The Koran As A Miracle?

For the sake of argument, try treating the Koran–or any part thereof–as parable. Then contrast it to OTHER parables. (I furnish a list in part 2 of my essay “The History Of Literature”.) When it is held up to some of the greatest literary masterpieces, the juxtaposition should reveal the book’s glaring deficiencies–even when it is read in such a charitable way.

When it comes using a captivating narrative to convey a message, the question must always be posed: Is this propagandistic (as with, say, the “Book of Revelation” by John of Patmos) or is it allegorical (as with, say, “Animal Farm” by George Orwell)? That is: Is it designed to manipulate us or to edify?

In assessing the caliber of writing, we mustn’t confuse grandiloquence for eloquence. There is nothing new about using poignant imagery to express a view of the world–whether it be lurid (Milton and Blake) or solemn (Donne and Coleridge) or

didactic (Byron and Emerson) or sardonic (Molière and Cummings) or romantic (Shakespeare and Keats) or whimsical (Wordsworth and Whitman) or introspective (Thoreau and Frost) or brooding (Lermontov and Percy Bysshe Shelley).

The question arises: Shall we take the tales in Islam's holy book allegorically? This would require analogical deduction ("qiyas"), a faculty that would have to exist independently of having read ANY scripture. Even if we were to take Koranic accounts allegorically ("mutashabih") rather than literally ("muhkam"), we find ourselves in a quandary—as we must wonder how we can know for certain where the metaphor ends and the literal parts begin (and vice versa). (There is no clear demarcation; so the heuristic becomes rather arbitrary.) In any case, the crudely-hewn tales recounted in the book fail to convey any important moral lessons (see my essay on "The Boundary Conditions Of Metaphor").

A bit of counsel is given here and there; but nothing that would strike a marginally erudite reader as especially revelatory…let alone earth-shattering. There is not so much as a single clever aphorism in the entire book.

When one is well-read in great literature, there is no way for the Koran—even as parable—to be seen as anything but crudely-fashioned, puerile exposition; with little to offer in the way of edification. Coming to Islam's holy book with a sober mind guarantees that reading it will be—at best—a disheartening experience.

It is important to keep in mind that—unlike most other holy books—Islam's holy book is fashioned as a VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT of god's speech. This is literal; not figurative. Mohammed of Mecca was not offering ideas of his own; he was—so the story goes—merely relaying a series of divine communiques to his worldly audience. Those communiques are dubbed "N-Z-L" (rendered "tanzil" / "anzal" / "nazal"), and were conveyed via a divine emissary: the arch-angel, Gabriel.

In this sense, the Koran is not analogous to the Hebrew Bible; it is analogous to the snippets of dialogue ascribed to Yahweh WITHIN the Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim (most famously: the Mosaic Decalogue). Meanwhile, the Koran is not analogous to the Gospels; it is analogous to Jesus of Nazareth himself (insofar as Jesus is considered the Christ; and thus an embodiment of THE WORD). Interestingly, even the authors of the Koran don't seem to understand this distinction; as they stipulate that the Koran was "revealed" to Mohammed in the same way that the Torah was

“revealed” and the Gospel was “revealed” (3:3). According to this statement, the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were all “wahy” in the same sense. But, according to standard Islamic lore, that is not so.

There are other key differences between the various Abrahamic scriptures. Most sacred text was composed as “scriptura” (that is: as actual text) AB INITIO. In this scenario, the hands of the various scribes were simply guided AD HOC (by divine inspiration). By contrast, the Koran was not originally conceived as a text. Again: the physical BOOK (“kitab”) known as the RECITATIONS (“Al-Qur’an”) is merely a post-hoc transcription of a spoken word that was (purportedly) delivered verbally in real time to a certain person (a Bedouin merchant known as “Mu-H-M-D”) over the course of 23 years. Hence, the material was meant to be “keryana” (Syriac for “that which is recited”). This is made clear in the Koran itself—most notably in 75:17.

Another fundamental distinction: The Old and New Testaments are each small libraries of distinct—sometimes disparate—texts from different sources at different times; often in different languages. By contrast, the Koran is seen as an indivisible collection of verses; from a single source, given to a single person in a set period of time.

That being the case, we are met by yet another quandary. The first words of the first major chapter (after “Al-Fatihah”): “This is the book!” This is a peculiar thing to say when proffering something that was merely a series of “Recitations”. (The pronouncement is repeated in the opening passage of chapters 11 and 14.) What’s even more interesting is that the Koran talks about the Koran throughout the Koran, boasting about itself from cover to cover. (Meanwhile: Scattered throughout the Koran are threats against those who fail to heed the Koran. In a sense, the book annotates itself. Such self-referentiality brings into question its authenticity.)

Not only is the book described as a SOURCE OF wisdom; the book ITSELF is referred to as wise–as in 31:2. All this comes off as a kind of pleading. Books that brag about THEMSELVES (touting how wonderful they are) are suspect, to put it mildly.

For devout Muslims, the proof that Mohammed of Mecca was, indeed, the Last messenger of the Abrahamic deity (the Seal of the Abrahamic prophets, delivering THE FINAL revelation to mankind) is that the Koran ITSELF is a miracle. Whereas JoN performed miracles to prove his divine nature (and so couldn’t possibly have been

merely human); the divine nature of the “Recitations” is proven by the fact that what it says—and how it says it—is believed to be MIRACULOUS; and so couldn’t possible have been contrived by humans.

So the question becomes: Were the “Recitations” miraculous? As we’ll see, the answer is incontrovertible: No; not even close. In fact, the only thing that’s miraculous about the Koran is that anyone still believes that there is anything miraculous about the Koran.

The supposition that Koranic verse is “i’jaz” (inimitable) is immediately revealed to be absurd the moment any literate person reads a few passages in Islam’s holy book. Instead of un-matched (and un-matchable) eloquence, one encounters crudely-fashioned exposition. Instead of exquisite phraseology, one finds only sloppy wording. Instead of profundity, one finds only puerility.

A key element of Koran fetishism is the fetishization of Classical Arabic: Islam’s liturgical language. Contrary to the spurious claims of proponents (fetishism involves delusive thinking as well as chronic obsession), Clasical Arabic (CA) is an entirely derivative language—which is to say that it is hardly timeless; and actually an accident of history like any other language (see Appendix 2).

Keep in mind how many people have been stupendously impressed by trash pulp throughout history…to this very day. Some people think that “Dianetics” is the most brilliant book ever written. This does nothing to attest to its actual merit. The same goes for the Torah, the Book Of Revelation, Dianetics, The Purpose Driven Life, The Secret, and countless other blockbuster pieces of pulp trash (see my essay: “The History Of Sacred Texts”).

The galumphing, perfunctory stylization of Koranic verse is surpassed only by the puerility of its contents. That is, its imagery is cartoonish–managing to be both crude and overwrought at the same time. In hearing Koran fetishists croon about the (imagined) exquisiteness of the text (enraptured by an eloquence that exists only in their own minds), we might bear in mind that someone accustomed to nothing other than chaff will fail to recognize the culinary poverty of the high-sodium gristle before him in the way that an astute gourmand would. Not all discernment is equal.

It stands to reason that the authors of the Koran were obviously very impressed with their own writing. Comically, 72:1 notifies us that even some JINN were mesmerized by the “balagha” [eloquence] of the “Recitations”. Such conceit is unsurprising.

Indeed, the self-praise found in the Koran is typical of sacred texts. We have seen the same thing with such sanctified drivel as, say, the Book(s) of Mormon. The authors of such tracts were quite enamored with themselves, and expected their readership to be extremely impressed as well.

The question is: Does the purported virtue of any given text withstand the test of time? For the Koran, the answer is a resounding “no”. This infelicitous verdict becomes especially pronounced in the advent of the Enlightenment, when sage exposition became readily available to the common man.

Contrast this with something like Homer’s epic poetry (which is about 16 centuries OLDER than the Koran), for which the answer is a resounding “yes”. The same goes for, say the “Tao Te Ching” (which is over 13 centuries older). (I explore more examples in party 1 of my essay: “The History Of Literature”.)

Many have crooned about the aesthetic merits of tajwid. Even when rendered melodious by the murattil / mujawwid, such “tarteel” only makes the material SOUND pleasing. Amidst their swooning, those who fetishize the Koran fail to realize that the hypnotic character of sonorous recitation does not magically imbue THAT WHICH IS RECITED with wisdom, or even prove that it has aesthetic value.

The mischaracterization of the Koran is largely attributable to confusing grandiloquence for eloquence. Confusing nebulousness for sagacity is the mistake adolescents often make; yet it is a mistake routinely made by those who have succumbed to Koran fetishism. {11}

Let us now turn to a critical analysis, which proves—beyond any doubt—that the Koran is not only not an estimable book; it is indubitably deficient.

An Undeniable Case of Shoddy Writing:

The first open critics of the Mohammedan movement were the freethinkers from the 9th century: Abu Isa Muhammad ibn Harun al-Warraq and Abu al-Hasan Ahmad ibn Yahya ibn Ishaq al-Rawandi; both from Khorasan (eastern Persia). The former was known for making an observation about the Koran's protagonist (regarding the doctrine of pre-destination): "He who orders his slave to do things that he knows him to be incapable of doing, then punishes him, is a fool." (For more on "qadar", see my essay, on "Fiduciary Theology, The Straight Path, And Pre-Destination".) The latter composed a tract dubbed "Kitab al-Zumurrud" [Book of the Emerald], in which he brought to light several theological snafus found in Islam's holy book.

Unsurprisingly, most critical commentary emerged during the Enlightenment. For Edward Gibbon, the Koran was an "incoherent rhapsody of fable." Thomas Carlyle called the book an "insupportable stupidity" and a "wearisome, confused jumble." And German scholar Salomon Reinach wrote: "From the literary point of view, the Koran has little merit. Declamation, repetition, puerility, a lack of logic and

coherence strike the unprepared reader at every turn. It is humiliating to the human intellect to think that this mediocre literature has been the subject of innumerable commentaries, and that millions of men are still wasting time absorbing it."

But don't take THEIR word for it. The best argument against the Koran's purported virtues is the Koran itself. Freethinkers around the world should encourage people—ALL people—to take the time to read the entire Koran (in their own language, using a translation that has widespread approval). Only when one sees for oneself what is in the book can one truly grasp the (abysmally low) caliber of writing and the slew of glaring mistakes. {1}

German palaeographer, Gerd R. Puin of Saarland states: "The Koran claims for itself that it is 'mubeen', or clear. But if you look at it, you will notice that every fifth sentence or so simply does not make sense… The fact is that a fifth of the Koranic text is just incomprehensible. If the Koran is not comprehensible, if it can't even be understood in Arabic, then it is not translatable into any language… Since the Koran claims repeatedly to be clear but obviously is not, there is a serious contradiction."

That is an understatement.

Over and over again (e.g. 3:138, 44:58; 54:17, 22, 32, and 40), the Koran tells us that it is crystal clear ("mubeen") on all matters. Really? This is a peculiar claim to make considering the actual contents of the book. 2:118 explains that god's final message to mankind will be cogent to those who already believe that god's revelations to MoM were perfectly articulated. (Funny how that works out.)

So let's start with the main point: Islam's holy book is comprised with what can only be described as shoddy writing. Many passages would be kicked back by any competent editor (or promptly returned to the student by any writing professor worth his salt) covered in red ink with "unacceptable" emblazoned across.

The slew of awkward constructs with which the text is riddled are primarily attributable to the fact that the verses were originally composed in SYRIAC, and were only later translated into Classical Arabic (see my essay on "The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Text"). Much of the rest is either puerile, inconsistent, or just incoherent. Indeed, there are over THIRTY ayat of mere SOUNDS (letters) that go completely unexplained–and thus have no discernible meaning. Behold the opening verse of surahs 2, 3, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 36, etc. {4}

Are we to take seriously the declaration that all things in the Koran are perfectly

clear? One need only take a moment to read, say, Surah 105 to see that this is not the case. The articulation is often hackneyed; and whenever it is clear, it is maudlin. In other words, the poorly-written verse is overwrought even when it is intelligible.

The Koran explains EVERYTHING? Really? The book is riddled with dated references (e.g. 5:103, 71:23, and 81:8). It is also riddled with references to inexplicable figures (e.g. Shu'ayb in Surahs 7 and 11, As-Samiri in Surah 20, Dhul-Kifl in Surahs 21 and 38, Luqman in Surah 31, Idris in Surahs 19 and 21, etc.) Who are these people? The original audience was obviously expected to know. The authors assumed that readers 14 centuries later would be familiar with these figures. Obviously, this is not the case. {5} The reference to "Dhul-Qarnayn" (one with horns) in Surah 18 likely pertains to Alexander the Great. But for those listed above, few have any idea.

Other parts of the book are entirely inexplicable. Surah 97 tells us something about a 1,000-month-long "Night Of Decree". No explanation is given for this.

For those who insist the book is exquisitely written–nay, inimitable–, ask them about 22:15, in which the reader is told to commit suicide by hanging himself (if, that is, he really wants to test his Faith). (Marvelous advice.)

One of the more amusing flubs involves what seems to be a slip of the tongue in 19:81-82–where god himself (implicitly) recognizes other gods.

In several instances, we encounter roughly the same statement with discrepant phrasing—as with, say, 2:62 and 5:69. (The statement actually occurs a third time, in a different way, in 22:17; as if the authors couldn't quite make up their mind how to make the point.)

Moreover, the book is festooned with sloppy syntax. Take, for instance, the seventh verse of chapter 17: "If you do good, you do good for yourselves; and if you do evil, you do evil [against yourselves]." Interpreters naturally insert "against yourselves" to ensure the second part makes sense, but the statement actually ends "fala-ha", which simply means "it is for it". Not exactly the epitome of eloquence.

This is not an isolated case. Bracketed insertions are needed THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE BOOK in order to make certain lines read better. Such ad hoc interpolations are used promiscuously whenever the Koran is translated; because the composition

is sloppy in so many places; and the presentation is quite clumsy. With bracketed insertions, the idea is to coyly fix the wording, then pretend it was as it is now presented ALL ALONG.

YET…all this fudging often passes without notice. Had the verses been perfectly crafted, we would not encounter so many bracketed insertions throughout interpretations of the Koran. The fact that they are needed cannot be attributed to trans-language interpretation. The "lost in translation" excuse is a cop-out; as this is not a problem for ANY great work of literature in ANY source-language.

The first time the Koran was rendered in anything other than CA was a Latin version produced in 1143 by Robert of Ketton (during his time at the Benedictine monastery at Cluny, in France) as "Lex Mahomet Pseudo-Prophete" ["Law Of Mohammad, False Prophet"]. The title for which he opted indicates that he was unaware that the "Recitations" were believed to be a verbatim transcript of god's speech, not a tract about creedal positions, composed by a person. Another Latin version was produced by the Swiss publisher, Johannes Oporinus of Basel. The production of that edition was overseen by Martin Luther; and published (that is, PRINTED) in 1543. The motive for doing so is telling: Luther wanted everyone to see for themselves how abysmal the Mohammedan book was.

The key here was accessibility: As was the case with the vernacular renderings of the Latin Vulgate, Luther was confident that if people could simply read the Koran in a language they understood, they would recognize its glaring deficiencies. Ironically, this is likely the reason Islamic leaders did NOT want the Koran translated out of CA. They wanted to limit its analysis strictly to within the purview of the ulema (read: properly initiated). After all, the Last Revelation was meant to be HEARD (and RECITED via rote memorization); not read—and critiqued—by the rank and file. And so it went: Within Dar al-Islam, no scrutiny was allowed outside of designated authorities. (This was effectively the Islamic analogue of the sacerdotalism in the Catholic Church.)

As is the case to the present day, the surest way to see how deficient the "Recitations" are is to simply read them in a language in which one is fluent.

Another point worth noting: Omniscient beings delivering important messages are unlikely to resort to hearsay. Yet 25:5 reads "And they say…" as if the Creator of the Universe were party to scuttlebutt.

Even as Koran-fetishists chortle about the unsurpassed eloquence (“balagha”) and inimitability (“i’jaz”) of their holy book, we find a veritable salmagundi of shoddy writing. What might honest MUSLIM scholars say of the Koran’s impeccable articulation? In his book, “23 Years”, famed Iranian writer Ali Dashti noted:

“The Koran contains sentences which are incomplete and not fully unintelligible without the aid of annotation [commentaries]. [It contains] foreign terms, unfamiliar Arabic terms, and terms used with abnormal meaning. [It contains] adjectives and verbs inflected without the observance of the concords between gender and number. [It contains] illogically and ungrammatically applied pronouns, which sometimes have not referent; and predicated which in rhymed passages are often remote from their subjects. Those and other such aberrations in the language have given broad scope to critics who deny the Koran’s eloquence.” {2}

This is what happens when an honest person, free from the intellectual constraints of iron-clad dogmatic trammels, reads the Koran without bias and actually pays attention to what it says; then has no qualms reporting what he finds. Those who come to Islam’s holy book with open eyes and an open mind will concur with these assessments…assuming, that is, that they have basic reading comprehension skills and the courage to be forthcoming about what they find. {3}

The hodge-podge of material of which Islam’s holy book is comprised reflects the ad hoc manner in which it was cobbled together. It is not so much a resplendent medley of brilliant insights as it is a discordant miscellany of puerile musings and half-baked ideas. Alas, Koran-fetishists crow about the book as if the hackneyed phrasing, the tortured exposition, and the glaring incongruities were marks of unfathomable genius.

In its final form, the “Recitations” is a garbled mess of discordant ideas. Take, for instance, the dialogue of 7:12-18. It’s like the script for a bad soap opera. Or take the blatantly contrived dialogue between god and Jesus in 5:116-117—a transparent attempt to rebuff Christian lore. Or take the statement to not be disrespectful to one’s parents in 17:24. The Creator of the Universe admonishes his audience: Whether one or both of [your parents] reach old age with you, say not to them, ‘Uff’.”

We should bear in mind that both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are a kladderadatsch of ancient myths, songs of worship, enumerations of laws, metaphor-infused political propaganda, prophecies, gospel accounts, apocalypses, and a fair amount of mystical mumbo-jumbo. By contrast, the Koran is first and foremost presented as WARNING, then an INSTRUCTION MANUEL. In other words, while the Judeo-Christian scriptures can be taken metaphorically, Islam's holy book is meant to be taken at face value…even when what it says is rather inscrutable. (To take the Koran figuratively is to disregard the Koran's demand to be taken literally; and thus to contravene the Koran.)

All this becomes even more confounding once we realize that much of the material had been lifted from pre-existing folklore (see my essay, "Syriac Source-Material For Islam's Holy Book").

Inconsistencies abound (see my essay on "Genesis Of A Holy Book"). This also pertains to phraseology. In many places the Koran is addressed exclusively to MoM (i.e. in the second person) before reverting to the (more standard) first and third person voices. For example:

- In passages like 5:67, 38:29, 40:55, and 48:1-2, god directs statements to MoM personally. In Surah 33, god devotes a lot of time addressing MoM (verses 1, 28, 37, 50, and 59).
- In verses like 2:186, 3:183-185, 17:89-96, 29:50-55, 33:59, and 72:20-23, god gives MoM special instructions.
- In passages like 15:49-50, 66:1, and 79:42-45, god asks MoM a question.

Meanwhile, in 68:2-6, god reassures MoM that he is not insane.

This is all rather quizzical. It is actually a literary trick known as a "raisonneur". The voice is effectively that of an "author's avatar", strategically–if clandestinely–inserted into the text as a didactic device. (For more on this peculiar feature, see Appendix 1.)

In Surah 93, god tries to PERSUADE MoM: his own messenger. This is odd. Did the rest of mankind need to be privy this? Did god really need to beseech his designated Last Prophet?

It's as if the Creator of the Universe wants to ensure that everyone is "in on" the things that he said to MoM personally. (Recall: This has all be written on eternal tablets since the beginning of time. So such comments are puzzling.) That is all

addressed to MoM in the 2nd person. But elsewhere, verses refer to MoM in the third person (e.g. 3:68). This is a disjuncture in narrative style that serves no didactic purpose.

In 22:17, the Koran's protagonist refers to the Zoroastrians as "majusa" (Magians / Magi)—a comment that is clearly not from an omniscient point of view.

Regardless of whether or not one concedes that the hackneyed verse of Islam's holy book exhibits puerility, we might ask: How could a man possibly have produced such verse? Well, let's see how possible it really may have been. Alexander Pope was publishing his poetry by the time he was 12 years old (e.g. "Ode To Solitude"). By his 21st birthday, he'd published his first major work, "Pastorals"…even though he'd had a sketchy education (thanks to Roman Catholic precedent) and been ill much of his youth. Question: How could this possibly be? Was this some act of god?

In terms of duration of ministry, it is rather odd that the Abrahamic deity accorded to his Last Prophet only two decades (just two years longer than he accorded to Joseph Smith). Even as Jesus' ministry only lasted for about three years (give or take a year), the Creator of the Universe saw fit to allow the likes of L. Ron Hubbard to proselytize for over three decades. MoM's untimely death makes no sense (a point I explore in part 2 of my essay series "On Mohammed").

The book's thematic redundancy is astounding to behold. The authors (pointlessly) repeat the tales of Noah and the Flood, of Moses and the Pharaoh, and of Joseph and Lot…over and over and over and over. Why do this? Surely, one re-telling of each Biblical story is sufficient (if, that is, the re-telling is done well enough).

We might also note the commonplace inconsistency of pronoun usage.

The Koran's protagonist has an idiosyncratic way of expressing himself. Never mind the mere technicality of sometimes referring to himself in the monarchical plural and at other times in the normal singular; what of the Koran referring to god in the first person and then in the third person within the same passage? A few examples:

- 6:99 in which **HE** sends down water from the sky… Then from it, **WE** bring forth vegetation.
- 7:182-184, in which "**WE** (god) lead them… **I** (god) give them… **HE** (god) is but a…"
- 22:66-67, in which "**HE** (god) is the one… **WE** (god) have appointed."

- 24:55, in which "**HE** (god) will grant…**HE** granted… **HE** will establish…**HE** will cause… Let them worship **ME** (god)."

The protagonist of the Koran sometimes even refers to himself in the first person and in the third person WITHIN THE SAME VERSE–as in, say, 3:145. In other places, god adjures his audience to address god (referring to himself in the third person)—as with 3:26. This is all rather odd, even for a language that conjugates in the (Old Semitic) manner that it does.

The frequent occurrence of anacoluthon (syntactic inconsistency) indicates a disjointed composition–that is: a panoply of disparate authorships. The clumsily agglomerated nature of the Koran becomes evident upon reading almost any chapter. It is obvious that the book is the product of an ad hoc process of various people at various times consolidating snippets of text from a wirrwarr of different sources, each of which wrote in a different voice. This is not to say that the agglomeration was done in a slapdash manner; it is to say that it was done by people who's literary skills were–shall we say–wanting.

Indeed, there are several places where god refers to himself in the third person in one sentence, then in the first person in the very next sentence (e.g. 21:69-70). This indicates that fragments were cobbled together without consideration for grammatical consistency. Needless to say, a divine super-being would most likely have thought this through a bit better. {6}

We might be charitable and suppose that verses in which god is referred to in the third person, even as the message is FROM GOD HIMSELF, might be done for rhetorical effect. Even so, some of the verses in the third person STILL do not make sense–most notably: imprecations TO GOD. For example, 9:30 reads: "May god destroy them!" ("them" being non-Muslims, of course). Is god pleading with HIMSELF? {7}

The text often transitions between 3rd person (general declamations) to 1st person (addressing MoM personally, as with, say, 4:60-70).

In 33:56, the Koran's protagonist and his angels do "salat" for MoM. In other words: GOD PRAYS. {8}

Never mind the thematic redundancies over the course of the book; there is often even semantic redundancy in a single verse. This happens in the basic form: "the happy people were filled with happiness" (where a noun is qualified by the same

descriptor, first before, then after). This kind of gratuitous repetition WITHIN THE SAME CLAUSE happens many times throughout the Koran. Even in Classical Arabic, this is a sign of very poor writing.

