

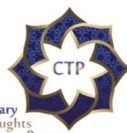
The Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies

Volume 4, Issue 2, December 2025



Shahid Beheshti
University

Shahid Beheshti
University



Contemporary
Thoughts
Press

Contemporary
Thoughts Press

The Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies (JIQS)

Volume 4, Issue 2, December 2025

Licensees and Publishers:

Shahid Beheshti University, Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies

Research Institute

Shahid Shahriari Square, Evin, Tehran, Iran

Postal Code: 1983969411

Telefax: 0098 21 22431872

<http://iqs.sbu.ac.ir>

Email: iqs@sbu.ac.ir

Contemporary Thoughts Press

86c Water Street, Birmingham, England, B3 AHL

Phone: 00442076045537

<https://www.contemporarythoughtspress.com>

Email: info@contemporarythoughtspress.com

Director-in-Charge: Dr Alireza Talebpour

Editor-in-Chief: Dr Alireza Talebpour

Manager: Dr Bahareh Mazaheri Tehrani

Copy Editor: Dr Mehdi Baghi

Frequency: Semiannual

Contents

Editorial: Trajectories and Reflections on Four Years of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Discourse	5
<i>Alireza Talebpour</i>	
Generating Inferences from Qur'anic Verses: A Computational Text Mining Approach	11
<i>Samira Abdi; Alireza Talebpour; Ahmad Mahmoudi-Aznavah; Mostafa Moradi</i>	
Structure and Semantics in Surah al-Nisa': on marriage, wealth, and building a community	25
<i>Rawand Zoulfikar Osman</i>	
The Prophet Muhammad's Responses to Opponents and Supporters: A Quantitative Analysis of Qur'anic Prophet–People Conversation Patterns ...	57
<i>Fatemeh Ashtiani; Farzaneh Rohani Mashhadi; Alireza Talebpour</i>	
Sentiment and Tone Analysis of the Holy Qur'an Using Natural Language Processing	71
<i>Mahdi Rafiei; Ehsan Khadangi</i>	
A Semantic Analysis of “Wizr” in the Holy Qur'an: Integrating Structural Semantics and Historical Etymology	93
<i>Farideh Amini; Hadis Riahy</i>	
Fractal Dimensions as a Model for Qur'anic Semantic Depth: Reconsidering the Concept of Butūn of the Qur'an	117
<i>Iman Dehqanzadeh Hamedan; Samiyeh Shahbazi; Mohammad Ali Heydari</i>	
A Critical Analysis of Textual Historicity in Abu Zayd's Thought in Light of the “Spirit of Meaning” Theory in Transcendent Philosophy	135
<i>Mansoor Doagoo</i>	
The Discursive Value-Oriented Analysis of the Story of Moses and Khidr in the Reconstruction of Emotional Meanings: A Semiotic-Semantic Approach	157
<i>Mahnaz Amiri; Hamid Reza Shairi</i>	
Riffaterre's Semiotic Theory in Angelika Neuwirth's Intertextual Qur'anic Studies: A Case Study of Surah al-Ikhlās	177
<i>Seyed Hamed Alizadeh Mousavi</i>	

The Methodological Divide in Comprehending the Prophecy of the Defeat and Victory of al-Rūm (Q.30:2-4): A Comparative Analysis of Historical Reading and Esoteric Interpretation195
Reza Mollazadeh Yamchi; Mansoureh Arjomandi Fard; Mohammad Sadeq Hedayatzadeh

A Metallurgical Re-evaluation of Dhū al-Qarnayn’s Barrier: From the Alloy Hypothesis to an Fe-Cu Composite Model211
Mostafa Jafari

The Manifestation of God in the Parable of “Light”: A Re-reading of the Verse “Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth” (Q. 24:35) Based on Modern Science225
Asieh Zouelm

Author Guidelines245

Editorial Board255

Editorial: Trajectories and Reflections on Four Years of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Discourse

Alireza Talebpour ¹ 

Associate Professor, Computer Science and Engineering Department, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

1. Introduction

It is our pleasure to present the eighth issue of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies*. Featuring twelve scholarly articles, this issue marks the conclusion of our fourth year of publication. Over these eight consecutive issues, we have published a total of ninety-six articles, reflecting a steadfast commitment to fostering interdisciplinary discourse and scholarly rigor. This milestone offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on our thematic trajectory and the scholarly path we have traversed thus far.

2. A Review of Thematic Developments (Issues 1–8)

From its inaugural issue, which introduced a novel quantitative approach to evaluating the Qur'an's miraculous nature, the journal has consistently sought to bridge the gap between Qur'anic studies and contemporary science. Our foundational orientation was exemplified by research such as “*Scientific Explanation of Hail Based on the Verse 43 of Surah al-Nūr*,” “*Formation of the Universe from the Viewpoint of the Qur'an and Science*,” “*An Evolutionary Reading of Adam's Creation*,” and “*Investigating the story of Noah's Flood according to Qur'anic verses and archaeological researches*.” Parallel to this trend, philosophy and theology gained an early

1. Email Address: talebpour@sbu.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIOS.V4I2.0>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_107135.html?lang=en

foothold through works like *“The Authority of Intellect and its Function from the Perspective of the Holy Qur’an”* and *“Panpsychism in Philosophy of Mind, Transcendent Philosophy, and the Qur’an,”* while linguistics established its presence by exploring the intersection of Qur’anic language and scientific discourse.

Issues Two and Three witnessed a remarkable expansion in linguistics, discourse analysis, and semantics. Research on commissive speech acts, discourse analysis of Qur’anic names, and the orthography of the letter *alif* in early manuscripts opened new hermeneutical avenues. Simultaneously, jurisprudence, law, and governance consolidated their place within our scope through studies on political participation under illegitimate governance, the punishment of false claimants to prophethood, and the authority of custom in interpretation, the latter notably introducing quantitative methodologies via *“The Sustainability of Social Systems According to the Qur’an: A Mixed-Methods Study.”* Issue Three also marked the introduction of quantitative and statistical methodologies through the article *“Sustainability of Social Systems Based on the Holy Qur’an: A Multi-Study Mixed-Methods Research.”*

A major turning point emerged from Issue Three onward with the integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning into Qur’anic analysis. Studies employing deep neural networks (RoBERTa) for sentiment analysis, similarity-based deep-learning approaches to Qur’anic chapter organization, and natural language processing techniques demonstrated that computational Qur’anic studies had matured into one of the journal’s principal areas of focus. This trajectory reached its peak in Issues Seven and Eight with contributions on hybrid semantic networks for the Qur’an, inference generation from Qur’anic verses through text mining, strong artificial intelligence from a Qur’anic perspective, mathematical analyses of Qur’anic textual superiority, and sentiment and tone analysis of the Qur’anic discourse using natural language processing.

Alongside these major developments, several other interdisciplinary domains maintained a steady and growing presence. Psychology and Qur’anic education explored topics such as the development of a Qur’anic familiarity questionnaire, the effect of morphological awareness on reading, semantic-psychological analyses of *ḍayq al-ṣadr* (constriction of the chest), and the relationship between faith and creativity.

History and archaeology contributed studies on archaeological insights into the angels’ knowledge of Human Corruption on Earth, comparative analyses of human creation narratives in the Qur’an and the Old Testament, and investigations into the prophecy concerning the defeat and subsequent victory of the Romans.

Furthermore, philosophy and theology addressed themes including the spectrum of consciousness, the reinterpretation of prophetic miracles from supernatural to natural frameworks, and the embodiment of human deeds in near-death experiences. Translation studies also gained visibility through analyses of lexical bundles in English translations of the Qur'an and studies of Persian Qur'an translations within multilingual contexts.

The least represented field was that of art, media, and architecture, with only two published articles, one on the transformation of Qur'anic pretexts into dramatic hypertexts and another on the conceptual and spatial dimensions of the Persian garden through a Qur'anic lens. This relative scarcity highlights a significant research gap and suggests a promising direction for future scholarship.

3. Issue Eight: Diversity within Focus

The present issue, comprising twelve articles, continues our tradition of interdisciplinary synthesis, showcasing a diverse array of methodologies applied to the Qur'anic text:

- **The linguistic and semantic domain (4 Articles):** This remains a cornerstone of the journal. Contributions explore the structural and semantic intricacies of Surah al-Nisa' regarding marriage and social building, alongside a study on the intersection of Riffaterre's semiotic theory with Angelika Neuwirth's intertextual approach to Surah al-Ikhlāṣ. Furthermore, this section includes a structural-historical analysis of the term *wizr* and a discursive, value-oriented examination of the story of Moses and Khidr, which employs semiotic-semantic frameworks to reconstruct emotional meanings.
- **Computational and quantitative analysis (3 Articles):** This domain is particularly robust, featuring research on generating logical inferences from verses through text mining, as well as an investigation into the sentiment and tone of the Qur'anic discourse using natural language processing. Complementing these are quantitative analyses of the Prophet Muhammad's interaction patterns with supporters and opponents, which offer fresh insights into the communicative dynamics of the Qur'an.
- **Philosophy and hermeneutics (3 Articles):** Articles in this category include a critical analysis of textual historicity within the thought of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, a study on the concept of fractal dimensions to model the semantic depth and *buṭūn* (inner meanings) of the Qur'an, and a comparative study on the methodological divide in

interpreting the prophecy of the defeat and victory of the Romans (al-Rūm).

- **Empirical inquiries (2 Articles):** This issue demonstrates our commitment to bridging revelation and contemporary knowledge. We present a metallurgical re-evaluation of the Barrier of Dhū al-Qarnayn, shifting the perspective from traditional alloy hypotheses to an Fe-Cu composite model. Additionally, this section features a reading of the "Light" parable in Surah al-Nur (Q. 24:35), which re-examines the manifestation of God through the lens of modern scientific discourse.

Together, these twelve articles represent a sophisticated maturation of the interdisciplinary dialogue we have fostered over the past four years.

4. Concluding Remarks and Future Directions

The thematic breadth of our 96 published articles is summarized in the table 1.

Table 1. Thematic Distribution of Published Articles (Issues 1–8)

The Core Subject	The Interdisciplinary Domain	Article Count
Qur'an	Empirical Sciences & Scientific Miraculousness	18
Qur'an	Linguistics & Translation	18
Qur'an	Hermeneutics & Exegetics	12
Qur'an	Computational Studies (AI & NLP)	11
Qur'an	Philosophy & Theology	12
Qur'an	Law & Governance	9
Qur'an	History & Archaeology	6
Qur'an	Psychology & Education	8
Qur'an	Art, Media & Architecture	2
Total	—	96

A review of these articles published across eight issues reveals several noteworthy trends:


- Empirical sciences and scientific exegesis, with eighteen articles, continue to constitute the journal's foundational identity and intellectual backbone.
- Linguistics and textual analysis, also represented by eighteen articles, stand alongside empirical sciences as the most stable and enduring

interdisciplinary domain within the journal.


- Artificial intelligence and text processing, with eleven articles, have experienced the most rapid growth in recent issues and are likely to play a defining role in the journal's future development. Computational Qur'anic studies have evolved from a marginal approach in Issue Three to one of the journal's central themes in Issues Seven and Eight.
- Qur'anic exegesis and hermeneutics, represented by twelve articles, have maintained a consistent, reflective, and methodologically significant presence throughout the journal's history.
- Art, media, and architecture (two articles), and to a lesser extent translation studies (three articles), require greater scholarly attention and may benefit from targeted calls for papers.

We hope that this eighth issue will mark the beginning of a new phase in interdisciplinary Qur'anic scholarship and foster broader international academic collaboration. We extend our sincere gratitude to all authors, reviewers, and colleagues whose contributions have supported the journal throughout these eight issues.


Generating Inferences from Qur'anic Verses: A Computational Text Mining Approach

Samira Abdi 

Master's degree in Computational Qur'an Mining, Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies Research Institute, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

Alireza Talebpour ¹ 

Associate Professor, Computer Science and Engineering Department, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

Ahmad Mahmoudi-Aznaveh 

Assistant Professor, Cyberspace Research Institute, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

Mostafa Moradi 

Assistant professor, Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies Research Institute, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

Article History: Received 16 February 2025; Accepted 6 April 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

The Recent advancements in deep learning have yielded novel and significant capabilities in natural language processing (NLP) and automatic inference generation. These capabilities are particularly critical due to their resemblance to human reasoning. At the same time, interdisciplinary initiatives have led to substantial advancements in the realms of knowledge and technology. In this study, the Qur'an is examined as a rich source of multiple concepts and teachings. The objective of this research is to employ natural language processing algorithms to derive meaningful and accurate inferences from the English translation of the Qur'an. Inference is defined as the process of deriving a new and logical sentence from two basic and related sentences. The research methodology introduces a model that utilizes transformers and pre-trained language models. Consequently, we construct the set of all unique unordered verse pairs ($i < j$) from 6,236 verses, totaling 19,440,730 pair evaluations. A fine-tuned BERT-based classifier labels each pair as either exhibiting or not exhibiting a syllogistic relation. Pairs predicted as "Yes" and exceeding a confidence threshold of 0.80 proceed to the subsequent stage, which is inference generation, while all other pairs are discarded. In the following phase, large language models are employed to generate inferences from the selected pairs of verses.

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: talebpour@sbu.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I2.1>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_106596.html?lang=en

KEYWORDS: The Qur'an, Artificial Intelligence, Inference, Computational Qur'an Mining, Deep Learning, Natural Language Processing (NLP), Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies.

1. Introduction

Inference, as one of the critical processes in human thought, plays a fundamental role in knowledge analysis. The Holy Qur'an, which serves as the foundation for the present research and is rich in knowledge and diverse teachings, underscores the significance of the process of inference and the potency of human reasoning in attaining profound truths. It invites humankind to engage in contemplation of the signs of creation and to draw logical conclusions from them. In this context, the role of inference in comprehending the phenomena of the universe becomes more pronounced. Interdisciplinary research facilitates the integration of diverse fields of knowledge.

Inference from English text represents a sophisticated challenge in NLP, moving beyond superficial pattern matching to derive implicit information and structured knowledge that is not directly stated within a text (Dagdelen et al. 2024). Unlike traditional extraction methods that focus on explicit, token-level matches, inference seeks to reconstruct deep semantic structures, identifying compositional relations, nested attributes, and context-dependent meanings often distributed across sentences and even paragraphs (Dagdelen et al. 2024). The ultimate goal of inference generation is to transform loosely structured, free-form language into analyzable variables, which supports critical applications such as clinical research, materials discovery, and legal analysis (L. Wang et al. 2024). This reconstruction of underlying knowledge is vital for building comprehensive, structured databases that enhance both scientific discovery and real-world decision support systems (Gu et al. 2025).

Inference generation bridges three foundational fields: natural language inference (NLI), information extraction (IE), and domain-specific reasoning (Dagdelen et al. 2024). Like NLI, it requires models to assess logical consequences from a passage; like IE, it demands mapping extracted or inferred knowledge into structured representations. Importantly, domain-specific inference often requires deep conceptual schemas, which general-purpose language models struggle to represent adequately (Dagdelen et al. 2024). For instance, inferring social determinants of health (SDoH) from clinical notes demands familiarity with clinical semantics, social contexts, and healthcare documentation conventions (Gu et al. 2025). Similarly, comprehending research papers in materials chemistry requires

understanding domain-specific nomenclature and implicit conventions (Dagdelen et al. 2024). The ability to fuse linguistic understanding with specialized knowledge enables scalable mining of systems like electronic health records (EHRs) that previously resisted quantitative analysis (Gu et al. 2025). Such advancements herald a major transformation in how unstructured professional texts can be converted into actionable knowledge.

Historically, early extraction methods targeted surface-level patterns, often relying on predetermined rules or keyword matching (Dagdelen et al. 2024). Such techniques failed to capture the complex relational and semantic structures that characterize true inference. The emergence of large language models (LLMs) has enabled a paradigmatic shift, allowing models to perform deep semantic reasoning, infer implicit attributes, and yield structured, machine-readable outputs such as JSON objects. This progression has made it possible to convert raw, unstructured text such as clinical admission records or scientific literature into analyzable datasets (L. Wang et al. 2024). Their ability to model contextual meaning and reconstruct relational structures makes LLMs indispensable for building domain-specific knowledge bases at scale (Dagdelen et al. 2024). Large language models such as GPT-3, GPT-4, PaLM, and Llama have demonstrated remarkable emergent abilities in natural language understanding, long-form reasoning, and open-ended question answering (F. Wang et al. 2024).

Their vast pretrained knowledge allows them to perform complex tasks such as linking dopants to host materials in chemistry papers, extracting biomedical attributes, and interpreting legal concepts across documents (Dagdelen et al. 2024; L. Wang et al. 2024). Their proficiencies extend to multi-hop reasoning, synthesizing information across multiple passages, and generating coherent outputs across diverse domains (F. Wang et al. 2024). These abilities make LLMs promising cognitive tools for automating intellectual tasks traditionally reserved for domain experts.

The necessity of this research can be summarized in terms of time and cost efficiency. The substitution of human reasoning with intelligent inference has been demonstrated to enhance the efficiency of analysis while concomitantly reducing expenses. This transformation plays a pivotal role across various fields and will have substantial impacts. The application of large language models in analyzing pertinent Qur'anic verses has the potential to yield novel insights into Qur'anic exegesis and to enhance comprehension.

The primary objective of this study is to automate the process of inference from Qur'anic verses using advanced NLP algorithms. Interdisciplinary Qur'anic studies, which are aimed at establishing a

connection between religion and science, demonstrate that Qur'anic teachings and scientific findings are not only compatible but can also facilitate the achievement of desired outcomes. They encourage researchers to examine this foundational text from multiple angles and incorporate it into their studies. This research is of particular significance as it is the first to apply intelligent inference to the Holy Qur'an for analysis. The subsequent section will expound upon the research methodology.

However, LLMs come with substantial limitations. Models like PaLM 540B and Llama-3.1 405B require enormous computational resources, and their high inference latency makes them impractical for real-time applications or on-device deployment (F. Wang et al. 2024). Their reliance on cloud APIs introduces ethical and privacy concerns, particularly when handling sensitive data like medical or legal documents. Moreover, general-purpose LLMs often lack the specialized knowledge necessary for expert-level reasoning in medicine, law, or materials science, leading to hallucinations or domain inaccuracies (F. Wang et al. 2024). In code generation, LLMs can inadvertently produce insecure or vulnerable scripts and even be exploited to create polymorphic malware, raising serious concerns in cybersecurity. Attribution studies show that although LLM-generated code mimics human style, its origin can be detected using inference-based authorship classification techniques with high accuracy (Choi & Mohaisen 2025).

In response to these challenges, Small Language Models (SLMs) have emerged as efficient alternatives that offer a balance between performance, accessibility, and cost-effectiveness. SLMs provide low latency, lightweight fine-tuning, and enhanced adaptability for domain-specific applications, especially in settings with privacy constraints or limited hardware resources (F. Wang et al. 2024). Their ability to run on consumer-grade GPUs makes them suitable for localized tasks such as clinical feature extraction, legal attribute classification, and educational analytics (L. Wang et al. 2024). Quantized versions of SLMs, such as the INT4 version of Qwen-14B-Chat, have demonstrated high accuracy (97.28%) and even a 0% null ratio, eliminating unsupported predictions while preserving inference quality (L. Wang et al. 2024).

These results underscore the promise of SLMs in delivering reliable inference in privacy-sensitive or resource-limited environments. Several architectural innovations further optimize inference systems. Transformer-based language models form the backbone of modern inference, learning contextual semantics, bridging inferences, and elaborative reasoning through self-supervised objectives like masked language modeling (Kumar et al. 2024). Meta-learning and few-shot learning allow models to adapt

rapidly to new tasks from limited examples, enabling incremental learning without full retraining (Kumar et al. 2024). Further, non-autoregressive (NAT) approaches using CTCPLM and connectionist temporal classification (CTC) loss dramatically improve inference speed, achieving up to 16.35× acceleration while preserving translation quality (Syu et al. 2024). Hybrid inference architectures combine lightweight named entity recognition (NER) models with LLMs, enabling scalable knowledge extraction from massive corpora of scientific literature, such as extracting over one million property records from polymer research articles (Gupta et al. 2024).

Inference-based systems have demonstrated compelling utility in real-world domains. In healthcare, modular LLM pipelines have been deployed to extract clinical features from 25,709 pregnancy cases using Qwen-14B-Chat and Baichuan2-13B-Chat, achieving high precision and low hallucination rates (L. Wang et al. 2024). In legal analytics, few-shot learning approaches enable the extraction of structured attributes from criminal case documents, significantly improving legal judgment and statute prediction tasks (Adhikary et al. 2024). In educational research, cognitive studies show that human inference depends on background knowledge, vocabulary depth, and strategic reading behaviors, highlighting parallels between human and machine inference. These findings suggest that robust inference, whether in humans or machines, relies not only on language processing but also on knowledge integration and reasoning strategies (Cain et al. 2024).

Concrete examples of Qur'anic inference. In this work, we use the term inference to denote the task of producing a concise conclusion sentence that is logically and semantically supported by two input verses (premises). For example, combining “*And sing His praises morning and evening*” (Q. 33:42) with “*And glorify Him in the night*” (Q. 52:49) yields the inferred statement “Praise God at all times,” which summarizes the shared temporal instruction across both verses. Likewise, pairing “*And gave him abundant wealth*” (Q. 74:12) with “*The Thamud denied (the truth)*” (Q. 91:11) leads to the inference that denial can be driven by attachment to worldly wealth. These examples illustrate why inference matters: it can surface implicit, cross-verse conclusions that are not explicitly stated in either verse alone, supporting scalable exploration of thematic relationships in Qur'anic exegesis.

In conclusion, the landscape of inference from English text has evolved from surface-level pattern matching to deep semantic reasoning powered by advanced neural architectures. Large language models have transformed knowledge extraction, but limitations regarding cost, accuracy, domain

alignment, and privacy have spurred the rise of Small Language Models and hybrid architectures. These developments signal a future in which inference systems combining semantic reasoning, domain knowledge, and computational efficiency serve as foundational tools in science, medicine, law, and beyond.

2. Methodology

We trained a binary classifier using the Avicenna syllogistic reasoning dataset. Each instance contains two premises and a binary label indicating whether a syllogistic relation exists between the premises (“yes”) or not (“no”). We used the dataset-provided “Syllogistic relation” field as ground truth; labels were not newly assigned by the authors. The labels in the Avicenna dataset were annotated by the dataset authors following explicit annotation guidelines; further details regarding the annotation protocol and quality are provided in Aghahadi and Talebpour (2022).

Dataset split: The Avicenna dataset contains 6,000 instances. We used the provided 4,800 instances as the training pool and 1,200 instances as the held-out test set (20%). From the 4,800 training instances, we set aside 10% (480 instances) as a validation set and used the remaining 4,320 instances for training. The validation set was used for model selection, while the test set was used only once for final reporting.

Model details: We fine-tuned a pretrained BERT model (bert-base-cased) for binary sequence classification (yes/no). Input pairs were formatted as: premise1 [SEP] premise2, tokenized using AutoTokenizer with a maximum sequence length of 512 and truncation enabled. We trained for 10 epochs with a learning rate of 2e-5, batch size 32, and weight decay 0.01, selecting the best checkpoint based on validation performance.

Verse pair construction: We extracted 6,236 verses from the English translation file (en.ahmedali). We enumerated all unique unordered verse pairs by selecting indices $i < j$, resulting in 19,440,730 candidate pairs. Each pair was then passed to the trained classifier to obtain a predicted label and confidence score.

Filtering weak pairs: We first discarded all pairs predicted as “no” by the classifier, retaining 205,013 candidate “yes” pairs. We then applied an automatic confidence threshold (score ≥ 0.80) to remove weak or low-confidence pairs, yielding 9,820 high-confidence pairs.

Human evaluation feasibility: A human expert did not evaluate all 205,013 candidate pairs. Expert review was applied only after automatic

filtering on the high-confidence subset (and/or on a small stratified sample for quality control), making the manual step practically feasible.

Figure 1 illustrates the research framework designed to analyze and generate inferential statements from the Qur'anic text in English. This architecture comprises several interconnected components.

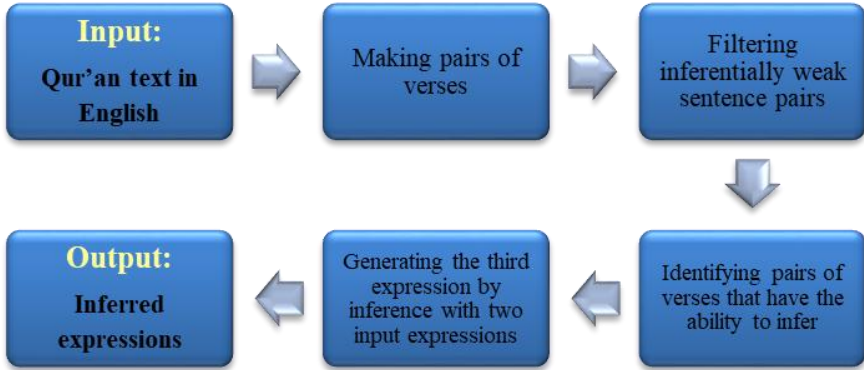


Figure 1. The overall architecture of the proposed framework

2.1. English Qur'anic Text as Input and Model Construction

The technical process of this study begins with the use of the English-translated Qur'anic text as the primary input, which assumes a pivotal role in subsequent analysis and processing. In view of the paucity of labeled datasets in the domain of Qur'anic textual inference, the Avicenna dataset, a benchmark in natural language generation and inference, was utilized for model construction (Aghahadi & Talebpour 2022).

2.2. Construction of Qur'anic Ordered Pairs

In this phase, transformers were employed for model building and text classification. The architecture is predicated on the attention mechanism, thereby enabling the model to accurately capture relationships between words and sentences (Bostrom et al. 2022). Subsequently, the Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers (BERT) model was implemented, capitalizing on its pretraining on extensive unlabeled text corpora to attain robust performance (Devlin et al. 2019). Following the deployment of the model, all Qur'anic verses were processed in pairs, with the model predicting potential relationships for each verse pair.

