

MECCA

those who opposed him were even prepared to label him an agent of the American Central Intelligence Agency, and cast doubt on his scholarship on the grounds that he never received a formal Islamic education. His writings were frequently dismissed as being mutually contradictory, and his opinions were characterized as immoral, as constituting innovation (*bid'at*) and even as heresy. In 1951, in Delhi, an assembly of the *'ulama*, the *Jamiyyat al-'ulama*, passed a *fatwa* against him, and in 1976 a further *fatwa* was published, designating him a heretic. Despite such opposition, Mawdudi continues to be a major influence on the thinking of the Muslim world, and his writings provide at least one blueprint for radical Islamists.

Further reading

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See also: **Sayyid Qutb; tafsir – Salafi views**

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MECCA

see: **Arab; Becca**

MECCAN AND MEDINAN SURAS AND THE QUR'AN

The style and emphasis of the Meccan suras

One of the difficulties for a reader of the Qur'an is the general lack of chronology in the sequence of its chapters. Many of the *suras* are mixtures of passages from Muhammad's years of preaching in Mecca and his years as leader of the Muslim community in Medina. The shorter *suras* generally come from the Meccan period and the longer passages of the later *suras* from the Medinan period. Many Western critics prefer the former to the latter, finding them more spiritual and less legalistic, more concise and less verbose.

The early Meccan *suras* concentrate on issues that must have made a striking impression on Muhammad, such as the lack of faith his audience showed in his message, the judgement to come, and the destiny of all humanity to end up in either heaven or hell. In these early passages, Muhammad communicates messages in his role as someone sent to call his people to the right path and to warn them about the punishments awaiting evil-doers. *'Innama anta munthir* (Verily you are but a warner) (79.45) is the address found in various forms in these passages (see also *suras* 74.2; 87.9). As Cragg points out, Muhammad is several times reminded in the Meccan period that his only task is *al-balagh*, communication (Cragg, 1971: 146). The contrast and indeed conflict between pagan Arab religion and the absolute unity of God, between *jahaliyya* and *Islam*, between *shirk* and *tawhid*, only come out explicitly in the later Meccan *suras*. Allah, the name for God, only begins to appear with regularity in these later Meccan *suras* as well, with the

rather impersonal *ar-Rabb* (the Lord) being generally used in the very earliest *suras*. In Muhammad's earliest preaching, the warning about the Day of Judgment is much more frequently mentioned than the issue of the unity of God, and it was these revelations about the afterlife that his opponents bitterly criticized during the first twelve years.

A contrast is often made between the mainly prophetic character of the Meccan *suras* and the legalistic style of most of the Medinan *suras*, and the earlier *suras* are sometimes regarded as more moving and personal than those that come later. Of course, the Prophet was in a different position earlier on, surrounded by enemies and with few supporters, and with little scope to turn the message into actuality, whereas in Medina he could establish a political authority and organize the city along the lines specified by God.

One of the contrasts between the two periods is the style of address, which is much more personal earlier on and impersonal later. The Meccan passages usually speak to Muhammad himself or to people generally, the Medinan passages are often addressed to Muhammad's followers with the introduction *Ya ayyuhallathina a'manuu* (O you who believe!). What follows is often about law, which is of its nature impersonal, and the laws of Islam are found mainly in the passages dating from Muhammad's period in Medina. We find details on campaigns, consultations, customs, contracts (2.282) and behaviour, the abolition of usury (2.278), the laws of inheritance (4.11-12), the prohibited degrees of relationship (4.23), the property of orphans (4.6-10), the prohibitions on wine and gambling (5.93-94), comments on public events, statements of policy, criticism of those who did not see eye to eye with the Prophet (mainly the Jews), and some detail about his

domestic problems, how he resolved them, and so on. Muhammad is given special permission to exceed the limit placed on Muslims not to take more than four wives at a time (33.50-52), and believers are commanded to salute him (33.56) and even given strict details regarding etiquette to be observed when approaching his apartments:

O you who believe! Enter not the Prophet's houses, until leave is given you, for a meal, [and then] not [so early as] to wait for its preparation: but when you are invited, enter; and when you have taken your meal, leave, without seeking familiar talk. Such [behaviour] annoys the Prophet: he is ashamed to dismiss you, but God is not ashamed [to tell you] the truth. (33.53)

This is in marked contrast with 80.1-12, where he may have been criticized for lack of humility on a particular occasion.