It is sometimes claimed that such redundancy is done for some kind of poetic affectation…or for rhetorical effect (as with, say, epizeuxis); or simply for the sake of rhythm. When it comes to sacred scripture, such rationalizations ring hollow–unless, that is, one concedes that one is dealing with very bad poetry. No decent poet would write that "the X people were of X-ness". Such wording is fatuous…in ANY language.

To make this indictment stick, it is not necessary to refer to lines like, "punish [the non-Muslim] with a punishment by which no one else has been punished" (5:115)… or even the repetition found in passages like 69:1-3, 74:18-20, and 78:4-5. All of these instances can be rationalized thus: "The repetition is used poetically–for the sake of rhythm or emphasis." That is: It is simply a use of epizeuxis. {9}

These excuses can't be made without eliciting a snicker.

Nor am I referring to refrains, such as is found at the end of 62:1 and 62:3. Arguably, in such verses, such redundancy is done for rhetorical effect–and, presumably, sounds somewhat reasonable in Classical Arabic (CA). I am inclined to give such occurrences the benefit of the doubt.

For this indictment, refer to passages like:

- 2:121, in which god instructs his audience: Recite [the book] with its true recital."
- 7:164, 9:74 and 18:87, in which god will "punish with a terrible punishment."
- 8:17, in which god is "testing believers with a good test."
- 9:46, in which disbelievers "prepared for it some preparation"; and are told to "remain with those who remain."
- 15:85, in which we are told to "forgive with gracious forgiveness."
- 17:16 and 25:36, in which god "destroyed with complete destruction."
- 22:74, in which non-Muslims have not "appraised god with true appraisal."
- 24:1, in which god mentions a passage that he'd "sent down and appointed, and We have sent down in it signs, clear signs, that you will gladly remember."
- 25:21, in which people were "insolent with great insolence."
- 28:61, in which god "promised a good promise."

- 33:11, in which believers were “shaken with a severe shaking.”
- 33:23, in which Muslims will not “alter with any alteration.”
- 33:71, in which MoM “attained a great attainment.”
- 34:7, in which those who died “disintegrated in complete disintegration.”
- 51:9, in which “deluded away from the Koran is he who is deluded.”
- 56:35, in which god boasts that he has “created [houri] of special creation.”
- 69:10, in which god “seized them with a seizure.”
- 74:45, in which god “plunged with the plungers.”
- 74:48, in which “the intercession of intercessors” shall have no benefit.
- 87:8, in which god will “ease you toward ease.”

Two dozen examples not enough? Islam’s holy book sometimes even repeats the same statement twice in a row. 94:5 reads: “Surely, with every hardship there is ease.” The very next verse reads: “Surely, with every hardship there is ease.” Brilliant. 102:3 reads: “No! You are going to know.” The very next verse reads: “No! You are going to know.” Is this done for “effect”? God only knows. To be so gratuitously repetitive may be some sort of mnemonic strategy—designed for orality amongst simple-minded audiences. {9}

Meanwhile, the (incessantly redundant) praise for the book’s protagonist is utterly inane. The most widely esteemed of such passages seems to be 2:255…which, alone, hardly qualifies as mediocre poetry…let alone a gem of earth-shattering insight.

The Koran is riddled with oodles of redundancies that occur within the same clause—as in Surah 109. This is something that is difficult to explain away…short of claiming the author of the Koran was E.E. Cummings or Shel Silverstein. Any purported mellifluence of such redundancy misses the point here. A dexterous author would manage to create mellifluence WITHOUT such redundancy, as masterful poets so often do. The author of such passages was certainly no linguistic maestro.

We could go on and on about the lack of purported “elegance”. Take, for instance, 19:20, in which Mary (mother of Jesus) asks, “How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste?” Being chaste MEANS that “no man has touched” her; so the elaboration is gratuitous. (Imagine her saying: “I’m unmarried and have no husband”.) Alas, in the Koran, such redundancy is

commonplace.

Common rationalizations for such (intra-clause) semantic redundancy include:

- It is done for emphasis.
- It is done to maintain rhythm.
- Such wording makes more sense in CA.
- Such wording sounds prettier in CA.
- These problems disappear altogether when the verse is read in CA (due to the unique nature of its grammar / lexicon / orthography). Thus, only in the translation does the redundancy seem emerge AS SUCH.
- It is endemic to the syntax of CA, so it can't be avoided. But no matter; for it is more melodious that way. Therefore it is justified.

One does not need to be fluent in CA to see that such rationalizations are hogwash. If we survey modern Arabic writing (specifically, literature in Arabic that is estimable), we don't find this problem. More to the point: This peculiar issue is not encountered in ANY OTHER language (in the event that we translate great literature from around the world, from different eras, into English).

Are we to suppose, then, that this odd idiosyncrasy is unique to CA? Such special pleading strains credulity. Those with level heads can't help but conclude: The phenomenon is not the result of a "glitch" in translation; it is the result of SHODDY WRITING.

The unavoidable fact is that the Koran is not the quintessence of elegance. On the contrary, it is the polar opposite of elegance. We don't need to know that the deniers are in denial or that the wrongdoers are doing wrong…any more than we need it specified that "fat people" are fat. If I write that I "admire you with admiration", you might question my writing skills. Thus, in 11:38, when Noah says, "If you ridicule us, we will ridicule you just as you ridicule us," we must wonder who the author of the dialogue might be. Nobody very articulate, to be sure.

Meanwhile, inter-verse repetition is sometimes employed to the point of distraction (presumably for rhetorical effect). Take, for instance, the exhausting refrain used in 55:13-77. During the course of this passage, the text repeats "So which of the favors of your lord would you deny?" THIRTY-ONE times (almost every other line). Such repetition "for effect" is done in other places–such as in Surah 77, in which

“Woe, that day, to the deniers” is repeated TEN times in the course of a single page (verses 15-49). Meanwhile, 75:34-35 proclaims: “Woe to you, and woe! Then woe to you, and woe!”

Needless to say, this is anything but elegant. Yet it is well-suited for proselytization–which is precisely why the authors of the Koran composed it in this manner. (Repetition is a common oratory trick routinely employed by sophists. Would a divine super-being need to resort to this?)

Elegance (or lack thereof) generally transcends language; as is regularly demonstrated when great literature is translated from one tongue to the next. There is nothing unique about CA, of all the world’s hundreds of tongues, that exempts it from this fundamental linguistic logic.

Try to make sense of oddly-worded verses like 21:91. (Good luck.) When we read 24:61, we are certainly not experiencing the world’s most elegantly-worded edict. And what of the poor wording of 6:151? (If read literally: it forbids the good treatment of one’s parents.) Also take for example the extremely awkward phrasing in verses like 2:195, 16:106, and 53:54. Those spellbound—or otherwise extremely impressed—by such verses seem not to understand that their own subjective states are not a barometer for objective merit. They misconstrue their infatuation as discernment…and interpret the ensuing intoxication as some kind of validation of their beliefs.

The inimitability of the Koran is belied by a slew of awkwardly worded passages–as with the entirety of Surah 101. (Authored by an infinitely wise super-being? Don’t be silly.) Holding that there exists spectacular writing in the Koran means the following: One can actually point to a passage that would be at all impressive those of us who know spectacular writing when we see it. Such a passage has never been cited.

By reading the Koran (again), I learned absolutely nothing (again)…outside of what is contained in the Koran. This is, to be frank, a strange experience for me–as I typically read a book each week from which I glean a least a small kernel of wisdom. (Even some of the WORST books sometimes teach me SOMETHING.)

Muslims do their deity no credit by adamantly insisting that their holy book is his magnum opus. In fact, they do the Abrahamic deity a grave disservice by treating it as a perfect transcription of his final message to mankind. Surely, such a super-being could do far better.

I realize some may find my candor jolting. But the fact remains: Even though it was not my first go-around, I was once more taken aback by how remarkably UN-remarkable the Koran's prose actually is. (I've encountered higher quality exposition in the New York Post.)

This is no exaggeration; I literally can not point to a SINGLE LINE in the entire Koran that could be accurately described as either eloquent or remotely insightful. NOT ONE. Nor is there a SINGLE LINE that a medieval expositor could not have written.

The only NOTABLE thing to be gleaned from the Koran is: The worship of the Abrahamic deity is an end in itself. Period. The corollary: He should therefore be incessantly glorified…and that glorification should be done either for its own sake or to secure admission into a celestial luxury resort after death (whilst averting hellfire). This proposition is established by fiat; and is proffered with absolutely no cogent argument to back it up (that is: above and beyond the appeal to each audience-member's own self-interest, via a lurid presentation of cosmic carrots and sticks).

There does not seem to be an attempt to offer ANY reasoning for ANY of the brazen claims made throughout the book. (Ergo the demand for blind faith.) In general, propositions in the Koran are simply ASSERTED, then repeated…over and over and over again…ad nauseam (swapping an adjective here and there). This makes for an exasperatingly tedious (not to mention, painfully unsatisfying) reading experience for those of us accustomed to even the mildest intellectual stimulation. {10}

There is no schadenfreude to be derived from this unhappy verdict. I do no gloat. IF ONLY there were a handful of impressive passages in the Koran to which we might point! Fighting anti-Islamic bigotry would be so much easier. Alas.

Indeed, I sincerely wish that the verdict here were different. But wishing doesn't make the Koran any better than it actually is. But take heart: As I have been careful to point out, there need be no dilemma for open-minded Muslims. Koran 2.0 is always an option.

After browsing a few pages—ANY few pages—in Islam's holy book, something should become quite clear to any impartial observer: The majority of the exposition is little other than banal rambling. What can be said about the alleged transcription of the Abrahamic deity's final message to mankind? Its contribution to wisdom / progress is essentially zero. At the end of the day, we should remind ourselves: Delectable drivel is still drivel. Artificially-flavored hogwash may taste good, but it has no nutritional value.

Koran fetishists ogle at Koranic text as though it were some feat of literary genius. One imagines marveling at a child who has clumsily played "Mary Had A Little Lamb" with one finger on a keyboard…as though he has just given a masterful performance of Beethoven's Hammer-Klavier. They feign bedazzlement during recitation of a passage, as if they have been plunged into a rapturous reverie; and are being exposed to the most mind-bending insights imaginable.

Supplicants are thus conditioned to swoon over each verse, rhapsodizing about imagined eloquence—as if biting into cardboard and gushing about how exquisite the flavor is. It's a sort of self-induced trance; a reflex they have been programmed to have, so as to demonstrate their piety. {12}

The writing manages to be both scattered and puerile. We're not dealing with a massive vocabulary here. A mere 20 lexemes account for over a third of the Koran's text. 62 lexemes account for about half. 300 lexemes account for over 70%. Those include many lexemes that are still used in the modern Arabic vernaculars. Much of the other 30% of the Koranic lexicon is comprised of arcane vocabulary in awkwardly-worded statements—a reminder of the antiquated thinking of the book's authors.

Just as revealing is what is NOT in the Koranic lexicon. In CA, there was no word for—and for most of Islam's history, no NEED FOR any word for—**democracy**. So when the modern (formalized) Arabic vernacular was developed (i.e. "Fus-ha"), a term had to be concocted; and the only recourse was to borrow it from more refined languages. Ergo "damaqrata": a borrowing from the (Greek-based) English—that is: from a language outside Dar al-Islam. {37}

Never mind the lack of Arabic vernacular for secularity, individual liberty, universal love, critical analysis, civil rights, and other Enlightenment concepts. Arabic was clearly a language stuck in the Middle Ages: primitive and crude. We are obliged to ask ourselves: Was this really the (eternal) language of an (atemporal) omniscient

super-being? Odd how the Creator of the Universe had no use for such important concepts. It is telling that Arabic speakers were later forced to crib words from Occidental tongues (when, that is, they eventually encountered the need to articulate such concepts).

The disjunctive tone of the Koran belies claims of “elegance”. It would seem not to have been composed by its protagonist (as it so adamantly claims to be), as it often refers to him in a manner that does not comport with self-proclamation. Take, for instance, 3:32, in which we’re told, “Surely, god does not love [non-Muslims].” Never mind the perniciousness of the message; is this the phrasing god would use when talking about HIMSELF? The “surely” here is sometimes translated from Classical Arabic as “verily” or “truly”. But even so, the prompt is gratuitous—more of a rhetorical flourish than a mark of pristine locution. Indeed, with such a tone, it’s almost as if the Creator of the Universe is pleading his case.

Rule of thumb: If the authors of a book find the need to remind the reader that the protagonist is “merciful” over 120 times, then the protagonist is almost certainly not merciful. (Memo to the Abrahamic deity: Actions speak louder than words.) The entire Koran is essentially a gargantuan “but” clause appended to the “god is merciful” pronouncement. Taken in context, the pronouncement amounts to: “He is merciful BARRING the fact that [insert threats of damnation here]” or “He is merciful, YET he will do [insert vindictive or malicious act here]” or “He is merciful to SOME; however to others he is merciless.” The upshot: He is merciful only when he feels like it. (In other words, “He is NOT merciful.”)

And so it goes with other strident declarations in the Koran. Once one has been notified that the book’s protagonist is “beneficent” FIVE DOZEN times, one might start to wonder about the claim. (In fact, it should immediately occur to the reader that there are mountains of incontrovertible evidence–all around the world–which conclusively prove otherwise.) Overwhelming amounts of irrefutable substantiation (on a daily basis, everywhere on the planet) to the contrary, many votaries come away from their reading of the Koran with the impression that the book’s protagonist is beneficent (and “just”, “forgiving”, etc.) simply because the book says so. The problem of theodicy is thus ameliorated by fiat.

Such specious rationalization is an indication that many supplicants are not actually paying attention to the contents of their holy book. It seems that they are instead merely highlighting certain snippets in order to validate their own wishful thinking. By “bracketing” such extracts (which are repeated over and over and over again),

one can remain smug in the belief that this deity is GOOD…simply because that's what a slew of isolated statements affirm. ("Why would the book repeat this bold assertion so many times if it wasn't true?!") Once the desired proposition has been incessantly pounded into one's head for long enough, it seems unthinkable to suggest otherwise. The overwhelming countervailing evidence encountered around the world, day in and day out, is thereby rendered moot.

("The Merciful" and "The Beneficent" are two of god's NAMES, for crying out loud. So he MUST be merciful and beneficent. Right?" So goes the thinking of the malleable-minded supplicant. This is circular reasoning with a radius of zero.)

In the Pickthall translation, "surely" / "verily" / "truly" is used 511 times. In the Ali translation, it is used 531 times. This manner of speech would seem unfitting for a perfectly articulate, CONFIDENT super-being. That such rhetorical flourishes are used so much in the Koran is rather befuddling…until, that is, we realize that the book's authors were engaged in a project of proselytization.

The Koran's eminently human authorship is obvious simply by reading not only WHAT it says, but HOW it says it. In verse after verse, we encounter anything but optimally elegant diction–regardless of the language in which it is read.

KNOWLEDGE?

In 33:36, we are told: “It is not for a believer, man or woman, when god and his messenger have decreed upon a matter, that they should have any option in their decision.” That is: In the event that the Abrahamic deity and/or MoM have issued an edict, the only option for Muslims is to obey. Do NOT question. Do NOT think for yourself.

As we’ll see, Islam’s holy book is riddled with glaring mistakes. This does not bode well for those who insist on taking every word of the book as infallible; and proclaim that it is the ultimate source of knowledge. But what about the book’s (apparent) touting of “knowledge”?

The Koran makes use of the term, “ilm”, which is typically translated as “knowledge”; as if it were just as simple as that. After all, if the book encourages the pursuit of knowledge; it can’t be all that bad.

However it is more accurate to say that “ilm” means an acute awareness of Islamic doctrine. That is to say, it is knowledge in a narrow sense: knowledge of god’s word (and of MoM’s teaching). Thus “ilm” is not knowledge; it is familiarity with–and fealty to–the Sunnah. In Islam, doctrinal acumen is referred to explicitly “hikmah” (commonly translated as “wisdom”), which is seen as concomitant with the Koranic sense of “ilm” (commonly translated as “knowledge”). The equivalent to this in ancient Greek thought was “doxa”; and in Judaic thought as “da’at[h]”. This is NOT what the Greeks referred to as “episteme” / “sophie” [knowledge]; or what was known in Classical Hebrew as “yedi’at”.

Indeed, even thinking ITSELF (what the Greeks often dubbed “phronesis”) was not so straight-forward. For there was the immediate apprehension of concretes (“noesis”); but there was also critical reflection (“dianoia”). Thus the distinction was made between simply understanding instructions versus the higher functions of abstract thinking. Religious “knowledge” is predicated on the former while actively discouraging the latter.

If one wants to see what a text means by X, it is instructive to see what it means by lack-of-X. So, a way of ascertaining what is meant by “ilm” in Islam’s holy book, one needs only see what is meant by “ignorance” (i.e. lack of knowledge). The Koran’s use of “ilm” is best exemplified by the term used for un-belief, “jahiliyyah”. As it turns out, “jahiliyyah” is (conventionally) taken to mean “those in a state of

ignorance". In other words, Faith is equated with knowledge, whereas LACK OF Faith is equated with ignorance. Lo and behold: "jahi" ["ignorance"] is not ignorance in the modern sense (absence of erudition); it means ignorance of the god's word (and of MoM's teaching). Hence "ilm" simply means AWARENESS OF something very specific, with the implication that awareness is concomitant with acquiescence. {13}

Meanwhile, a lack of FAITH is synonymous with a lack of KNOWLEDGE. This quirky taxonomy is more theology than epistemology.

And so it went: Those "with knowledge" cannot possibly refer to non-believers (who's wrong-headedness is relentlessly castigated throughout the Koran). For those "with knowledge" are simply those who adhere to the Sunnah. The people who have "ilm" (the so-called "uwtuw al-ilm"), then, are people who are PIOUS: those who exhibit doctrinal fidelity ("ibadah")…who correspond to those who most embody "iman". Hence the promotion of "ilm" is none other than the promotion of familiarity with doctrine (the Sunnah).

Passages like 29:49 tell us that "ilm" is something we are GIVEN, not something that we acquire for ourselves. It is quite telling that "ilm" is seen a function of "wahi" [revelation]. In other words, as far as the authors of the Koran were concerned, being well-versed in Islamic doctrine (itself a function of revelation) is all that "ilm" is. More to the point, "ilm" is something allotted to each of us as god sees fit to allot it. Indeed, 17:85 emphasizes the fact that the knowledge being conveyed to mankind by this Final Revelation is strictly circumscribed: "You are not given aught of 'ilm' but a little." So "ilm" is not something one cultivates by one's own devices; it is something rationed by god.

The point cannot be emphasized enough; so let's recapitulate it. In a strictly Koranic sense, "ilm" entails the recognition of certain dogmas; not "knowledge" as understood in the post-Enlightenment sense. (For more on how knowledge is advanced, see Karl Popper's "The Logic of Scientific Discovery" and Thomas Kuhn's "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions". This will help one cultivate a way of thinking about the scientific credence of Islam's holy book—especially when it comes to putting it into the historical context of mankind's advancements in knowledge.)

This is further demonstrated by the fact that Sunni theology is often referred to as “ilm al-kalam”. The rubric is typically used as a euphemism for apologia (“kalam” effectively means rhetoric). Once we understand religious dogmas as memetic narcotics, we see that edification is the LAST thing with which religious apologists are concerned. Their charge is to defend sacrosanct “truths” with pedantic flourishes; not to elucidate Reality. Indeed, like Christian apologia, “ilm al-lalam” demonstrates that dogmatism serves as a surrogate for wisdom–an insight that goes back to Socrates’ indictment of sophistry.

To be “in the know” was simply to accede to whatever doctrinal positions were being prescribed. The point was to SURRENDER to dogmatism, not to resist it. If anything, genuine knowledge was a CASUALTY of “ilm”, not its aim.

Such obtuse thinking was illustrated by the (cartoonishly absurd) treatment of “ilm” by the so-called “Dars-i Nizami” [houses of Nizam], an Islamic fundamentalist movement founded in the 18th century (named after its founder, “mulla” Nizam ud-Din As-Sihaalwi). Salafis (esp. Deobandis) prized what they referred to in their own dialect as the “Dar al-Ulum” [house of knowledge], effectively an indoctrination facility (i.e. Salafi madrasah).

Other dead give-aways of the nature of (what was meant by “ilm”) include the buzz-term “ilm al-rijal” [knowledge of men], which refers to Islamic religious studies that deals with which Hadith are to be deemed more / less credible.

Suffice to say, “ilm” does not correspond with the post-Enlightenment conception of knowledge, as we now use it. In fact, it is the polar opposite of what the ancient Greeks (notably, Socrates) referred to as “episteme” / “sophie”. Re-labeling dogmatism (or a familiarity with sacred doctrine) “ilm” does not change what it is. It is plain to see that the Koranic “ilm” is not comparable to what the ancient Greeks dubbed “episteme” / “sophie” (in the scientific sense) or “gnosis” (in the spiritual sense); nor is it comparable to the Syriac, “mandata”; nor is it comparable to what Hindus dubbed “abhijna” / “gyan” / “jnana” / “vidya”; nor what Dzogchen Buddhists refer to as “rig-pa”. As it turns out, it is more comparable to what is referred to as “da’at[h]” in Judaism–which primarily has to do with familiarity with–and fealty–to Mosaic law. Note, for example, Hosea 4:6, which reads: “My people are destroyed for lack of ‘da’at’.”

Theology is the handmaiden of religious apologetics. It is–by definition–not about knowledge; it is the craft of concocting rationalizations for pre-established dogmas. Indeed, theology is the ANTITHESIS of a discipline that is genuinely concerned with knowledge (i.e. philosophy / science; which is based on the AVOIDANCE / DEBUNKING of dogmatism). The Islamic term for an apologist is thus "mu-ta-kalim". Mutakalimun are people who specialize in the peddling of (Mohammedan) superstition under the auspices of "scholarship". Such pretense perverts the notion of erudition.

Alas, this blinkered epistemology underlies any discussion of "reason" in the Koran. As it turns out, "reason" is something ANYONE would encourage. That the authors of the Koran insist that they are using reason is therefore unsurprising. Isaiah 1:18 in the Hebrew Bible invites readers, "Come now and let us reason together"; yet only the most deluded would suggest this enjoinder was really prescribing "reason" in the Enlightenment sense–as with the German "wissenschaft".

Here's the thing: EVERYONE thinks they are being reasonable; this does not make everyone a champion of (actual) Reason. The value of using REASON goes back to the Sanskrit notion, "yukti". Yet the Koranic use of "A-Q-L" [typically translated as "reason"] is in no way comparable to what the Ancient Greeks dubbed "nous" [the capacity for understanding], which involves (critical) deliberation / reflection. Nor is it comparable to the Syriac "binta". It is plain to see that "yaqil-una" / "taqil-una" is not employed as an exhortation to engage in critical thinking. Rather, it is used as a way of referring to those who think in the correct manner (as in: those who are pious). Translating this reference as those who REASON is therefore misleading.

As mentioned, the Koran also refers to something called, "hikmah" (e.g. 2:129), which is commonly translated as "wisdom", as it is simply a variant of the antecedent Semitic root, "H-K-M[a]" (typically rendered "[c]Hokmah" in Aramaic). What does this term actually mean?

The Koranic conception of "wisdom" is: Thinking in a pious way (i.e. in the way we say you're supposed to think; a.k.a. "correct thinking"). In other words: NOT wisdom. Hence, failing to think in this manner is decried as LACK OF "hikmah" (e.g. 2:171), which is effectively the same as sacrilege. This does NOT correspond with what the Greeks referred to as "arete" / "phronesis" [wisdom]; nor even what was referred to in antecedent Semitic languages as "[c]Hokmah" / "Hak[h]mah".

