

A Muslim Rewriting of the Psalms of David

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Centre for Muslim–Christian Studies, Oxford, June 8, 2022

These slides are available at vishanoff.com

This research was assisted by an NEH Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities and an ACLS Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities or the American Council of Learned Societies.

Blessed are the anxious, those stricken with fear, who comfort orphans with food and nourishment.

Blessed are those who withdraw in silence from society and its vices, whose souls are afforded the most sublime insight.

Blessed are those who rise to **spend the night in vigil.**

But woe to those who go looking for adultery! The least that I will do to adulterers is to blot out the glow of health from their faces and wipe away both their lifespan and their livelihood.

Blessed are those who think too highly of me to gaze on the private parts of those forbidden to them, fearing my punishment.

An Islamic psalm

Why Islamic psalms?

Sources of inspiration

- Islamic parallels
- The Bible
- The Qur'an

Shared ascetic origins

- Early Islamic asceticism
- Christian monasticism

Later versions

- David's evolving sin
- Reception and use

Significance

- Interreligious polemic
- Internal exhortation
- Shared piety and symbols



An Islamic psalm

Why Islamic psalms?

(Q 38:17-20) Remember Our servant David, a man of strength who always turned to Us: We made the mountains join him in glorifying Us at sunset and sunrise; and the birds, too, in flocks, all echoed his praise. We strengthened his kingdom; We gave him wisdom and a decisive way of speaking. (trans. Abdel Haleem)

(Q 21:105) We wrote in the Psalms, as We did in [earlier] Scripture: 'My righteous servants will inherit the earth.'
(trans. Abdel Haleem; cf. Psalms 37:29)

An Islamic psalm

Why Islamic psalms?

Sources of inspiration

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Mālik ibn Dīnār in Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, 2:408.

Son of Adam, do not fail to **weep as you stand before me in prayer**, for I am God, who draws near to your heart, and whose light you see supernaturally.

Ibrāhīm ibn Adham in al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, 20-21.

Do not hope to **spend the night in vigil** while having eaten your fill;

do not hope to **achieve sadness** while getting plenty of sleep;

do not hope to attain the **fear of God** while craving this world.

An Islamic psalm

Why Islamic psalms?

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- Islamic parallels

Saying attributed to Hermes and Luqmān

Reason without *adab* is like a barren tree; reason with *adab* is like a fruitful tree. (al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik, *Mukhtār al-ḥikam*, pp. 19, 277)

Moses 29

Knowledge without works is like a tree without fruit.

Knowledge without works is like a bow without a string. [...]

Knowledge without the alms tax is like planting wheat on the rocks.

Knowledge is to a fool as pearls and sapphires are to animals.

A hard heart exposed to knowledge is like a stone soaked in water.

Preaching to one who doesn't care is like a playing the flute in a graveyard.

An Islamic psalm

Why Islamic psalms?

Sources of inspiration

- Islamic parallels

Core 14

All ye creatures, if you make me your refuge, and put your trust in me as you pursue your daily bread, I will make a way for you to get it. **For when my servant loves me, I become his hearing with which he hears and his sight by which he sees;** if he contemplates a good deed I embolden him, and if he contemplates a bad deed I restrain him.

An Islamic psalm

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Core 96

David said: O Lord, do not lead me to ruin; **do not let my enemies gloat over me; do not cast me from your door; do not make me despair of your mercy.** My God, **give me a truthful tongue that calls on you, and a heart that listens and obeys.** Do not busy me with the affairs of the people, but busy me with remembering you, and occupy my heart with obeying you.

Sufi 2:4

O David, **be devoted to me, and I will cause heads to bow before you,** and clothe your face with dignity.

An Islamic psalm

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Core 3.6

O David, say to the attendants who tend my House, relying fully on me and not on what the people have to offer them: **“Look at the birds; they neither plow nor toil nor sow, and yet each day they receive anew their full provision of ample nourishment. All this is under my supervision and management, for I know all things.”**

Core 1.1

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but in the law of the Lord he studies night and day. He is like a tree by the water's edge, whose leaves are not scattered and whose fruit does not fail.

But few are those who act thus! The **hypocrites** are not so, **for God knows the way of hypocrites and the way of sinners**; and because a hypocrite is full of deception, given to licentiousness, a breaker of covenants; and because **God knows the way of the God-fearing**, for they have the rank of the truthful, and they say nothing that their actions do not bear out.

Psalm 1 (RSV)

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. **In all that he does, he prospers.** The **wicked** are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; **for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.**

Core 1.1 with **Koranic changes**

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but in the **book (*kitāb*)** of the Lord he studies night and day. He is like a tree by the water's edge, whose leaves are not scattered and whose fruit does not fail. But few are those who act thus! The hypocrites are not so, for God knows the way of hypocrites and the way of sinners; and because a hypocrite is full of deception, given to licentiousness, a breaker of covenants; and because God knows the way of the God-fearing, for they have the rank of the truthful, and they say nothing that their actions do not bear out.

Core 1.1 with **Pious changes**

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but in the **law (*nāmūs*)** of the Lord he studies night and day. He is like a tree by the water's edge, whose leaves are not scattered and whose fruit does not fail. But few are those who act thus! The hypocrites are not so, for God knows the way of hypocrites **and he forgives the repentant and absolves the errant;** and because a hypocrite is full of deception, given to licentiousness, a breaker of covenants; **and the rank of God's prophets is the rank of the truthful, for they say the truth and abide by it.**

Core 1.1 with **Sufi changes**

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but in the law of the Lord he studies night and day. He is like a tree by the water's edge, **that gives its food and praises its Lord; its leaves are verdant; it hears and obeys its Lord.** But few are those who act thus! The hypocrites are not so, **for the works of hypocrites are scattered by the wind, because God knows the way of the hypocrites and the way of the righteous.**

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Sufi 58.1

The words of David (peace be upon him): **the mountains glorify you from every slope, the trees with every leaf, the deserts with every grain of sand, the seas with every drop of water**, the seven heavens and the seven earths from every quarter and every corner, the angels in every row with every feather. So too the rays of the sun, the light of day, the darkness of night, and the flanks of the clouds; and **so too the blood, veins, limbs, and eyes of every living thing, human, jinn, beast, or cattle.**

The words of God, the magnificent and majestic, concerning adultery and hardship: **Did you not know I am the Lord to whom all things in heaven and on earth bow down—birds, clouds, seas, stars, trees, beasts, the earths and skies**, both what is hidden from humankind and what is not hidden from them? They all acknowledge my lordship and concede their servitude, abjectly listening and obeying.

An Islamic psalm

Why Islamic psalms?

