

Psalms of the Muslim Prophet David

Rewritten Bible in a Qur'anic Idiom

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An Islamic psalm

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. (Koranic 5 = Core 4)

An Islamic psalm

Why Islamic psalms?

Ascetic origins

- Fear
- Repentance
- Otherworldliness
- The Vienna papyrus

Later recensions

Sources

- *Zuhd* and *ḥikma*
- Biblical parallels
- The Qur'an

Reception

Implications

- Interreligious polemic
- Internal exhortation
- Shared piety and symbols

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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. (Q 38:17-20, trans. Abdel Haleem)

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

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David said: My God, my sins have worn out my face, weakened my frame, and wounded my heart. 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 only you would receive me. (Core 29)

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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.** (Koranic 12 = Core 10)

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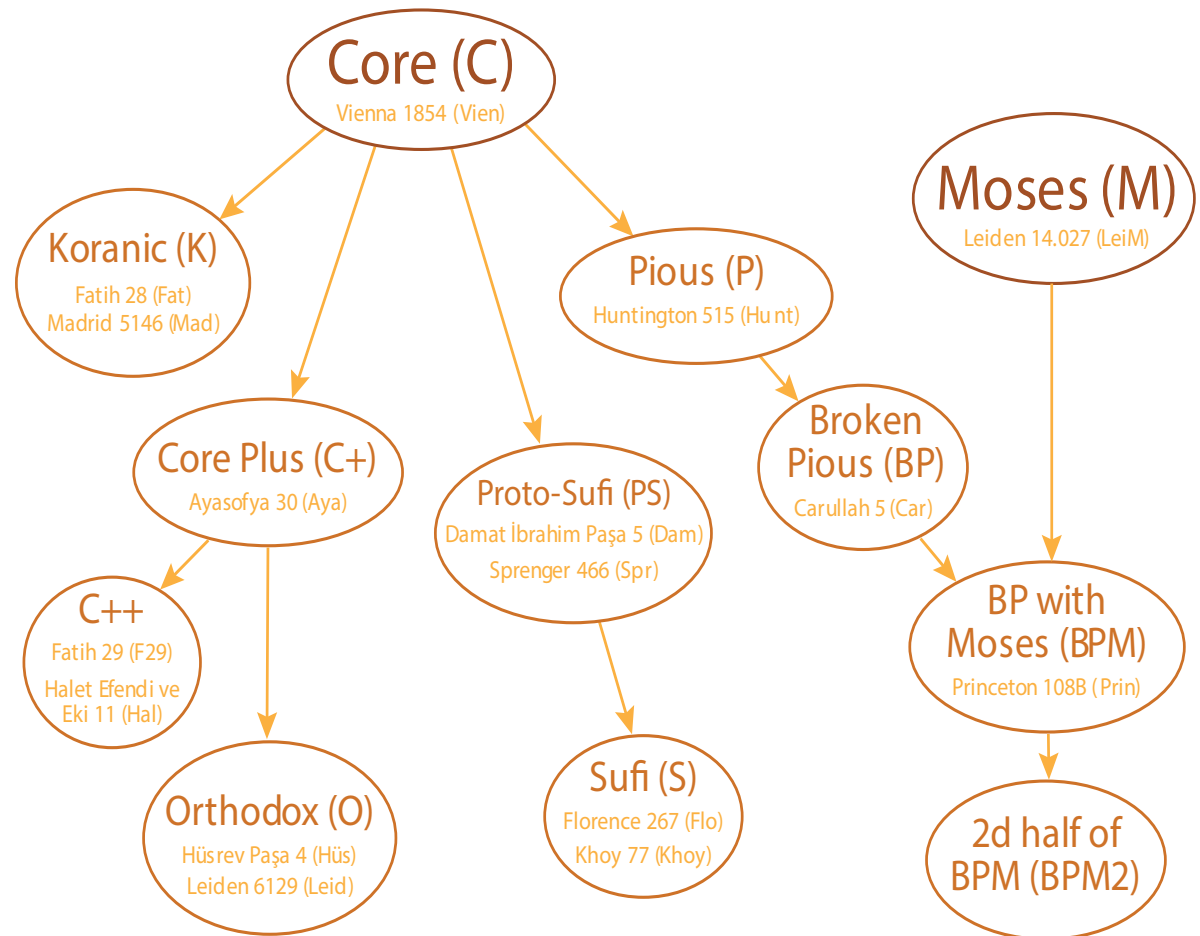
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Reason without *adab* is like a barren tree; reason with *adab* is like a fruitful tree. (Saying attributed to Hermes and Luqmān in al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik, *Mukhtār al-ḥikam*, pp. 19, 277)