2.3. Filtering Weak Inference Pairs

In order to enhance the quality and relevance of the data, model-based filtering criteria were applied to remove verse pairs labeled as “no” due to weak inferential connections. This step ensures that only meaningful pairs (labeled “yes”) proceed to subsequent stages. As not all constructed pairs demonstrate robust logical or semantic coherence, this phase necessitates model-driven evaluation to eliminate weaker pairs. In essence, the model learns to accurately classify strong (related) and weak (unrelated) pairs.

2.4. Identifying Strong Inference Pairs

After applying the trained BERT-based classifier to all unique unordered verse pairs, a total of 205,013 verse pairs were predicted as exhibiting a syllogistic relation (label “yes”). These pairs represent candidate inference relationships between Qur'anic verses generated automatically by the model. To remove weak or unreliable predictions, an automatic confidence-based filtering step was applied. Only verse pairs with a predicted probability score greater than or equal to 0.80 were retained. This threshold reduced the number of candidate pairs from 205,013 to 9,820 high-confidence inference pairs. Human expert review was not conducted on the entire set of 205,013 candidate pairs due to feasibility constraints. Instead, expert evaluation was applied only after the automatic filtering stage, either on the resulting high-confidence subset or on a small stratified sample of it, with the goal of quality control and validation rather than exhaustive annotation. This process ensures both scalability and reliability in identifying strong inference pairs.

2.5. Generating Inferential Statements

In the final step, a generative inference model was employed, utilizing LLMs to produce inferences. These models analyze the inferential relationship between input verse pairs and generate logically coherent conclusions. This capability is derived from the proficiency of LLMs in semantic understanding and context-aware content generation. The Llama3 model family, which was introduced by Meta Research, signifies a novel generation of foundational AI models. These models are available in three parameter sizes (8B, 70B, and 405B) and have been shown to optimize computational resource utilization (Dubey et al. 2024). The system's capabilities are characterized by its ability to demonstrate competitive performance in comparison to models that represent the pinnacle of technological advancement, as well as its capacity to exhibit behavior that

is aligned with human tendencies. The present study implemented the Meta Llama 3.1 8B variant. The ensuing sections are dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the results and analyses.

3. Results

This study is among the first to apply advanced NLP algorithms and LLMs to generate intelligent inferences from Qur'anic verses. The findings indicate that these models can effectively identify semantic relationships between Qur'anic verses and produce logically coherent inferential statements. They further show that pre-trained language models function as effective instruments for the analysis of religious texts, particularly the Holy Qur'an. This approach has been demonstrated to reduce the time and costs associated with textual analysis while enabling the discovery of novel and deeper interconnections between verses.

In the contemporary digital research environment, interdisciplinary studies and diverse methodological strategies have played a pivotal role in propelling scientific inquiry forward. The integration of knowledge and methodologies from multiple domains has been demonstrated to facilitate the emergence of new insights, underscoring the transformative potential of cross-disciplinary collaboration in computational linguistics and theological studies.

3.1. Performance Evaluation

Table 1 presents the performance metrics of the proposed model.

Table 1. Performance metrics of the proposed model

Number of Verses	Number of Ordered Pairs	Verses Suitable for Inference	Accuracy
6,236	19,440,730	9,820	84%

As illustrated in Table 2, the model's outputs are presented in English.

Table 2. Sample outputs in English

No.	First Verse	Second Verse	Inferred
1	And glorify Him in the night, and when the stars begin to wane (Q. 52:49)	And sing His praises morning and evening (Q. 33:42)	Praise God at all times
2	The Thamud denied (the truth) in their perverseness (Q. 91:11)	And gave him abundant wealth (Q. 74:12)	Their denial was due to their love for and being enriched by worldly wealth.
3	Why then do they turn away from the admonition (Q. 74:49)	But those who try to subvert Our signs will be given over to punishment (Q. 34:38)	Those who deny or go against God's messages will face punishment.
4	When souls are reunited (with the bodies) (Q. 81:7)	Gather all the wicked together and their comrades, and those they had worshipped (Q. 37:22)	Judgment or a reckoning for the wicked will occur when souls are reunited with their bodies.
5	Whoever turns away from it will surely carry a burden on the Day of Judgement (Q. 20:100)	Surely the devotees will drink cups flavoured with palm blossoms (Q. 76:5)	Turning away from Allah will result in a burden on the Day of Judgement, while devotion to Him brings rewards and blessings.

3.2. Analysis of Inferential Sentences in the Output

In this section of the study, brief explanations are provided regarding the inferential outputs.

1. The first verse details the glorification of the Lord during nocturnal hours, while the subsequent verse underscores the glorification of God in the morning and evening. The proposed language model, by integrating these two verses with its temporal awareness, has deduced that the worship and praise of the Lord should be unceasing (in all circumstances).
2. Based on the Qur'anic verses, the people of Thamud turned to denial despite the abundant material blessings and vast wealth bestowed upon them. This rejection of the truth stemmed from their deep attachment to material possessions and worldly allurements. The present analysis indicates that accepting the truth and following divine commands requires a detachment from worldly attachments and an orientation toward the transcendent truth.
3. The first verse alludes to a collective renunciation of truth, while the subsequent verse delves into the repercussions of those who engage in the act of falsehood. In the interpretation of these verses, the model identifies "turning away" as a metaphor for rejection and explicitly describes the severe punishment awaiting such individuals.
4. The first verse alludes to the reanimation of the soul within the physical body, while the subsequent verse portrays the congregation of all transgressors and the deities they venerate. Despite the absence of

explicit mention of the Day of Judgment in these verses, the model, based on the concept of the soul's return to the body, has inferred a day of reckoning for the sinners.

5. The initial verse addresses those who disregard God and the Day of Judgment, burdening themselves with the weight of sins through persistent wrongdoing. In contrast, the second verse delineates the righteous, characterized as individuals who, through their pious deeds, find themselves immersed in divine and heavenly blessings. A thorough examination of these verses reveals a definitive conclusion: those who transgress will face dire consequences, while those who adhere to virtuous principles are poised to receive substantial rewards.

4. Conclusion

This study evaluated a computational model for Qur'anic analysis using a large-scale comparative framework. The model processed a corpus of 6,236 verses, from which 9,820 structured inferences were systematically derived. The evaluation was conducted through an automated process that generated 19,440,730 comparative data points. The results demonstrate that the model achieved a final inference accuracy of 84%. This outcome substantiates the efficacy of the proposed methodology, which integrates domain-specific knowledge from Qur'anic studies with advanced natural language processing techniques. The model's performance highlights the utility of LLMs in enhancing analytical capabilities for complex textual problems. By leveraging vast pre-trained knowledge, LLMs can significantly contribute to the precision and quality of scholarly inferences in the humanities. This research signifies a substantive advancement at the intersection of Islamic studies and artificial intelligence. It underscores the considerable potential of computational methods to facilitate rigorous, scalable analysis in religious and humanistic disciplines. The findings provide a robust foundation for future research, encouraging more extensive and applied explorations of digital tools in specialized scholarly domains.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been extracted from the thesis prepared by Samira Abdi under the supervision of Dr. Alireza Talebpour, Dr. Ahmad Mahmoudi-Aznavah and Dr. Mostafa Moradi in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Computational Qur'an Mining. The authors extend their gratitude to the Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies Research Institute, Shahid Beheshti University, and the Research Deputy for supporting the research.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.


Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

References

- Adhikary, S., Sen, P., Roy, D., & Ghosh, K. (2024). A case study for automated attribute extraction from legal documents using large language models. *Artificial Intelligence and Law*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10506-024-09425-7>
- Aghahadi, Z., & Talebpour, A. (2022). Avicenna: A challenge dataset for natural language generation toward commonsense syllogistic reasoning. *Journal of Applied Non-Classical Logics*, 32(1), 55–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11663081.2022.2041352>
- Ali, Ahmed (2001). *Al-Qur'ān: A contemporary translation*. Princeton University Press. <https://tanzil.net/trans/>
- Bostrom, K., Sprague, Z., Chaudhuri, S., & Durrett, G. (2022). Natural language deduction through search over statement compositions. *arXiv:2201.06028*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2201.06028>
- Cain, P. K., et al. (2024). The influence of reader and text characteristics on sixth graders' inference making. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 48(1), 24-45 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12474>
- Choi, S., & Mohaisen, D. A. (2025). Attributing ChatGPT-generated source codes. *IEEE Transactions on Dependable and Secure Computing*, 22(4), 3602-3615. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TDSC.2025.3535218>
- Dagdelen, J., Dunn, A., Lee, S., Walker, N., Rosen, A. S., Ceder, G., & Persson, K. A. (2024). Structured information extraction from scientific text with large language models. *Nature Communications*, 15, 1418. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-45563-x>
- Devlin, J., Chang, M.-W., Lee, K., & Toutanova, K. (2019). BERT: Pre-training of deep bidirectional transformers for language understanding. In *Proceedings of the 2019 Conference of the North American Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics* (4171–4186). Minneapolis, Minnesota. Association for Computational Linguistics. <https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/N19-1423>
- Dubey, A., et al. (2024). The Llama 3 herd of models. *arXiv:2407.21783*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2407.21783>
- Gu, B., Shao, V., Liao, Z., Carducci, V., Brufau, S. R., Yang, J., & Desai, R. J. (2025). Scalable information extraction from free text electronic health records using large language models. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 25. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-025-02470-z>
- Gupta, S., Mahmood, A.-U., Shetty, P., Adeboye, A., & Ramprasad, R. (2024). Data extraction from polymer literature using large language models. *Communications Materials*, 5, 269. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43246-024-00708-9>
- Kumar, S., Sharma, A., Shokeen, V., Azar, A. T., Amin, S. U., & Khan, Z. I. (2024). Meta-learning for real-world class incremental learning: A transformer-based

- approach. *Scientific Reports*, 14, 23092. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-71125-8>
- Syu, S., Xie, J., & Lee, H. (2024). Improving non-autoregressive translation quality with pretrained language model, embedding distillation and upsampling strategy for CTC. *IEEE/ACM Transactions on Audio, Speech, and Language Processing*, 32, 4121-4133. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TASLP.2024.3451977>
- Wang, F., Zhang, Z., Zhang, X., Wu, Z., Mo, T., Lu, Q., Wang, S. et al. (2024). A comprehensive survey of small language models in the era of large language models: Techniques, enhancements, applications, collaboration with LLMs, and trustworthiness. *ACM Transactions on Intelligent Systems and Technology*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2411.03350>
- Wang, L., Ma, Y., Bi, W., Lv, H., & Li, Y. (2024). An entity extraction pipeline for medical text records using large language models: Analytical study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 26, e54580. <https://doi.org/10.2196/54580>

Structure and Semantics in Surah al-Nisā`: On Marriage, Wealth, and Building a Community

Rawand Zoulfikar Osman¹ 

Independent Researcher, PhD in Islamic Studies, University of Birmingham, England.

Article History: Received 4 April 2025; Accepted 28 May 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

This paper asks whether existing scholarship on the unity and structure of Surah al-Nisā` can be used as a hermeneutic tool. The first part of the paper attempts to find if there is meaning in the structure, particularly in the final verse on *Kalālah*, verse 176 which seems to be misplaced. The second part of the paper explores some of the key words used to describe gender/marital relations in Surah al-Nisā`, which are actually repeated throughout the surah in different capacities. Drawing on three classical and modern tafsīrs with an eye to coherence (al-Rāzī, al-Biqā`ī, and Tabataba`i) this paper recontextualises such words as *qiwāmah*, *fadl*, and *nushūz*. In the final discussion, concepts of femininity and masculinity as they relate to the surah are analysed.

KEYWORDS: The Qur'an, Surah al-Nisā`, Qur'anic coherence, *Fadl*, *Munāsabah*, *Qiwāmah*, *Kalālah*, *Nushūz*, Gender relations in the Qur'an.

1. Introduction

Considering the Islamic feminist hermeneutical principle that a holistic vision of the Qur'an is needed in order to properly understand its particular verses (Afifi 2022), *ilm al-munāsabah* seems like one place to look for just such a connection. This traditional Islamic science of studying the connection between Qur'anic verses has culminated in contemporary scholarship on the unity of the Qur'anic surah. This paper comprises two parts, one on structure and the other on semantics. It begins by examining contemporary literature that has dealt with the coherence and structure of

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: osmanrawand18@gmail.com

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I2.3>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_106636.html?lang=en

Surah al-Nisā'. Here, the aim is not to add to this body of literature in that regard, but to see how it may be used hermeneutically in a woman's reading of the Qur'an. This will then take us back to the classical *tafsīr* that employs *'ilm al-munāsabah* in connecting the verses of this *surah*, finally leading to an investigation of the *surah*'s key words in reference to gender relations. There are, overall, four words that come to focus here. *Kalālah* is used twice in the Qur'an, in this *surah*. *Qiwāmah* or some variant of it, will be shown to be a 'focus-word' of Surah al-Nisā' as a whole, and its "basic" and "relational meanings" will be examined.¹ *Faql* will be shown to be the focus-word on gender relations. *Nushūz*, in its sense of marital conflict also occurs twice in the Qur'an, within this *surah*, once for the wife and once for the husband, although it is used once more in its literal sense of 'to rise' in (Q. 58: 11), in Surah al-Mujādilah nonetheless. Finally, on a conclusive note, we shall see how non-contextual readings of those key words were developed within legal constructs which now seem removed from the goals of the *surah*.

2. Structure and Aims of Surah al-Nisā'

Mustansir Mir, one of the foremost contemporary writers on coherence in the Qur'an, argues that considering the *surah* as a unit had taken root among many modern exegetes such as the Pakistani Amīn Iṣlāhī (d. 1997), the Iranian Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i (d. 1981), and the Egyptian Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) among others. He convincingly argues that this is an indigenous effort, not necessarily to answer western scholars or orientalist who find the Qur'an disjointed, but an approach to the sacred text that has arisen individually and spontaneously, in order to provide more organic interpretations of the Qur'an in the challenging modern age (Mir 1993, 217-221). A few medieval exegetes like Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210 AD) did pay attention to what they called *'ilm al-munāsabah*, a "linear-atomistic" method connecting the preceding and following verses, whereas the modern method may be described as "organic-holistic" (Mir 1993, 212, 219). Even so, Andrew Rippin (2013) suggests that this modern approach to coherence might be apologetic, and that at least some facets of this development in Qur'anic studies relate to concurrent theories in literary criticism. Rippin rather favours a reading focused on the effect of the text on the reader's experience, the impression it leaves. Salwa el-Awa (2006) views the structure of *surahs* as an interwoven fabric; for all intents and purposes, it is the immediate context, closer to the verse in question that has the most

1- This is borrowing from Toshihiko Izutsu's monumental work (Izutsu 2002, 11-28).

relevant meaning in its decoding, irrespective of the 'unity of the *surah*' as such. Mathias Zahniser (2000), who did work on the unity of some longer *surahs* including Surah al-Nisā', advises that his findings be used heuristically; that is, with a practical approach to problem solving that is not guaranteed to be optimal.

As regards Surah al-Nisā', there are five existing readings in terms of structure and coherence, four of them largely resembling one another, although only two will be consulted here,¹ Mustansir Mir representing Amin Islahi's exegesis (which is in turn based on his teacher Hamid al-Din Farahi's Qur'anic exegesis grounded in thematic and structural coherence) and Mathias Zahniser. These two contemporary scholars of very different backgrounds (Islahi being a traditional Islamic scholar and Zahniser a western academic) happen to structure Surah al-Nisā' and read its coherence similarly.

By careful reading Islahi discerns the *surah*'s compositional units and the breaks between them. Then, based on the thematic contents of those units, he finds the *surah*'s core theme, what he calls '*amūd* (pillar) (Zahniser 2000). Islahi thus divides Surah al-Nisā' into three main sections. Zahniser is not so much concerned with a central motif of the *surah* as he is with its structure, particularly its thematic units. He worked on this prior to his knowledge of Islahi, yet in line with the latter, he found that major breaks in the *surah* occur between verses 43-44 and 126-127. However, he identifies two additional major breaks, as a result of what he calls a "Battle Block" in verses 71-104, therefore dividing the *surah* into five sections (Zahniser 2000):

1- The other three are Raymond Farrin's, Nicolai Sinai's, and Joseph Lowry's. Farrin's (2016) structure is made of five symmetrical sections; his additional break at verses 105-115 is due to what he considers an "exemplary ruling", which is however mostly based on extra-Qur'anic sources. Farrin's structure otherwise conforms to the ones represented here; his exceptional break (which still starts at the end of Zahniser's "battle block") if considered in the body of our paper will only complicate matters that nonetheless do not affect our thesis in any way. Another reading is Nicolai Sinai's which is duly noted; however Sinai (2021) develops a plausible chronological development of the *surah*, whereas it is the finished product that concerns us here. Finally, most recently is Joseph Lowry's reading. Lowry (2022) "highlight(s) the limits of structural interpretation, at least in regard to Surah al-Nisa", and suggests that this *surah* is best understood primarily in relation to its thematic content, as an aggregate of materials that reflect an urgent preoccupation with communal governance and regulation." He finds non-legislative themes to be tied to internal and external threats to the Qur'anic community. Lowry's reading emphasises religious polemics with the people of the book in the second and penultimate sections (Q. 4: 44-57, 153-173), thereby finding symmetry in there. More importantly for us here, his reading on the women verses (besides the first legislative passage of the *surah* Q. 4: 1-43) he finds to be either out of place, such as Q. 4: 127-130, or intrusive, such as Q. 4: 176. Therefore, not considering the two incidents of "yastafūnaka" an inclusion in Q. 4: 127, 176, he finds those women verses to exhibit tension in the structure. He does however agree with Zahniser that the battle block is indeed the centre of the *surah*. Our paper here is an exercise in using existing hypotheses on structure heuristically, it is not on the various readings of the structure of the *surah* per se.

1. Social Reforms: verses 1–43; “provides legislative guidance for the Muslim community. It deals with women and related concerns: orphans, marriage, dowry, inheritance, sexual offences, concubines, and other relations between men and women” (Zahniser 2000). This first section Zahniser names the “Women Block” (Zahniser 1997).
2. The Islamic Community and its Opponents: verses 44–126; discusses the Jews’ and hypocrites’ opposition to reform. It instructs Muslims not to allow conflict to keep them from justice and divine guidance, and that they must be prepared to fight when necessary and make sacrifices for Islam (Mir 1986). Within this section of Islahi, Zahniser further identifies a “Battle Block” which extends from verses 71-104 (Zahniser 1997). Therefore, here Zahniser has three sections:
 - Section II: verses 44-70. This will be mirrored by section IV.
 - Section III: verses 71-104 is the ‘battle block’ in the middle; this “contains all references in the surah for fighting in the way of God... its major theme not found outside its borders.”
 - Section IV: verses 105-126. Sections II and IV address the People of the Book, and he confirms Islahi’s suggestion, that this surah offers “legislation or guidelines and exhortation or summons to Islam” (Zahniser 1997).
3. Conclusion: verses 127–176; replies to questions about legal reforms introduced previously in the surah, warns the People of the Book, and consoles the Prophet (Mir 1986). Zahniser names verses 127-134 the “Women Cluster” and verse 176 the “Women Verse” (Zahniser 1997). He makes an interesting point on the address for humanity (*yā ayyuha al-nās*) in verse 1, and the same in the penultimate thematic unit verses 170-175 which concerns Christians more particularly, thus stressing the importance of the latter message. He concedes however, the relevance of verse 176 at the end, saying “that position is hermeneutic” (Zahniser 1997).

According to Islahi, the ‘*amūd*’ unifying these parts is, “factors that make for cohesion in a Muslim society” (Mir 1986). The first break in the surah happens at verse 43 which mentions the word “women” but shifts the topic signalling a transition; semantically it is still connected to section 1 of the *surah*, but thematically it indicates change. This is a transition device for oral discourse (Zahniser 2000). The final break in the surah occurs at verse 127, which reverts back to the topic in section 1 with the phrase, “They consult thee concerning women (*wa yastaftūnaka fī al-nisā’*)”. This is

similar to the final verse 176, “They ask thee for a pronouncement (*yastaftūnaka*)”. In fact, the term “*yastaftūnaka*” in this form, occurs only twice in the Qur’an, and it is in these verses.

Mir asks whether verse 135 (*yā ayyuha al-ladhīna āmanū kūnū qawwāmīn bil-qist*) makes as good a point of division as verse 127 (Mir 1986). He asks why despite the obvious similarity in their formulaic structure (*yastaftūnaka*) verses 127 and 176 are not placed next to each other, for even if the question about verse 176 was posed later in time, the verses could have been grouped together in the surah itself as occurs elsewhere in the Qur’an (Mir 1986). Mir does not elaborate on his proposal, but Zahniser agrees with him and provides several points as to why, according to his own understanding of structure, breaking at verse 135 would make more sense (Zahniser 2000). Yet in the final analysis, Zahniser decides with Islahi, that the break needs to be at verse 127 because this helps identify the position of the *surah*’s last verse 176. To Zahniser, verse 176 begins with a refrain identical to that in verse 127 and shares the same theme on “women”. This thus forms brackets for the last fifty verses of the surah. These brackets which encompass section 3 in fact balance section 1 which is devoted to women and related matters (Zahniser 2000). On the contrary Mir, who favours a break at verse 135, finds that the last isolated verse on sisters’ inheritance means that coherence need not be viewed as rigidly as Islahi presents it (Mir 1986).

This final verse which altered our two scholars’ views on structure in general (in the case of Mir) and this surah’s structure in particular (in the case of Zahniser), is perhaps not so random. Rippin (2013) has observed that disruptions need not be glossed over or denied as structuralists do, but that they “may also convey meaning through the very act of disruption.” Besides closing the bracket, does this verse have any significance concluding Surah al-Nisā’?

2.1. The Concluding Āyah: The Case of the Kalālah

Verse 176 revisits the inheritance of sisters where in the absence of immediate ascending/descending heirs, collaterals take their share of the inheritance. Verse 176 is the second verse to deal with the case of *Kalālah*. Earlier in the surah, verse 12 reads: “... *If the heirs of a deceased man or woman are collateral relatives and a brother or sister survives, then he or she takes one-sixth. But if there is more than one brother or sister, they share one-third.*” At the end of the surah, verse 176 reads: “*God ordains concerning collateral relatives that if a man dies without a child and leaves a sister, she takes half of the inheritance; and he will be her heir if she dies*

without a child. If there are two sisters, they take two-thirds of the inheritance. If the collaterals include both males and females, then the male takes a share equivalent to that of two females."¹

Authentic traditions concur that verse 176 is known as *āyah al-ṣayf* because it was revealed in the summer time and verse 12 as *āyah al-shitā'* because it had been revealed earlier in the winter (Muslim n.d., 2: 81).² There is consensus among the various legal schools, that the apparent contradiction between these two verses is resolved through the *sunnah* of the Prophet, which shows that the first of them verse 12 specifies the shares of uterine brothers and sisters, while the other verse 176 specifies the shares of germane and consanguine brothers and sisters. Same as elsewhere in the Qur'anic verses of inheritance, it is the female share that is specified outright, often leaving the male share to be deduced. The uterine sister inherits equally with her uterine brother, and so does the mother with the father of the deceased. It is the daughter and the germane or consanguine sister who receive half as much as their male counterparts when they inherit jointly ('Abd al-'Ati 1977).

There is a debate on whether the term *Kalālah* pertains to the deceased or to the heirs, and this has been problematised in contemporary scholarship, with far-reaching consequences. For example, David Powers' Aramaic reading of *Kalālah* as "female-in-law" leads him to read verse 12b as referring to testate succession - in the sense of the freedom to nominate an heir, as opposed to the designation of heirs by the Qur'an (*'ilm al-farā'id*) with the freedom to bequeath only a portion of the estate - and consequently he reads verse 176 to be in case of intestate succession (Powers 1982). Richard Kimber (1998) understands *Kalālah* as *'aṣaba* (agnate) - some evidence for which he finds in the lexicographical tradition - but his re-reading of the two *Kalālah* verses requires an absolutist understanding of *naskh*, in particular, that verse 176 abrogated verse 12, in favour of siblings against the *'aṣaba*. Yet, Yassin Dutton (2014) shows that if one were to read *Kalālah* as a verbal noun (*maṣdar*), therefore pertaining to the situation of this kind of inheritance, it would at least greatly minimise unnecessary complications, and one might add, it would also take *Kalālah* to mean the same exact thing in both verses where it occurs. Thus, Dutton (2014) translates this (part of verse 12) roughly as, "*If a man is inherited from by*

1- Qur'an translation for Q. 4:12, 176 here, are from Coulson (1971). He also observes that the root of the word *Kalālah* is k-l-l and one possibility for its meaning would be "to surround" similar to the word "iklil". The etymological root however signifies weakness, fatigue (Lane 1968, 8: 256). Other Qur'anic verses will be based on Pickthall's translation.

2- Pavel Pavlovitch (2016), after David Powers, contends that the "summer-verse linguistic tag" was transferred from verse 12 to 176 since around the first half of the second century AH. Whatever the case may be, this does not affect our understanding of the content of these verses.

way of *Kalālah* - or a woman - and he has a brother or a sister” Agostino Cilardo (2005) correctly finds that the crux of the matter in the traditional literature was not linguistic but a legal debate, with the question of what *wālid* (parent) and *walad* (child) mean to have been more important than what *Kalālah* means.

Most reports on the allegedly problematic notion of *Kalālah* centre on the figure of the second caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. While the reports themselves are of an anecdotal nature, there might well be a valid reason for them. Of special interest here is a tradition - among others - reported by al-Ṭabarī and translated by Powers (1982), “Then he said, ‘Verily, I am about to issue a decree regarding *al-Kalālah* that women will talk about in their private quarters.’ At that very moment, a snake emerged from the house, causing everyone to scatter (*tafarraqū*). [‘Umar] said: ‘Had God wanted the matter to terminate, then he would have finished it.’”

