

Dhu’l Qarnayn and the muddy spring in Qur’an 18:86 - New evidence

A comprehensive examination with new evidence and many new arguments concerning the different interpretations of Qur’an 18:86 and 18:90

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A much shorter [summarised version](#) of this article (and pdf files for both) can be found on the website

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First published 6 Feb 2011

Last updated 3 February 2012

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Introduction

Deep into the 18th chapter of the Holy Qur'an can be found a pair of verses that have given rise to no small controversy. Indeed, a controversial claim that appears to undermine its very foundation - a claim that according to the Qur'an, there are specific places where the sun actually sets and rises, and worse, that the sun sets in a muddy spring. This claim is based on two verses within the Dhu'l Qarnayn episode in Qur'an 18:83-101. This passage says that Allah empowered a person called Dhu'l Qarnayn (which translates as possessor of the two horns) and gave him means or ways to all things. It narrates that he used these to go on three journeys to strange places with strange inhabitants, and finishes with him making a prophecy about the role of some of these people in the end-times. A translation and transliteration of the passage appear at the end of this article for reference.

The two controversial verses concern the first and second of Dhu'l Qarnayn's three journeys:

Until, when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it set in a spring of murky water: Near it he found a People: We said: "O Zul-qarnain! (thou hast authority,) either to punish them, or to treat them with kindness."

Hatta itha balagha maghriba alshshamsi wajadahā taghrubu fee AAaynin hami-atin wawajada AAindahā qawman qulnā ya tha alqarnayni immā an tuAAaththiba wa-immā an tattakhitha fehim husnan

Qur'an 18:86

Until, when he came to the rising of the sun, he found it rising on a people for whom We had provided no covering protection against the sun.

Hatta itha balagha matliAAa alshshamsi wajadahā taṭluAAu AAala qawmin lam najAAal lahum min dooniha sitran

Qur'an 18:90

While much has been written about the meaning of these verses, I have found many new, important arguments, and much more evidence that can be used to shed light on this matter. I have done my best to present the strongest case for each of the many different interpretations of the controversial phrases, even giving new arguments that support them, before critically examining them and reaching conclusions.

Notes on the translations, transliterations and sources used

Unless otherwise stated, the original 1934 translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali¹ is used for quotations from the Qur'an. Word for word translations are those used on <http://corpus.Quran.com/>. However, these are used only to explain in English the arguments in this article, which are founded on analysis of the Arabic words of the Qur'an.

For hadith (oral traditions of the words and deeds of Muhammad, collected and written down mainly in the 8th and 9th centuries CE), the translation of Muhammad Muhsin Khan² is used for *Sahih Bukhari*. That of Abdul Hamid Siddiqui³ is used for *Sahih Muslim*. Their numbering systems are used (vol., book, no. and book, no., respectively). Where an Arabic transliteration is given, the numbering of the hadith in Arabic on www.ekabakti.com is given in the references. A hyperlink to it, and often to the same hadith in Arabic on <http://hadith.al-islam.com>, which includes vocalization marks, is also given in the references.

All transliterations of the Arabic Qur'an into Latin characters are from the free, widely used Muslimnet transliteration used by many popular websites such as www.muslimaccess.com, which has a transliteration table,⁴ and www.islamicity.com. I have not found a source for transliterations of the commentaries and hadith, so I have done those myself from the Arabic using the same transliteration rules.

Resources that can be used by the reader to verify the claims made

The following free, online resources will be useful to anyone studying the Qur'an, and when verifying the claims in this article:

Transliteration of the Qur'an and many compared English translations
<http://www.islamawakened.com/Quran/>

Word-for-word Arabic-English translation with annotated grammar, syntax and morphological information for each word, view occurrences of a word
<http://corpus.Quran.com/>

Download tool to find occurrences of root Arabic words, with links to entries for the word in scans of Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon
<http://www.studyQuran.co.uk/PRLonline.htm>

Search the Qur'an by verse number or in English, see English translations, Arabic text and transliteration
<http://www.islamicity.com/QuranSearch/>

Search the transliterated Qur'an with phonetic search
<http://www.islamicity.com/ps/default.htm>

Search the hadith in English
<http://www.searchtruth.com/>

Search the Qur'an, hadith and tasfir in Arabic
www.ekabakti.com

Search the Qur'an, hadith, tasfir and biographies of Muhammad in Arabic
<http://hadith.al-islam.com/>

See many different Arabic tafsir for any selected verse in the Qur'an, and a few in English
<http://www.altafsir.com/>

Part 1: What do Qur'an 18:86 and 18:90 say that Dhu'l Qarnayn reached?

The Dhu'l Qarnayn episode can be divided into three journeys, the first two of which are described in verses 18:86 and 18:90. In 18:86, Dhu'l Qarnayn travels until he reaches maghriba alshshamsi (مَغْرِبَ الشَّمْسِ), and in 18:90, he travels until he reaches maṭliAAa alshshamsi (مَطْلِعَ الشَّمْسِ). Three possible interpretations of the Arabic words maghriba alshshamsi in 18:86 and maṭliAAa alshshamsi in 18:90 have been claimed:

- The west and the east
- The time when the sun sets and the time when the sun rises
- The place where the sun sets and the place where the sun rises

First we will examine each of these interpretations in context to identify the true meaning of those words. Then in Part 2 we will look at what these two verses say happened when Dhu'l Qarnayn arrived and at broader questions concerning how this passage of the Qur'an was meant to be understood.

Derivation of the words maghrib and maṭliAAa

The word *alshshamsi*, which immediately follows the words *maghriba* and *maṭliAAa* in 18:86 and 18:90, means “of the sun”. *Maghrib* and *maṭliAA* are nouns derived from the roots of the verbs *gharaba*, to set, and *ṭalaAAa*, to rise, respectively. They are a special type of noun meaning either the place where the action of the verb happens or the time when it happens (the place or time of the sun setting or rising). If it indicates a place, such a noun is called an *ism makan*. If it means a time, it is called an *ism zaman*. In either case, these nouns are formed by adding the *ma-* prefix to the root word and using a *kasarh* (transliterated as ‘i’) after the 2nd letter to create the words *maghrib* and *maṭliAA*.⁵

The *fatha*, or “-a” suffix is added to *maghrib* and *maṭliAA* in 18:86 and 18:90 for the accusative grammatical case to indicate that they are the objects of the verb *balagha*, “he reached” (there is also a different interpretation that these are not the things reached, which we will examine in section 2). The definite article, “al” as in “al *maghrib*”, is missing but implied in these verses. That’s because in the genitive construction called *’idāfa* (indicating possession, as in the X of Y), the definite article is implied for the first word when it is used for the genitive word, which in this case is *alshshamsi*, meaning “of the sun”.⁶

1. First interpretation: He reached the west and east

First we shall present the case that *maghriba alshshamsi* in 18:86 and *maṭliAAa alshshamsi* in 18:90 could be referring to the west and east such that Dhu’l Qarnayn reached the westernmost and easternmost parts of his travels in the direction of sunset and sunrise, but not literal setting and rising places of the sun.

Supporting this claim is the fact that *al maghrib* is a common Arabic idiom for the west, used in this way elsewhere in the Qur’an and hadith (indeed, the Arabic name for Morocco is *al-Mamlakah al-Magribiyya*, commonly called *al-Maghrib* for short). Supporters of this interpretation also point out that it was the one given in some classical commentaries of the Qur’an.⁷

1.1 Words used to mean the east and west elsewhere in the Qur’an

Looking outside of 18:86 and 18:90, there are two ways in which the west and east are referred to in the Qur’an. Derived from the verb *ashraqa* (“to rise / shine”), we have *al mashriq*, which literally means the place or time of the sun’s rising / shining, and is used to mean the east in many verses in the Qur’an (this is not, however, the word used in 18:90, which is *maṭliAA*). In the following verses in the Qur’an, *al maghrib* is usually translated as the west or western, and *al mashriq* as the east or eastern:

2:115; 2:142; 2:177; 2:258; 7:137; 26:28; 43:38; 55:17; 70:40; and 73:9.⁸

In verses 19:16; 24:35 and 28:44, *gharb* (from the same root as *maghrib*) is used in an adjectival form to mean western or of the west and *sharq* (from the same root as *mashriq*) is used in an adjectival form to mean eastern or of the east.

Now we shall see that there are at least 4 serious weaknesses with the claim that *maghriba alshshamsi* in 18:86 means the west and *maṭliAAa alshshamsi* in 18:90 means the east.

1.2 Was *alshshams* ever used with *al maghrib* to mean the west?

Alshshams means “the sun”, and the *-i* suffix (an Arabic *kasarh*) in 18:86 and 18:90 is for the genitive case, which indicates possession (“of the sun”). When we look at how *maghrib* is used elsewhere in the Qur’an to mean west (see list above), we see that it is always used as a stand-alone word without *alshshams*, in contrast to 18:86. Why is *alshshamsi* added in 18:86 when it is not in the other instances if not to emphasise a literal meaning? Indeed, *alshshams* is not even used with *maghrib* when it means the west anywhere in the 6 major Sunni hadith collections.⁹

Lane’s *Lexicon of classical Arabic*, long regarded as authoritative and drawing on many classical Arabic dictionaries and sources, says that *al maghrib* can signify the west, and also the time of sunset, but originally signified the place (or point) of sunset, which it says is the

meaning when alshshamsi is added.¹⁰ Indeed, this is what these words are used to mean elsewhere, as we shall see.

1.3 Was al maṭliAA ever used to mean the east?

It gets even worse when we look at 18:90. Al maṭliAA means “the rising place” or “the rising time” (of the sun) and is the first word in the phrase maṭliAAa alshshamsi in 18:90. MaṭliAA, with or without alshshams, is not used to mean east anywhere else in the Qur’an, nor anywhere in the 6 major Sunni hadith collections.¹¹ The verb ṭalaAAa (“to rise”), from which it is derived, is not used in this connection either.

If verse 18:90 was about the east, then al mashriq or al sharq would likely have been used, as is always the case elsewhere when the Qur’an mentions the east. Outside 18:86, every verse in the Qur’an that uses maghrib to mean west also uses mashriq to mean east. For aesthetic reasons, we would then also probably replace taṭluAAu with tashruqu in 18:90 (both mean “it rising” and are forms of the verbs from which maṭliAA and mashriq are derived, respectively).

Furthermore, Lane’s Lexicon does not give the slightest indication that maṭliAA, with or without alshshamsi,¹² nor related words like ṭalaAAa¹³ can be used in an idiom meaning the east. The Lexicon is freely available online and links to cited pages are in the References below.

The only place in the 6 major Sunni hadith collections¹⁴ where maṭliAA might seem to be used in an idiom meaning the east is in Sahih Muslim:

...The belief is that of the Yemenites, the sagacity is that of the Yemenites, the tranquillity is among the owners of goats and sheep, and pride and conceitedness is among the uncivil owners of the camels, the people of the tents in the direction of sunrise.

Sahih Muslim Book 1, Number 91 ¹⁵

Here, qibala means direction and maṭliAAi alshshamsi is translated as “of sunrise”, literally meaning the direction of the rising-place of the sun. The very next hadith is another version of the same hadith:

The belief is that of the Yemenites, the sagacity is that of the Yemenites and the summit of unbelief is towards the East.

Sahih Muslim Book 1, Number 92 ¹⁶

This version of the hadith ends with “qibala almashriq”, translated, “towards the East”. As mentioned above, al mashriq usually appears as an idiom to mean the east. It seems easy at first to argue that just as almashriq means the east in one version of this hadith, maṭliAAi alshshamsi just means the east rather than the rising-place of the sun in the other version. However, even if almashriq means the east in Sahih Muslim Book 1, Number 92 (rather than literally, “the rising point”, as in Qur’an 37:5 and 70:40), both the east and the imagined setting-place of the sun would be in the same direction. These hadith only show that the directions (“qibala”) of these two things (“maṭliAAi alshshamsi” and “almashriq”) are interchangeable.

Conclusive evidence that maṭliAAi alshshamsi in the above quoted hadith means literally the rising-place of the sun and not merely the east comes a little earlier in the first version of it in Book 1, Number 83, which has “where emerge the two horns of Satan”, which many other hadith tell us is where the sun rises.¹⁷

It is narrated on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud that the Apostle of Allah (may peace and blessings be upon him) pointed towards Yemen with his hand and said: Verily Iman is towards this side, and harshness and callousness of the hearts is found amongst the rude owners of the camels who drive them behind their tails (to the direction) where emerge the two horns of Satan, they are the tribes of Rabi'a and Mudar.

1.4 Wajadahā refers back to the sun as a literal object

The next words after maghriba alshshamsi in 18:86 are wajadahā taghrubu, meaning “he found it setting”. Right after maṭliAAa alshshamsi in 18:90 we have the words wajadahā taṭluAAu, meaning “he found it rising”.

In both cases, wajadahā (وَجَدَهَا) means “he found it”. That “it”, the feminine “-hā” suffix to wajada, refers to the previous word, the sun, as the object of the verb¹⁹. Thus, the words mean “he found the sun setting” and “he found the sun rising”. However, in the west and east interpretation the sun has only been mentioned as one part of an idiom for the west or the east, yet wajadahā clearly refers back to it as a literal object. The west and east interpretation would only make sense if the sun had also been mentioned explicitly as a literal entity. It would probably omit alshshamsi in both verses, and then say, “wajada alshshamsa taghrubu...” (“he found the sun setting...”), and “wajada alshshamsa taṭluAAu...” (“he found the sun rising...”).

For the same reason, neither can maghriba alshshamsi nor maṭliAAa alshshamsi mean nations or places that have those names in these verses (for example, the Japanese characters for Nippon (the Japanese name for Japan) means “sun origin”, and it is sometimes called The Land of the Rising Sun).

Better still, these verses would be worded completely differently. Even if one argues that there is some poetic reason to describe the west and east using the words we have in 18:86 and 18:90, it would be an extraordinarily poor choice of words since people reasonably understood them to be about the literal setting and rising places of the sun, as we shall see. How would we know what anything in the Qur’an means if it uses words that commonly (and when the context suggests) mean a particular thing when it really means a different concept, for which it uses a different word everywhere else?

1.5 Commentators use knowledge unknown to 7th century Arabs

Finally, we turn to the commentators of the Qur’an. There were certainly classical commentators who claimed that the verses just mean that Dhu’l Qarnayn reached the west and east. However, as pointed out by S. Shamoun and J. Katz,²⁰ when we look at their reasoning, it is based not on narrated traditions or linguistic or contextual analysis, but rather on their knowledge that the obvious interpretation describes something that is impossible. We can look at the reasoning (which I have highlighted in bold) of the commentators, who are frequently cited on this topic to deny the obvious interpretation and support the west / east idiom interpretation:

It is not meant by reaching the rising or setting of the sun that he reached its body and touched it **because it runs in the sky around the earth without touching it and it is too great to enter any spring on earth. It is so much larger than earth.** But it is meant that he reached the end of populated land east and west, so he found it - according to his vision - setting in a spring of a murky water like we watch it in smooth land as if it enters inside the land. That is why He said, ‘he found it rising on a people for whom we had provided no covering protection against the sun.’ (Holy Qur’an 18:90) and did not mean that it touches or adheres to them; but they are the first to rise on. Probably this spring is a part of the sea and the sun sets behind, with or at it, so the proposition takes the place of an adjective and God knows best.

al-Qurtubi (died 671 AH/1273 CE) *Al-Game’ Le Ahkam-el-Qur’an* ²¹

When Zul-Qarnayn reached the furthest west and no populated land was left, he found the sun as if it sets in a dark spring, **but it is not in reality.** The same when sea traveler sees the sun as if it sets in the sea if he cannot see the shore **while in reality it sets behind the sea.**

al-Razi d. 606 AH (1149-1209 CE) *Tafsir al-Kabir* ²²

“Until, when he reached the setting of the sun” means he followed a certain way till he reached the furthest land he could go from the west. **As for reaching the setting of the sun in the sky, it is impossible.** What narrators and story tellers say that he walked for a period of time in earth while the sun was setting behind him is unreal, and most of it is from myths of People of the Book and inventions of their liars. ‘he found it set in a spring of murky water’ means he saw the sun according to his vision setting in the ocean and this is the same with everyone ending to the shore seeing as if the sun sets inside it (i.e. the ocean).

Ibn Kathir (701-774 AH/1302-1373 CE) *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* ²³

The knowledge of these commentators that the obvious interpretation is impossible would not, however, be likely to have been known to Muhammad and the earliest Muslim community. This knowledge was unknown to the Arabs until Ptolemy’s *Almagest* was translated in the 8th century CE after the Qur’an was completed.²⁴ Ptolemy recorded in book five of his *Almagest* in the mid-2nd century CE the discovery of Hipparchus, and of Aristarchus before him, that the sun is much larger than the earth and much more distant than the moon.²⁵ David A. King writes:

The Arabs of the Arabian peninsula before Islam possessed a simple yet developed astronomical folklore of a practical nature. This involved a knowledge of the risings and settings of stars, associated in particular with the cosmical setting of groups of stars and simultaneous heliacal risings of others, which marked the beginning of periods called *naw’*, plural *anwā’*. [...] Ptolemy’s *Almagest* was translated at least five times in the late eighth and ninth centuries. The first was a translation into Syriac and the others into Arabic, the first two under Caliph al-Ma’mūn in the middle of the first half of the ninth century, and the other two (the second an improvement of the first) towards the end of that century [...] In this way Greek planetary models, uranometry and mathematical methods came to the attention of the Muslims.²⁶

We shall also see when we look at the 3rd interpretation that contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim sources demonstrate that in the early Islamic era before the translation and study of Indian and Greek astronomy under the Abbasid Caliphate, there was a widespread popular belief in the region that the world is flat and that the sun had literal rising and setting places.

So, the above commentators were forced by their beliefs to say what they said since they knew certain things about the world, even though their interpretations cannot be correct (this will become even more apparent in part II when we examine the *wajada* phrases). These are attempts to make the verses fit scientific knowledge acquired later, not evidence that the verses have those intended meanings or were originally understood in that way.

Furthermore, the commentators not only give the invented interpretation, but they also have to deny the literal setting and rising places interpretation (or for al-Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir, a caricature of it), thus confirming that the place where the sun sets on Earth was the interpretation that had been understood by Muslims before scientific knowledge was acquired.

We should briefly discuss the passage relating to Dhu’l Qarnayn in *Sirat Rasul Allah (Life of the Messenger of God)* by Ibn Ishaq (died mid 8th century CE and was the first biographer of Muhammad), which survives in a copied and edited version by Ibn Hisham (died 833 CE). It describes the story of Dhu’l Qarnayn in a passage about the occasion Sura al kahf was revealed. We are told that Muhammad’s enemies challenged him to tell them about “the mighty traveler who reached the confines of both East and West. ” (literally, “the easts of the Earth and the wests of it”).²⁷

...*mashariqa alardi wamagharibaha*...²⁸

The same Arabic phrase occurs again shortly afterwards in this passage:

Roads were stretched out before him until he traversed the whole earth, east and west. He was given power over every land he trod on until he reached [the end of the east and the west, to] the farthest confines of creation.²⁹

My square brackets show a 3rd instance of *almashriq* and *almaghrib* (this time singular), which is omitted in the quoted translation.