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Core 100

By the night when it grows dark; by the day when it grows bright! [...] **Happy is he who receives his book in his right hand** and goes off to his people with his face beaming; but wretched is he who receives his book in his left hand or behind his back, and goes off to his people with a scowling face, his color turned pale, his lips swollen, and his tongue hanging out. [...] **I know the unseen of the heavens and the earth, and I know which eyes are faithless and what each heart conceals. I am Hearing and Knowing.**

An Islamic psalm

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Moses 29.1 (quoting Q 3:102)

O ye who believe, fear God with the fear that is due him, and do not die without being Muslims.

Orthodox 119.1 (paraphrasing Q 112)

I am One, Singular, Absolute. I begat not, nor was begotten. I have taken neither spouse nor child. None is like unto me.

إِنِّي وَاحِدٌ أَحَدٌ صَمَدٌ لَمْ أَلِدْ وَلَمْ أُولَدْ وَلَمْ
أَتَّخِذْ صَاحِبَةً وَلَا وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُن لِّي كَفُورًا
أَحَدٌ.

An Islamic psalm

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Core 18.1

David, give heed to what I say: Tell Solomon to proclaim after you that **I will give the earth as an inheritance to Muhammad and his community.**

Q 21:105

We wrote in the Zabūr, after the Remembrance, that my righteous servants will inherit the earth.

Pss 37:29 (NRSV)

The righteous shall inherit the land, and live in it forever.

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Core 10

O ye people, do not forget the next world, nor let **the splendor and radiance of this world** delude you. O Children of Israel, if you reflected on your end and destination, and if you called to mind **the Resurrection** and what I have prepared on that Day for the disobedient, you would **laugh little and weep much!** [...] If only you would think **how hard the ground and how cold and dark the grave**; then you would speak little, but would frequently invoke my name and attend single-mindedly to me. For beauty is found only in the next life; the beauty of this world is fickle and fleeting.

An Islamic psalm

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Abba Antony, in *The Book of the Elders: Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. John Wortley, p. 25.

With **fear of God** before our eyes, let us ever be **mindful of death**. [...] While staying in the cell, collect your mind; remember the day of death; **behold the subsequent decomposition of the body**; consider the misfortune; accept the pain; **condemn the vanity of the world**; be attentive to due proportion and zeal that you might be able ever to remain in the same intended *hēsychia* [stillness, the life of a hermit] without weakening. Keep in mind, too, **the state of things in Hades** and think what it is like for the souls who are therein: in what most bitter silence, amidst what most **horrid groaning**, in what great **fear and agony**, in what apprehension as they anticipate the **unrelenting torment or the eternal and internal weeping**. But remember too **the day of resurrection** and of [our] appearing before God.

An Islamic psalm

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Core 4.5

Blessed are the anxious, those stricken with fear, who comfort orphans with food and nourishment.

Blessed are those who **withdraw in silence from society** and its vices, whose souls are afforded the most sublime insight.

Blessed are those who rise to **spend the night in vigil**.

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Saying attributed to al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyād
in al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, 12.

Blessed is he who **recoils from society**, is
drawn to his Lord, and weeps over his
offenses.

Saying related by Ibrāhīm ibn Adham
in al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, 20.

Do not hope to **spend the night in vigil** while
having eaten your fill;

do not hope to achieve sadness while
getting plenty of sleep;

do not hope to attain the fear of God while
craving this world.

An Islamic psalm

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Later versions



An Islamic psalm

Why Islamic psalms?

