

# Evaluating the Effect of Occasions of Revelation (*Asbāb al-Nuzūl*) on the Literal Understanding of the Verses of the Holy Qur'an

KOSAR KHEIROLLAHZADEH<sup>1</sup> 

*Master of Qur'an and Hadith Sciences, Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies Research Institute, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran*

FARZANEH ROHANI MASHHADI<sup>2</sup> 

*Assistant Professor, Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies Research Institute, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran*

Article History: Received 10 January 2023; Accepted 20 March 2023

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

The present study aims to address the issue of how occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) affect the understanding of the Qur'an. It also provides a basis for evaluating the impact of cultural studies on Qur'anic comprehension in prospective research. To accomplish this objective, the narratives of occasions were collected from three well-known resources, regardless of their documental and textual credibility, and their role in understanding the relevant verses was quantitatively and qualitatively evaluated. Consequently, twelve qualitative roles were identified, and each narration (*hadith*) was quantitatively assessed with a score ranging from zero to three. Statistical analysis of the data revealed that 10% of the entire Qur'anic verses have occasions of revelation in the mentioned sources. About 10% of the studied verses (1% of the Qur'an) are completely dependent on the occasions of revelation to be understood, according to the evaluation method and assumptions of the survey. In 72% of the verses (7% of the Qur'an), the occasions of revelation have an impact on a better understanding of the verse, even though in the first encounter the verse has a customary appearance and no ambiguity. Likewise, 8% of the

1. E-mail address: kheirallahzade76@gmail.com

2. Corresponding author. E-mail address: f\_rohani@sbu.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/jiqs.v2i1June2023.1>

Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



occasions of revelation examined have no impact on the understanding of the verse. Thus, the role of the occasions of revelation on the apparent meanings of the verses, although undeniable, does not create a significant dependency, since the impact of most of these narrations (82%) is as much as a slight improvement in the initial understanding of the verse (scores 1 and 2), so that the occasions of revelation are not the sole means of achieving a secondary understanding of that verse.

---

KEYWORDS: Apparent meanings of the Qur'an, Interpretation of the Qur'an, Occasions of revelation, Qualitative and quantitative evaluation.

---

## *1. Introduction*

The interaction between the Qur'an and the culture of that era is an issue that has recently attracted the attention of scholars more than ever. The ancient exegetes did not disregard this matter and included it as one of their resources for exegesis (*tafsīr*), which is evident from their attention to occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) as a source of understanding the Holy Qur'an. The commentators of the Qur'an have always explained and sometimes criticized the occasions of revelation under the verses, using them as aids in understanding those verses.

Today, with the emergence of innovative theories advocating a paradigm shift in Qur'anic studies and encouraging a more historically informed approach to this text as a scientific method, the subject of the Qur'an's susceptibility to the culture of the time of its revelation has become a significant matter. This choice significantly will influence an exegete's interpretive methodology and his or her understanding of the Qur'anic text. As a result of this paradigm shift, a spectrum of opinions and perspectives has arisen among Qur'anic scholars and exegetes. Some argue that the Qur'an is influenced by the culture of the time of its revelation, and the understanding of all its verses is contingent upon cultural studies. In other words, without studying the culture of the time of revelation, an accurate understanding of the Qur'an is impossible. Neglecting this interpretive source would lead to incorrect interpretations. However, others believe that the understanding of the Qur'an is independent of the cultural studies of the era of revelation, asserting that syntax, vocabulary, context, and textual structure are sufficient for comprehending the Qur'anic verses.

In addition, a middle view can be found, with some suggesting that a minimal understanding of certain Qur'anic verses is dependent on the study of the cultural context of the era of the revelation. Therefore, for the comprehension of these specific verses, an examination of the cultural context of the era of the revelation is deemed necessary (Khodamoradi et al. 2022).

Regarding the analysis and judgment regarding the above-mentioned issue, it can be broken down into smaller sub-issues and examined from various perspectives. This research focuses on the issue of the impact of occasions of revelation on the understanding of Qur'anic verses and restricts its data to three sources within the Sunni corpus of *ḥadīth*. Consequently, this article is limited to only one aspect of studying the Qur'anic cultural context, specifically focusing on the attention of Qur'anic exegetes to the occasions of revelation. However, it is important to note that while collecting the occasions of revelation into a dataset, two types of evaluations regarding these narrations (*aḥādīth*) are intended. First, how and in what way has the occasions of revelation affected the understanding of the verse? Second, how is this impact assessed quantitatively?

The first evaluation is qualitative and requires an appropriate description of how the occasions of revelation influence the understanding of the verses through an open coding method. Eventually, it aims to categorize and introduce qualitative types of influences. The second evaluation is quantitative that should assign a numerical value, based on a predefined coding scheme, to measure the impact of each narration on the understanding of the verses. This method allows for a precise assessment of the effectiveness of the occasions of revelation.

It is clear that the result of this study cannot be generalized to the principle of the effect of the occasions of revelation on the understanding of the Qur'an or the effect of the entire occasions of revelation on the understanding of the verses. Rather, it only determines the effectiveness and usefulness of the occasions of revelation, reported in Sunni sources, on the interpretation of the respective verses. As a next step, one can explore the occasions of revelation within the Shi'a tradition or study the impact of other cultural factors quantitatively and qualitatively.

