْلَمُونَ ظَاهِرًا مِنَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ عَنِ الْآخِرَةِ هُمْ غَافِلُونَ (7)

Dye

Texte extrêmement ambigu, pour de nombreuses raisons.

On sait que les plus anciens témoins matériels du texte coranique ne connaissent ni points diacritiques ni voyelles. Or si la mise en place, par la tradition musulmane, des points diacritiques et des voyelles est souvent correcte, elle ne l'est pas toujours, car il n'existe pas de tradition orale fiable et ininterrompue qui en garantirait l'exactitude. Il peut donc être légitime, au moins d'un point de vue méthodologique, de la remettre en question.

Concernant le présent passage, on est face à au moins deux problèmes. Premièrement, comment comprendre le verbe à l'accompli (quelle que soit la vocalisation) du v. 2 ? Pour en rester au *textus receptus* : *gulibat al-rûmu* signifie-t-il « les Romains ont été vaincus » ou « Que les Romains soient vaincus ! » ?

Deuxièmement, doit-on suivre le *textus receptus*, et comprendre que les Romains ont été vaincus, puis qu'après leur défaite, ils vaincront *fî biḍ'i sinîna* ? La référence aux guerres byzantino-sassanides serait alors évidente, et on aurait affaire à une prophétie *ex eventu* (et rédigée, par conséquent, après 629). Ou doit-on lire plutôt *sayuḡlabûna*, comme le suggère Kropp, et voir ici une malédiction prophétique (même si Q 30 ne commence pas par des serments, contrairement à Q 85:1–3) ? Ou peut-on lire *galabati al-rûmu... sayuḡlabûna*, et comprendre que les Romains ont

vaincu, mais qu'ils seront défaits dans un avenir proche ? Dans ce dernier cas, on verra dans ce passage un oracle du Prophète destiné à remobiliser et encourager ses troupes après la défaite de Mu'tah (dans les tous les cas, cela s'accorde mal avec l'idée qu'il s'agit d'une sourate mecquoise – ce qui me paraît être plutôt un argument supplémentaire contre la chronologie traditionnelle que contre les interprétations proposées ici). Je serais tenté de rester fidèle au *textus receptus*, mais j'avoue n'avoir aucune certitude sur la question.

V. 4 : pourquoi les croyants se réjouissent-ils? Parce qu'ils se sentent plus proches des Byzantins que des Sassanides? Cela reste à prouver (la suite des événements ne le confirme guère), même si Bowersock (2012: 60–77) argumente en ce sens. Ou plus probablement, parce que la victoire byzantine confirme leurs espérances eschatologiques, en rapport avec les apocalypses que mentionne Tesei?

Hawting

The conventional understanding that this passage alludes to the fighting between Byzantines and Sasanids seems plausible, in spite of the lack of reference to the Persians. Since the accepted vocalizations of *ḡulibat* and *sayaḡlibūna* could just as well be reversed (*ḡalabat* and *sa yuḡlabūna*), the conventional interpretation that the passage refers to Byzantine defeat at the start of the long war and a prophetic prediction that the Byzantines would win in the end is not the only one possible.

Whatever the background to the allusion, it is made to emphasize God's power in the determining of events. The rejoicing of the believers "on that day," although it seems to relate to the foretold victory (of the Byzantines?), has an eschatological ring to it. The apparent break in the sentence at the end of v. 3 and the start of v. 4 is disconcerting. Is the fact that the Byzantines have been defeated (?) "in the nearest land" (v. 3) relevant to the issue of the geographical origins of the materials collected in the Qur'ān?

Imbert

Sur le site syrien du *Ḡabal 'Usays*, se trouve un isolat coranique (un verset coranique gravé isolément, sans aucun contexte): *li-llāh al-amr min qabl wa-min ba'd wa-yawma'idīn yafraḥū l-mu'minūn* (cf. *al-'Ušš* 1964: 249, n. 23). Le verset souffre d'une totale décontextualisation; le Coran *muṣḥaf* rappelle l'omnipotence de Dieu et son action sur la destinée humaine dans le cadre précis d'une prédiction concernant la défaite puis la victoire des Byzantins sur les armées perses qui devait advenir vers 624. Cet épisode est totalement effacé dans le graffiti d'Usays, ce qui paraît étrange sur un site occupé par les Romains et les Ghassanides pour le compte des Byzantins. La péricope d'Usays écarte totalement ce contexte et nous sommes en droit de nous demander à quoi réfère la seconde partie où il est question d'un jour précis où les croyants se réjouiront. Dans le texte du Coran, ils se réjouissent du secours apporté par Dieu (*bi naṣrī Llāh*) ; sur le rocher d'Usays, rien n'est sûr.

Kropp

Since Edmund Beck's 1944 articles on Q 30 little progress has been made, even for the first verses. It seems that the ways of interpretation are blocked by the nearly unanimous thought that these verses refer to historical and recent events, and what could be nearer than to think of the great war between Byzantium and Persia in the 7th century.

But simple questions perhaps could help one to think in another direction.

Why should early Muslims, near to heterodox Christianity or heterodox Judaism, sympathize with either of these two powers? Byzantium was the sworn religious enemy; Persia, after having conquered Jerusalem, very quickly was disappointed in their hopes for getting back the "promised land" and in general was not more generous to both confessions.

This leads to the interpretation as a prophetic curse, meant for the future, the near one and the one in some years. The first perfect is clearly parallel to *qutila* in Q 85 and other examples. And the second exact future *sa-yuḡlabūna* adds to this first curse by saying that "they certainly will be defeated in some years" (and not only at the borders of their country, but everywhere). It is perhaps an idle attempt of an historian's vain mind to find out an event in Muḥammad's or Early Islam's history – if we ever know something reliable from them – which fits to this now reconstructed prophecy. This curse could be uttered at every moment by a member of the growing Muslim community against the Byzantines.