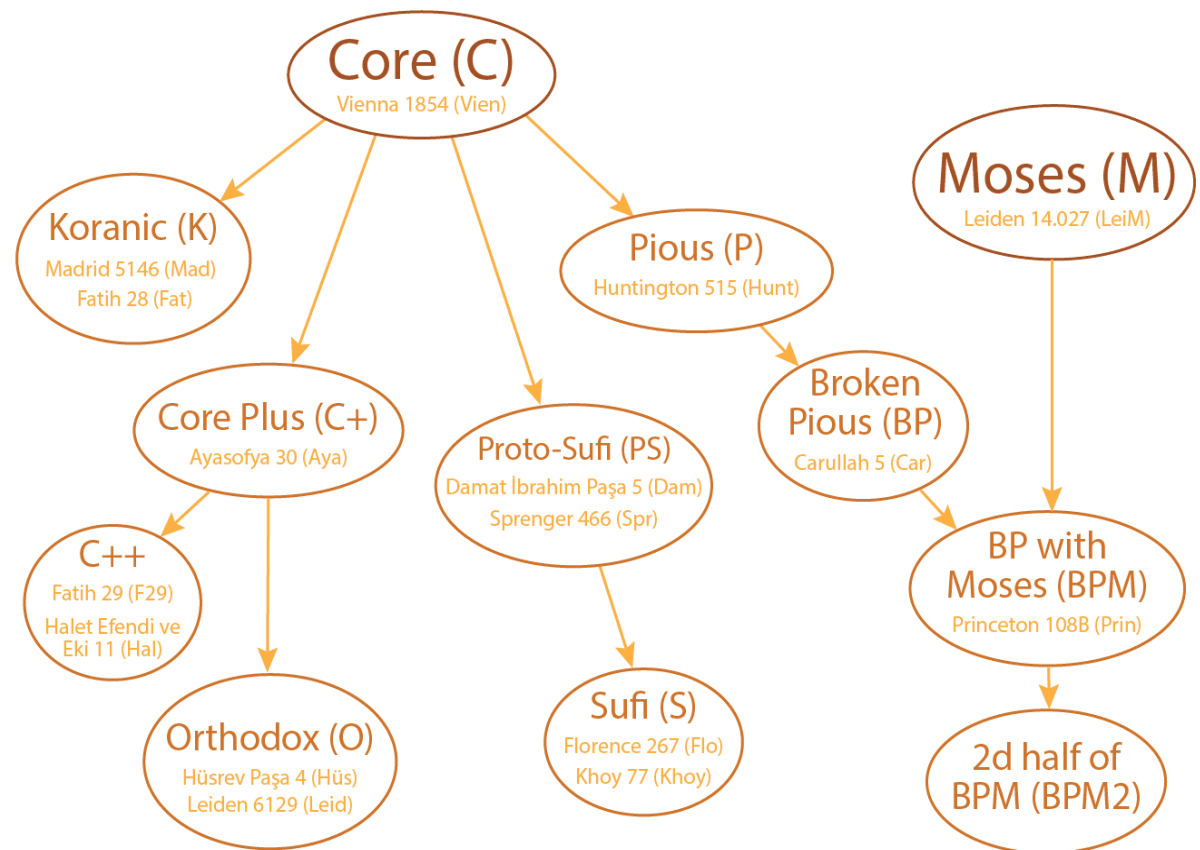
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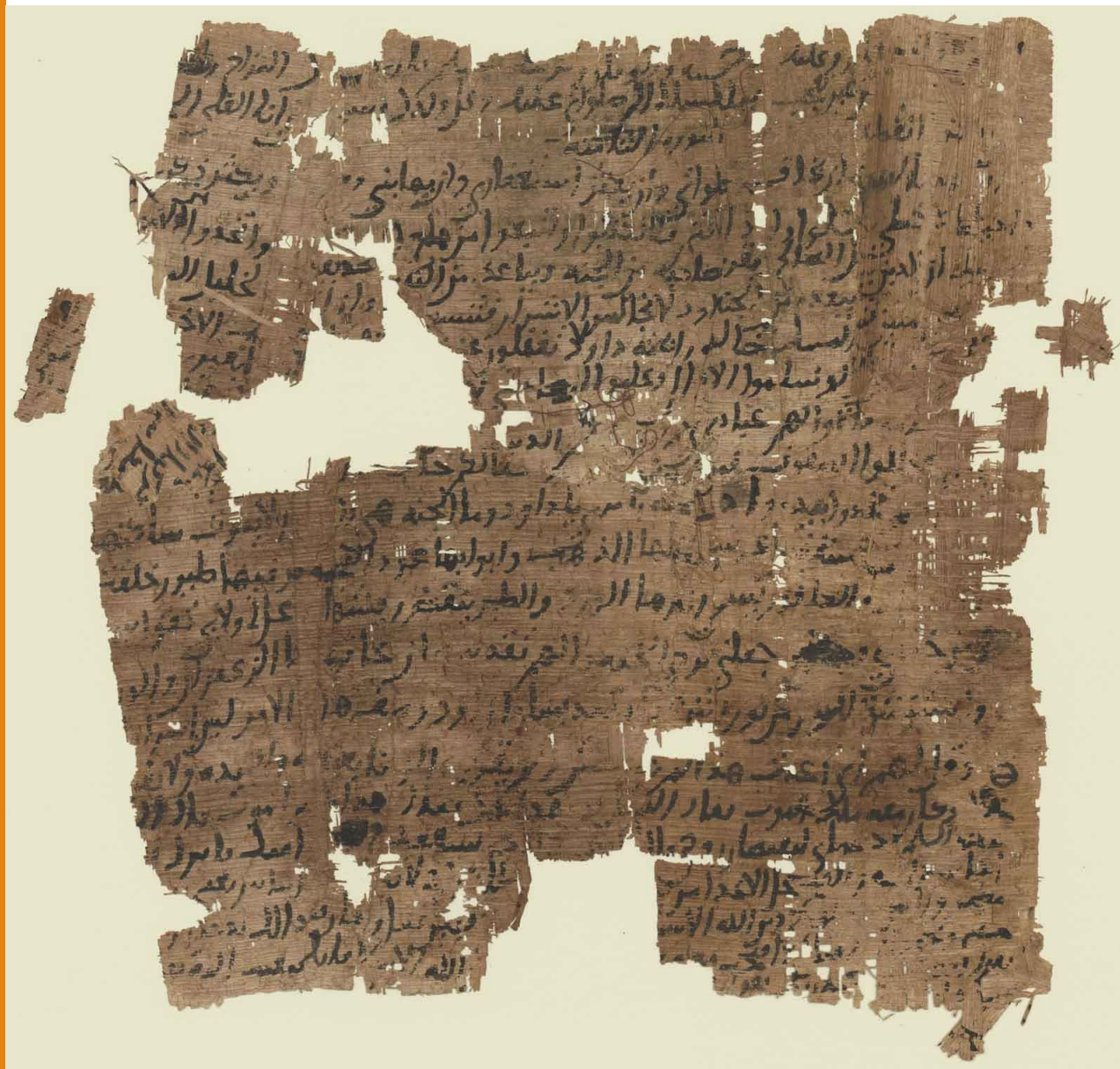
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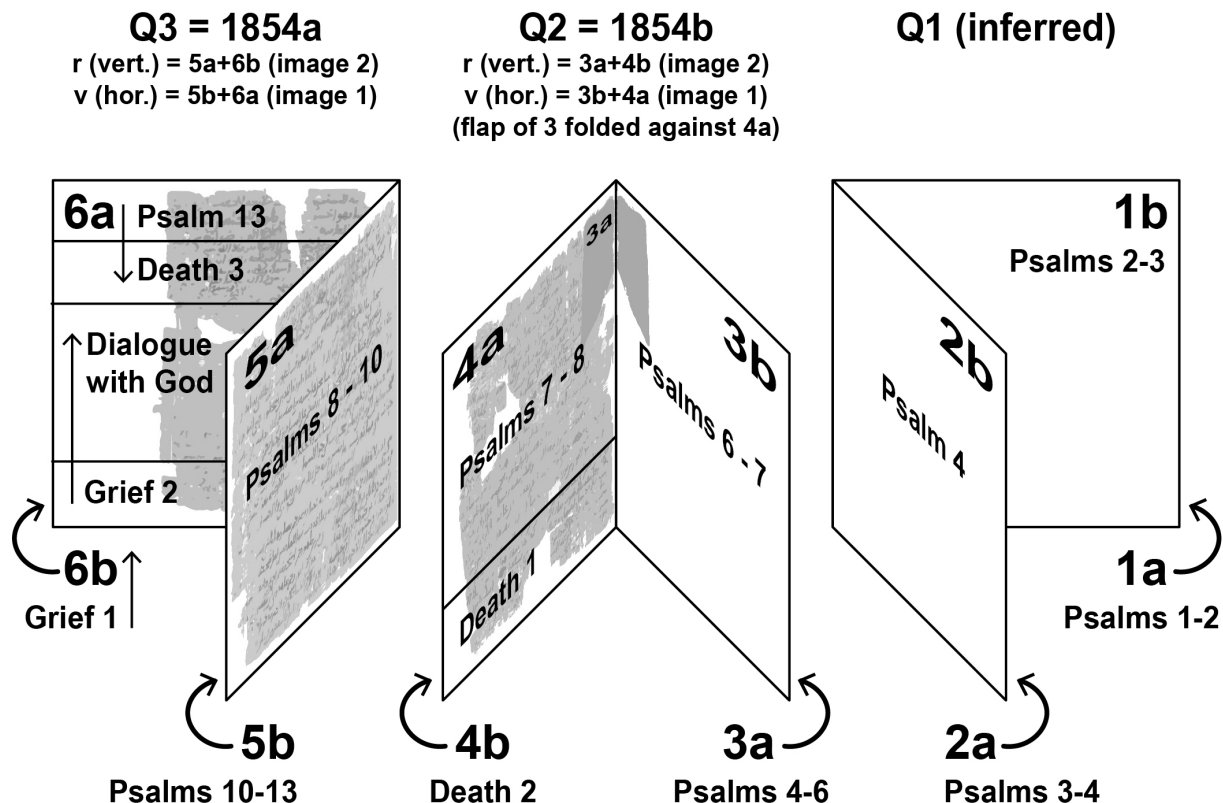
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Reconstruction of Vienna papyrus codex