As mentioned above, all siblings are considered a case of *Kalālah* and therefore not primary heirs however, “Of those blood relatives, therefore, who are primary or substitute heirs only the mother and the grandmother do not exclude the uterines. But the uterines are not excluded by any agnatic brother or sister or by any other secondary heir. When entitled to succeed, the uterines inherit always as Qur’anic heirs, one brother or sister taking a basic portion of one-sixth and two or more sharing equally, regardless of sex, in a basic collective portion of one-third. The rule that a male relative takes twice the share of a corresponding female relative is a principle of agnatic succession which does not apply to uterines” (Coulson 1971).

Here, inheritance through the female bloodline has a uniformly egalitarian and collective aspect to it. Shi’i law takes this egalitarian clause not only to apply to the uterine brothers and sisters themselves, “but the children of the uterine brother share their father’s entitlement equally, and the great grandparents also share equally in the entitlement of the paternal grandmother, *since they are connected with the praepositus through a female* [emphasis mine]” (Coulson 1971).¹ Kimber (1998) has observed however, that Shi’i law does not take its own theory to all its logical conclusions.

Before Islam, agnatic relations and camaraderie in arms constituted the primary, almost only category of heirs (‘Abd al-‘Ati 1977). In Islam, within this *surah*, this was changed into the blood relationship (Q. 4:7) and included women as inheritors after they had been inherited (Q. 4:19). Fatima

1- Further, due to the rule of the strength of the blood-tie, “any germane, male or female, excludes any consanguine, but neither germanes nor consanguines exclude uterines.” Maternal grandparents rank as uterine siblings (Coulson 1971).

Mernissi's (1991) analysis has shown just how shocking the new inheritance laws were to their primary recipients, and that they sometimes did not understand this new ethical system that was often in favour of the helpless. The changes that distributed wealth freely to those who did not contribute in making it caused dismay sometimes among the new Muslims themselves ('Abd al-'Ati 1977). All readings and re-readings of the *Kalālah* examined above have, with varying degrees, found that it favours the nuclear family (as opposed to the agnates) and the female.

Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Biqā'ī (d. 1480 AD) - whose hermeneutics is based on *'ilm al-munāsabah*, the knowledge of correspondence among verses - finds more than randomness or structural necessity, but actual meaning in putting verse 176 at the end of this surah. On the former *Kalālah*, he hints at the important placement of the latter saying, "*al-khitām min maẓannāt al-ihtimām*" (al-Biqā'ī n.d.). Then, al-Biqā'ī finds that the repetition of the expression "*yastaftūnaka*" in verses 127 and 176 indicates that the audience iterated questions about women and children's inheritance, and this implies their resistance to the answers they received. To him, the Qur'an's insistence in return, always reassuring them that "*Say: God hath pronounced for you*" (Q. 4: 176) means to advise not to resist a divine decree like this one. al-Biqā'ī also finds that the final verse's final phrase, "*God expounds unto you, so that ye err not (yubayyinu allāhu lakum an taḍillū), God is knower of all things*" (Q. 4: 176) was left until the very end of the surah purposefully, knowing that introducing what the audience could not bring themselves to accept - in terms of the legal verses on women and children's inheritance - needed to be done gradually in a manner that helps people become more receptive to it. Only then could the message be sealed with that final phrase that relates to the opening verse of the surah; after declaring the common source of all humanity and equating men and women ontologically in the first verse, the two genders are similarly and decisively equated in their entitlement to inheritance, thus connecting God's omnipotence in verse 1 with his omniscience in verse 176 (al-Biqā'ī n.d.).¹

Indeed, the opening of Surah al-Nisā', reminds the human family of its single soul origin (*naḥs wāḥidah*) and common bond of flesh, *al-arḥām*, literally "the wombs" but meaning blood relationships (*wa-ttaqqu allāh alladhī tasā'alūna bihi wa al-arḥām*) (Q. 4:1). Among other things, the surah continues to teach that inheritance is now due to the blood relationship. This new rule is spelled out as *ulu al-arḥām ba'ḍuhum awlā bi-ba'ḍ fi kitāb allāh*, in Surah al-Anfāl (Q. 8:75) and Surah al-Aḥzāb (Q. 33:6). That the

1- Al-Rāzī (1981, 11: 123-124) too considers one of the subtle marvels of this surah is that it connects God's omnipotence in verse 1 and omniscience in verse 176, but he does not go deeply into the placement of the last *Kalālah* verse.

mother's inheritance is either equal to the father's or exceeds it (Q. 4:11), puts into practice this rule of priority for those with a closer "womb" relationship (Tabataba'i 1996, 4:214).

With this in mind, we may conclude that the two main verses on inheritance in the first section of the surah, already contained the principles of succession for descending heirs in verse 11a, ascending heirs in verse 11b, with a mention of siblings. Then, verse 12a moves to the inheritance of spouses, and finally the uterine succession among collaterals in verse 12b. There is no collateral inheritance in the presence of a child or parent, and siblings inherit by the right of their departed parent who is their connection to the deceased. Thus, it may be understood that verse 176 was indeed only an elaboration of the above; that for the collaterals who are not uterine, the general - though not absolute - rule of succession (the male's share being equal to two females) applies.

Even though the case of the collaterals is merely in the absence of primary heirs; as Leila Ahmed (1992) argues in an altogether different capacity, even ideals which are not practiced are the conceptual ground upon which other laws are built. The case of the *Kalālah* may often be only conceptual but it is foundational. Whether it is the uterine sister's equal share to her brother, or even the germane/consanguine sister's inheritance rights spelled out, it creates a conceptual ground even if it were rarely practiced. Like the rest of section 3, verse 176 seems like an afterthought, answering questions related to issues earlier in the surah. Yet it effectively concludes the entirety of Surah al-Nisā' not simply by closing the brackets, but by grounding the ontological equality between the two genders in the opening verse of the surah, in securing succession for unlikely female heirs.

3. Other Key Words on Gender in Surah al-Nisā'

Mir (1986) pushes the idea of thematic coherence when he comments on the Qur'anic expression "*taṣrīf al-āyāt*", which has also been dealt with in the Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an,

"*Taṣrīf*, a word used in the Qur'an to denote the changing patterns of movement of the winds (Q. 2:164; 46:27) and also the diverse modes of presentation of the Qur'anic message (*nuṣarrifū*, as in Q. 6:65; and *ṣarrafnā*, in Q. 17:41; 46:27), may be called a Qur'anic narrative principle. Typically, the Qur'an does not present, for example, a story all in one place but breaks it up into several portions, relating different portions in different places, often with varying amounts and emphasis of detail, as they are needed and in accordance with the thematic exigencies of the surahs in which they

occur. The Qur'an does not tell a story for its own sake but in order to shed light on the theme under treatment in a particular surah. In doing so, it eliminates chronology as an organizing principle, replacing it with the principle of thematic coherence, a principle that determines which portion of the story will be narrated in what place. In other words, the story told in a given surah is likely to be surah-specific" (Kadi & Mir 2003).

Terminology often presumed to be the definitive expression of gender relations in the Qur'an, is in fact repeated within our surah in various contexts. Other surahs employ other terms and concepts. Also, as we discussed in the introduction, one does not need to prove coherence as such, in order to appreciate the semantic and thematic context of supposed gendered terms within the surah and the Qur'an. In the case of *Kalālah*, it was not difficult for the Qur'anic audience to remember that the *Kalālah* had been previously discussed because verse 176 itself reminds them that this is in answer to their own question on the *Kalālah*. Seeing the importance of positioning the *Kalālah* as the concluding verse of Surah al-Nisā', we now ask about the *taṣrīf* of other gender-related key words in the surah. The words *qiwāmah*, *faḍl* and *nushūz* come to the front as they interrelate within the surah's larger semantic and thematic context.

In this section, we will start by looking at the gendered verses in Surah al-Nisā', with the aid of those major *tafsīr* compilations that profess to have a more holistic approach to the text. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was perhaps the first to employ *'ilm al-munāsabah*. He did look at the connections between verses but mostly in a linear order, the procession of verses one after another, without integrating this too much into a larger vision of the *surah*'s coherence. Then Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī concentrated his exegesis on the holistic coherence between verses from the start of the surah to its end (in addition to coherence between surahs too). His vision on the meaning of the placement of verses was evident in his reading of the *Kalālah* at the end of Surah al-Nisā'. As his title indicates "*Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*", coherence is the central motif of his exegesis. From the modern period, Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i's (d. 1981 AD) exegesis pays attention to the aim (*gharaḍ*) of the surah which is always stated at the beginning of each surah, although this is only one of his methods for comprehending the Qur'an. He always separates his inter-Qur'anic exegesis from extra-Qur'anic sources, therefore begins with the main section employing *tafsīr al-kitāb bil-kitāb*, only after that does he add sections that consider philosophical (including anthropological, psychological, historical, scientific, ethical etcetera) reflections and *ḥadīth* narrations. As Mir shows, none in the modern period is as efficient or committed as Islahi to structure and coherence however, Tabataba'i (1996, 1:16; 4:134) considers the

surah's objective important enough to reject on the basis of its interpretation of a verse that does not serve the objective (Mir 1986).

The following will be an account of what the exegetes' attention to coherence adds to their own reading, and a woman's reading (i.e. women's experience at the centre) of the Qur'an. We will start with a survey of the exegetical tradition, followed by further analysis of key words.

3.1. Introduction to the Surah

At the start, al-Rāzī (1981, 9:163-173) comments that this surah contains much in legal matters, for which it starts with the guidance to show compassion to children, women, and orphans, paying them their dues (Q. 4:1-3), and thus it ends on the inheritance of *Kalālah* (Q. 4: 176), with other legal matters cushioned in between. And just as in verse 1 it offers guidance in relation to *al-arḥām*, so in verse 2 it continues its guidance towards *al-aytām*, the orphans who do not have a (*rahm*) parental relation to look after them.

Tabataba'i (1996, 4:134, 151, 155) confirms that despite the surah being revealed at different intervals, its verses do not lack a connection. He finds that the surah's grouping of themes of marriage and inheritance makes perfect sense. He explains that speaking on marriage and defining the licit and illicit in sexual relationships, is done in view of giving children their rightful place. He adds that inheritance verses are for the sake of the distribution of the wealth of the world through which a society is maintained. To him, these twin elements of progeny and property, are the pillars for establishing human society. He further points out that the verse on orphans towards the start of the surah (Q. 4: 2) is the root of all following verses on women and inheritance.

The surah groups the subjects of orphans and polygyny in verse 3 and revisits them in verse 127. Since the previous verse (Q. 4: 2) had condemned benefitting from the orphans' wealth in any way, our exegetes subscribe to the view that while in pre-Islamic Arabia, men would marry orphaned girls and confiscate their wealth, verse 3 admonishes believers who fear they would not do justice to the orphans under their care if they were to marry them, to leave them be and marry other women up to four. And just as they have come to fear God with the rights of orphans, so they should with other women as well, therefore marry just one if need be (al-Rāzī 1981, 9:177-178; al-Biqā'ī n.d., 5:177-182; Tabataba'i 1996, 4:166-167). Our exegetes further contend that verse 127 (the first "*yastaftūnaka*") is a clear reference to verse 3 (al-Rāzī 1981, 11:63; al-Biqā'ī n.d., 5:417; Tabataba'i 1996,

5:100). Indeed, these verses were revealed shortly after the battle of Uhud which had left a considerable number of widows and orphans (Watt 1956, 276).

Al-Biqā'ī (n.d., 5:191-192, 274, 426), after the first three verses of the surah - which he thinks of as introductory - takes an interesting turn. He reflects on verses 1-3 of Surah al-Nisā' - with a forward view of the whole surah - saying that marriage is the cause of reproduction and all its ramifications, and the surah teaches the way to marry, the inheritance laws, and how to reconcile spouses when they quarrel or reach a breach. He points out that all the details on conducting as well as keeping a proper marriage have been explained here, except for divorce. Al-Biqā'ī adds that since the foundation of this surah is bringing people together and keeping their rights, it has specifically addressed marital problems in order to heal them, and mentioning divorce here, besides a single hint of it in verse 130, would have been uncondusive to these ends. Al-Biqā'ī reiterates this view later after each *nushūz*. His vision must be kept in mind for the final analysis of the aims of Surah al-Nisā'.

3.2. *The Intertwining of the Qur'anic Principle of Faḍl with Qiwāmah, Nafaqah, and Nushūz*

Moving on to our next relevant passage, verses 32 to 35. Al-Rāzī's (1981, 10:82-83) initial reading generally connects verse 32 to the previous verses (29-31) with coveting being the operative word, because it generates ingratitude toward God, trespassing of boundaries, and ruins human relationships. Only after mentioning the occasion of revelation, which in all its versions has either the Prophet's wife Umm Salamah or else "the women" or "a woman" pose a question to the Prophet (more on this below) does al-Rāzī move to discussing the gendered aspect of the verse. Al-Rāzī (1981, 10:84-85) makes clear from the start that the verse may be addressing material matters, spiritual matters, or both, as he also makes clear the relativity of *faḍl* for either gender. He poses that *kasb* in verse 32 could pertain to worldly rewards including - but not limited to - inheritance which is varied among people. In his interpretation of verse 34, al-Rāzī explains that men's *faḍl* in verse 32 was their greater share in inheritance (*kasb*), and in verse 34 it is the dower they pay women and the maintenance (*nafaqah*), both of which compensate the *faḍl* of inheritance. Therefore he concludes, it is as though there is no *faḍl* for men at all. This, he says, is coherence (*naẓm*). Then, al-Rāzī starts his interpretation of verse 34 from the start, he explains men's duty of *qiwāmah* in their role as maintainers and protectors of women, but due to the disciplinary measures at the end of the verse, he

then defines *qiwāmah* as authority (*salṭanah*) over women, and this is owing to men's *faḍl* and *nafaqah*. Now, man's *faḍl* is due to both innate qualities like his sounder mind (*'aql* and *'ilm*), resoluteness (*ḥazm*), and physical strength (*quwwah*), and due to all the legal stipulations that give him precedence over women, where al-Rāzī names a host of alleged legal preferences for the man. As for the second portion of men's *qiwāmah* "*wa bimā anfaqu*", al-Rāzī now explains as man's excellence over woman because he spends the dower and maintenance (al-Rāzī 1981, 10:90-91).

As for "*fal-ṣāliḥāt qānitāt ḥafizāt lil-ghayb bimā ḥafīza allāh*", al-Rāzī sees that although women's obedience to God (*qānitāt*) is given priority, it is then coupled with their keeping their husband's rights (*ḥafizāt lil-ghayb*). Al-Rāzī (in line with standard exegesis) understands *ghayb* (absence, remoteness, hiding, concealment) as the husband's absence; meaning that she keeps his rights - regarding his money, house, and her own self - in his absence. Or he understands *bimā ḥafīza allāh* as she keeps her husband's rights, in return for the rights God had given her. Therefore, to him, this verse requires wifely obedience (al-Rāzī 1981, 10:91-92). This, al-Rāzī says is then contrasted with the opposite, the recalcitrant wife. He identifies the wife's *nushūz* as in its literal meaning of 'rising above' the husband in comparison to her previous behaviour, so that the husband notices a shift. Such disobedience may be with her words or deeds. Legal opinions are brought in here to ensure that limits are set to control the husband's disciplining of his wife, in particular he quotes al-Shāfi'ī who says that while the third measure is permissible, leaving it is better. Al-Rāzī finds that the three disciplinary measures must be taken gradually, always starting with the softest first, even if they are connected with "and" (*wa*). Finally, there might be no other way left for a marriage in trouble but to appoint arbiters (Q. 4: 35) in order to bring justice to the situation. al-Rāzī uniquely points out that the address here in verse 35, is to whom it may concern be it the judge or the community, to appoint a representative for each side, the husband and the wife (*fa-b'athū ḥakaman min ahlihi wa ḥakaman min ahlihā*) (al-Rāzī 1981, 10:93-95).

Al-Biqā'ī (n.d., 5:262-274) (inexplicably) does not take note of the issue of gender in verse 32. For verse 34, he does seem to look back at verse 32 saying, it is as though it answers the question, "why have men been preferred?" But he bypasses the notion that women have their own *faḍl* in verse 32. As a result, he explains *qiwāmah* as rule (*qiyām al-wulāt*), in disciplining, teaching, and commanding women, and he is the only one among our three exegetes who adds religion to the list of men's *faḍl*. Al-Biqā'ī however does find that the verse's ending with "God is ever high, exalted" warns that God's power over men is greater than their power over

women.

By skipping the gender issue that is actually clear in verse 32, al-Biqā'ī does not have an egalitarian reference to *faḍl* that our other exegetes have, and it seems to him, based on verse 34 alone, that men are unequivocally preferred. This is a troublesome oversight from someone whose exegesis otherwise has a more coherent vision than the others. Having followed al-Rāzī almost verbatim in some places, his utter silence on female *faḍl* speaks loudly. Perhaps he encountered an exegetical dilemma that he could not resolve. It is true that the nature of *faḍl* (for both men and women) is elusive in the text of the Qur'an, but the egalitarian allocation of *faḍl* to each gender in principle, did not elude our other exegetes.

Tabataba'i (1996, 4:335-339) groups verses 32-35 together, and he considers the gender aspect of verse 32 from the start. He understands *faḍl* as a characteristic given by God to men on the one hand and women on the other, each consequently having its ramifications in divine law. Attributing *faḍl* to God, serves to awaken each to surrender to God, and the added expression "*ba ḍakum 'ala ba ḍ*", serves to awaken to love, knowing that whoever has or has not been given some benefit is yet a part of the other. Tabataba'i prefers to understand *kasb* in verse 32 as "gathering" rather than "earning" which he points out is a true etymological meaning, because he says, a narrow financial understanding while linguistically applicable, does not fit well into the whole passage of the surah on inheritance and marriage rules. Therefore, to him, *kasb* is a gathering of characteristics that men and women may accumulate. This also means that neither men nor women ask of what was given to the other gender because if that were granted, it would be a negation of divine wisdom and corruption of divine law.

Tabataba'i (1996, 4:341-347) links verse 33 with the previous one in what he considers a single sequence (*siyāq wāḥid*), and in view of the earlier verses on inheritance in the surah, he understands "*for those with whom your right hands have made a covenant, give them their due*" (Q. 4:33) to be regarding the husband and wife. Thus, he maintains a flow from verse 32 to 34. In verse 34, Tabataba'i as al-Rāzī, understands *qayyim* as one who manages somebody else's affairs, and *qawwām* as a reinforcement of that meaning. As for *faḍl*, it means excess, therefore that with which men excel over women, and Tabataba'i understands this as men's excess in their reasoning power and in strength, whereas women live a life of sensitivity and emotionality. *Nafaqah*, he understands like the others, as men's payment of dower and maintenance support for women. Then, Tabataba'i makes the statement that the part of the verse on men's *qiwāmah* is not restricted to the marital relationship, but concerns men in general, in their

capacity for the offices of rulership (*wilāyah*) and judgement (*qaḍā'*) which require prudence (*ta'aqqul*), and war (*jihād*) which requires vehement prowess (*shiddah, ba's*). As for the part of the verse describing women as *ṣāliḥāt* etcetera, he restricts to the marital relationship. Tabataba'i considers *qawwāmūn* as general, and *ṣāliḥāt qānitāt* as specific; and just as men's *qiwāmah* in society (particularly within the three aforementioned fields of *wilāyah, qaḍā'*, and *jihād*) does not restrict women's freedom altogether, so too his *qiwāmah* within the marital relationship, does not oblige her beyond that particular marital aspect of the man's right to seek pleasure from his wife.

For Tabataba'i (1996, 4:344-351), *ṣāliḥāt* means good-natured and *qānitāt* is acquiescent. To him, it is when contrasted with *nushūz* later in the verse, that *ṣāliḥāt* and *qānitāt* convey obedience to the husband. *Hāfiẓāt lil-ghayb bimā ḥafiẓa allāh*, he understands as *ḥifẓ al-ḥuqūq* or safeguarding the legal rights (to herself and the marital home, and to his finances). Tabataba'i insists that the disciplinary measures necessarily reveal a gradation that must be respected. He also recounts traditions that hinder violence against the wife, and advises that contemplation upon them reveals Islam's true stance on the subject matter.

Due to the latter part of verse 34 - on disciplining the recalcitrant wife - both al-Rāzī and Tabataba'i end up contrasting the good women in the verse with the recalcitrant ones, and as a result, both understand *qiwāmah* in a more authoritarian manner than they had defined in the beginning. There is, another way to organise this verse though as we shall see.

Noteworthy is that in his interpretation of the inheritance verses earlier in the surah (Q. 4:11-12), Tabataba'i (1996, 4:215-217) discusses the *faḍl* in verses 32 and 34, and the supposed higher reasoning of men over women. He understands the distribution of wealth to signify that man's rationality causes him to be the one in control of wealth but without spending much of it, whereas women's emotionality causes her to spend more. This to him, explains the law of inheritance balanced with women's rights to the dower and maintenance. There (Q. 4:11-12), he continues on the polarity of *faḍl* to finally conclude that women, due to their qualities of love and compassion, and their power to attract men with those qualities, are the cornerstone of human civilisation. He points out the interdependence between the two genders, saying that what men do is for the sake of women. Ultimately, he explains, preference as such, is only ever related to piety which is never gendered. Therefore early on, he keeps an eye on the relativity of *faḍl* yet to be explored in the surah (perhaps because verse 32 in part, refers back to the inheritance verses). However - whereas al-Rāzī does not mention the

specifics of female *faḍl*, besides a tradition on women's pregnancy and nursing - Tabataba'i offers an understanding of a differentiated *faḍl* between men and women, which is too polarised and too symbolic in his perception. In an epilogue to the *qiwāmah* verse, he explains the importance of reason (*ʿaql*) in governing certain aspects of public life - reason being the masculine principle - with the importance of emotions in raising the individual soul and society as well; but the positive impact of emotion and sensitivity works well, when under the discerning influence of reason.

For those exegetes who link verse 32 with 34, *faḍl* is a key word on gender relations, and it is a point of similarity as well as the point of difference. In trying to bring the two verses together however, al-Rāzī extends men's *faḍl* beyond women and beyond his own initially egalitarian reading; thus his understanding of *qiwāmah* supersedes - even eradicates - his understanding of *faḍl*. In terms of key words on gender, *qiwāmah* as authority takes pride of place after it had been *faḍl* as equity. Therefore, the two verses 32 and 34 have not merged well. Tabataba'i tries to find a way around this, and says explicitly what al-Rāzī, al-Biqā'ī, and others do implicitly. He makes an interpretive choice to consider men's *qiwāmah* to be outside the scope of the marital relationship. Then he brings - in the most general terms - the tradition of the prophet Muhammad, that he apparently did not appoint women as judges, governors, or military leaders. All our exegetes list those public offices as "proofs" of men's *qiwāmah*. Although some women certainly did fight by the prophet Muhammad's side in battle for instance (Afsaruddin 2010 & 2019). Had Tabataba'i not made that choice, expanding men's *faḍl* beyond the egalitarianism of verse 32 would have been limited because the text itself does not give information about what either *faḍl* or *qiwāmah* are in reference to (besides *nafaqah*). Al-Rāzī had used the financial element to explain men's *faḍl* as preference, even after he had explained that the financial element evens out in the end. Tabataba'i consolidates men's *qiwāmah* not through the financial, but in extra-Qur'anic evidence based on early practice, and on his view of the nature of men and women.¹

Is man's *qiwāmah*, in the sense of being in charge of critical public affairs corroborated by the Qur'an? In Surah al-Tawbah (Q. 9:71) reads: "*And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one of another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and they establish worship and they pay the poor-due, and they obey God and his messenger...*" Asma Lambrabet (2015) emphasises that this mutual guardianship in Q. 9:71 is not

1- Of course, equating men with reason and women with emotion - or in other words men with culture and women with nature - is not unique to Islamic exegesis but seems to be deeply rooted universally (Ortner 1974).

only religio-moral but also socio-political as the verse advises men and women to “command the good and forbid the evil”, a statement frequently used in Qur’anic language in reference to socio-political matters.

It must be said, that considering the *Sunnah* of the Prophet as the context of the Qur’an is good and proper. In fact, it is precisely this look at *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* which serves to contain the severity of the latter portion of verse 34.¹ However, Tabataba’i has no evident Qur’anic reason to single out men’s *qiwāmah* as general, and women’s *qunūt* as specific. He reads the women’s part of the equation (*ṣālihāt, qānitāt, ḥāfīzāt*) to apply strictly to the marital relationship. Asking women to be submissive outside the marital home would be contrary to Islamic teachings on modesty, and the advice to the Prophet’s wives in Q. 33: 32 is the most glaring example of this.

It seems that *qiwāmah* and *faḍl* inform one another in a loop, as indeed *qiwāmah* is mentioned after *faḍl*, but *faḍl* is a condition of *qiwāmah*. Perhaps the only tangible meaning in this equation is *nafaqah* as expenditure. However, if *faḍl* (the first condition of man’s *qiwāmah*) were the same as *nafaqah* (the second condition of it), that would be redundant.² So let us consider the semantic context of each (*qiwāmah* and *faḍl*) - away from the concerns of the exegetes - particularly in their relational meanings within the surah and the Qur’an.

3.3. Extra-exegetical analysis: *Qiwāmah*

Q-w-m or *qāma*, the trilateral root of *qiwāmah*, is essentially to rise, stand up/still, and *qā'im* is a superintendent, but *qāma 'alā* is to tend to. Other forms of this root have such meanings as a standing place, to establish or make straight, stature and justness of proportion, one who rises much to pray, as well as a people or community (Lane 1968, 8:2995; Ibn Manzūr 1993, 12:496-506).

