

MAN'S CREATION FROM CLAY AND FROM SEED IN THE QUR'ĀN

In twenty-nine passages in the Qur'ān, dating from the earliest proclamations made at Mecca to those of the final years at Medina, God is depicted as producing man out of various materials. The vocabulary of these passages is stereotyped, *khalāqa* being used to express the divine activity and *min*, "out of", introducing the material worked upon. The phrase is usually translated as "he created out of", which is admissible if understood as "he brought into being from something that already existed under another form", but not as "he brought forth out of nothing". The commentators in fact give the root *khalāqa* the meaning of "mold" or "measure" in several passages¹ and contrast the creation of heaven and earth from nothing with that of man from previously existing material². On a smaller scale creation is attributed to one whom the Qur'ān portrays as a mere creature, Jesus twice³ being said to create or mold living birds out of clay "with God's permission".

When ascribed to God, creative activity is seen above all as a sign of His power⁴, and so it is not surprising to find it often occurring in the earlier surahs where the aim is to demonstrate this attribute by the "signs" of the creation of heaven and earth and the formation of the human body in the womb⁵. It is only subsequently, in texts revised late in the Meccan period and at Medina, that creation and the mysterious growth of the embryo are used as proofs of God's power to effect the resurrection of mankind on the Last Day⁶.

Understood in this sense the Qur'anic conception of creation stands in closer relationship to that of the Bible than does the commonly cited definition of "bringing into being from nothing".

¹ E. g., Bayḍāwī, *Anwāru 'l-tanzīl*, and *Taj̄sīru 'l-Jalālayn* on 3. 59/52 and Bayḍāwī on 2. 21/19 and 9. 69/70.

² Bayḍāwī on 40. 57/59.

³ In 3. 49/43 and 5. 110.

⁴ Tr. DE BOER, "Khalk", *Encyclopédie de l'Islam* (1st ed.), II, 944.

⁵ RICHARD BELL, *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1953), p. 115.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 115 and 119.

In the concrete Biblical way of speaking, the "chaos" of the first chapter of Genesis comes as close to "nothingness" as does anything in the Old Testament⁷. As for man's creation, both Bible and Qur'ān represent it as God's initiative in producing a rational creature by the sole act of His all-powerful will—a notion close to that which the term has reassumed in recent theological writing⁸.

The Qur'ān often refers simply to man's creation, without determining the materials from which he was formed, but in the twenty-nine verses referred to it does specify the materials. The twenty-nine are here summarized and arranged according to the four periods to which Nöldeke and Blachère assign the 114 surahs of the Qur'ān. Beneath the key word are the numbers of the surah and verse, Flügel's reference⁹ being placed after the diagonal when it differs from that of the official Egyptian edition. This is followed by Bell's provisional dating and by the ordinal indicating the chronological position of the surah according to Blachère.

In his dating Blachère follows Nöldeke's rule of length of verses, while Bell is guided chiefly by content and the association of individual phrases with events in Muhammad's life¹⁰. To some extent, therefore, the two systems can be checked against each other and may be compared with the traditional Islamic chronologies as well as with those established by other Orientalists like Hirschfeld. The time order Blachère assigns to the surah is not always that of all its individual verses, typographical devices and explanatory notes being used in his translation to indicate the exceptions. Further details on the dating of the verses are given in the course of this investigation.

⁷ HENRICUS RENCKENS, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964), p. 85. The "nothing" of 2 Mc 7. 28 probably corresponds to the "formless matter" of Wis 11. 17.

⁸ See JOHN H. WRIGHT, "Modern Trends in Theological Method", *Current Trends in Theology*, Donald J. Wolf and James V. Schall, editors (New York: Image Books, 1965^c), p. 53, and Renckens, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁹ GUSTAVUS FLÜGEL, *Corani Textus Arabicus* (third edition; Lipsiae: Tauchnitz, 1883).

¹⁰ RICHARD BELL, *The Qur'ān Translated, with a Critical Arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1937-39) and Régis Blachère, *Le Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1949-51). Blachère for the most part follows the sequence proposed by THEODOR NÖLDEKE (*Geschichte des Qurāns*; second edition, Leipzig: Dieterich'sche, 1909-38). Bell's system of dating groups of verses rather than surahs is now commonly accepted as more in accord with the way in which the Qur'ān actually originated. See W. Montgomery Watt, "The Dating of the Qur'ān: A Review of Richard Bell's Theories", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1957, 53-54.