Pericope instances with parallels and relationships												
Text		Ps	vs	v	Pericope ID							
+	C	14	1	2	make me your refuge							
+	C	14	3	3	be devoted to me							
+	C	14	4	5	those who do as they please							
-	C	14	6	7	deeply moving voice							
Pericope in:		Text	Ps	vs	v	fol	s	lir	foli	s	li	
-	Aya30 13:6-7	Aya30	13	6	7	7 b			7 b			
Pericope re		Target pericope		Relationship t		Base pericope		Dire				
		4219 Aya30 13:6-7		Based on		C 14:6-7						
*	(New) Aya30 13:6-7											
+	BPM 11:6-7	BPM	11	6	7							
+	C 14:6-7	C	14	6	7							
-	F28 15:6-7	F28	15	6	7	16 a		8	16 b		3	
Pericope re		Target pericope		Relationship t		Base pericope		Dire				
		4213 F28 15:6-7		Based on		C 14:6-7						
*	(New) F28 15:6-7											
+	FI 2:8-9	FI	2	8	9	3 b			3 b			
+	Hunt 15:6-7	Hunt	15	6	7							
+	Le 14:6-7	Le	14	6	7							
+	O 14:6-7	O	14	6	7							
+	P 15:6-7	P	15	6	7							
+	Pr 11:6-7	Pr	11	6	7	13 b		9	14 a		3	
-	S 2:8-9	S	2	8	9							
Pericope re		Target pericope		Relationship t		Base pericope		Dire				
		4216 S 2:8-9		Based on		C 14:6-7						
		4220 S 2:8-9		Ideologically mo		C 14:6-7						
*	(New) S 2:8-9											
*												
+	C	15	1	Prayer of my servant in distress								

An Islamic psalm

Why Islamic psalms?

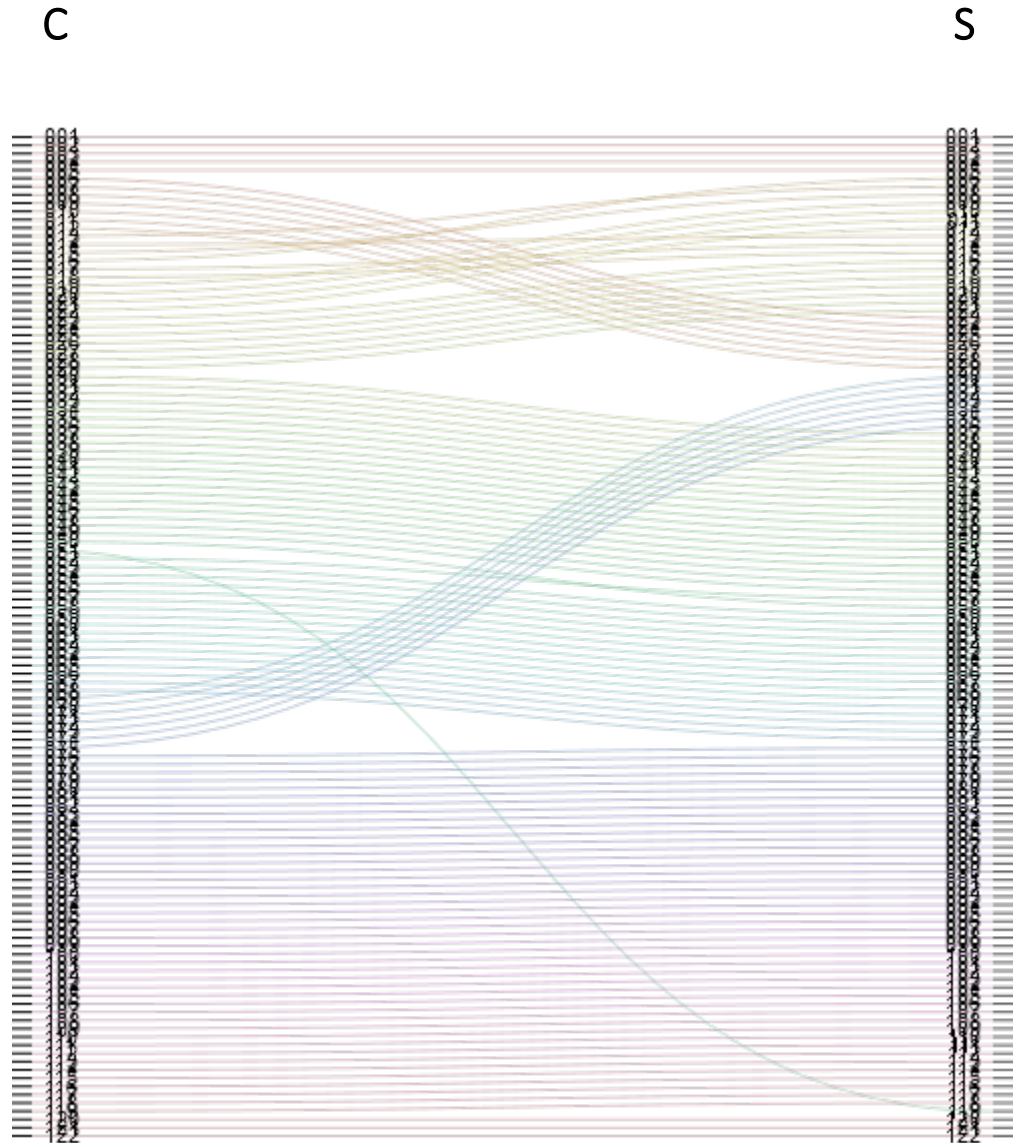
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Shared ascetic origins

