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## Holiness (Qds) in the Qur'ānic Language

In the present study, an attempt will be made to clarify the meaning of forms derived from the root *QDS*, just as they occur in the *Qur'ān*. The method followed will be that of reading various texts which contain forms of the root *QDS*, both within their immediate and their wider context. The immediate context is the *Qur'ān* itself. The wider context is constituted by the exegetical tradition.<sup>1</sup> A study of a limited number of forms – all counted only ten – can only be a modest contribution to the Qur'ānic sciences. The particularities of the forms in question, however, call for a closer investigation. Moreover, the various elements present in the basic meaning of *QDS* in the *Qur'ān* might justify the publication of an inquiry such as the present one in a collection of studies on “Holiness.”

The texts in which forms from the root *QDS* occur belong both to the Meccan and the Medinan Sūras. Only once a finite form of the verb *qaddasa* is found;<sup>2</sup> in all other places there are nominal forms.<sup>3</sup>

1. The principal commentaries referred to are : Abū-Ga'far Muḥammad b. Garīr al-Tabarī (224/839-310/923), *Gāmi'-al-bayān fī tafsīr-al-Qur'ān* (ed. Cairo 1388/1968; abbr.: ṬABARĪ); Abū-l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamahsarī (467/1075-538/1144), *Al-kassāf 'an ḥaqā'iq-al-tanzīl wa 'uyūn-al-aqāwīl* (ed. Tehrān n.y.; abbr.: ZAMAHSARĪ); Abū-'Abd-Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Rāzī (543/1149-606/1209), *Mafātīḥ-bal-gayb* (ed. Cairo 1352/1933; abbr.: RĀZĪ); Abū-'Abd-Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), *Al-Gāmi' li-aḥkām-al-Qur'ān* (ed. Cairo 1387/1967; abbr.: QURṬUBĪ); 'Abd-Allāh b. 'Umar al-Bayḍāwī (d. ca. 690/1291), *Anwār-al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta'wīl* (ed. Cairo 1305/1888; abbr.: BAYḌĀWĪ. 'Alā'-al-dīn 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Hāzin (678/1279-741-1340), *Lubāb-al-ta'wīl fī mā'ānī-al-tanzīl* (ed. Cairo n.y.; abbr.: HĀZIN); Muḥammad Rasīd Riḍā (d. 1354/1935), *Tafsīr-al-Manār* (ed. Cairo 1972-1975; abbr.: MANĀR).
2. *nuqaddisu laka* (2, 30).
3. *muqaddas* (79, 16; 20, 12; 5, 21); *quddus* (16, 102; 2, 87, 253; 5, 110); *quddūs* (62, 1; 59, 23).

As to the realities to which these forms point, one can distinguish three entities: (1) a place or an area ("valley," "land"); (2) the Spirit; (3) God. Significantly, these forms are not used in relation to human persons.<sup>4</sup>

In the early Meccan Sūras, we come across the expression "the holy valley of Ṭuwā." It is found in two places, 79, 16 and 20, 12, and occurs in the story of Moses indicating the place where God addressed His word to Moses.<sup>5</sup> As in the passage of Exodus, where the place is called *admat-qōdes*,<sup>6</sup> So also in the *Qur'ān*, a form from the root *QDS* is employed. Here the expression is: *al-wādī al muqaddas*. QURṬUBĪ is in full agreement with the exegetical tradition, when he interprets the "holy valley" as "the holy land," i. e., the purified land; it is called 'holy' because God has expelled the unbelievers from it and has populated it with the believers. "He also reports another interpretation, according to which "Ṭuwā" does not indicate the name of the valley, but should be understood as the equivalent of "ṭiwā, which means 'something doubled'." This could then mean here that the place had been sanctified twice.<sup>7</sup>

The relevant point here is that *muqaddas* is understood as synonymous with *muṭahhar*, "purified." The tension which exists in the biblical use of the words derived, respectively, from the roots *QDS*