God created man out of

(First Meccan Period 612-616 A.D.)	<i>clottings</i> ' <i>alaq</i>	<i>water</i> <i>mā'</i>	<i>a drop</i> <i>nuṭfah</i>	<i>a drop</i> <i>nuṭfah</i>	<i>a drop</i> <i>nuṭfah</i>	<i>a drop</i> <i>nuṭfah</i>	<i>a drop</i> <i>nuṭfah</i>	<i>a drop</i> <i>nuṭfah</i>	<i>a drop</i> <i>nuṭfah</i>
	96. 1 f earliest	86. 5 f early	80. 18/17 f early	75. 37 f Meccan (?)	76. 2 Meccan (?)				
	Meccan 1st	Meccan 9th	Meccan 17th	Meccan 27th	Meccan 34th				
(Second Meccan Period 616-619 A.D.)	<i>clay</i> <i>ḥīn</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ṣalṣāl</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ṣalṣāl</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ḥīn</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ḥīn</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ḥīn</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ḥīn</i>	<i>a drop</i> <i>nuṭfah</i>	<i>a drop</i> <i>nuṭfah</i>
	37. 11 ff Meccan	55. 14/13 f later Mec- can inser- tion	15. 26 f Meccan	38. 71 Meccan	38. Meccan	76/77 Meccan	36. 76 f Meccan		
	52nd	28th	59th	61st	61st	62nd			
(Third Meccan Period 619-622 A.D.)	<i>a drop</i> <i>nuṭfah</i>	<i>water</i> <i>mā'</i>	<i>a drop</i> <i>nuṭfah</i>	<i>water</i> <i>mā'</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ṣalṣāl</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ṣalṣāl</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ḥīn</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ḥīn</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ḥīn</i>
	16. 4 Meccan	25. Meccan	53. late	77. late Mc. or early	15. 28 late Mc. or early	15. 33 Mc. or early	17. late Mc. or early	7. Mc. (?) with	23. 12 ff late Mc. or early
	619- 622 A.D.)	54/56 Meccan	46/47 late	20 Medinan	20 Medinan	late Med.	61/63 Medinan	11/10 f additions	23. 12 ff Medinan
	75th	68th	30th	25th	54th	59th	74th	89th	66th
(Medi- nan Period 622- 632 A.D.)	<i>clay</i> <i>ḥīn</i>	<i>clay</i> <i>ḥīn</i>	<i>dust</i> <i>turāb</i>	<i>dust</i> <i>turāb</i>	<i>dust</i> <i>turāb</i>	<i>dust</i> <i>turāb</i>	<i>dust</i> <i>turāb</i>	<i>dust</i> <i>turāb</i>	<i>they-know-what</i> <i>mā ya'lamūn</i>
	32. early	6. 2 early	18. early	30. early	40. Medi- nan	35. Medi- nan	22. early	3. after	70. 38 f late Medinan
	7/6 f Med.	7/6 f Med.	37/35 Med.	20/19 Med. (?)	67/69 Med. (?)	11/12 Med.	5 f Med.	59/52 f June	624 A.D.
	71st	91st	70th	76th	80th	88th	109th	99th	33rd

Blachère and Bell agree in situating five of these twenty-nine texts in the first Meccan or earliest period of the proclamation of the Qur'ān. The commonly accepted Muslim dating of the surahs, which looks chiefly to the Traditions, confirms the early origin of four of them¹¹. Hirschfeld too, in ordering the twenty-nine passages in question according to rhetorical purpose, puts these five among the earliest texts of his series¹².

The five passages with enough of their context to make each intelligible are as follows:

¹¹ I. e., of all but 76. 2. (This order is given in the official Egyptian edition of the Qur'ān after the titles of the surahs.)

¹² Of the 226 sections which constitute his chronological ordering of the Qur'ān, he puts 96. 1 f first, 76. 2 tenth, 80. 18/17 twenty-third, 86. 5 f twenty-fourth, and 75. 37 twenty-fifth. See Hartwig Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), pp. 36 and 143-45.

96. 1 f. Preach in the name of your Lord who created, created man *out of clottings*.
86. 5 f. Then let man consider out of what he was created. He was created *out of water ejected*.
80. 18/17 f. Out of what did He create him (man)? *Out of a drop*.
75. 37 f. Was he (man) not *a drop of sperm which was emitted*? Then it (the sperm) was a *blood clot* and then He created and shaped (it)...
76. 2. We created man *out of a drop, out of mixtures*.

Several notable similarities appear in these first five texts. [Insert omitted sentence—see copy]. All five are also “sign” material extolling God’s beneficent power. As yet no direct attempt is made to connect human generation with the raising of mankind from the dead on Judgment Day, but, like other “sign” passages, these too seem to be cited merely as proof of God’s power without further application¹³.

A certain progression of thought also appears in these passages. In the first the material in the womb by which man’s beginnings are established is described by an indefinite noun ‘*alaqin*, “clottings”¹⁴. But this is not the ultimate stuff from which man comes, and so—in the second text a prior substance in the process is introduced—“water ejected”, the male element that initiates generation. The third text further determines this element as *nutfah*, meaning either “drop” or “sperm”. The fourth (75. 37) is even more explicit and univocal: man was first a drop of seminal fluid, then a blood clot, ‘*alaqatan*, which is “created”, that is, “molded” and “shaped” by God. The last passage (76. 2) specifies “drop” from another aspect by bringing in the female element: “from a drop, from comminglings (*amshājin*)”, pointing to the mixing of the male and female generative elements¹⁵ to initiate the formation of a new individual.

These details are paralleled in Scripture, especially in the Psalms and the Wisdom literature. Here too reference is often made to God’s forming the human body in the womb as a sign of His wisdom and power. According to the Book of Wisdom man “in the womb was molded into flesh... from the seed of man, and the pleasure that accompanies marriage”¹⁶. God “knit me in my mother’s

¹³ BELL, *Introduction*, p. 119. The direct linking with the resurrection of mankind attempted in 86. 7 f is, according to Bell (*The Qur’ān*, 648), a later insertion.

¹⁴ Baydāwī, *ad loc.*

¹⁵ Jalālayn, *ad loc.*

¹⁶ Wis 7. 1-2.

womb", "curdled me like cheese, clothed me with skin and flesh", say the Psalmist and the author of Job¹⁷. Similar ideas recur elsewhere¹⁸ and parallel those of the Qur'ān in three ways. God is depicted as acting directly, secondary causes and natural processes being passed over or subordinated to the divine action in order to emphasize the Creator's beneficent power. Secondly, the same details of the generative process are introduced: the sperm, the knitting and molding in the womb, and the early phases of embryonic development. Finally, a similar medical theory explaining this development is implied in both sources. According to the ancients, including the Greek philosophers and doctors, the sperm coagulates the blood of the menses to form the embryo. Into this initial substance are then woven flesh, bone, nerves, and skin to form as it were the meshes of a tissue¹⁹. This last process will be described more explicitly in the Qur'ān in a later amplification of the subject near the time of the Hijrah²⁰ when Muḥammad was in closer contact with Syrian Christians and with the Jews of Medina.

