

THE NOTION OF STONE IN THE QUR'ĀN

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1. Introduction

The ideas, motifs and images of sacred texts have many faces. This feature of the scriptural poetics is well known. The notions, moving from one scripture to another, lose or acquire symbolic connotations. The comparative study of the Bible and the Qur'ān can reveal the stock of common motifs of the three monotheistic religions. The theme of this paper is the Qur'ānic treatment of the two closely related motifs of stone and stoning¹.

2. Statistical Data

Table 1 shows the distribution of the "stone" contexts in the Qur'ān. The chronological division of the *sūras* accepted in this paper is a modification of the classical scheme of Weil-Nöldeke-Blachère-Krachkovsky. The Qur'ānic *sūras* are divided into three groups:

- 1) Early Meccan *sūras* (= Poetic *sūras*): their main topic is the assertion of the unity of God, or the exposition of the first part of the Muslim *šahāda*: "There is no God except Allāh", their external context is that of the Peninsula, allusions to the Biblical imagery being very scarce;
- 2) Late Meccan *sūras* (= *rahmānic* + Prophetic *sūras*): their main topic is the outlining of the new faith in the perspective of the Near Eastern monotheistic tradition, or the exposition of the second part of the *šahāda*: "and Muḥammad is the messenger of God", as well as of the idea of the Qur'ān as the scripture of Islam; their external context is that of the Bible;
- 3) Medinese *sūras*: their main topic is the exposition of the Muslim Law revealed by Allāh, as well as the assertion of the autonomy of Islam within the previously established historical context.

¹ The notion of stone in the Bible was the topic of my papers delivered at the conference devoted to the 80th Anniversary of Igor Diakonoff (Moscow, January 1995) and at the 12th World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem, July-August 1997). This publication represents the text presented at the 35th ICANAS (Budapest, July 1997). A complete version of my study with necessary references will appear as part of the book about the notion of stone in the Bible and the Qur'ān which I am now writing.

Table 1. The Stone and Stoning in the Qur'ān

	Early Meccan <i>sūras</i>	Late Meccan <i>sūras</i>	Medinese <i>sūras</i>	Total
stoning (<i>rġm</i>)	81:25	11:91 15:17, 34 16:98 18:20 19:46 26:116 36:18 38:77 44:20 67:5	3:36	13
killing with stones (<i>hġr</i>) of clay	105:4	11:83 15:74 51:32-34	8:32	5
water out of stone (<i>hġr</i>)		7:160	2:60	2
resurrection of stone (<i>hġr</i>)		17:49-50		1
hearts of stone (<i>hġr</i>)			2:74	1
stones (<i>hġr</i>) as fuel in hell			2:24 66:6	2
Total	2	16	6	24

The first observation is that the stone motif in the Qur'ān is not as frequent as in the Bible. The total number of the contexts is 24 which is less than the number of "stone" contexts in the book of Exodus alone (28 occurrences).

The second observation is that most of the contexts occur in the Late Meccan *sūras* (16 contexts) and Medinese *sūras* (6 contexts), or 22 contexts out of 24. The

Early Meccan *sūras* give only two "stone" context, both having to do with the motif of stoning (81:25; 105:4).

Such a distribution of contexts between the three periods cannot be considered accidental even from the point of view of statistics. This conclusion, which will be confirmed by further analysis, definitely places the Qur'ānic stone motif in the Biblical perspective.

The third observation is that the notion of stoning is prevalent in the Qur'ān (18 out of 24 are close to 80%). It is not unexpected, as the motif of stoning is also frequent in the Old Testament, especially the Pentateuch², but the treatment of the motif, as will be shown, is different.

3. Stoning in the Qur'ān

The notion of stoning is rendered in the Qur'ān by two ways:

- a) by a special verb *rağama* and its derivatives (*rağīm*, *marğūm*, *ruğūm*);
- b) by verbal phrases with an object complement: the verbs used in such phrases are *amtara* "to rain" (8:32; 11:82; 15:74), *arsala* (51:32), *ramā* "to throw" (105:4) and the object complement always is the plural form *hiğāra* "stones".

Let us begin with the brief exposition of the realization of this motif in the Bible.

There are two points where the two scriptures meet.