We have seen how exegetes might start the sequence verses 32-35 with an egalitarian view and then concede that due to the latter part of verse 34, they revise their own interpretation into a more authoritarian one.

There is a grammatical shift (*Itifāt*) from the second person (2nd person to 3rd person to 2nd person) in verse 32, to the third person in the first section

1- Kecia Ali (2008) discusses al-Shāfi’ī in this regard, as indeed al-Rāzī and al-Biqā’ī both refer to al-Shāfi’ī on this. Yet this is equally true of Tabataba’i who consults Shi’i traditions in order to contain the latter portion of verse 34. It quite interesting that none of our exegetes mention the degree (*darajah*) that men have over women in Q. 2: 228, although they do mention men’s right to unilateral divorce, which is what that verse is ultimately about, as per Amina Wadud’s (1992) contextualisation.

2- Cf. Saqib Hussain’s (2021) observation of the word *qiyām* in verse 5 as support, but in reference to financial support.

of verse 34 (Figure 1). Neal Robinson (2003) suggests, “More rarely, the shift may be from the second person to the third person. This has the effect of objectifying the addressees. It may be done in order to enable them to gain self-knowledge by seeing themselves externally.”

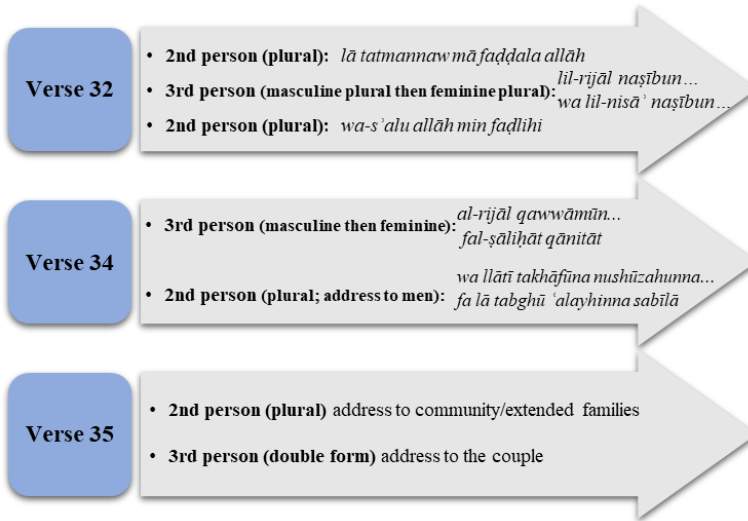


Figure 1. Illustration of Iltifāt in verses 32, 34 and 35

In verse 32, men and women stand on an equal footing in *faḍl*. In verse 34, *qiwāmah* and *qunūt* are an extension to one another in the 3rd person, while *nushūz* is odd in the 2nd person, advising the husband. In verse 35, *nushūz* is then given to the community, also in the 2nd person, in order to address. Male *nushūz* is then revisited in verse 128.

The point here is that the controversial verse 34 is cushioned between verses in which the manner of address toward men and women is identical in verses 32 and 35. And also, that womens' *qunūt* (as devotion to the divine) is not strictly speaking, set against her *nushūz* (as rebellion at the husband). For men's *qiwāmah* (conditioned by *faḍl* and *nafaqah*), and women's *qunūt* (which *ḥifẓ al-ghayb* would be a natural addition to), are within the same third person address describing the marital state. Talk of her *nushūz* and subsequent disciplinary measures shift to address the men as abnormal occurrences. Finally addressing the community in verse 35 if the situation does not go back to normal.

In verse 35, in case of a breach (*shiqāq*) - which the *ḥadīth* identifies as the *nushūz* of both parties (al-ʿAyyāshī 1960, 1:240), the intervention of a family member on behalf of each spouse should be sought in order to help

resolve the issue. Accordingly, the husband is not left without check, for if he were to overstep his bounds, he is subject to the arbitration of the community.

Al-Rāzī (1981, 11:73-74) views verse 135 as an extension to the sequence on women and orphans starting at verse 127. Despite the gap, he finds that verse 135 is for following all of God's commands in general, but also particularly for reconciling with the wife as in verse 127 and dealing justly with the orphans as in verse 3 (*wa in khiftum allā tuqsiṭū fil-yatāmā*). Al-Rāzī elaborates on “*yā ayyuha alladhīn āmanū kūnū qawwāmīn bil-qist shuhadā' li-llāh wa law 'alā anfusikum...*” (Q. 4: 135), that it asks every qualified adult (*mukallaḥ*) to be a *qā'im*, which he defines here as exceeding in choosing justice. It is noteworthy that the semantic connection al-Rāzī finds here is *qist* (justice) that links verse 135 with verse 3. He does not mention that *qist* is also mentioned in verse 127 in relation to the orphans, but perhaps this is what he had in mind when he made all these connections.

Verse 127 says, “*And that ye should deal justly with orphans*” (*wa an taqūmū lil-yatāmā bil-qist*). Therefore, with the word *qist* (justice) *an taqūmū* (a verbal form of *qiwāmah*) is twinned. Later in this sequence, verse 135 (where Mir and Zahniser debated a break as opposed to Islahi's break at verse 127) admonishes all believers, “*O ye who believe! Be ye staunch in justice...*” (*kūnū qawwāmīn bil-qist*) (Q. 4:135). In all these verses *qiwāmah* is always adhered to justice. *Qiwāmah* thus has the sense of a weighty responsibility, being used with regard to orphans (Q. 4: 127), and it is also a grave accountability towards God and a fine line whence it says “*witnesses for God even though it be against yourselves*” (*shuhadā' li-llāh wa law 'alā anfusikum*) (Q. 4:135). The third occurrence of the term, or rather the first, comes earlier in this surah, in the controversial verse 34, “*Men are in charge of women (al-rijāl qawwāmūn 'ala-n-nisā'), because God hath made the one of them to excel the other (bimā faḍḍala allāhu ba 'dahum 'alā ba 'd), and because they spend of their property (for the support of women) (wa bimā anfaqū)...*” Considering the fact that *qiwāmah* (*bil-qist*) is a repeated term in this surah, it becomes clear that verse 34 fits into the aims of the surah, admonishing the strong to be upright in their stance for justice towards the de facto weaker members of society. That men stand up for women, and that men and women stand up for orphaned children, and that believers stand up for justice.

There are three more occurrences of the term in the Qur'an at large. In Surah al-Mā'idah, in the context of keeping God's covenant (Q. 5:7) and adhering to justice, it says, “*Be steadfast witnesses for God in equity*” (*kūnū qawwāmīn li-llāh shuhadā' bil-qist*) (Q. 5: 8). This is the exact same word

combination as verse 135 in our surah but in different order. In Surah Saba', it says, "Say (unto them, O Muhammad): I exhort you unto one thing only: that ye awake, for God's sake, by two and singly, and then reflect..." (*an taqūmū li-llāhi mathnā wa furādā thumma tatafakkarū*) (Q. 34: 46). Here, one may well have to stand up alone, but still, one will have to stand. In Q. 4: 127, 135, and 5: 8, the emphasis is on witnessing and justice. In Q. 4: 135 and 34: 46, it requires witnessing and has a most individual sense as a matter of priority. Therefore, verse 135 of Surah al-Nisā' has the most well-rounded Qur'anic sense of *qiwāmah* (*yā ayyuha alladhīna āmanū kūnū qawwāmīna bil-qisṭ shuhadā' li-llāh wa law 'alā anfusikum*).

The third incident of *qiwāmah* in the form of *qūmū*, occurs in Surah al-Baqarah, where in the midst of a passage that discusses the treatment of divorcees and widows, the verse advises the faithful to keep to their prayers, saying, "and stand up with devotion to God" (*wa qūmū li-llāhi qānitīn*) (Q. 2: 238). On this, Muhammad Abdel Haleem (2020) reasons that, "far from being a diversion, however, the verses on 'prayer and danger' are introduced precisely in order to enable believers to obey the teachings on divorce. They urge the believers to stop, in the middle of bitterness, and perform the prayer. They can then come back in a better mood when they are more likely to obey the instruction to be magnanimous." Notice that *qānitīn* here is the adverb for *qūmū*; acquiescence to God describes the proper way to stand upright.

In verse 34, *qawwāmūn* is male, upright and vertical as opposed to *qānitāt* which is female, surrendering and horizontal. Yet, *qiwāmah* has in its Qur'anic meaning an in-built *qunūt*. Therefore, in his *qiwāmah* man is obedient to God (and to community), and in her *qunūt*, the woman upholds divine social order.

It is important that *qiwāmah* and *qunūt* are set in relation to one another, which is different from our exegetes setting *qunūt* and *nushūz* in opposition to each other. The latter order (of the exegetes) had given the impression that woman's *qunūt* (obedience to God) is in obedience to the husband himself, who is then made *qawwām* in an authoritative sense. Rather, female *qunūt* (obedience to God) coupled with male *qiwāmah* (standing for God) keeps that "equal but different" understanding of *faḍl* in verse 32. Then, her *nushūz* in the end of verse 34 may be compared with her husband's *nushūz* in verse 127 which - in its own words - reverts to earlier discussions on the subject of "women". *Qiwāmah* and *qunūt* are two sides of the coin, describing the ideal marital roles of men and women. *Nushūz* is the contrast to both. Woman's *nushūz* is her rising above her husband in the strictly intimate domain of her fidelity (as we shall see). Man's *nushūz* is opposed to his *qiwāmah*, because just as *qiwāmah* is standing upright for justice,

nushūz is standing out in disharmony. Figure 2 shows structural positioning of *qiwāmah* and *faḍl* within the overall coherence of the surah.

3.4. Extra-Exegetical Analysis: *Faḍl*

Verse 7 which starts the passage on inheritance utilises the phrase “*lil-rijāl naṣībun mimmā tarak al-wālidān wa al-aqrabūn wa lil-nisā’ naṣībun mimmā tarak al-wālidān wa al-aqrabūn*”. This is echoed in the middle of verse 32, “*lil-rijāl naṣībun mimma ktasabū wa lil-nisā’ naṣībun mimma ktasabna*”. This perhaps again points out that financial equity between men and women is fundamental to the surah, and indeed an occasion of the revelation of verse 32.

The recorded occasion of revelation of verse 32 combines a couple of interpretations of men’s *faḍl*. Umm Salamah (the Prophet’s wife) appeals to the Prophet; men raid (thus making financial gain), and we women do not, but still we have half the share in inheritance (al-Wāḥidī 1968). If men are socially equipped to provide, why do women take half their share in inheritance? The occasion of revelation then is a question on men’s dominion over both inheritance and war, as these themes have been grouped together in the authentic *ḥadīth* as well; that typically men get double the share in inheritance because they have to provide (*nafaqah*) and protect (*jihād*) (al-Kulaynī 1986, 7:85).

The basic etymological meaning of the word “*faḍala*” (of the root f-ḍ-l) is to exceed, and “*faḍḍala ‘ala*” (as in its usage in our verse) is to excel (Lane 1968, 6:2411), but it is to excel through a particular characteristic (Ibn Manzūr 1993, 11:524). Besides its occurrence in verses 32 and 34, the term *faḍl* happens in nine other verses within the surah. *Faḍl* in general has the sense of bounties and blessings awarded by God, of a material and spiritual nature, such as to the righteous, the martyrs, and the prophets, in this life and the next (Q. 4:37, 54, 70, 113, 173, 175). Verses 73, 83, and 95 occur within the section that Zahniser calls “the battle block”, and there, it is God’s blessing as a direct result of his men heeding the call to *jihād*, particularly in relation to the grace given to “those who strive in the way of God with their wealth and lives” (*faḍḍala allāhu al-mujāhidīn bi-amwālihim wa anfusihim...*) (Q. 4: 95). Nowhere in the surah - except for verse 34 - is *faḍl* particular to men, for even in reference to war, it includes the financial aspect of it along with the military, thereby maximising the chances to access for the general population, including women. This still does not take us very far on the *faḍl* in verse 34 within the marital relationship.

Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah (d. 2010 AD) (1998, 7:230-231), observes

that man's *qiwāmah* rests on two distinct pillars. He explains that even when a man's *qiwāmah* collapses due to the collapse of one of its pillars - such as failing to provide financial support to his wife - this is not the same as merging the two. Fadlallah (1998, 7:216) sees *faḍl* as something potentially befitting the male physique, crucially however he makes sure to restrict this interpretation to the *faḍl* in verse 32 (which had military excursions as the occasion of its revelation) and not extend it to verse 34, which he sees as a verse not on gender but strictly on marital relations. As a result of this, Fadlallah (1998, 7:229) acknowledges that his interpretation of the *faḍl* in verse 34 remains ambiguous and revolves around the man's mental rigour. But cannot muscular strength be extended to verse 34 for the physical protection of the family? Men's advantage regarding muscular strength might have more truth to it than mental rigour (notwithstanding the uterus being the strongest muscle in the human body), and this reading would in fact defy the problem of domestic violence.

Amina Wadud (1992, 72-73) in her early work, following Sayyid Qutb (1980, 2:650-653) on this, neatly bridged the gap between *faḍl* and *nafaqah* when she saw men's *faḍl* as the "physical protection as well as material sustenance" of women - because they are usually child-bearers - "otherwise, 'it would be a serious oppression against the woman.'" Wadud (1992, 72-74) however, then expanded that protection beyond the married couple and even beyond the material realm,¹ which is unnecessary. The latter part of verse 34 as well as verse 35, do clearly indicate that they are verses on marital and familial relations.

Therefore, the *faḍl* in verse 34 may be indicating that, mirroring his antecedence in inheritance and war, physical protection including sustenance of the family remain the man's prerogative.

A study of masculinity in the Qur'an has reached similar conclusions, "The content analysis of the Qur'an reveals at least five salient character traits that may be taken as prescriptions of masculinities. These traits (submissiveness, altruism, righteousness, steadfastness and combativeness) however, are not only overlapping but are also contradictory, depending on the institutional context in which people are acting, as well as their religious status... Thus the message of the Qur'an is complex, and it can be put into practice properly only when it is examined and absorbed holistically" (Arat & Hasan 2016).

This would then take us nicely to the next part of the verse on *nushūz*, the basic meaning of which is 'to rise from the ground' (Ibn Manzūr 1993,

¹ Wadud (1992, 71) herself had perceptively noted that the Qur'an gives *faḍl* to 'some over others', but not to masculine plural over feminine plural.

5:417) or ‘to rise from its place’, therefore, also to become protruded, overtop, or high ground (Lane 1968, 8:2795).

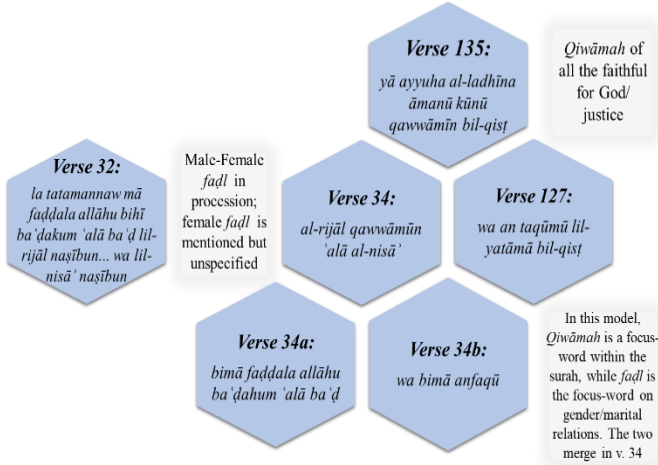


Figure 2. Structural positioning of *qiwāmah* and *faḍl* within the overall coherence of Surah al-Nisā'

3.5. Nushūz Re-visited

On the husband’s *nushūz*, the relevant passage is verses Q. 4:127-130. We will recall that verse 127 literally reverts the reader back to the passage on “women” that had been revealed earlier in the surah (*wa yastafūnaka fī al-nisā' quli allāhu yuḥḥikum fīhinna wa mā yutlā 'alaykum fī al-kitāb fī yatāma al-nisā' ...*). And so, marital discord as regards women’s *nushūz* was addressed in verse 34, and it is reconsidered here with regard to men’s *nushūz* in verse 128.

The passage addresses the woman fearing the recalcitrance or *nushūz* of her husband, just as it had addressed men fearing *nushūz* of the wife.¹ Al-Rāzī (1981, 11:66-68) finds that recalcitrance of either spouse is their repulsion. To him, the word *i' rād* (following *nushūz*) in the verse or turning away altogether is the worst of *nushūz* because it implies extreme antipathy. He further points out that the wife giving away some of her rights may be a

1- For al-Rāzī (1981, 11:66) and al-Biqā'ī (n.d. 5:422), fear of *nushūz* means simply that, neither certain knowledge, nor speculation. Al-Rāzī elaborates that this fear does not happen without signs of *nushūz* already beginning to show. Tabataba'i (1996, 5:101) understands fear here to mean that remedial action must be taken at the first signs so that it may still be of use. Notice however, that the same does not apply to all incidents of 'fear of' something, for example Tabataba'i (1996, 4:168) is more strict in his definition of fear in verse 3 as simple fear, even without any signs beginning to show, saying that caution may be taken against marrying multiple wives, before the “commanding soul” has its way.

means for reconciliation (which is what all our exegetes - and the law¹ in general - understand), and he observes that coming to an agreement on any form of reconciliation is in fact commendable according to the verse (*al-sulh khayr*) as opposed to divorce or living together in disharmony. Clearly, the remedial actions for the wife's *nushūz* and the husband's differ (Cf. Chaudhry 2013, 68).

For al-Biqā'ī (n.d. 5:421-423), since *nushūz* is literally 'to rise' in an unfavourable sense, it indicates his putting her down, not fulfilling her rights or mistreating her, and *i'rāḍ* is his disinclination from her or having to exert himself (*mutakallif*) in his love.

Tabataba'i (1996, 5:100-102) does not define male *nushūz* at all, although he does pay attention to the man's justice among his co-wives in the next verse 129, and on that note, he says that the husband ought to be gracious, not show repulsion and not be ill-mannered. He brings in traditions that explain that this verse acknowledges that equality is impossible in reference to love (*mawaddah*), unlike the equality in verse 3, which is on expenditure (*nafaqah*) (al-'Ayyāshī 1960, 1:279). Therefore to him, *nushūz* is similar to *i'rāḍ*. Tabataba'i explains that verse 128 and 129 are offshoots of verse 127, for even though they are not the subject which was queried about (*yastaftūnaka*), they are still connected with the original verse 127 with *munāsabah*.

Remember that al-Rāzī and al-Biqā'ī saw the wife's *nushūz* to be a shift in her personality and her disobedience in word or deed, although they did mean that disobedience with the word was still an initial sign of her recalcitrance. Tabataba'i - perhaps being the modern one among them - refrains from discussing disobedience in those general terms but views it to be specifically of the man's intimate marital rights.

Much has been written about this but Maysam al-Faruqī's analysis is on point. Al-Faruqī (2000) notes that in the case of the wife, before mention of *nushūz*, verse 34 describes good women as devout ones who are "guarding the intimacy". As for the man's *nushūz* in verse 128, it is mentioned in

1- Later legal constructions which gave men easy access to divorce had to compensate the wife by changing the rules of dowers, "the dower took on more prominence as a financial institution that could serve as a brake on easy divorce. This shifted the balance of power between the sexes. The dower became practically mandatory, the wife's right to waive was largely suppressed, and male relatives of the bride dominated the negotiations in order to obtain as high a dower as possible. The inflated dower was then divided into two parts - one prompt and one deferred. The deferred dower was of much higher value than the prompt dower. The difference was justified as an instrument to obstruct the divorce which has been made easy for husbands" (Jones-Pauly 2011, 454). Furthermore, "this greater centrality of the deferred dower ties in with the increased importance of the husband as provider. Rather than at the time of marriage, a woman is now perceived to need financial guarantees when she loses her husband, whether through widowhood or repudiation" (Moors 1999, 162).

reference to his desertion of his wife and showing interest in other women, which he might be legally allowed to marry but discouraged from inclination towards, at the expense of his wife “leaving her as in suspense” (*kal-mu'allaqah*) in verse 129. Also, verses 15 to 28 of the surah describe the licit and illicit in sexual relationships. Therefore, after the collection of verses on inheritance rights but before the ones on marital rights, there is a large section that regulates sexual lives. Al-Faruqi concludes that *nushūz* refers specifically to “sexual misconduct” of either partner. Her analysis is clear and consistent. Indeed, it is fathomable that *ḥāfīzāt lil-ghayb* is a euphemism for sexuality specifically, as the Qur'an itself uses the term *ḥifẓ al-farj* for both male and female chastity (Q. 23:5; 24:30-31; 33:35; 70:29).

In line with this definition of *nushūz*, Kecia Ali (2006, 185) writes, “the identification of ‘clear lewdness’ with *nushūz* is supported by some versions of the Prophet’s ‘Farewell Sermon’ in which he outlined the measures mentioned in 4: 34 as consequences for ‘clear lewdness’ by women. His words on that occasion are also the source for the specification that any striking must be ‘*ghayr mubarriḥ*’ or ‘non-violent’.” This is also Khaled Abou el Fadl’s (2006) contention, who makes another interesting and important point, connecting verse 34 to 15, and pointing out that perhaps in the worldview of the Qur'an and pre-Islamic Arabia, female immodesty (i.e. short of *zinā*, but always requiring four witnesses) is best dealt with privately. One possibility is that if verse 15 concerns unmarried women, verse 34 deals with married women. Woman’s sexual fidelity was replaced for centuries throughout Islamic thought by the notion of her sexual availability. This original, rediscovered meaning of *nushūz* differs from Tabataba’i for example, who did limit the wife’s obedience to the intimate domain, but still read it as sexual fidelity and availability together. Of course, there is an evident logical inconsistency here that no amount of interpretation was ever able to cover up; because the verse itself suggests as a response to women’s recalcitrance that men ‘banish them to beds apart’. *Nushūz* as sexual misconduct for either spouse, succeeds in assigning the same meaning for the same word. One might add that this interpretation provides another layer of meaning for man’s *qiwāmah* and *faḍl* as physical protection of the wife, guarding her intimacy, including leading by example.

Of particular interest is al-Biqā’ī’s observation that this surah, due to its aim for cohesion, describes reconciliation between spouses, instead of divorce. Indeed, after every *nushūz* mentioned in the surah, there is *ṣulḥ* - or a derivative - also mentioned (once in verse 35, thrice in verse 128, and once again in verse 129) before finally acknowledging the possibility of separation in verse 130, adding that God would enrich either spouse from his amplitude. Now this is interesting, because it means that despite the

variance in dealing with both *nushūz*, this exists in the context of doing the utmost to keep the union together rather than break it apart. After all, the wife does not really need to give up any of her universally acknowledged legal rights if she would rather divorce. Nor does her family have to put up with a disciplinarian husband for their daughter, if she herself did not wish for reconciliation, “*if they (both, double form) desire amendment, God will make them (both) of one mind*” (in *yurīdā iṣlāḥan yuwaffiqi allāhu baynahumā*) (Q. 4: 35). Here, the lexical and persistent Qur’anic sense of voluntariness in the root word *ṭ-w-‘* is pertinent.¹

Compare this to Surah al-Baqarah’s passage on divorce where it says, “*fa-imsākun bi-ma’rūfaw tasrīhun bi-iḥsān*” (Q. 2: 229), where the couple stay together happily or separate happily, without mention of any discipline or anyone giving up their rights. In Surah al-Ṭalāq again; “*fa-amsikūhunna bi-ma’rūfaw fāriqūhunna bi-ma’rūf*” (Q. 65: 2). This is what is meant that the different angles from which the Qur’an approaches a certain issue are “surah-specific”.

3.6. Bringing Coherence and Semantics Together

As many scholars of ‘woman in the Qur’an’ would acknowledge, there are among the gendered verses plenty that are egalitarian and others that are hierarchical.² The discussion above has attempted to show that the verses within Surah al-Nisā’ fit into the aim and themes of Surah al-Nisā’. *Qiwāmah*, *faḍl*, and *nushūz* are together one facet of gender/marital relations that exist within the surah they occur in, and they occupy their own unique place among other angles from which the Qur’an tackles the broader subject of gender relations.

Al-Biqā’ī in particular is neither modern nor apologetic, as we have seen. Yet, al-Biqā’ī contributed to our understanding of structure and coherence, when he pointed out the placement as well as the tone of the last verse of the surah, being a lasting reminder of the importance of female inheritance. It was also al-Biqā’ī’s brilliant observation of the purpose of Surah al-Nisā’, as a surah that does not wish to resort to divorce because it is cohesive, which makes those problematic verses on marital discord comprehensible. We were then able to corroborate his finding by noting the consistent semantic

1- The lexical definition of *ṭaw’* is “the opposite of *karh*”, the latter conveying disapproval (Ibn Manzūr 1993, 8:240). Lane (1968, 5:1890-1892) finds that *ṭaw’* indicates, in addition to obedience, capability and consent. Also, see the Qur’anic contrast of *ṭaw’an* with *karhan* in four verses, the former (*ṭaw’*) denoting willingness and the latter (*karh*) denoting unwillingness in Q. 3:83; 9:53; 13:15; and 41:11.

2- Sources on Q. 4: 34 and the dichotomy between the egalitarian and hierarchical, not already cited in this paper include: Shaikh (1997), Barlas (2002), al-Hibri (2003), Marin (2003), Mubarak (2004), Mahmoud (2006), Silvers (2006), Ibrahim & Abdalla (2010), and Hidayatullah (2014).

link of *ṣulḥ* with *nushūz* (after al-Rāzī had brushed on this). Semantic contexts better clarify the concepts *qiwāmah* and *faḍl*, even *nushūz* to a certain extent. However, the disparities within *nushūz* needed to be read with a more holistic and coherent view of the surah, and its place among other surahs of the Qur'an.