- Early Islamic asceticism
- Christian monasticism

Later versions



An Islamic psalm

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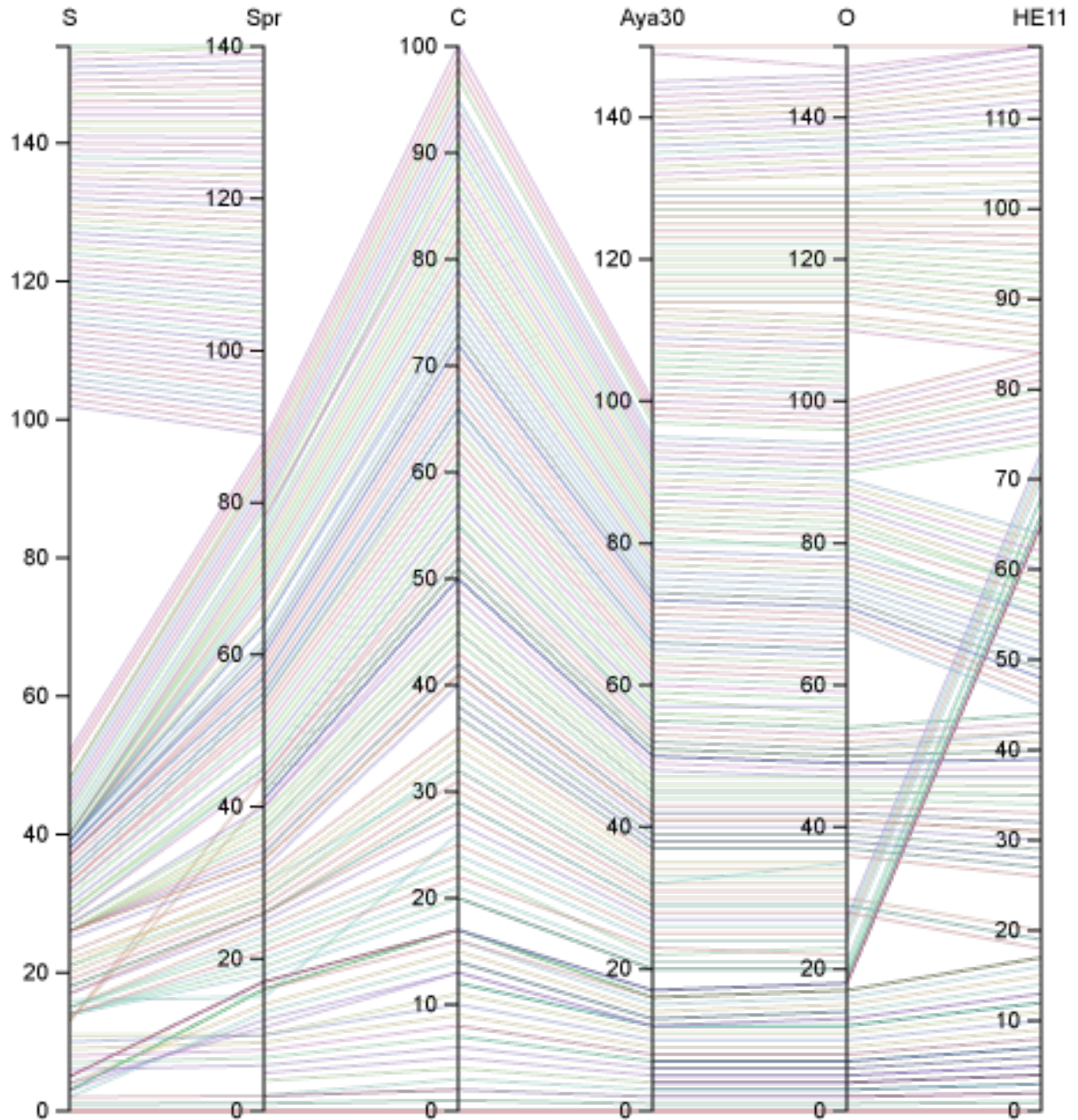
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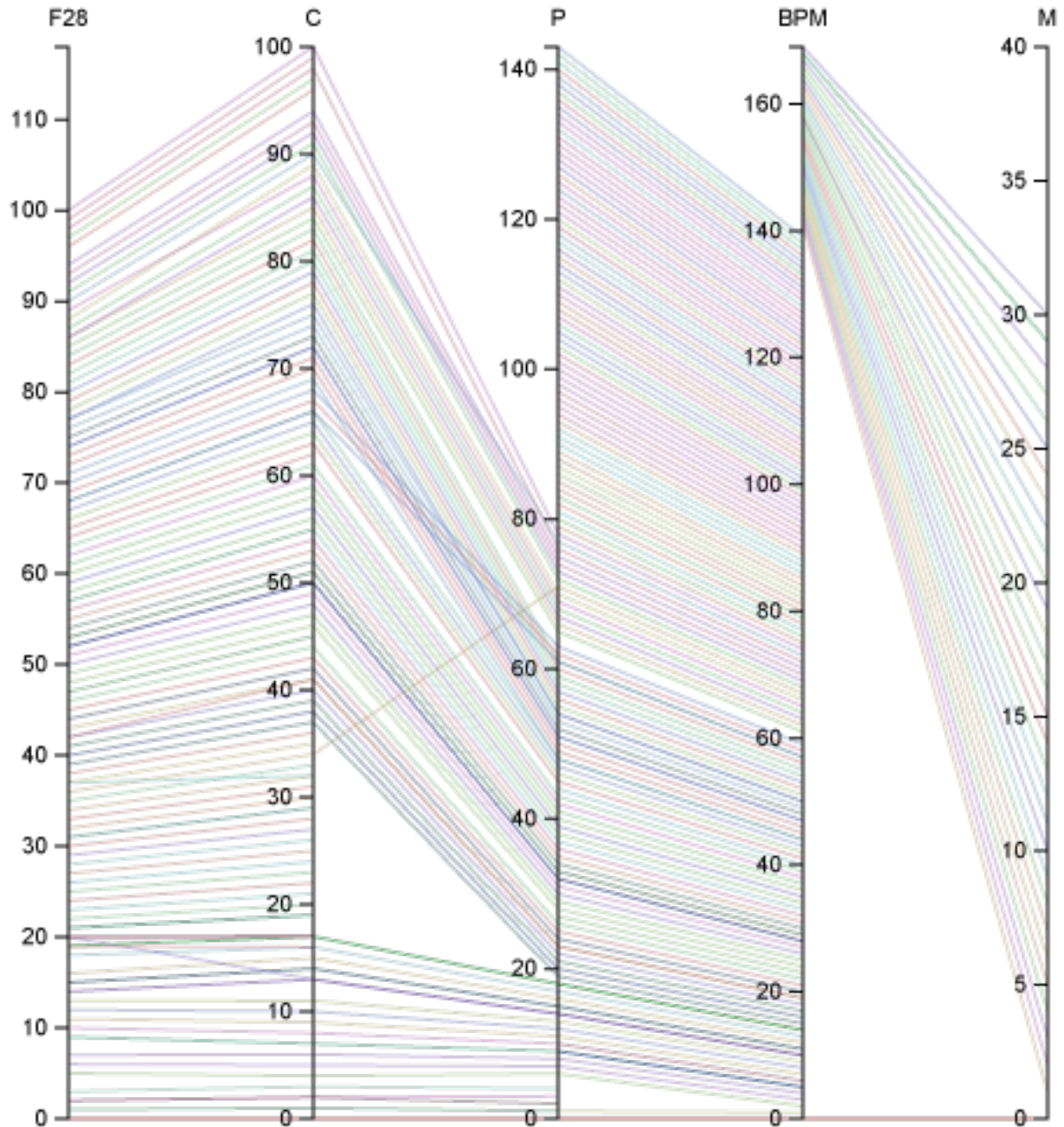
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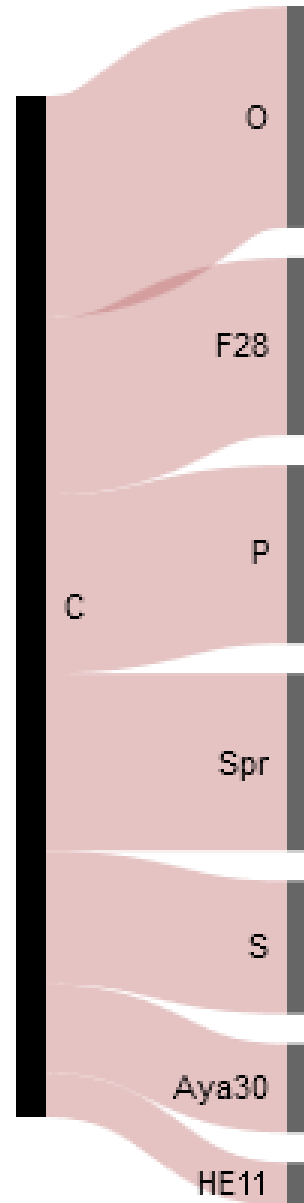
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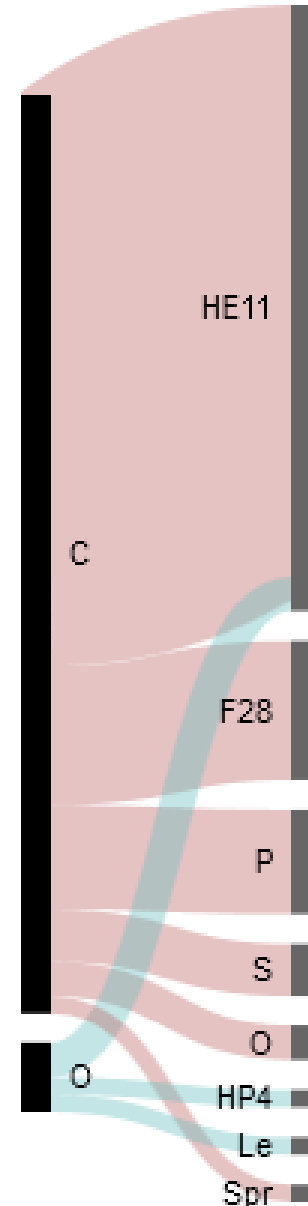
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Later versions