The conception of “wisdom” as subservience goes back to the beginning of the Abrahamic tradition. According to the Judaic treatment of the term, we might ask: Who qualifies as “wise”? Proverbs 10:8 explains: It is one who obeys commands. In Proverbs 3:5, we are admonished not not rely on our own understanding. Even worse, throughout the Hebrew Bible, wisdom (qua piety) is rendered a function of FEAR [“yir’at”]. This is made especially clear when the vengeful god of the Torah commands respect by threatening to DESTROY. Most infamously, Proverbs 1:7 states that “the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom.”

Meanwhile, throughout the Hebrew Bible, there is a disdain for the pursuit of GENUINE wisdom–that is: when it is conceptualized in terms of knowledge in the Enlightenment sense [“yedi’at”] rather than knowledge in the sense of doctrinal awareness [“da’at”]. In the opening chapter of Ecclesiastes, we read–in the concluding verse–that “in much wisdom is much vexation; and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow.” This can only be taken as contempt for intellectual curiosity. It is no wonder, then, that such an attitude predominated in much of the Abrahamic tradition. After all, critical inquiry is the death-knell of institutionalized dogmatism.

The distinction between worldly wisdom (that is, wisdom in the modern sense) and “wisdom” qua piety is illustrated in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (3:19): “The wisdom of the world is foolishness with god.”

Here’s the thing. According to the Koran, “hikmah” is a mark of “iman” [Faith]. That is to say, it is a function of “ibadah” (fealty). The key, then, is piety rather than probity; devotion rather than erudition. This myopic conception of “wisdom” is purely a matter of “fitra”: the recognition of good and evil (per the Manichean worldview being propounded).

Such blinkered thinking was nothing new in the Abrahamic tradition. Even in the early Christian church, the vague notion of enlightenment was conflated with salvation via the Koine Greek term, “soteria”. In other words, enlightenment was strictly a matter of “seeing the light” in the religious sense. To be enlightened was to be saved; and vice versa.

Thus “hikmah” is not comparable to what the ancient Greeks referred to as “arete” / “phronesis”; or what is referred to in the Eastern tradition as “pragya” / “prajna” / “jina” (rendered “panna” in Pali). Such concepts refer to an insight into the true

nature of Reality. Such insight is gleaned not via subservience (and CERTAINLY NOT through dogmatism), but rather via the human powers of intuition / apprehension. {14}

Importantly, Eastern traditions tend to emphasize a healthy dose of skepticism ("vicikitsa" in Sanskrit) rather than dogmatism; and so encourage precisely what is discouraged in Islamic thought. Also, in the Buddhist tradition, the notion of an enlightened mind ("bodhi-citta") is a function of compassion ["karuna"] FOR ALL SENTIENT BEINGS (what the Ancient Greeks dubbed "agape"). This means expressing loving-kindness ["maitri"] toward EVERYONE; which involves a principle known as "ahimsa": never causing harm to any sentient being.

Suffice to say, the Islamic mandate to submit has little to do with what is now normally understood to be "enlightenment". There is nothing resembling "arete" / "phronesis" addressed anywhere in Islamic scripture; and for good reason. Such mental acuity would have only undermined the effort to engender "iman" via SUBMISSION.

We might also juxtapose "hikmah" against the notion of "moksha" in Eastern traditions. "Moksha" is a function of LIBERATION, not submission. (It is a matter of bringing one's soul into alignment with the divine; and so is a matter of synchronicity rather than of obeisance.) It is achieved via one's own devices; and does not require the simpering / groveling of idolatry. (As the Buddha exhorted: "Be your own lamp.") In other words, "moksha" involves what Kant would later call autonomy. According to this conception of wisdom, Truth itself serves as one's light. It is something to be found within all of us. This diverges sharply with "hikmah", which is a function of subservience (i.e. servility to a cosmic master).

Consequently, the translation of "ilm" (as it occurs in the Koran) as "knowledge" is markedly inaccurate–based as it is on an inverted epistemology. In the Islamic context, "ilm" effectively means "familiarity with doctrine"–a quality that is diametrically opposed to what the Ancient Greeks referred to as "arete" / "phronesis". Ergo proselytes described as "those with ilm" are simply those who have been properly indoctrinated.

Bear in mind that the theme of FEAR permeates the entire book. So we should not be surprised to learn that the Koran's authors equate fear of god with wisdom. This is nothing new. Indeed, it is in keeping with, say, Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 of the

Hebrew Bible, in which we are told that FEAR OF THE LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Thus we are asked to suppose that “arete” is predicated on dogmatism; and even on neurosis. This would be a gross perversion of the term. {15}

Alas, such a neurotic state is the basis for “hikmah”–nay, of piety in general–was codified in the exalted term “taqwa” [fear of god]. The harebrained notion that wisdom is somehow a function of FEAR is not unique to the Koran…as those in the West have been well-acquainted with the fire-and-brimstone brand of Christianity.

And so it goes: Once one has been inculcated with the appropriate set of beliefs, one can boast that one has “ilm”; and aver that one’s convictions–whatever they might be–are synonymous with WISDOM. Not only does such sacralized dogmatism have nothing to do with knowledge; it is the OPPOSITE OF knowledge. The so called “fard al-kifayah” regarding “ilm” is the mandate for all Muslims to convince themselves of certain things (namely: that of which they have been instructed they should be convinced). That is: It is the duty of each supplicant to ensure he has been thoroughly indoctrinated. This is comparable to the (spurious) Roman Catholic obligation to become well-versed in the catechism.

The instantiation of habits of thought is exactly what knowledge is NOT.

Another revealing indication that “knowledge” is conceptualized in a queer manner in Islam’s holy book is the duel meaning of “aziz”: teacher and authority. That is, to teach is to command. Rather than “aziz” referring to a pedagogue who helps people LEARN (qua think for themselves), it refers to a master (whom we are obligated to honor) who dictates. Edification is thus rendered a matter of obeisance. Meanwhile, “hakim” [wisdom] is equated with deference to the authority of god.

In 49:9, the Koran encourages the pursuit of “ilm”, but links this to an awareness of god (and his “justice”). This myopic conception of “knowledge” is hardly consummate with the use of the term in the modern world. In this sense, “knowledge” is simply reverence for whatever the Koran says. According to this interpretation, the typical Salafi is BRIMMING with “knowledge”. This is hardly consummate with what the ancient Greeks called “arete”: the Enlightenment sense of erudition known in German as “Aufklärung”.

So now let’s look at what happens when “knowledge” is conceptualized in such an obtuse way.

A FOUNT OF SCIENTIFIC INSIGHT?

Once we read about the talking baby Jesus (3:46 and 19:29-34), we know we're dealing with highly superstitious authorship. But are we to take the Koran at its word, and REALLY treat it as an explanation for everything worth knowing?

Serious attempts to explain the natural world go back to the early 6th century B.C. with the Ionian philosopher, Anaximander of Miletus. His (now lost) "On Nature" inaugurated the reductionist approach to understanding the world (for him, all things reduced to "apeiron") endemic to all scientific inquiry. Meanwhile, Democritus of Teos proposed the first atomic theory of the material world in the late 5th century. Where was the Abrahamic deity then? It seems belief in him was not required to glean insights into how the cosmos worked.

Significant fruit was not yielded until two millennia later, when Nicolas Copernicus privileged empirical observation over received wisdom (thereby demolishing geocentrism once and for all) with his “De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium” (in the early 16th century). {16} Francis Bacon then pioneered the principles of the scientific method in his “Novum Organum”; while Johannes Kepler posited that there were universal laws of nature awaiting discovery (via our innate capacities for induction) with his “Harmonices Mundi” (both in the early 17th century). {17} One can’t help but wonder: What was god waiting for? {18}

Islam’s holy book bears the mark of its terrestrial origins. The “Recitations” were clearly composed by authors who understood almost nothing about the natural world. The purported study of nature (“taffakur”) alluded to in the Koran means little other than an exhortation to familiarize oneself with the proclamations of the Koran. This hardly constitutes a bona fide “study of nature”. In a sense, the Koran could be thought of as “The Illiterate Bedouin’s Guide to the Universe”. Or, alternately, as a field-guide for highly-superstitious Arabians in the Dark Ages.

Finding defective explanations of the natural world in the Koran is like fishing with dynamite. The embarrassment of riches is, well, rather embarrassing. Let’s look at the top ten:

1. 25:53, 27:61, and 55:19-20 give a myopic description of the world’s seas (there are only two of them: one salt, one fresh). {24} We are notified that god “has set the two oceans in motion, converging together”, between which is a “barrier”—using the same term that refers to the Hijaz. {25}
2. 36:36 and 51:49 say that all living things are made in pairs. {19}
3. God created homo sapiens from mud / clay (6:2, 7:12, 15:26-28/33, 17:61, 23:12, 32:7, 37:11, 38:71, and 55:14). As if that were not bad enough, this contradicts 3:59, 22:5, 35:11, and 40:67, where it is states that homo sapiens were created from dust.
4. The Earth is flat, and is located the center of the cosmos (discussed forthwith).
5. Embryos form from a blood clot [“alaq”] (22:5, 23:14, and 96:2), and the bones of the fetus form before the flesh (2:259 and 23:14). {20}
6. Honey bees were commanded to eat from fruit; and carry honey in their bellies (16:68-69).
7. Semen comes from a place between the backbone and ribs (86:5-7). {35}
8. Cows produce milk from the contents of their stomachs–that is: from a mixture of blood and digested food (16:66 and 23:21).

9. 37:6-10 and 67:5 notify us that shooting stars are god's way of warding off genies (who are presumably lurking in the sky). Thus shooting stars are ACTUAL stars; and god hurls them at nefarious beings to prevent them from eavesdropping on the denizens of heaven. {21}
10. Wind causes rain by impregnating the sky with water (15:22 and 30:48).

Let's dwell for a moment on this last item. In addition to 15:22 and 30:48, 24:43 indicates that the authors did not understand where rain came from. These verses refer to an endless store of water in the heavens (emerging as if by magic from within the clouds) rather than a perpetual cycle of evaporation and condensation (which forms the clouds themselves) and precipitation. Today, many children can provide a far better explanation of rain (and snow) than what is found in the Koran. (SNOW? What's that? The Koran's protagonist was apparently unaware of it. No mention of ice either.) Of course, the aforesaid cycle that causes rain was already understood in rudimentary naturalistic terms at least since Aristotle wrote about it (rather crudely) in the 4th century B.C. Assuming we are to take the Koran at its word, a thousand years later, the Creator of the Universe seems to have had difficulty explaining to mankind why, exactly, it rains.

So we have fraudulent geography (hydrology and oceanography), fraudulent botany, fraudulent bio-chemistry, fraudulent astronomy (geo-centricity), fraudulent embryology, fraudulent entomology, fraudulent anatomy / physiology, fraudulent astronomy, and fraudulent meteorology. Or perhaps, rather than "fraudulent" (which insinuates perfidy), we might be charitable and say "farcical" (which insinuates ignorance).

Is this cherry picking? Have I selected the handful of errors in a vast sea of scientific erudition? No. In fact, the above flubs account for VIRTUALLY ALL of the statements made about the natural world. The blunders go on and on. 78:7 offers us an ersatz lesson in geology—claiming that god uses the mountains as stakes (as in: tent stakes) to hold the Earth down. (What is it being held down AGAINST?) 16:15, 21:31, and 31:10 explain that god uses the mountains to "stabilize" the Earth… when, in fact, mountains often exist as a direct result of the INSTABILITY OF the Earth. Mountains, we are notified, never shift (79:32). According to this view, mountains are anchors that keep the Earth from shaking. This is, of course, absurd.

There are three basic kinds of mountains. First: Those that form from subduction–as with "fold" and "block" mountains. This occurs due to the shifting of the Earth's crust along fault lines. (Funny how the authors of the Koran had nothing to say

about plate tectonics.) Second: Those that form from volcanic activity, whereby igneous matter is pushed through the crust up onto the surface. Third: Those that form from denudation–as with migration of receding glaciers (which gouge out valleys). In every case, mountains exist due to things MOVING; which–it might be noted–is the opposite of things being held in place. Orogenesis has never occurred by a mountain being PLACED UPON anything–let alone being put there to keep everything stationary. {26}

Meanwhile, the only medical insight the Creator of the Universe can bring to mankind's attention is the healing power of HONEY (16:69). But beware, it only works for MEN. Of all the importunate memos on medicine he could have mentioned that would have conferred tremendous benefit, the Creator of the Universe could only think of…honey?

39:6 tells us that there are eight kinds of cattle (or four kinds if we allow for the two sexes, depending on how one reads 6:142-143). How so? There are sheep, goats, camels, and oxen, we're told. In reality, there are ten genera of "bovinae", of which there are over three dozen different animals, ONE of which is "cattle". The Koran's authors' comment on this matter reveals precisely the provincial view that we'd expect from desert-wanders during the Dark Ages.

Hence we should add to the long list of the Koran's counterfeit science: bogus geology, bogus medicine, and bogus zoology. There's a reason that no university's geological, medical, or zoological department uses the Koran in its curriculum. Hint: It's the same reason that bona fide scholars in world history, anthropology, archeology, biology, cosmology, astro-physics, economics, and philosophy don't include the Koran in their syllabi either. Islam's holy book is utterly derelict in every one of these areas.

We might ALSO include:

- bogus psychology (one can both love and fear something; i.e. god)
- bogus spirituality (a healthy Faith is one based on fear)
- bogus epistemology (a conception of "ilm" based entirely on familiarity with the Sunnah)
- bogus ethics (divine command theory; conflating piety with morality)
- bogus neuroscience (the mind persists after brain-death)
- bogus sociology (tribalism is amendable to peace)
- bogus political theory (theocracy can be civil)

Add to ALL this a comic obliviousness to aerodynamics (16:79 and 67:19 marvel at how birds can fly), and we have a book that not only fails to edify, but positively misleads on every conceivable topic. It should not be a problem for Muslims to notice ALL of these glaring defects in their holy book; and openly acknowledge them. Having now listed gross errors in so many fields, perhaps the task will be slightly easier.

Today, only the scientifically illiterate can read such passages without a chuckle. Yet the scientifically barren nature of the Koran is rarely acknowledged…even by PIA who deign to be forthcoming. When we read passages like 28:32, in which the test of god's power is for Moses to insert his hand under his garments and then withdraw it to find that it emerges WHITE, we know that we're dealing with authors who had a somewhat blinkered view of nature.

Such flagrant mistakes are easily elided when the ULTIMATE explanation for, well, EVERYTHING can be boiled down to "Because that's what god wills." This explains why birds fly (16:79) and why boats float (17:66 and 31:31); to heck with aerodynamics and the laws of buoyancy.

The befuddling statements go on and on. According to 27:16, Solomon and his son, David were taught the "language of birds" ["mantiq al-tayr"]. (Which birds? Who knows. Presumably not penguins.)

It is evident that the authors of the Koran only had in mind situations that were unique to the Hijaz during the Dark Ages. Testament to this is the fact that the authors of the Koran articulated things NOT in timeless terms, but rather in terms that were highly specific to the circumstances unique to 7th century Arabia—including a peculiar pre-occupation with she-cames (ref. the constant reference to she-camels: 7:73/77, 11:64, 17:59, 26:155-158, 54:27-29, 81:4, 91:13-14, etc.) (Add to this an inexplicable aversion to dogs expressed in Bukhari's Hadith.) The incessant mention of camels throughout the Koran clearly comes from a people who were primarily familiar with THAT ANIMAL, and unfamiliar with most others. This is clearly a reflection of the centrality of this particular animal in the lives of medieval Bedouins. Had Islam's holy book been composed by Mongols, it would have been HORSES mentioned throughout. Had it been composed by Siberians, it would have been REINDEER mentioned throughout. And had it been composed by native Americans, it would have been riddled with references to llamas / alpacas.

Note how geographically bounded the ambit of concern is. We hear about Alexander the Great (though the authors are unaware of his proper name, so refer to him only as the "two-horned" one), but not about Siddartha Gautama (the Buddha) or Rama or Lao Tzu or Confucius. Why not? Such figures, though relevant on a world-historical stage, were not relevant to the history of the Middle East: the delimited scope with which the early Mohammedans were concerned.

According to the slew of directives enumerated throughout Islam's holy book, the Abrahamic deity has rather peculiar priorities. What deeds incense "allah" the most? He is adamant that "drawing / tossing arrows" is "a heinous practice" (5:3) and a "repugnant act" (5:40). So we'll condone the raping of captives; what you need to watch out for, though, is tinkering with divining arrows. And bear in mind, god uses lightning bolts to kill people who doubt him (13:13)…just in case you were wondering what thunder was from. We shouldn't be surprised to find that ANY of these superstitions were common amongst in the Bedouin tribes of Arabia in the early 7th century.

Indeed, the authors exhibit a medley of highly-specific medieval preoccupations. Another amusing example: The second to last surah of the Koran (113, ironically titled "Daybreak") notifies us that god will protect us from "witches who blow on knots". (The belief was that witches did this in order to place curses.) The authors of the Koran also believed in the magic of (non-Muslim) sorcerers—as in 10:76-81. In 12:6, the Abrahamic deity even offers to teach us dream interpretation. And don't forget: At death, the soul exits the body through the collar bone (75:26).

The litany of silly superstitions contained within the Koran is, of course, a dead give-away that it is man-made—that is: authored by staggeringly ignorant men who believed things that only staggeringly ignorant men could believe.

There are also outlandish statements that everyone knows are not true—simply from life experience. For example, 53:38 tells us that nobody who already bears a burden shall ever bear another's burden. If we assume that this is neither a tautology nor a self-fulfilling prophecy, then it is patently false. Koranic verse refracted through an ideological prism requires one to see a passage as utterly brilliant that in any other context would be seen as idiotic.

Silly superstitions aside, the worldview offered by the Koran is an extremely myopic one. It urges us to see the world in a way that is patently antithetical to the principles of humanism / cosmopolitanism…while referencing things like witch-craft

and evil genies. So when the Creator of the Universe isn't busy splitting the moon in two (54:1), making ants talk (27:18-19), and turning Jews into Apes (2:65, 4:47, 5:60, and 7:166), he wants to make sure that tribal affiliation is the ultimate standard by which people judge each other. (4:160 even tells us that the Abrahamic deity punished Jews by putting them on a restricted diet. Splendid.) We are thus treated to a smorgasbord of fatuity.

In addition, the authors seem to be confused on several points. For example, 39:74 speaks of "god's promise" to the believers, which involves both land (in this world) and paradise (in the hereafter). However, this verse seems to EQUATE heaven with the promised land—thereby conflating "dunya" and "akhirah". (Note: "al-arda" means either the land or the earth.) Elsewhere, the Koran's protagonist (and purported author; i.e. the Abrahamic deity) cites HIMSELF, stating that he decreed in the Book of Psalms that "the righteous shall inherit the earth" (21:105). Needless to say, citations do not make sense in a book that has existed since the beginning of time.

The authors clearly didn't really think things through very well. According to 35:1, angels have two, three, or four wings. (THREE wings? Yep.) In 2:260, the book's protagonist promises to resurrect dead birds (in order to make a point). And, don't forget, birds were made from clay (e.g. 3:49 and 5:110).

We might also note the botched math of 4:11-12. (As it turns out, god doesn't know how to add fractions). In 18:22, god can't even count. (Indeed, the protagonist of the Koran cannot seem to figure out how many people were sleeping in a cave.) One would think that if nothing else, basic arithmetic might be an omniscient being's strong suit. Alas. What more might we expect from a book that posits talking ants (27:18-19)?

Another indication that the Koran is fallible is the fact that, throughout the book, there are numerous historical flubs. Here are a dozen of the most glaring:

- 2:31 claims that the Creator of the Universe taught Adam the names of all things, indicating that at one point, there was a single language. Such a global language never existed. (This trope was probably a regurgitation of the comment in chapter 11 of Genesis.) More to the point, even if we were to suppose that such an omni-language may have somehow been in use at some point in the Bronze Age (amongst, say, the Sumerians or early Canaanites), it

was certainly not the neo-Syriac language that came to be known as Classical Arabic during the Middle Ages.

- 2:213 claims that at one point, all mankind was of one religion. This has, of course, never been the case.
- 7:137 notifies us that the grand structures of ancient Egypt were all completely destroyed.
- In 12:41 and 20:71, Joseph says that one of his fellow prisoners (in Egypt) was to be crucified. That was in the 2nd millennium B.C. Crucifixion was not used until a thousand years later, when it was pioneered by the Carthaginians and Macedonians.
- 16:8 notifies us that god created horses, mules, and donkeys for the purpose of being ridden by homo sapiens. Homo sapiens have existed for well over a hundred thousand years. Horses were first domesticated in the late 4th millennium B.C. Hence: For the first 95% of human history, horses were not being used for the purpose for which they were created. No memo was given.
- 18:89-98 informs us that the overtly pagan Alexander the Great was really a Muslim. Another irony is that the Sunnah denounces homosexuality even as it lionizes Alexander the Great, who was gay. (We might also note Mohammed's documented fondness for young boys.) This comes as no surprise, as the authors of the Koran were not even aware of Alexander's given name–referring to him simply as "the one with horns".
- In 19:27-28, the authors confuse Miriam (the mother of Jesus of Nazareth) with Miriam (the sister of the patriarchs, Moses and Aaron, who lived over twelve centuries earlier). This mistake is confirmed by 3:33-35 and 66:12, which specifies Jesus' mother as the daughter of "Imran" (an Arabization of "Amram", the father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam-the-prophetess). Thus: Rather than being the father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam-the-prophetess (in the early 13th century B.C.), Amram is rendered the maternal grandfather of Jesus of Nazareth (in the late 1st century B.C.)
- 20:85/95 recounts that a Samaritan led the Israelites astray while Moses was at Mount Sinai [alt. Horeb]—an event that would have occurred no later than the 13th century B.C. Yet the Samaritans as a distinct ethnic group did not come into existence until the 7th century B.C.
- The Biblical villain, "Haman" (alternately rendered "Ahaseurus" in Judaic lore) was a Persian vizier from the 5th century B.C. (He was a minister for Xerxes, as noted in the Book of Esther). Yet the Koran casts him as a vizier for the Egyptian Pharaoh during the 13th century B.C. (28:5-38, 29:39, and 40:24-36).

Presumably, this modification was espoused to accord with the treatment of the Pharaoh as the primary nemesis in Biblical times.

- According to 34:10, David used a coat of iron chain-mail as armor. That would have been in the late 11th century B.C. Yet chain-mail was not used until Classical Antiquity–primarily by the Persians, Macedonians, and Etruscans.
- The Koran states that it sent a prophet to every nation (16:36, 17:5, and 35:24). Clearly, this did not occur; otherwise, the Native Americans, Norsemen, and Chinese (to take just three examples) would have been aware of Abrahamic lore. The simple explanation for this blunder is obvious. So far as the authors of the "Recitations" were aware, the entire world (the "oikoumene") was limited to the Middle East. The scope of "every nation" ranged from just west of the Nile Delta to the Hindu Kush. {23}
- In 57:25, the Koran's protagonist boasts that he sent mankind iron–for which "there were many uses." But it was the Chinese who first made use of cast iron. It is rather odd that the Abrahamic deity opted to originally give this precious gift–which he so proudly touted to his Arab audience–to a people who were not even Abrahamic, and who were located almost seven thousand kilometers away from where he sent his prophets. In any case, the fact that iron came from meteorites had been known since the second millennium B.C. Indeed, Egyptian hieroglyphs from the Bronze Age refer to iron as "material from the heavens". {22}

These are precisely the kind of mistakes one would expect to find were nescient Bedouins from the Dark Ages to decide to cobble together a compendium of folklore. The presence of such historically erroneous passages indicates that the "Recitations" were of eminently human provenance. Would the Creator of the Universe made so many elementary flubs in a book the existence of which was meant to be THE BEST explanation for, well, everything of importance?

Regarding the last item listed above (the statement in 57:25 that god "sent down" ["anzalna"] iron), we find that this is not as impressive a revelation as Koran-fetishists like to think.