This does not mean that Ibn Ishaq (or his source) did not believe that Dhu'l Qarnayn reached the setting and rising places of the sun. Unlike the commentators quoted above, Ibn Ishaq is not denying that Dhu'l Qarnayn did so. It literally says that there was nothing from creation behind these places, so it must mean the edges of a flat Earth, and the setting-place would be at the western edge and the rising place at the eastern edge. He even uses a different word order: *mashriq* then *maghrib* rather than *maghrib* then *matliAA* as in the Qur'an. This suggests he was simply quoting a common phrase to summarize Dhu'l Qarnayn's adventure. Incidentally, at the beginning of the same work in a section about pre-Islamic traditions³⁰, Ibn Ishaq quotes some lines of verse by a Yemeni king called Tubba' who says that Dhu'l Qarnayn witnessed the sun setting in its resting place into a muddy pool. See section 3.5.1 below for a quote by al-Tabari of these same lines.

Given all of the problems detailed above (especially that *alshshamsi* is not used elsewhere when the meaning is merely east or west, that *matliAA* is not used elsewhere to mean the east and the problem of what *wajadahā* refers to in the next phrases), it is clear that the west/east idiom interpretation of 18:86 and 18:90 is not correct.

2. Second interpretation: He reached [a place at] the setting and rising times of the sun or he reached those times

Dr Zakir Naik, a prominent Muslim public speaker, claims that "balagha maghriba alshshamsi" means "he reached at the time of sunset"³¹, and another interpretation appears in Osama Abdallah's article on the www.answering-christianity.com website, that it means "he reached the time of sunset".³² In support of the time interpretation is the fact that both *maghrib* and *matliAA* can be used as an *ism zaman* (a noun to indicate the time that a verb happens). *Maghrib* is not used as an *ism zaman* anywhere in the Qur'an, but outside the Qur'an *al maghrib* is the name given to the prayer that takes place at the time of sunset (one of the 5 daily prayers for Muslims). The phrase *maghriba alshshamsi* is also used to mean the time of sunset in two hadith, each with two versions (*maghrib* has an "-i" suffix here as it follows a preposition):

...*bayna salati alAAasri ila maghribi alshshamsi*...

...between the 'Asr prayer and sunset...

Sahih Bukhari Volume 4, Book 56, Number 665 ³³

The other version of this hadith is in *Sahih Bukhari* Volume 6, Book 61, Number 539.³⁴

Sahih Muslim has:

...*hatta maghribi alshshamsi*...

...at the time of sunset...

Sahih Muslim Book 041, Number 7028 ³⁵

It also appears in a version of the same hadith in *Sunan Abu Dawud*.³⁶

There is one example in the Qur'an where *matliAA* is used as an *ism zaman*. Verse 97:5 has, "...*hatta matlaAAi alfajri*" ("...until the rise of morn").

*There is nowhere in the Qur'an where matliAAa alshshamsi is used to mean the time of sunrise. It is not used with this meaning in any of the 6 major Sunni hadith collections.*³⁷ There are many other weaknesses with this interpretation. We shall look at those that apply to it in general and then those specific to Dr Naik's and Osama Abdallah's interpretations.

2.1 Why say *itha* and *balagha*?

Notice that in the above examples that *hatta*, "until", is used without *itha*, "when", and without *balagha*, "he/it reached". There is no need for *itha* or *balagha* in verses 18:86 or 18:90 either if they mean that Dhu'l Qarnayn followed a way until the time of sunset/sunrise.

2.2 Contextual problems

There are also various contextual problems with this interpretation. Verse 18:84 has Allah giving Dhu'l Qarnayn "*min kulli shayin sababan*", which in the word-for-word translation says, "of everything a means". The word *sababan* is used again in the next verse, "*FaatbaAAa sababan*", word-for-word translation, "So he followed a course". The word *fa* (prefixed to *atbaAAa*) means "And so" or "thus", clearly in reference to the preceding phrase.

Why say that Allah gave Dhu'l Qarnayn a course/way/road to everything without telling us what it was about the physical locations of the peoples he visited that made this a remarkable achievement?

The next problem is that verses 18:86 and 18:90 seem to be explaining the reason why Dhu'l Qarnayn followed the ways mentioned in the previous verses. It could be argued that the purpose of each journey was to find a people, but the beginnings of each verse seem to suggest that the intention related to the sun and that this unexpectedly resulted in the discovery of some people. He would be travelling distances in order to reach the times of sunset and sunrise, which seems rather pointless. Similar points are made by P. Newton³⁸ and Cornelius³⁹.

A related problem is that if he just followed a way until the time when the sun sets rather than until he reached the place where the sun sets, there is no reason to then describe what he found the sun to be doing.

2.3 Verses 92-93 use the same wording as 85-86 and 89-90 to mean reaching a location

A highly significant contextual problem is that verses 18:92 - 93 use exactly the same introductory phrase:

Thumma atbaAAa sababan hatta itha balagha...

Then followed he (another) way, until when he reached...

The next words are "*bayna alssaddayni*" ("between two mountains"), clearly describing the location reached, and each of the three journeys of Dhu'l Qarnayn begins with the same phrase. Surely the exact same phrase would not be used to say that he reached a time or an unstated location at a time in the first two instances, but explicitly a location in the third.

2.4 Different wording is used elsewhere when the time of sunset is meant

In the Qur'an, there are three verses that mention the times when the sun rises and sets (and three more that just mention the time of sunrise – we shall look at those in a moment). The verbs *gharaba*, used in 18:86 in the form "*taghrubu*", "it set", and *talaAAa*, used in 18:90 in the form "*tatluAAu*", "it rise" are used for this purpose in those three verses (in a noun form of the verbs in the latter two cases) along with a time adverb, "when", or "before".

Wataru alshshamsa itha talaAAat ... waitha gharabat...

And you (might) have seen the sun when it rose ... and when it set ...

Qur'an 18:17

...wasabbih bihamdi rabbika qabla tulooAAi alshshamsi waqabla alghuroobi

...and celebrate the praises of thy Lord, before the rising of the sun and before (its) setting.

Qur'an 50:39

...wasabbih bihamdi rabbika qabla tulooAAi alshshamsi waqabla ghuroobiha...

...and celebrate (constantly) the praises of thy Lord, before the rising of the sun, and before its setting;...

Qur'an 20:130

Verses 18:86 and 18:90 could have simply followed this pattern if they were meant to express the time of sunset and sunrise, saying that he followed a way "until when the sun set" (*hatta itha gharabat alshshamsu*) and "until when the sun rose" (*hatta itha talaAAat alshshamsu*), similar to 18:17. They could have even said that he followed a way "til the setting of the sun" (*ila ghuroobi alshshamsi*) and "til the rising of the sun" (*ila tulooAAi alshshamsi*), similar to 50:39 and 20:130.

Similar phrases are used many times in the hadith. For example:

...hatta taghruba alshshamsu ... hatta tafluAAa alshshamsu.

...till the sun sets ... till the sun rises.

Sahih Muslim Book 4 no.1805 ⁴⁰

The other way that the time of sunrise is referred to in the Qur'an uses the verb *ashraqa*, "to (sun)rise" in the form of an active participle or verbal noun as in the following verses:

aakhathathumu alssayhatu mushriqena

But the (mighty) Blast overtook them before morning [Pickthall and some others have "at sunrise" instead of "before morning"]

Qur'an 15:73

FaatbaAAoohum mushriqena

So they pursued them at sunrise.

Qur'an 26:60

...bialAAashiyyi waalishraqi

...at eventide and at break of day [Pickthall and some others have "sunrise" instead of "break of day"]

Qur'an 38:18

If the Qur'an in 18:90 meant the time of sunrise, it would likely have used a formulation similar to these using a derivative of *ashraqa* or used *talaAAat* / *tulooAAi* as in the other 3 verses.

2.5 Could it mean he reached [a place at] the setting and rising time of the sun?

As well as the problems above, there are problems specific to Dr. Naik's claim that the relevant words mean "until when he reached at the time of sunset, he found it...". The verb *balagha* is always transitive when it means to reach, and always has an explicit object elsewhere in the Qur'an, but in Dr. Naik's interpretation, *balagha* is used as an intransitive verb, which even if it was technically allowed, would make no sense here. It is allowed in Arabic for the object (*maf'ul bihi*) of a transitive verb to be omitted (*mahdhuf*), but only if the

object is obvious, since otherwise the sentence would make no sense.⁴¹ That is not the case here, so we wouldn't know what Dhu'l Qarnayn reached and the sentence would make no sense.

As noted at the beginning of this article, maghriba and maṭliAAa have the accusative case ending, which you'd expect if they are the objects of the verb balagha. If maghriba alshshamsi and maṭliAAa alshshamsi are not the things reached, but instead are redundantly stating the time of day (redundant because it mentions the sun setting/rising immediately afterwards), they would interrupt the flow of the sentence before it continues with the wajada phrase ("he found..."). It would be a ludicrously awkward, and misleading way to phrase such a meaning. Hassan Radwan, who taught Qur'anic Arabic for many years, describes Dr. Naik's claim as "nonsense".⁴²

2.6 Balagha was not used for someone reaching a time of day

It is very unusual for balagha to be used to mean someone reaching a time of day in Arabic, and it is not used in that way in the Qur'an. Various verses have been used to support the claim that balagha, (بَلَغَ), translated "he reached", means that Dhu'l Qarnayn reached the time of sunset in 18:86 and reached the time of sunrise in 18:90.⁴³ As well as reaching a location, balagha can mean reaching an age or milestone in one's life. It is used in this way in the following verses ("old age"; "marriageable age"; "his full strength"; "puberty"; "work with his father"; "forty years"):

3:40; 4:6; 6:152; 12:22; 17:23; 17:34; 18:82; 19:8; 22:5; 24:58-59; 28:14; 37:102; 40:67; 46:15

It is important to notice that age is an attribute of a person, who is reaching a point on the human age scale. There is also a clear difference between saying that a man has reached 40 years (a personal duration - the sun has been orbited 40 times since his birth) and saying that he has reached a particular year or time of day, which is not a measurement of duration from a personal milestone.

The setting time of the sun is a point that the sun (or time of day at a particular location) can appear to reach on the daily cycle at that location. Dhu'l Qarnayn, who is doing the reaching in 18:86 and 18:90, does not have a personal attribute that can be described in those terms. Balagha is not used in the Qur'an to describe the time that a person is experiencing in terms of the time when an external event occurs rather than a personal milestone. Perhaps the sun can be said to "balagha" its setting time (or to be precise, "balaghat" - this interpretation is examined further below), but it would be very unusual to say Dhu'l Qarnayn did so.

2.7 Other examples of balagha

We can also look at two other types of example that someone might attempt to use (although I have not seen them used by anyone) to support the time interpretation.

In verse 68:39, balagha is used in reference to a covenant "reaching till the day of judgement", "balighatun ilā yawmi alqiyamati" (ilā means "till" or "to"). Clearly, you could also speak of a covenant "reaching till the time of sunset", "balighatun ilā maghribi". However, in these cases balagha has a different meaning to the examples above. Here it refers to the valid duration of the covenant. It always had this duration from the moment it was defined. It always could be said to reach till the day of judgement. Perhaps, when the day of judgement happened it could also be said that the covenant had "reached the day of judgement", "balagha yawma alqiyamati". Here it would mean that the covenant had now reached that point on its duration attribute, which can be described in terms of external events. Dhu'l Qarnayn is not like a covenant, as a person has no such attribute (a person's age is described in terms of personal events and milestones, as we saw above). He could not be described as a man reaching until the day of his death or until sunset.

There are some other verses (2:231-232; 2:234-235; 6:128; 7:135; 40:67; 65:2) where balagha is used to refer, in the word-for-word translation, to widows reaching "their term" (ajalahuna), "a prescribed term its end" (alkitābu ajalahu), we (i.e. evil doers) reaching "our term which you appointed for us" (ajalana allathee ajjalta lana), the people of Pharaoh

reaching “a term” (ajalin), or the listener addressed by the Qur’an reaching “a term specified” (ajalan musamman). In these verses, ajala means a term or period of duration.⁴⁴

They have the same meaning of balagha as in 46:15 mentioned above (“forty years”, “arbaAAeena sanatan”) where it refers to a period of duration. In these verses the attribute of the person or people or prescribed term is the quantity of time that has passed since the period began and the point that they reach is “the term” or “its end”. As with the age examples, they are not referring to the time of an external event that someone one other than those described as doing the reaching could also reach. Only the widows could be said to reach their term. No one other than Pharaoh’s people could be said to reach the term mentioned in 7:135. Most people reach marriageable age, but on the day when you reached marriageable age, it could not be said (in English or Arabic) that this is something that other people reached on that same day just because they were alive at the time when it happened to you. It was a personal event.

We have now seen how balagha was used in the Qur’an to mean reaching a time. In contrast, the time interpretation of 18:86 and 18:90 requires balagha to mean that Dhu’l Qarnayn reached the time of an external event, not a personal event. Furthermore, Lane’s lexicon defines balagha thus:

The reaching, attaining, arriving at, or coming to, the utmost point of that to which, or towards which, one tends or repairs or betakes himself, to which one directs his course, or which one seeks, pursues, endeavors to reach, desires, intends, or purposes; whether it be a place, or a time, or any affair or state or event that is meditated or intended or determined or appointed: and sometimes, the being at the point thereof: so says *Abu-l-Kásim* in the *Mufradát*.⁴⁵

It is clear here and in the usage of balagha in the Qur’an that even when it is used in reference to a time, that time is distinguished as one that is reached (unlike any other time) because something is intended for that time (e.g. widows can remarry after waiting their term, a righteous man prays for gratitude when he is 40 years old etc.). The wajada phrases suggest that Dhu’l Qarnayn’s intention for that reaching would have been to find out what the sunset and sunrise looked like. This shows why the time interpretation would suffer from one of the contextual problems mentioned above (you needn’t intentionally do something to reach the time of sunset in order to see it).

2.8 Could balagha mean “it reached”?

An alternative version of the time interpretation appears in the www.answering-christianity.com website’s article on this topic when they attempt to use the following argument from common usage:

The word ‘balagha’ when referring to any heavenly object was mainly used for determining the time of the day. For instance, when the Muslims talk about the pink or reddish line in the sky appearing so that they can start the evening daily prayer and end the fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, they say a phrase such as:

“Balagha al-khattu al-ahmar haddah”, which means “The red line has reached its limit”⁴⁶

To apply this argument, balagha in 18:86, which has the masculine 3rd person singular perfect tense suffix, -a, meaning he/it,⁴⁷ would have to mean “it reached”(where “it” refers to the sun) rather than “he reached”, referring to Dhu’l Qarnayn mentioned earlier. This is not grammatically possible for two reasons.

Firstly, the words following balagha, “maghriba alshshamsi” (“the setting place/time of the sun”), can only be the object of the verb balagha. It is not grammatically possible that the sun is the subject of balagha since it only appears as part of a genitive construction (called ‘idāfa) with maghriba, which has the accusative case ending (indicating the object of the transitive

verb, *balagha*). If *balagha* meant “it reached”, where “it” meant the sun, the verse would be grammatically incomplete since there would be no referent to which “it” refers.⁴⁸ The same grammatical problem would also occur in 18:90. Note also that in Arabic, the word *balagha* cannot implicitly refer to the time of day as the subject. You can’t just say, “*balagha almaghriba*”, meaning “It reached sunset” (i.e. that the time of day had advanced to sunset), as someone might occasionally say in English.

Secondly, *alshshamsu* is a feminine noun, so verbs must use the feminine gender when the sun is their subject.⁴⁹ We also see this in the next parts of the verses, which use the feminine 3rd person singular imperfect tense prefix, *ta-*, in words referring to the sun, *taghrubu* (“it/her set”) in 18:86, and *tatluAAu* (“it/her rise”) in 18:90.⁵⁰ *Balagha*, as noted above, uses the masculine suffix, *-a* (called *fatha* in Arabic), rather than the feminine suffix *-at*,⁵¹ so it cannot refer to the same subject (the sun) as *taghrubu* and *tatluAAu* do. *Dhu’l Qarnayn* must be the subject of *balagha*.

2.9 An interpretation invented in modern times

Finally, *nowhere in the Qur’an nor in the 6 major Sunni hadith collections*⁵² is there a phrase where *shams* or *maghrib* or *maṭliAA* are used with *balagha* to describe reaching a time. Thus the time interpretation requires a very unusual phrase usage. With this and the other problems (and the strong evidence supporting the next interpretation examined below), it is clear that the time interpretation is not correct.

We saw that while *maghriba alshshamsi* is used a few times in the hadith to mean the time of sunset, *maṭliAAa alshshamsi* is not used to mean the time of sunrise, so it would be very uncommon usage. We saw that elsewhere in the Qur’an other phrases are always used for these purposes. We also saw that there were serious contextual problems, especially the same phrase being used in verses 92-93, where the thing reached is indisputably a place.

So far as I have seen, supporters of the time interpretation cannot point to a classical commentator who took this interpretation for 18:86 or 18:90. We are asked to believe that nobody understood for centuries that these phrases, against strong evidence to the contrary, just meant that *Dhu’l Qarnayn* travelled until the times of sunset and sunrise or to unstated places at those times. It should come as no surprise by now that none of the major Muslim translations of the Qur’an into English use the time interpretation.⁵³ At most they use the non-committal phrase, “he reached the setting of the sun”.

3. Third interpretation: He reached the places where the sun sets and rises

Many arguments have been or could be used to support this interpretation (objections are also examined below).

3.1 Similar word usage in the Qur’an

Firstly, as noted at the beginning, *al maghrib* and *al maṭliAA* can each be used as an *ism makan* (a noun referring to the place of the action of the verb from whose root it is derived). This indeed is how *maghriba alshshamsi* and *maṭliAAa alshshamsi* are translated by the Muslim translators M. Khan / M. al-Hilali (“the setting place of the sun”, “the rising place of the sun”), M. Ali (“the setting-place of the sun”, “the (land of) the rising sun”), M. Pickthall and M.S. Ali (“the setting-place of the sun”, “the rising-place of the sun”), M.H. Shakir (“the place where the sun set”, “the land of the rising of the sun”), and others.⁵⁴

In 55:17 and 70:40 mentioned above, which are the only other verses in the Qur’an that refer to the place of sunset (depending on translation), *maghrib* is used (although without *alshshamsi*). *MaṭliAA* is not used elsewhere in the Qur’an to mean the place of sunrise (37:5, 55:17 and 70:40 are the only other possible references to the place of sunrise and *mashriq* is used there). On the other hand, *gharaba* (from which root *maghrib* is derived) and *ṭalaAAa* (from which root *maṭliAA* is derived) are used later in 18:86 and 18:90 to mean setting and rising with a place preposition (*fee*, meaning “in” and *AAala*, meaning “on”).