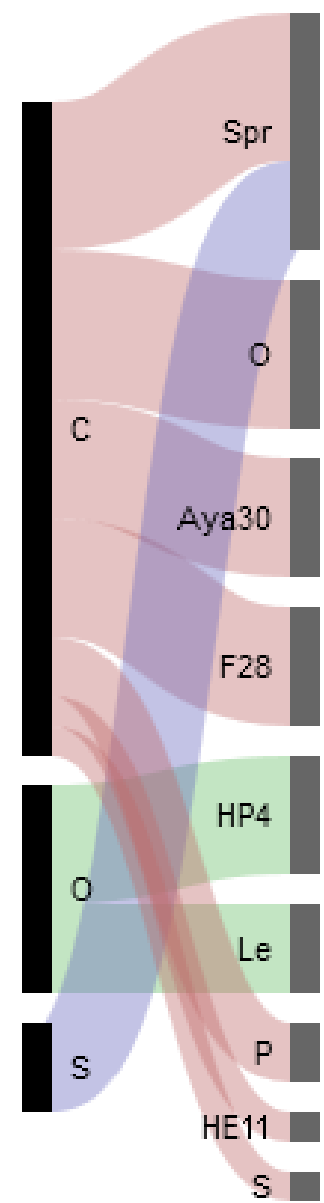
Ideological changes



Additions



Corruptions



An Islamic psalm

Why Islamic psalms?