In Islamic theology, god is believed to have "sent down", well, EVERYTHING; not just iron. Muslim apologists have a habit of only quoting part of verse 25 in surah 57. The other part says the same thing about "the book and the balance", which were "sent down" along with something else: god's "rasul". Messengers were sent down too, then. So does this mean that every messenger came from outer space?

That's not all. 2:57 says the same thing about QUAILS ("anzalna"). 7:26 says the same thing about CLOTHING ("anzalna"). 39:6 says the same thing about CATTLE ("anzalna"). Are we to suppose, then, that poultry, garments, and bovinae are all originally from outer space? 10:59 even says that provisions were "sent down". So when something exists due to "anzalna", we're not only dealing with the origins of iron; we're dealing with…SPACE BANANAS? Clearly, "anzalna" does not pertain to physical transport from above Earth's atmosphere to its surface.

As it turns out, god sent everything "DOWN" to Earth for the simple reason that he is up in the heavens and the Earth is down here, where we are. That's why 41:10 states that mountains were placed upon the Earth "from above". If god did everything, and he's over our heads, then this phrasing makes sense.

In another sense, though, virtually everything in the universe was formed inside stars—and disseminated via supernovae—billions of years ago; not just iron. Yet 41.9-12 stipulates that god created the Earth (with its molten iron core already in tact) BEFORE all the stars. So even this charitable interpretation doesn't work. God didn't need to send it down; it was already beneath our feat. (Never mind that the stars formed billions of years before the Earth.)

All this is a reminder that when Koran-fetishists gush about Islam's holy book, the vast majority of them don't really know what's in it (that is: what's ACTUALLY in it); least of all so-called Koranic "scholars".

In my essay, "Genesis Of A Holy Book", I explore the many contradictions in the Koran. For now, let's explore further examples of the book's fallible nature.

In Surah 55, just after the passage asserting that man was created from clay (55:14), we encounter an archaic view of world geography. In 55:17 we are told of "the two easts" and "the two wests" when being notified that the Abrahamic deity is Lord of the entire world. Even taken figuratively, such passages are extremely misleading–especially for those who don't know any better (i.e. the original target audience of the "Recitations"). This is especially so once we consider that much of the audience likely took these passages as THE BEST possible explanation of natural phenomena.

Some apologists retort that the Koran was not meant for this sort of explanation. But the Koran itself would beg to differ. The book is quite emphatic about being a clear, detailed explanation for everything–at least, everything that is of importance. Indeed, the book is ADAMANT that it–and it alone–is all that you'll ever need to procure an adequate understanding of the universe.

As mankind would eventually discover, this was far from the case.

We might ask: Is an expectation of basic scientific acuity asking too much of the Koran? Well, not if we assume that it was composed by the Creator of the Universe. Here, we are merely holding the book to the standard to which it explicitly insists it be held.

To suppose that we've learned nothing significant about the natural world since the early 7th century is horrifying to contemplate. The fact of the matter is that the Koran explains NOTHING of importance…even decently well. (Even on spiritual matters, it has virtually nothing sage to say.)

A retort to this plaintive observation might be: "Well, the fate of one's eternal soul is extremely important." Indeed, there is THAT. But this is only important insofar as one believes in "souls" and an "afterlife" to begin with. Such importance is question-begging.

Let's take this inquiry a step further: Why would god have left ANY things the way he left them in the Koran? Would he not have foreseen that the lack of clarification on ALL important matters would lead to profound misunderstandings (and consequently, gigantic problems)? Would he not have known about the confusion that would ensue when he just "left it at that" upon completing his dictations to MoM in 632…regarding misogyny, slavery, authoritarianism, etc.? On any given topic, we need only see what was NOT said, and wonder if it made much sense to just "leave it at that"…knowing how people proceeded.

Furthermore, we must wonder, regarding any given matter of import: Was this severe lack of clarity INTENTIONAL? Surely, it wasn't inadvertent, coming from a super-being of infinite wisdom.

There can be little doubt that BOTH fundamentalist AND Progressive Muslims (i.e. everyone from the most conservative to the most liberal extremes within the Ummah) would agree in one way or another that the myriad misunderstandings

(WHATEVER, exactly, they are claimed to be) have led to a massive amount of egregious injustice (however that might be defined by each party). Any Muslim would agree that faulty interpretations of Koranic verse have proliferated, and been responsible for needless tribulation amongst votaries since the days of the first caliph. (They simply disagree on what those mis-interpretations might be.)

There is obviously no point to such confusion. So what's going on here? If god REALLY MEANT what any given Muslim CLAIMS he meant (be that Muslim a hidebound fundamentalist or the most liberal-minded reformist), he surely could have been far more clear about it; thereby precluding the prodigious amount of quibbling over "interpretation" that ensued over the next 14 centuries (and continues to this day). We can only assume god—being prescient—saw all those problems coming while we was fashioning his precise articulation.

Note that the present essay is testament to this quandary. Let's assume for a moment that this entire critique is completely off-base. Thus: Everything I have surmised is erroneous. That fact ITSELF would demonstrate that the Koran is far from "mubeen" [clear]. Barring a devious scheme of protracted duplicity on my part, how else could I be so colossally mistaken about so much?

We might wonder: Was leaving things unclear a sort of divine STRATEGY? That seems rather bizarre, as it was evidently undertaken at the expense of allowing an obscene amount of (otherwise pointless) ignorance, suffering, and lethal conflict to transpire as a result. Was doing so supposed to pose as some kind of "test" to supplicants? That would be a strange way of corroborating someone's fealty / piety. For the repercussions of failing the test seem un-necessarily cruel.

The point here is not to dwell on a raft of technical mistakes (including geo-centrism and the rather embarrassing depiction of the world as flat). Rather, the point is that there is nothing in the Koran—not a single thing—that would indicate that it was authored by anyone other than extremely ignorant Bedouins of the 7th thru 9th centuries.

The fact is that not only does the Koran get a myriad of things WRONG; it hardly gets anything at all RIGHT. That is to say: there is very little history, very little valid geography, no valid science, and not even a good health tip to be found anywhere in the entire book. This is after the authors ATTEMPTED to comment on each of these things, and fumbled on every one.

Here's the problem for those of us who insist on taking the Koran at its word: NONE of the contents of the Koran is anachronism. (In other words: There is nothing in the Koran that would not have come from the time in which the book was composed). Every statement contained within the book is something we would expect to find if we were to read a book authored by scientifically illiterate Bedouins in the Dark Ages.

To reiterate: The authors were only aware of two seas (one salt water, one fresh water), they thought the Earth was flat, and they were under the impression that natural phenomena could only be explained by animistic supernatural forces–be it evil genies, angels, or god's will. It's not that the Koran fails to explain EVERYTHING (as it claims it does); it's that it actually explains ALMOST NOTHING.

Note that the Koran repeatedly says that the universe was created in six days (or in some combination of 2-, 4-, and 6-day long periods, depending on how one reads the salient passages). 7:54, 10:3, 11:7, 25:59, 32:4, 57:4, and 50:38 specify six days…while 41:9-12 gives (presumably overlapping) periods of 2, 4, and 2 days. The rational for this is (as it is with Genesis) that the statement doesn't mean LITERAL "days". Alas, this ad hoc rationalization doesn't work. Unlike Genesis, the problem in the Koran is that elsewhere it DEFINES what "days" are to the Abrahamic deity (22:47 and 32:5). 1,000 years. Thus, the universe was created in 6,000 years. (Yet another **oops.**) But, then again, 70:4 notifies us that a day for god is 50,000 years. Gee-wiz.

This is what a book looks like when it is written by highly superstitious men in the Dark Ages. Of course, the bit about a 6,000-year-old cosmos should not come as a surprise, as it is mostly just a regurgitation of Genesis…with the slight adjustment that the blame for eating from the tree of knowledge is not placed primarily on Eve (7:19-24 and 20:115-121). The only "miraculous" thing about the Koran is the fact that so many people are (STILL) under the outlandish impression that anything about it is miraculous.

But, then again, perhaps this widespread misperception is not so surprising after all. For the vast majority of Muslims (including many Progressive Muslims) seem to be blissfully unaware of EITHER the myriad contradictions OR the myriad scientific inaccuracies with which their holy book is riddled. Others are simply in denial. (I hasten to add that this End Note is not an exhaustive list of the Koran's smorgasbord of glaring technical mistakes. There are many more. I mention a few others in the Afterword.)

Such lack of awareness is rather stultifying. It makes one wonder how many Muslims have bothered to ACTUALLY READ the Koran cover to cover (assuming an appreciable degree of reading comprehension). But, then again, that such a large portion of the Ummah seems not to have the faintest clue what is actually in their holy book is not so confounding once one sees that even those who dedicate themselves to the (patently asinine) endeavor of memorizing (by rote) Koranic verse in a language they don't understand (i.e. CA) only end up mouthing a sequence of sounds the meaning of which they have little–if any–genuine apprehension. {27}

So what of the prognostications of Mohammed himself (as the Last Messenger; and Seal of the Abrahamic prophets)? When it came to prophecy, did he have a good track record?

See for yourself. In Bukhari's Hadith (9/88/237), he predicts that eventually, wealth will be so abundant that wealthy people will no longer be able to find anyone to accept alms ["zakat"]; as poverty will be eradicated wherever Islam is spread. On the contrary, most of the most impoverished communities in the world are where Islam is most prevalent. When would the Day of Judgement come? In Muslim's Hadith (written long after the fact), we read that MoM "looked at a young boy and said, 'If this boy lives, he will not grow very old until the Last Hour comes to you." So much for that. He then contradicted himself by affording a bit more time, declaring: "I take an oath and say that no soul upon the Earth will survive past the next hundred years" (vol. 41, no. 7052).

Meanwhile, it must be noted that certain things are conspicuously absent from a book that insists that it is the ultimate source of insight on all matters, everywhere, for all time (including every place on Earth in the 21st century). If we take the book's grandiose claims about itself seriously, then glaring problems arise.

First and foremost, when the Koran declares that it has been composed in "your own language" (the tongue of Mohammed of Mecca; putatively Classical Arabic, but actually Syriac), it says it was so composed "so with it you [the messenger] may give the message [tidings] to the righteous and warn those who are insolent." In other words, we are told that the Koran is composed in the lingua franca of medieval Arabs SO THAT the message can be conveyed to everyone. ("We have made this scripture easy to understand in your own tongue.")

Clearly this was dealing with a very delimited purview–circumscribed by a provincialism endemic to a comically parochial worldview. Even if we are to suppose that Classical Arabic WAS MoM's tongue (which it wasn't), this makes no sense once we consider that all of "nas" (mankind) cannot understand Classical Arabic.

Further problems arise. 16:89 stipulates that the Koran explains ALL THINGS. Really? ALL things? The injustice of slavery? Of rape? A woman's opinion means just as much as a man's? Evolutionary theory? The germ theory of disease? The macro-economic law of supply and demand? The basic principles of civil society? Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope. Such explanations would certainly have come in handy in the Dark Ages (and precluded a massive amount of pointless suffering and death). Alas, ensuring that nobody ate the meat of an animal that died due to falling on its head was evidently a far more important to attend to (see my essay, "Of Pork, Pictures, And Pedophilia").

The fact of the matter is: The Koran not only fails to explain ALL important things, it explains almost NO important things. Nothing on democracy. Nothing on human rights. Nothing on antibiotics. Not even anything on how to build a better boat…or, perhaps, new ideas on improving agriculture. Nada. YET…as far as the authors of the Koran were concerned, their book contained within its hallowed pages all the explanations mankind would ever need. Period.

No sane Muslim believes this. THAT means that all sane Muslims are disregarding one of the major claims of their holy book–whether they admit it or not.

Bear in mind, the Koran's protagonist is clear that he "did not leave anything out of this book" (6:38). (!)

To ensure that mankind would be well-informed, the Koran's authors also included the claim that all fruit is made as male and female (13:3). (No word yet on sightings of bananas mating.)

Are there ANY pearls of wisdom in the book? According to the Koran's authors, there are two types of water: sweet and salty. Never mind that there is only one kind of water: di-hydrogen monoxide (commonly referred to as "ma'an" in Arabic)…some of which has salt in it, some of which does not. Using Koranic logic, we might engage in ANY binary aquatic taxonomy. We could say that there are two kinds of water: potable and dirty…or hot and cold…or stagnant and flowing…or with a baby in it and without a baby in it. In mentioning the forms water can take, might god have

mentioned the four phases of matter: solid, liquid, gas, and plasma? Alas, if you want a tutorial on elementary physics from the Koran, you're out of luck. But worry not; for the Koran explains that, in the beginning, the heavens started as SMOKE (42:11).

In sum: Whenever the authors of the Koran weigh in on an important topic in the natural sciences, they get it wrong every time. It is actually quite remarkable: the Koran somehow manages to literally get NOTHING right…about ANYTHING having to do with the natural world. (As a point of reference: Even L. Ron Hubbard's "Dianetics" at least managed to get SOME things right.)

But here's the thing. It's not that these are all flubbed attempts at "science". Indeed, they aren't even attempts at science. For, in the Koran, science per se isn't even acknowledged as a concept. Rather, all these flubs are nothing more than erroneous statements about the natural world–made by people who didn't know any better.

Thus, it's not that the Koran puts forth bad science; it's that it doesn't even deign to do science at all. Why not? Because–for the book's authors–anything we'd now refer to as "science" didn't even exist as something anyone might try to do. People just made statements about things…based on who-knows-what…and hawked it all as "truths". The idea was that the stuff being said (by certain people) should be believed (believe, that is, based on whatever criteria the audience happened to employ).

One might say that the Koran proffers botched science in the same way that a fortune teller (or witch-doctor / sooth-sayer) proffers botched science. Such a person isn't even TRYING to do science; so how could he be failing at it? The Koran is fraudulent "science" in the same way that an astrology chart is fraudulent astro-physics. It's not. It's just hogwash. The mere notion of astro-physics does not even enter into the picture.

If I proclaim that pigs can fly, it's not because I was doing science ineptly; it's because I wasn't even concerned with science. Indeed, I'm just "saying stuff" that I —for whatever reason—think is true (or, perhaps, just want others to BELIEVE is true, even if I don't). It is by others doing science that I can be shown to be full of shit.

It might be noted that such glaring nescience was nothing new in the Abrahamic tradition.

In sum: ANY ONE of these errant statements reveals the book to not be the disquisition of an omniscient super-being—or even of someone who has rudimentary understanding of how the natural world works.

When it comes to the Koran's plethora of technical mistakes, apologists work diligently to interpret their own sacred text in a way that gets it to comport with current knowledge. This is a common stratagem–which confuses interpretation with translation. The contention is that, if a statement in the Koran contradicts established science (as so many do), then the fault automatically lies in the interpretation, not in that which is being interpreted.

One way to rebut such ploys is to see if people whom we ARE certain held erroneous views employed the same idiom (and even articulated it in similar ways).

Who else exhibited errant beliefs that ended up in the Islam's holy book? The authors of the Torah supposed that the Earth was created prior to the heavens, as demonstrated by the opening passage of Genesis–which notifies us that daylight was made prior to the heavens (i.e. the sun). We find the same backwards cosmogony in the Koran (2:29, 41:9-12, and 79:27-30).

Per the "Enuma Elish", Assyrians / Babylonians supposed that there were two primordial bodies of water: one fresh (represented by "Abzu" / "Apsu") and one salt (represented by "Tiamat"). The Koran expresses the same view of the world in 25:53, 27:61, and 55:19-20.

We might also look at dogmas about biopoiesis. The belief that homo sapiens were created from mud / clay is found in the Torah (Genesis 2:7); but the belief goes back to the Sumerians, who believed that their godhead, Enlil, created man from blood and clay. In Greek myth, Prometheus created man from clay (ref. Hesiod's "Theogony" and "Erga Kai Hemrai"). The Koran countenances this erroneous abiogenesis in ten places (6:2, 7:12, 15:26-28, 15:33, 17:61, 23:12, 32:7, 37:11, 38:71, and 55:14). But that's not the end of it.

The ancient Chinese believed that their god, "Ny-wa" / "Nugua" created homo sapiens from dirt / dust (ref. the "Chu Ci" from the 3rd century B.C.) The Koran echoes this idea in 3:59, 22:5, 35:11, and 40:67. {28}

The Babylonians believed that man was made from a dollop of blood; as attested by the account of Marduk's creation of man in the "Enuma Elish". The Koran echoes this idea in its version of embryology ("alaqah") in 23:12-14 and 96:2.

In the Koran, there is no mention of anything resembling what we now know about epigenesis: two gametes (ovum and sperm) merging to yield a zygote, then dividing into morula before forming the blastula, which in turn develops into a gastrula, subsequently leading to a fetus…all according to the protein-folding processes dictated by genetic codes partially inherited from the mother and partially inherited from the father. In the Koran, instead of accounts of proteins and DNA, we are treated to statements about "nutfah" and "despised fluids"; i.e. exactly the sort of material we would expect from the Dark Ages. Indeed, 23:12-14 simply notifies us that a blood clot ("alaqah") eventually turns into a wet, mushy glob ("mudghah" is typically translated as a chewed-up-like substance). As we now know, blood does not form in the embryo until at least the third week. (The idea that the embryo begins as a clot of blood is also found in 22:5 as well as in the first passage to be revealed: Surah 96.)

To make matters worse, the Koran reverses the sequence of flesh- ["lahm"] and bone-formation (2:259 and 23:14). Where might the authors have gotten the impression that bones form prior to flesh during embryogenesis? The mistake echoes Galen–who, it turns out, was widely disseminated in the region at the time. (At any rate, clothing the bones in flesh seems to INTUITIVELY makes sense.)

Interestingly, early Islamic scholars derived their thoughts on embryology NOT from the Koran (which offered no insight into the matter), but rather from the "Kitab al-Hayawan" [Book of Animals], which was largely based on Aristotle's (Greek) "On the Generation of Animals". Like the Koran, this book was originally composed in Syriac (c. 800)…and only later translated into Classical Arabic. (The earliest known citation of the "Kitab al-Hayawan" was by the Arab polymath, Al-Kindi, in the early 9th century.)

The Koran also presents a comically puerile, anthropocentric teleology–as with we are notified that god created horses and donkeys for us to ride (16:8). Thinking of all things as created for a specific purpose, and that purpose being FOR HUMANS, is as old as time.

The dogmas found in Islam's holy book were almost all extant dogmas, circulating around the Middle East at the time. These tid-bits of hokum were adopted by the book's authors as conventional wisdom; and often articulated in precisely the same way. Thus Mohammedans were merely repeating what they understood to be true…

which turns out to be what others had previously understood to be true…almost all of which was patently false. Be that as it may, cherished lore is cherished lore; and pre-modern minds were inclined to take certain dogmas seriously.

Where might the authors of the “Recitations” gotten all these zany ideas? We should be reminded that no belief arises ex nihilo. Dogmas are not conjured in a vacuum–even those claiming “revelations” suddenly zapped into someone’s head via paranormal means. (I do a survey of such cases in my essay: “The History Of Exalted Figures”.)

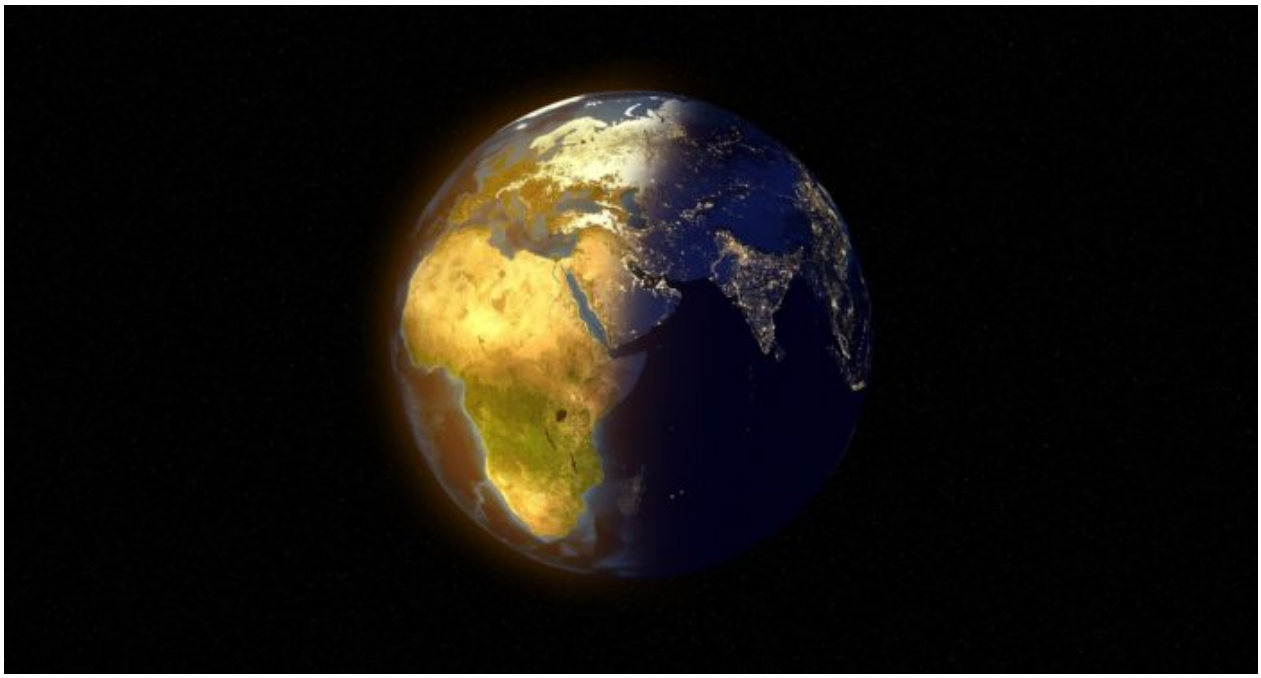
The regurgitation of superstition is something we find throughout the world… throughout the course of recorded history. Such is the nature of memes–and entire memeplexes–over long periods of time. And it is especially the case when those memes are based in a sanctified dogmatic system; and the memeplex is consecrated. When dogmas are codified / sanctified, the result is often INSTITUTIONALIZED dogmatism (that is: religion).

The Koran resembles a work of science in the same way that a gnat resembles a space shuttle. Should we opt to conduct a discussion of things that can fly and attack with stealth, would it make sense to treat those two things in the same manner? To caricature the former as the latter would be, to put it mildly, silly. Yet we see such an outlandish parity regularly posited by Islamic apologists when it comes to the Koran’s alleged scientific credence.

Of the thousands of verses in the Koran, there is NOT ONE that indicates divine authorship. In fact, virtually every verse in the book broadcasts the fallibility of its author(s). So to pretend that Islam’s holy book offered some crucial insight into the workings of the cosmos is simply naive. In most cases, its authors merely rebranded extant dogmas–adding a new twist here and there–then passed it off as a groundbreaking revelation. Unsurprisingly, it worked like a charm.

It seems that every time the authors of the Koran attempt to say something about the natural world, they screw it up. A book festooned with so many glaring mistakes —on such elementary matters—should certainly give one pause. A book that has NOTHING BUT glaring mistakes should make it clear that its authors were anything but sagacious. It makes sense, then, to pose the question: Is this slew of erroneous statements not enough to demonstrate the scientific delinquency of those who first disseminated the “Recitations”?

To reiterate: It’s not so much that the Koran gets so much wrong; it’s that it gets almost nothing right. As a source of information about the natural world, it is worse than useless; it is extremely misleading. {36}



The Flat Earth:

Serious astronomy has been practiced since Nabu-ri-mannu of Chaldea in the 6th century B.C. More to the point: the model of a flat Earth has been debunked since Classical Antiquity. In the 5th century B.C., Euctemon of Athens seems to have been well aware that the world was spherical. In the 4th century B.C., Pytheas of Massalia became the first to demarcate the north and south poles in his terrestrial cartography. And in the 3rd century B.C., Eratosthenes of Cyrene deduced the sphericality of the Earth after observing that shadows cast by sunlight were different lengths at different latitudes. He even calculated the circumference of the planet to within a few kilometers. (!)