Beginning with the surahs of the second Meccan period another block of five passages occurs in which man is said to be created, no longer from sperm, but from clay. The mid-Meccan date of these texts is confirmed by the official Egyptian edition of the Qur'ān, which ranges them between the thirty-eighth and seventy-first places in its chronological sequence²¹. Hirschfeld too locates them between the fifty-seventh and ninety-first places among the 226 sections in order of time into which he divides the Qur'ān.

In the Bible God's direct intervention in the beginning to form man out of the dust of the ground and His presiding at each individual's creation are presented in harmony. In Wisdom, for example, Solomon is depicted as saying, "I am... a descendant of the first man formed of earth, and in my mother's womb I was molded into flesh",²² and Job replies to the Creator, "Remember that you fashioned me from clay... curdled me like cheese... with bones and sinews knit me together"²³.

But in the Qur'ān the two kinds of creation in these early passages are found in apparent opposition and are combined only at

¹⁷ Ps 139. 13; Jb 10. 10.

¹⁸ E. g., in Ps 119. 73; 2 Mc 7. 22 f; Jer 1. 5; Is 44. 24; and Eccles 11. 5.

¹⁹ E. Ostry, *La Sainte Bible traduite en français sous la direction de l'École Biblique de Jerusalem: Le livre de la Sagesse* (second edition; Paris: Cerf, 1957), p. 55, n., and C. LARCHER, *Le livre de Job* (second edition; Paris: Cerf, 1957), p. 68, n.

²⁰ See Surah 23. 14 and the comments on it later in this investigation.

²¹ Only 55. 14/13 is disputed, but most Muslim exegetes hold it to be Meccan. See Blachère, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

²² Wis 7. 1-2.

²³ Jb 10. 9-11.

a later stage of Muḥammad's preaching, in texts dating from late in the third Meccan period and from the early years in Medina²⁴. The first passage in which man is said to be created from clay is 37. 11, an early Meccan text addressed to the polytheists²⁵ and set into a context in which Muḥammad and the signs he offers are made the butt of derisive mockery.

37. 11 ff. So ask them: Are they stronger in mold or those We have created? We have created them *out of sticky clay*. But you wonder while they mock. When they are warned, they pay no attention. When they see a sign, they look for cause to laugh.

Islamic exegesis sees in the reference to "sticky clay" a reminder that the Meccan scoffers are only weak creatures originating from Adam who was molded from clay²⁶. The mockery of the polytheists may have been the occasion for the sudden shift from sperm as man's primal substance to the clay mixed with water²⁷ here proposed for the first time. The scoffers could well have disputed the "sign" of man's origin from sperm by objecting that previous revelation in the Pentateuch had pictured him as created out of earth.

An incidental passage (71. 13/12) from about this time, showing Noah rebuking his unbelieving people, does not say in so many words that man was created out of clay but might be taken to imply it.

71. 13/12 f. Why do you not hope that God will be forbearing, since He has created you *by stages*?

Muslim exegesis so interprets the passage, taking the first of the "stages" to be inorganic elements or dust and the others to be sperm, a blood clot, and the others proposed in the Qur'ān in the third Meccan and Medinan surahs²⁸. Muḥammad may have intended the text even at this early date as a reconciliation of the two statements of man's origin already made, but the meaning of *aṭwā-ran*, "recurrences", "times", is not altogether clear. It is possible too, that the passage may belong to the third Meccan period, since the traditional Muslim ordering of the surahs puts Surah 71 in seventy-first place²⁹ instead of the fifty-third place assigned to it by Blachère, and Bell regards the two verses as additions made to

²⁴ For example, in 23. 12 and 32. 7/6f.

²⁵ BLACHÈRE, *op. cit.*, 152-53 n.

²⁶ Jalālayn, *ad. loc.*

²⁷ Bayḍāwī, *ad. loc.*

²⁸ E. g., in 23. 12 and 22. 5. See Zamakhshari and Bayḍāwī on 71. 14/13.

²⁹ According to the ordering given after the title of the surah in the official Cairo edition.

the surah even as late as the Medinan period, to which he assigns other parts of the same surah.

While the two previous passages remind disbelievers of their own insignificance by an indirect reference to Adam, the reference in the four subsequent verses is direct: God in the beginning molded man's common ancestor out of clay. Two of these, 55. 14/13 and 15. 26, both dating from the second Meccan period³⁰, introduce a new term for the material out of which the first man was formed. All four contrast the origin of mankind with that of the jinn, the latter being depicted as made out of fire.

The first passage (37. 11) to affirm man's origin from clay used the common Semitic noun *ṭīn*, but the two texts now in question (55. 14/13 and 15. 26) use *ṣalṣāl*, an onomatopoeic word with a connotation of "resonance", which the commentators explain as dry clay that rings when struck³². The phrase, "from black mud molded", in the second text Bell regards as a later insertion. It probably dates, like 15. 28 and 33, from around the time of the Hijrah in 622 A.D.

55. 14/13 f. *Out of dry clay like the potter's* He created man, but He created the jinn out of smokeless fire.

15. 26 f. *Out of dry clay* We have created man, *out of black mud molded*; but the jinn We created before out of blazing fire.

In a long passage (38. 71 ff) which all the chronologies put towards the end of the second Meccan period³³ God is twice said to have created "human kind" (*bashar*) out of "clay" (*ṭīn*). The same material is implied in a third verse in this text in which the Creator says, "I created (man) with My own hands". The use of all three expressions strongly suggests a Syrian Christian source. *Bashar* and *ṭīn* have close cognates in Syriac; and Aphraates, a Syrian Christian writer of the fourth century, speaks of God creating man alone of all creatures "with His own hands"³⁴. *Iblīs* too,

³⁰ BLACHÈRE, *op. cit.*, p. 74, regards Surah 55 as a transitional chapter between the first and second Meccan periods and Bell makes 55. 14/13 a later insertion into its context.