First, the motif has in the Bible, like in the Qur'ān, two modes of verbal expression:

- a) by one of the two special verbs (*rağam* and *şağal*) with or without the object complement;
- b) by a phrase composed of a verb of general semantics ("to throw", "to kill" and the like) with an obligatory object complement "with stone" or "with stones".

Second, as far as semantics is concerned, the set of variants of the motif is basically the same in the two scriptures, see Table 2.

² In the New Testament it occurs only as a reference to the practice of Judaism which is blamed and rejected (Matthew 23:37; Mark 12:4; Luke 13:34; 20:6; John 8:5; 8:59; 10:32; 10:33; 11:8; Acts 5:26; 7:58; 7:59; 14:5; 14:19; 2 Corinth 11:25; Hebr 11:37; 12:20).

Table 2. The Stoning in the Bible and the Qur'ān

Variant of the motif	The Bible	The Qur'ān	Qur'ānic reference to the Bible
Legal punishment	+	—	
Offence of God's messengers	+	+	+
Direct God's punishment of His enemies	+	+	+
God's curse of the Satan	—	+	+
Use of stones as a weapon	+	—	

3.1. The two first variants of the motif form in the Bible a kind of symbolic opposition as the positive and the negative versions of the same notion. On the one side, the stoning is a legal punishment enforced by men against the sinners in accordance with God's will for several grave sins such as sacrilege, worship of other gods, losing virginity, murder, etc. On the other hand, it is the threat (sometimes realized) to stone the prophet, coming from the unbelievers among the Gentiles, or sinners among the Jewish people, for what they consider to be a sacrilege or another sin, which means a rebellion against God's will.

The opposition between the positive and the negative variant of the motif is neutralized in the New Testament, where the punishment enforced according to the Law turns out to be a violation of God's will³. The Qur'ān went a different, though similar, way. Stoning as a legal punishment is never (sic!) mentioned in the text⁴. On the contrary, the motif of the threat of the stoning of a prophet by the people to whom he was sent and who did not believe him and considered his words a blas-

³ See above, note 2. The most significant passage is John 8.3-11.

⁴ We are not dealing here with the problem of *āyat ar-raġm* which is transmitted through 'Umar and is considered one of the Qur'ānic verses which were abrogated (*mansūha*) and its contents remained valid for the law, as it is not present in the authorized text of the Qur'ān, see Nöldeke 1970: I, 248-249.

phemy is "amplified" or multiplied. Different peoples and communities, not only the Jews, are shown as practising it. In other words, the Qur'ān omitted the "positive" variant of the Biblical motif and kept its "negative" variant⁵. This fact can explain why one of the Biblical verbs (*rağam*) occurs in the Qur'ān and the other (*sağal*) does not, the latter being more closely related to the legal punishment.

The Biblical origin of this variant of the motif was carefully stressed, as three of the six relevant Qur'ānic contexts involve Biblical characters (Moses, Noah, Abraham). The bridge between the two scriptures seems to be the story of Moses and Pharaoh, which can be considered as the starting point of the unfolding of the motif in both of them. The Qur'ānic passage (44:17-20)⁶ looks like a direct Biblical reminiscence (Ex 8.25-26)⁷.

In general, the process of transformation of Biblical narratives in the Qur'ān aimed at the condensation and typification of them, in order to present them as a series of parables of a unified structure which reflect the circumstances of Muḥammad's own story: "a prophet comes to a people, the people do not accept him, threaten him, but God defends His messenger and punishes the people"⁸. The details which were alien to this scheme were omitted, and the details originally missing but fitting in the scheme were added.

The threat to stone a messenger turned to be in conformity with the pattern and was multiplied, the stories of several other prophets being added, even if this detail was missing from the Biblical text. At the same time, the chronological perspective into which the motif was placed was changed.

In the Bible, the unfolding of the motif moves onwards in time, as Mūsā is the earliest person in connection with whom stoning is mentioned and, consequently, the motif is totally absent from the book of Genesis. On the contrary, the Qur'ān shifted this motif backwards to the time of Biblical patriarchs who lived before Moses. They are Noah/Nūḥ (26:116), Abraham/Ibrāhīm (19:46).