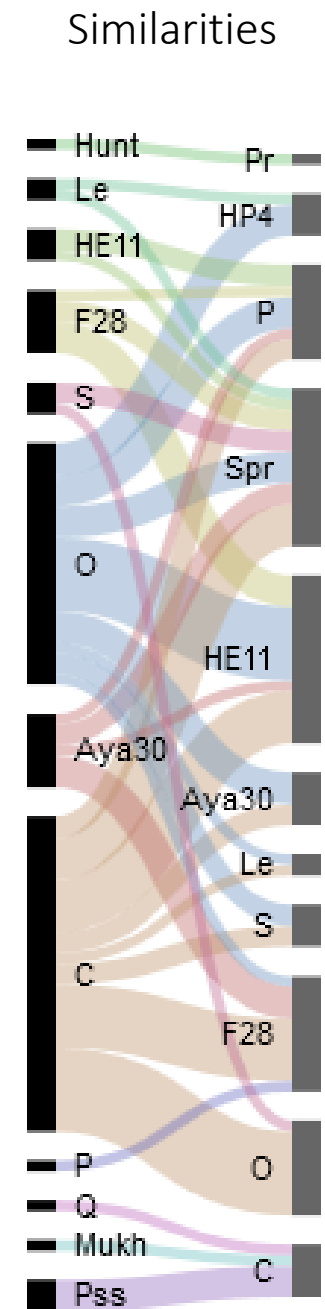
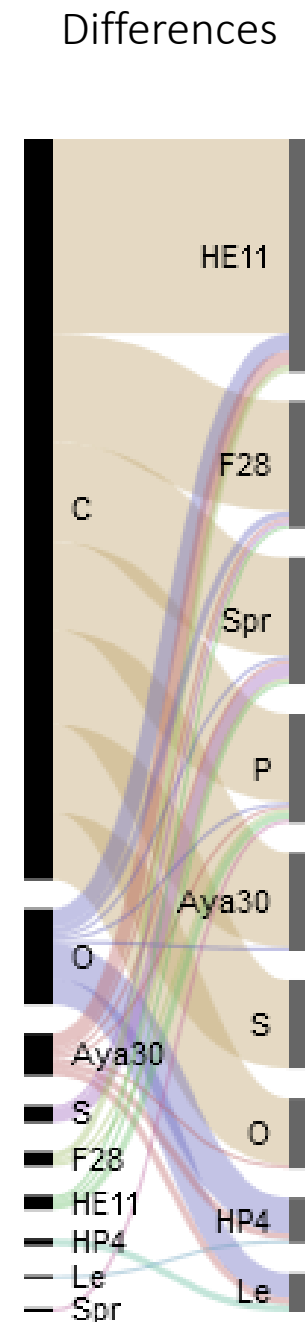
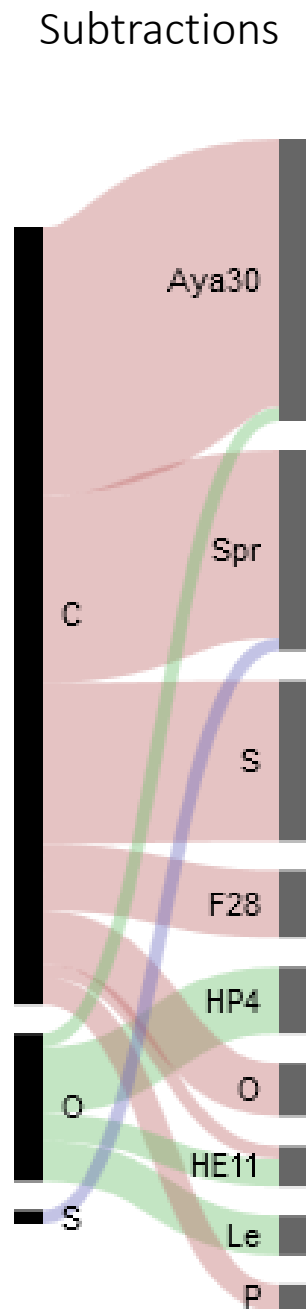
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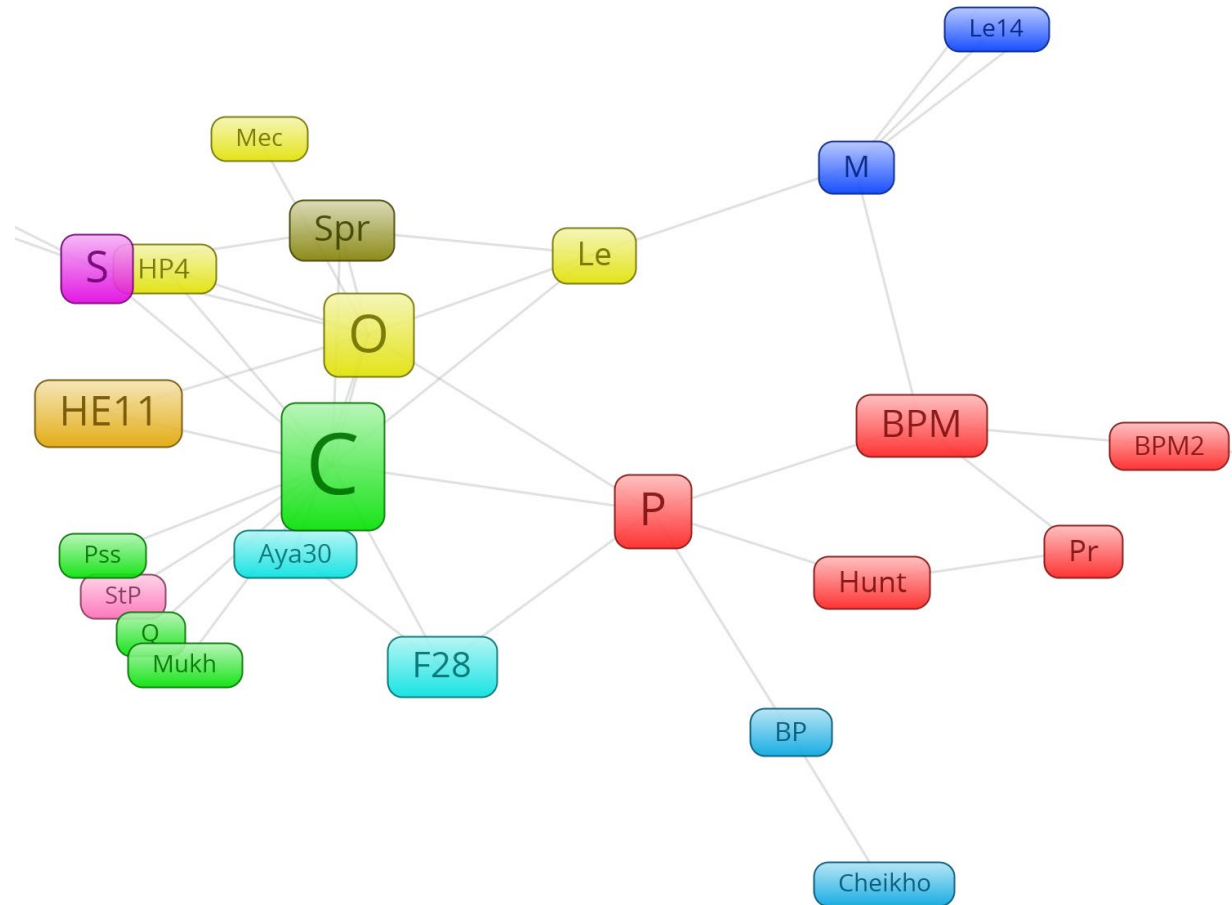
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- David's evolving sin

Koranic 108

(1) David said: Praise to you, my God!
Forgive me my sin, for truly my sin
upsets me and saps my strength. (2)
My God, if you do not forgive me I will
be left penniless among the destitute.
(3) But what is my sin to one as great
as you, O my God, and what is my
punishment to one who rules over
everything? (4) My God, **make me one
of the righteous**, who do not keep
going back to their sins, (5) **and give
me a tongue of truth and holiness.**

An Islamic psalm

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Core 77

David, I swear by my own might: **I will surely leave you in such a predicament with Uriah** that the earth will shudder and the angels droop their wings [aghast]! No injustice by any tyrant will get past me on that day. Why, **your father Adam** was my most cherished treasure, my dearest and my nearest; **he did not kill anyone, or join himself to a forbidden woman**; all he did was eat from a certain tree that I had forbidden, yet for that his crown fell from his head, the whole Garden went into mourning, and I consigned him to bitter remorse. So how will it be with you, when **you have brought down [Uriah's] vengeance on your own head and invited his retaliation**? If you could just foresee how he is going to come after you, you would bewail yourself still more!

An Islamic psalm

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Core 78

You, David, have passed [this] sentence against your own self—you who have men sent off to war that you might take pleasure from what they used to enjoy. For I had in mind to build multiple palaces for you, but **when you did what you did** I had already determined to cut your status down to size—and what disaster could be worse than to lose status in God's sight?

= Pious 56

O David I made you my Caliph on the earth that you might **judge rightly between people, but you followed your fancy** rather than obey your Lord, **and preferred your desire** over the truth. [...]