By the end of the 5th century A.D., the renown Indian astronomer, Arya-bhata of Pataliputra / Kusumapura [Bihar] had established the spherical nature of the Earth in his “Ashmaka-tantra” [Book of Solutions; rendered “Aryabhatiya” in Arabic]. He posited that the APPARENT rotation of the stars was actually due to the daily rotation of the EARTH ITSELF. He made such astronomical observations even as he laid the groundwork for algebra and trigonometry.

Meanwhile, in Europe, the understanding of a spherical Earth was reflected in the writings of Anicius Boëthius, who had no qualms with bucking Church teachings.

In the 620's, the renown Indian mathematician, Brahma-gupta of Rajasthan [Gurjarata] pioneered algebra. He even established the numerical notation–replete with zero, negative numbers, and a decimal system to represent the value of pi–that would later be adopted by the Arabs (later to be mislabeled "Arab numerals"). He too recognized the Earth as spherical. Amazingly, he correctly estimated the Earth's circumference at 4,967 yojanas (about 40,000 km).

By the time MoM was undertaking his ministry, the Indian astronomer, Bhaskara was composing commentaries on Arya-bhata's work, as well as refining the numerical system that would later be adopted by the Arabs. The Andalusian scholar, Isidore of Seville was also referring to the world as round. Alas, the Seal of the Abrahamic prophets, who was purportedly in direct communication with the Creator the Universe, was none the wiser.

When the Mohammedan creed was established, the impression that the world is flat was nothing new to Abrahamic cosmogony. The misconception dates back to the Hebrew Bible–in which the Abrahamic deity asked Job rhetorically: "Where were you when I laid the Earth's foundations, marked out its dimensions, and laid its cornerstone?" Elsewhere in the Book of Job, we are told that "the Earth takes shape like clay under a seal" (38:14).

Even during the Rashidun caliphate (mid-7th century), we find widespread recognition–OUTSIDE OF Dar al-Islam–that the world was round. The Armenian geographer / astronomer, Anania Shirakatsi penned his magnum opus, the "Ashkharatsuyts" within only a few years of MoM's death, explicating the spherical nature of the Earth. The Byzantine "Ravenna Cosmography" also exhibited a clear understanding this fact.

Alas. The notion of the Earth being flat had a long history in Abrahamic lore–as attested by, say, First Samuel 2:1-8 ("For the pillars of the earth are god's, and on them he shall set the world"). Isaiah 40:20 speaks of god sitting "above" the Earth. And we are notified that the Abrahamic deity "has set the world on its foundations; so that it shall never be moved" in Psalms 93, 96, and 104. First Chronicles says the same thing (16:30). All this is reminiscent of the Koran describing mountains as stakes holding the Earth down (16:15 and 78:7), while marveling at the heavens being suspended above the Earth without pillars (13:2-3, 22:65, and 31:10).

It is obvious that the authors of the Koran were under the impression that the world was flat. In 2:22, 13:2-3, 15:19, 20:53, 43:10, 50:7, 51:48, 71:19, 79:30, 88:20, and 91:6, we are told that the world is “dahaha” [a vast expanse] that was created (by god) by being “spread out” (like a carpet). {30} Such passages might alternately be interpreted as describing the Earth as a bed. (Beds aren’t spheres.) This is all rather embarrassing, as much of the rest of the world had been well-aware of the Earth’s spherical nature since Classical Antiquity (as was the case with Pythagoras, Parmenides, Zeno, Plato, Hipparchus, etc.)

In keeping with this, it’s no surprise that MoM’s audience wondered where the sun went at night. This befuddlement was clearly a consequence of a conception of the world as a flat surface with edges (as well as a geo-centric perspective). Of course, instead of correcting these glaring misconceptions, MoM opted to ANSWER such queries; as he HIMSELF espoused the same erroneous cosmic model.

As if it weren’t already clear enough, 78:6-7 elaborates on the point, specifying that the Earth was spread out LIKE A CARPET. It should come as no surprise, then, that the authors of Islam’s holy book marvel at the fact that the sky (as a dome) does not fall down, being as it is not held up by pillars.

The authors of the Koran posited the (literal) ENDS of the Earth. For them, the entire scope of the world (the “oikumene”) was from the Indus River valley (“Pison” in the argot of early Semitic peoples) in the east to the Nile Delta (“Gihon”) in the west. {23} So, as far as they were concerned, one could literally voyage to the places where the sun rose (presumably: from somewhere just beyond the Hindu Kush) and set (into a muddy pool, ostensibly located somewhere in the Maghreb, just beyond Egypt). {32} The SUN’S RESTING PLACE is referenced in 36:38 as well.

It evidently never occurred to the Muslim conquerers of the Middle Ages that when they pushed eastward toward India (and westward toward the Barbary Coast and Iberian Peninsula), they were venturing into places the authors of their holy book were unaware existed.

13:41 and 21:44 explicitly refer to the ENDS / EDGES / SIDES [“a-trafi-ha” / “tarfi” / “tarafan”] of the earth [“arda”]—stating that god reduces the world from its ends. This was not meant to be metaphorical. In 11:114 and 20:130, when instructing people when to pray, the same term (“T-R-F”) is used to refer to the “ends” of the day (sunrise and sunset).

And what is ABOVE this flat surface? 13:2, 21:32, 22:65, and 31:30 describes the sky as a “protective” ceiling over us (i.e. a dome). As it turns out, the Koranic description of the heavens as a (protective) DOME was nothing new. The Sumerian heaven was depicted as a dome suspended above the flat earth (over which was the sea of Tiamat)–almost exactly the description we find in Islam’s holy book. Were the Sumerians thinking of ozone as well? As it turns out, Anu created the world by cleaving the heaven and earth. He then used stars to protect the world from evil demons. Any of this sound familiar? It should. All of these zany dogmas are found in the Koran.

The heavens-as-a-dome leitmotif is even found in ancient Chinese mythology, replete with pillars suspending it over a flat Earth (ref. the “Huai-nan-zi” from the 2nd century B.C.; in which the pillars had to be repaired by the goddess, Nü-wa). Such cosmology was nothing new when the Koran was composed. Had the book’s authors thought of the world as spherical, they would have described this protective encasement as a rind or shell, not as a dome.

The Koran’s authors marvel at how god holds up the sky without using pillars. Likewise, in 34:9, the authors seem to be in awe at how god restrains the sky from falling onto the Earth. Hearing that god keeps the sky from falling down, we can’t help but be amused. Yet we’re told that the heavens BEGAN conjoined with the Earth; for 55:7 explains that when god created the heavens, he RAISED them up from the Earth like a canopy. It makes sense, then, that 2:22 describes the sky as a canopy over the Earth, while comparing the Earth to a (stationary) bed.

Thus the Earth is an expanse, rather than a sphere, over which is the dome of the heavens is miraculously suspended without pillars (also ref. 34:9). The heavens is something one could theoretically pass beyond, if god so permitted–as mentioned in 55:33. Moreover, this magically-suspended dome was created AFTER the Earth—as specified in 2:29, 41:9-12, and 79:27-30. (That’s right: The Earth was first, the cosmos came later on.) Naturally, then, the sky is seen as a roof that will break / open (or a canopy that will fold) on Judgement Day (as in 21:104, 69:16, 78:19, and 81:11).

We could, of course, read all this figuratively; but that would be an odd approach to take with a text that claims to be the ultimate explication of the natural world. This is rather embarrassing, as the Greeks started positing the Earth was spherical in the 6th century B.C.–more than twelve centuries before the Koran was composed.

In 51:47, the Koran's protagonist announces that he was the one who'd made the heaven ["sama'a"] spacious / expansive. ("Mu-s[h]i'una" means ONE WHO makes spacious / expansive; based on the verb "aus[h]a'a", which might also be translated as extensive / vast.) Was this a premonition of Hubble's constant? An incredible insight that the fabric space-time ITSELF is undergoing a process of expansion?

Hardly. In the very next verse, the book's protagonist announces that he had "spread out" ["fa-ras[h]-naha" means we've spread it out"] THE EARTH. He then praises himself for being the "mahiduna" [spreader]…on BOTH counts: Heaven and Earth. (All this is done in the first person royal plural.) Are we to suppose, then, that the planet Earth is expanding as well? Nope. As mentioned, 13:41 and 21:44 state that god is DIMINISHING the Earth (from its edges). And keep in mind, 21:31 tells us that mountains were placed upon the surface of the Earth to keep it from shaking. (!)

Thus we're told that god used his prodigious power to make Earth a vast expanse; and the heavens a vast expanse OVER it. THAT is how it all began. It comes as no surprise, then, that the exegete, Mawardi cited the same phrasing ("spread out") as an argument "against those who claim the Earth is like a ball" in the late 10th / early 11th century.

Revealingly, the authors of the Koran felt pressed to answer the question: Where does the sun go at night? The mere posing of the question reveals the degree of ignorance involved. That they even attempted to answer the question reveals that they were complicit in that ignorance. Those who knew better would have clarified this misconception, stating that the sun doesn't "go" anywhere; it temporarily disappears from the side of the rotating sphere on which the observer happens to be standing. They would have likely pointed out that it is always daytime SOMEWHERE, and always night SOMEWHERE ELSE. Alas: Those who wrote the relevant Koranic passages were under the impression that when the sun set, it set on the Earth itself (such that when night fell, it fell upon the entire world). It is no wonder, then, that it never occurred to the authors of the Koran that fasting and praying according to the rising and setting of the sun might be problematic for, say, NORDIC Muslims (2:187 and 17:78). {23}

Clearly, the authors did not think of the Earth as a round object drifting along (in a vast cosmos, most of which we can't see). These comments reveal, instead, that the authors saw the world as a flat base with the heavens as something that exist exclusively above it. Even if this is taken as metaphor, it still reveals that the book's

authors thought of the heavens as miraculously SUSPENDED (or held up, as though by supports). Of course, such pillar-less-ness would not seem miraculous to anyone who understood Earth to be a spherical body floating within a firmament.

Is it not odd that god failed to mention that our sun is just another star…and that stars are just other suns…and that many of the pinpoints of light we see in the sky are entire galaxies? Well, it's not odd once we understand who wrote the Koran.

It is also clear that the authors of the Koran thought the Earth to be flat from the way that they discuss night and day (i.e. as if the Earth did not have poles). Certainly, fasting could be either deadly or stupendously easy in, say, the upper Nordic region (depending on which time of year Ramadan fell). Of course, if the Earth were flat, there would be no place with several months between sunrise and sunset. The authors were obviously unaware of the lengthening days and nights as one went extremely far north or south. If Islam were only meant for people in the Arabian desert, there would be no problem at all. (Well, at least, on this particular matter.)

Clearly, the early Muslims (i.e. the Salaf) were under the impression that the Earth was flat, which—it would seem—had to be beneath one thing and atop another. As it turns out, it was beneath a miraculously suspended dome (no columns holding it up); but what, pray tell, was it ON? No answer is forthcoming in the Koran. Yet, according to the 14th-century historiographer, Ibn Kathir, one of the Sahaba (MoM's cousin, Ibn Abbas) was convinced that the world was set on top of a gigantic fish ("nun"); which Ibn Kathir (in keeping with with Al-Tabari) connected to the opening verse of Surah 68. (Incidentally, the 8th-century historiographer, Jafar "al-Sadiq" was left with the same impression.)

The Koranic passages enumerated here had a clear effect on the thinking of the Muslim world. They led the 9th-century exegete, Abu Bakr ibn Mujahid al-Atashi of Baghdad to note: "If the Earth were round, then water would not have settled on it." Brilliant. It was this model of the world that was articulated by Al-Tabari in his "History" (10th century) when he referenced "the two sides of the Earth and the two rims of heaven" (in recounting the tale about Alexander the Great voyaging to the places where the sun rises and sets.

According to 18:83-90, Dhul-Qarnayn ["Two-horned One"; a reference to Alexander the Great] voyages to the edge of the world…and finds the actual place where the sun sets (into a puddle of murky water, as it turns out). It is then explained that

people who live in that location are therefore always in the sunshine. (No shit.) 25:45 then explains that god made the sun's movement as an indication for the length / direction of shadows; thereby reversing a cause and effect that even most children understand.

So we have the unequivocal statement that the sun sets into a muddy pool (18:86). The passage recounts that "D[h]u al-Qarnayn" [one with two horns; i.e. Alexander the Great] traveled to the place where the sun set. Apologists often dissimulate when it comes to this rather embarrassing verse–insisting that it REALLY meant to say the place where "IT APPEARED" to him that the sun set in a muddy pool. But that is not what the passage says.

Eisegetes are forced to clandestinely insert the qualifying clause into the text so as to get the passage to mean what they wish it meant. The comical view that there is a place the sun goes at night–namely: into a muddy pool at the western edge of the (flat) world–is confirmed in Abu Dawood's Hadith no. 4002. This reiteration refutes the notion that 18:86 might be charitably interpreted as a description of mere appearances. {31}

When we look at 18:86, we should note that it is not that it only APPEARED to Alexander the Great that the sun was setting in the muddy pool; he actually FOUND ("wajadah[a]") it doing so. {32} We know this, because when the authors of the Koran DID want to state that something merely appeared to be a certain way, but was not really so, they said as much. Note, for example, 4:157 wherein it is explained that when Jesus of Nazareth was supposedly crucified, it only APPEARED to be the case: "shubbiha" denotes merely seeming-to-be (in contradistinction to actually being). The upshot was that witnesses were mistaken. There is no such insinuation in 18:86. At no point does it intimate that Alexander was under any mis-impression when he arrived at the place where the sun set. {33}

Needless to say, one does not need to travel to a distant land to REACH THE PLACE where the sun sets; as the sun sets from anywhere and everywhere on the planet (being as how the Earth is a rotating sphere). The horizon does not exist at a certain location; it is an optical effect.

We know that MoM was referring to an actual place where the sun LITERALLY sets due to the "sahih" Hadith account of Abu Dharr, who recounted that MoM once asked him: "Do you know where the sun sets?" The self-proclaimed prophet continued: "It sets in a spring of warm water." Abu Dharr then asks: "Do you know

where the sun goes?" MoM replied: "Verily it glides until it reaches the place under the throne. There, it falls prostrate and remains until it is given permission to rise again; and go to the place from whence it came. It then returns and emerges from the rising place" (Bukhari 4/54/421). This iteration involves the sun in transit (as THE explanation for its diurnal disappearance / reappearance). Given that the sun is always in the sky from the perspective of somewhere on the Earth's surface, this makes no sense. Yet it DOES make sense if we were to suppose that the Earth was stationary and flat, WITH EDGES, and that the sun revolved around it.

As late as the 15th century, Jalal ud-Din al-Mahalli of Cairo wrote (in his "Tafsir al-Jalalayn") that the relevant passages of the Koran "suggest that the Earth is flat"; an assertion, he added "that is the opinion of most of the ulema." (!)

Also noteworthy was the Persian polymath, Al-Khwarizmi's major work on geography, the "Kitab Surat al-Ard" [Book of the Face of the Earth] c. 833, which was based on the work of the geo-centrist, Ptolemy. Needless to say, spheres do not have faces. {29} None of his maps in any way indicated that he was aware of the Earth's sphericality (the fact that if, say, one were to venture off one side of the drawing, one would emerge on the opposing side).

Evidence that the flat-Earth view abided in Mohammedan lore can be found in a slew of medieval Islamic geographers–every one of whom, guided by the Koran as they were, STILL hadn't yet gotten the memo that the Earth was spherical. Perhaps many of them were urged to demarcate the place where "Dhul-Qarnayn" had found the edge of the world (per 18:83-90). Take, for instance, three of the most notable Islamic geographers:

- Abu Hanifah Ahmad ibn Dawood of Dinawar (9th century)
- Abul-Qasim Ubayd-allah ibn Abdullah ibn Khordadbeh of Jibal (late 9th /early 10th century)
- Muhammad Abul-Qasim ibn Hawqal of Nisibis (10th century)

It is clear from the writings of all three that the accepted view was of a flat Earth. This last writer was best known for his "Surat al-Ard" [Face of the Earth]. He was clearly not thinking about the surface of a sphere.

There is a passage in the Hadith of "Muslim" (book 5; no. 7258) in which MoM is quoted as proclaiming: "God drew the ends of the Earth together for me to see; and I saw its eastern and western lands; and I saw that the dominion of my community

will reach as far as that which has been drawn together for me to see." This is a peculiar thing to say if one understands that the entire world exists on the surface of a sphere.

With the possible exception of the Ptolemist (geo-centrist), Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Kathir al-Farghani of Baghdad (9th century), it would seem that the first major expositors in the Muslim world to have–finally–figured out that the world was spherical were the Persian polymaths, Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni of Khwarezm and Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn al-Husayn of Karaj–both in the early 11th century. It might be noted, though, that they both still equivocated on the matter of geo-centrism.

However, the Muslim cartographer, Muhammad al-Idrisi of Palermo (also from the 12th century) seems to have STILL not gotten the memo about the Earth NOT actually being as the Koran describes it (flat). This is made evident by his "Tabula Rogeriana"; a map clearly not drawn by someone trying to show that the Earth was spherical. His best-known book was "The Pleasure Of He Who Longs To Journey To the Horizons". For, so far as he saw it, there existed the edges-of-the world described in the Koran (13:41 and 21:44). {30}

In much of Dar al-Islam, the Koran flat-Earth view actually persisted into the 19th century. Revealingly, in the memoirs of his official Egyptian mission to Paris (published in 1834), Rifa'a al-Tahtauri of Cairo (a respected teacher at Al-Azhar University) marveled at the fact that European astronomers had actually proven that–contrary to the Koran–the Earth was, in fact, round. (!) His surprise makes sense. For as far as the authors of his holy book were concerned, the known world was a flat surface with edges. The circumscribed "oikumene" reflected the limited knowledge of the "known world" at the time the "Recitations" were composed.

Far from motivating scientific inquiry, the Koran stymied it for centuries. Any headway that was made was made IN SPITE OF, not because of, Islamic theology. We should not be surprised, then, to find that the founder of Boko Haram–indoctrinated at the University of Medina c. 1990–was confident that the world was flat. For, so far as he was concerned, Islam's holy book was the ultimate source for understanding anything and everything. He was simply noticing what the Koran clearly says. Therefore THAT must be the truth; and that's all there is to it.

GEO-CENTRISM:

Islamic scripture's treatment of the sun rising / setting is SPECIFIC LOCATIONS is not the only giveaway that the early Mohammedans thought the Earth was flat, and at the center of a cosmos AROUND WHICH the sun revolved. The revealing thing is not the (daffy) answers given to "Where does the sun go at night?"; but in the very question posed. If one wanted to be crystal clear on the matter, and leave no doubt that mis-impressions had been decisively dispelled, how easy it would have been to simply respond to such inquiries with: "The sun does not GO anywhere. The Earth is a spherical object, the rotation of which accounts for the sun's apparent rising in the east and setting in the west." On the contrary, 91:4 claims that it is NIGHT that hides the sun. In 38:32, Solomon says that the night occurs because the sun disappears behind a curtain of darkness. We could be charitable; and take this in a purely poetic way, but–then again—isn't the Koran meant to EXPLAIN things?

Defective astronomy suffuses the Koran. As mentioned, in 21:104, the heavens are said to be a sheet that god will fold on Judgement Day. Even taken metaphorically, this is an odd thing to say.

In 13:2, 14:33, 21:33, 31:29, 35:13, 36:38-40, 39:5, 55:5, and 91:1-2, the Koran talks about how the sun and the moon have designated orbits / courses (which, of course, they do); but predictably fails to acknowledge that the Earth ALSO has an orbit / course. (The sun's movement is described as running / swimming from here to there, then finding a resting place between sunset and sunrise.) 36:40 even states that the sun is never allowed to "catch up to" the moon. Splendid. That "the sun and the moon swim in their own rounded courses across the sky" is hardly a succinct way to convey the fact that the earth is a sphere revolving around the sun. It is no wonder, then, that the authors of the Koran are beguiled by the fact that the sun never "catches up to" the moon as they swim along in their respective orbits.

Meanwhile, 91:3-4 and 92:1 state that the night-time "CONCEALS" the sunlight… which is, so we're told, why it becomes dark. And, to top it all off, 37:6-7 explains that the stars are located in the "lower heavens" (i.e. closer than the sun and moon). 81:2 reminds us that stars can FALL…as in: down to Earth. This only makes sense if one sees the heavens as a dome suspended miraculously over the flat Earth–which is, as it turns out, precisely what the authors of the Koran thought. {29}

Is all this really better than Copernicus managed? If this were intended to explicate helio-centrism, god had a very strange way of doing it.

Recall that god built the seven heavens to be "strong" (78:12), noting that it has no cracks in it (50:6). The authors expect us to be impressed by this. 22:65 notes that god holds the heavens up (from falling down to Earth); while 13:2 marvels that he does so without using visible pillars.

And what of the passage referring to the sky as a protective ceiling? No such passage exists. 21:32 refers to the "heavens" as a PROTECTED ceiling, not a protective one. That is, the (seven) heavens are PROTECTED FROM Earth, not PROTECTING Earth. That's why shooting stars are said to be projectiles god uses to shoot down djinn who are trying to eavesdrop on the goings-on of heaven. For "akhira" is a cordon, quarantined from the corruptions of "dunya".

If 21:32 is referring to the Earth's atmosphere, it doesn't make any sense; as the planet's atmosphere is an interface with the rest of the universe (including the stars, sun, and moon), not a ceiling. (It is effectively a gaseous membrane.) In any case, a spherical shell isn't a ceiling. If, on the other hand, the verse is referring to the rest of the universe (as the sky is said to CONTAIN the stars, sun, and moon), then it is STILL not a ceiling.

Nothing makes the geocentric view more glaring than the authors' need to address the matter of where the sun goes at night. Looking to verses 86 thru 90 of Surah 18, we find the the sun goes to a "setting place" (located in a muddy spring) at the end of the day, only to miraculously re-appear each morning at a "rising place". Where, then, is it during the night? Well, at a "resting place", of course (36:38)… located beneath god's throne, where it prostrates (waiting until morning, at which point god grants it permission to rise again). Of course, the whole matter of where the sun goes is moot once we realize the entire process is about the Earth (as a sphere) ROTATING; whereby places on its surface change with respect to the sun. The sun is, of course, always where it is; and is always shining somewhere in the world. There is no "resting place" where it awaits it queue to rise again. (The fact that the entire solar system slowly revolves around the center of the galaxy does not change this. After all, it's all about frame of reference. Even our galaxy is drifting through space; but that has no bearing on the diurnal activities of the planet Earth.)

The Koran also describes the moon as a source of illumination. This was a common belief in ancient times. Indeed, in the Sumerian / Akkadian and Hittite word for the moon, "Iskhara", means "maker of light". Given a geo-centric worldview, this kind of description is exactly what we would expect.

When we read at the beginning of Surah 91 that the day "displays" the sun while the night "covers" the sun, we're reading the words of someone who doesn't understand what accounts for the light of day and the darkness of night: a revolving Earth, and the positional relation of a given part of its surface to the rays of a nearby star. It would never occur to the Koran's authors that the moon might still be there even during daylight hours.

Nevertheless, apologists insist that the Final Message to mankind explained everything with perfect clarity. Consequently, how could anyone have possibly come away with the impression that the world was anything but an orb floating in space? We must wonder: Did it not occur to the Koran's vaunted protagonist to—at some point—simply say: "The Earth is a spherical object that rotates within a vast space while orbiting the sun (which is itself just another star), thereby giving the appearance that the sun ascends from the eastern horizon and descends on the western horizon; when it is really the Earth that is spinning. So when it is day on one side, it is night on the obverse side, and vice versa." That would have likely done the trick.