The benefit of these research endeavours lies in their potential to serve as a paradigm for resolving the challenge of comprehending the Qur'an in contemporary times, especially when access to the contextual cues of the time of revelation is limited. Despite the attention of Qur'anic exegetes and scholars in the field of Qur'anic studies to the role of the

occasions of revelation in comprehending Qur'anic verses, as Ma'refat (Ma'refat 2002, 1: 97) indicates, discerning the occasions of revelation has proven to be quite arduous. This challenge stems from the fact that the early scholars did not extensively document significant material in this regard, except for a limited amount that may not be entirely conclusive. Perhaps, one reason for this lack of precise documentation was their familiarity with the context, leading them to believe that there is no necessity to record their knowledge and observations as future references. Subsequently, narrations on this matter emerged, but most of them possessed weak chains of transmission and were deemed untrustworthy.

In such a scenario, a serious question is whether, given the obstacles to accessing the occasions of revelation, one can claim that the understanding of many Qur'anic verses is so dependent on the understanding of these narratives that if the occasions of revelation are not accessible, the understanding of some Qur'anic verses becomes impossible today. Does such a conclusion not cast doubt on the principle of divine wisdom, general guidance, and the completeness of the proof (*burhān*)?

If the study of the occasions of revelation shows a great relative independence of the understanding of the verses from those narrations, this hypothesis will be substantiated that the apparent meaning of the Qur'an is sufficient for guidance and completion of the proof. In other words, the impossibility of obtaining all the occasions of revelation, which leads to the loss of evidence for the understanding of the Qur'an, will not significantly damage the guidance of any part of the Qur'an because it can be claimed that rational, Qur'anic, and literary arguments are more effective than cultural and contemporary arguments in eliminating the ambiguity of the verses and achieving their understanding.

### *1.1. Concepts and Terminology*

Two important concepts that play a key role in this study are the occasions of revelation and the literal understanding of the verses of the Qur'an.

#### *1.1.1. Occasions of Revelation (Asbāb al-Nuzūl)*

The term *sabab* in its technical sense, meaning occasion of revelation, seems to start appearing in the works of al-Ṭabarī and al-Naḥās. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ

was the first to regularly use the term in introducing reports on the revelation of the Qur'an (Rippin 1985). Although the term "occasions of revelation" (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) is not a Qur'anic term and, seemingly, each of the two words, 'occasions' (*asbāb*) and 'revelation' (*al-nuzūl*), has been employed multiple times in various contexts within the Qur'an.

From the perspective of Qur'anic exegetes, particularly the late scholars, the occasions of revelation refer to any event or inquiry during the time of the Prophet, which necessitated the immediate revelation of one or more Qur'anic verses (Babaei et al. 2000, 144; Saeedi Roshan 1997, 15-14).

The term *sha'n nuzūl* (circumstances of revelation) has been used in some books of *tafsīr* and Qur'anic sciences, but most exegetes and scholars of Qur'anic sciences have not independently discussed, and they have not even provided a specific definition, which may be related to their view of *sabab al-nuzūl* and *sha'n al-nuzūl* being essentially the same. Thus, in many Persian interpretations, the term *sha'n nuzūl* is frequently used instead of *sabab al-nuzūl*. However, a contemporary scholar has provided a separate definition for *sha'n nuzūl* and made a distinction between these two concepts. The scholar defines *sha'n nuzūl* as something for which a Qur'anic verse or *sūrah* has been revealed, whether for an explanation, description or to draw lessons from it. The difference lies in the understanding that *sabab al-nuzūl* is specific to an event, incident, or issue that occurred or was raised at the time of revelation, and the verses were revealed to address that problem. In contrast, *sha'n nuzūl* encompasses events that have taken place during the time of Qur'anic revelation or even in the past (Babaei et al., 2000, 152). In this study, we did not distinguish between *sabab al-nuzūl* and *sha'n nuzūl*, and we considered any narration from the sources introduced as an occasion of revelation, even if it may pertain to *sha'n nuzūl*, since our groundwork was based on the three books collecting occasions of revelation.

### 1.1.2. *Literal Understanding of the Verses*

In this research, the term "literal understanding of the Qur'an" refers to the attainment of God's intended meaning in the most superficial layer of the text. It means that despite an ordinary reader's comprehension of the apparent meaning of a verse, their mind might be unaware of many deeper layers of meaning within the verse since the Qur'an is a text with multiple dimensions and layers of meaning according to narrations and the viewpoint of most Muslim scholars (Tayyeb Hosseini 2010, 30).

Some scholars, including Tabataba'i, believe that the literal meanings of all Qur'anic verses are understandable to the general public since they perceive the notion of incomprehensible verses as contradictory to the attributes of the Qur'an such as being a source of light, guidance, and healing (Tabataba'i 2011, 1:11). Furthermore, the idea that the Qur'an is not comprehensible to everyone is not in line with the Qur'an's universal call for reflection and the utilization of its guidance for all. Therefore, most of the Muslim scholars have considered relying on the literal meanings of the Qur'an for matters of belief and practice as legitimate. However, the meanings of Qur'anic verses are not always explicit at one level and degree. Sometimes, the literal meaning we understand from the Qur'an might be sufficient to express God's intended meaning; that is, the literal meaning of the verse is the same as God's intended meaning. Other times, understanding the true intention of God may require additional evidence, and one of these contextual pieces of evidence may be the occasions of revelation of a verse, which we have received through narrations.

Words, in terms of their indication of meaning, are divided into four categories: *naṣ* (explicit), *zāhir* (apparent), *mu'awwal* (esoteric), and *mujmal* (ambiguous). The literal understanding refers to words of the type of *zāhir* whose meaning is apparent, and their indication is evident to the intellect. This category can be further subdivided as follows:

- 1) *Zubūr badwī* (immediate apparent): The meaning that immediately comes to mind upon hearing the word.
- 2) *Zubūr 'urfī* (customary apparent): The meaning that comes to mind through rational and customary indications.
- 3) *Zubūr jiddī* (intended apparent): The meaning that comes to mind after a complete examination of connected and disconnected evidences of the word. This latter type is the meaning that it is legitimate to rely on it, according to the scholars. (Hakim 1999, 175; Radmansh 1995, 206; Shaker 2003, 183).