³¹ *ṭīn* is used twice in the Qur'ān in a context other than creation—in 28. 38 and 5. 33. On its etymology see Samuel S. Haas, "The Creation of Man in the Koran", *The Moslem World*, XXXI (1941), 269 n.

³² Bayḍāwī and Jalālayn *ad loc.*

³³ Blachère ranks Surah 38 as sixty-first but makes vv. 71-85 a later addition; Bell makes vv. 67-88 earlier than the late Meccan vv. 49-66; and Hirschfeld ranks this passage as fifty-ninth.

³⁴ APHRAATES, *Demonstratio XIII*, n. 11; *Dem. XVII*, n. 7 (*Patrologia Syriaca* (R. Graffin and Ioannes Parisot, editors; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894-1926), I, 563-66; 795-98).

the name used for Satan, a corruption of the Greek *diábolos*, probably entered the Qur'ān through the Syriac³⁵, and the epithet *rajīm* (stoned, deserving of death by stoning, accursed) in 38. 77/78 is a transliterated Syriac adjective also applied to him in the works of St. Ephrem³⁶. Finally, the phrase, "breathed into him some of My spirit (*nafakhtu fihi min rūḥī*) used here and elsewhere in the Qur'ān to describe God's creative breathing into Adam, is found in Syriac cognates arranged in the same partitive construction both in Aphraates and the *Liber graduum*, an anonymous collection of moral and ascetical sermons dating from the early fifth century³⁷.

Aphraates and, to a lesser extent, Ephrem and the other Syrian Christian writers in their turn borrowed many of their Scriptural interpretations from rabbinic sources³⁸, in which man's creation from clay is a commonplace³⁹ based on texts like Job 10. 9, Is 29. 16 and 45. 9, and Jer 18. 6. The figure is carried over into Aphraates, who describes man as "molded" out of earth⁴⁰, a thought closely approximating the Qur'anic sense of *khalāqa* in 38. 71 ff.

Both this passage and its parallels in 15. 26 and 15. 28 and 33 seem inspired by the teaching, common in Judeo-Christian circles in the first few centuries, which represented God as creating seven angels with bodies of fire and choosing His son from among them⁴¹. Satan's refusal to worship Adam is likewise found in a Judeo-Christian apocryphon, the *Life of Adam and Eve* (13. 1—14. 3), which incorporates many legends that arose between the first and fourth centuries of the Christian era⁴². The reason given by Satan

³⁵ KARL AHRENS, "Christliches im Qoran", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, LXXXIV (1930), 176.

³⁶ J. JOSEPHUS OVERBECK, *Ephraemi Opera Selecta* (Oxford, 1865), p. 131, 11.

³⁷ See 15. 29 and 32. 9/8. For the same creative breathing into Mary at the conception of Jesus, compare 21. 91 and 66. 12. Examples of this usage in Aphraates are found in Dem. XVII, n. 7 (P. S., I, 800, 4). See the *Liber graduum*, Sermo XXVIII, n. 1 (P. S., III, 788, 11 f).

³⁸ Regarding Aphraates' use of rabbinic material see *Patrologia Syriaca*, I, xliv-l, and JACOBUS FORGET, *De vita et scriptis Aphraatis* (Lovanii: Vanlinthout, 1882), p. 287. On Ephrem's dependence see IGNATIUS ORTIZ DE URBINA, *Patrologia Syriaca* (Roma: Pont. Inst. Orient. Stud., 1958), p. 71, and GIUSEPPE RICCIOTTI, *Sant' Efreem Siro* (Torino: Marietti, 1925), pp. 139-41.

³⁹ See HERMANN STRACK and PAUL BILLERBECK, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, (Munich: Beck, 1922-28), III, 270-71 in connection with Rom 9. 20-21 for examples.

⁴⁰ See e. g., Dem. VIII, n. 6 (P. S., I 369, 20); Dem. XVII, nn. 6-7 (P. S., I, 793, 22; 797, 9); Dem. XXII, n. 26 (P. S., I, 1049, 3) and Dem. XXIV, n. 53 (P. S., II, 104, 24).

⁴¹ JEAN DANÉLOU, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1964), pp. 109 and 123; Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, III, 678-79; AHRENS, *op. cit.*, 176.

⁴² R. H. CHARLES, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*

for his refusal in the *Life of Adam and Eve* —that Adam is “a younger and inferior being”— is made more concrete in the Qur’ān, probably on the basis of a hearsay version of the Genesis account, by Satan’s excuse, “You created me out of fire, but him You created out of clay”.

38. 71-77/71-78. Once your Lord said to the angels: “I am going to create man *out of clay*. So when I have formed him and have breathed into him of My spirit, fall before him in worship”. And every single one of the angels worshipped except Iblīs; he was a haughty disbeliever. Said He, “Iblīs, what keeps you from worshipping what I have created with My own hands? Are you too haughty or are you of the nobility?” He answered: “I’m better than he. You created me out of fire but You created him *out of clay*”. Said He, “Get out of here, for you are accursed”.

Another block of five texts now returns to the first Meccan theme of man’s creation from sperm. Bell regards all the verses in this group as “Qur’ān period” material and the last two (53. 45/46 f and 77. 22) specifically as late Meccan. This estimate Blachère accepts in its general outline, ranking all five no later than the early third Meccan period. The official Egyptian edition of the Qur’ān puts none of the five after the seventieth place in its chronological ordering and Hirschfeld none later than one hundred and eleventh among his 226 chronologically arranged sections.

36. 76 f. So don’t let their talk sadden you (Muḥammad). We know what they hide and what they show. Doesn’t man realize that We created him *out of a drop*? Then look at him—an open disputer.
16. 4. *Out of a drop* He created man. Then look at him—an open disputer.
25. 54/56. It is He who created man *out of water* and appointed him a lineage and kinship. Mighty is your Lord.
53. 36-46/37-47. Has he (the scoffer) not been told of what is in the pages of Moses and Abraham... that He has created the couple, the male and the female, *out of a drop* when it is emitted?
77. 19-22. Woe on that day to those who call others liars! Did We not create you *out of vile water* and set you in a safe repository up to a known term?

