

Is the Lifecycle of the Universe Foretold in the Qur'an?

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In an attempt to prove the authenticity of the Qur'an, Muslims often claim that the Qur'an tells us of scientific facts long before they have been discovered. One such claim^[1] is that an image of a planetary nebula and recent discoveries about the color of the Universe have confirmed statements made in the Qur'an and the Hadith revealing the lifecycle of the Universe. This paper shows however, that the claims are made using erroneous data which actually disprove what Muslims have said.

What is Claimed from the Qur'an

The recent image^[2] on the right of the Cat's Eye nebula taken by the Hubble Space telescope is being used to confirm the following verse from the Qur'an^[3]:

Qur'an Sura 55:37

“Then when the heaven is rent asunder, and it becomes rosy or red like red-oil, or red hide - [See V.70:8]”

The Cat's Eye Nebula



The red in the picture along with its explosive appearance could only be seen in modern times therefore the verse given above has foreknowledge as no one could have seen this detail before telescopes were invented. This is how the universe will end.

What is Claimed from the Hadith

As a digression from an experiment, two astronomers^[4] from The John Hopkins University decided to measure the color of the universe. Their initial findings was that it is turquoise. This fits in perfectly with a verse from the Hadith^[5] which says:

“In our time the heavens are green but on that day they will become red..”

Combined with the final red stage shown by the Cat's Eye Nebula, this proves that Muhammed must have had divine knowledge from Allah.

Problems with the Cat's Eye Nebula

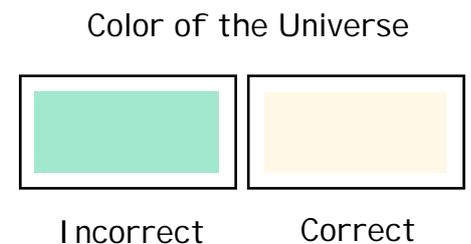
The Cat's Eye Nebula is a planetary nebula where a star has thrown off its outer layers into space and the gas is illuminated by the remains of the star. The Sun is likely to end its life this way. The image taken shows vivid colors of green and a majority of red. However, it is very important to consider with this well publicised image, that it is a **false color** image, i.e. it would not appear like this to an observer. Different gases glow at specific wavelengths of light, so by using a filter of that wavelength, it is possible to observe just the hydrogen, for example, in a gas cloud. By using different filters, different gases can be observed. By giving different colors to the individual black and white images obtained from the filters. It is then possible to create the composite seen above where hydrogen is red, oxygen is blue and nitrogen is green. (See how this was done at [6]).

Therefore, using such images to prove a case about color is totally false as the colors can be chosen arbitrarily. As it happens however, the original claim is very lucky as the true color of this nebula, is in fact reddish.

So, does this then show that the Qur'an is correct? No. When we read the verse from the Qur'an, we are talking about the heaven or the sky being torn apart. This is totally different to what is happening in the Cat's Eye Nebula where a star is shedding outer layers. This is a normal part of stellar evolution and is observed throughout the Universe and therefore has nothing to do with the heavens. In fact, the amount of 'sky' occupied by this nebula is about one sixtieth the diameter of the moon so does not represent the heavens. If indeed it were possible to tear the sky apart, then no one is going to know what the outcome would be or what color it may appear. If the Qur'an talked about stars evolving like this, then there would be a good case for foreknowledge.

Problems with the Universe Color

Unfortunately, the astronomers who had revealed the color of the Universe had made an error in their calculations. As good scientists, they revised their work^[7] with the corrected color being beige and almost indistinguishable from white. The two colors are shown on the right.



When looking at color, it is important to distinguish between hue, luminosity and saturation which make up what we broadly call color. We would easily say that the color of the Universe is black, but black is not a color, it is an intensity or luminosity. All hues (e.g. red, green etc) will appear black when their intensities are very low.