Based on this explanation, the literal understanding refers to either immediate or customary apparent meanings, which means that the statement is understood according to the customary meaning of the words, syntax, and related clues (Babaei et al. 2000, 23-24; Rajabi 2004, 9-10; Rezaei Esfahani 2013, 31). In this study, secondary understanding is coined due to the influence of the occasions of revelation (as evidences) on the apparent meanings of the verse.

The distinction between the effect on understanding a verse and the effect on understanding, in general, is indeed noteworthy because there is no data that has no effect on human understanding.

For example, in this context, even if the occasion of revelation does not directly contribute to understanding the intended meaning of a verse or has credibility issues with its source, it can still contain valuable historical and sociological information. Similarly, if there is no narration regarding a specific verse's occasion of revelation, and the possibility of the Prophet and his companions remaining silent on it is noteworthy, the silence itself may convey characteristics of that verse. However, it may not have a direct impact on understanding the divine intent behind the verse.

### 1.2. Literature Review

Raghebi and his colleagues (2011), in the thesis entitled, "Comparative Study of the Occasions of Revelation from *Majma' al-Bayān* and Other Interpretations," examined al-Ṭabrisī's approach to explaining the occasions of revelation. They specifically focused on the occasions of revelation for five sections of the Qur'an (sections 16 to 20). They conducted a critical analysis of verses mentioned in the chosen book in comparison with Shi'ae and Sunni narrations from various works of exegesis (*tafsīr*). The four controversial verses included in this study are the verses of *Mi'rāj*, *Gharānīq*, *Ifk*, and *Li'ān*.

The closest work to current study is the paper by Piroozfar (2012) titled, "Investigating the Influence of the Narrations of Occasions of Revelation in Interpretation of the Qur'an." In her paper, Piroozfar presents a tripartite classification of the effects of the occasions of revelation: positive, negative, and neutral effects. She provides examples of each of these effects. This research begins with a holistic approach and assumes three types of effects of the occasions of revelation in Qur'anic exegesis based on the researcher's experience without expressing any reasons or methodology. It is considered the first step in categorizing occasions of revelation based on their impact on understanding the Qur'an, although the researcher did not intend to examine all occasions of revelation.

Raghebi and Khosravi's (2013) article, "The Role of Occasions of Revelation in Better Understanding the Verses of the Qur'an," highlights several benefits of understanding the occasions of revelation

in interpreting Qur'anic verses. These benefits include clearing up ambiguities within the verses, comprehending the status of the divine speech, selecting the most appropriate interpretation, gaining insight into the context of revelation, and understanding the characteristics of the people of that era. Knowledge of the occasions of revelation can facilitate a more accurate interpretation of the verses. The authors also provided some examples of how knowing the occasions of revelation helps in understanding various aspects of the Qur'an, such as recognizing Meccan and Medinan verses, abrogating and abrogated verses, generality or specificity of certain verses, and unveiling some of the miraculous aspects of the verses.

Hosseini and Yazdi (2017), in their article entitled, "The Role of Occasions of Revelation in Understanding Qur'anic Verses from the Perspective of Allama Tabataba'i," examined the significance of occasions of revelation in contemporary interpretations of the Qur'an. They focused on two prominent exegeses: *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (a renowned Shi'a exegesis) and *Tafsīr al-Maraghī* (an eminent Sunni exegesis). The authors explore the perspectives of these two exegetes regarding the occasions of revelation. Based on the result, although Tabataba'i does not attach significant importance to the context of revelation and occasions of revelation due to his interpretive school of thought, he acknowledges that mentioning these reports or reasons helps clarify the meaning and context of Qur'anic verses. In his *ḥadīth*-based interpretation, he incorporates these aspects and sometimes confirms his interpretations using them. However, Al-Maraghi has mentioned more than three hundred narrations of the occasions of revelation in his interpretation. If there is a confirmed occasions of revelation of a verse or chapter, he reports it. Al-Maraghi's method of criticizing and analysing these narrations involves comparing them with the Qur'an and rational evidence. This work focuses on the methodologies of these two interpreters, and its goal is to collect and evaluate narrations rather than providing a quantitative or qualitative analysis.

It is evident that in the theses and articles written on this topic, there has either been a general discussion of the issue of the occasions of revelation and a report on the status of its narrations, or an analysis of the approach taken by exegetes in using these narrations. None of them has provided quantitative or qualitative analysis and evaluation of the role of the occasions of revelation in understanding the verses based on a comprehensive statistical study.



### *1.3. The Method of Collecting and Evaluating the Occasions of Revelation*

In this study, due to time constraints, the focus was only on collecting the occasions of revelation from Sunni sources. Thus, three prominent collections of occasions of revelation, namely *Al-Tashbīl al-Wusūl ilā'l-Ma'rifatu Asbāb al-Nuzūl* by al-'Ak, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* by al-Wāḥidī, and *Asbāb al-Nuzūl al-Qur'ānī* by Inayah, were selected in order to collect as many relevant narrations as possible. It should also be stated that all the narrations (*aḥādīth*) in the mentioned sources were considered as data, without examining their documentary and textual validity. Therefore, the results refer only to the narrations in these sources, both authentic and non-authentic, and cannot be generalized to all the occasions of revelation or to the use of cultural and historical sources in exegesis.