3.2 These words mean the setting and rising places in the hadith

Far more significantly, we find the words used in 18:86 and 18:90 also used in hadith that concern the behaviour of the sun. We need not assume that these hadith are accurate reports about Muhammad. We can use them simply as contemporary evidence of how Arabic words and phrases were used.

The hadith below that refer to the setting or rising place of the sun use *maghrib* or *maṭliAA* followed by the suffix *-hā* (meaning “of it” or “its”) or *-ki* (meaning “your”) in reference to *alshshamsu*, “the sun”, mentioned earlier in those hadith. Therefore they effectively say *maghriba alshshamsi* and *maṭliAAa alshshamsi*.

There are numerous hadith relating to the end of the world and use these phrases. See for example:

...*taṭluAAa alshshamsu min maghribihā*...

...the sun rises from the place of its setting...

Sahih Muslim Book 1, Number 294 ⁵⁵

Similarly, *Sahih Muslim* has:

...*tulooAAu alshshamsi min maghribihā*...

...the rising of the sun [from] its place of setting.

Sahih Muslim (Book 1 no. 296) ⁵⁶

The next hadith has, even more significantly:

...Do you know where the sun goes? [...] Rise up and go to the place whence you came, and it goes back and continues emerging out from its rising place [...] Rise up and emerge out from the place of your setting, and it will rise from the place of its setting...

Sahih Muslim (book 1, no. 297) ⁵⁷

Here, “*mina maṭliAAihā*” is translated as “from its rising place”, “*mina maghribiki*” as “from the place of your setting” (so the sun is commanded to go somewhere – it cannot be claimed that this is an idiomatic way of commanding the Earth to rotate), and “*mina maghribihā*” as “from the place of its setting”, all in reference to *alshshamsu*, “the sun”. *Maghribihā* and *maghribiki* can only mean the sun’s setting-place. The hadith would have just used “*mina almaghribi*” if the meaning had just been “from the west”.

There is some inconsistency about the way the English translators of *Sahih Muslim* and *Sahih Bukhari* translate *maghribihā* in other versions of the same hadith. See the endnotes for a discussion of this.⁵⁸

Finally, we have examples of *maṭliAAa alshshamsi* meaning the rising-place of the sun in *Sahih Muslim* Book 1, Number 91 (discussed above) and in *Sunan Al-Nasa-I*, which has the phrase:

...*qala bilalun ana fastaqbala maṭliAAa alshshamsi*...⁵⁹

...Bilal said, “I will”. So he faced the rising-place of the sun...”

(My translation since none is available online⁶⁰)

It describes how Bilal volunteered to stay up to make sure the dawn prayer was not missed. He faced the rising place of the sun, but it only awakened them when it hit their ears and is similar to *Sahih Muslim* Book 004, Number 1448.⁶¹

Another example is found in a hadith in *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, which says that faith in Allah alone, then jihad, then hajj are as preferable to other work as the distance between the

rising place of the sun to the setting place of it (“*kama bayna maṭlaAAi alshshamsi ila maghribiha*”).⁶²

The evidence is that wherever *maṭliAA* and *maghrib* are followed by *alshshamsi* (or indirectly as when *alshshamsu* is the referent of *matliAAiha* and *maghribiha* in the hadith), then the phrases mean the rising place of the sun and the setting place (or occasionally setting time, but maybe not rising time) of the sun. *Alshshamsi* is probably added to *maghrib* to avoid the ambiguity that would arise if just *al maghriba* without *alshshamsi* is used, since that can be an idiom for the west.

3.3 Balagha is a perfect fit in this interpretation

There are numerous examples of *balagha* meaning to reach a location in the Qur’an and the hadith. It is worthwhile highlighting some important examples in this context.

Of most importance are verses 18:92 - 93 discussed above. We have the exact same phrase as in 18:85-86 and 18:89-90, “*atbaAAa sababan hatta itha balagha*”, used there to describe reaching a place, This is surely no accident.

Immediately preceding the passage about Dhu’l Qarnayn we have one about Moses. There we have:

...la abrahu hatta ablughu majmaAAa albahrayni [...] Falamma balagha majmaAAa baynihima...

...I will not give up until I reach the junction of the two seas [...] But when they reached the Junction...

Qur’an 18:60 – 61

There are at least four other examples of *balagha* meaning to reach a location in the Qur’an (6:19; 13:14; 16:7; 48:25;) and far more in the hadith, which contain a lot of brief historical narratives from Muhammad’s lifetime.

Finally, we saw above that *balagha* implies an intention. Finding the place of sunset serves as a purpose once the destination is reached after following a road / way.

3.4 It fits the context

This interpretation explains the purpose of the second phrase in verse 18:84 discussed above because reaching the setting and rising places of the sun would be an extraordinary feat and the desire to relate it to Allah is understandable.

Lane’s Lexicon indicates that a *sabab* (which Dhu’l Qarnayn follows to reach his destinations and is translated way / means / road in 18:84, 18:85, 18:89, and 18:92) is a means to an end:

*A thing (S, M, Msb, K) of any kind (S, Msb, K) by means of which one attains, reaches or gains access to another thing*⁶³

Clearly, the setting place of the sun could be such an end, but reaching the time of sunset makes no sense as an end to which this *sabab* is a means. It is also worth mentioning that Kevin Van Bladel has written some interesting things about what may be the real meaning of this word.^{64 65}

Mentioning that Dhu’l Qarnayn found the sun setting in a spring also makes sense if he was at the place where it sets. Otherwise it could have just said that he found a people by a spring without mentioning the sun. Similarly, mentioning the people in 18:90 only in terms of how the sun affects them fits the rising place interpretation perfectly.

3.5 Compatibility with contemporary beliefs

We now look at explicit statements in the hadith about the sun (it is debatable whether these hadith authentically reflect Muhammad utterances, but they do at least show some of the contemporary beliefs of the early Muslims, which help us judge the likelihood that Muhammad

could have believed and intended a literal interpretation of 18:86 and 18:90). Afterwards we shall look at some early commentaries, pre-Islamic poetry and a highly significant contemporary legend.

Before we begin, it's worth noting that in the same article just mentioned⁶⁶, Van Bladel describes how Christian theologians in the region of Syria in the sixth century CE shared the view that the Earth was flat and the sky or heaven was like a tent above the Earth, based on their reading of the Hebrew scriptures. This was a rival view to that of the churchmen of Alexandria who supported the Ptolemaic view of a spherical Earth surrounded by celestial spheres. He says, "Clearly the Ptolemaic cosmology was not taken for granted in the Aramaean part of Asia in the sixth century. It was, rather, controversial."

3.5.1 Hadith

We saw above some of the hadith that describe the sun having setting and rising places which it goes into and comes out from. S. Shamoun quotes the following hadith, which is classified as Sahih (authentic), from Sunan Abu Dawud, book XXV - *Kitab Al-Ahruf Wa Al-Qira'at* (Book of Dialects and Readings Of The Qur'an):

Abu Dharr said: I was sitting behind the Apostle of Allah who was riding a donkey while the sun was setting. He asked: Do you know where this sets? I replied: Allah and his Apostle know best. He said: It sets in a spring of warm water.⁶⁷ [the reference includes a link to the Arabic]

He also gives another version of the hadith in Musnad Ahmad (this time the spring is muddy rather than warm - the Arabic words sound similar and the same variant readings exist for Qur'an verse 18:86). The same hadith is also recorded by al-Zamakhshari (1075-1143 CE) in his commentary on the Qur'an, *al-Kashshaf*⁶⁸. Even if one doubts that this is an authentic report about Muhammad, it is certainly further evidence that early Muslims understood 18:86 to mean a literal setting place. The possibility that Muhammad ever taught a different interpretation thus further diminishes.

There are also numerous sahih hadith that state that the sun rises and sets between the horns of Satan, for example:

Ibn 'Umar reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: Do not intend to observe prayer at the time of the rising of the sun nor at its setting, for it rises between the horns of Satan.

Sahih Muslim Book 4, Number 1807 ⁶⁹

...then cease prayer till the sun sets, for it sets between the horns of devil, and at that time the unbelievers prostrate themselves before it...

Sahih Muslim Book 4, Number 1812 ⁷⁰

These imply a belief that there were locations where the sun sets and rises. There are a few versions of the hadith below, which implies a bounded, flat Earth belief:

Thauban reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: Allah drew the ends of the world near one another for my sake. And I have seen its eastern and western ends....

Sahih Muslim Book 41, Number 6904 ⁷¹

The following hadith (also found in Sahih Muslim Book 19, Number 4327) demonstrates a belief that the sun actually moves through the sky each day:

...So, the prophet carried out the expedition and when he reached that town at the time or nearly at the time of the 'Asr prayer, he said to the sun, 'O sun! You are under Allah's Order and I am under Allah's Order O Allah!

Stop it (i.e. the sun) from setting.' It was stopped till Allah made him victorious....

Sahih Bukhari Volume 4, Book 53, Number 353 ⁷²

As S. Shamoun and J. Katz point out⁷³, al-Tabari (839-923 CE) gives a lengthy hadith in the first volume of his *History of the Prophets and Kings*, which claims that Ibn 'Abbas gave an account of what Muhammad said about the sun and moon and the setting and rising places. I have also read a library copy of Franz Rozenthal's translation of this hadith, which they quote. Whether or not Muhammad said the things attributed to him here (or said anything similar), this hadith certainly demonstrates a belief in literal rising and setting places among the early Muslims.

Then he said: For the sun and the moon, He created easts and wests (positions to rise and set) on the two sides of the earth and the two rims of heaven, 180 springs in the west of black clay - this is (meant by) God's word: "He found it setting in a muddy spring," meaning by "muddy (*hami'ah*)" black clay - and 180 springs in the east likewise of black clay, bubbling and boiling like a pot when it boiled furiously. He continued. Every day and night, the sun has a new place where it rises and a new place where it sets. The interval between them from beginning to end is longest for the day in summer and shortest in winter. This is (meant by) God's word: "The Lord of the two easts and the Lord of the two wests," meaning the last (position) of the sun here and the last there. He omitted the positions in the east and the west (for the rising and setting of the sun) in between them. Then He referred to east and west in the plural, saying; "(By) the Lord of the easts and wests." He mentioned the number of all those springs (as above).

He continued. God created an ocean three *farsakhs* (18 kilometers) removed from heaven. Waves contained, it stands in the air by the command of God. No drop of it is spilled. All the oceans are motionless, but that ocean flows at the rate of the speed of an arrow. It is set free to move in the air evenly, as if it were a rope stretched out in the area between east and west. The sun, the moon, and the retrograde stars run in its deep swell. This is (meant by) God's word: "Each swims in a sphere." "The sphere" is the circulation of the chariot in the deep swell of that ocean. By Him Who holds the soul of Muhammad in His hand! If the sun were to emerge from that ocean, it would burn everything on earth, including even rocks and stones, and if the moon were to emerge from it, it would afflict (by its heat) the inhabitants of the earth to such an extent that they would worship gods other than God. The exception would be those of God's friends whom He would want to keep free from sin. [...]

He continued. When the sun rises, it rises upon its chariot from one of those springs accompanied by 360 angels with outspread wings. They draw it along the sphere, praising and sanctifying God with prayer, according to the extent of the hours of night and the hours of day, be it night or day. [...] Finally, they bring the sun to the west. Having done so; they put it into the spring there, and the sun falls from the horizon of the sphere into the spring.

Then the Prophet said, expressing wonder at God's creation: How wonderful is the divine power with respect to something than which nothing more wonderful has ever been created! This is (meant by) what Gabriel said to Sarah: "Do you wonder about God's command?" It is as follows: God created two cities, one in the east, and the other in the west.

[...] By Him Who holds the soul of Muhammad in His hand! Were those people not so many and so noisy, all the inhabitants of this world would hear the loud crash made by the sun falling when it rises and when it sets. Behind them are three nations, Mansak, Tafil, and Taris, and before them are Yajuj and Majuj. [...] Whenever the sun sets, it is raised from heaven to heaven by the angels' fast flight, until it is brought to the highest, seventh heaven, and eventually is underneath the Throne. It falls down in prostration, and the angels entrusted with it prostrate themselves together with it. Then it is brought down to heaven. When it reaches this heaven, dawn breaks. When it comes down from one of those springs, morning becomes luminous. And when it reaches this face of heaven, the day becomes luminous.⁷⁴

The hadith continues with a description of an angel who releases parts of a veil of darkness each night, and how the sun and moon will behave at the end of the world.

In volume 5 of the same work, al-Tabari quotes some verse by a Yemeni king, Tubba':

Dhu al-Qarnayn before me submitted himself [to God], a king to whom the other kings became humble and thronged [his court]. He reigned over the Eastern and Western lands, yet sought the means of knowledge from a wise, rightly guided scholar. He witnessed the setting of the sun in its resting place into a pool of black and foetid slime.⁷⁵

3.5.2 Tafsir (Commentaries)

Shamoun and Katz quote al-Tabari's commentary (tafsir) on the Qur'an, in which he says at the beginning of his commentary on 18:86:

The meaning of the Almighty's saying, 'Until he reached the place of the setting of the sun he found it set in a spring of murky water,' is as follows:

When the Almighty says, 'Until he reached,' He is addressing Zul-Qarnain. Concerning the verse, 'the place of the setting of the sun he found it set in a spring of murky water,' the people differed on how to pronounce that verse. Some of the people of Madina and Basra read it as 'Hami'a spring,' meaning that the sun sets in a spring that contains mud. While a group of the people of Medina and the majority of the people of Kufa read it as, 'Hamiya spring' meaning that the sun sets in a spring of warm water. The people of commentary have differed on the meaning of this depending on the way they read the verse.⁷⁶

The end of the 3rd and 2nd from last sentences literally say, "In other words: it sets in a spring of muddy water" and, "That is to say that it sets in a spring of hot water". Notice he omits *wajada* ("he found") in these sentences. We can clearly see from al-Tabari's commentary that it was understood by early Muslim communities that 18:86 meant that the sun actually sets in a spring. We can also imply from this that they understood the verse to say that Dhu'l Qarnayn reached the place where the sun sets.

Al-Tabari continues the same passage giving reports concerning the different interpretations of *hamiatin*. He even gives some claimed to be from Ibn 'Abbas such as:

I heard Sa'id bin Jubair say Ibn 'Abbas had read it as "in a spring *hamiatin*". He says, "the sun sets in black mud". And others said "instead it disappears in a hot spring".

(my translation since none is available online⁷⁷)

The middle phrase is word for word, "And he says mud black, it sets in it, the sun"). It is also interesting that to this day, nobody knows which Arabic word used to describe the spring (muddy or hot) in the original Arabic Qu'ran, and translators take different choices.

Shamoun quotes from al-Baydawi's commentary on the Qur'an, *The Secrets of Revelation and The Secrets of Interpretation (Asrar ut-tanzil wa Asrar ut-ta'wil; 13th century CE)*, which has the following concerning 18:86 (although in the previous sentence Al-Baydawi gives his own view that perhaps Dhu'l Qarnayn went to the ocean coast and only saw it like the sun set in a spring):

It was said that Ibn 'Abbas found Mu'awiya reading it (as) hot. He told him, 'It is muddy.' Mu'awiya sent to Ka'b al-Ahbar and asked him, 'Where does the sun set?' He said in water and mud and there were some people. So he agreed with the statement of Ibn al-'Abbas.

[The translation of the last two sentences is a loose summary of the rest of the commentary on 18:86. The first sentence is literally: "How do you find the sun setting?" He said, "In water and clay also I find in the Torah"]⁷⁸

Shamoun also quotes the same work of al-Baydawi in which he gives this among various interpretations for 36:38:

For it has a cycle of three hundred and sixty sunrises and sunsets; it rises every morning from its resting-place and sets in a setting place, only to return to them the following year.⁷⁹

Tanwir al-Miqbas Tafsir Ibn 'Abbas by unknown author(s) and unknown date has for 18:86:

(Till, when he reached the setting place of the sun) where the sun sets, (he found it setting in a muddy spring) a blackened, muddy and stinking spring; it is also said that this means: a hot spring...⁸⁰

For 18:90 *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* by al-Mahalli and completed by Siyuti in 1505 CE has:

until, when he reached the rising of the sun, the place where it rises, he found it rising on a folk, namely, Negroes (zanj), for whom We had not provided against it, that is, [against] the sun, any [form of] cover, in the way of clothing or roofing, as their land could not support any structures; they had underground tunnels into which they would disappear at the rising of the sun and out of which they would emerge when it was at its highest point [in the sky].⁸¹

Note that this only makes sense if the sun being at its highest point means it has literally moved further away from the people.

Newton quotes similar reports from other commentaries on 18:90.⁸² These commentators or the reports that they quote understand these verses to mean literal setting and rising places. It is clear from the hadith contained in hadith collections and commentaries that there was interest in what happens to the sun when it is beyond view, so if Muhammad had given another interpretation there would surely be hadith to indicate as such, yet there is none.

3.5.3 A close similarity with the Christian Legend about Alexander the Great

It has been known since 1890 thanks to Theodore Nöldeke that there is a very close similarity between the account in the Qur'an of Dhu'l Qarnayn and the *Alexander Legend*. This was written in Syriac, probably around 630 CE, but incorporates older traditions such as that of the iron gate built by Alexander dating to at least the time of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus in the 1st century CE⁸³ and journeys to the rising and setting place of the sun from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.⁸⁴

It is part of a larger collection of legends about Alexander the Great known as the *Alexander Romance*. The Alexander Legend begins with Alexander expressing his desire to explore the ends of the Earth. It then has Alexander saying that God has given him horns on his head and

he asks for power over other kingdoms. After collecting seven thousand iron and brass workers from Egypt, he goes to the fetid sea at the end of the Earth. He makes some evildoers go to the shore of the fetid sea, and they die. He and his men go to the window of heaven into which the sun sets between the fetid sea and a bright sea (although it does not say that the sun actually sets into this sea). The place where the sun rises is over the sea and the people who live there must flee from it and hide in the sea. The story then describes how Alexander⁸⁵ prostrates before God and travels through the heavens at night to the place where the sun rises. He then visits some mountains and the sources of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Next it has Alexander coming to some people who tell him about the Huns within the Northern mountains (Gog, Magog and other kings are listed). He offers to build an iron and brass gate to close up the breach between the mountains, does so and prophesies that God will destroy the gate at the end of the world and the Huns will go forth through it. Next there is a battle with the Persians and their allies after they were told of his gate. It then ends with Alexander worshipping in Jerusalem and his death in Alexandria.⁸⁶

Kevin Van Bladel sums up the correspondence with the Qur'an passage in his recent article:

Thus, quite strikingly, almost every element of this short Qur'anic tale finds a more explicit and detailed counterpart in the Syriac Alexander Legend. In both texts the specific events are given in precisely the same order. Already earlier several cases of specific words that are exact matches between the Syriac and the Arabic were indicated. The water at the place where the sun sets is "fetid" in both texts, a perfect coincidence of two uncommon synonyms (Syriac Saryâ and Arabic hami'a).⁸⁷

It is often denied by modern Muslims that Dhu'l Qarnayn is meant to be Alexander because we now know that he was not a monotheist. However, it is clear from the *Alexander Legend* and other sources that he was widely believed in Muhammad's time and region to have been pious and to have worshipped the God of Abraham, so the Qur'an tells his mythical legend.