Furthermore, *faḍl* as men's *jihād* is proposed here as a hypothesis based on sources such as *asbāb al-nuzūl* and the *ḥadīth*. However, Zahniser's identification of a "battle block" central to the surah, works to bring credence to this hypothesis from within the Qur'an. Notice for example, *istid'āf* or oppression, occurs within a recurring phrase particular to Surah al-Nisā'; twice in the "battle block", "*wa mā lakum lā tuqātilūn fī sabīli allāh wa al-mustaḍ'afīn min al-rijāl wa al-nisā' wa al-wildān*" (Q. 4: 75), and "...*illā al-mustaḍ'afīn min al-rijāl wa al-nisā' wa al-wildān*" (Q. 4: 97-98), and once in the "women cluster" concerning orphaned boys, "*wa al-mustaḍ'afīn min al-wildān*" (Q. 4: 127). Zahniser's "battle block" at the centre of the surah, is here semantically tied to its theme on *qiwāmah* over orphans.

In this surah, *faḍl* is assigned to both genders, neither is defined. Although good women are described as loyal in the relationship. The question remains, what is feminine *faḍl* in itself? There are a couple of verses that are contenders in identifying female *faḍl*, such as (Q. 4: 1) on the mystical "*al-arḥām*" within this surah's exordium (Osman 2015, 32-36), and verse (Q. 3: 36) which prefers the female sex basically, "the male is not as the female (*wa laysa al-dhakarū kal-unthā*)" a little further afield in Surah Āl 'Imrān (Osman 2015, 72-83).

4. Conclusion

If coherence of the surah or at least of any given passage is not used as a hermeneutical tool, there will be another kind of construct on which legal matters would be built. Traditionally, jurists picked the notion of *nafaqah* from the first part of verse 34, mixed it with *nushūz* from the second part of the verse, to create an ideology of wifely obedience in return for spousal support, which is what Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2015, 14-15) describes as the "DNA of patriarchy" in Islam. Clearly, this is done irrespective of the surrounding verses, such as the extended family of both spouses potentially regulating marital discord, because the verse on obedience also speaks about a breach in the marriage, and because obedience there, is voluntary. For the ideology of male superiority and wifely obedience is also constructed disregarding words that are used in parallel for both men and women (*faḍl* and *nushūz*).

Gender reform is presented in Surah al-Nisā' as an element of community building. The surah expresses women's right to their dowers (Q. 4:19-21) and their rights to inheritance as discussed above, with a similar tone of earnestness and 'proceed at your own peril' that it uses to plead for the rights of orphans, particularly their financial rights (Q. 4:2-3, 9-10, 127). Encouraging women's right to own their property, whether by means of the dower, inheritance, and especially *Kalālah*, occupies a vast space in this surah. Parallel to this, the man has added protective duties towards his family and community. It is clear that male authority derives from male responsibility (Kandiyoti 1988), but it must also be said that there is something quite sinister about absolving the man from his financial duties towards his family. This is how Surah al-Nisā' teaches that it is in the act of giving rather than taking, that men establish their *qiwāmah*.

Men are posited as protectors over women, children and community. As verse 75 within the "battle block" describes, "*How should ye not fight for the cause of God and of the feeble among men and of the women and the children who are crying: Our Lord! Bring us forth from out this town of which the people are oppressors! Oh, give us from thy presence some protecting friend! Oh, give us from thy presence some defender*" (Q. 4:75). The Qur'anic construction of the term *qawwām* necessarily has an in-built *qunūt*. This transitions men's understanding of their own masculinity from force into power.

Even though *qiwāmah* (Q. 4: 135), like *faḍl* (Q. 4: 32) applies to both men and women, the male role here is more pronounced. Even though the surah is named after 'women', it is equally involved in delineating an evolved masculinity and the making of men.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this paper for their valuable comments that helped make significant improvements.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

References

- ‘Abd al-‘Ati, H. (1977). *The Family Structure in Islam*. American Trust Publications.
- Abdel-Haleem, M. (2020). Structural Coherence in the Qur’an: How to See the Connections. In Klar M. (Ed.), *Structural Dividers in the Qur’an*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003010456-12>
- Abou el Fadl, K. (2006). *A Conference of the Books: The Search for Beauty in Islam*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Affifi, M. (2022). Islamic feminist interpretation: a reformulation of the universal-particular. *Islamic Studies Review*, 1(1), 39-66. <https://doi.org/10.56529/isr.v1i1.3>
- Ali, K. (2008). The best of you will not strike: Al-Shafi’i on Qur’an, *Sunnah*, and Wife-Beating. *Journal of Comparative Islamic Studies*, 2(2), 143-155. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cisv2i2.143>
- Ali, K. (2006). *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith and Jurisprudence*. London: Oneworld Publications.
- Al-Faruqi, M. (2000). Women’s Self-Identity in the Qur’an and Islamic Law. In Webb, G. (ed.) *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America* (72-101). New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Afsaruddin, A. (2010). Early Women Exemplars and the Construction of Gendered Space: (Re-) Defining Feminine Moral Excellence. In Booth, M. (ed.) *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (23-48). Durham: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822393467-003>
- Afsaruddin, A. (2019). Jihad, Gender, and Religious Minorities in the Siyar Literature: the Diachronic View. *Studia Islamica*, 114, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1163/19585705-12341386>
- Al-Hibri, A. (2003). An Islamic Perspective on Domestic Violence. *Fordham International Law Journal*, 27(1), 195-224.
- Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Al-‘Ayyāshī, M. (1960). *Al-Tafsīr (Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī)*. Tehran: Maktabah al-‘Ilmiyyah al-Islāmiyyah.
- Barlas, A. (2002). *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an*. University of Texas Press.
- Al-Biqā‘ī, B. I. (n.d.) *Nazm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*. Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī.
- Chaudhry, A. (2013). *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford

- University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199640164.001.0001>
- Cilardo, A. (2005). *The Qur'anic Term Kalala: Studies in Arabic Language and Poetry, Hadit, Tafsir, and Fiqh, Notes on the Origins of Islamic Law*. JAIS Monographs. Edinburgh University Press.
- Coulson, N. J. (1971). *Succession in the Muslim Family*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Dutton, Y. (2014). Old Light on a New Problem: The *Kalala* Verses Revisited. *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 59(2), 357-376. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/fgu005>
- El-Awa, S. (2006). Linguistic Structure. In Rippin A. (ed.). *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (53-73). Malden; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470751428.ch4>
- Fadlallah, M. H. (1998). *Min Wahy Al-Qur'ān. Beirut: Dār al-Malāk*.
- Farrin, R. K. (2016). Surat al-Nisa' and the Centrality of Justice. *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, 14(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12340028>
- Hidayatullah, A. (2014). *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199359561.001.0001>
- Hussain, S. (2021). The Bitter Lot of the Rebellious Wife: Hierarchy, Obedience, and Punishment in Q. 4: 34. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 23 (2), 66-111. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2021.0466>
- Ibn Manzūr, M. (1993). *Lisān al-'Arab*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir.
- Ibrahim, N. & Abdalla, I. (2010). A Critical Examination of Qur'an 4: 34 and Its Relevance to Intimate Partner Violence in Muslim Families. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 5(3), 327-349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564908.2010.551278>
- Izutsu, T. (2002). *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung*. Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust.
- Jones-Pauly, C. (2011). *Women under Islam: Gender, Justice and the Politics of Islamic Law*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Arat, Z. F. K. & Hasan, A. (2016). Muslim Masculinities: What is the Prescription of the Qur'an? *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(7), 788-801. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1316246>
- Kadi, W. & Mir, M. (2003). Literature and the Qur'an. In McAuliffe J. D. (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (vol. 3, 213-216). Leiden: Brill.
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with Patriarchy. *Gender and Society*, 2(3), 274-290.
- Kimber, R. (1998). The Qur'anic Law of Inheritance. *Islamic Law and Society*, 5(3), 291-325.

- Al-Kulaynī, M. (1986). *Kitāb al-Kāfī*. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah.
- Lamrabet, A. (2015). An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of *Khilafah*, *Wilayah* and *Qiwamah*. In Mir-Hosseini, Z. Al-Sharmani, M. & Rumminger J. (eds.) *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition* (65-87). Oneworld: London.
- Lane, E.W. (1968). *An Arabic English Lexicon*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban.
- Lowry, J. E. (2022). A Guide to the Legal Material in Surat al-Nisa' (Q 4). In Sinai, N. (ed.). *Unlocking the Medinan Qur'an* (422-479). Leiden: Brill.
- Mahmoud, M. (2006). To Beat or not to Beat: On the Exegetical Dilemmas over Qur'an, 4:34. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 126(4), 537-550.
- Marin, M. (2003). Disciplining Wives: A Historical Reading of Qur'an 4: 34. *Studia Islamica*, 97, 5-40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4150600>
- Mernissi, F. (1991). *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.
- Mir, M. (1986). *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islahi's Concept of Nazm in Taddabur-i Qur'an*. Indianapolis: American Trust Publications.
- Mir, M. (1993). The Surah as a Unity: A 20th Century Development in Qur'anic Exegesis. In Hawting, G. & Shareef, A.A. (eds.) *Approaches to the Qur'an* (211-224). London: Routledge.
- Mir-Hosseini, Z. (2015). Muslim Legal Tradition and the Challenge of Gender Equality. In Mir-Hosseini, Z. Al-Sharmani, M. & Rumminger J. (eds.) *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition* (13-43). London: Oneworld.
- Moors, A. (1999). Debating Islamic Family Law: Legal texts and Social Practices. In Meriwether, M. L., & Tucker, J. E. (Eds.). *A Social History of Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East* (141-177). Colorado: Westview Press.
- Mubarak, H. (2004). Breaking the Interpretive Monopoly: A Re-examination of Verse 4:34. *Hawwa*, 2(3), 261-289. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1569208043077288>
- Muslim, I. H. (n.d.). *Al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Mukhtaṣar bi-Naql al-'Adl*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
- Ortner, S. B. (1974). Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture? In Rosaldo, M. Z. & Lamphere, L. (Eds.). *Woman, Culture, and Society* (68-87). Stanford University Press.
- Osman, R. (2015). *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna: Examining the Major Sources of Imami Shi'i Islam*. London: Routledge.
- Pavlovitch, P. (2016). *The Formation of the Islamic Understanding of Kalala in the Second Century AH (718-816 CE): Between Scripture and Canon*. Leiden: Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306073>

- Powers, D. (1982). The Islamic Law of Inheritance Reconsidered: A New Reading of Q. 4:12b. *Studia Islamica*, 55, 61-94. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595432>
- Qutb, S. (1980). *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq.
- Al-Rāzī, F. (1981). *Mafātīh al-Ghayb*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
- Rippin, A. (2013). Contemporary Scholarly Understandings of Qur'anic Coherence. *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, 11(2), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.11136/jqh.1311.02.01>
- Robinson, N. (2003). *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*. London: SCM Press.
- Shaikh, S. (1997). Exegetical Violence: *Nushuz* in Qur'anic gender Ideology. *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 17, 49-73.
- Silvers, L. (2006). In the Book We Have Left out Nothing: The Ethical Problem of the Existence of Verse 4: 34 in the Qur'an. *Comparative Islamic Studies*, 2(2), 171-180. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cisv2i2.171>
- Sinai, N. (2021). Toward a Redactional History of the Medinan Qur'an: A Case Study of Surat al-Nisa' (Q 4) and Surat al-Ma'idah (Q 5): In Klar, M. (Ed.). *Structural Dividers in the Qur'an* (365-402). London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003010456-13?urlappend=%3Futm_source%3Dresearchgate.net%26utm_medium%3Darticle
- Tabataba'i, M. H. (1996). *Al-Mīzan fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Qom: Jāmi'ah Mudarrisīn.
- Al-Wāhidī, A. (1968). *Asbāb Nuzūl al-Ayāt*. Cairo: Al-Ḥalabī.
- Wadud, A. (1992). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakti.
- Watt, M. (1956). *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Zahniser, M. H. (1997). Sura as Guidance and Exhortation: The Composition of Surat al-Nisa'. In Afsaruddin, A. & Zahniser, M. (eds.) *Humanism, Culture, and Language in the Near East: Studies in Honor of Georg Krotkoff* (71-86). Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- Zahniser, M. H. (2000). Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Suras: al-Baqara and al-Nisa'. In Boullata, I. (ed.) *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (26-55). Richmond: Curzon.

The Prophet Muhammad's Responses to Opponents and Supporters: A Quantitative Analysis of Qur'anic Prophet–People Conversation Patterns

Fatemeh Ashtiani 

Master of Qur'anic sciences, Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies Research Institute, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

Farzaneh Rohani Mashhadi ¹ 

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

Alireza Talebpour 

Associate Professor, Computer Science and Engineering Department, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

Article History: Received 11 January 2025; Accepted 23 April 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

This study aims to examine the Qur'anic verses that record the dialogues between the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the people. After identifying the dialogical methods employed by the Prophet's audience, it investigates how the Prophet responded to both opponents and supporters according to their methods. To achieve accurate results and provide a systematic analysis of the verses, association rules (a data-mining method) have been applied. The findings show that the Holy Qur'an contains 153 verses devoted to the dialogues of the Prophet with the people, which can be divided into 72 separate conversations. The main focus of this study is on the verses in which the people initiate the dialogue and the Prophet provides the response. By categorizing the Prophet's interlocutors into opponents and supporters, and by identifying the dialogical methods used by both sides, ten dialogical methods were recognized: emotional, argumentative, interrogative, exhortative, persuasive, propagative, denunciatory, assertive, derisive, and threatening. The analysis reveals that when the opponents initiate dialogue in an interrogative manner, the Prophet's response is propagative; when their

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: f_rohani@sbu.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I2.4>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_106667.html?lang=en

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



method is denunciatory, the Prophet responds with propagative and argumentative approaches; when their method is assertive, the Prophet responds in a persuasive manner; and when their method is derisive, his response is threatening. By contrast, the dialogue method of the supporters is predominantly interrogative, to which the Prophet responds in an exhortative manner.

KEYWORDS: The Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad, Qur'anic Dialogical Patterns, Prophetic Communication, Qur'an Mining, Association Rule Analysis.

1. Introduction

The exemplary role of the divine prophets and the doctrine of their infallibility prompt one to contemplate their conduct, namely, their words, actions, and thoughts, in order to discern principles and salient points conducive to human spiritual growth and flourishing. It can be argued that the dialogues of the prophets with their people are among the most effective and impactful forms of conversation, for nothing has penetrated the depths of the human soul as profoundly as religion. Indeed, the prophets' dialogues with their communities represent some of the most successful means for embedding faith in God and guiding human thought and perception.

Among the prophets, only five were entrusted with a divine law (*al-sharī'ah*), which renders the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) unique and exceptional. While each law-bearing prophet was commissioned to guide a specific people, Prophet was sent to address all of humankind for all times. His mission is thus so comprehensive that there is no longer any need for another prophet to be sent after him. In line with the narrative, "*We, the company of prophets, have been commanded to speak to people according to the measure of their intellects*" (al-Kulaynī 1986, 1:23; al-Ḥarrānī 1983, 1:37), it may be said that prophets dealt with their audiences in accordance with their intellectual capacities.

This consideration motivated the present research: by examining the Qur'anic verses in which the Prophet engaged in dialogue with people and by identifying the dialogical methods employed, the study seeks to address the question of how the Prophet responded to the utterances of his interlocutors. In order to assess this properly, the audience must first be divided into two groups, opponents and supporters. Next, the dialogical methods used by the Prophet and by his audience must be identified. Finally, through the application of association rules (a data-mining method), the relationship between the Prophet's dialogical methods and those of his

interlocutors, both opponents and supporters, can be systematically evaluated.

What is of particular importance is whether the Prophet's method of dialogue exemplified arguing in a manner that is best (*mujādalah bil-aḥsan*), as in “*Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best*” (Q. 16:125) and “*Repel ill [conduct] with that which is the best*” (Q. 23:96), or reciprocity (*muqābalah bil-mithl*), as in “*The requital of evil is an evil like it*” (Q. 42:40) and “*For those who have committed misdeeds, the requital of a misdeed shall be its like*” (Q. 10:27). This indicates that whether the people were supporters or opponents, and whether they addressed the Prophet in a favorable or unfavorable manner, he either responded with mercy and forgiveness or reacted in kind.

The scope of this study is limited to those Qur'anic verses in which a dialogue occurs between the Prophet and the people, whether opponents or supporters, where the initiators of the dialogue are the interlocutors themselves, in order that the Prophet's reactions may be assessed. Verses in which the Prophet initiates the dialogue (six dialogues comprising nineteen verses) are excluded from the scope of this research. For the purpose of this study, dialogue is defined as the exchange of speech between a speaker and an interlocutor. Such a dialogue may be realized within a single verse or across multiple verses.

2. Literature Review

Numerous books and articles have been authored on the biography and life of the Prophet. However, the focus of the present study is specifically on the dialogues of the Prophet in the Qur'an and, more precisely, on his dialogical method with his audience, a subject that has not been explicitly addressed in the existing literature. By way of reviewing the relevant research in this field, the following studies may be introduced: “*Manners of Conversation from Perspective of Qur'an and the Prophet*” (Azizi and Mahdavi Farid 2015); “*The culture of negotiation and dialogue in Sira Prophet of Islam (PBUH)*” (Janahmadi and Ahmadi 2022); “*Consequences of the peace-loving trait of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) based on His dominant behavioral chain in Qur'an*” (Fariani et al. 2023).

It should also be noted that works such as “*Dialogue in the Qur'an*” (Mir 1992) are found among English sources, but these focus generally on dialogue in the Qur'an and do not bear direct relevance to the present study. While the aforementioned works are valuable, there remains a need for a

specialized analysis of the Prophet's dialogues in order to determine his dialogical methods in addressing different types of audiences.

It is also noteworthy that the application of computational data mining and association rules in the analysis of Qur'anic data has been exemplified in academic research, such as the Master's thesis "*Extracting divine laws using association rules in Qur'anic verses*" (Seraji 2022) and the article "*Emotion Recognition from Qur'anic Text Using Advanced RoBERTa Deep Learning Network*" (Karami et al. 2023).

3. Theoretical Framework

In order to examine the dialogues, it is necessary to identify specific dialogical methods within the verses. Accordingly, based on a review of various articles and books, six methods, emotional, argumentative, interrogative, exhortative, persuasive, and propagative, were drawn from the article "*Dialogue in the Qur'an*" (Kariminia 2004). However, further study of the verses revealed that four additional modes, denunciatory, assertive, derisive, and threatening, may also be posited. Thus, by identifying these four dialogical methods during the analysis of the verses and adding them to the six previously defined methods, the content of the verses can be more comprehensively covered (Table 1). The six dialogical methods defined by Kariminia (2004) are as follows:

1. Emotional Dialogue: In certain verses, the use of human senses or the arousal of the audience's emotions and feelings can be observed.
2. Argumentative Dialogue: Verses that contain reasoning and rational arguments.
3. Interrogative Dialogue: Some Qur'anic dialogues appear in the form of questions or requests for legal and educational clarification, with the aim of providing explanatory responses to questions posed to the Prophet.
4. Exhortative Dialogue: Dialogue that is effective because it is devoid of violence, humiliation of the interlocutor, or provocation of stubbornness. The Qur'an calls upon the Prophet to engage with others through goodly exhortation and in an exhortative manner.
5. Persuasive Dialogue: In some verses, in order to invite reflection and convince the audience, questions are posed that cannot be easily rejected, or explanations are given with the aim of persuading the interlocutor.
6. Propagative Dialogue: Verses that emphasize the propagation of

religion and the communication of the divine message.

The four dialogical modes identified during the present study are defined as follows:

7. **Denunciatory Dialogue:** Verses in which negation or rejection occurs, whether rejection of the other's statement or judgment, denial of existential truths, or denial of God, and so forth.
8. **Assertive Dialogue:** Verses in which a statement is simply expressed, independent of any advice, exhortation, threat, encouragement, derision, or propagation. Assertion here may be considered equivalent to affirmation or declaration.
9. **Derisive Dialogue:** Verses containing humiliating words or allusions; any form of mockery, ridicule, reproach, belittlement, or insult falls under this category.
10. **Threatening Dialogue:** Verses that employ threatening words or allusions for the purpose of warning and instilling fear of dreadful events, such as depictions of eschatological punishments or threats of death.

It should be noted that a single dialogue may encompass multiple dialogical methods simultaneously. Furthermore, this study refers exclusively to those conversations in which one party is the Prophet himself and the other is a human interlocutor. Instances in which the interlocutor is God, the angels, or animals are excluded from the scope of this research.

Table 1. Dialogical Methods Framework

No.	Dialogical Method	Brief Definition
1	Emotional	Use of senses or emotions to move the audience
2	Argumentative	Verses containing reasoning and rational arguments
3	Interrogative	Dialogue in the form of questions seeking clarification
4	Exhortative	Dialogue free of violence or humiliation, using goodly exhortation
5	Persuasive	Aimed at reflection and convincing the interlocutor
6	Propagative	Focused on propagation of religion and delivering the message
7	Denunciatory	Negation or rejection of statements, truths, or God
8	Assertive	Simple assertion without advice, exhortation, or threat
9	Derisive	Mockery, ridicule, reproach, belittlement, or insult
10	Threatening	Threatening words or warnings of punishment or death

4. Research Methodology

In this study, the speech rules of the Prophet were extracted using the association rules technique. Association rules are a data-mining operation aimed at discovering relationships between features within a dataset. This type of analysis is also known as market basket analysis. Essentially, association rules indicate conditions that occur repeatedly together in a dataset. The extracted rules describe the presence of certain features on the basis of others. Association rules are expressed in the form of if-then statements and are defined with two measures: support and confidence.

- Support: indicates the percentage or number of transaction sets in which a given feature set appears.
- Confidence: indicates the degree of dependency of one feature on another and is calculated according to the following formula, for example:

$$\text{Confidence}(X \rightarrow Y) = \frac{\text{Support}(X \cup Y)}{\text{Support}(X)}$$

This index measures the degree of dependency between two feature sets (X and Y) and serves as a criterion for evaluating the strength of a rule. Typically, a rule is selected when it demonstrates a high confidence value. Strong rules are those that simultaneously exhibit both support and confidence values above the threshold (Ghazanfari et al. 2008, 157–160).

To apply the association rules method, the first step was to compile a dataset of the Qur'anic verses containing the Prophet-people dialogues. The second step was to identify the types of dialogical methods and the roles of speaker and interlocutor in the speech exchanges recorded in these verses. After implementing these specifications in the selected verses and tabulating the results in Excel, a dataset was constructed that served as the basis for extracting association rules from the Qur'an.

Since the principal requirement of this study, namely, the dataset of verses, already exist in the article "*Extracting the Dialogue Patterns of Prophets in the Qur'an*" (Ashtiani et al. 2024),¹ it was decided to make use of the datasets and features provided therein. In that article, a wide range of features influencing dialogue in the verses were identified, among them the dialogical methods employed by both speaker and interlocutor. This dataset covers all ten dialogical methods examined in the present research.

1- The dataset is available at: <https://quran.sbu.ac.ir/peykare>

5. The Dialogical Rules of the Prophet

An examination of the dataset of dialogue verses reveals that the Qur'an contains a total of 153 verses related to the dialogues of the Prophet with the people, which can be distinguished into 72 separate conversations. In six conversations (19 verses), the Prophet is the initiator, while in 66 conversations (134 verses) the Prophet responds to the utterances of his interlocutors (Ashtiani et al. 2024). Accordingly, the present study analyzes these 66 dialogues.

The purpose of applying association rules here is to determine, in cases where the interlocutors initiate the dialogue, what dialogical methods they employed and how the Prophet responded in turn. For a more precise analysis of the results, the Prophet's interlocutors have been divided into two categories: opponents and supporters. An examination of the dialogue verses shows that the category of opponents includes Jews, the People of the Book, Quraysh, Christians, Jewish leaders, Jews and Christians collectively, disbelievers, hypocrites, defectors, polytheists, and the ignorant. The category of supporters, on the other hand, includes Muslims, believers, the Prophet's wife, and certain groups of people. The analysis of the data indicates that 46 dialogues were conducted between the Prophet and opponents, and 20 dialogues between the Prophet and supporters.

5.1. Opponents as the First Party

The analysis of the results shows that the dialogical methods employed by the opponents were predominantly interrogative, denunciatory, assertive, and derisive. The details and the Prophet's corresponding responses are presented as follows (Table 2):

Rule 1: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ an interrogative method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is propagative.

- Support (first party= opponents, second party = Prophet, method of opponents = interrogative): 18 cases
- Support (method = propagative): 8 cases
- Confidence (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, method of opponents = interrogative → method of Prophet = propagative): 44%

$$\text{Confidence} = \frac{8}{18} \approx 44\%$$

Rule 2: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ a denunciatory method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is propagative and argumentative.

- Support (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = denunciatory): 18 cases
- Support (method = propagative and argumentative): 7 cases
- Confidence (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = denunciatory → Prophet's method = propagative and argumentative): 38%

$$\text{Confidence} = \frac{7}{18} \approx 38\%$$

Rule 3: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ an assertive method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is persuasive.

- Support (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = assertive): 11 cases
- Support (method = persuasive): 4 cases
- Confidence (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = assertive → Prophet's method = persuasive): 36%

$$\text{Confidence} = \frac{4}{11} \approx 36\%$$

Rule 4: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ a derisive method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is threatening.

- Support (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = derisive): 10 cases
- Support (method = threatening): 6 cases
- Confidence (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = derisive → Prophet's method = threatening): 60%

$$\text{Confidence} = \frac{6}{10} \approx 60\%$$

Among these opponents, the methods emotional, exhortative, and threatening were not used at all, and only a single dialogue was found for each of the methods argumentative, persuasive, and propagative. For this reason, they were not considered suitable for deriving association rules.