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. (BPM 168 = Moses 29)

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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. [...] My God, grant me the coolness of your forgiveness, and the sweetness of dialogue with you. If one of my many enemies wills me evil, stand him on his head! O Lord, how could my heart not be stronger than iron, when you are my support and my glory? O God, O ruler of land and sea, **grant me to be held in awe by kings,** for you are the mighty king. (Core 96; cf. Psalms 25:2, 51:10-11)

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O ye who believe, fear God with the fear that is due him, and do not die except as Muslims. (BPM 168 = Moses 29, quoting Q 3:102)

I am One, Singular, Eternal; I neither begot nor was begotten; I have taken neither companion nor child; no one is comparable to me. (Orthodox 119, paraphrasing Q 112)

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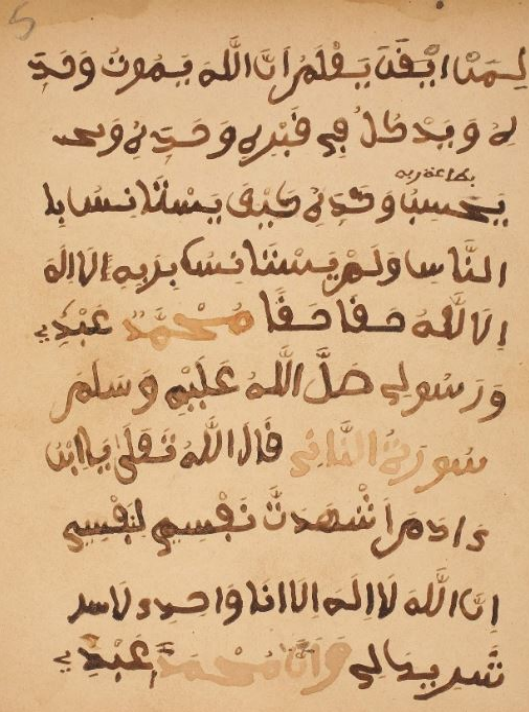
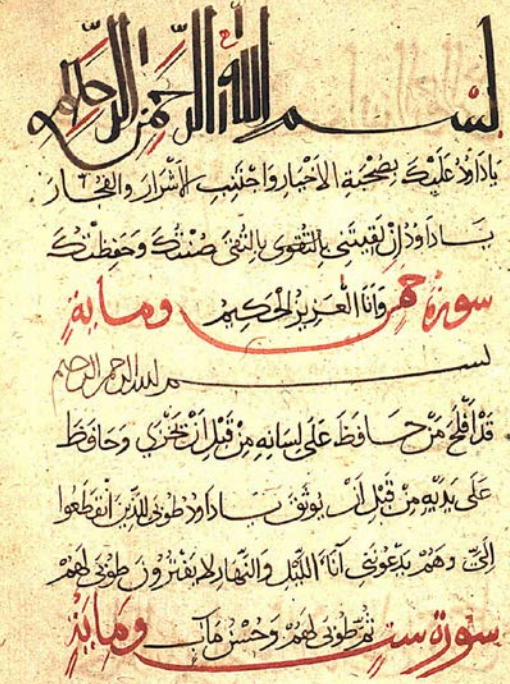
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David, Muhammad is the praiseworthy one, exalted, uppermost, and esteemed. [...] He is not bedazzled by the beauty and splendour of this world. In him resides **the light of both sun and moon.** [...] **For his sake I unburden the clouds** when they 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. (Sufi 107)