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4. "Holiness" in a more moral sense is expressed in the *Qur'ān* by words such as *ṣāliḥ* (67, 4; 3, 39, 46, 110; 4, 76; 5, 87 etc.), *ṣiddīq* (4, 69; 5, 75; 12, 46; 19, 41, 57; 57, 19) and *barr* (19, 14, 32; especially in the plural: 3, 193, 198 etc.). All these terms would rather denote the idea of righteousness and piety. As to "saints" who are venerated in cult, one could point to expressions such as *arbāb* (lit.: "Lords%: 3, 64, 80; 9, 31; 12, 39), "those whom they invoke besides God" (16, 20 etc.), and, in some places, *awliyā'* (e. g.: 29, 41; 39, 3; 42, 6, 9). The word *qiddīs* appears in the Arabic language such as it is employed by Christian Arabs.
  5. Because of God's speaking to Moses, the latter receives, in the Arabic tradition, the title *kalīm-Allāh*. Cf. BAYḌĀWĪ on 2, 252. A highly elucidative commentary on the meaning of God's speaking to Moses is found in: "Le tafsīr mystique attribué à Ga'far Ṣādiq." Ed. P. Nwyia, S. J. *MUSJ* 43 (1968) 181-230. *Ibid.* on 20, 12.
  6. Exodus 3, 5. Cf. also Zach 2, 16: *admat ha-qōdes*, referring to the land surrounding Jerusalem.
  7. QURṬUBĪ on 20, 12. ZAMAHSARĪ mentions that the "twofold" expressed by *ṭuwā* can also mean that Moses has been called twice. QURṬUBĪ, moreover, reports the opinion of Ibn-'Abbās, according to whom *ṭuwā* refers to the fact that "Moses had crossed (*ṭawā*) the valley during the night. "This diversity of opinions demonstrates that the meaning of *ṭuwā* is to longer understood.

and ṬHR is not felt here. In the *Bible*, the forms from the root *QDS* refer to the cultic sphere, and imply the presence of a divine energy, whereas the forms from ṬHR are applied to what has to do with the ritual, and express the idea of purity.<sup>8</sup> In the conception of the Muslim exegetes, the "holines" of a land or valley indicates that "the religion is entirely for God" (8, 39). This is also true of 5, 21, a text belonging to the Medinan period. Here are the words of Moses to his people. "Enter the holy land which God has prescribed for you." RĀZĪ mentions a difficulty with regard to the traditional interpretation: "When Moses said 'Enter the holy land,' that land was not sanctified from (*muqaddasa* 'an) polytheism, and was not a dwelling-place of the prophets." This difficulty could be solved according to RĀZĪ, by explaining that the land had been in such a state of holiness/purity at an earlier time. The expression "sanctified from" demonstrates with greater evidence the predominantly negative meaning which the word *muqaddas* connotes, and which is proper to the notion of purity.

With regards to the form *muqaddas*, one last point remains to be considered. The first form from the root *QDS*, which occurs in the *Qur'ān* is precisely this participle. It seems probable that *QDS* did not originate in the Arabic language,<sup>9</sup> but the use of the participle *muqaddas* is neither suggested by the Hebrew text of the *Bible*, nor by the Targum.<sup>10</sup> Rather the occurrence of the participle is an indication that the verb was known in the Arabic language at the time of the proclamation of the *Qur'ān*. This is confirmed also by a Pre-Islamic text.<sup>11</sup>

A second form from the root *QDS*, which also is found in the Meccan Sūras, is the noun *quds*.<sup>12</sup> It occurs for the first time in

8. Cf. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Ed. G. KITTEL. Transl. G. W. BROMILEY. Grand Rapids 1964 etc. I, p. 89ff. .

9. K. AHRENS, "Christliches im Qoran." *ZDMG* 9 (1930) 15-68; 149-190. p 32.

10. Cf. J. HOROVITZ, "Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran." *HUCA* 2 (1925) 145-227. p. 218.

11. See: A. FISCHER, "Al-Maqdisi und al-Muqadqasi" *ZDMG* 60 (1906) 404-410.

12. Or, according to some, *quds*. Cf. BAYDĀWĪ on 2, 87. *Al-Quds*, as name for the Temple, and hence for the entire city of Jerusalem, is not qur'ānic. In the .qur'ān, the Temple is called *al-masgid* (17, 7).