The first impression left by the above group is that of the strong opposition expressed towards Muḥammad in the immediate context. The first phrase of the last text, “Woe on that day to those who call others liars”, is repeated in ten of the fifty verses of Su-

rah 77 as a refrain which was added, according to Bell, around the time of the Hijrah. Muḥammad's feelings about such accusations are shown in the opening words of 36. 76 f, "Don't let their talk sadden you", which embody God's message of consolation addressed to the faithful witness of His unicity and of a final day of reckoning. The first two texts of this block also refer to those who oppose Muḥammad as "open disputers". The commentators identify the subject of the dispute as the final raising of mankind from the dead⁴³, that is, the second creation⁴⁴, but it almost certainly extended to other subjects as well—including the first creation of men out of clay or a drop of sperm, the first and second creations being closely linked in the Qur'ān⁴⁵.

In the one text (25. 54/56) in which opposition is not mentioned in the immediate context, it is even more forcefully manifested a dozen verses earlier, in 25. 41/43: "When they see you (Muḥammad), they only make you a laughing-stock (saying): Is this the God-sent messenger?"

This critical spirit is in accord with what is known of the circumstances of the period. Muḥammad's adversaries at Mecca now become more and more hostile, feeling their leadership and material interests threatened. To cynicism and ridicule they add provocative questions, attacks on intellectual grounds, and attempts to involve in contradiction the new preacher of monotheism and a final resurrection⁴⁶. These attempts to convict Muḥammad of inconsistency in his teaching on the subject of creation, inasmuch as he had at first declared its starting point to be sperm but more recently as clay, are in all likelihood the occasion for the return to the older teaching in this present block of five texts beginning with 36. 76 f.

The first two texts of the series, 36. 76 and 16. 4, are closely linked not only by the final phrase, "then look at him—an open disputer"⁴⁷, but also by the assertion of God's omniscience, "We know what they show", which occurs in 36. 76 and twice in the mediate context of 16. 4, that is, in 16. 19 and 16. 23/24. The next three verses, 25. 54/56; 53. 45/46; and 77. 20, form a unit, both in the ideas expressed and in the traditional interpretation given to them. In 23. 54/56 and 77. 19-22 man is said to have been created out of water, while 53. 45/46 and 25. 54/56 note that he has been created

in English (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913; first edition), II, 137, and S. M. ZWEMER, "The Worship of Adam by Angels", *The Moslem World*, XXVII (1937), 125.

⁴³ Bayḍāwī and Jalālayn *ad loc.*

⁴⁴ See, 6. 94; 18. 48/46; and 53. 45/46.

⁴⁵ See, e. g., 6. 94; 18. 48/46; and 53. 45/46.

⁴⁶ BLACHÈRE, *op. cit.*, 131.

⁴⁷ Bell regards the phrase, "open disputer", as added in Medina, but it well suits the circumstances of this period.

male and female. The sexual differentiation is explicitly stated in 53. 45/46 and implicitly, according to the interpretation of the commentators⁴⁸, in 25. 54/56, Bayḍāwī comparing this text to a first Meccan verse, 75. 37:

Was he (man) not a drop of sperm emitted? Then it was a blood clot and then He created and shaped and made out of it (the sperm⁴⁹) the two sexes, the male and the female.

The "water" in 25. 54/56 and 77. 20 is interpreted as "sperm"⁵⁰ which makes it equivalent to the "drop" of which the other three passages in this block speak⁵¹. The identification is explicit in 77. 21 f, where God reminds the scoffers that He created them out of "vile water" or sperm which He deposited in the womb for the fixed term of human pregnancy.

Here as elsewhere in the Qur'ān the viewpoint adopted is that of the Bible, which tends to ignore secondary causes in order to bring into stronger relief the fact of God's constant guidance both of man and of the works of nature.

At the end of the third Meccan period, on the eve of the Hijrah, Muḥammad comes back to the theme of man's creation from clay in another block of five passages. Four of these resume the early second Meccan account, in Surahs 15 and 38, of Adam's creation out of clay and Satan's refusal to worship a being formed out of so base a material. The fifth (23. 12-14) is the first of a long series of passages, beginning shortly before the Hijrah and running into the first few years at Medina, which bring together the sperm and the clay theories of man's origin previously proposed separately⁵².

Bell dates the five texts of the present block as late Meccan or early Medinan, an estimate accepted in general by Blachère⁵³. The "clay" too, in 23. 12 Bell would make a later substitution for "semen" which originally followed *sulālah*, "an extract". "Clay" is indeed an awkward term in this context, since *sulālah* is better used in connection with a liquid, as Zamakhsharī remarks in his com-

⁴⁸ Bayḍāwī and Jalālayn *ad loc.*

⁴⁹ Jalālayn *ad loc.*

⁵⁰ By Jalālayn as the only equivalent and by Bayḍāwī as the second of two interpretations.

⁵¹ Two other texts belonging also to this period, 24. 45/44 and 21. 30/31, speak of God's creating "every beast out of water" and "everything living out of water". The two do not properly belong with this block because they do not limit themselves to the creation of man and because the "water" is more logically interpreted as part of the substance of living things and not merely as sperm. See Bayḍāwī *ad loc.*

⁵² BELL, *Introduction*, pp. 118-19.

⁵³ BLANCHÈRE, *op. cit.*, 218 n., 375, and 386-87, italicized text and n.

ment on the passage and the Qur'ān itself shows by using *sulālah* with "water" in a passage (32. 7/6) closely following this in time⁵⁴.