In fact, the style of the Medinan period has sometimes been criticized by contrast with the earlier *suras*, as by Bell: The slovenliness, the trailing sentences, the mechanical rhymes of the later portions of the Qur'an, have often been remarked on (Bell, 1926: 96). During the later *suras*, the Prophet comes to great prominence, and revelations about the biblical prophets take a pattern rather similar to his own prophetic history and experience. This consists of dialogues between a prophet and his relations, in which the former preaches monotheism and right living to the latter, who have strayed from the monotheistic path (Noah, 21.76-77; Abraham, 37.83-99; and so on). Hud, the prophet of the 'Ad people, is said to have discoursed with his countrymen in this manner:

'O my people! Worship God! Ye have no other god but Him.' ... the leaders of the unbelievers among his people said 'Ah! We see that you are an imbecile.' ... He

MECCAN AND MEDINAN *SURAS* AND THE QUR'AN

said, 'O my people! I am no imbecile, but [I am] an apostle from the Lord ... Do you wonder that there has come to you a message from your Lord through a man of your own people, to warn you?' ... They said, 'Do you come to us so that we may worship God alone, and give up the cult of our fathers? Bring us what you are threatening us with if you are telling the truth!' He said, ... 'Are you arguing with me over names which you have made up, you and your fathers, without authority from God?' (7.65-71)

This passage deals with Muhammad's own struggle with the pagan Meccans. He too concentrated on proclaiming the unity of God, was rejected as one possessed, and likewise defended his claims. (Hud, as in all the stories of the prophets the Qur'an records, is made to describe Allah in typically Qur'anic terms: e.g. *rabbil-'alamin*, The Lord of the Worlds.)

Again there is the emphasis on the prophet being called from his own people who, however, prefer the cult worship of their ancestors. Muhammad likewise threatened his people with destruction and was challenged to bring it about (8.32) and, like the supposed prophet Hud, reviled their idols as '*asma' summaytumu ha antum wa aba'ukum* (names which you have devised, you and your fathers) (7.71; 53.23).

Muslim and non-Muslim commentators take different lines on the contrast between the Meccan and Medinan passages. Believing that the Qur'an is eternal and that it was simply dictated to Muhammad, Muslim writers are generally disinclined to admit the existence of any contrast. They are not inclined to accept any idea of a development in the Qur'anic text as this seems to imply that the text had much to do with Muhammad's career and might even suggest that he was its author. On the other hand, verses are often explained by

Muslim commentators in terms of the events that were pertinent to some as opposed to other verses. Indeed, this is often used as a guide to when abrogation is and is not appropriate. A rather radical Muslim commentator, Fazlur Rahman, has no problem in perceiving a contrast between the two periods of versification:

A voice is crying from the very depths of life and impinging forcefully on the Prophet's mind in order to make itself explicit at the level of consciousness. This tone gradually gives way, especially in the Medina period, to a more fluent and easy style as the legal content increases for the detailed organization and direction of the nascent community-state. (Rahman, 1966: 30)

He goes on to say:

It is interesting that all these descriptions of experiences and visions belong to the Meccan period; in the Medina era we have a progressive unfolding of the religio-moral ideal, and the foundation for the social order for the newly instituted community but hardly any allusions to inner experiences. (Rahman, 1966: 128)

Muhammad Taha argued that the Meccan verses are much more universal than the Medinan verses, and the latter only reflect the exigencies of the time when the Prophet was trying to keep the community together in exile. Once he returned to Mecca, the Medinan verses could be accepted as only having applied in an earlier period and could be rejected. This in an unusual interpretation and resulted in its author's execution. Those hostile to Islam and the later Medinan verses representative of an increasingly autocratic and unsympathetic Muhammad, someone who was enjoying the use of power and getting back at his enemies. The earlier verses are

seen as concise and to the point, often moving in their style and content, while the later are ponderous and unwieldy, representing the desire to establish a religion and law when the signi- cance of persuasion was no longer current. It has to be said that law is not the most gripping subject matter for anyone, and so it is hardly surprising that the revelations that are replete with legal distinctions and information do not exactly inspire the reader or hearer.