"May the Byzantines be vanquished at the borders of their country! And, certainly, after this their (first) defeat they certainly will be vanquished (definitely and everywhere) in some years. God decides at any time (expression *per merismum!* Not idiomatically translated in almost any of the existing translations!). And that day the believers will rejoice!" (Q 30:1–4).

I frankly admit that for me the main difficulty of this interpretation is not so much grammar and sequence of statements but the fact that the Byzantines (Rūm) are mentioned, the only mention in the Qur'ān. After I succeeded some years ago to eliminate Byzantines and Persians in the pre-Islamic Arabic inscription of en-Nemara (Kropp 1993), I tried here, but without success. Certainly, a prophetic curse against enemies of God and Muslim faith in general fits better into the context; cf. again Q 85:1–9 as the next parallel, where a historical allusion has to be eliminated as well.

Pregill

The first verse is seemingly a reference to a Roman defeat in the Great War with Persia, to be quickly overturned by the Romans; this is perhaps an allusion to the Roman counterstrike under Heraclius in the 620's. The crux here seems to be the rejoicing of the Believers at the Romans' victory (v. 4), which is left unexplained.

A traditional variant alters *ḡulibat al-rūm... sa yaḡlibūna* (they [the Romans] are vanquished... but they will vanquish) to *ḡalabat al-rūm... sa yuḡlabūna* (they have

vanquished... but they will be vanquished) – meaning that in the present the Romans are victorious, but in the future the Believers will overthrow them (which makes better sense of their rejoicing). Cf. Cheikh 1998: the conflicting interpretations of this verse in *tafsīr* reflect shifts in historical circumstances; preference for one or the other reading seems to have been dictated by whether the Byzantines were perceived positively (the Believers will rejoice at their victory) or negatively (the Believers will rejoice at their defeat) at the time.

The strong emphasis here on divine providence in determining such matters implies to me some palpable investment in the outcome by the community. This suggests two different possibilities for interpretation, both of which challenge the traditional account of Islamic origins. If it is the triumph of the Romans that will cause the Believers to rejoice, this implies that the community may have been directly involved in the Roman-Persian conflict in some way while the prophet was still alive (that is, while the Qur’ān was still being revealed). In this connection, I wonder if the oblique verses of Q 8:7–10, universally assumed to be about Badr, might actually refer to such involvement (see comments on QS 11 above).

Alternatively, if it is the Roman defeat that is anxiously hoped for, the obvious context would be a prophesied conquest of Roman territory by the *umma* in the future; this implies a point of origin for this passage after the commencement of the *futūḥ* campaigns, assuming the “prophecy” is actually a reference to current events (e.g., the battle of the Yarmuk in 636), as prophecies typically are. The acknowledgment of Roman victory and anticipation of Roman defeat could also point to the defeat at Mu’ta in 629 as the context, if one is inclined to rely on the *sīra*.

To me, this all indicates most of all the fluidity of the canonical text: the tradition preserves diametrically opposed interpretive options, linked to different vocalizations of the *rasm*, but it is by no means clear which of these possibilities are most plausible without knowing the larger context in which the text was actually composed.

Tesei

The prophecy in these verses clearly describes the conflict between Byzantines and Sasanians, during which the former defeated the latter after a period of initial crisis. It is plausible that we are in the presence of a *vaticinium ex eventu*. The prophecy about the destiny of the Rūm seems in fact a description *a posteriori* of events that already took place. A *terminus post quem* for this Qur’ānic passage could be fixed for the year 628, when Heraclius signed the peace treaty that put an end to the conflict with the Sasanians. The prophecy of the Rūm finds a very precise parallel in a passage of the *History of Maurice* by Theophylact Simocatta (written during the reign of Heraclius). Here, the Sasanian sovereign Khosrow II predicts that the Persians “will hold the Roman state in their power” and that, however, the “Romans will enslave the Persians” after a certain lapse of time (V, 15). What is interesting in this prophecy is the attribution of an eschatological dimension to the victory of the Grae-

co-Roman Empire. In fact, according to Khosrow's prophecy the victory of the Byzantines over the Sasanians would be the very last event before the Last Day (cf. Reinink 2002: 86). A similar eschatological view seems to be expressed at the end of the Qur'ānic prophecy about the Rūm. In particular, I refer to the claim at v. 4 that the believers will rejoice in the day of the Romans' victory. This enigmatic statement is best explained if read as a prognostication about the coming of the Last Day, that would immediately follow the historical events referred to in the previous verses. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand why the Qur'ān should express sympathetic feelings toward the Byzantines' victory. This view seems to be corroborated by the claim at v. 4, "God is in command, first and last," and that at v. 5, "God helps whomever He pleases," both suggesting that the victory of the Rūm follows God's wish and is part of the divine project. That the Qur'ān here is not addressing secular but sacred history is also confirmed by the temporal expression at v. 4: *wa-yawma'idīn* ("and on that day"), and by the sentence at v. 6: "this is the promise (*wa'd*) of God, He does not break His promise." In fact, such terminology sets the day of the Romans' victory in an apocalyptic framework. Thus, it seems that the *vaticinium* found in al-Rūm predicts the same development of sacred history expressed in Khosrow's prophecy: the defeat of the Romans is followed by their victory; this event immediately precedes the end of times. Both predictions reflect larger apocalyptic expectations widespread in the Middle East in the third decade of the 7th century. In fact, several sources of that period certify that the conclusion of the wars between Byzantines and Sasanians was understood as the last event preceding the imminent end of the world.