Why would god NOT have clarified this elementary point when he knew full well that most people at the time were under the distinct (mistaken) impression that the Earth was the center of the cosmic scheme, and all bodies in the heavens revolved around it? Why would he just "leave it at that" when, by ONLY stating what is found in the Koran, that widespread (mistaken) impression would persist for a thousand more years? (As it turned out, Galileo published his "Dialogue Concerning Two Chief World Systems" on EXACTLY the one-millennium anniversary of MoM's ignominious death.) The Vatican would not forgive Galileo for his position until 1992. {34}

It is no secret that in Abrahamic lore, the geo-centric view prevailed. This is made apparent in passages like Joshua 10:13, in which we are told that the sun stopped in the sky, delaying its setting for a full day. That such an effect would be due a cessation in the Earth's rotation would have never occurred to those who thought the world was flat and located at the center of the universe. So we are told the sun was held still; not that the Earth stopped rotating. We also encounter this phrasing in the Book of Habakkuk (3:11). Ecclesiastes 1:5 tells us that it is the sun that revolves around the Earth.

It is no surprise, then, that the Koran exhibits the same misconceptions.

The supposition that the Earth was NOT at the center of the celestial spheres dates back to the 6th century B.C., when the Ionian thinker, Hecataeus of Miletus recognized the world to be a round object in a solar system–as explicated in his "Periodos Ges". That was all well over a millennium before MoM lived. The idea was seconded in the 5th century B.C. by Meton of Athens, who developed lunar theory. Ki-dunnu of Chaldea continued to develop lunar theory in the 4th century B.C.

The helio-centric model continued to be promoted through the 3rd century B.C. In the early part of that century, Aristarchus of Samos presented the first explicitly helio-centric model of the solar system. Archimedes of Syracuse would then champion the idea…as would the aforementioned Eratosthenes of Cyrene.

Alas, in the Muslim world, the geo-centric view prevailed–as attested by the Andalusian astronomer, Abu al-Qasim al-Qurtubi of Madrid (a.k.a. "Maslama al-Majriti"), who is best known for translating Ptolemy's "Planisphaerium" c. 1000, yet stopped short of endorsing the idea that the Earth revolved around the sun.

The first Muslim thinker to explicitly delineate a helio-centric view of the solar system would not be until the 12th century, when it was endorsed the Andalusian astronomer, Nur al-Din ibn Ishaq al-Bitruji (a.k.a. "Alpetragius").

Yet, even then, the impression that world was flat persisted in Dar al-Islam. Any doubts that this misimpression was rampant throughout the Muslim world are dispelled by the fact that medieval expositors found the need to posit “Bahamut”, the giant fish that carried the world on its back. Some accounts even had the world resting on the back of a giant ox (“Kuyutha”)…which was, in turn, standing on a giant gemstone (a slab of “jacinth”) …which was held up by Bahamut, which swam in the primordial waters beneath everything. This zany cosmological picture was still being proffered in the 13th century–as with the Persian thinker, Zakariya of Qazwin in his “Aja’ib al-Makhluqat wa Ghara’ib al-Mawjudat” [Wonders of the Creatures and Miraculous Things of the Universe]. If the Koran had made it clear that the world was round, then why were such prominent writers still under the impression the world was flat?

Yet another indication that denizens of Dar al-Islam thought the world was the center of the universe was the panoply of works by NON-Muslims who were INFLUENCED BY Muslim thinkers, and as a consequence espoused geo-centrism. Take, for instance, the English writer, Johannes of Sacro-Bosco (John of Holywood). His “The Sphere of the World” placed the Earth at the center of the cosmos. That was in the 13th century. While Johannes DID recognize the Earth to be spherical, he sought validation of his mis-impressions about the celestial spheres (a model first made famous by Ptolemy) from Muslim sources. (He was fluent in medieval Arabic).

Even by the late 14th century, many of the most prominent Muslim thinkers STILL thought the Earth was the center of the universe. The celebrated astronomer, Ibn al-Shatir of Damascus penned the “Kitab Nihayat al-Sul fi Ta-shih al-Usul [Book of the Final Quest for the Rectification of Principles], which presented an expressly geo-centric model of the cosmos (though he seemed to have come to terms with the fact that the Earth was spherical).

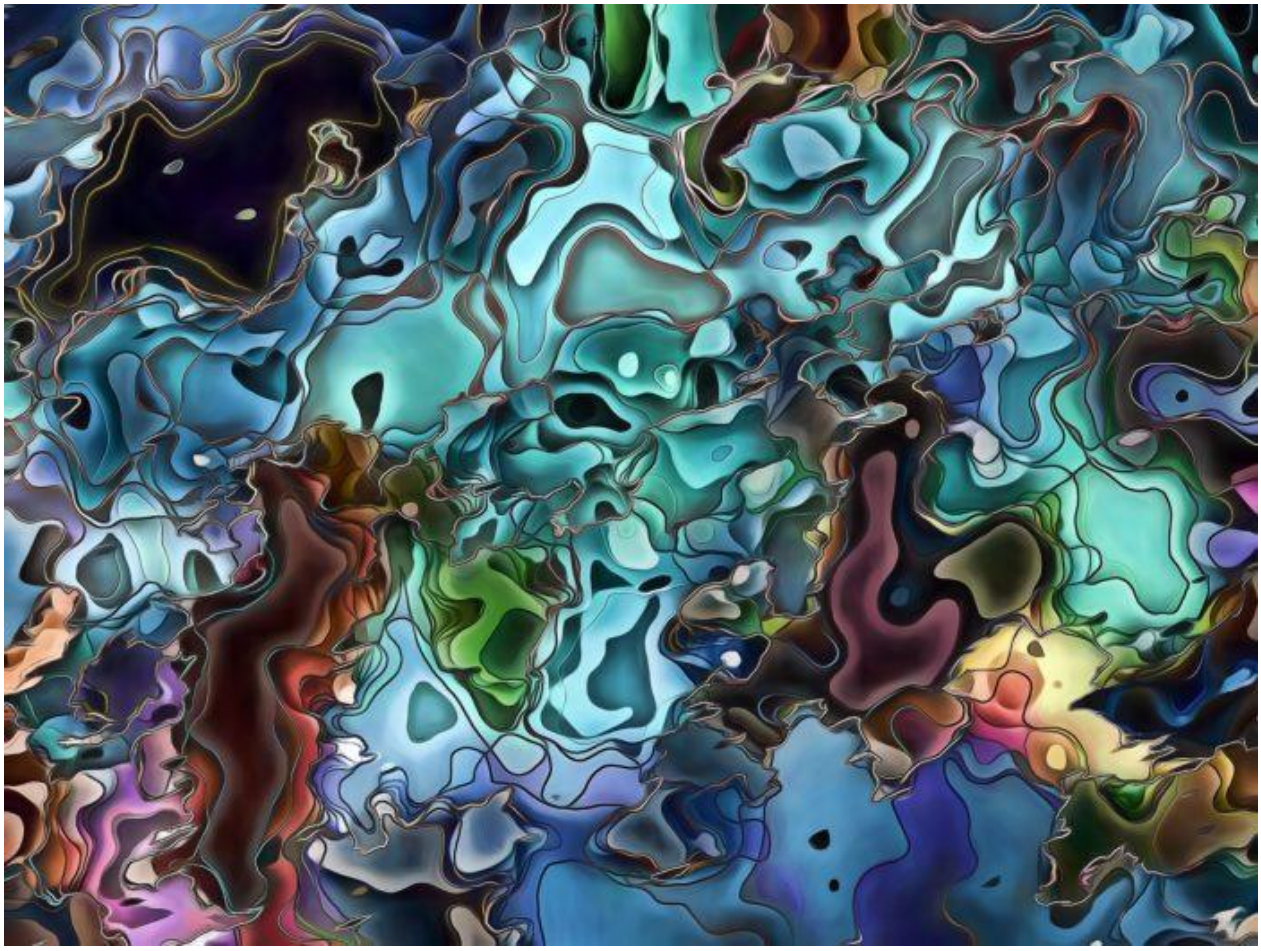
When it came to an actual understanding of the cosmos, German astronomer (and Renaissance humanist), Nicholas of Cusa made headway in the 15th century. Yet—like the Catholic Church—most of the Muslim world was un-moved by such insights. (For more on this, ref. “A History of Arabic Astronomy” by George Saliba; as well as “Orthodoxy” by Sonja Brentjes.)

When, in 1543, the Polish freethinker, Nicolaus Copernicus published “De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium” [On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres], the helio-centric model of the solar system came as somewhat vexing news to the denizens of Dar al-Islam (as it was to the Vatican). That the entire Muslim world

found the development so surprising should come as no surprise. It was not as if those the Ummah hadn't been reading their holy book carefully enough; the problem was that they were ONLY familiar with the worldview of their holy book. They were simply convinced of that which their scriptures had informed them; as that seemed to be the only way to know anything.

Of course, almost all denizens of Dar al-Islam NOW know the Earth to be a spherical object in a solar system, orbiting a star that is just one of countless other stars. This is yet another reminder that the vast majority of the world's Muslims TODAY disregard the Koran; though typically without recognizing that they are disregarding the Koran. The fact remains: Until the modern age, most Muslims were under the distinct impression that the Earth was flat…and was at the center of the universe… as a direct result of what their holy book told them.

In closing, let's look past the flat-Earth, geo-centric perspective of the Koran. For, in the grand scheme of things, such flawed astronomy was the least of mankind's problems in the 7th century. What was REALLY going on when this was all written down? For the problem with the laughably defective explications of the natural is not an isolated one; it is indicative of a larger problem that pervades the rest of the book…on ALL subjects (from the conditions for civil society to the location of a man's testicles). Considering all this, the only thing that is miraculous about the Koran is that there are still people who think that there is anything miraculous about the Koran.



FOOTNOTES:

{1 For more on the matter of the Koran's purported clarity, see Gerd F. Puin's "Observations On Early Qu'ran Manuscripts In Sana'a".}

{2 Ali Dashti concluded: "Belief can blunt human reason and common sense, even in learned scholars. What is needed is more impartial study." I explore the matter of impartiality at length in part 1 of my series: "On Mohammed".}

{3 This does not always end well. There is a disincentive for engaging in frank critical analysis—as the world was reminded when the Turkish critic of Islam, Turan Durson was assassinated in 1990, outside his home in Istanbul.}

{4 “Ha Meem” (used at the beginning of Surahs 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, and 46) may sound cool to some people, but nobody has any idea what the heck it means. So why do so many surahs begin with the utterance of these two letters? Nobody knows. But this inexplicable feature is apparently an integral feature of a perfectly clear book.}

{5 It is surmised that Dhul-Qarnayn [One of two horns] probably referred to Alexander the Great. Meanwhile, “Dhul-Nun” [One of the fish] and/or “Sahib al-Hut” [Man of the fish] probably referred to Jonah. Such vague descriptors indicate that the authors were not aware of the proper names of these Biblical figures.}

{6 Apologists refer to this literary glitch as “al-tifat”. Typically, they rationalize it as some sort of rhetorical device. In pre-Mohammedan Arabian text, such inconsistency in grammatical structure was not uncommon. Be that as it may, this is a sign that the Koran is almost certainly not the Word of a divine super-being. “But back then, Arabians did this…” doesn’t apply when one claims that GOD was the author, and that the Koran has existed since the beginning of time. (How peculiar that the Creator of the Universe happens to have particular, Iron Age Arabian expository habits!) The rest of us are more inclined to simply refer to “al-tifat” as “bad writing”.}

{7 Instead, M. Pickthall opts to translate this as: “God fights them!” Yusuf Ali opts for: “God’s curse be upon them!” Such attempts to fix this didactic snafu are unsuccessful. In the former case: Are we to suppose that GOD fights non-Muslims? (That is: He is literally FIGHTING his followers?) In the latter case, there is still an imprecation implied: May god curse them.}

{8 Reader beware: This verse is typically re-written as “bestow blessings upon the prophet”, a deliberate mis-translation designed to obfuscate an embarrassing statement.}

{9 Such is the case with Robert Frost’s famous ending: “And miles to go before I sleep; And miles to go before I sleep.” In song lyrics, epizeuxis is often employed for emphasis and/or to maintain the meter; and may even be required to keep pace with the rhythm of the music. (Instead of inserting new verbiage, words / phrases are repeated as a kind of “filler”, in order to keep time.) This phenomenon has no relevance whatsoever to Koranic verse…as there is no pre-established meter / rhythm to which the recitation must adhere. In sum: The “Recitations” does not warrant the kind of pointless repetitions / redundancies encountered throughout.}

{10 Reading the Koran is best described as a slog; as one finds oneself trudging through boorish text that is stultifyingly redundant and utterly unimaginative.}

{11 Is this assessment committing the sin of “historicism”, by which bygone eras are assessed according to ahistorical benchmarks? How are we to respond to the protestation that it is unfair to judge the Koran by the standards of the present day? What, then, about judging The Iliad and the Odyssey–writing that is literally TWICE as old–by today’s standards? Needless to say, we regularly do so, without qualms; and the virtue of Homer’s achievement remains fully in tact. Surely, the Creator of the Universe could fare at least as well as Homer were he to compose something specifically intended to accommodate an audience centuries later. (Meanwhile, taking the “who are we to question the Koran?” approach is no better than an endorsement of authoritarianism: Don’t question; just accept!) Such an ahistorical assessment is fair because the Koran ITSELF says that it is fair. In fact, it DEMANDS to be evaluated in such a manner. To judge the Koran using timeless principles is simply to judge the Koran on the Koran’s own terms. By doing so, we are honoring the Koran’s authors’ request to treat it as an eternal message, good for all time. To apologize for the deficiencies of the “Recitations” by temporizing them is to flout the proposition that they have divine origin–conceding that they were, in fact, man-made (i.e. mere reflections of the specific time and place in which they were composed). Koranic theology insists that we NOT do this.}

{12 Koran fetishists rhapsodize about Koranic verse as if “polysemy” (packing multiple meanings into a single term) were a linguistic phenomenon that was unique to CA. One need only open a dictionary to ANY page to see that words with only a single meaning are actually quite rare. (Dare I say: Use words poetically, and a singular meaning doesn’t even exist.) This brings to mind a ethnocentric bigot who is convinced that a person can achieve X (where X is some desirable state) ONLY by having an ethnic background that–conveniently enough for him–happens to be his own. Polysemy (dubbed “wujuh al-Qur’an” in Islamic apologia) was a feature of ALL Semitic languages (including Hebrew). Indeed, the phenomenon (a word exhibiting a range of meanings depending on context) is ubiquitous throughout every one of the world’s vernaculars. For instance, the Prakrit that serves as the liturgical language for Theravada Buddhism (Pali) reads in such a way that one can’t be certain of a lexeme’s meaning until one has reached the end of the statement. Pali is fungible to an inordinate degree; yet even there intertextuality assures that meaning is fairly well-attested. The point is that, in such cases, it is a delimited RANGE, not an entirely open-ended invitation to choose your own meaning, with

which exegetes must contend. To be entranced whenever one encounters this mundane phenomenon is a sure way to incapacitate one's own mind. Shall we all be enthralled by the fact that "shishka" in Russian can mean a pine-cone, a powerful boss-man, a bump on the head, OR a large penis? Gee wiz.}

{13 This is roughly the same has the usage of "knowing" found in the Christian's locution: to KNOW Jesus. "Knowing Jesus" is not really a form of knowledge; it is concomitant with religious Faith.}

{14 This point cannot be emphasized enough. Wisdom is not to be confused with doctrinal fidelity–what the Greeks referred to as "doxa", and what is dubbed "hidmah" in CA. This is more a function of piety than wisdom. That is: It is based more on subservience than on erudition. There is nothing sagacious about being doctrinaire. We mustn't confuse being punctilious (the mark of religious zeal) with being perspicacious (the mark of intellectual rigor).}

{15 Greek thinkers considered "arete" (wisdom) concomitant with "agape" (universal love; what Marx dubbed "species-being"). In other words, "eudaimonia", not a regimen of simpering / groveling, was seen as integral to intellectual virtue. Thus wisdom was taken to be predicated on vitality (what Nietzsche called "saying yes to life") rather than on a state of obsequiousness and intimidation.}

{16 Also in the 16th century, the pioneering scholar, Giacomo Zabarella of Padua did a groundbreaking work on natural philosophy.}

{17 Also in the 17th century, René Descartes pioneered modern rationalism with his "Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences" and "Meditations on First Philosophy". Then came Baruch (cum-Benedict) Spinoza with his "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus", Isaac Newton with his "Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica", and Robert Boyle with his "A Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature".}

{18 I explore the progress of science over the ages (vis a vis Islam's contributions) in my essay, "Islam's Pyrite Age".}

{19 Even FRUIT is made in pairs (13:3). And all PLANTS are made in pairs as well (20:53). Bungling botany at such a basic level is rather embarrassing. Of course, SOME plants engage in sexual reproduction. But this is a far cry from every plant

being made in pairs; especially considering most flowers have DUAL sexuality—as they have stamens (which produce pollen) as well as carpels (which produce ovules). Asexual reproduction exists not just in flora, but in some animals as well.}

{20 There is even a Hadith that makes a fumbled attempt at embryology, specifying that after 4 lunar months of gestation, the angel charged with crafting the fetus asks god himself what the gender shall be…at which point god decides. The angel then makes it so. Never mind the existence of X and Y chromosomes; or the fact that sex is determined the moment two gametes form a viable zygote.}

{21 When it is explained that what we know dub "shooting stars" (being STARS rather than debris falling into our planet's atmosphere) are god's way of protecting Earth from an incursion of evil genies, we know we are not dealing with scientifically literate authors. (For this, reference Bukhari's Hadith vol. 65, no. 223 and 322.) Shooting stars are referred to as "kawkab" in the Koran (as in 6:76 and 24:35). Suffice to say, meteoroids (which is what "shooting stars" actually are) are not lamps (qua light source). They briefly illuminate as they burn up in the Earth's thermosphere. In the Koran, stars are referred to as "najm" (as in 53:1 and 86:3); and are ALSO referred to as LAMPs ("masabih" / "mis'bah", as in 24:35; or "siraj", as in 25:61, 33:46, 71:16, and 78:13). Of course, shooting stars are NOT stars; nor are they projectiles intended to ward off demons trying to infiltrate the heavenly realm. And what of actual stars? Embarrassingly, the Koran explains that these pinpoints of light are–like lamps hung from the ceiling–adornments of the dome over the Earth.}

{22 Evidently, those who propagated the "Recitations" were fascinated by iron, as they refer to that particular metal as divinely forged in 57:25, which–as we've seen–refers to iron as having been "sent down" by god. Of course, it was believed that EVERYTHING was made / sent by god; so there is nothing especially striking about this phrasing. That medieval Bedouins were beguiled by iron was understandable, as it seemed to exhibit magical properties (inordinate heft and strength). These were—after all—the same people who were still marveling at things like thunder and lightning. The Koran's authors were obviously impressed by iron—so heavy, so solid, so tough. This is reflected in their choice of materials for the collars and chains by which the damned shall be laden (13:5, 34:33, 36:8, 40:71, 76:4, etc.) People had considered iron to be divinely forged since time immemorial. Iron was known as "material from the heavens" by the ancient Egyptians AND Sumerians. The Koran's references to iron are merely an echo of this archaic trope. While there are plenty of iron-ore deposits in the Earth's crust, iron–like various other metals–is common in meteors. It is also found in the Earth's molten core, which accounts for the

magnetic field surrounding the planet. As with various other elements found on Earth, it was formed by supernovae billions of years ago. If only the Koran's authors had explained the unique properties of ALLOYS, there would have been something by which we might be impressed. Meanwhile, no memos on titanium were forthcoming.}

{23 "All nations" did not include any of the places that had NOT ever received an Abrahamic prophet–namely: the Americas, the Nordic lands, sub-Saharan Africa, the Eurasian Steppes, Siberia, India, China, and southeast Asia. There was obviously no awareness that there was even a Western hemisphere. Indeed, there was not even a conception of hemisphere, as the world was not understood to be spherical. In other words, so far as the authors of the Koran were aware, the entire "world" was the world of the Old Testament. 16:63 declare that, by the time of the LAST prophet (MoM), the Abrahamic deity had sent an Abrahamic prophet to every nation in the world. The authors were clearly not aware of any lands beyond the Middle East (skirted by the land of the Romans to the west and the Persians to the east). The scope of the known world (at the time) was considered the ENTIRETY of the world. This myopic purview was captured in the Greek term, "oikoumene ge" (typically rendered "[o]Ecumene"; which served as the basis for the ecclesiastical term for universality, "ecumenical"). Such an ideation attests to the conceit of such epistemology–which typically takes the form: All that MATTERS TO US is tantamount to all that exists. That is: If it isn't relevant to our delimited scope concern, then it may as well not exist. The entire universe is that which WE care about is a form of (collective) epistemic narcissism. Hence the attitude: All we happen to be aware of is all that matters. ("Anything outside our designated purview is not worth knowing.") While its authors seem to have been aware of Mandaeans (as "Sabians") and Zoroastrianism (in addition to Judaism, Christianity, and the various forms of Arab paganism), the Koran fails to mention Manichaeism, Mithra-ism, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism…or any of the many other religions of the world at the time. Such a myopic purview would have seemed fine insofar as the entire "world" was comprised exclusively of the East Mediterranean (the Apennine Peninsula, the Balkan Peninsula, Anatolia, Egypt, and the Levant)…in addition to Arabia, Abyssinia, Mesopotamia, and Persia. To complicate matters: 28:46, 32:3, 34:43-44, and 36:2-6 notify us that MoM was the first prophet to be sent to Arabia…even after we are expected to believe that Abraham and his son had erected the Kaaba in Mecca (see my essay: "Mecca And Its Cube"). Such ignorance is unsurprising, coming as it did from people who thought the world was flat.}

{24 According to verses 25:53, 27:61, and 55:19-20, the world has two seas (one salt water, one fresh water) separated by a “barrier” or “partition” (“barzakh”). In the discussion of the “two seas” of the world (one fresh, one salt). 55:22 states that coral (along with pearls) comes from both kinds of water. Wrong. Coral can only grow in salt water. (The authors thus manage to bungle both basic world geography and basic marine biology in just two verses.) Those who engage in eisegesis attempt to spin this (obviously false) proposition as some kind of brilliant description of the (apparent) immiscibility found in what are called “suspensions” in chemistry. Of course, wherever two bodies of water (which have different salinity / temperature / pressure) interface with one another, each body retains its native features up to the place of interface, where there is a margin that demarcates one body from the other. But so what? Salt wedge estuaries occur where fresh water interfaces with saline water (i.e. ocean water) at the mouth of some rivers. This often happens in a manner that temporarily prevents the water—at any given moment—from mixing. Sometimes this provides the visual effect of two distinct colors on the surface of the water (as if they were magically separated by a mysterious barrier). In the end, the ocean remains the ocean (with all its traits) and the river remains the river (with all its traits). Incidentally, saline water and fresh water are miscible; so this is only a visual effect, not an explanation of how all water behaves. Oddly, there is no mention of hydro-colloids in the Koran. Go figure.}

{25 This Hijaz-centric view of the world is telling. The word for “barrier” in the Koran is “barzakh”. As it just so happens, “Hijaz” means “barrier” as well. Not coincidentally, “Hijaz” was the label given—by the pre-Islam Arabs—to the area of southwestern Arabia that separates the (salty) Red Sea and Dead Sea from (fresh) water bodies like the Jordan River in the north and the aquatic accumulation in the various “wadis” (riverbeds) after rainfall further inland. That is likely to have been the “barrier” to which the Koran’s Bedouin authors were referring. The upshot: “That which separates the bodies of salt water from the bodies of fresh water” was the land on which they dwelt (see footnote 26 below). The separation of the waters of the world into salt and fresh goes back to the Sumerian legend of Tiamat (representing ocean waters) and Abzu (representing fresh waters) in the Enuma Elish.}