First, we entered the verses, which, according to these source books, have the occasions of revelation along with the related narrations into a table in Excel software. In this table, there are nine columns for nine characteristics of the verse and its corresponding occasion, which include (1) Row number, (2) Address of the verse, (3) The verse, (4) Existence of ambiguity in the verse, (5) Explanation of ambiguity, (6) Occasion of revelation, (7) Source of the occasion, (8) The effect of the occasion on the understanding, (9) The degree of the effect of the occasion on the understanding. Each row is a record created for each occasion of revelation and contains nine feature columns. In this way, the structure of the dataset of occasions of revelation was formed.

In the first step, the contents of columns 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 were completed. In the next step, characteristics based on the content analysis of the verses and narrations were examined and defined. This means that some features such as existence of ambiguity in the verse, explanation of the ambiguity, the effect of the occasion on understanding, and the degree of it, which require a method of analysing the verse, narration and assigning values to content-based features, were explained and quantified.

#### *1.3.1. Existence of Ambiguity in the Verse*

After contemplating the verse and providing a simple, faithful translation (rather than an interpretative one), the literal understanding, i.e., customary meaning of the verse was determined. Based on this, it was ascertained whether there was any ambiguity or question regarding

God's intention within that specific verse or not. The default value is the absence of ambiguity, for which nothing has been entered in the corresponding cell of the table.

### *1.3.2. Explanation of the Ambiguity*

Ambiguities and questions, which arise regarding the literal meaning and cannot be clarified by a simple translation, were recorded in this column. The reason for including this feature is to help determine the effect of the occasions. In other words, it provides the context for determining the role of the occasions in understanding and removing ambiguity. The coding and assigning values to the feature of "role of the occasion in the understanding" was an open process. That is, as the study progressed, the researcher encountered different examples of roles, combined similar roles, and determined the code and value of 'role' for each combined category.

### *1.3.3. The Role of the Occasion in Understanding*

This feature is the result of a qualitative assessment of the role of the occasions of revelation on the literal understanding of the verse. For this purpose, the literal understanding of the verse was compared with the meaning provided by the occasion of revelation in order to clarify what meaning was added to the literal meaning by the occasion of revelation. Then, an appropriate explanation was assigned to the way in which the meaning was added or clarified by the occasion.

### *1.3.4. Degree of the Impact of the Occasion on Understanding*

This feature is the result of a quantitative evaluation of the impact of the occasion on understanding of the verse. Four quantitative modes of effect were defined as follows:

*The first level (0):* The occasion of revelation has no impact on the understanding of the verse.

*The second level (1):* The occasion provides an additional explanation, but without that explanation, the literal meaning of the verse is understandable, and the narration does not address a particular issue or difficulty at that level. If the verse has ambiguity, it does not significantly help in resolving that ambiguity.

*The third level (2):* If the verse contains ambiguity, the occasion partially resolves the ambiguity, although the verse is understandable to some extent through contextual clues and other related verses. If the verse does not have ambiguity, the occasion has a more noticeable impact on better understanding the verse compared to the previous level.

*The fourth level (3):* If the verse contains ambiguity, the occasion completely eliminates the ambiguity, to the extent that the verse is not understandable without the occasion of revelation. Table 1 presents a portion of the dataset prepared for this study.

**Table 1.** A part of the dataset of the occasions of revelation for the verses of the Qur'an

Row	1	2	...	312
The Verse Address	Q. 2:2,3,4	Q. 2:6	...	Q. 14:28
The Verse	This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah; Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; And who believe in the Revelation sent to thee, and sent before thy time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the Hereafter.	As to those who reject Faith, it is the same to them whether thou warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe.	...	Hast thou not turned thy thought to those who have changed the favor of Allah, with ingratitude, and caused their people to descend to the House of Perdition?
Ambiguity in the Verse			...	has
Explanation of ambiguity type			...	<i>dār al-bawār</i> (hell)

Row	1	2	...	312
The Verse Address	Q. 2:2,3,4	Q. 2:6	...	Q. 14:28
Occasions of Revelation	Abū ‘Uthmān Za‘farānī, with references from Mujāhid, narrates that the first 4 verses of <i>Sūrah al-Baqarah</i> are about the believers, the following two verses are about the disbelievers, and the next 13 verses are about the hypocrites.	Ḍaḥāk says: These verses were revealed about Abū Jahl and five of his relatives.	...	It is narrated from Ibn Jarīr through ‘Aṭā ibn Yasār that these verses were revealed about the slain on the Day of Badr.
Source	al-Wāḥidī 1998; al-‘Ak 2003; Inayah 1990	al-Wāḥidī 1998; al-‘Ak 2003; Inayah 1990	...	al-‘Ak 2003
Role of Occasions of Revelation	Reference to the subject matter of the verses	Mention of examples with little impact on understanding	...	Mention of examples with little impact on understanding
Degree of impact of Occasions on Resolving Ambiguity	0	1	...	0

## 2. Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

Based on the data collected using the detailed method mentioned earlier, we have identified 12 distinct roles for the impact of the narrations of the occasions on understanding Qur’anic verses. In this section, each of these roles is explained along with an illustrative example.