Two other contexts of the group seem to have a Christian colouring and, consequently, move the motif to the time after the Old Testament narrative about the history of the people of Israel. The first is the context (36:18) which is part of the

⁵ The Qur'ānic treatment of stoning as the universal ritual is true to historical facts which show that it was practised all over the Near East from time immemorial. Thus, the Akkadians and the Egyptians used it.

⁶ All commentators expressly state that the "noble messenger" was Mūsā.

⁷ There is a significant discrepancy between the two versions of the story. Moses in the Bible is a prophet sent to the people of Israel, while Mūsā in the Qur'ān is God's messenger to two nations: the Jews and the Egyptians, the first of them accepting his guidance and the second refusing and being punished.

⁸ This is a parable of rejected prophets. There is another parable which depicts accepted prophets. Mūsā appears in both types of the Qur'ānic parables about prophets, see Frolov 1995.

story about “the people of the town”, *aṣḥāb al-qarya* (36:13-29) who rejected two messengers, later “reinforced with a third”, sent to them. All the commentators unanimously identify the town as Antioch and the messengers as Christians and supply various details mostly of a legendary character, see e.g. commentaries of aṭ-Ṭabarī, az-Zamaḥṣarī, Ibn Kaṭīr, as-Suyūṭī. Several *tafsīrs* mention Paul in connection with this story. On this basis, I. Krachkovsky, e.g. assumes that this story is a recollection of an episode from Acts 11, 27-30 and 21,10ff, which is part of Paul’s travels⁹.

The fifth context of the group is the recollection of a Christian story, absent from the Bible, about “the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus”, who are called in the Muslim tradition “the People of the Cave” (*aṣḥāb al-kaḥf*), see 18:20.

The last, sixth context of the group transfers the motif of stoning the prophet by unbelievers into the setting of the Arabian Peninsula, and makes it part of one of the Qur’ānic versions of the story of Šu‘ayb, who was sent to the inhabitants of Maydan, see 11:91. It is significant in this relation that the Qur’ān establishes the link between this Arabian prophet and the Biblical ones by saying that Šu‘ayb came after Nūḥ, Hūd, Šāliḥ and Lūṭ, see 11:89. Later commentators identified Šu‘ayb, though without sufficient evidence, as the Old Testament Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses who lived in Maydan¹⁰.

To sum up the analysis of this variant of the motif, always expressed by the verb *rağama*, we can state that stoning is shown as a habit known in Arabia before Islam which has a Biblical origin, and is more or less universally widespread in the Near East. The assertion of the Biblical origin of the motif goes side by side with another tendency: to place all the instances of the stoning either before the Exodus or after destruction of the Second Temple, in other words, to alienate the motif from the history of the people of Israel, with which it is closely related in the Bible.

3.2. The third Biblical variant of the motif represents the direct intervention of God in the course of events on side of the true believers, when He throws stones from the sky at His enemies or the enemies of Israel, see Joshua 10,11: And it came to pass, as they (= the Amorites) fled from Israel... that the Lord cast down great stones (*wa-ba-šem hišlich ‘aleyhem abanim gdolat*) from heaven upon them unto

⁹ The identification of this episode still remains somewhat uncertain, as several important details, missing from the Acts story, such as the changing number of messengers, the intercession of a man from the far side of the town, *rağulun min aqsā al-madīna* (36:20), the annihilation of the city by a single shout, *sayha wāḥida* (36:29), fit well the Old Testament story about the appearance of the Lord before Abraham in Mamre in the form of three angels, two of whom later went to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, see Genesis, chs. 18 and 19.

¹⁰ It can be added that Šu‘ayb is regularly mentioned in the Qur’ān side by side with Lūṭ with whom he is closely associated.

Azekah, and they died: they were more who died with hailstones (*abney ha-barad*) than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword¹¹.

The great stones which God throws from the sky can easily be identified with falling or shooting stars, cf. the passage from the song of Deborah (Jud 5,20)¹².

The same motif can be found in the Qur'ān and is represented, as Table 1 shows, by five contexts. Three of them are parts of different Qur'ānic versions of the story of Abraham and Lot:

11:82-83: So when Our command came, We turned it upside down and rained on it stones of clay (*ḥiḡāra min siḡḡīl*), one on another (*mandūd*), marked with thy Lord (*musawwama ʿinda rabbika*).