Whatever the historical relationship between these texts⁸⁸ and whether or not Dhu'l Qarnayn is meant to be Alexander the Great, it is clear from the legend that the setting and rising places interpretation of 18:86 and 18:90 was entirely compatible with contemporary beliefs in the region. Indeed, verse 18:83 tells us that what follows was supposed to relate to an already known story ("They ask thee concerning Zul-qarnain").

3.5.4 Pre-Islamic and contemporary poets

Stories influenced by the Alexander legends appear in Arabic poetry shortly before and during the time of Muhammad. As Richard Stoneman says, "the poet Imru' l-Qays (Diwan 158) referred to a Yemeni hero who undertook a similar campaign against Gog and Magog. [...] In addition, the pre-Islamic poet al-'Asha and the contemporary of Muhammad Hassan ibn Thabit both composed verses referring to the conquest of Gog and Magog and the furthest east by Dhu 'l-Qarnayn."⁸⁹

Those lines by Imru' l-Qays (died c. 540 CE) clearly mention the literal rising of the sun:

Have I not told you that destiny slays by guile,
A slayer most treacherous indeed, it consumes men's sons.
It banished Dhū Riyāsh from lordly citadels,
When he had ruled the lowlands and the mountains.
He was a valiant king; by revelation he sundered the horizons.
He drove his vanguards to their eastern edges,
And, where the sun climbs, barred the hills to Gog and Magog.⁹⁰

The lines composed by Hāssan b. Thābit, a poet who for a time was employed by Muhammad himself, appropriate elements of the Alexander Legend to a king in the line of Himyar (called Tubba' by the Muslims):

Ours the realm of Dhu 'l-Qarnayn the glorious,
Realm like his was never won by mortal king.

Followed he the sun to view its setting
 When it sank into the sombre ocean-spring;
 Up he clomb to see it rise at morning,
 From within its mansion when the East it fired;
 All day long the horizons led him onward,
 All night through he watched the stars and never tired.
 Then of iron and of liquid metal
 He prepared a rampart not to be o'erpassed,
 Gog and Magog there he threw in prison
 Till on Judgement Day they shall awake at last⁹¹

As we can see, a literal setting in a spring is mentioned (in the Arabic those lines are literally, "he followed the sun nearby its sunset to observe it in its spring while lowly"⁹²). We only have these poems from Islamic sources, so it is possible that they were composed or edited after Muhammad's death. Even if that is so, they still demonstrate how the story was understood in the early Islamic era.

The above hadith, tafsir (commentaries), legends and poetry, are strong circumstantial evidence that the literal setting of the sun in a spring and a literal rising of the sun are the intended meanings in the Qur'an's version of the same story. Otherwise there would surely be some sign of an alternative interpretation among these early sources given that there was clearly great interest in the story, and Muhammad would have corrected any misunderstanding when people asked him about it. If we suppose that even Muhammad himself misunderstood Allah's words, then how could an all-powerful God have made such a poor choice of words if this is not the intended meaning? He would have known about the popular legend and how Arabic words and phrases were used and understood by the people, yet would have chosen wording that reinforced people's false notions about this myth and the sun. The Alexander Legend, the poetry, and the phrase "They ask thee concerning Zul-qarnain" in 18:83 suggest this was a popular belief and need not have seemed unbelievable to Muhammad. The legend, or an earlier version of the same story, provides an obvious potential source for the Quranic version.

3.6 Arguments against this interpretation

3.6.1 Places on the horizon behind which the sun appears to set and rise

Before getting into specific arguments that people have raised against the *ism makan* interpretation, I will briefly address a subtly different way of interpreting the phrases *maghriba alshshamsi* and *maṭliAAa alshshamsi*, which might occur to some people.

The root word from which *maghrib* is derived is *gharaba*, meaning "to set" in the context of the sun. This word also means "to go away" such that something can no longer be seen.⁹³ Thus one might argue that *maghriba alshshamsi* is the area of land on the horizon, from Dhu'l Qarnayn's perspective, behind which the sun disappears at sunset. On the other hand, *maṭliAAa* is derived from *ṭalaAAa*, meaning "to rise"⁹⁴ in the context of the sun. Could *maṭliAAa alshshamsi* be the place on the horizon that the sun rises from behind?

The first problem with that explanation is that there are no single places on the Earth behind which the sun seems to set and rise, but rather it depends on the observer's location. Perhaps we can suppose that *maghriba alshshamsi* means the point on the horizon that the sun disappeared behind from the perspective of Dhu'l Qarnayn's starting position, so it was not a moving target. That's reading quite a lot into the text! Even this makes no sense given the context. Why follow a special road / way to get there, and why then mention the sun setting, now hidden by a 2nd horizon? Why describe both the 18:86 and 18:90 destinations in those terms? Another problem is that if *maghriba* means the disappearing place or the place where the sun goes away, can you really describe a place on the horizon as the place where a much more distant object disappears? It seems more natural that the place where something disappears would be in the same location as the thing that is disappearing. An *ism makan*, after all, is the place where an action occurs. Since the Earth's rotation hides the sun from a location-specific viewpoint, a literal horizon interpretation doesn't work as an *ism makan*, but a specific place that the sun literally sets into does work. A similar set of arguments applies to *maṭliAAa*.

Neither can these words be successfully interpreted as simply places which the sun sets or rises on as the Earth revolves. Anywhere outdoors is such a place. The same place would also simultaneously be a setting and rising place of the sun. Furthermore, there is no evidence in the Qur'an, hadith or Lane's Lexicon that *maghriba alshshamsi* and *maṭliAAa alshshamsi* had any of these meanings.

Nor can the words here mean the apparent points in the direction of the horizon where the sun appears to set and rise when viewed from a particular location since they are not places (how could Dhu'l Qarnayn reach them?). These horizon interpretations lack supporting evidence and have serious problems.

3.6.2 Other verses in the Qur'an – the sun's rounded course

It will take too long to discuss here the controversy over whether or not the Qur'an says or implies that Earth is flat / egg-shaped / some other shape, that it is stationary or rotates on its axis and that it supports a geocentric or heliocentric solar system. However, we shall look at a phrase that occurs in the Qur'an twice and is of direct relevance here. It may at first seem to suggest that 18:86 and 18:90 cannot mean literal setting and rising places of the sun.

It is He Who created the Night and the Day, and the sun and the moon: all (the celestial bodies) swim along, each in its rounded course.

Qur'an 21:33

It is not permitted to the Sun to catch up the Moon, nor can the Night outstrip the Day: Each (just) swims along in (its own) orbit (according to Law).

Qur'an 36:40

Both verses end with "*kullun fee falakin yasbaḥoona*" (literally, "all in a rounded course floating/swimming").

If this phrase meant to say that the sun moves in a circle around the galactic centre or around the Earth, then it would apparently preclude the existence of setting and rising places. Tafsir Ibn Kathir comments on 36:40:

(They all float, each in an orbit.) means, night and day, the sun and the moon, all of them are floating, i.e., revolving, in their orbits in the heaven. This was the view of Ibn 'Abbas, 'Ikrimah, Ad-Dahhak, Al-Hasan, Qatadah and 'Ata' Al-Khurasani. Ibn 'Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, and others among the Salaf said, "In an orbit like the arc of a spinning wheel."⁹⁵

He comments on verse 31:29:

(It goes and prostrates beneath the Throne, then it seeks permission from its Lord, and soon it will be said: "Go back from whence you came.") Ibn Abi Hatim recorded that Ibn 'Abbas said, "The sun is like flowing water, running in its course in the sky during the day. When it sets, it travels in its course beneath the earth until it rises in the east." He said, "The same is true in the case of the moon." Its chain of narration is Sahih.⁹⁶

However, we saw above in the hadith given by al-Tabari that belief in the sun circling the sky above a flat Earth and setting and rising in springs was believed to be compatible with the "*falakin*" phrase in the Qur'an:

He continued. God created an ocean three *farsakhs* (18 kilometers) removed from heaven. Waves contained, it stands in the air by the command of God. No drop of it is spilled. All the oceans are motionless,

but that ocean flows at the rate of the speed of an arrow. It is set free to move in the air evenly, as if it were a rope stretched out in the area between east and west. The sun, the moon, and the retrograde stars run in its deep swell. This is (meant by) God's word: "Each swims in a sphere." "The sphere" is the circulation of the chariot in the deep swell of that ocean.⁹⁷

In any case, *falak* does not necessarily mean a sphere. Arabs would have understood the phrase to mean a hemisphere, as Lane's Lexicon entry for *al falak* defines the word:

*The place of the revolving of the stars; (O, K, TA;) [the celestial sphere: but generally imagined by the Arabs to be a material concave hemisphere; so that it may be termed the vault of heaven; or the firmament:]*⁹⁸

Thus no conflict was seen between the *falakin* phrase in the Qur'an and the setting and rising places interpretation for 18:86 and 18:90.

We must also look at another argument from Mahir Karaosmanovic.⁹⁹ He quotes the following hadith in *Tasfir Ibn Kathir* when it comments on verse 36:38 to claim that the verse conflicts with a daily setting and rising event.

This was narrated from `Abdullah bin `Amr, may Allah be pleased with him. Ibn Mas`ud and Ibn `Abbas, may Allah be pleased with them, recited this Ayah as: (وَالشَّمْسُ تَجْرِي لِمُسْتَقَرٍّ لَهَا) (And the sun runs with no fixed course for a term,) meaning that it has no destination and it does not settle in one place, rather it keeps moving night and day, never slowing down or stopping...¹⁰⁰

This is given by Ibn Kathir as an alternative view to the one expressed in the hadith that have the sun prostrating under Allah's throne each night, which is the "destination" referred to in the commentary. The commentary then cites the following verse to support this view:

And He hath made subject to you the sun and the moon, both diligently pursuing their courses; and the night and the day hath he (also) made subject to you.

Qur'an 14:33

The Arabic word *daibayni* is translated as the phrase "both diligently pursuing their courses". This is not actually a problem for the setting and rising place interpretation since the commentators and other hadith quoted above showed a belief that the sun keeps moving after passing through its setting place (springs in al-Tabari's History) into heaven (or according to the Ibn `Abbas hadith quoted above, under the Earth) after it has set and continues back to its rising place. Unlike the hadith, the Qur'an does not mention the sun stopping to prostrate (but even if it did, that would simply be a stage of its daily course which happens reliably every day until judgement day). Either view is compatible with the setting and rising places interpretation of 18:86 and 18:90.

Perhaps the most likely explanation is that these verses do not have to be consistent with a single cosmology. Perhaps it seemed necessary to Muhammad to give a recitation about Dhu'l Qarnayn to confound those who had questioned him and any need for it to neatly fit the other recitations was of less importance. The already known story of the great traveller had Dhu'l Qarnayn reaching these places, so the recitation had to do so as well in order to pass the test of the questioners. However, we shall see later that it must have been intended to be believed as a true historical account.

3.6.3 Multiple setting and rising places

The Earth's tilt causes the apparent place of the sun's setting and rising to shift back and forth along the horizon during the course of a year. A flat Earth believer might imagine there were

many places where the sun sets and rises, or places that move (see above for the set of springs or places the commentators mention), but 18:86 and 18:90 only refer to one of each.

Al magharib and al mashariq in 37:5, 55:17 and 70:40 are usually translated as the easts and wests (or in 55:17, the two easts and the two wests). As noted earlier however, other translations have here the points of sunrise and sunset or explanatory notes to that effect. The commentators say that these verses are referring to the points from which the sun rises and sets from the Summer to Winter solstices. See for example Tafsir Ibn Kathir,¹⁰¹ Tafsir al-Jalalayn,¹⁰² Tafsir al-Tabari,¹⁰³ and Tafsir Ibn 'Abbas.¹⁰⁴ It could mean points on the horizon (from a flat earth perspective) or actual setting and rising places (though they are not mutually exclusive).

On the other hand, we saw above the hadith referring to "the rising place", "the setting place", "its rising place" and "your setting place" in the singular. Both there and in the Qur'an it would mean the place where the sun set and the place where it rose on those particular days whether one or many were imagined to exist.

A similar question applies to the Alexander Legend, which has the sun set and rise through windows of heaven over the fetid sea encircling the world. The rising place also has people living there, like the Quran (perhaps people were imagined to live all along the range where it rises, or maybe just in the place Alexander went to on that day). Perhaps Muhammad imagined there were many springs in the sky-ocean like al-Tabari's hadith, or maybe the muddy spring is copied from the pre-Islamic poems quoted above, or derived from the fetid sea of the Alexander Legend, or their common source for the story, which Muhammad felt bound to follow (insofar as he correctly remembered or was informed about it) to answer the questioners in 18:83.

3.6.4 Why does it only say the people in 18:90 lacked shelter?

Unlike 18:90, verse 86 does not say anything about the people near the spring suffering from the sun's close proximity at sunset. There are a few possible explanations compatible with the setting and rising place interpretations. Most likely, Muhammad was simply following the outline of the popular legend he was using. The Alexander Legend itself only mentions the lack of shelter for the people at the rising place. The creator of the story may also have imagined that the people in verse 86 did have shelter, unlike those in verse 90. Finally, Muhammad might not have thought about or considered it worth mentioning how the sun affected the people in 18:86, just as he doesn't mention what Dhu'l Qarnayn said or did (if anything) to the people in verse 90.

3.6.5 Some of Osama Abdallah's nonsensical objections

The article on this topic on the www.answering-christianity.com website¹⁰⁵ puts forth various arguments that the words discussed above are being used as metaphorical or figurative words. These arguments are very easily dismissed. We shall look at arguments that the passage as a whole is metaphorical or figurative later in part 2.

First, their argument supposes that the use of maghrib means that Dhu'l Qarnayn first went to the west (but not to a literal setting place), but because maṭliAAa rather than mashriqa is used in 18:90, he did not then go to the east. This is indeed a problem for those who claim that maghrib in 18:86 just means the west and then claim that maṭliAAa in 18:90 just means east. It is not an argument against the rising and setting place interpretation unless we wrongly assume that mashriqa must be used for the rising place.

They then argue that the use of gharaba and ṭalaAAa (from which maghrib and maṭliAA are derived) in verses 50:39 and 20:130 cannot mean literal rising and setting on Earth because even if we assume that the Qur'an follows a flat-Earth belief, all nations experience sunrise and sunset, not just those near the rising and setting places. This argument is apparently based on the false premise that if maghrib and maṭliAA can be literal nouns for the place of the action meant by these verbs, gharaba and ṭalaAAa, then something (celebrating the praises in 50:39 and 20:130) done before those actions occur (the rising and the setting of the sun) must happen in the same place as those actions. This is obviously nonsense. Furthermore, the verses are perfectly compatible with a literal rising and setting belief since

for everywhere on a flat Earth there would be a time (the same time for all nations) when the sun sets and when it rises.

They then give examples of al mashriq and al sharq being used to mean the east. As discussed above, these are just options that were not used. They are not required in order to describe the rising place of the sun, and as we saw above, their non-use is evidence that 18:90 does not merely mean that Dhu'l Qarnayn went to the east.

To support the claim that balagha is metaphorical in 18:86 and 18:90, the article uses verse 6:19, but their nonsensical argument relies on the fact that the Yusuf Ali translation does not translate the word bihi, "with it". All other major translations do so by some means.

The transliteration of the relevant phrase in 6:19 reads:

...waoohiya ilayya hatha alQur'anu lionthirakum bihi waman balagha...

A.Y. Ali has

...This Qur'an hath been revealed to me by inspiration, that I may warn you and all whom it reaches...

M. Pickthall has

...And this Qur'an hath been inspired in me, that I may warn **therewith** you and whomsoever it may reach...

Even if the Qur'an did not have the word bihi here, the only claimed metaphorical aspect of the sentence would be that Muhammad is warning people he hasn't met (it is actually via the Qur'an, as the other translations show). Either way, the people who the Qur'an reaches (carried in the memory or written record of people) are indeed in actual physical locations away from where Muhammad was.

After quoting various verses where balagha refers to a reaching an age (this argument was addressed above), the article then makes the irrelevant criticism that balagha does not have to refer to a specific place (or in reference to time, to a specific time). Strictly speaking this is correct. Even in English, to say you reached the coastline does not have to mean that you came so close that you actually touched the very edge of the land.

They then claim that you would use yudrik / tudrik / adraaka instead of balagha to describe someone travelling to the sun, but you wouldn't unless you wished to say that he came so close as to touch it! To claim that balagha is metaphoric after all of this is to confuse the word "metaphor" with "approximate", a completely different concept.

4. Conclusion of part 1

We have seen that only the setting and rising places interpretation of 18:86 and 18:90 fits the context, grammar, and words used in these verses and nearby verses such as 18:93. It was the only interpretation until the Muslims acquired Greek and Indian astronomical knowledge and it complimented the beliefs and legends of the region, including the remarkable match with the *Alexander Legend*. The arguments against this interpretation have been demonstrated to be weak or groundless. The alternative interpretations have been shown to have fatal contextual, grammatical and logical flaws and use word meanings invented purely in an attempt to support those interpretations.

4.1 Tables summarising word usage

The tables below show how some of the Arabic words discussed above are used in the Qur'an (not including the controversial instances in 18:86 and 18:90) and in the 6 major Sunni hadith collections. This might make it easier for the reader to verify the statements made in this article and reach his or her own conclusions. Of course, many of the most important arguments in the preceding discussion cannot be derived merely from these tables.

Word	Place (ism makan)		Time (ism zaman)		East/West	
	Qur'an	Hadith	Qur'an	Hadith	Qur'an	Hadith
maghrib	Only without alshshams 70:40; 55:17	With alshshams and possibly without	None	With and without alshshams	Only without alshshams 2:115; 2:142; 2:177; 2:258; 7:137; 26:28; 55:17; 73:9	Only without alshshams
maṭliAA	None	Only with alshshams	Rising time of dawn (not alshshams) 97:5	Only without alshshams	None	None
mashriq	Only without alshshams 37:5; 70:40; 55:17	Not checked	None	Not checked	Only without alshshams 2:115; 2:142; 2:177; 2:258; 7:137; 26:28; 43:38; 73:9	Not checked
gharb	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	24:35; 28:44	Not checked
sharq	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	19:16; 24:35	Not checked

Verb	Referring to the sun in relation to a location		Referring to the sun in relation to time	
	Qur'an	Hadith	Qur'an	Hadith
gharaba	18:86	Yes	18:17; 50:39; 20:130	Yes
ṭalaAAa	18:90	Yes	18:17; 50:39; 20:130	Yes
ashraqa	None	Not checked	15:73, 26:60; 38:18	Not checked

Part 2: What do Qur'an 18:86 and 18:90 say happened next?