The immediate problem with the statement from the Hadith is that it is clearly wrong as shown by the corrected color measurements. However, it could be argued that the latter half of the statement ('will become red') is correct when we consider what is contributing to the color, but again, is this correct? The light we can see in the Universe comes from starlight. When we look up at the night sky, we can see that there are many different colors to the stars ranging from red (e.g. Betelgeuse) to blue (e.g. Vega), caused by their different temperatures. Just as white light is made up of equal amounts of red, green and blue (take a close look at a computer monitor), so the beige color of the Universe is made up of the combinations of the different stars. As the stars age and their fuel supplies become used up, then the stars will become cooler and redder and certainly the color of the universe will change. Ultimately, however, the stars will cease to shine and there will be no color at all - the Universe will become truly black. Is this what the Hadith is referring to? Obviously not as it will not happen in human lifetime, and as with the current color of the Universe, it is not actually possible to see it unless specialised equipment is used. If this was a sign, then it is essentially an invisible one and so rather pointless unless it was written for future understanding. But the correct understanding has come from instruments and not the Hadith. Now, if the Hadith had stated that the Universe would end up cold and black, then that would be more impressive. It is suggested that the author of the Hadith may have been visualising the colors of a sunset and imagined that the Universe would end as a day ends, writing in a more poetic sense. Seeing that the heavens at present are not green, it would be interesting to know what the author was meaning.

So where does all this come from? Is it possible that the so called foreknowledge could have come from earlier sources?

What does the Bible say?

The Bible^[8] talks of the destruction of the Universe hundreds of years before the Qur'an was written so it cannot be ruled out that the author of the Qur'an may have been inspired by Scripture.

Revelation 21:1 says:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for **the first heaven and the first earth had passed away**, and there was no longer any sea.*

So we know from this verse that the present universe will come to an end i.e. not eternal.

Then, in 2 Peter 3:10-13:

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the **elements will be destroyed by fire**, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the **destruction of the heavens by fire**, and the **elements will melt in the heat**. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Here, it is very clear that the heavens will be destroyed by fire. Any notion of melting and burning in the Qur'an can easily have come from the Bible. Again, we cannot know what this would be like, but with little imagination this would also describe destruction with a rose-red color - perhaps much like the appearance of a fiery sunset.



Conclusion

Neither the Qur'an nor the Bible were written to be scientific text books, therefore it is wrong to claim that they give scientific foreknowledge, particularly as this is not the aim of either text. Although this is not generally done by Christians, Muslims are very keen to say that the Qur'an gives scientific knowledge unknown at the time. If this is so, then a simple question can be asked: Why didn't people who read the Qur'an before the discoveries were made, gain that scientific knowledge? Clearly, what has been claimed in this paper is yet another example of Islamic 'non-science', that is, taking modern science and trying to force it to fit the Qur'an or the Hadith. In this example, a measurement error was used to confirm a Hadith, thus showing that the Hadith itself is in error. Claiming that the outer layers of a star represent the universe is also a large leap of imagination with no scientific basis. This approach could be taken with the Bible as well, but no one does it - why? Because there simply is no need as it already agrees with history, archaeology and science.

[1] Zaman S., Lifecycle of the Universe Foretold in the Qur'an, www.nessia.org/artgen.aspx?id=7

[2] Harrington J.P. & Borkowski K.J., University of Maryland, 1999, antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap991031.html

[3] Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali M. & Khan M. M., Interpretation of the Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in the English Language, Darussalam, 1997

[4] Glazebrook K. & Baldry I., Astronomers Determine Color of the Universe, John Hopkins University, 2002, www.jhu.edu/news_info/news/home02/jan02/color.html

[5] Upon the authority of `Abdur-Razzâq, Ibn Jarîr, `Abd bin Humayd, and others in Tafsîr ibn Kathîr, al-Jâmi`u li-Ahkâmi-l Qur'ân of al-Qurtubî, Jâmi`u-l Bayân `An Ta'wîl Ayy al-Qur'ân of at-Tabarî, ad-Durr al-Manthûr fi-Tafsîr bi-l Ma'thûr of as-Suyûtî

[6] http://hubblesite.org/sci.d.tech/behind_the_pictures/meaning_of_color/catseye.shtml

[7] Glazebrook K. & Baldry I., Color of the Universe Corrected by Astronomers, John Hopkins University, 2002, www.jhu.edu/news_info/news/home02/mar02/color.html

[8] Holy Bible New International Version, International Bible Society, 1994