15. 28. Once your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to create man *out of dry clay (ṣalṣāl), out of black mud molded*".
15. 33. He (*Iblīs*) said, "It is not fitting that I should worship man whom You created *out of dry clay (ṣalṣāl), out of black mud molded*".
17. 61/63. Once We said to the angels, "Worship Adam!" So they worshipped—but not *Iblīs*. Said he, "Shall I worship one whom You created *out of clay (ṭīn)?*".
7. 11/10 f. We (God) created you; then We formed you; then We said to the angels, "Worship Adam!" So they worshipped—but not *Iblīs*. He was not a worshipper. Said He, "What kept you from worshipping when I told you?" He (*Iblīs*) answered, "I'm better than he. You created me out of fire, but him You created *out of clay (ṭīn)*".
23. 12-14. We created man *out of an extract from clay (ṭīn)*. Then We put him as a drop in a secure resting place. Then We molded the drop into a blood clot. Next We molded the blood clot into a fleshy cud; then We molded the fleshy cud into bones; then We clothed the bones with flesh; then We produced him—another creation. So blessed be God, the best of creators.

The vocabulary of the above passages is remarkable. "Clay" is *ṣalṣāl* in the first two and *ṭīn* in the last three. *ṭīn* will later be carried over into the first two texts of the next series in the Medinan period, forming with them another block of five *ṭīn* passages. To the present stage also belongs the addition "out of black mud molded" found in the first two passages of the group and now inserted, according to Bell, into the earlier text, 15. 26, dating from the second Meccan period.

The first two verses (15. 28 and 15. 33), which resume the clay theory of man's origin, are also set into a context of disbelief and mockery on the part of Muḥammad's opponents. Surah 15 mentions "those who disbelieve" in verse 2, "those who mock the messenger" of God in verse 11, and God Himself defending Muḥammad from the "scoffers" in verse 95. Again the preacher of Islam is pictured under pressure from his enemies, a factor probably contributing to the return to the statement of man's origin from clay found in this set of texts.

⁵⁴ BLACHÈRE too regards most of the development of 23. 12 as a much later addition. *Ibid.*, 276 and 277 n.

The next verse, 17. 61/63, Blachère treats as a variant of 15. 30 ff and a later insertion into a context unconnected with it in thought. He likewise links it up both with the subsequent verse (7. 11/10 f) and with two other verses similar in content, 4. 1 and 7. 189, which were also proclaimed in the last months at Mecca or early in Medina.

To this time too, Bell assigns the last text of the block (23. 12-14)—an early Meccan “sign” revised to suit the present occasion. The expansion of the text after the two opening clauses Blachère attributes to some time after the mid-Meccan period. Hirschfeld gives the whole passage the hundredth place among his chronologically ordered sections, putting it with the so-called “descriptive revelations”, which mark the last stage in the preparation of Muḥammad’s hearers for the “legislative revelations” proclaimed late in Mecca and throughout the Medinan period. The official Cairo edition confirms the late Meccan character of Surah 23 by ranking it seventy-fourth in its chronological series of eighty-six Meccan surahs.

The alteration, then, from “semen” to “clay” in 23. 12 brings this early “sign” text⁵⁵ into conformity with the theory of man’s origin current at the time of the Hijrah. The same text also contains the first inclusive synthesis of previous theories on man’s origin and their incorporation into a single narrative. The combining process here begun will be repeated in more or less complete form in several passages proclaimed in Medina after the Hijrah.

In its present altered version its meaning seems not to have been clear to Muḥammad’s hearers, because Bayḍāwī, resuming the traditions of earlier exegetes, gives for it two possible interpretations. One holds that the “man” here created is Adam and the other that “man” signifies the human race, sprung from Adam’s seed. An excursus of the second interpretation would understand the “clay” of 23. 12 as Adam himself, so called because he was created out of it, and the “extract” as Adam’s sperm; the final sense then being: “We created the human race out of Adam’s sperm”⁵⁶. Zamakhsharī sums up his explanation of the passage by saying that God in the beginning made man out of clay and after that out of a drop of sperm⁵⁷. This is the simplest explanation of a rather complicated text and it would seem closest to Muḥammad’s real opinion, arrived at finally after a long series of shifting theories about mankind’s beginnings.

⁵⁵ See BELL, *The Qur’ān*, 327 n.

⁵⁶ Bayḍāwī *ad loc.*

⁵⁷ Zamakhsharī *ad loc.*

The wonder of man's origin from seed is a notion frequently met with in the sapiential writings and later books of the Old Testament like Job, Wisdom, Sirach, Machabees and many of the Psalms⁵⁸. It is found in several places in combination with the Genesis account of Adam's creation from dust, for example, in Wisdom 7. 1-2: "I am... a descendant of the first man formed of earth. And in my mother's womb I was molded into flesh... from the seed of man". Muḥammad, however, seems to have arrived at a similar combination only gradually—incited perhaps by the scorn for the Qur'ān and its preacher which he reprobates later in the surah⁵⁹.

The explanation of 23. 12-14 that Zamakhsharī was later to propose appears explicitly in 32. 7/6, the text following 23. 12-14 in chronological order. Bell identifies this new passage as early Medinan; Blachère and Hirschfeld put Surahs 32 and 23 close together in time and the official Cairo edition of the Qur'ān makes Surah 32 follow immediately upon Surah 23 in its chronological sequence. This new text in fact seems intended as an explanation of 23. 12-14 which in its present form is an awkward revision whose sense is somewhat obscure. This explanatory intent is manifested even to the point of reusing the peculiar term *sulālah*, "extract", identified by Zamakhsharī as a diminutive⁶⁰ and found only in these two passages. A new verb, *bada'a*, "he began", "he did a first time"⁶¹, is likewise brought into contrast with *sulālah* to give the following clear statement of man's origins:

32. 7/6 f. He made well everything that He created. He created man a first time *out of clay* (*ṭīn*); then *out of an extract of vile water* He produced his descendants.