On the other hand, the distinction between the style of the two periods should not be overdone. After all, we are told:

God! There is no god but He, the Living, the self-subsisting, the eternal. No slumber can seize him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there can intercede in His presence except as He allow? He knows what [comes to His creatures as] before or after or behind them. They will grasp only as much of his knowledge as he allows. His Throne cloth extends over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them. For He is the Most High, the Supreme [in glory]. (2.255)

This is the *ayat al-Kursi*, the Verse of the Throne, named after the throne of God described in it. The other striking passage from the Medinan period is a rare verse of obvious beauty, which tends to move into the mystical realm in its description of God's glory and has accordingly been highly esteemed by the Su- ra:

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp: the lamp enclosed in a glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star lit from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil is almost luminous, though fire hardly touched it: Light upon Light! God guides whom He will to His

light: God provides parables for men: and God knows all things. (24.35)

These two passages are rightly highly esteemed by Muslims and are typical of the constant endeavour in the Qur'an to glorify God in suitable terms. Nevertheless, they do appear to be more easily related to the earlier *suras* of the Meccan period than the otherwise legislative spirit of most of the Medinan passages. It is in the Meccan *suras* that we find quite a number of verses expounding this theme of God's goodness and power. Indeed, quantitatively this is by far the most prominent aspect of the message of the early passages (Watt, 1953: 63).

Time of revelation

When *suras* were revealed is an important aspect of Qur'anic hermeneutics. For example, it is sometimes said that the early revelation was written when Muhammad was weak and the later when he was stronger. So the later revelation is filled with injunctions that call the believers to be harsh with the unbelievers and kill them wherever they find them. It sometimes seems that the believers needed to be encouraged to fight when they were initially disinclined to do so: Fighting is prescribed for you, and you dislike it. But it is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you (2.216). Is it really the case that fighting is good for people? But when this did not work, Muhammad apparently coerced them with: Unless you go forth, He [God] will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place (9.39).

If the later revelations abrogate the earlier, then 9.29 suggests constant hostility even against the People of the Book. At first fighting was forbidden, then it was permitted, and after that it

MICHAEL / MIKHA'IL

was made obligatory. The Meccan part, however, although mostly abrogated, is often used by defenders of Islam to show it in a positive light. As against the milder Meccan *suras*, we find later on:

Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he among you that turns to them [for friendship] is of them. Verily Allah does not guide a people. (5.51)

There is also: Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush (9.5). Plus: And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is for Allah (2.193). There are several bellicose verses of this nature:

When you meet the unbelievers, strike their necks; finally, when you have thoroughly subdued them, restrain them firmly (47.4; see also 8.12).

These verses are very much part of the second part of the revelation, and those suspicious or hostile to Islam regard them as the real viewpoint of the religion which it adopted when it was strong enough to enact its wishes. The much gentler verses from the earlier period do not, in this view, represent what Islam is really about. Yet although this contrast between earlier and later verses is interesting and important, it has to be acknowledged that such a strategy for attacking Islam is misguided. First, Muslims themselves are interested in the timing of the revelation when they consider its interpretation, and they certainly do not think that the earlier verses become irrelevant just because later ones may be contrary to them. Second, verses in the Qur'an are not the only source used by Muslims to discover God's will. There are also the Traditions (*ahadith*) and the *sunna* of the Prophet, and of course the

mass of legal and theological reflection on the text of the Qur'an and these other significant sources of meaning.

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See also: **abrogation; Arab; asbab al-nuzul; Qur'anic Studies**

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MICHAEL / MIKHA'IL

Michael/Mikha'il is a name of one of the chief angels or archangels. It can be pronounced Mika'il or Mikal, and is referred to at 2.98. The name is a compound from two components: *Mik*, meaning who is like, and *il* meaning God. His role is to provide nourishment for bodies and knowledge for souls. He stands above the Swarming Sea (52.6) in the seventh heaven, and if he were to open his mouth, the heavens would fall within it like a mustard seed in the ocean.

According to a *hadith*, Every prophet has two viziers from those in heaven and two from the earth; my two from heaven are Gabriel and Michael. When Israel blows the trumpet, Gabriel will stand at his right hand and Michael at his left.

OLIVER LEAMAN