Cf. also 15:74.

51:32-34: They said: "We have been sent to a people of sinners to loose upon them stones of clay (*ḥiḡāra min ṭīn*) marked with thy Lord for the prodigal (*musawwama ʿinda rabbika li-l-musrifīn*).

The other two are connected with the story of Muḥammad:

105:3-4: (The story of the expedition of Abraha¹³) Did He not foil their stratagem and send against them flocks of birds which pelted them with stones of clay (*ḥiḡāra min siḡḡīl*)¹⁴.

8:32: And when they said: "O God, if this be indeed the truth from Thee, then rain down upon us stones out of heaven (*ḥiḡāra min as-samāʾ*).

The Medieval commentaries also add the sixth context, taken from the story of Šuʿayb, although the word "stone" does not occur in it, see 26:187¹⁵.

This motif, like the previous one, is placed in the Biblical setting, but some aspects are different. First, the direct link between the two scriptures in the form of an almost literally repeated passage is missing. Second, the important Qur'ānic detail, "stones of clay", absent from the relevant Biblical passage (Joshua 10,11), seems to be of a non-Biblical origin.

The opposition of stone as God's chosen matter which is the link between God and man, and clay as matter rejected by God as unfit for this role, is significant for the Biblical message, see the story of the tower of Babel (Gen 11,3); and the motif of

¹¹ Cf. also the Deuterocanonical book of Jesus Son of Sirach 46,7.

¹² The same image of the shooting star appears in the apocalyptic visions in the Deuterocanonical 2 Esdras book, see 2 Esd 15,39-44; and the New Testament, see Mt 24,29; Mk 13,25; Rev 6,13; 8,10.

¹³ The expedition against Mecca is dated 570 C.E., which is considered the year of Muḥammad's birth.

¹⁴ It is noteworthy that birds as tools of God's wrath are mentioned only in this context, which is, accidentally, the earliest one.

¹⁵ The word *kasf* "lump" in this context was explained by the commentators as part (*qiṭʿa*) of the sky, or its side (*ḡānib*), or simply a punishment (*ʿadāb*) from the sky.

“stones of clay” which invalidate the opposition seems to be incompatible with Biblical symbolism.

The word *siġġīl* (11:82-83; 15:74; 105:3-4), interchangeable with *ṭīn* (51:32-34), is interpreted by *mufassirīn* as a Persian (Pahlavi) loan-word synonymous with *ṭīn*¹⁶ and the phrase “stones of clay” is explained either as dried clay which became hard as stone or as baked clay (= brick), see Ibn Kaṭīr, commentary to 11:82-83.

The important feature of these “stones of clay”, repeated twice (11:82-83; 51:32-34), is that they are marked (*musawwama*) by the Lord. The commentators are unanimous in their interpretation of this detail. They say that each stone bore the name of the person whom it was going to kill.

In a search of the origin of this detail we must turn eastward to the direction of Mesopotamia and Persia, not westward to the direction of Egypt and Palestine. Since Biblical times, Mesopotamia has been opposed to Egypt as the land of clay to the land of stone¹⁷. Up to present time, the Shumerians and Akkadians are associated first of all with clay tablets with words written on them. There is evidence that the ritual killing with stone seals which had inscriptions on them was practised in Mesopotamia very early¹⁸.

This variant of the motif looks like an example of the “amalgamation” of heterogeneous. Biblical and non-Biblical, elements, which has a definite Muslim colouring. The resulting motif is once more consciously implanted into the Biblical context. The expansion of the motif is achieved in a way similar to the motif of stoning prophets. Again, the motif is simultaneously shifted from the story of Exodus, where it is located in the Bible, backwards to the time of Abraham, Lot (and Šuʿayb), and forwards, into the time of Muḥammad himself. Once more the direct link between the pre-Exodus time and post-Exodus time is established, which is in complete accordance with the historical perspective set up in the Qurʾān where the Islamic faith is

¹⁶ They mention that the word can also be pronounced as *siġġīn* with the same meaning.