To "create man a first time" is equivalent to creating the first man Adam⁶² while to "create from vile water" is to produce all other men from sperm, the peculiar terminology being resumed from the third Meccan period, where it was last used in 77. 20⁶³.

Bell with some hesitation assigns two other passages to about this time even though they differ somewhat in style from the rest in the Medinan block. One of them, 6. 2, uses *ṭīn* for "clay" for the

⁵⁸ See, e. g., Jb 11. 9-11; Wis 7. 1-2; Sir 16. 5; 2 Mc 7. 22; and Pss 119. 73; 139. 13.

⁵⁹ See 23. 67-70/69-72.

⁶⁰ Zamakhsharī on 23. 12.

⁶¹ EDWARD WILLIAM LANE, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1863-85), Bk. I, Pt. 1, p. 163.

⁶² Bayḍāwī *ad loc.*

⁶³ Certain other Medinan verses parallel 32. 7/6 in thought but speak in more general terms; e. g., 53. 32/33: "...He knew you well when He produced you from the earth and when you were embryos in your mothers' wombs". See also 11. 61/64.

last time and the other, 70. 38 f, represents disbelievers in all their insignificance as created out of "they-know-what" —which the commentators interpret as sperm. The second text is the more difficult of the two to place in time, Bell hesitating between Mecca and fairly late in Medina, and Blachère opting for an early Meccan origin⁶⁴. Bell's preference for a late Medinan date would yield a more natural interpretation of the context.

6. 2. He is the One who created you *out of clay* (*ṭīn*), then set a term and a term is fixed with Him...
70. 38 f. Does every man of them (the disbelievers) desire to enter a garden of delight? By no means; We created them *out of they-know-what*.

The "term" fixed by the Creator in 6. 2 is understood by the commentators to be the life span of each individual. They also interpret "clay" as the matter from which each human being has his origin because Adam, the common ancestor of the race, was created out of it⁶⁵.

The six remaining Medinan texts resemble the first of the Medinan block, 32. 7/6, insofar as all repeat in one way or another the combining process it carries over from the end of the previous period. They differ from 32. 7/6 f, however, in saying that man was created out of "dust" (*turāb*), a term exclusively Medinan when used in connection with creation.

All nine texts now in question can safely be attributed to the Medinan period, but to fix their exact sequence is neither possible nor necessary. It is sufficient to note that the sequences established for the surahs by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike manifest a general trend that assigns these texts to the later part of Muḥammad's career. Bell, whose chronological arrangement is the most reliable, dates all nine from the Medinan period. His opinion is confirmed by the official Cairo edition of the Qur'ān, whose median chronological rank for the twenty Meccan texts dealing with man's creation out of sperm or clay is forty-first, while the median rank for the nine Medinan texts now in question is seventy-fifth. In Hirschfeld's ordering the same later date for the Medinan block is also evident, his median chronological rank for the Meccan texts being fifty-ninth and for the Medinan block one hundred and thirteenth⁶⁶. Blachère's median rank for the Meccan texts is fifty-ninth and for the Medinan eightieth, the smaller difference being due to

⁶⁴ BLACHÈRE, *op. cit.*, 95. Hirschfeld too makes 70. 38 f an early text, putting it in thirty-fourth place.

⁶⁵ Baydāwī and Jalālayn *ad loc.*

⁶⁶ Hirschfeld, it will be recalled, divides the Qur'ān into 226 chronologically arranged sections.

the fact that his chronology of both periods allows for many exceptions made for Medinan verses found in Meccan surahs and *vice versa*. Two of the nine texts in this block he assigns to Medinan surahs and for five of the seven remaining he allows, with Bell, a probable reediting in Medina⁶⁷.

Three (32. 7/6 f; 6. 2; and 70. 38 f) of this Medinan block of texts have already been discussed. Five of the six remaining have three common characteristics: they make *turāb*, "dust", the primal stuff out of which man was created⁶⁸; they put *turāb* before any other material mentioned in connection with human generation; and they, like 32. 7/6 f, engage in some kind of combining of previous theories concerning the matter from which man originated.

18. 37/35. And his companion said, conferring with him, "Have you denied the One who created you *out of dust*, then out of a drop, then proportioned you as a man?"
30. 20/19. Among His signs is that He created you *out of dust*; then look! you are human beings who are widely propagated.
40. 67/69. He has created you *out of dust*, then out of a drop, then out of a blood clot; then He brought you forth as a baby; then (He conserves you) that you may reach your prime... and that you may attain an appointed term...
35. 11/12. God created you *out of dust*, then out of a drop; then He made you married couples. No woman conceives or gives birth without His knowing it. No one's life is lengthened or shortened unless (it is) in the book (of His decrees)...
22. 5 f. Men! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection, (remember that) We have created you *out of dust*, then out of a drop, then out of a blood clot, then out of a fleshy cud, proportioned and disproportioned... and We make to rest in wombs what We wish up to an appointed term; then We bring you forth as a baby; then (We conserve you) that you may reach your prime... That is because God is the truth...
3. 59/52 f. In God's sight Jesus resembles Adam. *Out of dust* He created him (Adam). Then He said to him, "Be" and he was—the truth from your Lord.

⁶⁷ See BLACHÈRE, *op. cit.*, 328, 355, 419, 595, and 665 regarding 18. 37/35; 32. 7/6; 30. 20/19; 35. 11/12; and 6. 2 respectively.

⁶⁸ Man's being created out of dust and his being shaped by God's hands are often mentioned in Aphraates. See, e. g., Dem. VIII, n. 6 (P. S., I, 370); Dem. XVII, nn. 6-7 (P. S., I, 794, 798, and 799); Dem. XXII, n. 26 (P. S., I, 1050); Dem. XXIII, n. 53 (P. S., II, 103). *Turāb* occurs in eleven other verses, all Medinan or late Meccan according to Bell, in a context other than that of creation.