In this part we look at the different interpretations of the phrases:

...*wajadahā taghrubu fee AAaynin ḥamiatin*...

...he found it set in a spring of murky water...

Qur'an 18:86

And

...*wajadahā taḷluAAu AAalā qawmin lam najAAal lahum min dooniḥa sitran*

...he found it rising on a people for whom We had provided no covering protection against the sun.

Qur'an 18:90

The main questions are what does *wajadahā* mean in these phrases, are the things found being described figuratively, from whose point of view is the story told, and is the story meant to be a fictional fable or an historical account?

5. Context

We saw earlier that some commentators claimed that the phrase in 18:86 is describing Dhu'l Qarnayn's point of view that the sun appeared to set into the sea when he could see to the horizon. Before examining what *wajadahā* means, let us see if this fits the context and common sense.

There is no contextual support for the later commentators' interpretation and many contextual problems. There is no reason to remark on what the sun merely appeared or was mistakenly thought to be doing in 18:86, as Cornelius argues.¹⁰⁶ We should also notice that there would be no reason to describe the nature of the spring (murky / muddy / hot) unless something happened at the spring itself.

If Dhu'l Qarnayn had just travelled until the time of sunrise or to the east in 18:90, but no closer to the sun, it seems odd that the people are described only in terms of how the sun affects them (it rises on them and they have been given no covering protection from it).

The alternative to the clear and obvious interpretation is to suppose that these features being in the text next to words that literally and commonly mean the setting and rising places of the sun are a series of strange coincidences. Given these reasons, the only interpretation that makes sense in the context is that Dhu'l Qarnayn found the sun actually setting in a spring and rising close to a people.

5.1 Spring or ocean?

We must also question the claim that a powerful man, intelligent enough that people would offer him tribute for his help (18:94) could be so badly mistaken as to think he had found the sun to be setting in a muddy spring or even that he could regard it as having the misleading appearance of doing so while he knows it is not in reality.

To support this claim, a large body of water would be needed that extended to the horizon, so it is often claimed¹⁰⁷ that *AAaynin* (which has the genitive case because it is the object of a preposition, but the case is not translated in English) means a sea rather than a spring. We shall see below that Cornelius is correct to state that this word means "spring or well not ocean or sea".¹⁰⁸

Lane's Lexicon explains that this word, which usually means an eye, is also used to mean a spring or source of water (because from the eye springs forth tears).

The place [or aperture] whence the water of a *فَنَاءَةٌ* [i.e. pipe or the like,] pours forth : (K, TA:) as being likened to the organ [of sight] because of the water that is in it. (TA.) And, (K, TA,) for the same reason, (TA.) ‡ The place whence issues the water of a well. (TA.) And, (S, Msb, K, &c.,) for the same reason, as is said by Er-Rághib, (TA.) ‡ The *عَيْنٌ* (S, Msb,) or source, or spring, (K, TA,) of water, (S, Wsb, K, TA,) that wells forth from the earth, or ground, and runs : (TA: [and accord. To the Msb, it app. Signifies a running spring:] of the fem. gender:¹⁰⁹

While there is no apparent limit on the size of the spring, the lexicon does not give the slightest indication that AAayn is ever used to mean a sea or an ocean, which are generally not like a source of water from the ground. The verses in the Qur'an where AAaynun is used in the water rather than eye sense are as follows:

2:60, 7:160, 15:45, 26:57, 26:134, 26:147, 34:12, 36:34, 44:25, 44:52, 51:15, 54:12, 55:50, 55:66, 76:6, 76:18, 77:41, 83:28, 88:5, 88:12.

In every case, all the major Qur'an translations¹¹⁰ translate this word as spring, waterspring, fountain, font, or fount with the following exceptions:

In 15:45 Sarwar has "streams";

In 44:25 M. Asad has "water-runnels";

In 55:66 Khalifa translates AAaynani naddakhatani as "wells to be pumped" (most have here "springs gushing forth");

In 76:18 and 83:28 M. Asad has "a source".

It is only in verse 18:86 that AAayanin is translated differently. Here some translate "AAaynin hamiatin" as "a black sea" (Shakir, M. Ali), "a vast ocean" (Khalifa), "an ocean / spring" (Malik), "the Black Sea / the dark waters" (QXP), and "a dark, turbid sea" (M. Asad).

This has obviously been done to fit the interpretation of those commentators who claimed that Dhu'l Qarnayn reached the coast and saw the sun set behind the horizon. It is not in any way justified from internal evidence nor even from any hadith. The word al bahr would have been used in the Qur'an if the meaning were a sea. It is used to mean a sea, ocean, large river or any large body of water. It is used in this way 41 times in the Qur'an.¹¹¹

There were at least two different readings of the word used to describe the spring. Most translations use hamiatin, meaning muddy. Only the Sarwar and Free Minds translations use the other reading, which they translate as "warm" or "boiling". Perhaps a hot bubbling mud spring as is often found in geothermically active areas was imagined by the original source for the phrase. We saw some of the hadith relating to this controversy quoted above. There is also one from among the 6 major Sunni hadith collections.

Narrated Abdullah ibn 'Abbas:

Ubayy ibn Ka'b made me read the following verse as the Apostle of Allah (peace_be_upon_him) made him read: "in a spring of murky water" (fi 'aynin hami'atin) with short vowel a after h.

Sunna Abu Dawud Book 30, Number 3975 ¹¹²

Oceans and seas are not muddy. While an ocean might look dark at sunset, even up to the horizon, it would be clear the next day to observers that it is water rather than mud and is light or dark blue or blue-grey. It should now be very clear that "AAaynin hamiatin" does not mean any kind of sea or ocean and we can next examine the plausibility of an illusion.

5.2 A Plausible Illusion?

An important point is that no one would think they could see where the sun set or appeared to set into just because they could see to the horizon. It appears no larger, and therefore no closer, wherever on Earth you observe sunset. If you knew that you had travelled west around 90km and believed you were now within 10km of the sun, you would expect the sun to have an apparent diameter at least 10 times larger than when you started. By travelling west, even to a sea, it would look no more like you had found where the sun sets than it would from the eastern end of the Mediterranean or any other west facing shore.

Another question is what body of water could provide such an illusion, if it cannot be a sea or ocean? The horizon is approximately 5km away when viewed at sea-level by a 2m tall man.¹¹³

This gives us an idea of the minimum size of any candidate spring that reached the horizon (it would have to be even larger if viewed from a higher altitude than 2m). There would also have to be no hills or mountains taller than 2m for the 5km beyond the horizon in the direction of the sun, nor taller than 30m for the 15km beyond that to maintain the illusion. This rules out, for example, Lake Ohrid (or Ochrida, modern Lyncis/Lychnitis), which is fed by underground springs and was advocated by Yusuf Ali¹¹⁴, but which is surrounded by mountains and never spans more than 15km east to west. The Black Sea and Caspian Sea are ruled out because they are not springs / sources of flowing water from the ground (the Black Sea exchanges water with the Mediterranean and the Caspian Sea is fed by inflowing rivers).

6. What does *wajadah* mean?

It has been claimed by Zakir Naik, a prominent Muslim public speaker, that *wajadah* means that it appeared to Dhu'l Qarnayn that the sun was setting in a spring.¹¹⁵ He says that Allah is telling us Dhu'l Qarnayn's opinion, but Allah does not himself claim that this opinion was correct (he uses the analogy that a teacher would be wrong to say that $2 + 2 = 5$, but the teacher can correctly say that *a student thought that* $2 + 2 = 5$).

We can trivially dismiss on grammatical grounds Naik's specific claim that in 18:86 *wajadah* means "it appeared" because it requires that the subject of *wajadah* is the sun, when it can only actually be Dhu'l Qarnayn. The *fatha* (the "a") after *wajad* indicates the masculine gender, so Dhu'l Qarnayn is doing the action of the verb, which is in the active voice (*alshshams* is a feminine noun). The *-ha* suffix is a feminine referent to the sun as the object of the verb. It must therefore mean Dhu'l Qarnayn [verb] the sun.

However, we must still examine the essence of Naik's claim – that *wajadah* can mean "he found it having the misleading appearance" or "he mistakenly had the opinion that it". Note that it is not enough for his argument to work if usage of *wajadah* indicates an opinion that fits the reality.

First let us see what light Lane's Lexicon can shed on this matter. Then we shall look at the usage of *wajadah* in the Qur'an.

6.1 *Wajadah* in Lane's Lexicon

Lane's Lexicon (freely accessible online) gives the definition below for *wajadah*:

He found it; lighted on it; attained it; obtained it by searching or seeking; discovered it; perceived it; saw it; experienced it, or became sensible of it;¹¹⁶

Each of these meanings is then further explained. Regarding the last four, which could be relevant to Naik's claim, the Lexicon says:

The finding, &c., by means of any one of the five senses: as when one says وَجَدْتُ زَيْدًا [I found, &c., Zeyd]: and وَجَدْتُ طَعْمَهُ, and رَأَيْتُهُ, and حَسَبْتُ صَوْتَهُ, [I found, or perceived, &c., its taste, and its odour, and

its sound, and its roughness]. Also, *The finding, &c., by means of the faculty of appetite, [or rather of sensation, which is the cause of appetite:]* as when one says وَجَدْتُ الشَّبِيحَ [I found, experienced, or became sensible of, satiety].¹¹⁷

It is telling us that an attribute of a thing perceived by the senses (e.g. the taste of a thing) can be an object of the verb wajada. Thus, when wajada is used in this sense it means to perceive with the senses. The question we wish to resolve is whether or not wajada can mean to visually perceive something which conflicts with the reality.

There are 2 ways of interpreting what the lexicon here tells us about wajada. We shall see that neither interpretation gives any reason to suppose that wajada can mean to have a perception that conflicts with objective reality (which Naik's argument requires). Then we shall see that further down, the lexicon describes the usage of wajada that we actually have in 18:86 and 18:90.

The very likely and obvious interpretation of the above quote is that wajada can be used as a mono-transitive verb (verb acting on a direct object) to mean to sense something. For example, "I found its sound" in reference to a cat means I could hear the cat. Qur'an 12:94 is an example of this usage when Jacob says he can scent Joseph's smell (literally, "I find the smell of Joseph"). Whether or not a person has sensed a particular direct object is a matter of objective fact. You would be saying something that isn't true if you used wajada to say that a person had found the cat's odour, even if the person thought he had, when in fact he had smelled a dog. In this usage, wajada means to actually sense the noun concerned.¹¹⁸ There is no evidence here that it can mean a mere opinion, which may be incorrect, of having done so.

I'll quickly address one potential mistake some readers might make before we move on to the other interpretation. There are verses in the Qur'an where someone other than Allah is the speaker and uses the word wajada (e.g. 7:17). In such cases the quoted speaker could, in principle, be mistaken in their opinion and thus wrongly be stating that something was or will be found (as is conceivably the case in 7:17, 7:28, 18:36, 18:69), or the speaker could be deliberately misleading the listener (in 27:24-27, Solomon wonders if the hoopoe is lying when it says it found something). In those cases wajada still means to actually find even if the thing mentioned has not actually been found. It would just mean that the speakers in those verses are mistaken to use wajada or are being deliberately deceiving. We can assume that statements in the Qur'an where Allah is the speaker, as is the case in 18:86 and 18:90, are not meant to be mistakes or deceptions.

The other way to interpret the above quote from the lexicon is in a ditransitive sense (rather unlikely, as the ditransitive usage is described separately a little later in the lexicon as we shall see). In this interpretation you could, for example, use wajada to say a person found a taste to be pleasant.

The taste, smell, sound, feel, and aesthetics of an object detected by the senses are subjective attributes. A perception of a subjective attribute is neither correct nor incorrect. For example, if a woman says the phrase, "I found the painting to be beautiful", it may be objectively true that the painting seemed beautiful to her, but the painting is not objectively beautiful – the perception is a matter of opinion. However, if an action (e.g. an object falling, seen with the eyes) or an objective attribute (e.g. an object's name, heard with the ears) is being perceived, the perception can be correct or incorrect since these things are objective facts rather than matters of opinion. Like these latter examples, whether or not the sun set in muddy spring is a matter of objective fact. So, even if this 2nd interpretation of the above quote in Lane's Lexicon is correct, it is not the usage of wajada that we find in 18:86 and 18:90.

Now we look a little further down the lexicon at the description of the usage of wajada which we actually have in 18:86 and 18:90. This is the two objective compliments, ditransitive usage of wajada mentioned in Lane's Lexicon when wajada means to know something by direct experience:

[He found, in the sense of] he knew [by experience]. (A, TA, &c.) [In this sense, it is a verb of the kind called أفعال القلوب ; having two objective complements; the first of which is called its noun, and the second its predicate.] Ex. وَجَدْتُ زَيْدًا ذَا الْحِفَاظِ / [found, or] knew Zeyd to possess the quality of defending those things which should be sacred, or inviolable.¹¹⁹

In verses 18:86 and 18:90 respectively, the noun is the sun (via the referent “it”) and the predicate is “setting in a muddy spring” / “rising on a people for whom We had provided no covering protection against the sun”. It is clear from the quote that this usage means that a person actually comes to know something as it really is. We shall see some other examples in the Qur’an of this usage in the next section.

When wajada is used in this ditransitive way, it is being used as a “verb of the heart” (that is what أفعال القلوب means in the quote), and the predicate must fit the reality, as shown on www.learnarabiconline.com, which is quoted below (wajada is the 2nd verb from the bottom). What Lane calls the noun and predicate is here called the topic and comment.

Verbs in which two objects were originally topic and comment are known as Verbs of the Heart. The following seven verbs have the potential to be used as Verbs of the Heart.

Example Usage	Verb of the Heart
I mistook it to be worthwhile	حَسِبَ
I (wrongly) thought that it would be worthwhile	ظَنَّ
I (wrongly) perceived it to be worthwhile	خَالَ
I knew that it would be worthwhile	عَلِمَ
I (rightfully) thought it would be worthwhile	رَأَى
I (rightfully) found it to be worthwhile	وَجَدَ
I (rightfully/wrongly) thought it would be worthwhile	زَعَمَ

Definitions

أفعال القلوب verbs of the heart – those multi-transitive verbs, two of whose objects were originally topic and comment¹²⁰

As we can clearly see in this quote (2nd row from bottom in the table), when wajada is used with a noun and predicate (also called topic and comment) as in 18:86 and 18:90, it means to “rightfully” find rather than a mistaken perception.

If 18:86 and 18:90 had a few extra words, Dr Naik’s interpretation could have worked. If a false appearance were the thing that Dhu’l Qarnayn was said to have found, there would be no problem. It could have said, “he found its appearance like it was setting in a muddy spring”. Similarly, it could have said, “he thought he found the sun setting in a spring”, and there would be no factual error in the statement. Unfortunately for Dr. Naik, this is not what the Qur’an says and we have just seen that Lane’s Lexicon gives no indication that wajada can be stretched to include the meaning of those missing words. Dr. Naik is attempting to give us a meaning invented to rescue these verses from a conflict with reality.

The evidence does not suggest that wajada can mean to incorrectly perceive an objective fact or action, or to think it appears like something while knowing the perception is false, such as that the sun set in a muddy spring. On the contrary, the evidence is that if someone made a

statement that used a factually incorrect predicate in the object of the verb wajada, they would have made a factually incorrect statement. For example, you would have made a factually incorrect statement if you used wajada to say “Zayd found a flying elephant”, even if he believed that he had found such a thing or merely thought that it appeared that way. Thus, the Qur’an has Allah making a factually incorrect statement in 18:86, and similarly in 18:90.

6.2 Wajada in the Qur’an

Now let us also look at how wajada is used in the Qur’an. It is used there 107 times¹²¹, as listed by Project Root List¹²² and <http://corpus.Quran.com/>

You will see if you read them that this verb never means a mere perception that conflicts with an objective reality nor an opinion of what something appears like.

Of the 107 verses, there are four highly relevant ones that we look at now to help us learn what wajada means in 18:86 and 18:90.

Immediately after Dhu’l Qarnayn finds the sun setting in a spring, wajada is used again:

...wawajada AAindaha qawman...

...Near it he found a People...

Qur’an 18:86

The “wa” prefix just means “and”. Nobody would suggest that wajada means a mistaken perception here. It is rather unlikely that the same word would have been used both in this and in the preceding phrase unless it means to say that both these things were actually found by Dhu’l Qarnayn.

The same argument applies to verse 18:93 where the same structure is used as in 18:86 and 18:90.

Hatta itha balagha bayna alssaddayni wajada min doonihima qawman la yakadoona yafqahoona qawlān

Until, when he reached (a tract) between two mountains, he found, beneath them, a people who scarcely understood a word.

Qur’an 18:93

Here again, the words following wajada are clearly meant to be a description of what happened in real history, not a mistaken perception or an opinion of what something looked like.

A third example of wajada appears in the story of Moses preceding that of Dhu’l Qarnayn.

Faintalaqa hatta itha ataya ahla qaryatin ... fawajada feeha jidaran yureedu an yanqadda...

Then they proceeded: until, when they came to the inhabitants of a town ... They found there a wall on the point of falling down...

Qur’an 18:77

This verse has a similar structure to those in the Dhu’l Qarnayn story, beginning with “hatta itha” (although instead of balagha, the next word in this instance is “ataya”, translated “they came”, and has the sense of coming directly and quickly according to Lane’s Lexicon¹²³). As with the other examples, wajada clearly means an objective discovery rather than an illusory perception or a matter of opinion. We can also notice that a similar grammatical structure follows wajada here as in the Dhu’l Qarnayn episode: someone finds a thing doing something. This is the two objective compliments, ditransitive usage of wajada with a noun and predicate mentioned in Lane’s Lexicon (see quote above) when wajada means to know something by direct experience.

In this verse and verses 18:86 and 18:90 respectively, the noun is the wall / sun (via the referent "it") and the predicate is "on the point of falling down" / "setting in a muddy spring" / "rising on a people for whom We had provided no covering protection against the sun".

A possible objection arises from the Arabic words used in 18:77. The word for word translation of the predicate is "(that) want(ed) to collapse".¹²⁴ Obviously, a wall cannot "want" anything. This is a figure of speech with the meaning that the wall had a structural weakness that would cause it to collapse. This does not support Naik's claim about the word *wajada* because the reality described using a figure of speech is actually found, which is what we see in 18:77 and a few other verses (4:65, 5:59, the 2nd instance in 24:39 and 73:20). The idea that the predicates describing the behaviour of the sun in 18:86 and 18:90 are figures of speech rather than literal descriptions, whatever *wajada* may mean, is an alternative argument used by Dr Naik and we examine it later below.

The fourth important example, verse 24:39, is particularly relevant for any claim that *wajada* can mean a false perception:

Waallatheena kafaroo aAamaluhum kasarabin biqeeAAatin yahsabuhu alththamanu maan hatta itha jaahu lam yajidhu shayan wawajada Allaha AAindahu fawaffahu hisabahu waAllahu sareeAAu alhisabi...