16, 102,<sup>13</sup> and, later in three passages of the Medinan Sūras.<sup>14</sup> The word is always employed in the expression *rūḥ-al-qudus*, "the Holy Spirit."<sup>15</sup> In 16, 102 the context is that of the revelation of the *Qur'ān*, whereas the other passages are of a christological nature. Since 2, 87 is, in the actual text of the *Qur'ān*, the place where the expression is found for the first time, we will concentrate on the exegesis of this verse. BAYDĀWĪ resumes the exegetical tradition in the following way :

"*bi-rūḥ-al-qudus* : with the Holy Spirit (*muqaddasa*, lit. : "sanctified"), as one says 'Ḥātīm [the man] of generosity'<sup>16</sup> and 'a man of righteousness, The reference here is to Gabriel, or to the spirit of Jesus, who is thus characterized because of his being pure (*li-ṭahāratihī*) from the touch of Satan or because of his favour with God, and therefore the Most High connects this [qualification] with the soul<sup>17</sup> of Jesus ; or because he [i.e., Jesus] has not been formed by means way of sexual intercourse ; or [is meant] the Gospel ; or the name of God by which he [Jesus] brought to life the dead."<sup>18</sup>

The identification of *rūḥ-al-qudus* does not concern us here directly. What is relevant for the purpose of the present study is the meaning given to the word *qudus*. This meaning becomes clear from the reasons given for the employment of the term. If Jesus is the person meant here, then the following reasons for the use of the word "holiness" are mentioned : (1) his purity from contact with Satan ; (2) his favour (*karūma*) with God ; (3) his miraculous generation.

13. The dating of this Sūra is disputed. There are several Muslim exegetes who consider the part of Sūra 16 in which v. 102 is found as Medinan. This opinion is also held by some non-Muslim scholars. Cf. R. BLACHÈRE, *Le Coran*. Paris, Maisonneuve, 1949-1950. pp. 396, 414.

14. 2, 87, 253; 5, 110.

15. The Hebrew and Syriac equivalents of this expression have been studied by Th. O' SHAUGHNESSY, S. J., *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*. Rome 1953. pp. 42ff..

16. Reference is made here to Ḥātīm al-Ṭā'ī, a personage well-known in *adab* literature, "the most finished example of the pre-Islamic knight [---] Proverbial for his generosity and hospitality." Cf. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition. Leiden/London 1960ff.. III, 274f..

17. One notices here the lack of precision in the vocabulary of BAYDĀWĪ. He considers *nafs* as the equivalent of *rūḥ*. This is not in accordance with the qur'ānic employment of the terms.

18. BAYDĀWĪ on 2, 87.

As to the first meaning, it has already been pointed out that the equation between "holiness" and "purity" is the most obvious explanation given by the commentators in a number of places. The specification of this purity, as a being free from the "touch of Satan," goes back upon a Ḥadīṭ, according to which Jesus and his mother are the only human beings who have not been tainted by contact with the forces of evil. The second reason, which introduces the idea of "favour," brings a more positive note to the concept of holiness. This has been more aptly expressed by Ḥāzin, who offers the following explanation: "*al-qudus*, that is God, and the spirit of Jesus was connected with it, as an expression of honour and favour and special election, as one says: 'servant of God,' 'handmaid of God,' 'the house of God' and 'the she-camel of God'."<sup>19</sup> Thus it appears that, by virtue of a special relation to God, a person can be called "holy."<sup>20</sup> The third reason, again, refers to the idea of purity, but reduces it to the fact of being exempt, in the process of coming into being of a person, from what has to do with "the lions, the wombs and menstruations" (thus literally BAYDĀWĪ). This explanation is already found in the commentary of ṬABARĪ, who applies this both to Gabriel and to Jesus:

"God called Gabriel 'spirit' and connected this with 'holiness,' because God created him as a spirit from Him, without generation by a father who generated him. Therefore He called him 'spirit' and connected this with 'holiness.' Holiness means purity (*tuhr*). Likewise Jesus, the Son of Mary, was called a spirit for God, because he was created as a spirit from God, without generation by a father who generated him".<sup>21</sup>

No special reason is given by BAYDĀWĪ for the use of *qudus* in its application to the Gospel, but a more recent commentary, which identifies the Holy Spirit with the Spirit of Revelation, offers the following explanation: It is designated with 'the Holy Spirit,'

19. ḤĀZIN on 2, 87.