These six texts together with the three (23. 12; 32. 7/6 f; and 6. 2) immediately preceding them form a network of interconnected ideas and images woven around two basic themes: God's shaping the first man out of clay or dust and His forming Adam's descendants as embryos out of a drop of sperm. The first theme occurs in all nine texts and the second in all but two, namely 6. 2 and 3. 59/52⁶⁹. Four passages (6. 2; 40. 67/69; 35. 11/12; and 22. 5) introduce the notion of a "term appointed" by God for the life span of each man or for the months he spends in the womb. Three (22. 5; 23. 12; and 40. 67/69) return to the early Meccan theory that man originated from a blood clot.

The initial text of the series of harmonizing passages, 23. 12-14, makes this blood clot develop into a "fleshy cud" —an image which appears again towards the end of the series in 22. 5. The same initial text of the series, as has already been noted, also makes the first stage of man's development an "extract" (*sulālah*) of clay, an unusual word which is repeated in the next passage (32. 7/6 f) in a slightly different context, "an extract" of water.

The first text to affirm man's creation out of "dust" (18. 37/35) also speaks of God's "proportioning" (*sawwā*) man's frame or "making it symmetrical"⁷⁰. The same notion is applied in 22. 5 to the embryo which is said to be "proportioned or disproportioned", or "symmetrical or unsymmetrical". To express this last idea the Qur'ān uses a modified form of *khalāqa* (*mukhallāqatin*) which the commentator Bayḍāwī makes the equivalent of *sawwā*, "he proportioned"⁷¹. This use of a form of *khalāqa* to connote "symmetry" or "proportion" also brings out better the basic idea of this Qur'anic term usually translated as "create", but really closer in meaning to "form" or "shape" in the texts discussed⁷². Two texts (32. 7/6 f and 30. 20/19) also dwell on the thought underlying the Creator's blessing on mankind recorded in the first chapter of Genesis: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth". The first tells how God "produces" clay-created Adam's line out of "base" sperm and the second how the human race is propagated far and

⁶⁹ God's guidance of human generation is implicit in 30. 20/19, "human beings who widely propagate yourselves", which Zamakhsharī, *ad loc.*, interprets by citing 4. 1: "From the two (Adam and Eve) He spread abroad many men and women".

⁷⁰ See LANE, *op. cit.*, I, 4, 1476-77.

⁷¹ Bayḍāwī on 22. 5f.

⁷² Compare the German *Schöpfung*, "creation", akin to the English "shaping". See MURET-SANDERS, *Encyclopaedic English-German and German-English Dictionary* (New York: Ungar, 1944), II, 828 s. v. *schaffen*, and 858 s. v. *Schöpfer*.

wide from "dust"—the material out of which its common ancestor was molded⁷³.

The last two passages in the series, 22. 5 f and 3. 59/52, identified as Medinan by Bell and tentatively dated by Blachère from 627 and 631 respectively⁷⁴, are part of a series of texts⁷⁵ that represent God's creative word, *al-ḥaqq*, literally "the truth", uttered to summon creatures into being, to raise the dead, and to produce Adam and Jesus. The unabbreviated version of 22. 5 f, after describing man's creation in elaborate detail, mentions one form of second creation, the restoration of plant life by the water God sends down upon the earth. Then in three short statements it shows how both kinds of creation are effected: "That is so because God is the *ḥaqq* and because He effects the resurrection of the dead and because He is all-powerful". This close linking of God as the creative word, wisdom, and truth (since *al-ḥaqq* connotes all three) with God as the restorer of life in a second creation and with God as possessor of unlimited power well exemplifies the identification, made by the rabbis in explaining the apocalyptic and sapiential writings of the late Hellenistic age, of God's productive utterance with His permanent reality and creative power⁷⁶.

Finally, in 3. 59/52, "the truth from your Lord", that is, "the creative command issuing from God", is added as a title of Adam, who is the grammatical subject of "was" immediately preceding. By implication "truth" or "word of truth" or "creative command" is made a title of Jesus, because the parallelism which these verses affirm between the two persons lies precisely, as Muḥammad sees it, in their both being produced by the divine creative utterance "Be" without the mediation of a human father⁷⁷.

These last two passages, as has been noted above, originated at a fairly late date in Muḥammad's career. They fittingly sum up Qur'anic theology on the subject of human creation—reaffirming all the stages of man's development under the divine creative influence, as Muḥammad had conceived it in increasing detail over

⁷³ Bayḍāwī on 30. 20/19.

⁷⁴ BLACHÈRE, *op. cit.*, 865 and 1029. In the year 627 occurred the Expedition of the Trench.

⁷⁵ Others are 6. 72f; 21. 16ff; 34. 48/47f; and 19. 34/35ff.

⁷⁶ GERHARD KITTEL, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, I, 238 and 241.

⁷⁷ Bayḍāwī and Jalālayn *ad loc.* See 19. 34/35f for the more extended title applied to Jesus and compare the Epistle of James 1. 18 for the same rabbinic term in a context of eschatological creation.

the two decades of his preaching. They likewise reaffirm the basic sense of the Qur'anic *khalāqa*, "he created": the molding of man from dust or clay and his more gradual shaping in the womb, for God is "the truth", that is, unlimited creative power. This creative power can accomplish man's development "by stages"⁷⁸ while setting a limit to his span of life, or can, as with Adam and Jesus, summon him into existence peremptorily by the *haqq*, the word of truth, that irresistibly exacts obedience from the object created⁷⁹.

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⁷⁸ See 71. 14/13.

⁷⁹ See 41. 11/10 and Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'u 'l-bayān*, Maymuniyyah ed., VII, 143, on 6. 72f.