### 2.1. *Mention of Examples for the Qur'anic Concept*

According to scholars, the occasions of revelation that provide examples for the verses or relate an external event to a verse are not exclusive to that verse, and the comprehensive meaning of the verse remains intact (Rajabi 2004). Therefore, introducing examples, as they only make concepts tangible, provides minimal assistance in understanding the verse. In the verse Q. 2:6, the Qur'an discusses the warning of the Prophet and its impact on the disbelievers. Three instances of the occasions of revelation have been cited for this verse, mentioning individuals like Abū Jahl, the Jews, and the Jewish rabbis around Medina. It appears that these instances, given the further introduction of these individuals in other Qur'anic verses, provide limited assistance in understanding disbelief and the concept of disbelievers. Therefore, a score of one has been assigned to this case. Furthermore, in the verse Q. 86:5, the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of human attention to their origins of creation and mentions an example of an arrogant individual. Thus, it is evident that one of the benefits of this command is to confront feelings of arrogance. Consequently, it is rated as one.

### 2.2. *Expressing the Background Story of the Revelation*

*Sūrah al-Qadr* describes the revelation of the Qur'an on the Night of *al-Qadr*, elevating the significance of that night and ranking it above a thousand months, as it is the night when the angels and the Spirit descend (Tabataba'i 2011, 20:599). The verse itself is clear and carries the importance of the Night of *al-Qadr*. The occasion of revelation merely emphasizes the Prophet's amazement at the story of a man from the Children of Israel who wore armour for the sake of God for a thousand months. The occasion of this *sūrah* directed the Prophet's attention to something even more astonishing, which is the value of the Night of *al-Qadr* (Inayah 1990). It is evident that this narration does not significantly enhance the understanding of the intended meaning of the verse. Therefore, the role of the occasion of revelation in this case is classified as the first category, earning a score of zero.

The verse Q. 29:67 states "We have made the sacred house a means of livelihood for people, and a place of security." While the Arabs are indulging in insecurity, plunder, and killings everywhere, this land remains secure and safe (Makarem Shirazi 1992, 16:346). The verse itself is not ambiguous. The occasion of revelation of the verse, however,

addresses a problem. It explains the fear of disbelievers regarding embracing faith. They claimed that they did not believe because of their fear of the multitude of Arabs and that they were afraid the Arabs would annihilate them after accepting faith. The verse resolves this issue and elucidates that God has made the sacred house a sanctuary and provides reassurance. Although the verse may not seem ambiguous, the narration does play a role in understanding the verse, hence the score of one.

### *2.3. Description of the Psychological, Economic, Political, or Cultural Context*

The verse Q. 9:38 was revealed to encourage going to the Battle of Tabūk. At the time, the Prophet issued an order to wage war against the Romans right after returning from Ṭāʿif and the Battle of Ḥunayn. This order came at an inappropriate time, as the weather was dry and hot, the dates were ripe, and the fruits were ready for harvesting. This directive posed a challenge for the people, as they preferred sitting in the shade and staying at home to setting out for war. God recognized their lethargy and hesitation, and thus, this verse was revealed. In this verse, there is a strong call for people to engage in *jihād*, sometimes using words of encouragement, sometimes reprimanding and reproaching them, and at times using a threatening tone. It enters through various doors to prepare them, urging them with different approaches (Makarem Shirazi 1992, 7: 414). Although this verse is understandable without knowing the narration, understanding the circumstances of revelation indeed provides details of the psychological atmosphere of the revelation and emphasizes the impact of the verse. Therefore, the impact of the occasion on understanding receives a score of one.

### *2.4. Explanation of Vocabulary to Clarify Verdicts*

The verse Q. 17:110 is about the freedom to raise one's voice during prayers. According to a narration, the intended meaning of prayer (*ṣalāt*) in this verse is supplication (*duʿā*) (al-ʿAk 2003). Therefore, the role of this narration in understanding the verse falls into the third category with a score of two. This is because the prevalent assumption about prayer is its legal and religious context. Hence, it receives a score of two. Words that have genuine Qurʾanic meanings require contextual evidence for their usage in their linguistic sense. If this narration is reliable, it will

serve as the context and reason for deviating from the legal meaning of prayer in the verse.

### *2.5. Determining the Subject Matter of the Verse*

In the occasion of the revelation of *Surah al-Fil*, the focus is on the intended target of Abrahah's army, which is not explicitly mentioned in the *Sūrah* itself (al-Wāḥidī 1998). Therefore, it receives a score of two.

### *2.6. Explanation of the Customs, Traditions, and Beliefs of the Arabs at the Time of Revelation*

The verse Q. 2:222 deals with the rules of marital relations during menstruation. There are three occasions of revelation for this verse, and two of them address pre-Islamic customs that the verse abrogated (al-Wāḥidī 1998). Although the verse itself and the rules within it are understandable without the narration, the Qur'an's approach to social laws is better understood with this narration. Therefore, the role of the narration in the third case is rated as two. The verse Q. 3:130 takes a stance against the prevalent economic practice and prohibits it. A narration explains this custom in detail, which has earned it a score of two.

### *2.7. Creating a Conceptual Connection between the Verses*

The verse Q. 24:61 mentions the permissibility of eating food in one's own houses, the houses of relatives, or in the houses where one holds the keys, allowing him to eat collectively or individually. In this case, the verse is understandable and contains no ambiguity. The narration explaining the revelation of this verse establishes its connection with another verse, specifically Q. 4:29. The context is that before Islam, the people of Medina would withhold food from the blind, crippled, and sick individuals, and they did not share their meals with them, which is related to a misguided sense that it was improper to eat together with such individuals. However, after the advent of Islam, there were some groups that separated food for these individuals since they disliked sharing meals with them, because they wanted to ensure that the visually impaired people could see the food and eat it, while the able-bodied individuals refrained from eating before them. This act was against good

manners and ethics. Additionally, regarding lame or sick individuals, there was a fear that they might lag behind in the meal, and healthy individuals would get ahead of them. Therefore, this verse aimed to rectify these behaviours (al-Wāḥidī 1998). Thus, the verse Q. 24:61 was revealed to complement the guidance provided in the verse Q. 4:29, which clarifies that there should be no hesitation or concern regarding sharing meals with those who are ill or disabled (Makarem Shirazi 1982, 14:549). The impact of this occasion of revelation is significant in understanding this verse better, so it deserves a rating of two.