¹⁷ One of the main commentators of the Bible in the Jewish tradition, Rashi, comments on the passage (Gen 11,3) by saying: “they used bricks because there was no stone in that land (= Babel)”. Cf. passage (Jer 43.8-11) where the opposition of clay as the symbol of Mesopotamia and stone as symbol of Egypt can be discerned: “Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, [9] Take great stones in thine hand and hide them in the clay in the brickkiln, which is at the entry of Pharaoh’s house in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah. [10] And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them. [11] And when he cometh, he shall smite the land of Egypt...”. Cf. also (Dan 2.32-45) where Daniel interprets Nebuchadrezzar’s dream about the stone which smate the image whose feet were part of iron and part of clay.

¹⁸ I thank my colleague Galina Kalinina who brought my attention to the story about the death of Rimush, successor of Sargon of Akkad (2316-2261 B.C.E.), who was killed by plotters with the help of such seals.

depicted as the direct successor of the faith of Abraham which was "neither Judaism, nor Christianity".

3.3. The idea of shooting stars as means of God's punishment is also present in the Qur'ān, only the object of this punishment are the Satan (*Iblīs*, *šayṭān*) and demons (*šayāṭīn*), see 67:5:

And We adorned the lower heaven with lamps, and made them things to stone Satans (*ruḡūman li-š-šayāṭīn*). (Cf. also 15:17.)

This idea is the origin of the original, definitely non-Biblical variant of the motif of stoning, which gave the most widespread Muslim epithet of the Satan, *raḡīm* "accursed" or "being stoned", according to the commentators, which is reflected in the ritual of Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.

The motif of the stoning of the Satan and his servants, demons or devils (*šayāṭīn*) is represented by seven Late Meccan and Medinese contexts (3:36; 15:17; 15:34; 16:98; 38:77; 67:5; 81:25)¹⁹.

Once more the motif, which does not occur in the Bible, is consciously placed into a significant Biblical context, the story of the creation of the world and the human race, which originally does not contain any trace of the motif of stoning. The Qur'ānic version of this story contains an episode when *Iblīs* refused to bow before Adam, and was cursed and sent into exile²⁰. The story of the creation of man, told three times in the Qur'ān (*sūras* 2, 15, 38), contains the relevant motif twice:

15:33-34: Said he (=Iblīs): "I would never bow myself before a mortal whom Thou hast created of a clay of mud moulded". [34] Said He: "Then go thou forth hence: thou art accursed (*raḡīm*). [35] Upon thee will rest the curse (*la'na*), till the Day of Doom"²¹.

C.f. the same wording of the motif in 38:77-78.

At the same time, the motif is moved onwards to the times of the origin of the Christian faith, and is implanted into the story of the birth of John the Baptist which originally does not contain the motif of stoning, see 3:36.

¹⁹ The only context which occurs in the Early Meccan *sūra* is 81:25 but the passage does not look like an early one. Krachkovsky in his commentary states that many scholars consider it as late and related to *sūra* 53 which is on the border between the Early Meccan and Late Meccan periods. Bell considers verses 81:15-29 a result of a Medinese redaction aimed at the co-ordination of this passage with *sūra* 53.

²⁰ This story contains a very significant detail. The Satan *was stoned* because he, being made of fire, refused to bow before Man created of *clay*, see: 38:76. The Qur'ānic passage comes close to the idea expressed in the New Testament that there is no chosen material as such, like there is no people chosen for all the times; only this idea is related to the notion of stone in the New Testament, see Matt 3.9; while in the Qur'ān it is related to the notion of clay.

²¹ The occurrence of *raḡīm* and *la'na* in the same context strengthen the position of those Muslim commentators and European scholars who interpret these words as synonyms, like Arberry did in the passage we cited.

Further on, the motif of stoning the Satan, like the previous one, is moved until it reaches the time of Muḥammad and is related to the Qur'ān:

16:98: When thou recitest the Koran, seek refuge in God from the accursed (*rağīm*) Satan.

81:25: And it (= the Qur'ān) is not the word of an accursed (*rağīm*) Satan.