{26 Where, one might ask, did this daffy superstition come from? As it turns out, the notion of mountains as foundational fixtures, used by the gods to hold down the Earth, came from the Sumerians. The moniker “E-Temen-Anki” indicates the

mountain serving as the main buttress for the world. "Temen" refers to an axis mundi (the basis for the Greek "temenos"). "Anki" was the basis for "An" (god of the heavens) and "Ki" (Earth goddess).}

{27 Those who devote their time to memorizing verses almost certainly do not qualify for aptitude in the Koran's ACTUAL contents. This is especially so for the so-called "hafiz". Though the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, **rote memorization** (of memorized sounds) is typically incommensurate with **reading comprehension**. Those who seek to glean an understanding of a texts content rarely strive to MEMORIZE the text itself, as one undertaking has absolutely nothing to do with the other. More to the point: Pro-forma regurgitation of scripture can't be described as anything other than a colossal waste of time. If one can recite by memory large swaths of a text, it is a sure sign that one has not procured an understanding of the words coming out of one's mouth. And one has most certainly not subjected the material to critical scrutiny. The exercise is–at best–a gross misallocation of time and mental resources. Here's the key: This would be the case EVEN IF the book was brimming with ingenious insights. There, indeed, no reason to memorize ANYTHING by rote. Ever.}

{28 This is not to say that the Koran's authors got this idea from the Chinese. It is merely to point out that such motifs were not uncommon in the ancient world. (Similar accounts of abiogenesis can be found in various Native American myths as well.) In fact, there is NOTHING revelatory in Islam's holy book (or the Hadith) regarding non-theological matters. And, as is discussed throughout the present book, even the majority of theological claims were cribbed from extant lore–from heaven and hell to a Great Flood and impending Judgement Day.}

{29 Though we sometimes use the idiomatic expression "face of the Earth", it is not meant literally; as it is a locution for the SURFACE of a planet, even as it is understood to be spherical. Al-Khwarizmi had in mind a flat surface; as "sur", the Persian lexeme he employed, means "wall". Walls have FLAT surfaces.}

{30 Some apologists try to obfuscate this embarrassing description by a bit of legerdemain. To tweak the interpretation, the trick is to pretend that the Koran's authors meant to write "duhiya" here–a lexeme that may have been used to refer to the place where an ostrich lays its eggs in the sand. This is rationalized by the fact that "duhiya" and "dahaha" share the same root: "dahawa". One must then construe "place where an ostrich lays its eggs in the sand" as "egg-like"…and then take that as a poetic way of saying "round". This absurd bit of clumsy exegetical

acrobatics ends up being more embarrassing than the Koranic text that it aims to re-interpret. Of course, if the Koran REALLY HAD meant “round like an egg”, it would not have described the heavens as a DOME; it would have been described as a SPHERE..or perhaps as an ENCLOSED SHELL or a CARAPACE. Moreover, there would have been nothing miraculous about the heavens being somehow SUSPENDED ABOVE (without pillars), as it would have been seen as SURROUNDING the world.}

{31 Throughout the Koran, “wajadah[a]” is never used to mean “shubbiha”. Moreover, Alexander is said to have ALSO found (using the same term, “wajadah[a]”) a people at this location; so are we to suppose that they were an illusion as well?}

{32 Tellingly, the term for “sea” (“bahri” / “bahra”) was not used. Rather, the term used for the pool of water is “ayn”, which is typically translated as “spring”. The term used for “muddy” is “hami’ah”. We might note that no spring exists that is sufficiently large that it stretches across the horizon such that the setting sun might appear to be setting INTO it.}

{33 The verb “to reach” is “balagha”…which can either pertain to arriving spatially or temporally (to reach a geographic location OR to reach a point in time). In the passages here, describing Alexander traveling on roads to REACH various places, “balagha” is consistently used in the former sense–as is 18:89-90 (reaching the place where the sun rises on dark-skinned people) and 18:92-93 (reaching the place between two mountains where people spoke a foreign tongue).}

{34 The Roman Catholic Church was vehemently anti-intellectual–as a matter of course. The Vatican stifled intellectual activity in Europe for over a thousand years. The odious legacy began with the execution of Hypatia of Alexandria in 415, followed by the execution of Boëthius in 524. The programatic censure of scholarly activity continued on through the Renaissance. Behold: the persecution of Peter Abelard in 1140-42, the Condemnations of 1277, the excommunication of William of Ockham in 1328, the execution of Jan Hus in 1415, Tomas de Torquemada’s reign of terror in the 1480’s and 90’s, the exile of Tycho Brahe from Denmark in 1597, the burning of Giordano Bruno in 1600, the house arrest of Galileo in 1633, etc. When Spinoza noted that the only sensical conception of “god” was the god of nature, religious fundamentalists across Europe had aneurisms.}

{35 Not knowing that semen is made in the scrotum was odd enough. Even more oddly, 32:8 and 77:20 notify us that man is created from a “disdainful fluid” [“nutfa”] in 22:5 and 40:67. What’s going on here? Why would the impresario of the natural world choose to have his most prized creation derive from something that he disdained? More to the point: Would the Creator of the Universe really harbor DISDAIN for SEMEN?}

{36 The Hadith isn’t any better. Hadith tout an approach to sustenance–citing the “sons of Adam” who consumed one third food, one third drink, and one third air. Wait. What? Apparently the authors were under the impression that digestion and respiration shared the same anatomical reservoir. Presumably, then, if one eats / drinks more, one breaths less. Another Hadith prescribes the drinking of camel urine to treat ailments. And the most daffy passage proposes that flies carry diseases on only one of their wings…while carrying the cure on the other. So take heed: If a fly happens to land in your drink, make sure to dunk BOTH sides of the insect so as to prevent the liquid from being contaminated. One wing cancels the other out, you see.}

{37 To be fair, there was no such word in Hebrew either. And—until Vatican II in the 1960’s—the concept was anathema to all those in the thrall of the Roman Catholic Church’s medieval liturgy. Note that the etymology of this word in English (“democracy”) was indicative of the origins of the language-in-general; NOT a sign of cribbing (as was the case with the appropriation of the lexeme by Arabic speakers). A natural consequence of the overlapping Greco-Roman legacy (and thus the Occident’s incorporation of Hellenic vernacular) is that Latin borrowed from the Greek “dimokratia” (as “democratium”); and English likely inherited the Latin term via Norman (as it did much of the rest of its lexicon). It wasn’t just the Romantic languages that did this; even the Nordic, Germanic, and Slavic peoples opted for their own variations on the Greek lexeme. (For the history of democracy around the world, see my essay: “The Long History Of Legal Codes”. As is often the case, the philology tracked with the course of events; as exigency prompts linguistic innovations.) On the rare occasions that European languages opted for Arabic terms (e.g. “alcohol” and “algorithm”), we find that twists of fate prompted the adoption. In other words: Arabic-based etymologies were accidents of history—as was the case with, say, hurricane (from Taino) or tsunami (from Japanese). Such peculiar adoptions were not indicative of a lack of conceptual breadth in the European languages (i.e. for naming natural phenomena). Just because “pajamas” has a Hindi etymology, it doesn’t mean that Europeans were contending with a paucity of

sartorial terms for what people wore to bed. Trans-language etymologies are commonplace; and occur for a variety of reasons. An illustration: What came to be called “algebra” was already being pioneered outside Dar al-Islam long before the work was adopted from the terminology popularized by the Persian mathematician, “Al-Khwarizmi” in the 9th century. The Arabic etymology of “algebra” was not a sign that math was absent in the non-Muslim world (a point mane in my essay, “Islam’s Pyrite Age”). Such interesting linguistic quirks contrast with the reasons Dar al-Islam ended up having to adopt the COMPLETELY FOREIGN ideation, **democracy**—calling it what those in Occident called it. Hence “damaqrata”. There were no other options; as there was no salient vocabulary to which they had recourse in their own traditions. Meanwhile, what came to be called “pajamas” could have readily been called something else.}

APPENDIX 1:

In Classical Arabic, unless otherwise specified, when the singular “you” is used, the Koran is addressing MoM; whereas when the plural “you” is used, it is addressing the general audience (i.e. men). The distinction is not always evident in an English translation–as both are simply rendered “you”.

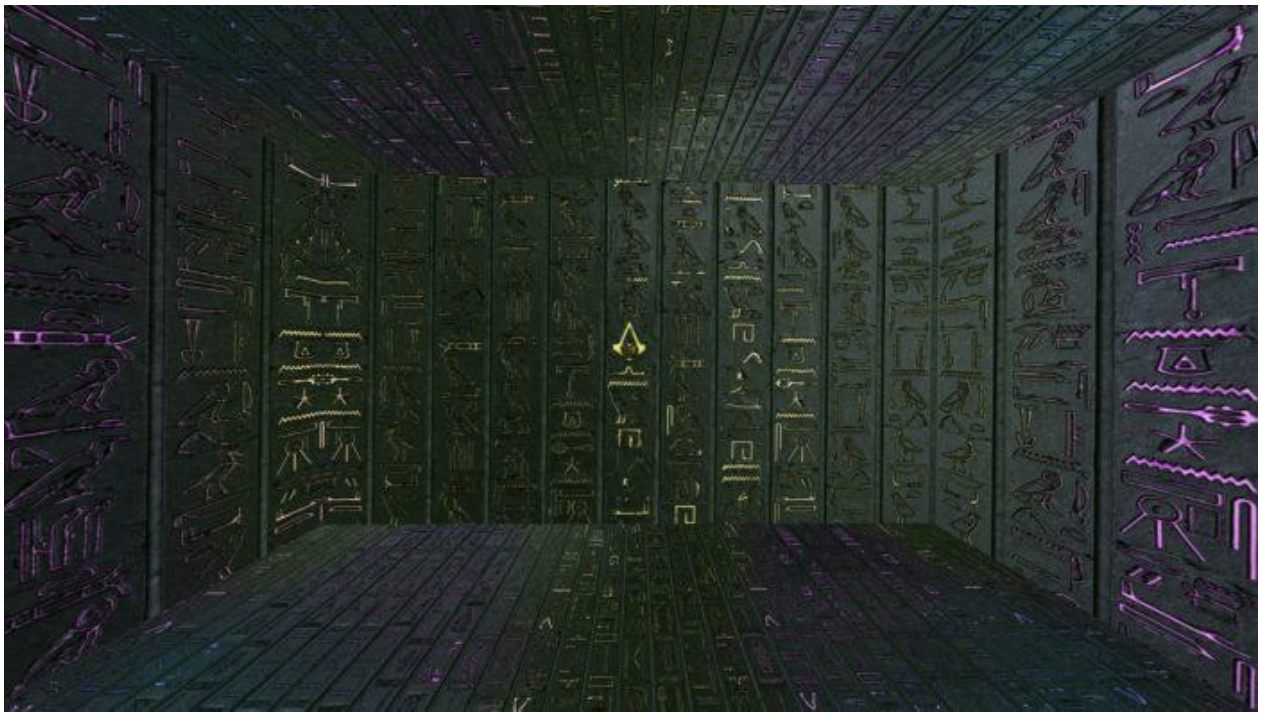
Because such things tend not to come through in English, any given translator is required to specify the distinction via annotation [typically, in brackets]. Textual context also provides a clue: When MoM is the addressee, the Koran is generally in the 1st person. When the general audience is the addressee, the Koran is generally in the 2nd person. And when “you” occurs in a quote during the recounting (or prognostication) of an event, the Koran is generally in the 3rd person (note, for example, what god says to the damned on Judgement Day; and then once they’ve arrived in hell).

And so it goes: There are a plethora of passages in which the Koran addresses itself exclusively to YOU, meaning MoM (rather than “you” the general reader). Ergo the conundrum: Why would god compose his final message–purportedly TO and FOR all mankind–in this manner?

Would instructions / memos to the Final Messenger ABOUT the final message need to be broadcast to everyone IN the final message? This peculiarity becomes even stranger when we consider passages like 19:54/56, where instructions to MoM about what to mention in the Koran are THEMSELVES part of the Koran.

Taking into account passages like 22:72 (in which the Koran refers to itself in a rather gratuitous manner), we must wonder in who's voice the book was supposed to be presented (and, more to the point, from which perspective it was allegedly composed). The fact that the book (purportedly) exists on an "eternal tablet", as asserted in 85:22, makes this issue all the more confounding.

Those who pretend NOT to be perplexed by this expositional oddity are simply not paying attention. The explanation, though, is actually quite straight-forward…once we consider how the book was actually composed: from a concatenation of disparate sources. I explore this at length in my essay: "Genesis Of A Holy Book".



APPENDIX 2:

There is nothing unique about Classical Arabic (CA) as a liturgical language. After all, there was medieval Arabic for Druze and a creolization of Pahlavi (Middle Persian) and "fusha" (formal modern Arabic) for Baha'i. (Such creolization was nothing new. Notably, Sogdian was a synthesis of Pahlavi and Arabic's precursor: Syriac.) CA was not the only liturgical language to come from Syriac (via its Nabataean incarnation). The liturgical language of Manicheanism was also based on Syriac (via its Palmyrene and Sogdian incarnations; with a confluence of Old Uyghur).

Fetishization of a particular language is not uncommon in cult activity. Conservative Hindus fetishize Sanskrit–especially “Shabd”: the divine speech in which the “revealed” scriptures (“shruti”; i.e. the Vedas) were articulated. Until Vatican II, Roman Catholics routinely fetishized Latin. (Vulgar Latin was the official language of the Empire that inaugurated their religion; even though their scripture was originally composed in Koine Greek, a language their savior did not speak.) How far can this be taken? The (Hindu) Tamils fetishize their language by deifying it as the linguistic incarnation of the goddess, “Tamil Tay” (alt. “Thamizh Thaai”).

The list goes on and on. Some Eastern Orthodox Christians harken back to Koine Greek (others to Old Church Slavonic). The sacred texts of Santeria are composed in “Lucumi” (a Cuban dialect of the Nigerian “Yoruba” language). The sacred texts of Candomblé Ketu are composed in “Nago” (a Brasilian dialect of “Yoruba”). The sacred texts of the Orthodox Tewahedo Church (and of “Beta Israel”) are composed in “Ge’ez”. Even Scientology has its own proprietary (neologism-infused) lingo.

Does it follow that these liturgical languages are the “favorite” languages of the Creator of the Universe? Does it follow that these sanctified tongues are somehow “eternal” (having existed since the beginning of time)?

In each case, the fetishized tongue acts like a secret handshake. That is to say, employment of a unique, liturgical vernacular serves as a validation of membership. In this way, incantations uttered in the designated language affirm one’s fealty. The implicit message is: “I’m speaking in the anointed tongue, so you can see that I’m bona fide.” Such is the nature of a liturgical language.

Thus: We have myriad case-studies of a phenomenon that parallels the events that led to the creation of the book in CA now known as the Koran. CA-fetishism takes this phenomenon to extremes. Indeed, it is the only instance in which it is claimed that DIVINITY ITSELF speaks in a certain tongue. Ergo: “It’s not that the Koran happened to be composed in CA; it’s that the Koran HAS TO BE in CA. Period.”

Consequently, the thinking goes, if it’s not in CA, then it’s not the “real” Koran. That the so-called “recitation” could not possibly have ORIGINALLY been in CA seems not to pose a problem for CA-fetishists. (It’s their story, and they’re sticking to it!) And so it went: Some of the material was sanctified and REMAINED sanctified; some of it was eventually for what it was: MYTH (infused with palpable elements of truth, as myth usually is).

But let's say that the Sumerian "Enuma-Elish" or the Akkadian "Legend of Etana" or the Canaanite "Epic of Zimri-Lim" had yielded cult followings that persevered to the present day. (This did not happen primarily because such works–like the Iliad and Odyssey–do not include dictates or prescribed agendas. They are therefore not recipes for sacred doctrines…let alone instigations for fanatical cult followings.) Under that hypothetical scenario, we might ask: As historians, anthropologists, and sociologists, would we be prudent in treating these tracts any differently than we treat the Koran / Hadith?

Answer: NO.

A full assessment of why some works yielded religions while others did not goes beyond the scope of this analysis. Obviously, certain features make one tract more amenable to ensuing cult activity than others. (WHAT WOULD a religion based on "The Epic of Gilgamesh" or "Beowulf" look like in the 20th century, anyway?)

In theory, a cult could be formed around virtually ANY book (even a NON-EXISTENT book, as the Necronomicon demonstrated). But the fact remains that some texts are much more conducive to the enterprise than others (which is why there is no religion based on Homer's epic poems, while L. Ron Hubbard had no problem constructing Scientology from Dianetics).

Consider two dozen other examples of liturgical languages:

- Vedic Sanskrit for Hinduism
- The "Ardha-Magadhi" Prakrit for Jainism
- The "Elu" Prakrit for (Buddhist) Sinhalese (basis for their lingua franca: Sinhala)
- The "Pali" Prakrit for Theravada Buddhism
- Ali Gali (a.k.a. "Galik"; a way to transcribe Old Tibetan) for Tibetan Buddhism
- Zhang-Zhung (a variant of Tibetan) for Bon
- Classical Chinese for Mahayana Buddhism
- Classical Chinese for Taoism
- Heian-period Japanese ("Chuko Nihon-go"; using the early Kana script known as "Man-yo-gana") for Japanese Buddhism
- Lehndi (the Lahnda dialect of Punjabi) for Sikhism
- Old Mongolian for Tengri-ism
- Uyghur [script: Syriac, then Manichaean] for Manicheanism
- Classical Mandaic (a derivative of Aramaic, with Persian lexical influences) for Mandaeanism

- The Hawrami dialect of Gorani (a variant of Kurdish from Persian influences) for Yarsanism
- Kurmanji (a variant of Kurdish; script: Sorani) for Yazidism
- Avestan (script: Pahlavi) for Zoroastrianism
- Classical Hebrew, then Masoretic Hebrew (script: sometimes Aramaic, sometimes Mishnaic, and sometimes Hebraic block letters) for Judaism
- Aramit [Samaritan Aramaic] for Samaritanism
- Syriac [Syro-Aramaic] for Chaldean / Nestorian Christianity
- The Sahidic [Thebaic] dialect of Coptic for Coptic Christianity
- Ge'ez for Ethiopian Christianity
- Koine Greek [pace Old Church Slavonic] for Eastern Orthodox Christianity
- Vulgar Latin for Roman Catholicism
- Old Norse (using Elder Futhark runes) for Odin-ism

Minor examples of sanctified tongues are endless: Santeria uses "Lucumi" (a Cuban variation on "Yoruba") as its liturgical language; while Candomblé Ketu uses "Nago" (a Brasilian variation on "Yoruba") as its liturgical language. The Palo Faith considers Habla Bantu a sacred language. The Mundhum Faith considers Limbu / Kira[n]ti a sacred language.

These aren't the respective linguas franca of the regions in which such communities live. Nevertheless, these languages are the media through which ancient traditions are maintained (and curated). They are believed to have preternatural (spec. incantatory) properties; and to be timeless. They are often seen as the native tongue of some divine super-being.

According to Mohammedan lore, Classical Arabic (CA) is the language of god, and so has existed since the beginning of time. Such a supposition requires one to ignore the fact that CA evolved over time from antecedent Semitic languages…and only STARTED to come into existence at the end of the 7th century…finally becoming a full-fledged language (with its own script) at some point in the late 8th or early 9th century. (During the 8th century, its earliest versions used Kufic script.)

Said process began with the earliest Semitic language, Ugaritic (language of the Amorites) at some point in the 2nd millennium B.C. (script: Phoenician). This yielded Old Aramaic (language of the Suteans, Chaldeans, Aramaeans, and various other Canaanite peoples); and then–after melding with Sumerian in Mesopotamia–Eblaite and Akkadian. Later, after incorporating elements of Phoenician from the north, Old Aramaic morphed into Aramaic (along with Edomite, Moabite, Ammonite, Classical

Hebrew, and Punic) as well as Ekronite (language of the Philistines, named after the city, Ekron). Meanwhile, on the African horn, it yielded Ethiopic (i.e. Ge'ez; language of the Aksumites / Abyssinians).

Aramaic would THEN morph into Syriac (and, specifically, its Nabataean incarnation). Finally, working from elements of Old South Arabian–it incorporated the Syriac lexicon and the Nabataean alphabet–a process that eventually yielded Classical Arabic (see my essay on "The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Verse"). So we are expected to believe that this final linguistic byproduct had existed ALL ALONG–as it were, written in the stars since the Big Bang.

Put another way: We are asked to suppose that–ALL THE WHILE, over the course of three millennia–this meandering etymology was somehow–slowly, steadily, miraculously–honing in on a destination that had been determined since the beginning of time. In other words: Since the Amorites in the 3rd millennium B.C., the long series of historical accidents–spanning across the Middle East–which defined the genealogy of the spoken word, the Semitic languages were DESTINED to converge upon a predetermined tongue…at some point during the Dark Ages…on the Arabian peninsula.

Thus ALL antecedent Semitic languages were just a prologue to an inevitable "Arabic".

In reality, this would require us to believe that this fore-ordained language was only fully realized–at long last–due to the compilation of Islam's holy book. To believe this, we would have to presume that all that time, the Creator of the Universe was guiding the development of his native language from a long line of Canaanite precursors, beginning at Ugarit…as if he were biding his time until the moment was ripe.

This is, of course, preposterous. It strains credulity, then, to suppose that CA is an eternal language. Yet might there STILL be something preternatural about it that indicates Providence was at work? Let's look into this possibility.

Though there were some sporadic antecedents (e.g. the Namarah inscription from the 4th century, in Syriac using a neo-Nabataean script that served as a precursor to "Kufic", which was itself the precursor to CA), evidence points to the fact that CA was largely developed–and subsequently refined–IN ORDER TO compose the Koran… during the 8th century (well over a century after MoM's death). Therefore, to point

to the fact that no other major work was composed in CA during the period preceding the Koran is to indulge in a catch-22. For more on this point, see my essay: “The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Verse”.

There are other snafus in this “just-so” narrative account of CA. If, as the Mohammedan argument goes, the ancient Hebrews had things right TO BEGIN WITH (and only botched things later on), then ALL the proper nouns in god’s final message would have remained what they had been when Job was wandering the desert: IN ANCIENT HEBREW. In other words: What things were called in the first place were, well, what things would have been called in the first place…and so would have retained THAT SPECIFIC LEXICOGRAPHY.

In that case, no etymology in the Koran would be based on SYRIAC derivatives (or on Koine Greek)…any more than they would be based on, say, Vulgar Latin or Middle Persian (Pahlavi) or Middle Chinese or the Pali Prakrit. For the contention is that the Koran is simply making mankind aware of what they’d been told in the first place (during the Iron Age)…but had subsequently forgotten or rejected or somehow contaminated (either deliberately or unwittingly). As a result, they had ended up with a corrupted Abrahamic theology (i.e. the errant doctrines that comprise what came to be Judeo-Christianity) by the time MoM was born. To go back to the original message, then, would entail reviving the ORIGINAL TERMS.

Yet we find that quite the contrary is the case. As we’ve seen, even a cursory philological analysis reveals that the language of the Koran is predicated OVERTLY on linguistic exigencies that were unique to the time and place that the Koran was composed (from the late 7th to the late 9th centuries in the Hijaz). To wit: The book is as timeless as any other artifact (i.e. not at all). It is an accident of history like anything else that is man-made.

What of its grandiloquent verse–surpassing, as it did, all other material from the region at the time in–well–grandiloquence? During the relevant period, the Koran was the only game in town. Why? Because the powers that be (starting with the Umayyad caliphate, followed by the Abbasid caliphate) were diligent in ENSURING that it was the only game in town. After all, WHAT ELSE was there for anyone to read in a region that was ruled by the caliphs? (I explore this matter in part 1 of “The History Of Literature”.)

By the time the Koran started to be compiled, burning anything that undermined the sanctity of the anointed text (or that was not in keeping with the official propaganda promulgated by the rulers) was standard operating procedure. So even if someone existed at the time with literary inclinations–and requisite abilities–who deigned to compose alternate works in the new "Classical Arabic", the endeavor would have been promptly curtailed by the authorities.