Table 2. *Dialogical Methods of the Opponents and the Responses of the Prophet*

Opponents’ Method	Prophet’s Response	Frequency	Confidence (%)
Interrogative	Propagative	8	44%
Denunciatory	Propagative–Argumentative	7	38%
Assertive	Persuasive	4	36%
Derisive	Threatening	6	60%

5.2. *Supporters as the First Party*

If the first party is the supporters and the second party is the Prophet, and the supporters employ an interrogative method, then the Prophet’s dialogical method is exhortative (Table 3).

- Support (first party = supporters, second party = Prophet, supporters’ method = interrogative): 18 cases
- Support (method = exhortative): 7 cases
- Confidence (first party = supporters, second party = Prophet, supporters’ method = interrogative → Prophet’s method = exhortative): 38%

$$Confidence = \frac{7}{18} \approx 38\%$$

Among these supporters, the methods emotional, exhortative, propagative, denunciatory, derisive, and threatening were not used at all. Furthermore, only a single dialogue was identified for each of the methods argumentative, persuasive, and assertive, and therefore they were not suitable for deriving association rules.

Table 3. *Dialogical Methods of the Supporters and the Responses of the Prophet*

Supporters’ Method	Prophet’s Response	Frequency	Confidence (%)
Interrogative	Exhortative	7	38%

6. *Analysis of Rules*

In the previous step, the components influencing the extraction of rules were identified and the acceptable rules were introduced. At this stage, examples are presented for each case, followed by an analysis of the rules. It is important to note that multiple dialogical methods may appear within a single dialogue. Therefore, while the examples provided correspond to the rules introduced, they may also contain additional dialogical methods.

Rule 1: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the

Prophet, and the opponents employ an interrogative method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is propagative with a probability of 44%. For instance, in the verse Q. 2:142, a dialogue takes place between the foolish ones and the Prophet:

The foolish among the people will say, "What has turned them away from the qiblah they were following?" Say, "To Allah belong the east and the west. He guides whomever He wishes to a straight path."

The Prophet, employing a propagative method, responds by affirming God's absolute ownership, which is one of the fundamental elements of monotheism. Thus, he emphasizes that both the east and the west belong to God, and that He disposes of them according to His wisdom and will (al-Ṭabrisī 1993, 1: 413).¹

Rule 2: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ a denunciatory method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is propagative and argumentative with a probability of 38%. For example, in Q. 46:7–10, a dialogue takes place between the disbelievers and the Prophet. At the beginning of their speech, the disbelievers reject the Qur'an as the miracle of the Prophet, declaring it to be sorcery from him, and they accuse him of falsely attributing it to God. The Prophet responds by combining propagative and argumentative methods to demonstrate that the accusation of fabrication is untenable and that the Qur'an is in fact a divine miracle from the Almighty:

When Our manifest signs are recited to them, the faithless say of the truth when it comes to them: "This is plain magic." Do they say, "He has fabricated it?" Say, "Should I have fabricated it, you would not avail me anything against Allah. He best knows what you gossip concerning it. He suffices as a witness between me and you, and He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful." Say, "I am not a novelty among the apostles, nor do I know what will be done with me, or with you. I just follow whatever is revealed to me, and I am just a manifest warner." Say, "Tell me, if it is from Allah and you disbelieve in it, and a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to its like and believed [in it], while you are disdainful [of it]?" Indeed Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot (Q. 46:7-10).

According to Tabataba'i, two forms of argumentation can be identified in the Prophet's words: first, *"If I have fabricated it, you do not hold any power to protect me from Allah"*; and second, *"Sufficient is He as a witness between me and you."* The Prophet clarifies that if he had fabricated the

1- Further examples for this rule include Q. 6:37 (dialogue between polytheists and the Prophet), Q. 36:78–83 (dialogue between polytheists and the Prophet), and Q. 29:50 (dialogue between disbelievers and the Prophet).

Qur'an and falsely attributed it to God, then God Himself would punish him severely, and no one would be able to prevent it. Hence, it is impossible that he should knowingly expose himself to God's certain punishment by inventing lies against Him. The second argument indicates that God's own testimony in the Qur'an, that it is His word and not a fabrication, is sufficient proof of the Prophet's truthfulness (Tabataba'i 1996, 18: 288).¹

Rule 3: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ an assertive method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is persuasive with a probability of 36%. For example, in Q. 3:183, a dialogue occurs between the Jewish leaders and the Prophet. Their speech is assertive in nature:

[To] those who say, "Allah has pledged us not to believe in any apostle unless he brings us an offering consumed by fire," say, "Apostles before me certainly brought you manifest signs and what you speak of. Then why did you kill them, should you be truthful?" (Q. 3:183)

The Prophet responds with a persuasive argument to remove their pretext. Here, persuasion is used as a form of reasoning less forceful than full logical argumentation, but sufficient to expose the inconsistency in their claim.²

Rule 4: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ a derisive method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is threatening with a probability of 60%. For example, Q. 9:61 recounts a dialogue between the hypocrites and the Prophet.

Among them are those who torment the Prophet, and say, "He is an ear." Say, "An ear that is good for you. He has faith in Allah and trusts the faithful, and is a mercy for those of you who have faith." As for those who torment the Apostle of Allah, there is a painful punishment for them (Q. 9:61).

The hypocrites, in order to belittle and reproach him, said: "He is all ears," portraying him as overly credulous and easily influenced. The Prophet redefines this trait positively. Yet, he follows with a threat of painful punishment.³

Rule 5: If the first party is the supporters and the second party is the

1- Further examples for this rule include Q. 17:90–100 (dialogue between polytheists and the Prophet) and Q. 34:34–37, 39 (dialogue between disbelievers and the Prophet).

2- Further examples for this rule include Q. 5:17 (dialogue between Christians and the Prophet), Q. 2:140 (dialogue between the People of the Book and the Prophet), Q. 10:15–16 (dialogue between polytheists and the Prophet).

3- Further examples for this rule include Q. 34:43, 46–50 (dialogue between disbelievers and the Prophet), Q. 52:30–33 (dialogue between disbelievers and the Prophet).

Prophet, and the supporters employ an interrogative method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is exhortative with a probability of 38%. For example, Q. 2:220 presents a dialogue between a group of people and the Prophet.¹ They ask about the treatment of orphans. The Prophet responds with exhortative guidance:

And they ask you concerning the orphans. Say, "It is better to set right their affairs, and if you intermingle with them, they are of course your brothers: Allah knows the one who causes corruption from the one who brings about reform, and had Allah wished He would have put you to hardship." Indeed Allah is all-mighty, all-wise (Q. 2:220).

The comparison of the identified rules between the two categories of interlocutors, opponents and supporters, reveals an important distinction. When both categories employed the interrogative method, the Prophet responded differently according to their stance. With opponents, he responded in a propagative manner, emphasizing the fundamentals of religion such as divine unity, resurrection, and prophet hood. With supporters, however, he responded in an exhortative manner, offering practical and spiritual guidance for their growth within their existing faith commitment. This highlights the decisive role that the status of the interlocutor, whether opponent or supporter, played in shaping the Prophet's dialogical approach.

7. Conclusion

Among the verses of the Qur'an, 153 verses are devoted to dialogues between the people and the Prophet. In 134 of these verses, the people are the initiators of speech. Based on the speaker, interlocutor, and subject matter, these verses can be divided into 66 distinct dialogues.

In the Qur'anic dialogues with the Prophet, the opponents include Jews, the People of the Book, Quraysh, Christians, Jewish leaders, Jews and Christians collectively, disbelievers, hypocrites, dissenters, polytheists, and the "foolish ones." The supporters, by contrast, include Muslims, believers, the Prophet's wife, and groups of people.

Five dialogical rules regarding the Prophet's conversational methods with people can be identified: four pertaining to opponents and one pertaining to supporters. The rules are as follows:

1- Further examples for this rule include Q. 2:189 (dialogue between people and the Prophet), and Q. 3:165 (dialogue between Muslims and the Prophet).

- When the opponents employed the interrogative method, the Prophet responded propagatively.
- When the opponents employed the denunciatory method, the Prophet responded propagatively and argumentatively.
- When the opponents employed the assertive method, the Prophet responded persuasively.
- When the opponents employed the derisive method, the Prophet responded threateningly.
- When the supporters employed the interrogative method, the Prophet responded exhortatively.

A comparison of the Prophet's responses to both opponents and supporters when they employed the same dialogical method reveals a significant difference: when opponents used the interrogative method, the Prophet responded propagatively, but when supporters used the same method, he responded exhortatively. In the propagative method, the Prophet focused on explaining fundamental religious principles such as divine unity, resurrection, and the necessity of prophethood. In the exhortative method, however, his aim was to provide intellectual and practical recommendations to nurture the supporters within their pre-existing faith commitments.

The Prophet's dialogical approach appears to be a combination of responding in the best manner and reciprocal response. For instance, when opponents resorted to ridicule, he responded in kind through a threatening method. Conversely, when opponents denied his mission, he countered with what is best, using propagative and argumentative methods in an attempt to alter their perspective and draw them toward the discourse of truth. In sum, the Prophet tailored his dialogical method according to the circumstances and exigencies of the dialogue.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been extracted from the thesis prepared by Fatemeh Ashtiani under the supervision of Dr. Farzaneh Rohani Mashhadi and Dr. Alireza Talebpour in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Qur'anic Sciences. The authors extend their gratitude to the Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies Research Institute, Shahid Beheshti University, and the Research Deputy for supporting the research.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no competing interests.


References

- Al-Harrānī, I. S. (1983). *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl 'an Āl al-Rasūl*. Qom: Islamic Publishing Institute.
- Al-Kulaynī, M. (1986). *Kitāb al-Kāfī*. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyyah.
- Al-Ṭabrisī, F. (1993). *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*. Tehran: Naṣīr Khusru.
- Ashtiani, F., Rohani Mashhadi, F. and Talebpour, A. (2024). Extracting the Dialogue Pattern of the Prophets in the Holy Quran. *Quran and Hadith Studies*, 18(1), 135-164. <https://doi.org/10.30497/qhs.2024.245775.3906>
- Azizi, B. and Mahdavi Farid, D.A. (2015). Manners of Conversation from Perspective of Quran and the Prophet. *International Multidisciplinary Journal of Pure Life (IMJPL)*, 1(1), 39-60. <https://doi.org/025/p-1.2015.263>
- Fariani, S. M., Islami Ardakani, H., & Javanshir, A. (2023). Consequences of the peace-loving trait of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) based on His dominant behavioral chain in Qur'an. *Studies in Islam and Psychology*, 17(33), 195-215. <https://doi.org/10.30471/psy.2023.9112.2081>
- Ghazanfari, M., Alizadeh, S., & Teymourpour, B. (2008). *Data mining and knowledge discovery* (In Persian). Tehran: Science and Industry Publications.
- Janahmadi, F. and Ahmadi, F. (2022). The culture of negotiation and dialogue in Sira Prophet of Islam (PBUH). *International Journal of Iranian-Islamic Studies*, 12(1), 85-118. <https://doi.org/10.30484/jii.2022.3039.1072>
- Karami, M., Talebpour, A., Tajabadi, F. and Haji Mohammadi, Z. (2023). Emotion Recognition from Qur'anic Text Using Advanced RoBERTa Deep Learning Network, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.37264/jiqs.v2i1june2023.8>
- Kariminia, M. M. (2004). Dialogue in the Qur'an. *Rawāq-e Andisheh*, 29, 86–105.
- Mir, M. (1992). Dialogue in the Qur'an. *Religion & Literature*, 24(1), 1–22.
- Qarai, A. Q. (2004). *Translation of the Holy Qur'an*. London: ICAS.
- Seraji, K. (2022). *Extracting divine laws using association rules in Qur'anic verses* (In Persian). Master's thesis. Shahid Beheshti University, Iran.
- Tabataba'i, M. H. (1996). *Al-Mīzān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*. Qom: Jāmi'ah Mudarrisīn.

Sentiment and Tone Analysis of the Holy Qur'an Using Natural Language Processing

Mahdi Rafiei 

Master's Degree in Computer Engineering, Department of Computer Engineering, Shahed University, Tehran, Iran.

Ehsan Khadangi ¹ 

Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science, Shahed University, Tehran, Iran.

Article History: Received 1 March 2025; Accepted 16 May 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

This article investigates sentiment and tone analysis of the verses of the Holy Qur'an using advanced Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques. By leveraging deep learning transformer models such as AraBERT and MARBERT, distinct models were designed and implemented for sentiment analysis (positive, negative, and neutral) and multi-label tone analysis. These models aim to identify emotional and tonal patterns within the sacred text of the Qur'an. Evaluation results demonstrate satisfactory accuracy and F1 scores in detecting these patterns. Furthermore, an analysis of the Qur'an's text reveals a balanced distribution of tones across its chapters (surahs). This research underscores the potential of NLP as a powerful tool for analyzing complex and multifaceted religious texts, paving the way for future studies in this domain.

KEYWORDS: The Qur'an, Sentiment analysis, Tone analysis, Natural Language Processing (NLP), Deep learning, Transformers.

1. Introduction

The Holy Qur'an, the divine scripture of Islam, serves not only as a source of spiritual and ethical guidance but also as one of the most prominent literary and religious texts in the world due to its unique linguistic and

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: khadangi@shahed.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I2.5>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_106693.html?lang=en

and rhetorical features. Since its revelation, the Qur'an has captivated scholars, exegetes, and researchers from various disciplines due to its eloquence, rhetoric, and tonal diversity. One of its striking characteristics is the variety of emotional and affective tones in its verses, expressed through diverse tones such as mercy, admonition, fear, glad tidings, and others. This tonal variety plays a crucial role in conveying divine messages to audiences with diverse backgrounds and emotional states.

Tone in religious texts, particularly the Qur'an, refers to the emotional or affective quality conveyed by the text to its audience, shaped by the choice and arrangement of words. It plays a pivotal role in transmitting spiritual messages and emotionally impacting readers. Qur'anic verses employ various tones to evoke emotions such as hope, fear, joy, or caution, each leaving a distinct impression on the reader or listener (Eissa 2023). For instance, verses emphasizing divine mercy and forgiveness instill tranquility and hope, while those addressing punishment or warning evoke fear and a sense of responsibility. Analyzing these tones not only deepens the understanding of the verses' meanings but also has applications in fields such as religious education, Qur'anic exegesis, and religious psychology (Goel & Arsiwala 2024). The challenge of translating the Qur'an from Arabic to other languages underscores the importance of studying its tone (Yari & Firouziyan Pour Esfahani 2025). Islamic theology considers the Qur'an miraculous and inimitable, asserting that its text should not be detached from its original Arabic, as a single Arabic word can carry multiple meanings depending on context. The significance of tone in the Qur'an includes:

- **Conveying Meaning and Emotion:** Tone is vital for conveying the profound spiritual and religious meanings of the Qur'an. It helps readers grasp both the literal meaning and the implicit concepts, symbols, assumptions, and ideals embedded in the text (Hezarkhani & Ashrafi 2023).
- **Moral and Didactic Impact:** As an educational and exhortative text, the Qur'an uses tone to critique certain ideas and behaviors while encouraging readers to pursue ethical goals (Hezarkhani & Ashrafi 2023). The didactic tone, consistent throughout Qur'anic narratives, reflects God's intent to transform and elevate the reader (Eissa 2023).
- **Engaging and Comprehending the Reader:** Tone is a key factor in the narrative's appeal and its ability to connect with the audience. Proper tone comprehension is essential for readers to understand the text's structure and the relationships between its sections. It also serves as a critical clue for uncovering the theme and intent of a textual work (Eissa

2023). Using NLP, these emotional and tonal patterns can be systematically and automatically identified.

The primary objective of this research is to design and implement two models for analyzing the sentiment and tone of Qur'anic verses using advanced NLP techniques. The first model focuses on identifying general sentiments (positive, negative, and neutral), while the second addresses multi-label tone analysis, such as mercy, reverence, command, and warning. By employing transformer-based models, preprocessing tools, and data augmentation techniques, this study aims to achieve high accuracy in detecting these patterns. Additionally, the sentiment and tone of the Qur'anic text is analyzed using the developed models.

The article is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the research background on NLP and religious text analysis. Section 3 details the research methodology, including data, preprocessing, data augmentation, and model training processes. Sections 4 and 5 present the evaluation results of the models and the analysis of model output. Finally, Section 6 provides a discussion and conclusion of the findings.

2. Literature Review

The analysis of religious texts using NLP has emerged as a compelling topic in recent years, bridging computer science and religious studies (Bengueddach 2025). Comprehensive surveys on Arabic Sentiment Analysis (ASA) have focused on deep learning methods and highlighted challenges in processing complex Arabic texts like the Qur'an (Shi & Agrawal 2025). This section reviews studies related to Arabic text processing, deep learning concepts and transformer models, sentiment and tone analysis in religious texts, and the application of deep learning models in Arabic text analysis (Kusal et al. 2023).

2.1. Natural Language Processing in Qur'anic Text

The Arabic language, with its unique features such as diacritics, diverse forms of the letter *alif* (e.g., *alif maqṣūrah*, *alif mamdūdah*, *hamzah*), and complex grammatical and rhetorical structures, poses significant challenges for NLP (Abdul-Mageed et al. 2021). These characteristics render standard NLP models designed for languages like English less effective for Arabic text processing. To address these challenges, Arabic text must undergo preprocessing steps such as diacritic removal, normalization of *alif* forms, and elimination of unnecessary characters to prepare it for deep learning

model training. Additionally, models and tools specifically fine-tuned for Arabic are required.

Recent studies have explored the structure of Qur'anic surahs (El-Affendi et al. 2025). One prominent theory is the *Thematic Unity Theory*, which posits that each surah revolves around a central theme. A key branch of this theory, the *Introduction and Exposition Theory*, suggests that God introduces the theme of each surah in its opening verses, elaborates on it through various methods such as stories, signs, comparisons, and predictions, and concludes in the final verses. Khadangi et al. (2022) investigated these theories using NLP techniques, calculating the similarity of Qur'anic roots using three methods: TF-IDF, Word2Vec, and root accompaniment. Their results confirmed that the studied surahs exhibit internal conceptual coherence, focusing on one or a few related themes. Additionally, comparing the similarity between the introduction and body of surahs validated the Introduction and Exposition Theory for many surahs. Furthermore, by analyzing the similarity between surahs relative to their order and revelation sequence, they concluded that the Qur'an's surah arrangement is relatively structured.

Computational text-mining algorithms have also been proposed for conceptualizing Qur'anic verses, providing a foundation for advanced tone and sentiment analysis (Azari et al. 2020).

2.2. Deep Learning and Transformer Models

Deep learning, a subset of machine learning, employs multi-layered artificial neural networks to model complex data patterns. It has made significant strides in recent years, particularly in NLP and computer vision, due to its ability to handle large and complex datasets. In NLP, earlier models such as Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) and Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) were widely used, and in specific applications to religious texts like the Qur'an, models such as Support Vector Machines (SVMs) have been employed for multi-label classification of translated English verses, which can also be useful for tone analysis (Prabowo et al. 2019). However, the introduction of the transformer architecture in 2017 marked a significant breakthrough in NLP.

Transformers, introduced in the seminal paper *Attention Is All You Need* by Vaswani et al. (2017), revolutionized sequence data modeling. Unlike RNNs, which process data sequentially with limited parallelization, transformers enable fully parallel processing, significantly speeding up model training. The self-attention mechanism allows the model to directly

compare all words in a sequence, effectively capturing their relationships. Transformers consist of two main components: an encoder and a decoder, each comprising multiple layers. The encoder consists of six identical layers, each with two sub-layers: a multi-head attention layer and a feed-forward neural network. The attention layer enables the model to assess the importance of different words in a sequence relative to a specific word. The decoder also consists of six layers but includes an additional sub-layer for multi-head attention over the encoder's output.

The introduction of transformers significantly improved performance in various NLP tasks, such as machine translation. Their simple yet highly efficient architecture has made them a cornerstone of modern deep learning models, with models like BERT, GPT, and T5 building directly on this framework. Models like MARBERT, optimized specifically for Arabic, leverage this architecture and demonstrate strong capabilities in understanding semantic and emotional relationships in Arabic texts (Abdul-Mageed et al. 2021).

Recent studies have applied transformer models to Qur'anic text analysis (Khadangi and Shabani 2023). Research indicates that Qur'anic surahs exhibit internal structure and organization, with each surah pursuing a specific purpose. While each surah focuses on a distinct theme, the Qur'an identifies 114 broad themes, and the notable similarity between adjacent surahs underscores their deliberate sequential arrangement. Khadangi and Shabani (2023) proposed a model comprising embedding and autoencoding components. The embedding phase used BERT to represent meaning and themes, while the autoencoding phase clustered data using soft labeling. Their findings revealed high semantic correlation between proximate surahs, decreasing with greater distance.

Alam et al. (2025) addressed the proliferation of Qur'anic content on social media, which poses challenges in verifying the authenticity of verses. They developed a method using transformer-based models (BERT-Base-Arabic, AraBERT, and MARBERT) trained on a dataset of authentic and fabricated verses. Among the models, MARBERT, designed for Arabic dialects, achieved the best performance with an F1-score of 94%.

2.3. Sentiment and Tone Analysis in Religious Texts and the Qur'an

Sentiment and tone analysis in religious texts like the Qur'an is challenging due to linguistic and semantic complexities (al-Ayyoub et al. 2019). Religious texts often feature composite tones, where a single verse

may convey multiple emotions or tones (e.g., mercy and warning) simultaneously. This complexity renders traditional sentiment analysis methods, typically designed to identify a dominant emotion, less effective. Previous studies, such as Abu Farha and Magdy (2021), demonstrated that deep learning models can effectively identify emotional patterns in Arabic texts, but advanced methods are still needed for multi-tone analysis. For instance, Qur'anic verses addressing mercy and forgiveness may evoke hope and tranquility, while those concerning punishment induce fear and caution. This complexity necessitates models capable of predicting multiple labels simultaneously. Most studies in this area have focused on translations of the Qur'an (Gaanoun & Alsuhaibani 2025).

Islamic scholars have undertaken extensive efforts to translate the Qur'an into various languages, with English being a prominent target language. Eissa (2023) analyzed the tone of translated Qur'anic verses, finding that 63% exhibited a non-ironic tone. Among thematic components, there was a near balance between entity and concept in sentiment analysis, with 72% of textual elements showing unipolarity. Notably, verses with positive polarity outnumbered those with negative polarity. Thematic sentiment analysis revealed a prevalence of non-polar sentiments, followed by positive, negative, neutral, strong positive, and strong negative polarities.

This study approached sentiment analysis from two perspectives: global text-level analysis, which found 72% of verses to be unipolar and 1% ironic, and thematic sentiment analysis, which identified themes and varying levels of polarity. Entity-based sentiment analysis determines emotions toward specific entities (e.g., a person or group) within a text.

Karami et al. (2023) highlighted the exponential growth of textual data (books, blogs, and articles) and the time-consuming nature of manual analysis. They emphasized the importance of automated sentiment analysis for identifying writing styles and target audiences, particularly for the Qur'an as a divine and miraculous text. Their study developed a multi-label sentiment analysis model for English translations of the Qur'an using transformer-based models like RoBERTa and BiLSTM, achieving 77% accuracy. Their proposed model integrates RoBERTa's language understanding capabilities with syntactic features. It comprises two sub-models: one processes the raw text using RoBERTa, while the other incorporates dependency tags or parts of speech, processed via BiLSTM. The outputs are combined through a dense classification layer.

Sentiment analysis has also been applied to other religious texts. Vora et al. (2024) analyzed sentiments in selected Bible passages across five translations, noting variations in vocabulary and emotional tones such as

humor, optimism, and compassion. They used a BERT-based model fine-tuned on the SenWave dataset for section-by-section sentiment analysis. The study used three English Bible translations: the King James Version (widely used), the Lamsa Version (translated from Aramaic), and the Simple English Version. The authors reviewed recurrent neural network models like LSTM and highlighted recent advancements in transformer models. They employed a BERT-based model for sentiment analysis, fine-tuned on the SenWave dataset.

3. Research Methodology

The methodology includes two distinct models for sentiment analysis (positive, negative, and neutral) and multi-label tone analysis. Both models follow similar steps, including text preprocessing, data augmentation, tokenization, and model training, but differ in label types and evaluation metrics.

3.1. Data

The dataset comprises approximately 1,000 Qur'anic verses, labeled in two ways with assistance from domain experts, prior studies such as (Hezarkhani & Ashrafi 2023), and large language models. The first labeling categorizes sentiment as positive (360 verses), negative (460 verses), or neutral (130 verses). The second labeling categorizes tone as “glad tidings and affectionate” (300 verses), “reverent and awe-inspiring” (365 verses), “commanding and authoritative” (370 verses), or “warning, reproachful, and fear-inducing” (410 verses). Some verses have multiple tones. Four tone labels were chosen to balance data volume and model performance. Approximately 100 verses were labeled by experts, while the rest were labeled using a majority-voting approach based on expert-labeled verses and outputs from large language models (GPT, Grok, Gemini, and Perplexity) (Zhang & Takada 2025).

3.2. Text Preprocessing and Vectorization

In NLP research, particularly for Arabic texts, preprocessing is critical for standardizing, cleaning, and preparing textual data to enhance machine learning model performance. Preprocessing steps include removing diacritics (e.g., *fathah*, *kasrah*, and *dammah*) to simplify text due to limited data volume, eliminating special characters like *hamzah* to reduce unnecessary variation, standardizing *alif* forms, removing numbers, and

eliminating extra spaces. To address class imbalance, the neutral class was augmented using oversampling.

Text vectorization converts preprocessed text into numerical representations for machine learning models. This involves tokenization and transforming texts into numerical vectors. Using the MARBERT tokenizer, texts were split into tokens, with a maximum length of 128 tokens. Longer texts were truncated, and shorter texts were padded to ensure uniform input. To handle tokenization errors, a fallback mechanism tokenized empty text to produce valid vectors. Two types of vectors were generated: one mapping tokens to unique IDs in the BERT vocabulary and a binary mask distinguishing real tokens from padding.