We can conclude that for a Muslim who reads the Qur'ān, this motif, which has a non-Biblical origin, appears as being related to the history of both Judaism and Christianity and to the Old as well as New Testament. The Qur'ānic innovation is presented as a continuation of the scriptural tradition of Near Eastern monotheism. Once more we see the tendency to achieve a synthesis of Biblical and non-Biblical elements accompanied by a conscious reinterpretation and transformation of the symbols involved²².

3.4. Table 2 allows us to visualize the two-fold strategy of shaping up the Qur'ānic version of the motif of stoning as part of the Qur'ānic message as a whole.

First, the set of chosen variants of the motif, related to the Biblical imagery or to non-Biblical sources, shows that the motif is given a bi-polar structure. On the one side, the stoning is the result of the disobedience of God's will and is directed against His messengers. On the other side, the stoning is God's direct punishment of His enemies, be it man or devil. The opposition can also be traced in the Bible but the Qur'ān lays special accent on it by omitting everything which might shade it or make it less sharp and evident.

Second, the motif taken as a whole is an example of the creative synthesis of heterogenous, Biblical and non-Biblical, elements, but all variants of the motif, even those not attested in the Bible, are placed into the Biblical context. At the same time, significant temporal shifts were achieved, either backwards to the pre-Exodus times where the story of Abraham is the centre of the motif, or onwards to the times of the birth of the Christian faith, or to the "present time" of the Qur'ān, the time of Muḥammad himself.

As a result we get not a disordered set of contexts unrelated to each other, but a complex and unified motif which is an organic part of the teaching of Islam.

4. The Stone in the Qur'ān

Table 1 shows that the motif of stone as a substantive is only represented in the Qur'ān by six contexts, four of which are found in the Medinese *sūras*. In fact, the range turns even narrower, as three contexts come from the second *sūra* (2:24; 2:60; 2:74) and two others are almost literal repetitions of the images taken from this *sūra*

²² The fourth Biblical variant of the motif of stoning, frequent in the Bible, though not in the Pentateuch, is the use of stone as a weapon in a fight (Num 35,17 and 23) or war with the help of a sling, see e.g. Jud 20,16; 1 Sam 17,49-50 or "engines of war to throw fire and stones", see 1 Macc 6.51. This variant is not represented in the Qur'ānic text at all, see Table 2.

(7:160; 66:6)²³. The only context which is not directly connected with this compact group is (17:50)²⁴.

Such a distribution of contexts directs our attention to the possibility of the existence of a common semantic dominant for the whole group. Indeed, such a common idea does exist. It is the conventional character of the opposition between life and death, between what is alive and what is dead, of the possibility of transgression across the border between the two extremes at the Lord's will and depending on the attitude of a creature towards its Creator.

The key-note is given by two contexts which are recollections of a well-known Biblical episode, when Moses struck the rock with his rod and water sprang from it, see Ex 17,5-6; Num 20,10-11:

2:60: And when Mūsā sought water for his people, so We said: "Strike with thy staff the stone (*ḥaḡar*)"²⁵, and there gushed forth from it twelve fountains, and all the people knew now their drinking-place²⁶.

The Qur'ānic story is placed in the same outer context as in the Bible, that of the wanderings in the desert. There is a significant substitution of the Biblical "rock" (*tzor* or *ṣela'*) by the Qur'ānic "stone" (*ḥaḡar*), which makes more evident the opposition of stone as dead matter and water as matter which gives life, equally important also for the Old and the New Testament.

Medieval Muslim commentators have much to say about this stone of Mūsā. They supply colourful details, e.g. that the stone was a cube form and three fountains sprang from each side of it, or that it had the form of a bull's head and was carried on a bull (or a donkey) in order to get water from it each time the people stopped for rest, or that it was in the form of man's head and was brought down by Adam from Eden, and was passed down afterwards from generation to generation until it reached Šu'ayb (sic!) and then Mūsā, etc.

There is the third context which is also placed within Mūsā's story, which makes the opposition of alive and dead, and the possibility of their changing places because of the fear of God or the lack of it, even more clear. This context, which contains

²³ The contrast between the Late Meccan period and the Medinese period as far as the stone motif is concerned is best exemplified by the comparison of the two *sūras* where there is more than one "stone" context. The Late Meccan *sūra* "al-Ḥiḡr" contains three stone contexts (15:17; 15:34; 15:74), and all of them are representations of the different variants of the motif of stoning. On the contrary, not a single context of the three occurrences found in the *sūra* "The Cow" is a realization of the motif of stoning.