But the Unbelievers,- their deeds are like a mirage in sandy deserts, which the man parched with thirst mistakes for water; until when he comes up to it, he finds it to be nothing: But he finds Allah (ever) with him, and Allah will pay him his account...

Qur'an 24:39

The word for word translation has:

But those who disbelieve, their deeds (are) like a mirage in a lowland, thinks it the thirsty one (to be) water, until when he comes to it he finds it not (to be) anything, but he finds Allah before him, He will pay him in full his due...¹²⁵

Here *wajada* is used in direct contrast to perceiving a mere visual illusion! Again, we have the *hatta itha ... yajidhu* [a form of *wajada*] ... *wawajada* structure. If Naik is correct, *wajada* could also have been used instead of *yahsabuhu* (he thinks/reckons) as the verb to describe the man's initial mistaken perception. The truth is that *wajada* was used to describe what was actually found because that is what it means. The thirsty man finds what he had falsely perceived as water to be nothing and finds Allah with him.

Other verses that have the ditransitive usage of *wajada* include 7:157 ("...the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (scriptures)..."), 12:65 ("they found their stock-in-trade had been returned to them..."), 27:24 ("And I found her and her people prostrating to the sun..."), and 58:22 ("Thou wilt not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day...").

There isn't the slightest indication in any of these verses or any other verse in the Qur'an that *wajada* can mean a false perception. It is clear that it means to gain actual knowledge about something.

Only Muslim translators incorrectly translate *wajadahā* in 18:86 as "it appeared to him" (QXP, M. Asad), or insert the comment "[as if]" (Saheeh). This is purely for the reasons shared by some classical commentators to avoid a conflict with scientifically acquired knowledge. Notice that the same translators correctly translate *wajadahā* as "he found it" in 18:90.

6.3 Words that could have been used if a mere perception was meant

If verse 18:86 did not mean he actually discovered some fact about the sun, it could have instead said that Dhu'l Qarnayn saw (as in 6:78) it setting in a spring of murky water (as P. Newton points out¹²⁶), or quoted Dhu'l Qarnayn's speech directly ("He said, 'I found it setting in...'" as in 18:87-88, 18:95-18:96 and 18:98.

Let us look at the two verses below:

Falammā raā alshshamsa bāzighatan...

When he saw the sun rising in splendour...

Qur'an 6:78

Watarā alshshamsa itha talaAAat...

Thou wouldst have seen the sun, when it rose...

Qur'an 18:17

The verb *raā* meaning "he saw" is used at the start of both verses in reference to the sun ("watarā" means "And you will see"). If verses 18:86 and 18:90 had used *raḥā* ("he saw it") instead of *wajadahā*, perhaps there would be a slight case for claiming that a mistaken perception or an opinion of what it looked like is meant, and certainly if it was then followed by a correction as in this verse:

...watarā alnnāsa sukara wama hum bisukara...

...thou shalt see mankind as in a drunken riot, yet not drunk...

Qur'an 22:2

The Qur'an has many similes, in which the prefix *ka-* is added to a noun to which something is being compared to create the meaning "like". *Ka-* combined with *anna*, which means "that" as in "I think that" is used to mean "as if". The word *kaannahā*, meaning "as if it", could have been used with *raḥā* in 18:86 in a similar way to verses 27:10 and 28:31, which both have the phrase:

...raaha tahtazzu kaannahā jannun...

...he saw it moving (of its own accord) as if it had been a snake...

In another example we have:

...wallā mustakbiran kaan lam yasmaAAahā kaanna fee oḥunayhi waqrān..."

...he turns away in arrogance, as if he heard them not, as if there were deafness in both his ears...

Qur'an 31:7

If this pattern had been used in verse 18:86 it would have meant a mere appearance. It could have had something like the phrase, "*raḥā kaannahā taghrubu fee AAaynin ḥamiatin*" ("he saw it as if it set in a spring of murky water"). It is already clear that the actual words used do not have this meaning.

7. Are the things found described figuratively?

There is an argument¹²⁷ that whatever *wajada* means, the things that Dhu'l Qarnayn found (whether actually or just in his opinion) are described in figurative language. For example, we talk about the sun rising even today, but we mean that actually, the Earth has revolved enough so that the sun becomes visible to us. If the phrases about the sun's setting and rising are meant to be figurative in 18:86 and 18:90 we could even remove the word *wajada* from

those phrases and they should not cause any conflict with what we know in reality. We can define figurative language as a way of expressing with words a meaning that is not necessarily true when read plainly.

If we ignore the context, the phrase about the sun rising on (AAalā, “on” or “above”) a people could possibly be meant as a figure of speech as with the hadith about the sun rising on Thabir mountain (“tashruqa alshshamsu AAalā thabeerin”) (*Sahih Bukhari* vol.5 book 58 no.179).¹²⁸

There it clearly means that the sun starts to shine on the mountain, on which the sun shines earliest in that location because of its height, rather than the sun actually being overhead above the mountain. Another example is *Sahih Muslim* book 20 no. 4643: “...(anything) on which the sun rises or sets”, “...talaAAat AAalayhi alshshamsu wa gharabat”.¹²⁹

Ignoring the context, you could argue that 18:90 is meant to be a figure of speech that Dhu'l Qarnayn found the sun began to shine on the people, just as it does for everyone on Earth when their day begins.

This does not, however, mean that the phrase in which the sun “set in a spring of murky water” could be a figure of speech because 18:86 is not an exact mirror of 18:90. 18:86 is describing the place that the sun sets into using the word “fee” meaning in or into. If 18:90 had said, “wajadahā tagrubu *min*”, meaning “he found it rising *from*” somewhere (i.e. the rising place that the sun emerges out of, as in *Sahih Muslim* book 1, no. 297 quoted above), it would be describing for sunrise the corresponding action of that described in 18:86 for sunset. Then there would be no case that the phrase in 18:90 could be a figure of speech either.

In fact, 18:90 says what the sun did *after* it emerged (perhaps because that's when Dhu'l Qarnayn reached them, and/or because Muhammad's purpose in that phrase was to describe the people, not the sun). If this was mirrored in 18:86 to describe the sun before it disappeared, that verse would have to say something like “he found it set *on* a spring of murky water” (using AAalā instead of fee), which perhaps, if again we ignore the context, would be a figure of speech to convey a reality that the sun started to appear too low to shine on a muddy spring.

Instead the word “fee” is used, and I have not found any evidence that “it set in a spring of murky water” could be a figurative phrase meaning something else. It would also be a highly misleading figure of speech to say that the sun set in a muddy spring when something else is meant, especially considering that wajada was used, that the literal reading fitted a popular legend, and that early Muslims took it literally. There is no evidence in Lane's lexicon suggesting that such a phrase could be used as a figure of speech.¹³⁰ Neither can “fee” mean “behind”.¹³¹ The word “waraa” is used in Arabic to mean behind. Furthermore, the contextual issues strongly imply a literal meaning.

Even if the phrase in 18:90 could be regarded as a figure of speech in the sense that the sun was not exactly overhead during the period when it is described as “rising on a people”, the context of the surrounding words strongly imply that they must at least have been unusually close to it during that part of the day, as discussed above. We can also obviously rule out one literal interpretation where AAalā means that the sun was in physical contact with the people as it was rising. That was set up as a straw man by al-Qurtubi (see above) who pretended that it was the only alternative to a figure of speech interpretation.

The only interpretation of 18:90 that fits with the context within the verse and with the fact that 18:86 is clearly not figurative is that Dhu'l Qarnayn found the sun to be over and/or close to a people when it was still relatively low in altitude after it emerged from its rising place. It is the clear and obvious interpretation, which was the only one found in the early commentaries.

Some might well say that there is a deeper meaning or lesson to be learnt from the account. That may be true, but even if some phrases have a deeper meaning, at the same time the plain reading must have been intended to be understood as a true account since it is obvious

that Muslims without sufficient scientific knowledge would (and did, as we saw above) understand the plain reading as historical narrative rather than only true in a figurative sense.

8. Is the story told from Dhu'l Qarnayn's point of view?

8.1 Why does it not just say, "it was setting"?

Some might try to make the slightly different argument that even if the *wajada* phrase must mean actually finding the sun setting in a spring, the phrase is just described from Dhu'l Qarnayn's point of view, and the author of the verse does not claim it happened as described. Al-Baydawi's comment on 18:86 is sometimes cited in discussions of this topic in which he says:

Perhaps he reached the coast of the ocean and saw it like that as it was not in the limit of his sight, but water, and so it says 'he found it setting' and not 'it was setting'.

al-Baydawi, *Asrar ut-tanzil wa Asrar ut-ta'wil* (my translation).¹³²

It is argued that if Allah claims that the sun really set in a spring, *wajada* would be omitted.¹³³

However, this passage is an account about Dhu'l Qarnayn, so we should expect each statement to be phrased in a way that makes clear how it relates in some way to him and what he did (in this case finding the thing that was the objective of his journey). We saw above various early commentaries giving reports of people explicitly stating that it was understood to mean that the sun actually sets in a spring.

8.2 Does verse 18:83 mean it is just Dhu'l Qarnayn's recollection of the events?

Another way of supporting the claim that the entire story is the point of view of Dhu'l Qarnayn is to use the last two Arabic words of verse 18:83 to suggest that this is meant to be merely how Dhu'l Qarnayn remembered it:¹³⁴

They ask thee concerning Zul-qarnayn. Say, 'I will rehearse to you something of his story.'

Qur'an 18:83

The second phrase is "*qul saatloo AAalaykum minhu thikran*", and in the word-for-word translation says, "Say, 'I will recite to you about him a remembrance". The word *minhu* literally means "of him" or "from him".

The second word here, *talawa* (*saatloo*), means "to recite". It is used 63 times in the Qur'an,¹³⁵ always (except for 91:2 and 2:102) in relation to the reciting of revelations from Allah, and whenever the subject doing the reciting is Muhammad, it means reciting the Qur'an. It has the sense of following, repeating, or reciting what has been done, written, or said.¹³⁶ An example is in verse 10:16, which refers to the Qur'an (I have also quoted the next verse, which emphasises that things which Muhammad rehearses about Allah must be true).

Say: 'If Allah had so willed, I should not have rehearsed it to you, nor would He have made it known to you. A whole life-time before this have I tarried amongst you: will ye not then understand? Who doth more wrong than such as forge a lie against Allah, or deny His Signs?'

Qur'an 10:16-17

In the next example, in a historical narrative about Jesus, we have all the words from the phrase in 18:83. *Talawa* (*natloohu*) is translated "we rehearse", "*AAalayka*" is "to thee", "*mina*" is "of", and "*alththikri*" is "the Message" (literally, "of the remembrance").

Thalika natloohu AAalayka mina al-ayati waalththikri alhakeemi

This is what we rehearse unto thee of the Signs and the Message of Wisdom.

Qur'an 3:58

Two more historical narratives are introduced with *talawa* (translated “rehearse” and “Recite”):

Natloo AAalayka min nabai moosa wafirAAawna bialhaqqi liqawmin yuminoona...

We rehearse to thee some of the story of Moses and Pharaoh in Truth, for people who believe...

Qur'an 28:3

Waotlu AAalayhim nabaa ibnay adama bialhaqqi...

Recite to them the truth of the story of the two sons of Adam...

Qur'an 5:27

We can already see that it is unlikely that 18:83 means that Allah is commanding Muhammad to recite from another man's mistaken recollection. Now we look at the word *thikran*. Lane's Lexicon defines this word as “A reminding”, or “causing to remember” and “An admonition”.¹³⁷

Two highly relevant examples of its usage in the Qur'an occur in Sura al-Kahf. Immediately preceding the passage about Dhu'l Qarnayn we have one about Moses and a servant of Allah, whom Moses follows.

The other said: 'If then thou wouldst follow me, ask me no questions about anything until I myself speak to thee concerning it.'

Qur'an 18:70

The words translated as “concerning it” in this verse are the same as in 18:83, “*minhu thikran*”. Here *minhu* is literally “of it” or “from it”. The reminder cannot be a recollection coming from the mind of the things which Moses might ask about. It is the servant's reminder *about* the things which Moses asks. That is what the phrase means here and in 18:83. All of the major English translations understand it this way.¹³⁸

We can also see that at the end of the Dhu'l Qarnayn story, Allah refers to it as *his* remembrance / reminder.¹³⁹

Allatheena kanat aAAayunuhum fee ghita-in AAan thikree wakanoo la yastateeAAoona samAAan

Those whose eyes were hoodwinked from My reminder, and who could not bear to hear.

Qur'an 18:101 (M. Pickthall's translation)

It could, however, be argued that *thikree* in verse 18:101 does not refer to the preceding story of Dhu'l Qarnayn, but rather to the warnings of the Qur'an in general.

8.3 Verse 91 could not be from Dhu'l Qarnayn's recollection

Finally, as noted by Cornelius,¹⁴⁰ this is explicitly an account told from Allah's point of view. It is clear from the numerous instances of the first person pronoun in reference to Allah (18:84, 18:86, 18:90, 18:91, 18:99, 18:100, 18:101) and the references to Dhu'l Qarnayn in the third person that this is supposed to be Allah's account from Allah's point of view about Dhu'l Qarnayn. Even where we have the speech of Dhu'l Qarnayn (as in 18:87-88, 18:95-18:96 and 18:98), it is preceded with *qala*, “he said”.

Even more importantly, in between the second and third journeys, Allah remarks:

Kathalika waqad ahatna bima ladayhi khubran

So (it was). And We knew all concerning him.

The word-for-word translation says, "Thus. And verily we encompassed of what (was) with him (of the) information".¹⁴¹

The first word, *Kathalika*, is frequently used in the Qur'an and means literally, "like that", and is usually translated "So it was" / "even so" / "thus" in relation to the preceding text, as in 26:59.

The verse below from the preceding story about Moses has the same ending phrase (but without "ladayhi", "with him"), so we can use it to verify the meaning of 18:91. Note that *ahatna* ("we encompassed") and *tuhit* ("you encompass") have the same root.

Wakayfa ta**s**biru AAala ma lam tu**h**it bihi khubra**n**

And how canst thou have patience about things about which thy understanding is not complete?

Qur'an 18:68

The word-for-word translation says, "And how can you have patience for what not you encompass of it any knowledge."¹⁴²

Verse 18:91 cannot be interpreted as coming from Dhu'l Qarnayn's recollection, so it is supposed to be what Allah is saying about the story and himself.

Even if there were not the problems explained above, it would be rather ridiculous to suppose that this passage is meant to be Allah explaining in his own words how he fits into someone else's mistaken recollection.

Given the fact that the story is actually meant to be understood as being told by Allah from Allah's point of view, and the fact that *wajadah* cannot mean he incorrectly thought or it falsely appeared as such to him, and that the things found are described literally, verse 18:86 means that according to Allah, Dhu'l Qarnayn reached the place where the sun sets and actually found the sun setting in a spring. Verse 18:86 would have had to include in the statement some words (some options were examined above) to indicate that this was just Dhu'l Qarnayn mistakenly thinking he had found it or his opinion of what it looked like if that is all it was from Allah's point of view because this is supposed to be Allah's account of the incident.

9. Is the story intended as a fable or metaphor?

Some might possibly argue that the entire account was intended to be understood as a fictional fable rather than a historical narrative from which lessons could be learnt.

There are many problems with this view. Most importantly, in 18:99–18:102 Allah confirms and elaborates on a prophecy by Dhu'l Qarnayn in 18:98 that Allah will destroy the barrier holding back Gog and Magog (mentioned again in 21:96). It must therefore be intended as a true account with future consequences.

Another problem is that 18:83 begins, "They ask thee concerning Zul-qarnain." He was clearly a known historical figure like Moses in the previous passage. It would be deceptive to answer the question with unhistorical details, and we have seen that it was regarded as historical.

The usage of *thikran* in the same verse shows that it means a reminder of something that is real or that really was said or happened. For example, 18:70 has the servant promising to give to Moses a reminder about things that Moses should regard as real history.

As Cornelius points out in his article,¹⁴³ in verse 18:84, Allah claims to have empowered Dhu'l Qarnayn ("Verily We established his power on earth..."). As this verse can only be understood as a claim about true history. It conflicts with the proposed fable intention.

There are also two related things I would like to add here. First, this verse begins with “inna”, which can be translated as “indeed” or “verily”. It indicates emphasis on the subject of the sentence that immediately follows it. In this case that subject is “We” i.e. Allah. The verse is emphasising that it is Allah who gave this famous man his power. It only makes sense as a claim of historical fact. We can also notice other places in the account where Allah is part of the unfolding story (18:86 says, “...We said: ‘O Zul-qarnain! (thou hast authority,) either to punish them, or to treat them with kindness.’”, and 18:90 says, “...a people for whom We had provided no covering protection against the sun.”).

Cornelius also points out that an intended true account fits with the recorded context for this Sura (Questions suggested by Jews to test Muhammad). It was recited in response to the expectation of the questioners that Muhammad would have no knowledge of “the mighty traveller”.

He then notes that 6:25 declares that the unbelievers dismiss the historical stories of people in the Qur’an as fictional (which obviously implies that the Qur’an claims to contain no such things):

Of them there are some who (pretend to) listen to thee; but We have thrown veils on their hearts, So they understand it not, and deafness in their ears; if they saw every one of the signs, not they will believe in them; in so much that when they come to thee, they (but) dispute with thee; the Unbelievers say: "These are nothing but tales of the ancients".

Qur’an 6:25

There are other similar verses including the following:

When Our Signs are rehearsed to them, they say: ‘We have heard this (before): if we wished, we could say (words) like these: these are nothing but tales of the ancients.’

Qur’an 8:31

Note that talawa is also used in the above verse (“tutla AAalayhim” translated “rehearsed on them”). We saw above that it is used in 18:83. Similar examples can be found in verses 25:4-5, 34:43, 68:15 and 83:13. In contrast, the verse below refers to another story in Sura al-Kahf and emphasises that it is meant to be historical:

We relate to thee their story in truth: they were youths who believed in their Lord, and We advanced them in guidance

Qur’an 18:13

The verse below follows a story about Moses:

Thus do We relate to thee some stories of what happened before: for We have sent thee a Message [thikran] from Our own Presence.

Qur’an 20:99

Finally, we saw above that 18:91 has Allah saying that the reminder which he is asking Muhammad to recite is how history actually happened. It seems likely that the purpose of this verse was to emphasise that the story so far had already shown that Allah could answer the testing question from the Jews. It means that like that part of the story, Allah knows everything else there is to know about Dhu’l Qarnayn.

The evidence presented above conclusively demonstrates that the story of Dhu’l Qarnayn was intended to be understood as a historical narrative rather than a fable or any other kind of fictional story.

10. Logistical objections

The www.answering-christianity.com article on this topic¹⁴⁴ makes two logistical arguments against the interpretation that the sun was found actually setting in a spring.

10.1 Bouncing sun

First they suggest that this interpretation implies that the sun must return to the rising place after it sets by taking the reverse journey that it took during the day.