Vectorization ensures text is machine-readable, with fixed-length inputs (128 tokens), and padding improving computational efficiency. MARBERT's tokenizer, optimized for Arabic, effectively handles the language's complex structures.

3.3. Proposed Model

This study employs deep learning with transformer-based models (AraBERT and MARBERT) for tone analysis, with a BiLSTM-based model for comparison. AraBERT and MARBERT, pre-trained for Arabic NLP, were selected for their ability to understand Arabic linguistic and semantic structures. The models were configured with three sentiment labels (positive, negative, and neutral) and four tone labels (glad tidings, reverent, commanding, and warning). Inputs include numerical vectors and attention masks from the vectorization stage. A comparison of the Transformer models used is shown in Table 1.

Class imbalance, particularly in the neutral class, was addressed by weighting the loss function. The neutral class weight was increased by 1.5 to balance attention to underrepresented classes. Label smoothing (0.1) was applied to improve generalization by reducing overconfidence in predictions.

Table 1. Comparison of AraBERT and MARBERT Models

Feature	AraBERT	MARBERT
Language Domain Focus	Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)	Arabic Dialect (DA) and MSA
Train data	61 GB (6.2 billion tokens)	128 GB (15.6 billion tokens)
Data Sources	Formal texts (books, news, web)	Arabic tweets
NSP Objective	Yes	None
Main Application	Formal and academic texts	Informal content and social media

3.3.1. Optimization Settings

AdamW optimizer: An improved version of Adam with a learning rate of $2e-5$ and weight decay of 0.2 to prevent overfitting.

Learning rate schedule: A linear schedule with warm-up, gradually increasing the learning rate in the first 10% of training steps, then decreasing it linearly for stable convergence.

Dropout: A dropout rate of 0.3 in hidden and attention layers to reduce overfitting.

3.3.2. Early Stopping and Cross-Validation

Early stopping prevented overfitting, with a patience of 2 epochs and a minimum improvement delta of 0.01. The best model, based on weighted F1-score, was saved. Five-fold cross-validation was used, with 85% of data for training/validation and 15% for testing. Data were split into five subsets, with one subset used for validation and the others for training in each fold. The average performance across folds provided a robust estimate, with the best model selected for final evaluation.

3.3.3. Training Process

Models were trained with early stopping, using 70% of data for training and 15% for validation. In each epoch, data was processed in batches, with loss calculated using a weighted loss function and label smoothing. Gradients were updated, and the model was evaluated on the validation set for metrics like loss, accuracy, recall, and F1-score.

4. Model Evaluation

To evaluate each of the developed models, experiments were conducted on each model. The performance of each model was assessed using metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score to address one of the research questions concerning the models' effectiveness on the dataset created from Qur'anic verses. The evaluations revealed differences in the models' performance.

In training the models using the dataset of verses labeled as positive, negative, and neutral, the model developed with the BiLSTM algorithm achieved its best performance in epoch 7, reaching an accuracy of 93.15%, precision of 93.22%, recall of 93.15%, and an F1-score of 93.12%. The model developed using MARBERT achieved its best performance in epoch 4, with an accuracy of 97.96%, precision of 97.97%, recall of 97.96%, and

an F1-score of 97.95%. Additionally, the F1-score for the positive label was 98% with a precision of 99%, for the negative label an F1-score of 98% with a precision of 99%, and for the neutral label an F1-score of 94% with a precision of 95%. The model developed using AraBERT achieved its best performance in epoch 5, with an accuracy of 94.9%, precision of 95%, recall of 94.9%, and an F1-score of 94.91%. The F1-score for the positive label was 93% with a precision of 92%, for the negative label an F1-score of 96% with a precision of 98%, and for the neutral label an F1-score of 95% with a precision of 92% (Figure 1).

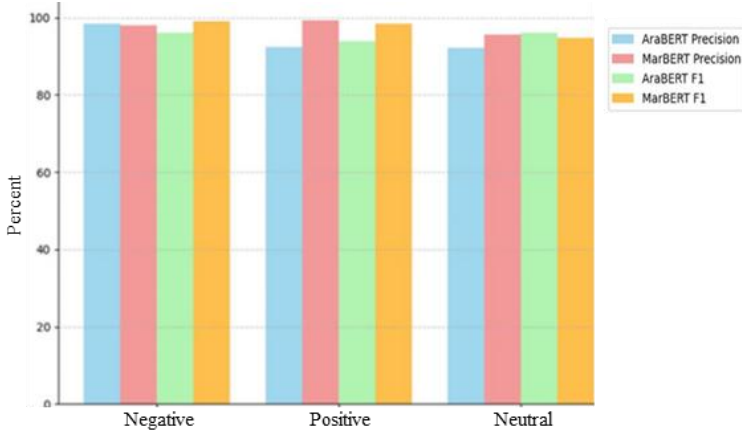


Figure 1. Comparison of the evaluation of two Transformer models on sentiment classes

Among the evaluated models, MARBERT outperformed the others across all evaluation metrics used, although the performance of the other models was also satisfactory and acceptable. The confusion matrices for the transformer models are presented in Figures 2 and 3, demonstrating their strong performance. Table 2 provides a summary of the performance of the evaluated models.

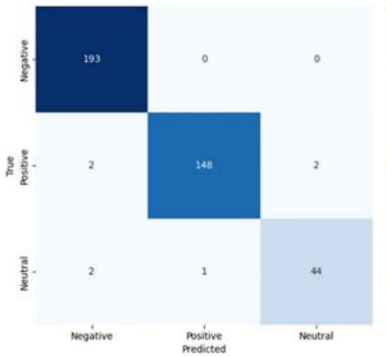


Figure 2. Confusion Matrix of the MARBERT Sentiment Model

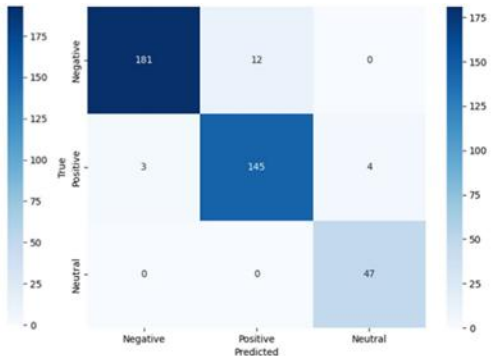


Figure 3. Confusion Matrix of the AraBERT Sentiment Model

Table 2. Sentiment Analysis Model Performance

Model	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	F1-Score
BiLSTM	93.15%	93.22%	93.15%	93.12%
MARBERT	97.96%	97.97%	97.96%	97.95%
AraBERT	94.9%	95%	94.9%	94.91%

We also employed probabilistic classification methods to determine the probability (percentage) of each verse and surah being positive or negative. For this purpose, machine learning algorithms including Logistic Regression (LR) and Support Vector Machines (SVMs) were used. The LR model achieved an accuracy of 86.46% and an F1-score of 84.69%, whereas the SVM model obtained an accuracy of 72.92% and an F1-score of 71.27%.

In training the models using the dataset of verses labeled with four tone categories, the model developed with the BiLSTM algorithm achieved its best performance in epoch 8, reaching an accuracy of 81.54%, precision of 92.72%, recall of 92.82%, and an F1-score of 92.73%. The model developed using MARBERT achieved its best performance in epoch 5, with an accuracy of 91.01%, precision of 94.99%, recall of 96.30%, and an F1-score of 95.58%. The model developed using AraBERT achieved its best performance in epoch 6, with an accuracy of 91.80%, precision of 95.98%, recall of 95.79%, and an F1-score of 95.87% (Table 3). Among the evaluated models, MARBERT and AraBERT demonstrated superior

performance across the evaluation metrics used. However, the performance of the BiLSTM model was also satisfactory and acceptable. The performance of the transformer models, broken down by tone classes, is presented in Figure 4.

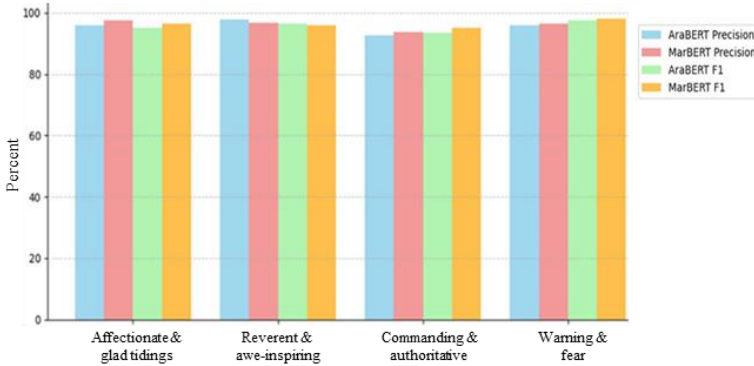


Figure 4. Comparison of the evaluation of two Transformer models on sentiment classes

The confusion matrices for the MARBERT and AraBERT models are shown in Figures 5 and 6.

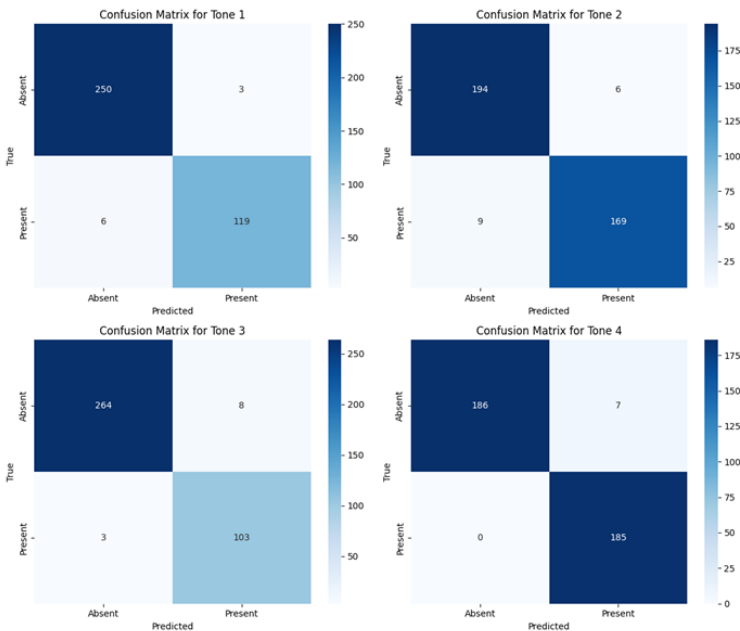


Figure 5. Confusion Matrix of the MARBERT Tone Model (Tone 1: Affection, Tone 2: Sanctification and Reverence, Tone 3: Authoritative and Directive, Tone 4: Warning and Reproach)

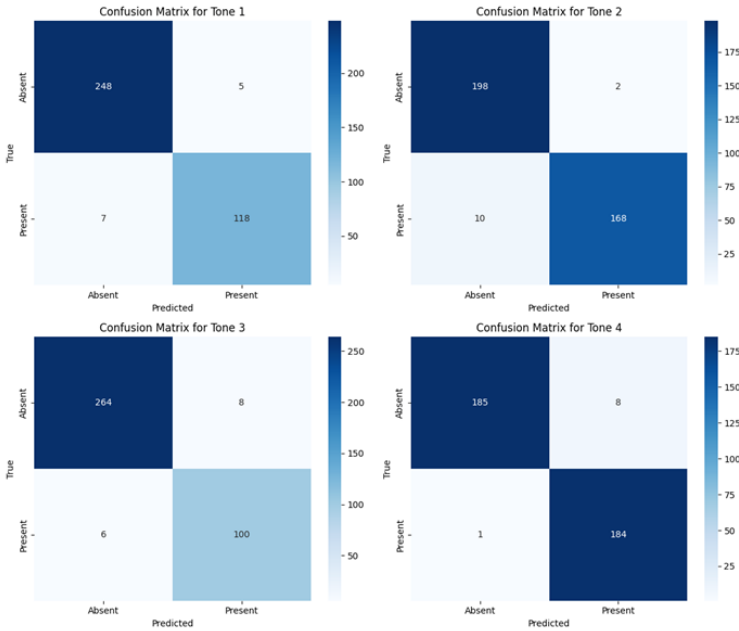


Figure 6. Confusion Matrix of the AraBERT Tone Model (Tone 1: Affection, Tone 2: Sanctification and Reverence, Tone 3: Authoritative and Directive, Tone 4: Warning and Reproach)

Table 3. Tone Analysis Model Performance

Model	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	F1-Score
BILSTM	81.54%	92.72%	92.82%	92.73%
MARBERT	91.01%	94.99%	96.30%	95.58%
AraBERT	91.80%	95.98%	95.79%	95.87%

In conclusion, it can be inferred that the MARBERT models demonstrated superior performance in analyzing the sentiment and tone of the dataset created from the verses of the Qur'an, making them suitable as reference models for examining the sentiment and tone of the Qur'anic text.

Additionally, as observed in Table 4, the models presented in this article achieved a higher F1-score compared to other studies evaluated.

Table 4. Comparison of the Performance of Developed Transformer Models with Other Studies in the Domain of Qur'anic Text Analysis

Model	Accuracy	F1-Score
MARBERT (This Study)	91.01%	95.58%
AraBERT (This Study)	91.80%	95.87%
MARBERT (Alam et al. 2025)	93.73%	93.80%
AraBERT (Alam et al. 2025)	57.99%	70.00%
RoBERTa (Karami et al. 2023)	77.00%	-

5. Results and Discussion

The sentiment and tone analysis of the Qur'an was conducted using the MARBERT model. Analysis revealed that approximately 37.8% of the Qur'anic text is positive, 45.5% negative, and 16.7% neutral, as depicted in Figure 7.

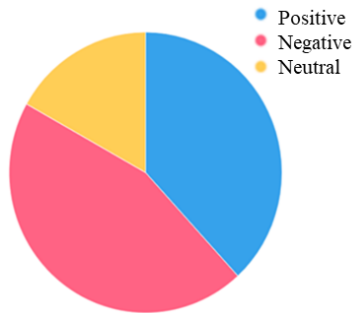


Figure 7. Sentiment Distribution across the Entire Qur'an

As shown in Figure 8, in many surahs, negative sentiments (represented in red) predominate, reaching over 80–90% in some cases. This indicates that a significant portion of the Qur'anic verses conveys warnings, admonitions, or serious messages regarding the consequences of human behavior. Despite the prevalence of negative sentiments, positive sentiments (represented in green) are present in nearly all surahs, reflecting the Qur'an's hopeful, encouraging, and inviting aspects, which consistently accompany its warnings. The neutral segment (represented in gray) constitutes 10–20% of most surahs, indicating verses that are informational or descriptive, lacking strong emotional undertones and focusing on conveying rulings, events, or descriptions. The initial surahs of the Qur'an, particularly longer ones such as al-Baqarah, Āl 'Imrān, and al-Nisā', exhibit a more balanced mix of positive and negative sentiments. In contrast, shorter surahs towards the end of the Qur'an show a pronounced tendency toward either negative

or positive sentiments, with significant fluctuations in their proportions. Surahs such as al-Ghāshiyah, al-Ḍuḥā, al-Ḥadīd, and al-Faṭḥ are notable for their higher proportion of positive sentiments, emphasizing themes of divine mercy, blessings, and guidance. It can be concluded that, alongside its warnings and admonitions, the Qur'an consistently incorporates hopeful, affectionate, and inviting messages. Moreover, a significant portion of its verses lacks direct emotional weight, focusing instead on conveying rulings and narratives. This diversity and balance in tone and sentiment are among the prominent features of the Qur'anic text, underscoring the comprehensiveness of its divine message.

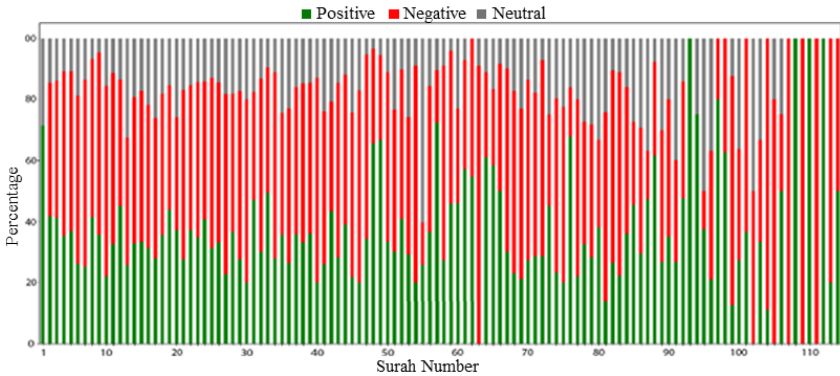


Figure 8. Sentiment Distribution across the Surahs of the Qur'an

In a surah-by-surah analysis, among the surahs of the Qur'an with more than 20 verses, the surahs al-Ḥadīd, al-Insān, al-Ghāshiyah, al-Faṭḥ, and al-Burūj exhibit the highest tendency toward positive sentiment, respectively. Conversely, the surahs Yūnus, al-Qamar, Saba', and al-Aḥqāf show the highest tendency toward negative sentiment. In Figures 9 and 10, the surahs with the highest rates of positive and negative sentiment classes are displayed.

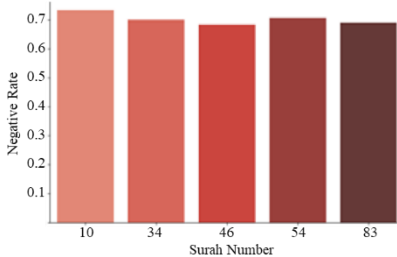


Figure 9. Surahs with the Highest Negative Sentiment

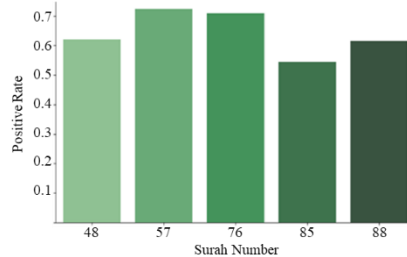


Figure 10. Surahs with the Highest Positive Sentiment

Figures 11, 12, 13, and 14 illustrate the probability percentages of each

surah being positive or negative, which were computed using probabilistic classification based on the Logistic Regression (LR) and Support Vector Machine (SVM) algorithms.

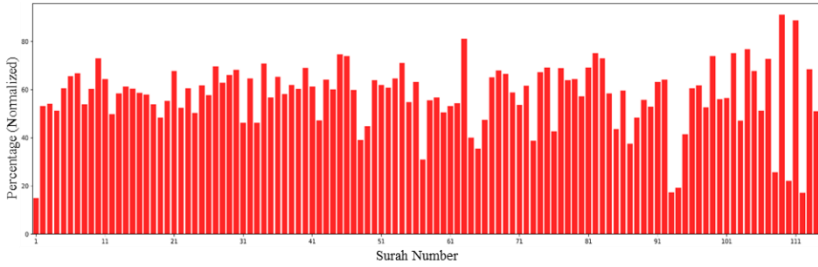


Figure 11. Normalized negative probability per surah (LR)

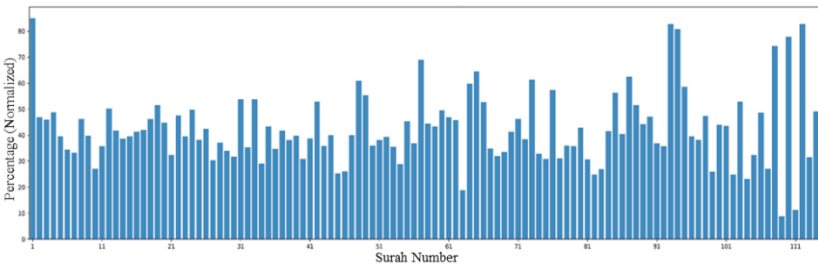


Figure 12. Normalized positive probability per surah (LR)

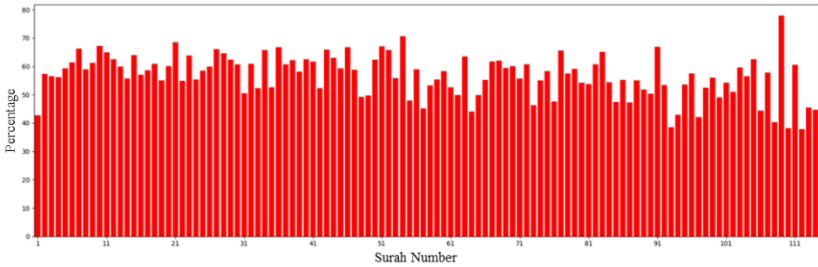


Figure 13. Negative probability per surah (SVM)

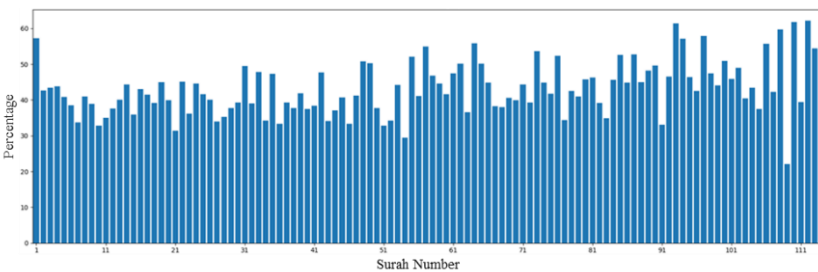


Figure 14. Positive probability per surah (SVM)

In the analysis of the tone of the Qur'an using the MARBERT model, which has the capability to classify Qur'anic text into four classes—"Good News and Affectionate," "Sanctification," "Authoritative and Directive," and "Warning, Reproachful, and Frightening"—approximately 19.8% of the verses are Good News and Affectionate, 23.6% of the verses have a Sanctification tone, 20.5% are Authoritative and Directive, and 36% of the verses exhibit a Warning, Reproachful, or Frightening tone. The chart of this distribution can be seen in Figure 15.

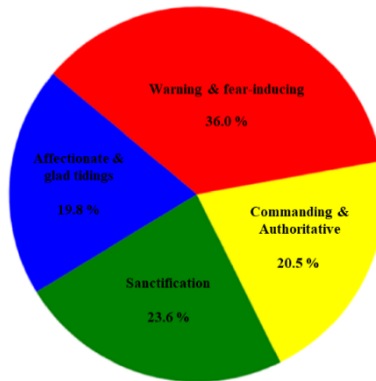


Figure 15. Tone Distribution in the Qur'an

Figure 16 illustrates the distribution of the four different tones across the 114 surahs of the Qur'an based on the tone analysis model discussed earlier. The horizontal axis represents the surah numbers from 1 to 114, while the vertical axis shows the contribution of each tone in each surah (ranging from 0 to 2, as each verse can exhibit more than one tone). According to this figure, the distribution of tones across the various surahs of the Qur'an is highly diverse, with no single tone uniformly dominating the entire text. This diversity reflects the rhetorical styles and varied themes of the Qur'an, shaped by the contexts and purposes of each surah. It should also be noted that some verses can exhibit more than one tone. In surahs like Al-Munāfiqūn, Al-Qamar, and Al-Qāri'ah, a predominant tone of warning and admonition is observed, while in surahs like al-Muzzammil and al-Ghāshiyah, an affectionate tone is more prevalent. Surahs like al-Takwīr and al-Raḥmān feature a predominant tone of sanctification, reverence, and awe, whereas surahs like al-Tawbah and al-Mujādilah are characterized by a prevailing authoritative and directive tone. In Figures 17 to 20, the surahs with the highest rates of each tone are specified.

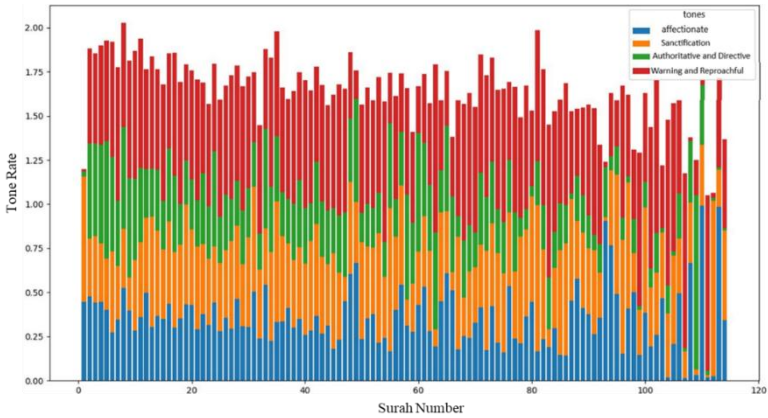


Figure 16. Tone Distribution across the Surahs of the Qur'an (Each Verse Can Have More Than One Tone)

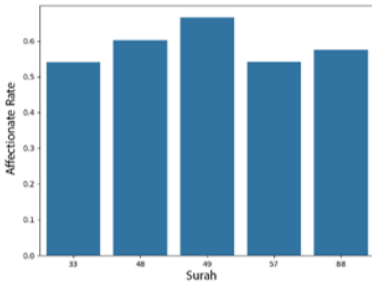


Figure 17. Surahs with the Highest Affectionate Tone

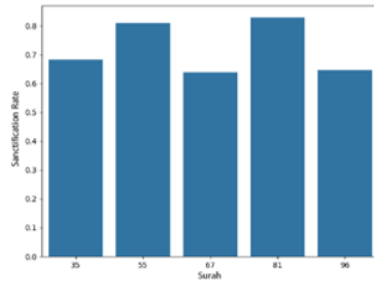


Figure 18. Surahs with the Highest Sanctification Tone

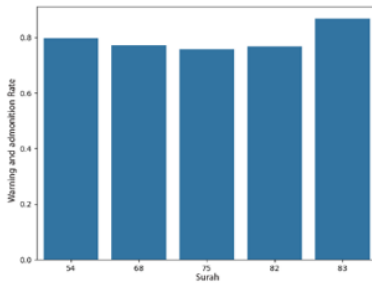


Figure 19. Surahs with the Highest Warning Tone

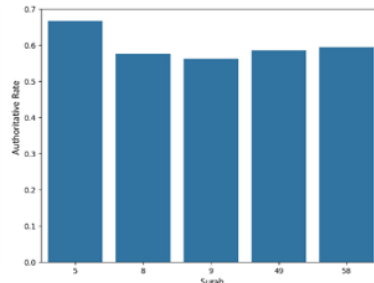


Figure 20. Surahs with the Highest Authoritative Tone

Table 5 displays a number of Qur'anic verses along with their English translations and the sentiment and tone detected by the model for each.