²⁴ The existence of this compact group of contexts tied by the notion of stone has been noticed by Muslim commentators who were careful enough to mention the existing relations between them, see Ibn Kaṭīr's commentary of the relevant passages.

²⁵ The word *ḥaḡar* is used in the singular only in these two Qur'ānic contexts.

²⁶ Cf. also 7:160. The theme of the twelve fountains is borrowed from another context, see Ex 15,27: "And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water... and they encamped there by the waters".

the motif of hearts of stone, includes a recollection of the water coming out of the stone:

2:74: Then your hearts became hardened thereafter and are like stones, or even yet harder: for there are stones from which rivers come gushing, and others split, so that water issues from them, and others crush down in the fear of God.

The motif of hearts of stone is also attested in the Bible, though the combination of the two motifs in one context is definitely Qur'anic. Cf. e.g.: 1 Sam 25,37; Job 41,24; Ez 11,19; Ez 36,26; Zecharia 7,12.

Two other contexts also vary the theme of the neutralization of the opposition of dead and alive at God's will:

2:24: (after the request to bring a *sūra* like the Qur'an) And if you do not — and you will not —, then fear the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for unbelievers.

66:6: Believers, guard yourselves and your families against a Fire whose fuel is men and stones...²⁷

This motif might also be a recollection of the Biblical passage, though the symbolic meaning is changed. We mean the passage (1 Ring 18,31-38).

The sixth context also continues the theme of the dead brought back to life at the Lord's will, or the theme of resurrection:

17:49-51: They say: "What, when we are bones and broken bits, shall we really be raised up again in a new creation?" [50] Say: "Let you be stones, or iron, [51] or some creation yet more monstrous in your minds!". Then they will say: "Who will bring us back?" Say: "He who originated you the first time".

This last context also seems to be a recollection (and reinterpretation) of the Biblical image, attested both in the Old and the New Testaments:

Nehemiah 4.2: (the Samaritans said when they heard that the Jews were rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem) What do these feeble Jews?... will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burnt²⁸?

Matt 3.9: (words of John the Baptist addressed to the Jews and already mentioned above) And think not to say within yourselves. We have Abraham to our father, for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham²⁹.

Once more we see the same method of the conscious assimilation of motifs and images of the earlier scriptures. Various themes are combined, condensed and reinterpreted, and, as a result, there emerges a binary opposition of the alive and the dead,

²⁷ The stones in these contexts are most often interpreted by commentators as idols, see, e.g. *Tafsīr al-Ġalālayn*.

²⁸ Note the implicit idea the stones were burnt also.

²⁹ Cf. the literal repetition in Lk 3,8.

which presupposes the possibility of each polar concept to turn into its opposite. This is characteristic of the *dialektique antinomique* of Arabic thought about which L. Massignon was speaking so much.

The notion of stone in its Qur'ānic interpretation turns into an important element of the Muslim conception of the relation of God to the World which He had created. Its foundations were laid down in the Qur'ān, and its further development in the history of Islamic thought brought forth the atomistic theory of *kalām* and the fatalistic outlook on history.

5. Summary

1) The set of "stone" contexts is characterized by the high degree of order, and represents a semantic field built upon the principle of binary oppositions which establish stoning as the means of solving the conflict between the Creator and its creatures and stress the conventional, not absolute character of the opposition of life and death in the eyes of facing the Lord. Two oppositions of the first order are subdivided into a number of secondary motifs combined together by associations.

2) The "stone" theme in the Qur'ān appears as a direct recollection of the Biblical texts, where images and motifs from the New Testament are superimposed upon the images of the Old Testament, with the addition of non-Biblical, Arabian and Mesopotamian, matter.

3) The true originality of the Qur'ānic message becomes visible when we analyze the process of combination and reinterpretation of the heterogeneous elements. The Qur'ānic poetics is in conformity with the thesis, repeated many times in the Qur'ānic text itself, that the new revelation is a "recollection" (*dikr*) of what has been revealed before.

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