And so it went: At the time it was being cobbled together, insofar as the audience were limited to the Middle East (as it was), the challenge to "produce a verse" that had parity with what was found in the Koran actually made perfect sense; at least, insofar as propagandistic purposes went. It is easy to claim the gold medal when one's horse is the only one in the race.

I have yet to see a list of all the (hypothetical) books from Arabia during the 7th and 8th centuries, written in CA, that can't seem to measure up to the Koran (again, see part 1 of my essay on "The History Of Literature"). Conveniently enough, once the Arabian world DID start producing alternate works, people were no longer using CA–a language that was, as a matter of policy, reserved for the Koran itself. Ergo a self-fulfilling prophecy was assured.

However, once the target-audience went beyond the initial region (as it eventually would), the challenge would no longer yield the desired verdict. For then, the Koran had to compete with GOOD WRITING. The "catch", of course, is that once the challenge to "produce writing like it" could easily be met (by an endless supply of great classical writing from other parts of the world), CA had undergone a metamorphosis toward the modern Arabic vernaculars…which, of course, were NOT "like it". So even those who lived in the Arab world could not TECHNICALLY meet the challenge…EVEN IF they were capable of writing something far superior to the Koran. Invariably, their exposition would have been done in a "less pretty" language (according to the terms set by the challenge). Heads I win, tales you lose.

Unsurprisingly, modern "Fus-ha" (literary Arabic, in contradistinction with the various modern vernaculars of everyday conversation) is not insignificantly different from the language in which the Koran was composed. All this means is that the language used by the Arabic-speaking world TODAY is, well, NOT the same as CA. The explanation for this state of affairs is primarily a matter of sheer pragmatism: Being organic, demotic language does not operate according to stringently formal rules; it uses slang and various (often quirky) idiomatic expressions that sometimes

follow their own logic. (Articulating oneself with perfect, formal language would be impractical for the quotidian concerns of everyday social interaction–not to mention exasperatingly pedantic.)

To conclude from this that there is something “miraculous” about the writing in the Koran is, therefore, inane. The fact that there is (for example) not as much assonance in the language’s modern incarnation only means that, well, the phonetics of modern Arabic vernaculars do not exhibit as much assonance as did the “Koranic” Arabic. (A mere tautology.) And it’s no wonder! For the Koran was composed EXPLICITLY to be memorized and recited aloud. That is: It was designed to be as memorable / catchy as possible. Assonance is one way to do this–as anyone knows who memorized nursery rhymes as a child.

There is a long history for this precedent. Attributing a new language to divine intervention goes back to ancient Sumeria, thousands of years before MoM and his followers. The Sumerians attributed the invention of their own writing to the Egyptian god Seshat (they referred to him as “Ea”). WHY did they do this? Well, the new writing MUST have been miraculous, right? After all, it was articulating things in ways that had never before been articulated!

Meanwhile, we may as well say that because…

- No major work was composed in Egyptian [Kemetic hieroglyphs] before the sacred Pyramid Texts (spec. The Book Of The Dead)
- No major work was composed in Akkadian [Old Assyrian cuneiform] before the Epic of Gilgamesh
- No major work was composed in Hittite before the the Proclamation of Anitta / Kussara [alt. the Chronicles of Hattusili / Hattusa]
- No major work was composed in Old Aramaic before the Epic of Zimri-Lim
- No major work was composed in Phoenician before the Ahiram epitaph
- No major work was composed in Ugaritic before the Epic of King Keret [of Hubur]
- No major work was composed in Greek before Homer’s “Iliad”
- No major work was composed in Babylonian Aramaic (proto-Hebrew) before “Deuteronomy”; which was followed by the other four books of the Pentateuch (a.k.a. the “Torah”, originally composed in Babylonian Aramaic, then Mishnaic Hebrew, then in Classical “block letter” Hebrew)

- No major work was composed in Syriac before the “Diatessaron” / “Peshitta” c. 160 A.D. (later, the Rabbula Gospels)
- No major work was composed in Ge’ez before the Gospels of Abba Garima c. 500
- No major work was composed in Etruscan before the “Gold Book”
- No major work was composed in Coptic before the (Nag Hammadi) Gnostic texts
- No major work was composed in Latin before the “Eclogues” and the “Aeneid” of Publius Vergilius Maro (a.k.a. “Virgil”)
- No major work was composed in Old Avestan (Ancient Persian) before the Zoroastrian “Gathas”
- No major work was composed in Parthian / Sogdian before the Manichaean Hymn Cycles: “Huyadagman” and “Angad Rosnan”
- No major work was composed in Sanskrit before the “Rig-Veda”
- No major work was composed in Magadhi (Prakrit) before the “Satkhandagama” (a.k.a. the “Pratham Shrut-Skandh”; the first of the Agam[a]s)
- No major work was composed in Pali (Prakrit) before the “T[r]i-pitaka”
- No major work was composed in Gandhari (Prakrit) before the Gandharan Buddhist texts
- No major work was composed in Kannada before the “Kavira-jamarga”
- No major work was composed in Malayalam before the “Rama-charitam”
- No major work was composed in Sinhala before the “Hela Atuwa”
- No major work was composed in Tamil before the (now lost) “Agattiyam” [on which the “Tolkappiyam” is based]
- No major work was composed in Awadhi before the “Padmavat”
- No major work was composed in Ancient Chinese before Confucius’ “Analects”
- No major work was composed in Tibetan before the Old Tibetan Annals
- No major work was composed in Japanese before the “Kojiki”
- No major work was composed in Korean (script: Classical Chinese) before the “Samguk Sagi” (though the first document in Hangul script was the Hunmin-Jeongeum” of the 15th century)
- No major work was composed in Khmer before the “Lpoek Angkor Wat”
- No major work was composed in Old Malay before the “Nitisarasamuccaya” (a.k.a. the “Tanjung Tanah” manuscript)
- No major work was composed in the Old Turkic before the “Irk Bitig” (“Book of Omens / Divination”)
- No major work was composed in Armenian before Mesrop Mashtots’ Bible

- No major work was composed in Albanian before Gjon Buzuku's "Meshari"
- No major work was composed in medieval Irish Gaelic before the "Lebor Gabala Erenn" ("Book of Invasions / Conquests") [The Book Of Kells from c. 800 was composed in Latin]
- No major work was composed in medieval Scottish Gaelic before the Celtic Psalter
- No major work was composed in Old Welsh before the "Mabinogion"
- No major work was composed in Old High German before the "Hildebrandslied" ["Lay of Hildebrand"]
- No major work was composed in Old Polish before Biernat of Lublin's "Hortulus Animae Polonice" [the Polish version of the Germanic prayer book, "Little Garden of the Soul"]
- No major work was composed in Old Yiddish before the "Dukus Horant"
- No major work was composed in Old English (Anglo-Saxon) before "Beowulf"
- No major work was composed in Old French before (Frankish) "The Canticle of Saint Eulalia"
- No major work was composed in Old Spanish (Castilian) before "El Cantar de Mio Cid" [The Song Of My Cid]
- No major work was composed in Catalan before Ramon Llull's "Blanquerna"
- No major work was composed in Tuscan before Dante's "Divina Commedia"
- No major work was composed in Florentine before Giovanni Boccaccio's "Decameron"
- No major work was composed in Romanian before Ureche's "Chronicles of the Land of Moldavia"
- No major work was composed in Magyar (Hungarian) before Andras Hess' 15th-century "Chronica Hungarorum" [a.k.a. the "Buda Chronicle"]; though the 12th-century poem, "Lamentations of Mary" predates it.
- No major work was composed in Old East Slavonic (i.e. proto-Russian) before the "Tale of Bygone Years" [a.k.a. "The Primary Chronicle"]
- No major work was composed in Slovene before the "Brizinski Spomeniki" (a.k.a. the Freising manuscripts)
- No major work was composed in Finnish before Mikael Agricola's so-called "ABC Kirja" [the ABC Book]
- No major work was composed in Old Norse before Eirik[r] Oddsson's (now lost) "Hryggjarstykki"
- No major work was composed in Mayan [Yucatecan] before the Madrid Codex
- And no major work was composed in Yoruba before "Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale" …

…it follows that ALL FIFTY of these works were of “divine” origin. Obviously, we see this to be the absurd claim that it is once we recognize how written languages (prior to the modern age) often came to be in the first place.

Though landmark achievements, there was nothing “miraculous” about any of these works. In each case, due to circumstances at the time, certain people (usually those with the most influence) ended up being the precedent-setters. In every scenario, a formal language was–as it were–officially established by the creation of a major work. (Both the Vedas and Gathas were sacred recitations, intended to be uttered aloud in a melodic fashion. Sound familiar?)

Until the advent of the Enlightenment, the general populace was ill-positioned (and ill-equipped) to accomplish such a feat on their own. Typically, the common man was barely literate (if literate at all) and spoke “conversational” vernaculars of the language in their region–which invariably prized practicality over eloquence. Only a few were able, motivated, and allowed to put together a formal WRITTEN WORK.

CA is no exception to the usual scenario. It might even be noted that within just a few years of MoM’s death (i.e. prior to the creation of CA), Sambhota [son of Anu] of the Thonmi invented the Old Tibetan script (roughly based on Brahmi precursors) in Lhasa. This was an achievement for which Tibetan Buddhists are not inclined to give preternatural explanations.

In pre-modern times, the composition of major new works often catalyzed the development / refinement of formal written languages. In addition to the examples listed above, this was demonstrated by Roman playwright Lucius Livius Andronicus’ pioneering use of “Old Latin” in his dramas during the 3rd century B.C.

So one might ask: How could Andronicus have POSSIBLY composed those dramas (since nothing from the preceding epoch matched his literary achievement in this burgeoning new language)? Was he delivering exposition from GOD? Of course not. The explanation for his achievement is quite simple: As far as THAT language went, he was the first producer of any major work. Invariably, it was noticeably more “eloquent” than the quotidian vernacular of the rank and file at the time–which was sheerly pragmatic–even mundane–in nature; geared, as it was, merely to address everyday concerns. In any case, it was HIS writing that set the precedent. No divine intervention required.

What makes the Koran DIFFERENT from many of the above examples is what happened surrounding its authorship…and the events that ensued. Given its content AND the circumstances in which it was created, it almost couldn't NOT have become the basis / inspiration for cult activity. It is adamantly prescriptive, and virtually SCREAMS for the formation of a religious movement.

The history of the Koran's formation makes sense in this light–especially vis a vis the presiding caliphates, from the Umayyads to the Abbasids. When the powers-that-be did not want the anointed text to be challenged, all they needed to do was take (draconian) measures to ensure THEIR text was, as it were, the only game in town. Ergo the systematic burning of un-approved copies of the Koran during the third caliphate. (It's easy to win when on ensures one's own horse is the only horse in the race.) No works as (allegedly) eloquent as the Koran arose in its early years simply because no other works (that may have rivaled its influence) were ALLOWED.

A tell-tale indication of this underhanded agenda was the contempt shown for "poets" (a.k.a. anyone who had the audacity to be eloquent in unapproved ways) exhibited throughout the Koran. The authors clearly wanted to marginalize anyone who dared be as eloquent as the officially-sanctioned verse. For such people threatened to actually MEET the challenge to "produce something like" Koranic verse. This danger was especially immanent if these highly literate people were proficient in CA (rather than merely conversant in the pedestrian vernaculars of the rank and file). It is no wonder the Koran beseeches its readers, "Don't listen to them! They will corrupt your mind!" So much for open debate.

Given the situation, this makes perfect sense: When one wants to win a competition via means other than sheer merit, simply eliminate potential competitors. The challenge to match the Koran's purported eloquence is not the only nutty challenge posed in the Koran. 53:27 challenges non-Muslims to "name all the angels with female names". No kidding. Can't name them? Gotcha! You obviously aren't acquainted with THE TRUTH.

Food for thought: If the Koran were composed in an eternal language, then what were the Sumerians (language from the 34th century B.C.) and the denizens of the Indus Valley (language from the 35th century B.C.) doing? Wouldn't god have tipped them off? What was he waiting for? Starting with the first Indus Valley language, FOUR THOUSAND years is a very long time to "hold off" until the language of his eternal book was finally revealed. Was he biding his time?

Those who compiled the Koran re-wrote its earliest (Syriac) versions, establishing CA with a MAIDEN WORK…

- Just as ancient Egyptian leaders did with the Pyramid Texts (spec. “Book Of The Dead”)
- Just as Akkadian / Assyrian leaders did with the Epic of Gilgamesh
- Just as Hittite leaders did with Chronicles of Hattusili
- Just as Babylonian leaders did with the Epic of Zimri-Lim
- Just as Phoenician leaders did with the Ahiram epitaph
- Just as Achaemenid leaders did with the Gathas
- Just as Parthian leaders did with the Manichaean Hymn Cycles and the Avestas
- Just as cultural impresarios in Ancient Greece did with Homer’s epic poems
- Just as Jewish leaders did with the Torah
- Just as (Syriac) Christian leaders did with the Peshitta
- Just as Abyssinian (Ethiopic) leaders did with the Gospels of Abba Garima
- Just as the rulers of Ugarit did with the Epic of King Keret
- Just as Etruscan leaders did with the Gold Book
- Just as Florentine leaders did with the Divine Comedy
- Just as Coptic monks did with the Gnostic Gospels
- Just as the Vatican curia did with the Latin Vulgate Bible
- Just as Armenian leaders did with their version of the Bible
- Just as Moldovan leaders did with the Chronicles of the Land of Moldavia
- Just as the leaders of Kievan Rus did with the Primary Chronicles
- Just as Turkic leaders did with the “Irk Bitig”
- Just as Slavic leaders did with the Freising manuscripts
- Just as Baltic leaders did with the “ABC-kirja”
- Just as Nordic leaders did with the “Hryggjarstykki”
- Just as Ashkenazic leaders did with the “Dukus Horant”
- Just as Celtic leaders did with Beowulf
- Just as the Gaelic rulers of Ulster and Eir did with the “Lebor Gabala Erenn”
- Just as Pictish monks (and the leaders of Alba) did with the Celtic Psalter
- Just as the rulers of Dyfed and Gwynedd did with the “Mabinogion”
- Just as Germanic leaders did with the “Hildebrandslied”
- Just as Piast and Jagiellonian leaders did with the “Hortulus Animae Polonice”
- Just as Castilian, Navarrese, and Aragonese leaders did with the “Cantar de Mio Cid”
- Just as Catalonian leaders did with “Blanquerna”
- Just as the Frankish rulers did with the Canticle of St. Eulelia

- Just as the Hindu leaders of Bharat[a] did with the Vedas
- Just as Jain monks did with the Agam(a)s
- Just as Theravada Buddhist monks did with the Pali canon
- Just as the rulers of Takshasila did with the Gandharan Buddhist texts
- Just as the rulers of Mewar did with the “Padmavat”
- Just as the Rashtrakuta rulers did with the “Kavi-raja-marga”
- Just as (Buddhist) Sinhalese leaders did with the “Hela Atuwa”
- Just as (Hindu) Tamil leaders did with the “Agattiyam” / “Tolkappiyam”
- Just as Tibetan monks did with the Annals
- Just as Zhou leaders did with the Analects, I Ching, Art of War, Tao Te Ching, etc.
- Just as Japanese leaders did with the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki
- Just as the Korean rulers of Silla and Goryeo did with the “Samguk Sagi”
- And just as Mayan leaders did with the Madrid Codex.

In each case, those “calling the shots” established a written account in a newly fashioned script (or a refined / formalized version of an extant script). They did so for their own purposes. It was no different with the Umayyad caliphs; or the Abbasid caliphs. There was nothing supernatural about it.

Disclaimer:

This list pertains to major works, not to mere inscriptions (or fragments of documents). Earlier writings (e.g. parcels of text) can sometimes be found in each of these ancient languages.

For example, in Sumerian there were texts from Abu Salabikh and Shuruppak.

The Epic of Gilgamesh (from the beginning of the 3rd millennium B.C.) may have been predated by the Code of Urukagina as well as Enheduanna’s Hymns. The oldest may well be the Liturgy to Nintud (on the creation of man and woman) found on the Kesh temple at Nippur from the 26th century B.C. Also around this time, the Legend of Etana was composed.

In Akkadian cuneiform, there were the Laws of Eshnunna and the Code of Lipit-Ishtar; as well as the Epic of Atra-Hasis and the Enuma Elis (18th century B.C.) The oldest text in Old Assyrian may well have been the Kültepe texts.

The earliest Elamite document was a peace treaty that the Awan rulers made with the Sumerian King Naram-sin of Akkad c. 2250.

The aforementioned Hittite chronicles were based on the antecedent writings of King Anitta of Kussara, the first to write in the language (17th century B.C.) The so-called Arzawa letters (from Armana in Egypt) may well be the oldest example of Hittite.

Technically, the oldest major work in Phoenician was the (now-lost) History of Sanchuniathon. In Ugaritic, there was also the “Baal Cycle” and the “Epic of Aqhat” (a.k.a. “Legend of Danel”) in the 15th-14th century B.C. (the latter of which likely served as inspiration for the Judaic legend of Daniel).

As far as Classical Hebrew goes, the Siddur predates the Torah; while the “Gezer Calendar” tablet was written in Old Aramaic (i.e. proto-Hebrew) as far back as c. 900 B.C. And what of the Torah? The oldest codices that have been found were ALL written in Aramaic: the scroll from En-Gedi (part of Leviticus 1:3), the Nash papyrus (part of the decalogue), and the Dead Sea Scrolls from the Kumran cave. The amulets from Ketef Hinnom (dating from c. 600 B.C.) have what seems to be an early version of a prayer that ended up in the Book of Numbers: also written in Aramaic.

Classical / Biblical Hebrew is referred to as “Lashon ha-Kodesh” [Holy Tongue]; not to be confused with modern Hebrew (now simply referred to as “ivrit[h]”), which has existed for barely over a century. (K-D-Sh is a variant of the Arabic Q-D-S, also meaning “holy”.) Classical / Biblical Hebrew, it turns out, is NOT the language in which the “Hebrew Bible” would have originally been composed. That would have been Babylonian Aramaic.

The oldest surviving work of Sanskrit grammar / vocabulary was the “Ashtadhyayi” by the Gandharan writer, Panini of Pushkalavati in the 6th century B.C. (around the same time that Ancient Hebrew was being formulated by Hebrew scribes in Babylon during the Exilic Period, when Judaic lore was first codified); however Sanskrit long predates that work. (Note that Panini’s work would be followed in the 2nd century B.C. by Patanjali’s “Mahabhasya”.)

The oldest work in the Magadha Prakrit is possible the anthology of Vajrayana poetry known as the “Charyapada” (which eventually gave rise to versions in Maithili, Bengali, Assamese, and Odia).

In Tamil, the oldest surviving work is the “Tolkappiyam”, which was a more recent version of the now-lost “Agattiyam”. Also significant was Nathamuni’s “Naalayira Divya P[i]rabandham” (9th century A.D.)

In Old [Church] Slavonic (the Slavic script that served as proto-Russian), the “Tale of Igor’s Campaign” may have predated the “Tale of Bygone Years”; yet the first compositions were translations of religious texts done by Byzantine theologians Cyril and Methodius c. 862. The earliest document in Old French was the Oaths of Strasbourg, a contract between East and West Francia written in 842.

In Latin, Quintus Horatius Flaccus (a.k.a. “Horace”) composed his verse around the same time that Virgil was writing (1st century B.C.); though the earliest surviving manuscripts in Vulgar Latin are those of the Roman Catholic “Vulgate” bible.

In Italian, the “Placiti Cassinesi” (juridical documents from the 960’s) predate Dante. The first major work to establish the Italian language was an anthology of verse entitled, “Il Canzoniere” by the Tuscan Renaissance humanist, Francesco Petrarca (a.k.a. “Petrarch”) in the 14th century.

“Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin” [“Black Book of Carmarthen”] may be the oldest book in Welsh (13th century).

Regarding major works in Ancient Chinese, Lao Tzu’s “Tao Te Ching”, Fu Xi’s “I Ching”, the Chronicle of Zuo Zhuan, and/or Sun Tzu’s “The Art Of War” may have been composed earlier than Confucius’ “Analects”. Note that Confucius also compiled the “Shi-ching” (“Book of Songs”) from antecedent material. Mencius’ “Mengzi” / “Meng-tzu” was written shortly thereafter. Regarding major works in Japan, the 8th-century collection of poetry, the “Man’yoshu”, is also one of the oldest.

In any case, in each language there was a major work that set the precedent for a formal written language. None were “miraculous”. All were human-inspired, human-crafted, and conceived according to human concerns. Each of them were created to address the exigencies at the time (assumptions, biases, hopes, and fears). All of them were sanctified in some way for some reason.

Incidentally, every one of these works is more eloquent than the Koran, and oftentimes much more insightful. Moreover, all of them come through perfectly fine when translated into English.

POSTSCRIPT:

For what it's worth, I took the challenge of 10:37-38, 11:13, and 52:34 upon myself. Suffice to say, I was required to RE-read (more accurately: peruse) a few translations of the Koran in order to do this. I even scoured myriad lists of Koranic verses compiled by devout Muslims (namely, verses that they found the most beautiful / moving / profound). That is: I bent over backwards to (once more) give Islam's holy book the benefit of the doubt.

The outcome was unsurprising. As it turns out, when the authors of the Koran challenge us to make any part of their magnum opus better, merely inserting a single eloquent phrase somewhere, anywhere, would do the trick. (Add a statement articulating the golden rule, for example, and the book becomes PROFOUNDLY better.)

For the life of me, I could not find ANYTHING in Islam's holy book that a marginally talented, semi-creative teen could not have composed…any day of the week…if handed a thesaurus and assigned the task of glorifying something to the point of distraction.

Three of the most popularly extolled ayah are 3:134, 17:24, and 24:35. Not exactly awe-inspiring stuff. If this is where the bar for profundity is set, then the bar is abysmally low. (Read them and see for yourself.) There is not a single verse in the Koran that could be accurately characterized as "balagha" [eloquent].

The delusive contention that the Koran is the epitome of "balagha" (eloquence), or that its verse is somehow "mu'ajiza" (a miracle), or that it is "i'jaz" (inimitable), is regularly heard from those who fetishize Islam's holy book. (In fact, it is regularly heard from those who fetishize ANY book.) This stands to reason, as such an illusion must be sustained if one is to be of the mind that Koranic verse is somehow divine. (Lest one cease taking the book at its word, one almost cannot NOT indulge in this illusion.)

In any case, the inimitability of the book is based upon what the book explicitly says ABOUT ITSELF. Consequently, if it is admitted that the book is erroneous on THAT basic point, then the credence of the rest of its claims is brought into question. The entire house of cards can come quickly crashing down.

Those who refuse to fetishize the Koran have no need for said house of cards. It recognizes that the purported “i’jaz” of the Koran is a chimera–nothing more than a figment of the imaginations of Koran fetishists (and of the Koran’s authors).

Regarding the notion of a Final Revelation being delivered to mankind in the 7th century, we are expected to believe that, for well over a 100,000 years, god sat idly by, watching thousands upon thousands of generations come and go (most of whom lived a miserable existence), completely sanguine…until he finally opted to intervene at some point between 3,000 and 4,000 years ago. And even then, according to the Mohammedan narrative, he allowed mankind to CONTINUE to bungle everything…again and again and again….until finally, at long last, he opted to release his Final Revelation to clear things up. What had the human race been getting wrong all that time? Well, among other things, tossing arrows, eating pork, and having sex during menstruation, it turns out. Good grief.

Koranic text inimitable? Don’t be ridiculous. Most of us who are highly literate would not deign to reproduce Koranic verse simply because we couldn’t bring ourselves to write that POORLY. Assuming a post-primary level of schooling, any creative writing teacher worth his salt would have little choice but to fail a student who turned in the kind of sloppy writing found in Islam’s holy book.