### *2.8. Expressing the Reason for Naming and Specific Titles*

Addressing the Prophet with the description of *muzammil* in the first verse of this *sūrah* (Q. 73:1) is one of the cases in this category. *Muzammil* means someone who wraps himself in a garment to sleep or to ward off the cold. From the context of this verse, it is apparent that at the time when this *sūrah* was revealed, the Prophet had wrapped himself in a cloak (Tabataba'i 2011, 20:94).

The occasion of revelation explains the reason for the naming. The Quraysh wanted to give the Prophet a name that others would use to refer to him, and they proposed some names that were not suitable. When the Prophet learned about this situation, he wrapped himself in a garment, and Gabriel descended, providing this unique name for the Prophet (al-'Ak 2003). The level of influence of this narration was determined to be two, as it does not directly affect the understanding of the verse.

### *2.9. Mentioning the Time of Revelation of the Verse*

In verse Q. 5:67, two clear points are expressed. One is a directive given by God to the Prophet, albeit a strong directive with pressure and threat, to convey a new message to humanity. The other is a promise given by God to His Prophet to protect him from potential dangers that he may face in delivering this message. The ambiguity in this verse arises from what the message is that the Prophet was supposed to deliver. The occasion of revelation clarifies this ambiguity by explaining the time of its revelation, which was on the day of Ghadīr Khum. It explains the message that God commanded the Prophet to convey to the people, which was the designation of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib to the authority. Therefore, the



level of impact of the occasion of revelation on understanding the verse is rated as three, as the understanding of the verse is closely tied to the occasion of revelation.

### *2.10. Explanation of Mujmal (Ambiguous Verses)*

The verse Q. 4:37 refers to the stinginess of the unbelievers and their encouragement of people to be stingy. They concealed what God had given them out of His mercy (Makarem Shirazi 1982, 6:59). The verse is somewhat ambiguous in terms of what is meant by stinginess and concealment. There are three occasions for the revelation of this verse, all of which are effective in removing the ambiguity and clarifying the meaning of being stingy. It highlights that the Jews used to hide the attributes of the Prophet and were stingy in telling the truth when answering questions about the attributes of the Prophet (al-Wāḥidī 1998). The ambiguity in the verse is fully elucidated by knowing the occasion of its revelation. Therefore, the impact of the occasion of revelation on understanding the verse is rated three.

### *2.11. Response to the Words of the Prophet's Contemporaries*

According to the literal understanding, the verse Q. 9:28 is a command to the believers not to allow the polytheists to enter Masjid al-Ḥarām because they are considered *najis* (impure). Therefore, the verse considers a kind of sanctity and purity for the Masjid al-Ḥarām and impurity for the polytheists, whatever it is, it is not a matter of avoiding meeting infidels while wet. In this context, the statement of “this year” refers to the ninth year after the Hijrah when ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib brought *Sūrah al-Barā’ah* to Mecca, reciting it for the polytheists and making it clear that they no longer have the right to circumambulate the Ka‘bah while naked. Moreover, no polytheist has the right to perform the circumambulation and pilgrimage. Then, the verse continues to say, if you fear that implementing this command may lead to economic decline and stagnation in your businesses, and you worry about falling into poverty, do not fear. God will make you self-sufficient from His grace shortly, and He will protect you from the poverty you fear (Tabataba’i 2011, 9:303).

In this verse, the relationship between the prohibition of polytheists entering Masjid al-Ḥarām and the fear of poverty among Muslims may

seem unclear. However, the narration explains that if the polytheists refrain from entering Masjid al-Ḥarām, the trade and businesses of the Muslims would suffer, and the market would experience a downturn (Inayah 1990). Therefore, due to the effectiveness of the occasion of revelation in clarifying this matter, it has been rated as three.

### 2.12. *Emphasizing the Literal Meaning of the Verse*

The verse Q. 3:77 is a general statement about the grave consequences of violating covenants and oaths, even though the occasion of its revelation involves a group of scholars from the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) who exchanged their divine covenants and oaths for a small worldly gain (Makarem Shirazi 1992). The narration serves as an additional explanation of the verse, and its role in understanding the verse is zero.

## 3. *Statistical Analysis of the Role of Occasions of Revelation in Understanding the Verses*

In this section, in order to assess the role of the occasions of revelation on the literal understanding of the verses, a corpus as shown in Table 1 was compiled and subjected to statistical analysis. Table 2 provides an example of a summary of the compiled corpus.