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Core 29

David said: “My God, my sins have sullied my face, sapped my strength, and made my heart to weep. My God, **does the Devil have no other net than women?** My God, I have humbled my face before you; I pray to you night and day, if you would only receive me.”

= Orthodox 29

David said: “My God, I have humbled my face before you; I pray night and day, if you would only receive me.”

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Sufi 72 (unique to S)

O David, next I say to you: let my Book pour forth from you; recite it to the resurrected [in paradise]! **If Uriah hears you, he will pursue vengeance upon you** with all his might, and will start to beat you as you stand in the pulpit of the prophets. When he strikes you, the crown of prophecy will fall from your head, the pulpit will vanish from beneath you, and the wild beasts will come after you for payment [of Uriah's blood money]. I will make the two of you enemies, and so it will be until I dispose him favorably toward you; so be meek in spirit and repent.

I have commanded you to ask forgiveness, and if you ask me for forgiveness I will accept you; but you asked my forgiveness without desisting from sin. Turn to me in repentance and I will receive you! **Turning to me in repentance from your sins is like land on which much blood has been poured out: the rain comes and washes away what was on the face of the earth.** Such are your sins and your repentance.

O Children of Adam, **when you consider your sins, laugh little and weep much!** Weep for shame before me, and I will cover over your evil deeds. I am fully aware of what you do.

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Core 76: David, the fear of me has vanished from your heart! And yet, your doing what you did allowed that man to reach the rank of the righteous; **Uriah was a God-fearing man, but his son was not, and I wished to gladden him with another child of his own lineage.** You chief of sinners! You loadstone of all disobedience! You should be mixing your food with ashes on account of your transgression.

Koranic 77: ... you did what you did so that the man might deserve the station of the righteous: that is, **he used to fear me greatly, but his father did not have that same fear,** and I wished **not** to gladden him with a child of his own lineage...

Orthodox 75: ... you brought about an occasion for the man to deserve the station of the righteous: that is, **Uriah's grandfather was a man who feared me, but his son did not have that same fear,** and I wished to gladden him in **paradise** with a child of his own lineage...

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Core 7.2

David, do but **lower your gaze** from the wives of believing men, and this world will come groveling before you! **David, if a good-looking and attractive woman passes by,** remember that you will be brought before me on the Day of Resurrection; ask me to admit you to the Garden, and **ask me to marry you to her in this world and the next.**

Pious 9

O David, lower your gaze... **O David, lower your gaze if a beautiful woman passes by,** and remember that you will stand before me on the day of resurrection. Ask me for paradise, and ask me to marry her to you **on the day of resurrection in paradise.**

- Reception and use



لَمَّا أَتَيْنَاكَ يَكْمُرُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَمُوتُ وَفَدَّ
لَهُ وَيَدَّ طُلُوعِ قَبْرِهِ وَفَدَّ لَهُ وَحْدَهُ
يَحْسِبُ وَفَدَّ لَهُ كَيْفَ يَمْسُلُ نَسْبًا بِأَلَا
النَّاسُ وَلَمْ يَمْسُلُ نَسْبًا بِزَيْهِ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
إِلَّا اللَّهُ حَقًّا **مُحَمَّدٌ عَبْدُ**
وَرَسُولُهُ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
سُورَةُ النَّازِعَاتِ قَالَ اللَّهُ تَقَالِي يَا بَنِي
إِسْرَءِيلَ أَشْهَدُ نَفْسِي لِنَفْسِي
إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا وَاحِدٌ وَلَا شَرِيكَ
لِي **وَأَنَا نَحْمَدُكَ عَبْدُكَ**

An Islamic psalm

Why Islamic psalms?

Sources of inspiration

- Islamic parallels
- The Bible
- The Qur'an

Shared ascetic origins

- Early Islamic asceticism
- Christian monasticism

Later versions

- David's evolving sin
- Reception and use

Significance

- Interreligious polemic

Sufi 107

David, Muhammad is the praiseworthy one, exalted, uppermost, and esteemed. [...] He is not bedazzled by the beauty and splendour of this world. In him resides **the light of both sun and moon**. [...] **For his sake I unburden the clouds** when they are overloaded with rain and beg me for relief. Were it not for him, I would not have put Adam on earth or filled the world with life. [...]

But there will come forth **a people claiming to be monks who will erase his name from their scriptures**. Do you know, David, why those disbelievers concoct this in their minds? It is because Satan lay with their mothers alongside their fathers, so that his sperm mixed with theirs. So they erred and disbelieved, led many others astray, and wandered from the level path.

Whoever believes in Muhammad has taken hold of faith, but whoever disbelieves in Muhammad has disbelieved in me and in my scriptures. **Whoever believes in the Torah, the Gospel and the Psalms, and makes no distinction between any of my books**, I will abundantly reward. For I am mighty and wise.

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Core 18.1

David, give heed to what I say: Tell Solomon to proclaim after you that I will give the earth as an inheritance to Muhammad and his community. **They will be unlike you; they will not worship with lutes, or praise me on the harp.** But you, when you praise me with the flute, let your eyes overflow with tears!

Koranic

They are [my true] worshipers, for they are not like you: **their prayer is not like that of the Sabians, nor do they worship idols.**

Ayasofya

They are not like you: they do not **ring bells** [or sound wooden gongs], nor do they **worship idols.**

Core 2 (Koranic/Pious/Orthodox)

O David, **what do the nations and the peoples say? They have joined together against the Lord and his army.** They wish to extinguish God's light with their mouths, but God refuses that his light and his holiness should be extinguished (but God perfects his light and his holiness). O David, **I made you my messiah and my prophet** (I made you one who glorifies me and my prophet / I created you by my will and power), but Jesus (son of Mary) will be **taken as a God beside me**, on account of the power I vested in him, making him raise the dead (by my leave) (by my leave, and heal the blind and the lepers).

Psalm 2:1-7 (NRSV)

(1) **Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain?** (2) The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers **take counsel together, against the LORD and his anointed**, saying, (3) "Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us." (4) He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD has them in derision. (5) Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, (6) "I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill." (7) I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "**You are my son**; today I have begotten you.

An Islamic psalm

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Significance

- Interreligious polemic
- Internal exhortation
- Shared piety and symbols

Core 4.5

Blessed are the anxious, those stricken with fear, who comfort orphans with food and nourishment.

Blessed are those who withdraw in silence from society and its vices, whose souls are afforded the most sublime insight.

Blessed are those who rise to **spend the night in vigil.**

But woe to those who go looking for adultery! The least that I will do to adulterers is to blot out the glow of health from their faces and wipe away both their lifespan and their livelihood.

Blessed are those who think too highly of me to gaze on the private parts of those forbidden to them, fearing my punishment.