20. The concept of *karāma* is further developed in Islamic prophetology. There it is understood as a sign of God's favour. It especially manifests itself in miracles. Cf. H. STIEGLECKER, *Die Glaubenslehren des Islam*. Paderborn 1962. pp. 158ff., 672ff..

21. ṬABARĪ, on 2., 87. ḤĀZIN also refers to the coming into being of Jesus. His commentary, however, concerns more directly the word *rūḥ* in reference to 21, 91.

because the doctrine formed by it is holy, or because it makes holy the souls".<sup>22</sup>

The various commentators normally do not offer an explanation of the meaning of *qudus* if it is to be understood as equivalent to *quddūs* and as referring to God. One exception is the Šūfī commentary of al-Tustarī, who interprets *qudus* as "untainted by offsprings (*aulād*), partners (*šurakā'*) and a consort (*šāḥiba*)."<sup>23</sup>

We thus see that the predominantly negative meaning of QDS is maintained in the way the expression *rūḥ-al-qudus* is interpreted. At the same time we notice that a more positive sense can be attributed to the word *qudus*, when it is understood as expressing a special relation to God, the Holy One. This brings us to a consideration of the remaining texts, where forms from the root QDS are employed in direct reference to God.

There are three texts in the *Qur'ān* where holiness refers directly to God. These texts are found in Sūras belonging to the Medinan period. The first passage reports the words uttered by the Angels: "We praise you and we proclaim your holiness."<sup>24</sup> Various ways of interpreting the text are listed by RĀZĪ. Starting from the affirmation of the equivalence of "holiness" and "purity," he enumerates: (1) "we declare you pure," that is we describe you with the excellence and the might that are fitting to you; (2) "we purify ourselves from our offences and our sins"; (3) "we purify our actions"; (4) "we purify our hearts from turning them to another than you."

A lexicographical curiosity is reported by ZAMAḤSARĪ at this place. His commentary runs as follows: "Praising (*tasbiḥ*) is declar-

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22. MANĀR on 2,87. When the older commentaries speak in this place of the Gospel as possibly meant by the expression *rūḥ-al-qudus*, they explain: "because it brings if life the hearts." This explanation views directly the word *rūḥ*, and not *qudus*.
23. Quoted by G. BOWERING, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam. The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Šāfī Sahl At-Tustarī* (d. 283/896.) Berlin/New York 1980. p. 166. The passage refers to 2, 87.
24. The construction with *li* in *nuqaddisu laka* (lit.: "We make holy for you") presents some difficulty to the commentators. R. BLACHÈRE remarks: "On a lieu de voir ici un emprunt à l' hébreu ou à l' araméen." *Le Coran*. Paris, Maisonneuve, 1949-1950. p. 736 note. The expression is reminiscent of the Jewish prayer of the *qeddsua*. Certain Muslim exegetes equate *taqdīs* with *ṣalāt* (ritual prayer). This opinion is reported by ṬABARĪ and ḤĀZIN.

ing that God is far removed from [any] evil, and thus also [is the meaning of] declaring him holy (*taqdis*) by those who spread out (*sabaḥa*) on the land and the sea and rush forward (*qds*) on the earth when they proceed far." Here ZAMAḤSARĪ clearly makes an attempt to show that *QDS* is a genuine Arabic formation by mentioning two less usual significations of *SBḤ* and *QDS*. The point made here becomes clearer in the commentary of BAYḌĀWĪ, who adds: When someone has purified a thing, one says *qaddasa*, because the one who purifies something removes the impurities [far] from it."

The passage of 2,30ff. is of great importance for the *qur'ānic* angelology; however, an investigation of this aspect would lead as beyond the limits of the present study. For our purpose it is sufficient to note that the verb *qaddasa* is understood here as expressing an act of declaring or making pure by removing from it what does not belong to it.