**Table 2.** A brief table of the role of the occasions of revelation in the understanding of the verses

The Verse	Role of the Occasions of Revelation	Degree of Impact of the Occasions on Resolving Ambiguity
Q. 2:2,3,4	Reference to the subject matter of the verses	0
Q. 2:189	Determining the question behind the occasion of revelation of the verse	1
Q. 2:189	Explanation of a pre-Islamic tradition	3
Q. 2:189	Explanation of a pre-Islamic tradition	3
Q. 2:189	Explanation of a pre-Islamic tradition	3

The Verse	Role of the Occasions of Revelation	Degree of Impact of the Occasions on Resolving Ambiguity
Q. 9:38	Explanation of the context of revelation affecting understanding	2
Q. 4:37	Explanation of Ambiguous Verses	3
Q. 4:37	Explanation of Ambiguous Verses	3
Q. 4:37	Mention of examples with little impact on understanding	0
Q. 4:37	Explanation of Ambiguous Verses	3
Q. 73:1	Expressing the Reason for Specific Naming	2
Q. 72:6	Mention of impactful examples on understanding	3
Q. 65:4	Determining the question behind the occasion of revelation of the verse	1
Q. 65:4	Determining the question behind the occasion of revelation of the verse	1
Q. 61:11	Explanation of the relationship between verses	1
Q. 17:110	Explanation of vocabulary to clarify verdicts	2
Q. 17:110	Explanation of vocabulary to clarify verdicts	2
Q. 17:110	Explanation of vocabulary to clarify verdicts	2
Q. 17:110	Explanation of vocabulary to clarify verdicts	2
Q. 17:110	Reference to the subject matter of the verses	2
Q. 9:28	Explanation of vocabulary to clarify verdicts	3

Based on the statistical analysis of the data set, it is possible to obtain the status of the quantitative effect of each of the 12 roles on understanding. Table 3 shows the number of narrations of each of the 12 roles and their average scores separately.

**Table 3.** Quantitative impact assessment of each of the 12 roles

Role	Total count	Count of score 0	Percentage of score 0	Count of score 1	Percentage of score 1	Count of score 2	Percentage of score 2	Count of score 3	Percentage of score 3	Percentage of total narrations	Average score
Mention of Examples for the Qur'anic Concept	677	78	0.11	516	0.76	48	0.07	35	0.05	0.61	1.06
Expressing the Background Story of the Revelation	33	5	0.15	26	0.78	1	0.03	1	0.03	0.02	0.93
Description of the Psychological, Economic, Political, or Cultural Context	5	---	---	2	0.4	3	0.6	---	---	0.004	1.6
Determining the Subject Matter of the Verse	10	---	---	8	0.8	1	0.1	1	0.1	0.009	1.3
Explanation of the Customs, Traditions, and Beliefs of the Arabs at the Time of Revelation	26	---	---	7	0.26	7	0.26	12	0.05	0.02	2.19
Creating a Conceptual Connection between the Verses	34	---	---	29	0.85	3	0.08	2	0.05	0.03	1.20
Response to the Words of the Prophet's Contemporaries	227	1	0.004	180	0.79	32	0.14	14	0.61	0.20	1.25

Role	Total count	Count of score 0	Percentage of score 0	Count of score 1	Percentage of score 1	Count of score 2	Percentage of score 2	Count of score 3	Percentage of score 3	Percentage of total narrations	Average score
Expressing the Reason for Naming and Specific Titles	4	---	---	---	---	4	1	---	---	0.0036	2
Mentioning the Time of Revelation of the Verse	5	---	---	4	0.8	1	0.2	---	---	0.004	1.2
Explanation of Ambiguous Verses	39	---	---	---	---	2	0.05	37	0.94	0.035	2.94
Explanation of Vocabulary to Clarify Verdicts	31	---	---	13	0.41	8	0.25	10	0.32	0.028	1.90
Emphasizing the Literal Meaning of the Verse	10	7	0.7	3	0.3	---	---	---	---	0.009	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1101</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>788</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>0.09</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1.22</b>

It is worth noting that only about 10% of the total verses of the Qur'an have the occasions of revelation according to the sources in this research because there are 1,101 occasions of revelation for 644 verses, which is about 10% of the 6,236 verses of the Qur'an.

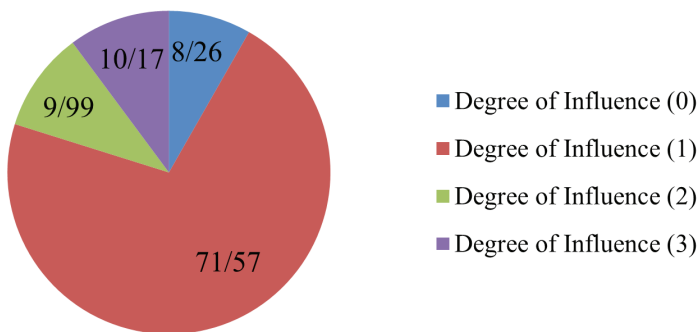
As shown in Table 3, regarding the 1,101 cases of the occasions of revelation, among the twelve roles, the role of "Explanation of Ambiguous Verses" has the most significant impact with an average score of 2.94. This role is associated with approximately 39 narrations. Typically, the verses in this category contain ambiguity, and the reports of the occasions of revelation play an influential role in resolving these ambiguities. Following that there is the role of "Explanation of the Customs, Traditions, and Beliefs of the Arabs at the Time of Revelation" with an average score of 2.19, which is associated with approximately 26 narrations. Therefore, only 6% of the occasions of revelation in the sources in question have an impact greater than 2. The role with the

least impact on the literal understanding of the verses is “Emphasis on the Literal Meaning of the Verse,” with an average score of 0.3. However, this category includes only 10 narrations, which make up just around 1% of the total narrations studied.

The highest number of occasions of revelation is related to the role of “Mentioning an Example for the Qur’anic Concept,” with a rate of 61%. The average score of this category is 1.06, which indicates the lack of influence of the occasions of revelation on the literal understanding of the verses in this category because a score of 1 was given in cases where the narration provided minimal clarification for understanding the verse, but the verse itself was understandable without referencing the narration. Furthermore, the average effect of all the narrations examined on the literal understanding of the verses has a score of 1.2. This means that on average, these narrations do not have much effect on the understanding of the verses and do not resolve any ambiguities.

