

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

THE SUN SETTING IN MURKY WATERS

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This is a matter that has been raised quite frequently as regards to the passage in question.

QUESTION

The Quran says in Surah Kahf (Chapter 18), verse 86 that the sun sets in murky water. This is unscientific and the Sun never sets in water. What does the verse mean?

Scientifically it can also be argued does the sun ever set? We know that the setting of the sun and rising of the sun is merely a **perception of the rotation of the earth**. However, this phrase is allowable in common modern speech.

However, let us have a look at the verse and the word used in Arabic.

018.086

"Until, when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it (Arabic: wajadaha) setting in a spring of murky water: Near it he found (Arabic: wajada) a community: We said: "O Dhul-qarnain! (you have authority,) either to punish them, or to treat them with kindness."

الشمس وجدها تغرب في عين

wajadaha

[Illustration - Joseph Islam](#)

The experience of Dhulqarnain as regards the sun setting has been described as 'Wajada' which some of commentators translate as 'found and others as 'appeared'.

The word 'Wajada' is not restricted merely to mean 'found' in the literal sense (as has also been used in the same verse) but also denotes a **perceptive nature**. It is not a stretch of any language to say that one found the sun setting in the sea at sunset. This does not mean the sun actually sets in the sea which would be a preposterous idea even to the most ignorant of people. It merely denotes the perception of the setting which is proved by the oldest lexicons which capture how the word was in use and understood by the Arabs to which the Quran was revealed.

and وَجَدَ and جَدَّة ; (L, K ;) and (وَجَدَهُ) aor. يَجِدُ ; (K ;)' but this form of the verb is not found in the lexicons, [the K only accepted,] (MF,) in the sense here assigned to it ; (TA ;) 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 ; (F, in the K and in the Baṣā'ir,

[Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon](#) [1]

However, no doubt some of the fanciful ways in which this passage has been interpreted by early Islamic authorities can be seen even amongst the earliest of historians for example, Ibn Ishaq who captures a poem by Tubba.

And left those men an example to the discerning.
Dhu'l-Qarnayn before me was a Muslim
Conquered kings thronged his court,
East and west he ruled, yet he sought
Knowledge true from a learned sage.
**He saw where the sun sinks from view
In a pool of mud and fetid slime.**

Before him Bilqis my father's sister
Ruled them until the hoopoe came to her. [2]

Here is what the Orientalist scholar, Alfred Guillaume himself had to say about the complete poem **(which this section is a part)** in the earliest Biography of the Prophet by Ibn Ishaq (Translated to English by A Guillaume)

"This poem is spurious; it is not difficult to see how Ibn Ishaq persuaded himself to incorporate such an obvious forgery in a serious historical work. At this point Tabari introduces a long passage from Ibn Ishaq. A much longer story via Uthman b.Saj given by Azr.i.79" [3]

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 8, Page 2924

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] GUILLAUME. A, The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah, Oxford University Press, Page 12

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