This argument essentially claims that because of the apparent presence of a logistical problem (how does the sun exit the spring in 18:86 so it can rise again?) which even 7th century CE Arabs could identify, Muhammad and his followers could not have believed that the sun literally sets in a spring, so 18:86 does not mean as such.

We have already seen the flawed premise in this argument. Commentators who were unaware of or ignored Greek astronomical discoveries did believe in this interpretation, so they cannot have been concerned about a logistical problem. We saw how Al-Tabari explained in detail that the sun is in heaven prostrating between entering the springs of sunset and sunrise. We also saw that various other commentators and hadith saw no problems with this interpretation.

There may have been other ways of answering this question. For example, people could have imagined the sun floating along an underground stream (i.e. the source of the water from the springs). We saw above the hadith in Ibn Kathir that has Ibn 'Abbas claiming that the sun is like running water. Perhaps Muhammad accepted the belief found in the Hebrew bible¹⁴⁵ that there is an ocean under the Earth and he imagined the springs were part of this ocean. We need not know what, if anything, Muhammad imagined about the sun between it setting in a spring and sunrise. We have seen enough to know that the setting in a spring and literally rising was not regarded as implausible.

10.2 What about the moon?

The other logistical argument is that there is no mention in the Qur'an of the moon setting in a spring, which seems to be implied by a belief that the sun does so.¹⁴⁶

However, we saw above in the hadith at the beginning of the quotation from al-Tabari's *History of the Prophets and Kings* that there was a belief that springs were created for both the moon and sun to set in and rise from and, further down in the quotation, that they both floated in the same ocean across the sky. Earlier in the hadith it also says after describing the path of the sun:

The same course is followed by the moon in its rising, its running on the horizon of the heaven, its setting, its rising to the highest, seventh heaven, its being held underneath the Throne, its prostration, and its asking for permission.¹⁴⁷

Again, we do not need to know what, if anything, Muhammad imagined the moon doing since we know that this question did not prevent early Muslims interpreting 18:86 as the sun actually setting in a spring.

In any case, these are not the only plausibility difficulties in the story. The idea that a large population would be unable to ascend over, dig under nor melt a metal barrier between two mountains nor find another way around the mountains until the barrier is destroyed in the last days sounds ridiculous to modern ears. Nevertheless, people believed it (as can be checked in the commentaries and as we saw above in the *Alexander Legend*) and it is mentioned again in Qur'an 21:96. Ridiculously enough, several expeditions were sent to find Dhu'l Qarnayn's wall/barrier/gate, beginning with one sent by Caliph 'Umar in the 7th century CE, as recorded by al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir.¹⁴⁸

11. Conclusion

The analysis above shows that the various interpretations that have been proposed for verses 18:86 and 18:90 in the Qur'an to reconcile them with scientific facts do not stand up to detailed scrutiny. It is possible that someone might propose another interpretation that has not been considered above. If so, it is highly likely to be even less plausible as the intended interpretation than those I have examined because it would be hard to think of a new one and therefore it would be even less obvious to the hearers or readers of the Qur'an.

In contrast, the evidence overwhelmingly supports the clear and obvious interpretation that this is intended to be understood as a historical account in which Dhu'l Qarnayn travelled until he reached the place where the sun sets and actually found that it went down into a muddy spring near to where a people were, and that he then travelled until he reached the place where the sun rises and actually found that it rose up above a people who lived close to the place where the sun rises.

Qur'an 18:83-101 for reference

Translation (Yusuf Ali)	Transliteration (muslimnet)
18:83 They ask thee concerning Zul-qarnain. Say, "I will rehearse to you something of his story."	Wayas-aloonaka AAan <u>thee</u> alqarnayni qul saatloo AAalaykum minhu <u>thikran</u>
18:84 Verily We established his power on earth, and We gave him the ways and the means to all ends.	Inna <u>makkanna</u> lahu fee al-ardi waataynahu min kulli shay-in <u>sababan</u>
18:85 One (such) way he followed,	FaatbaAAa <u>sababan</u>
18:86 Until, when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it set in a spring of murky water: Near it he found a People: We said: "O Zul-qarnain! (thou hast authority,) either to punish them, or to treat them with kindness."	<u>Hatta</u> <u>itha</u> balagha maghriba alshshamsi wajadaha taghrubu fee AAaynin <u>hami-atin</u> wawajada AAindaha qawman qulna ya <u>tha</u> alqarnayni immā an tuAAaththiba wa-immā an tattakhitha feehim <u>husnan</u>
18:87 He said: "Whoever doth wrong, him shall we punish; then shall he be sent back to his Lord; and He will punish him with a punishment unheard-of (before).	Qala amma man <u>thalama</u> fasawfa nuAAaththibuhu thumma yuraddu ila <u>rabbih</u> fayuuAAaththibuhu AAathaban <u>nukran</u>
18:88 "But whoever believes, and works righteousness,- he shall have a goodly reward, and easy will be his task as We order it by our Command."	Waamma man <u>amana</u> waAAamila <u>salihan</u> falahu jazaaan alhusna wasanaqoolu lahu min amrina <u>yusran</u>
18:89 Then followed he (another) way,	Thumma atbaAAa <u>sababan</u>
18:90 Until, when he came to the rising of the sun, he found it rising on a people for whom We had provided no covering protection against the sun.	<u>Hatta</u> <u>itha</u> balagha matliAAa alshshamsi wajadaha tafluAAu AAala qawmin lam najAAal lahum min dooniha <u>sitr</u>
18:91 (He left them) as they were: We completely understood what was before him.	Kathalika waqad ahatna bima ladayhi <u>khubran</u>
18:92 Then followed he (another) way,	Thumma atbaAAa <u>sababan</u>
18:93 Until, when he reached (a tract) between	<u>Hatta</u> <u>itha</u> balagha bayna alssaddayni

- two mountains, he found, beneath them, a people who scarcely understood a word. wajada min doonihima qawman la yakadoona yafqahoona qawlan
- 18:94 They said: "O Zul-qarnain! the Gog and Magog (People) do great mischief on earth: shall we then render thee tribute in order that thou mightest erect a barrier between us and them?" Qaloo ya tha alqarnayni inna ya/jooja wama/jooja mufsideona fee al-ardi fahal najAAalu laka kharjan AAala an tajAAala baynana wabaynahum saddan
- 18:95 He said: "(The power) in which my Lord has established me is better (than tribute): Help me therefore with strength (and labour): I will erect a strong barrier between you and them: Qala ma makkannee feehee rabbee khayrun faaAAeenonee biquwwatin ajAAal baynakum wabaynahum radman
- 18:96 "Bring me blocks of iron." At length, when he had filled up the space between the two steep mountain-sides, He said, "Blow (with your bellows)" Then, when he had made it (red) as fire, he said: "Bring me, that I may pour over it, molten lead." Atonee zubara alhadeedi hatta itha sawa bayna alsadafayni qala onfukhoo hatta itha jaAAalahu naran qala atonee ofrigh AAalayhi qitrana
- 18:97 Thus were they made powerless to scale it or to dig through it. Fama istaAAoo an yathharoohu wama istataAAoo lahu naqban
- 18:98 He said: "This is a mercy from my Lord: But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will make it into dust; and the promise of my Lord is true." Qala hatha rahmatun min rabbee fa-itha jaa waAAadu rabbee jaAAalahu dakkaa wakana waAAadu rabbee haqqan
- 18:99 On that day We shall leave them to surge like waves on one another: the trumpet will be blown, and We shall collect them all together. Watarakna baAAadahum yawma-ithin yamooju fee baAAadin wanufikha fee alssoori fajamaAAanahum jamAAan
- 18:100 And We shall present Hell that day for Unbelievers to see, all spread out,- WaAAaradna jahannama yawma-ithin ilkafireena Aardan
- 18:101 (Unbelievers) whose eyes had been under a veil from remembrance of Me, and who had been unable even to hear. Allatheena kanat aAAayunuhum fee ghita-in AAan thikree wakanoo la yasta'eeAAoona samAAan

Endnotes and references

¹ Ali, Abdullah Yusuf, *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary*, Lahore: 1934

² <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/bukhari/>

³ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/>

⁴ <http://www.muslimaccess.com/quraan/transliterations/index.htm> and

<http://www.muslimaccess.com/quraan/transliterations/table.html>

⁵ Rev. Thatcher, G. W., *Arabic Grammar of the Written Language* (2nd Ed.), pp.240-241, (London: Julius Groos), 1922

It can be read online at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/9739710/Arabic-Grammar>

or see <http://www.theholybook.org/content/view/9231/12>

⁶ <http://www.learnarabiconline.com/arabic-phrases.shtml>

⁷ See for example, <http://www.bismikaallahuma.org/archives/2005/Quranic-commentary-on-sura-al-kaHF-1886/>

⁸ It should be noted that M. Asad and M. al-Hilali / M. Khan translate *almashriqayni* and *almaghribayni* in 55:17 to mean the two furthest apart rising and setting places or points of sunrise and sunset rather than the easts and the wests. Similarly, M. Pickthall, M. Ali and M. al-Hilali / M. Khan translate *almasharīqi waalmaghribi* in 70:40 to mean the rising and setting places or points of sunrise and sunset rather than the easts and the wests.

⁹ based on searches in Arabic using www.ekabakti.com and <http://hadith.al-islam.com>

¹⁰ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume6/00000025.pdf>

¹¹ based on searches in Arabic using www.ekabakti.com and <http://hadith.al-islam.com>

¹² <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume5/00000155.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume5/00000152.pdf>

<http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume5/00000153.pdf>

<http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume5/00000154.pdf>

¹⁴ based on searches in Arabic using www.ekabakti.com and <http://hadith.al-islam.com>

¹⁵ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/001-smt.php#001.0091> For the Arabic, see Hadith #70 here:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=musl&rcd=92&bab=176&styp=had&hadid=183>

¹⁶ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/001-smt.php#001.0092> For the Arabic, see Hadith #71 here:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=musl&rcd=92&bab=176&styp=had&hadid=184>

¹⁷ See *Sahih Muslim* Book 4, Number 1807 and 1812, for example.

<http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/004-smt.php#004.1807>

<http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/004-smt.php#004.1812>

¹⁸ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/001-smt.php#001.0083>

¹⁹ http://arabic.speak7.com/arabic_pronouns.htm

²⁰ http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Science/sun_set.html

²¹ <http://www.bismikaallahuma.org/archives/2005/quranic-commentary-on-sura-al-kaHF-1886/>

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.* and <http://abdurrahman.org/Qurantafseer/ibnkathir/>

²⁴ In reference to the Dhu'l Qarnayn episode and other tales in the Qur'an, Van Bladel says,

When the worldview of educated Muslims after the establishment of the Arab Empire came to incorporate principles of astrology including the geocentric, spherical, Aristotelian-Ptolemaic world picture – particularly after the advent of the 'Abbāsid dynasty in 750 – the meaning of these passages came to be interpreted in later Islamic tradition not according to the biblical-quranic cosmology, which became obsolete, but according to the Ptolemaic model, according to which the Quran itself came to be interpreted.

Van Bladel, Kevin, "Heavenly cords and prophetic authority in the Qur'an and its Late Antique context", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 70:223-246, p.241, Cambridge University Press, 2007a

²⁵ Toomer, G. J., *Ptolemy and his Greek predecessors*, In *Astronomy Before the Telescope*, Ed. Christopher Walker, p.86, London: British Museum Press, 1996

²⁶ King, David A., "Islamic Astronomy", In *Astronomy Before the Telescope*, Ed. Christopher Walker, p.86, London: British Museum Press, 1996

See also what Hoskin and Gingerich have to say:

In 762 [Muhammad's] successors in the Middle East founded a new capital, Baghdad, by the river Tigris at the point of nearest approach of the Euphrates, and within reach of the Christian physicians of Jundishapur. Members of the Baghdad court called on them for advice, and these encounters opened the eyes of prominent Muslims to the existence of a legacy of intellectual treasures from Antiquity - most of which were preserved in manuscripts lying in distant libraries and written in a foreign tongue. Harun al-Rashid (caliph from 786) and his successors sent agents to the Byzantine empire to buy Greek

manuscripts, and early in the ninth century a translation centre, the House of Wisdom, was established in Baghdad by the Caliph al-Ma'mun. [...] Long before translations began, a rich tradition of folk astronomy already existed in the Arabian peninsula. This merged with the view of the heavens in Islamic commentaries and treatises, to create a simple cosmology based on the actual appearances of the sky and unsupported by any underlying theory.

Hoskin, Michael and Gingerich, Owen, "Islamic Astronomy" in
The Cambridge Concise History of Astronomy, Ed. M. Hoskin, p.50-52, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999

It can be viewed free online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=4nmjGztzfZwC&pg=PA50>

²⁷ For an English translation read:

Guillaume, A., *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 137 & p.139 London: Oxford University Press, 1955

²⁸ For the Arabic, see s302: <http://sirah.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=204&TOCID=242&BookID=160&PID=331>

²⁹ Guillaume op. cit. p.139. For the Arabic, see s307:

<http://sirah.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=204&TOCID=242&BookID=160&PID=337>

³⁰ Guillaume op. cit. p.12

³¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-dad389i4c>

³² http://www.answering-christianity.com/sunrise_sunset.htm

³³ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/bukhari/056-sbt.php#004.056.665>

For the Arabic #3272:

<http://hadith.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=192&TOCID=2078&BookID=24&PID=3283>

or alternatively, but without vocalization marks, see #3198:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=bukh&rcd=5151&bab=5315&styp=had&hadid=5322>

³⁴ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/bukhari/061-sbt.php#006.061.539>

For the Arabic, see #4754:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=bukh&rcd=7423&bab=7477&styp=had&hadid=7479>

³⁵ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/041-smt.php#041.7028>

For the Arabic, see #5213:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=musl&rcd=6587&bab=6719&styp=had&hadid=6720>

³⁶ For the Arabic, see #3749:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=daud&rcd=5395&bab=5438&styp=had&hadid=5439>

³⁷ based on searching in Arabic using <http://www.ekabakti.com/> and <http://hadith.al-islam.com>

³⁸ <http://answering-islam.org/Authors/Newton/spring.html>

³⁹ http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/cornelius/sun_in_muddy_pool.html

⁴⁰ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/004-smt.php#004.1805>

For the Arabic, see #827:

<http://hadith.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=192&TOCID=333&BookID=25&PID=1440>

or alternatively, but without vocalization marks, see #1360:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?app=&hds=musl&rcd=1468&bab=1780&styp=had&hadid=1783>

⁴¹ See post #8 in <http://www.lqtoronto.com/forums/showthread.php?t=241>

⁴² <http://councilofexmuslims.com/index.php?topic=9871.0>

⁴³ http://www.answering-christianity.com/sunrise_sunset.htm

⁴⁴ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume1/00000062.pdf>

⁴⁵ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume1/00000287.pdf>

⁴⁶ http://www.answering-christianity.com/sunrise_sunset.htm

⁴⁷ <http://corpus.Quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=18&verse=86>

⁴⁸ <http://www.learnarabiconline.com/verbal-sentences.shtml>

⁴⁹ <http://www.learnarabiconline.com/gender.shtml>

⁵⁰ Thus, those words cannot refer to **sababan**, "way /road / means" which is masculine

(<http://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=18&verse=84>), such that Dhul Qarnayn found the way / road / means going down into a muddy spring.

⁵¹ <http://www.learnarabiconline.com/verb-conjugation.shtml>

⁵² based on searches in Arabic using www.ekabakti.com and <http://hadith.al-islam.com>

⁵³ <http://www.islamawakened.com/Quran/>

⁵⁴ <http://www.islamawakened.com/Quran/>

⁵⁵ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/001-smt.php#001.294>

For the Arabic, see #157:

<http://hadith.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=192&TOCID=81&BookID=25&PID=297>

or alternatively, but without vocalization marks, see #218:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?app=&hds=musl&rcd=92&bab=381&styp=had&hadid=382>

⁵⁶ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/001-smt.php#001.0296>

For the Arabic, see #158:

<http://hadith.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=192&TOCID=81&BookID=25&PID=298>

or alternatively, but without vocalization marks, see #219:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?app=&hds=musl&rcd=92&bab=381&styp=had&hadid=383>

⁵⁷ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/001-smt.php#001.0297>

For the Arabic, see #159:

<http://hadith.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=192&TOCID=81&BookID=25&PID=299>

or alternatively, but without vocalization marks, see #220:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?app=&hds=musl&rcd=92&bab=381&styp=had&hadid=384>

⁵⁸ It should be noted that while A. Siddiqui translates *maghribihā* in Sahih Muslim as “the place of its setting”, M. Khan translates *maghribihā* as “the west” in exactly the same Arabic phrases for the versions in Sahih Bukhari of the above quoted hadith. *MaṭliAAiha* does not appear in Sahih Bukhari so Khan did not have to translate that word. However, when M. Khan (this time with M. al-Hilali) later translated the Qur’an, *maghriba alshshamsi* in 18:86 and *maṭliAAa alshshamsi* in 18:90 are translated as “the setting place of the sun” and “the rising place of the sun”.

A. Siddiqui, whose translation of Sahih Muslim is used in the main text, also translates *maghribihā* as “the west” in the exact same Arabic phrases about the sun at the end of the world for seven other hadith in Sahih Muslim. These do not mention the rising place. He could not attempt to translate this as “the west” in the above quoted hadith because of the “your setting place” phrase and references nearby to the rising place using *maṭliAAa*, which as we saw earlier, never means east. The motivation for translating *maghribihā* as the west in the other hadith is probably to make it fit with Qur’an 2:258:

...‘But it is Allah that causeth the sun to rise from the east: Do thou then cause him to rise from the west.’...

...fainna Allaha yatee bialshshamsi mina almashriqi fati biha mina almaghribi...

Qur’an 2:258

Here, *almaghribi* does not have the *-hā* suffix, so indeed it can just mean the west. The *-i* suffix is there because a noun following a preposition (*mina* means “from”) takes the genitive case.

There is another obvious motivation for translating *maghribihā* as “the west” rather than “its setting place”. This way the phrase can be interpreted as a figure of speech (with a literal meaning that the Earth’s rotation will reverse), thus saving those important hadith (except when they clearly say “your setting place”) from conflict with scientific knowledge unknown to Muhammad. We saw how some commentators (and some translators) reinterpreted verse 18:86 for the same reason.

These are the four hadith where Khan translates *maghribihā* (“its setting place”) as “the west”. It is clear from the use of the 3rd person (and in other versions, 2nd person) possessive endings that a more specific translation, “its setting place” would have been justified.