### 3.1. *The Distribution of the Occasions of Revelation in the Four Categories*

Figure 1 displays the distribution of the occasions of revelation based on the four categories. Approximately 10% of the narrations receive a score of 2, 10% receive a score of 3, and around 8% get a score of 0. The majority of narrations which is about 72%, receive a score of 1. Consequently, it appears that the understanding of most Qur’anic verses is not significantly dependent on the occasions of revelation. The verses are comprehensible by considering contextual clues and other verses.



**Figure 1.** The distribution of the four states of the influence on understanding

#### 4. Conclusion

It has been determined that about 10% of the total verses of the Qur'an have the occasions of revelation in the mentioned sources. On the other hand, some verses have multiple occasions of revelation, and in most cases, these narrations share the same subject matter. Additionally, some occasions of revelation are related to a specific *sūrah* or a portion of the Qur'an. Therefore, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the set of verses and the set of narrations related to them. If we assume that each verse approximately has one occasion of revelation, then the literal understanding of about 10% of these verses (1% of the Qur'an) depends entirely on the occasions of revelation.

In 72% of these verses (7% of the Qur'an), the occasions of revelation have an impact on a better understanding of the verse, even though the verse has a customary apparent meaning with seemingly no ambiguity. Moreover, 8% of the narrations have no impact on the understanding of the verses. Therefore, the impact of the occasions of revelation in question, on the understanding while not negligible, is not significant. In other words, the literal understanding of the verses does not depend much on the occasions of revelation. In most cases (82%), the impact is limited to minor improvements in the literal understanding of the verse (scores 1 and 2), which means that the narration is not the only way to reach a secondary understanding of the verse.

#### Acknowledgements

This paper has been extracted from the thesis prepared by Kosar Kheirallahzade under the supervision of Dr. Farzaneh Rohani Mashhadi in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Qur'an and Hadith Sciences. The authors extend their gratitude to the Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies Research Institute, Shahid Beheshti University, and the Vice President on Research for supporting the research.

#### References

- Al-'Ak, Khālid 'Abd al-Raḥmān (2003). *Al-Tashīl al-Wusūl ilā'l-Ma'rifah Asbāb al-Nuzūl*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rafah.

- Al-Wāḥidī, ‘Ali ibn Aḥmad (1998). *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah.
- Babaei, Ali Akbar (2002). *The Qur’an and the Exegetical Schools* (in Persian). Tehran: Samt.
- Babaei, Ali akbar, et al. (2000). *Methodology for Interpretation of the Qur’an* (in Persian). Tehran: Samt.
- Hakim, Mohammad Bagher (1999). *‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*. Transl. Lesani Fesharaki. Tehran: Tebian.
- Husseini, S. Kamal & Yazdi, Um al-Banin (2016). “Allamah Tabatabai and Maraghi on the Role of the Causes of Revelation in Understanding Qur’anic Verses (in Persian)”. *Studies Tatbighee Qur’an & Hadith*, 95(7), 7-32.
- Inayah, Ghazi Hossein (1990). *Asbāb al-Nuzūl al-Qur’ānī*, Beirut: Dār al-Jīl.
- Khodamardi, R., Rohani Mashhadi, F. & Talebpour, A. (2022). “Providing a Model for Evaluating the Dependency of Comprehension of Qur’an Verses on Cultural Studies”. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur’anic Studies (JIQS)*, 1(2), 175-193.
- Makarem Shirazi, Naser (1992). *Tafsīr Nemūneh* (in Persian). Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah.
- Ma’refat, Mohammad Hadi (2002). *Qur’anic Sciences* (in Persian). Qom: al-Tamhid.
- Piroozfar, Soheila (2012). “Investigating the Influence of the Narrations of the Occasions of Revelation in Interpretation of the Qur’an (in Persian)”. *Ulum-i Hadith*, 17(63), 187-218.
- Radmanesh, Mohammad (1995). *Introduction to Qura’nic Sciences* (in Persian). Tehran: Jāmi‘.
- Raghebi, M. A., Karimi-Tabar, M. A. & Ghesmati, T. (2011). *Comparative Study of the Occasions of Revelation from Majma‘ al-Bayān and Other Interpretations* (in Persian). University of Sciences and Education of the Holy Qur’an. Master thesis. Qom.
- Raghebi, M. A. & Khosravi, R. (2013). “The Role of the Occasions of Revelation in the Better Understanding of the Verses of the Qur’an (in Persian)”. *Kosar*, 48, 59-90.
- Rajabi, Mahmoud (2004). *Methodology of Qur’an Interpretation* (in Persian). Qom: Hawzah and University Research Institute.
- Rezaei Esfahani, Mohammad Ali (2013). *Textbook on the Principles and Rules of Interpretation* (in Persian). Qom: Al-Mustafa International Translation and Publishing Center.
- Rippin, Andrew (1985). “The Exegetical Genre “asbab al-nuzul”: A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey”. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 48(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00026926>.
- Saeedi Roshan, Mohammad Bagher (1997). *The Occasions or Contexts of Revelation of Qur’anic Verses* (in Persian). Qom: Zamzam Hedayat.



- Shaker, Mohammad Kazem (2003). *Principles and Methods of Interpretation* (in Persian). Qom: World Center of Islamic Sciences.
- Tabataba'i, Muhammad Husayn (2011). *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Al-A'lamī li'l-Maṭbū'āt.
- Tayyeb Hosseini, Mahmood (2010). *Multi-meaningfulness in the Holy Qur'an: An Introduction to the Development of Qur'anic Meanings*. Tehran: Hawzah and University Research Institute.