In verses 62,1 and 59,23, finally, the form *quddūs*<sup>25</sup> is found as an epitheton of the Most High. Both texts are, according to their form and their place in the respective *Sūras*, formulas of praise. *Sūra* 62 begins with the words: "[All] that is in the heavens and that is on the earth praises God, the King, the Most Holy, the Mighty, the Wise." *Sūra* 59 concludes with a longer hymn:

- 22 He is God—there is no divinity but He, the Knower of the invisible and the visible. He is the Merciful, the Compassionate.
- 23 He is God—there is no divinity but He, the King, the Most Holy, the Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, the Mighty, the Powerful, the Sublime. Glory be to God above all that they associate [with Him].
- 24 He is God, the Creator, the Producer, the Shaper. To Him [belong] the Most Beautiful Names. [All] that is in the heavens and on the earth praises Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.<sup>26</sup>

25. Also read *quddūs*. Morphologically, the word is an intensive. We translate it as "Most Holy."

26. This passage constitutes the longest enumeration of Divine Names found in the *Qur'ān*. For a complete list of the 99 Most Beautiful Names, as they are known in the Muslim Tradition, and for the theological questions connected with them, cf. the relevant article by L. GARDET in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition. Leiden/London 1960 etc.. I,714ff..

Similar hymns of praise are also found among the Jewish prayers.<sup>27</sup> In the Islamic exegesis, reference is made to a "Praise of the Angels,"<sup>7</sup> like the following: "Much Praised and Most Holy is the Lord of the Angels and the Spirit."<sup>28</sup>

Two different explanations of the word *quddūs* are given by the commentators. On the one hand, it is considered to be the equivalent of "pure," and means that God is pure from all that others wrongly ascribe to Him. On the other hand, it is interpreted as a synonym of *mubārak*, "blessed." In the qur'ānic language, *BRK* refers to a "beneficent force, of divine origin, which causes superabundance in the physical sphere and prosperity and happiness in the psychic order."<sup>29</sup> With reference to God, as, for example in the expression *tabārak-Allāh*, *BRK* is understood as a means to describe God's Majesty and Glory.<sup>30</sup> Thus, at the place where "holiness" is most immediately connected with its Source and its Paramount Subject, there appears in the qur'ānic exegesis the intimation of a positive sense of this term, whereas, in other places, the negative sense is emphasized. This positive sense-content, however, is an affirmation of God in an eminent and transcendent way, for which HĀZIN employs the expressions *irtafa'a* and *ta'ālā*.<sup>31</sup>

This brief investigation into the various ways of explaining the root *QDS* in the exegetical tradition of the *Qur'ān* thus shows that "holiness" is, first of all, understood as a "negative" quality, synonymous with "purity," and expressing the absence of all undue and inappropriate elements in a given subject. For realities of the created order, holiness can also indicate the presence or attribution of

27. R. BLACHÈRE notes, in relation to 59, 23: "Ce Verset et le suivant rappellent les eulogies juives, par le fond et le vocabulaire." *Le Coran*. Paris, Maisonneuve, 1949-1950. . p. 981. See also p. 823 note, and J. HOROVITZ, *HUCA* 2 (1925) p. 219.

28. Thus for example ZAMAĤSARI on 59, 23. The Tradition mentions that this prayer was said by Muḥammad at the *rukū'* and *sugūd* during the ritual prayer.

29. Cf. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I, 1032.

30. Thus HĀZIN on 7, 54. He adds: "*Baraka* means abundance of all good things." It is unnecessary to point to the cognate words in other Semitic languages. RĀZĪ presents another explanation of the expression *tabārak-Allāh*. According to him, it indicates God's unending permanence (*li-tubātihi lam yazul*; on 2, 99).

31. On 7, 56. Both verbs have the meaning of "being high, exalted."



a special relation to God; However, only God can really be declared holy. The affirmation of God's holiness (*al-taqdīs*) is understood as the very essence of prayer. This affirmation thus becomes a dynamic, never-ending declaration of the Islamic faith, of which the initial and basic expression is a negation : *lā ilāho illā huwa* : "there is no divinity but He."