Sahih Bukhari Volume 4, Book 54, Number 421

<http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/bukhari/054-sbt.php#004.054.421>

For the Arabic, see #2959:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=bukh&rcd=5006&bab=5019&styp=had&hadid=5020>

Sahih Bukhari Volume 6, Book 60, Number. 159

<http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/bukhari/060-sbt.php#006.060.159>

For the Arabic, see #4271:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=bukh&rcd=6432&bab=6722&styp=had&hadid=6723>

Sahih Bukhari Volume 6, Book 60, Number. 160

<http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/bukhari/060-sbt.php#006.060.160>

For the Arabic, see #4272:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=bukh&rcd=6432&bab=6722&styp=had&hadid=6724>

Sahih Bukhari Volume 9, Book 93, Number 520

<http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/bukhari/093-sbt.php#009.093.520>

For the Arabic, see #6996:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=bukh&rcd=10939&bab=11007&styp=had&hadid=11014>

⁵⁹ <http://hadith.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=192&TOCID=358&BookID=27&PID=620>

#624 or alternatively, but without vocalization marks, see #620:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=nasa&rkd=799&bab=982&styp=hads&hadid=986>

⁶⁰ This is also how *fastaqbala* (derived from *qabala*) is translated in hadith such as *Sahih Muslim Book 007, Number 2803* ("facing qibla", "fastaqbala alqiblata")

<http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/007-smt.php#007.2803>

For the Arabic see #2129:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=mu&rkd=2620&bab=2765&styp=hads&hadid=2766>

⁶¹ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/004-smt.php#004.1448>

For the Arabic see #1089:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=mu&rkd=1113&bab=1459&styp=hads&hadid=1460>

⁶² #18531

<http://hadith.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=192&TOCID=767&BookID=30&PID=18241>

⁶³ <http://www.studyquran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume4/00000009.pdf>

⁶⁴ Van Bladel, Kevin, "Heavenly cords and prophetic authority in the Qur'an and its Late Antique context", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 70:223-246 Cambridge University Press, 2007a

He argues that *sababan* in 18:84, 18:85, 18:89, and 18:92 refers to the popular belief in invisible cords, or courses leading along or up to heaven. Other examples of the word in the Qur'an have this meaning such as 38:10, which challenges unbelievers who think they have dominion over the Earth and heavens to ascend the cords / ropes ("falyartaqoo fee al-asbabi"). Soldiers there (heaven, where the cords go) are defeated and dead unbelievers from the time of Noah, Lot etc. are waiting for judgement there. Another example is 40:36-37 where Pharaoh requests a tower be built so that "I may reach the roads, The roads of the heavens, and may look upon the god of Moses" (Pickthall's translation), or in Arabic, "ablughu al-asbaba. Asbaba alssamawati faattaliAAa ila ilahi moosa". Van Bladel also shows that the word has this meaning in pre-Islamic poetry and early Qur'anic commentaries.

⁶⁵ Van Bladel, Kevin, "The Alexander legend in the Qur'an 18:83-102", In *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, Ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds, p.182, New York: Routledge, 2007b

Most of the article can be previewed online at:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=sqpgtcMXIb0C&printsec=frontcover>

(I have read the full version).

⁶⁶ Van Bladel 2007a *op. cit.* pp.224-226

⁶⁷, *Kitab Al-Ahruf Wa Al-Qira'at* [Book of Dialects and Readings Of The Qur'an], Chapter 1498, p. 1120 in Prof. Ahmad Hasan (trans.), *Sunan Abu Dawud – English Translation With Explanatory Notes*, Volume III. Chapters 1338-1890, XXV, hadith 3991, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1984 quoted in

http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/shamoun/mhmd_on_sunset.html

For the Arabic, see #4002:

<http://hadith.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=192&TOCID=1520&BookID=28&PID=3490>

⁶⁸ For a translation see Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshaf 3rd Edition, Volume 2, p. 743, Lebanon: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, 1987 quoted in (trans.) <http://www.answering-islam.org/Responses/Shabir-Ally/science11.htm>

The phrase translated "spring of slimy water" is actually, "hot spring" in the Arabic. For the Arabic, see:

<http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?>

[tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=2&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=2&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1)

⁶⁹ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/004-smt.php#004.1807>

⁷⁰ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/004-smt.php#004.1812>

⁷¹ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/041-smt.php#041.6904>

⁷² <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/bukhari/053-sbt.php#004.053.353>

⁷³ http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Science/sun_set.html

⁷⁴ Al-Tabari, *History of al-Tabari, Volume 1 - General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, pp. 234-238, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989

⁷⁵ Al-Tabari, *History of al-Tabari, Volume 5 - The Sasanids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, trans. Clifford Edmund Bosworth, pp. 173-174, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999

⁷⁶ Quoted by Shamoun, S. & Katz, J. (trans. Demetrius)

http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Science/sun_set.html

For the Arabic, see:

<http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?>

[tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=1&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=1&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1)

Or with vocalization marks (select the sura 18 and ayat 86):

<http://quran.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=221&BookID=13&Page=1>

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, comment 17563

⁷⁸ Al-Baydawi, *Asrar ut-tanzil wa Asrar ut-ta'wil*, p. 399 Beirut: Dar Al Jil, 1911 quoted in (trans.)

<http://www.answering-islam.org/Responses/Shabir-Ally/science11.htm>

For the Arabic, see:

[http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=6&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1)

[tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=6&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=6&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1)

⁷⁹ al-Baydawi's comments on S. 36:38 as translated and quoted by 'Abd al-Fadi, *Is the Qur'an Infallible?*, p. 29, Villach: Light of Life, 1995 quoted in <http://www.answering-islam.org/Responses/Shabir-Ally/science11.htm>

For the Arabic, see:

[http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=6&tSoraNo=36&tAyahNo=38&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1)

[tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=6&tSoraNo=36&tAyahNo=38&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=6&tSoraNo=36&tAyahNo=38&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1))

⁸⁰ [http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=73&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2)

[tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=73&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=73&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2)

⁸¹ [http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2)

[tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2)

⁸² <http://answering-islam.org/Authors/Newton/spring.html>

⁸³ Van Bladel 2007b op. cit. p.181 (See Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book VII, Chapter VII, Verse 4)

⁸⁴ Van Bladel 2007b op. cit. p.176 & p.197, note 6

See Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet IX

<http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/gilgamesh/tab9.htm> and Tablet I

<http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/gilgamesh/tab1.htm>).

⁸⁵ Alexander, *not the sun, as was incorrectly translated by A. W. Budge according to Van Bladel* (Van Bladel 2007b op. cit. p. 198, note 12)

⁸⁶ A. W. Budge (trans.), "A Christian Legend Concerning Alexander" in *The History Of Alexander The Great Being The Syriac Version Of The Pseudo-Callisthenes*, pp. 144-158, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1889

The translation of the Syriac version and the much of the rest of the book can be viewed online at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=5VI8AAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover#PRA3-PA144_M1

and the translation is also quoted in full at

<http://www.answering-islam.org/Books/Budge/alexander.htm>

⁸⁷ Van Bladel 2007b op. cit. p181

⁸⁸ Van Bladel's thesis is that the Syriac Alexander Legend is the source for the Qur'anic account, rather than the other way around (which is indeed highly unlikely due to strongly evidenced dating of the former to 629-630 CE), or them having a common source. However, I wonder if he dismisses a common source too easily. The key point of his argument appears on page 189-190:

If Alexander's prophecy was composed just for this purpose at this time [i.e. as propaganda for the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius – the prophecy in the Alexander Legend evidently serves this purpose], then the correspondence between the Syriac and the Arabic, which contains the same prophecy reworded, cannot be due to an earlier, shared source. Put differently, the only way to posit a common source is to assume that everything held in common between the Qur'anic account and the Syriac Alexander Legend could have been written for and would have made sense in an earlier context.

However, it seems Dhu'l Qarnayn's prophecy in the Qur'an would have been meaningful before Heraclius and before Muhammad. As we saw, the story of Alexander's gate enclosing Gog and Magog goes back at least as far as Josephus (or, at least enclosing the Scythians, who Josephus says are what the Greeks call the people of Magog in *Antiquities of the Jews* 1:6:1). We also know that the Christians believed that Gog and Magog would wage war across the world in the end times (see Revelation 20:7-10). Thus the simple, Qur'anic version of the prophecy about Gog and Magog would have made sense in a pre-Islamic Christian story about Alexander without needing a contemporary invasion to motivate it *ex eventu*. Very significantly, it appears again briefly in 21:96 in a way that makes clear it has not been fulfilled yet. Van Bladel believes that the omission of the Alexander Legend's pro Roman element in the Qur'anic account reflects some attitude of Muhammad's community (p.196). Instead that element and others could just be adaptations to the common source to turn it into an *ex eventu* prophecy for the specific purposes behind the Alexander Legend. A common source also better explains the fact that in the Qur'anic version, "...not a single Syriac word is found, but rather there are true Arabic equivalents of Syriac words..." (Van Bladel 2007b, op. cit. p.194). This seems surprising if the Qur'anic account is directly related to the Syriac version, but not if there is a common source in Arabic or a 3rd language.

⁸⁹ Stoneman, R., "Alexander the Great in the Arabic Tradition", In *The Ancient Novel and Beyond*, Eds. S. Panayotakis et al., pp. 7-8, Boston, USA: Brill Academic Publishers 2003

A preview can be seen at:

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=P1S1_ogqoqkC&pg=PA3#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁹⁰ Imru' l-Qays, Diwan 158 quoted in Norris, H. T. (transl.), "Fables and Legends" In *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*: "Abbasid Belles-Lettres, Eds. J. Ashtiany et al., p. 138-139, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990

A preview can be seen at:

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=4sFzGGqA6uoC&pg=PA138#v=onepage&q&f=false>

⁹¹ Hāssan b. Thābit quoted in R. A. Nicholson (transl.), *A Literary History of the Arabs*, p. 18, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1907

A preview can be seen at:

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=LBY0AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA18#v=onepage&q&f=false>

⁹² The Arabic text which Nicholson translates is from

Von Kremer, Alfred, *Altarabische Gedichte über die Volkssage von Jemen, als Textbelege zur Abhandlung "Ueber die sudarabische Sage."*, pp.15-16, VIII, lines 6-11, 1867

It can be read online in the google books preview:

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=TsAoAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>

or see it in this thread: <http://www.ye1.org/vb/showthread.php?t=34164>

⁹³ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume6/0000024.pdf>

⁹⁴ <http://www.studyquran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume5/00000152.pdf>

⁹⁵ http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1487

⁹⁶ http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1784

⁹⁷ Al-Tabari, *History of al-Tabari*, op. cit. p.235

⁹⁸ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume6/00000227.pdf>

⁹⁹ http://www.answering-christianity.com/mahir/scientific_errors_rebuttal.htm

¹⁰⁰ http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1487

¹⁰¹ <http://www.tafsir.com/default.asp?sid=55&tid=51606>

¹⁰² <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?>

[tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=55&tAyahNo=17&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?TMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=55&tAyahNo=17&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2)

¹⁰³ <http://Quran.al-islam.com/Tafseer/DispTafsir.asp?>

[nType=1&bm=&nSeg=0&=arb&nSora=55&nAya=17&taf=TABARY&tashkeel=1](http://Quran.al-islam.com/Tafseer/DispTafsir.asp?nType=1&bm=&nSeg=0&=arb&nSora=55&nAya=17&taf=TABARY&tashkeel=1)

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?>

[tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=73&tSoraNo=37&tAyahNo=5&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?TMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=73&tSoraNo=37&tAyahNo=5&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2)

¹⁰⁵ http://www.answering-christianity.com/sunrise_sunset.htm

¹⁰⁶ http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/cornelius/sun_in_muddy_pool.html

¹⁰⁷ See for example: <http://www.bismikaallahuma.org/archives/2005/Quranic-commentary-on-sura-al-kahf-1886/>

¹⁰⁸ http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/cornelius/sun_in_muddy_pool.html

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume5/00000500.pdf>

¹¹⁰ <http://www.islamawakened.com/Quran/>

¹¹¹ <http://www.studyQuran.co.uk/PRLonline.htm>

¹¹² <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/abudawud/030-sat.php#030.3975>

¹¹³ For any elevation, the horizon distance is $\sqrt{(R + E)^2 - R^2}$ where R is the Earth's radius and E is the elevation of the observer above sea level (imagine a right angled triangle placed on a circle with the right angle corner touching the circle and one of the other corners at the circle's centre).

¹¹⁴ Ali, Abdullah Yusuf (text and transl.), *The Holy Qur'an*, Sura 18, Appendix VII, pp.763, Maryland, USA: Amana Corp., 1983 [1934]

¹¹⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-dad389i4c>

¹¹⁶ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume8/00000178.pdf>

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Before the examples of wajada being used in relation to the four senses of taste, smell, sound and touch, we have the example "I found, &c., Zeyd" ("&c." means etcetera and is a placeholder for other forms of the same verb such as "I find", "she finds" and "Zeyd" is the name of a person). This must be an example of finding using the other sense, the faculty of sight.

¹¹⁹ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume8/00000178.pdf>

¹²⁰ <http://www.learnarabiconline.com/verbal-sentences.shtml>

¹²¹ A relatively quick way to see all of them is to do phonetic transliteration searches (<http://www.islamicity.com/ps/default.htm>) for wajad, yajad and tajad (yajidu and tajidu are forms of wajada in the imperfect tense), look at those results which are listed on the root list, and finally check 6:145, 9:92, 12:94, 18:36, 20:10, 20:115, 65:6 and 72:22 separately.

Alternatively, you can use this search:

<http://corpus.Quran.com/search.jsp?q=pos%3Av+%28I%29+root%3Awjd>

That only returns 106 results for some reason. Their dictionary lists 107 occurrences.

We can briefly list the 107 instances of wajada in the Qur'an. The following 10 verses use wajada as an intransitive verb which means having material means or money for a particular purpose: 2:196, 4:92, 5:89,

9:79, 9:91, 18:53, 24:33, 58:4, 58:12, 65:6.

The following 9 verses use wajada as a mono-transitive verb: 2:283, 4:43, 4:89, 5:6, 9:5, 9:57, 12:94, 33:65, 48:22.

The following verses use wajada as a ditransitive or tritransitive verb: 2:96, 2:110, 3:30, 3:37, 4:52, 4:64, 4:65, 4:82, 4:88, 4:91, 4:100, 4:110, 4:121, 4:123, 4:143, 4:145, 4:173, 5:82, 5:82, 5:104, 6:145, 7:17, 7:28, 7:44, 7:44, 7:102, 7:102, 7:157, 9:92, 9:92, 9:123, 10:78, 12:65, 12:75, 12:79, 17:68, 17:69, 17:75, 17:77, 17:86, 17:97, 18:17, 18:27, 18:36, 18:49, 18:58, 18:65, 18:69, 18:77, 18:86, 18:86, 18:90, 18:93, 20:10, 20:115, 21:53, 24:28, 24:39, 24:39, 26:74, 27:23, 27:24, 28:15, 28:23, 28:23, 28:27, 33:17, 31:21, 33:62, 35:43, 35:43, 37:102, 38:44, 43:22, 43:23, 43:24, 48:23, 51:36, 58:22, 59:9, 71:25, 72:8, 72:9, 72:22, 73:20, 93:6, 93:7, 93:8.

¹²² <http://www.studyQuran.co.uk/PRLonline.htm>

¹²³ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume1/00000051.pdf>

¹²⁴ <http://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=18&verse=77>

¹²⁵ <http://corpus.Quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=24&verse=39>

¹²⁶ <http://answering-islam.org/Authors/Newton/spring.html>

¹²⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-dad389i4c>

¹²⁸ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/bukhari/058-sbt.php#005.058.179>

For the Arabic, see #3626:

<http://hadith.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=192&TOCID=2164&BookID=24&PID=3636>

or alternatively, but without vocalization marks, see #3549:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?hds=bukh&rcd=5355&bab=5750&stye=hads&hadid=5758>

¹²⁹ <http://www.cmje.org/religious-texts/muslim/020-smt.php#020.4643> For the Arabic, see #1883:

<http://hadith.al-islam.com/Page.aspx?pageid=192&TOCID=890&BookID=25&PID=3567>

or alternatively, but without vocalization marks, see #3474:

<http://www.ekabakti.com/hadith.php?app=&hds=musi&rcd=4365&bab=4481&stye=hads&hadid=4486>

¹³⁰ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume6/00000024.pdf> and

<http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume6/00000025.pdf>

¹³¹ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume6/00000250.pdf> and

<http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume6/00000251.pdf>

¹³² <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafsir.asp?>

[tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=6&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafsir.asp?IMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=6&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=86&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1) for the

Arabic

¹³³ For example, see <http://sunniforum.net/showthread.php?t=10750>

¹³⁴ http://www.faithfreedom.com/anti_islamic_claims/zulqarnain.html

¹³⁵ <http://www.studyQuran.co.uk/PRLonline.htm>

¹³⁶ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume1/00000350.pdf>

¹³⁷ <http://www.studyQuran.org/LaneLexicon/Volume3/00000136.pdf>

¹³⁸ <http://www.islamawakened.com/Quran/>

¹³⁹ We should note that unlike all other major English translations, A.Y. Ali and M. Asad translate *thikree*, which is literally “my reminder / remembrance” as “remembrance of Me” (<http://www.islamawakened.com/Quran/>). “Remembrance of me / us” is indeed what *thikree* / *thikrina* probably means in 18:28, 20:14 and 20:42. In the other examples of *thikree* / *thikrina* (38:8, 20:124, 53:29 and probably 23:110), the context suggests it instead means “my / our reminder / admonition”. The examples of *thikree* meaning “remembrance of me” are directed to those who already believe rather than to unbelievers who have never been mindful of Allah as in 18:101. Thus it is the majority of translations that are more likely to be correct in 18:101.

¹⁴⁰ http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/cornelius/sun_in_muddy_pool.html

¹⁴¹ <http://corpus.Quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=18&verse=91>

¹⁴² <http://corpus.Quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=18&verse=68>

¹⁴³ http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/cornelius/sun_in_muddy_pool.html

¹⁴⁴ http://www.answering-christianity.com/sunrise_sunset.htm

¹⁴⁵ Gabriel Gohau, trans. and revised by Carozzi, A.V. & Carozzi, M., A History of Geology, p.20, USA: Rutgers, 1990

¹⁴⁶ It is true that whatever we propose that the earliest Muslim community believed about the behaviour of the sun, a similar belief probably existed for the moon. Verse 91:2 uses the word *talawa* (also used in 18:83), which means “he follows” with the sense of doing what someone else has just done (as when repeating the words from Allah when Muhammad recited the Qur’an). There is no sense in which the moon can correctly be said to do what the sun does. It does not produce light, but reflects it. It orbits around Earth, while the sun only appears to do so. This verse either means to say that the sun and moon have similar journeys or that the moon produces light like the sun. The former fits well with verse 36:38, which seems to assume that the sun and moon trace a similar path and could collide if their speeds were not regulated by Allah.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Tabari *History of al-Tabari*, op. cit. p.232

¹⁴⁸ Al-Tabari, Vol. III, pp. 235-239; Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah*, Vol. VII, pp. 122-125 cited in Maududi, Sayyid Abul A'la. *The Meaning of the Qur'an*. Note 71 on Sura al-Kahf. Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1967-79.

Available online at <http://www.englishtafsir.com/Quran/18/index.html>