Table 5. Examples of Qur'anic Verses with Detected Sentiment and Tone

Ayah	Translation	Label
وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ (المائدة/٩)	God has promised forgiveness and a great reward to the righteously striving believers (Q. 5:9).	Positive/Affection
وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَاكِينٌ طَيِّبَةٌ فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَنْ وَرِضْوَانٍ مِنْ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرَ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ (التوبة/٧٢)	God has promised the believers gardens wherein streams flow and wherein they will live forever in the excellent mansions of the garden of Eden. What is more important than all this for them is that God is pleased with them. Such is the supreme triumph (Q. 9:72).	Positive/Affection
وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَحِيمِ (مائدة ١٠)	However, the unbelievers who have called Our revelations lies will have hell for their dwelling (Q. 5:10).	Negative/Warning
هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيْمِنُ الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ (الحشر/٢٣)	He is the only Lord, the King, the Holy, the Peace, the Forgiver, the Watchful Guardian, the Majestic, the Dominant, and the Exalted. God is too exalted to have any partner (Q. 59:23).	Neutral/Sanctification
الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا مَا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِنْ تَفَوتٍ فارجع الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَى مِنْ فُطُورٍ (الملک/٣)	It is He who has created seven heavens, one above the other. You can see no flaw in the creation of the Beneficent God. Look again. Can you see faults? (Q. 67:3)	Neutral/Sanctification
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ (البقرة/١٨٣)	Believers, fasting has been made mandatory for you as it was made mandatory for the people before you, so that you may have fear of God (Q. 2:183).	Neutral/Authoritative
الرَّانِيَّةَ وَالزَّانِيَ فَاعْلَمُوا كَلَّ وَاجِدَ مِنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَيْشَأْذُ عَذَابُهُمَا طَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (النور/٢)	Flog the fornicatress and the fornicator with a hundred lashes each. Let there be no reluctance in enforcing the laws of God, if you have faith in God and the Day of Judgment. Let it take place in the presence of a group of believers (Q. 24:2).	Negative/Authoritative/Warning

As observed in Table 5, verse 72 of Surah al-Tawbah, in which Allah promises Paradise to the believers, has a tone of good news and affection. In contrast, the second verse of Surah al-Nūr, which addresses the punishment of sinners, carries a warning and frightening tone. Additionally, verses such as the third verse of Surah al-Mulk, which describe the attributes or power of Almighty God, exhibit a tone of sanctification, reverence, and awe. Verses such as verse 183 of Surah al-Baqarah, which issue commands to the believers, have an authoritative and directive tone.

6. Conclusion

This study examines the effectiveness of transformer-based deep learning models in analyzing the sentiment and tone of the text of the Qur'an. Three different models were implemented: a BiLSTM-based model, the MARBERT model, and the AraBERT model, all of which were fine-tuned to identify the sentiment and tone associated with each verse. Despite the inherent complexities of the Arabic language and the subtle differences among the verses, these models demonstrated remarkable performance. In particular, the MARBERT model, which was utilized to analyze the Qur'anic text, stood out. Based on these analyses, we can conclude that transformer-based models can accurately detect the sentiments and tones

associated with individual verses. The findings indicate that fine-tuned transformer models such as MARBERT and AraBERT have a stronger understanding of the meaning and structure of the text and can be effectively used to analyze the sentiment and tone of religious texts.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been extracted from the thesis prepared by Mahdi Rafiei under the supervision of Dr. Ehsan Khadangi in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Computer Engineering. The authors extend their gratitude to the department of computer engineering, Shahed University and the Research Deputy for supporting the research.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

References

- Abdul-Mageed, M., Elmadany, A., & Nagoudi, E. M. B. (2021). ARBERT & MARBERT: Deep bidirectional transformers for Arabic. In *Proceedings of ACL 2021*. <https://aclanthology.org/2021.acl-long.551>
- Abu Farha, I., & Magdy, W. (2021). A comparative study of effective approaches for Arabic sentiment analysis. *Information Processing & Management*, 58(2), Article 102438. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2020.102438>
- Alam, K. A., Khalid, M., Ali, S. A., Mahmood, H., Shafi, Q., Haroon, M., & Haider, Z. (2025). Automated authentication of Qur'anic verses using BERT-based language models. In *Proceedings of the New Horizons in Computational Linguistics for Religious Texts* (59–66). Abu Dhabi, UAE. Association for Computational Linguistics.
- Al-Ayyoub, M., Khamaiseh, A. A., Jararweh, Y., & Al-Kabi, M. N. (2019). A comprehensive survey of Arabic sentiment analysis. *Information Processing & Management*, 56(2), 320–342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2018.07.006>
- Azari, S., Shokrollahifar, M., & Lessani Fesharaki, M. A. (2020). Computational conceptualization of Qur'anic verses using text mining knowledge. *Zehn*, 21(82), 81–108.
- Bengueddach, A. (2025). Multi-dimensional NLP analysis of the Qur'an: Structure, semantics, and emotion across qirā'āt. *QURANICA: International Journal of Quranic Research*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.22452/quranica.vol17no1.12>
- Eissa, M. E. (2023). Sentiment analysis of a translated text of the Qur'an using the Pareto principle. *Islamic Studies*, 62(3), 379–402. <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v62i3.2706>
- El-Affendi, M. A., Al-Rajhi, L., Al-Khudhair, K., & Al-Harbi, H. (2025). NLP approaches to the Bible, Qur'an, and Bhagavad Gita. In *Proceedings of the First Workshop on Computational Linguistics for Religious Texts (CLRel 2025)* (1–

- 10). <https://aclanthology.org/2025.clrel-1.1>
- Gaanoun, K., & Alsuhaibani, M. (2025). Sentiment preservation in Qur'an translation with artificial intelligence approach: Study in reputable English translation of the Qur'an. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12, Article 222. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-04181-0>
- Goel, P., & Arsiwala, R. (2024). A comparative study of religious scriptures using natural language processing. *Journal of Student Research*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.47611/jsrhs.v13i2.6471>
- Hezarkhani, M., & Ashrafi, A. (2023). Analyzing the element of tone in the single-verse short short stories of the Qur'an. *Journal of Culture-Communication Studies*, 24(63), 141–163. <https://doi.org/10.22083/jccs.2023.388953.3720>
- Karami, M., Talebpour, A., Tajabadi, F. and Hajimohammadi, Z. (2023). Emotion Detection from the Text of the Qur'an Using Advance Roberta Deep Learning Net. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies*, 2(1), 147–165. <https://doi.org/10.37264/jiqs.v2i1june2023.8>
- Khadangi, E., & Shabani, M. (2023). Study of the organization of the Qur'anic surahs using the similarity-based approach in deep learning. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies*, 2(2), 69–85. <https://doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V2I2December2023.4>
- Khadangi, E., Fazeli, M. M., & Naghavi, M. (2022). The study on Qur'anic surahs' structured-ness and their order organization using NLP techniques. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies*, 1(2), 29–56. <https://doi.org/10.37264/jiqs.v1i2.3>
- Kusal, S., Patil, S., Choudrie, J., et al. (2023). A systematic review of applications of natural language processing and future challenges with special emphasis on text-based emotion detection. *Artificial Intelligence Review*, 56, 14215–14266. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10462-023-10439-0>
- Prabowo, S. A., et al. (2019). An implementation of support vector machine on the multi-label classification of English-translated Qur'anic verses. *Journal of Computer Science*, 15(12), 1752–1758. <https://doi.org/10.3844/jcssp.2019.1752.1758>
- Sarwar, M. (1981). *The Holy Qur'an: Arabic text and English translation*. Englewood: The Islamic Seminary Inc.
- Shi, Z., & Agrawal, R. (2025). A comprehensive survey of contemporary Arabic sentiment analysis: Methods, challenges, and future directions. In *Findings of the Association for Computational Linguistics: NAACL 2025* (3760–3772), Albuquerque, New Mexico. Association for Computational Linguistics. <https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/2025.findings-naacl.208>
- Vaswani, A., Shazeer, N., Parmar, N., Uszkoreit, J., Jones, L., Gomez, A. N., Kaiser, Ł., & Polosukhin, I. (2017). Attention is all you need. *arXiv*.

<https://arxiv.org/abs/1706.03762>

Vora, M., Blau, T., Kachhwal, V., Solo, G., & Chandra, R. (2024). Large language model for Bible sentiment analysis: Sermon on the Mount. *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2401.00689>

Yari, A., & Firouziyan Pour Esfahani, A. (2025). The Interaction of Human Translators, Machine Translation, and Artificial Intelligence in Qur'anic Translation. *Pazhouhesh Dini*, 24(50), 71–94.

Zhang, Y., & Takada, S. (2025). Applying LLMs to active learning: Toward cost-efficient cross-task text classification without manually labeled data. *International Journal of Intelligent Systems*, Article 6472544, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1155/ijis.6472544>

A Semantic Analysis of “Wizr” in the Holy Qur’an: Integrating Structural Semantics and Historical Etymology

Farideh Amini 

Assistant Professor, Department of Qur'anic Studies and Hadith, Faculty of Theology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran.

Hadis Riahy ¹ 

PhD in Qur'anic Studies and Hadith, Department of Qur'anic Studies and Hadith, Faculty of Theology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran.

Article History: Received 1 September 2025; Accepted 3 November 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

The semantic field of sin in the Holy Qur'an encompasses various terms, among which *wizr* is prominent. Semantic studies of the Qur'an typically focus on either synchronic or diachronic approaches; the present research investigates this concept by applying both methods simultaneously. In comparative Semitic etymology, the root *Z-R* represents condensed and hard force. This force creates three distinct states depending on its interaction with the subject: support, protection, and pressure. In the synchronic analysis, both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations independently indicate the presence of consistent concepts within the semantic network of *wizr*. Collocation analysis reveals that heaviness is a central component common to both the lexical root and its Qur'anic application. However, other components, such as undesirability, deviation from moderation, non-transferability, and the embodiment of deeds, are derived exclusively from the Qur'anic usage of the word, with no trace in its primary lexical meaning. An examination of paradigmatic concepts further corroborates the semantic components derived from syntagmatic relations. Therefore, it is more appropriate to define *wizr* as the heaviness of human actions that possess a degree of moral repulsiveness, manifesting across various concepts within the domain of sin, such as *sayyi'ah*, *khaṭī'ah*, *ithm*, and all divinely prohibited or even detestable acts. Consequently, the most suitable equivalent for this term is the application of its literal meaning, heaviness.

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: H.riahy@alzahra.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I2.11>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_107097.html?lang=en

KEYWORDS: Qur’an, *Wizr*, Structural Semantics, Historical Etymology, Semitic Roots, Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Relations, Semantic Field of Sin, Heaviness.

1. Introduction

The Holy Qur’an is a program for guidance, the adherence to which ensures eternal felicity. A prerequisite for understanding the Qur’an is the comprehension of its vocabulary with a focus on the context of the verses; this is because a specific semantic continuity exists between Qur’anic words and sentences, all arranged by the Almighty to convey a particular message. Semantics serves as a tool for discovering and elucidating various semantic levels within the Qur’an and achieving a more precise understanding. Regarding the discourse of sin in the Qur’an, a vast semantic field is traceable where numerous concepts are interlinked. This diversity should not be overlooked; rather, each word must be examined within its own context and framework.

The root W-Z-R is one of the high-frequency word-building roots in the Qur’an. Words derived from this tri-literal root appear 27 times across 14 verses (Abd al-Baqi 1996). The frequency of its various morphological applications is evidence of its prevalence in the Arabic language of the Qur’an. This root appears in the Qur’an in various morphological templates, including the active participle, verbal noun, verb, and broken plural, in forms such as *wāzīrah*, *tazīru*, *wizr*, *wazīr*, and *awzār*.

Upon examining the verses, we find that this root, despite having identical orthographic forms, is used in some verses in meanings distinct from sin. In Q. 20:29 and Q. 25:35, the word *wazir*, in the form of an adjective, refers to Aaron assisting Moses in the capacity of a minister or helper. In Q. 75:11, the word *wazar* refers to a refuge on the Day of Resurrection. In Q. 94:2-3, the Almighty states: “*and relieve you of your burden which [almost] broke your back, which weighed down your back.*” The majority of exegetes have interpreted the term *wizr* as the heavy burden of messengership, revelation, the elucidation of laws, and the guidance of the people (al-Ṭabrisī 1993; al-Bayḍāwī 1997; al-Zamakhsharī 1986; Tabataba’i 1996; Ibn ‘Ashūr 1999). In Q. 20:87, and Q. 47:4, the use of *awzār* refers respectively to the weight of jewellery and the burdens of war equipment (Figure 1).

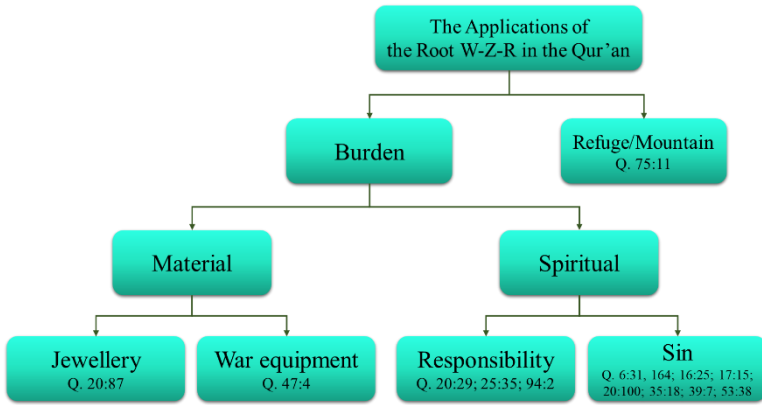


Figure 1. The Applications of the Root W-Z-R in the Qur'an

In this study, an attempt is made to redefine the semantic components of the concept of *wizr* by employing structural semantics and examining both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations.

2. Literature Review

In recent decades, in addition to exegetical and lexical studies, numerous research projects in the form of books and scholarly articles have been published to investigate and elucidate the concepts within the semantic field of sin in the Qur'an using various methodologies. Specifically regarding the concept of *wizr*, one may note the entry "Load of Burden" by Patrick Gaffney (2003, 2: 227-228) in the Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an. He considers the concept of "burden" in the Qur'an to be a symbol of human responsibility and obligation on one hand, and the weight of sin and divine duties on the other. However, this burden can lead to human growth and purification and reflects one's moral and social impact. Ultimately, liberation from the burden is a reflection of divine mercy and guidance. He regards this concept as one of the most pivotal ethical and anthropological metaphors. Sarmadi (1998) identifies the literal meaning of this root as carrying or bearing on one's shoulders. While noting the morphological structures derived from this root in the Qur'an, including verbs and nouns, he details the meanings of each structure.

The current study, in its first step, undertakes a diachronic study of the root W-Z-R to represent the semantic components of this root in Semitic languages, and subsequently, through a synchronic study, endeavours to formulate its semantic components within the semantic system of the Qur'an.

3. Methodology

From a semantic perspective, vocabularies are considered a network of conceptual relations. Conceptual relations are of two types: one group is subject to substitution and another is combinatorial; or, according to Saussure’s perspective, they follow paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes (Lyons 1995). The paradigmatic axis relates to the association of similarities, while the syntagmatic axis relates to the possibility of units occurring together to form larger units. In other words, paradigmatic relations involve potential similarities, while syntagmatic relations involve actual co-occurrence. Therefore, semantic proximity between co-occurring words finds expression through syntagmatic lexemes, much like paradigmatic lexical relations which are based on similarity (Geeraerts 2010, 139). The importance of recognizing these relations for the purpose of refining the concept of a word can be traced in the words of John Firth and Zellig Harris. Firth states that you shall know a word by the company it keeps. Harris also believed that if a word can substitute for another at a specific point in a context, it can be considered synonymous with that word (Geeraerts 2010, 145). These relations can be traced within structural semantics.

In addition to structural semantics, the historical semantics of the Arabic language in the centuries leading up to the period of the Qur’an’s revelation can guide us in achieving an accurate semantic understanding of a word. However, it is essential to note that in the semantic system of the Qur’an, innovative components are sometimes superimposed upon the word as it existed at the time of revelation. Thus, to accurately understand Qur’anic concepts, the historical etymology of a word, only when coupled with structural semantics and attention to the textual context of the verses, can lead us to a more precise understanding of Qur’anic concepts. To study the historical aspects of Qur’anic terms in the Semitic family, a comparison of four branches and sub-branches with Arabic is necessary. For each of these four branches, a pivotal language is considered: Akkadian, Hebrew, South Arabian (Yemeni), and Ge’ez (Ethiopic); furthermore, within the Aramaic branch, Syriac is examined. Delving into the concept of a word in Semitic languages is one of the tools of historical study (Pakatchi 2012).

Therefore, the present research employs a combination of these two approaches to refine the meaning of *wizr*. Structural semantics, alongside the study of a word’s meaning through its historical trajectory in Semitic languages, can serve as a corroboration for the validity of understanding a word and prevent deviations caused by subjective interpretations.

4. Semantic Analysis of the Concept of *Wizr*

In this section, to identify the semantic components of *wizr*, we first undertake a historical study across Semitic languages. Subsequently, an investigation within the Arabic language is deemed necessary. In the following stage, by employing structural semantics in an intra-lingual study, the semantic components of this root within the Qur'an will be elucidated.

4.1. Diachronic Study of the Concept of *Wizr*

For the historical and diachronic study of the concept of *wizr*, we begin by examining it across the primary branches of the Semitic language family, including Sabaic, Ge'ez, Akkadian, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Since Arabic, alongside languages such as Hebrew, Aramaic, Akkadian, Phoenician, etc., is considered one of the branches of the Semitic family, it is also essential to review the perspectives of Arabic lexicographers. The language of any ethnic group undergoes transformations over time and through migration to different territories; some words experience semantic expansion or restriction, while others are forgotten. Linguistic changes are accompanied by morphological, syntactic, and phonetic shifts. Nevertheless, the semantic core of a word can often be traced back to its linguistic ancestor (protolanguage).

In Aramaic, one of the significant North-Central Semitic languages and the closest relative to the Canaanite language (the second major language of the Eastern Mediterranean), a word with the phonetic form *vezary* is found, meaning "giant animals." Another word, *vazuo*, exists in the morphological category of a noun meaning "cave" (Jastrow 1903, 3: 106–107). In specialized Targumic lexicons, no direct entry for the root W-Z-R is recorded. However, the phonetic metathesis Z-W-R in Targumic Aramaic (a variety of Jewish Middle Aramaic) indicates applications meaning "to scatter," "to sprinkle," and "to distance." Concepts such as "sin" and "fault" in the Targums were expressed through roots such as Ḥ-W-B, Ḥ-Ṭ-', and 'W-N (Sokoloff 2002).

Hebrew lexicons (Brown et al. 1939, 255) mention the use of a word with the phonetic form *vazer* meaning "beasts of burden." In lexicons of Sabaic, the most widespread dialect of Old South Arabian, there is mention of a word with the phonetic form *waza*, meaning "to be large" (Beeston 1982, 280). Furthermore, the phonetic form *wuza* is observed in Akkadian in the morphological category of an adjective meaning "heavy" (Black et al. 1999). As previously noted, etymological data suggest the component of

heaviness through meanings such as giant animals acting as beasts of burden in Aramaic and Hebrew. The concept of largeness in Sabaic also attests to this component. Additionally, in the genealogy of the word *wizr*, the concept of a cave is traceable.

Another branch of the Semitic family is Arabic. In the following section, by reviewing the opinions of Arabic lexicographers, we shall examine the presence or absence of polysemy at a single point in time, the trajectory of semantic evolution over time, and the phenomena of semantic restriction and expansion. Al-Farāhīdī (1990, 7: 380) defines *al-wazar* as a mountain sought for refuge and *al-wizr* as the heavy burden of sins. In other words, within the concept of *al-wizr*, bearing/burdening (*ḥaml*) constitutes its general meaning, while heaviness (*thiqālah*) serves as its specific qualifier. In al-Azharī’s (2001, 13: 167) exposition, the general concept of bearing is likewise identifiable through the attribute of heaviness.

Other lexicographers have either explicitly stated or assumed the general concept of bearing, while specifically mentioning the condition of heaviness (Ibn Durayd 1987, 2: 712; al-Jawharī 1990, 2: 845; Ibn Sayyidah 2000, 9: 103; al-Ṣāhib ibn ‘Abbād 1994, 9: 83; al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1991, 867; al-Fīrūzābādī 1994, 2: 250; Muṣṭafawī 1989, 13: 101). Ibn Fāris (1983, 6: 108) identifies two primary meanings for the tri-literal form W-Z-R: first, refuge, and second, heaviness. Consequently, he derives the meanings of sin (*dhanb*) and weaponry (*silāh*) from this root.

Based on the foregoing, some lexicographers define *wazar* as a refuge, citing the mountain as an exemplar, while defining *wizr* within the general framework of bearing qualified by heaviness; its application to sins is attributed to the weight that sin imposes upon the human being. An examination of lexicographical opinions reveals the use of the terms *dhanb* and *ithm* to define *wizr*. These data indicate a lack of semantic evolution, restriction, or expansion within the Arabic language regarding this term.

The preceding analysis examined the root W-Z-R in Semitic languages and Arabic. However, due to the significant correlation some lexicographers have drawn between the roots W-Z-R and ‘-Z-R, it is necessary to first elucidate the latter root (‘-Z-R) in Arabic and subsequently its ancestry in Semitic languages. This inquiry may lead us to the bi-literal core of this root and provide a key to finding a common semantic component among the various meanings of the root W-Z-R (refuge, mountain, and heaviness).

In the Arabic language, *al-’azr* signifies the “back” (*al-zahr*) or “waist.” When one aids another, it is as if they have firmly girded their waist or become a support for their back, a meaning traceable in verse Q. 20:3:

“Strengthen my back through him” (al-Farāhīdī 1990, 7: 302; al-Jawharī 1990, 2: 298). The application of this root in the *faʿīl* form, *ʿazīr* (as an active participle or a permanent adjective), is not observed. However, its verbal usage meaning “to aid” is seen in the verbal form of *mufāʿalah* (*āzara – yuʿāziru*). In this verbal form, for ease of pronunciation, *al-hamzah* has been transmuted into an *al-wāw*. Ibn ʿĀshūr (1999, 16: 115) posits that because the Arab ear was accustomed to hearing the *al-wāw* in cognate words (such as *muwāzīr* and *yuwāzīru*), this habit was extended to the root word itself; consequently, the initial *al-hamzah* in *ʿazīr* was converted to *al-wāw*. They harmonized the word *ʿazīr* phonetically with *muwāzīr*, giving birth to the word *wazīr* (minister/helper). Had this word been derived from *wizr*, it would convey the meaning of heaviness and burden. However, since it stems from *ʿazr*, it signifies power, support, and reliance. He believes the transformation of *ʿazīr* to *wazīr* is a morphological exception (non-analogical/irregular) intended to convey the meaning of assistance (*qāʿidah al-ḥaml ʿalā al-naẓīr*) (Table 1).

Table 1. Rationale for transformation of *ʿazīr* to *wazīr*

Root	Primary Derivation	Final Evolution	Rationale for Change
ʿ-Z-R	<i>muʿāzīr/ yuʿāziru</i>	<i>muwāzīr/ yuwāzīru</i>	Morphological rule: Transmutation of <i>al-hamzah</i> to <i>al-wāw</i> due to the preceding <i>al-ḍammah</i>
	<i>ʿazīr</i>	<i>wazīr</i>	Influence of <i>muwāzīr</i> : Frequency of usage and linguistic habituation to the <i>al-wāw</i>

The most compelling evidence corroborating Ibn ʿĀshūr’s (1999, 16: 115) perspective is the textual context of the verses. In verses Q. 20:29-31 constitute a complete semantic unit. From the perspective of structural linguistics, the repetition of the root ʿ-Z-R immediately following the term *wazīr* indicates the presence of a semantic network. That is to say, Moses employs the word *wazīr* and subsequently glosses its root and meaning through the verb *ushdud* (strengthen) and the object *azrī* (my back):

- Request for office: “And appoint for me a minister (*wazīr*) from my family” (Q. 20:29).
- Identification of the instance: “Aaron, my brother” (Q. 20:30).
- Elucidation of function: “Strengthen my back (*azrī*) through him” (Q. 20:31).

In Hebrew, the closest cognate to Arabic, the root ʿ-Z-R signifies precisely “to help” and “to assist” (Koehler & Baumgartner 1994, 811). In

ancient Semitic languages (such as Akkadian, the language of Babylon and Assyria), the word *iziru* was used to mean “belt” or “something bound around the waist to strengthen the body.” This corresponds exactly to the meaning of *al-ʿazr* in Arabic and the expression *ushdud bihi azrī* (strengthen my back through him) (Klein 1987, 466). A close examination of other Semitic languages, such as Edomite, Hadramautic, and Qatabanic, regarding the root W-Z-R (characterized by the semantic component of heaviness) reveals that the traces of this root are not as prominent as those of ʿ-Z-R. This suggests that the semantic component of power and support in ʿ-Z-R is a primal Semitic root, whereas the component of gravity and heaviness may represent a secondary semantic evolution (Gordon 1965). Corroboration for this can be found in Ugaritic, a language significantly older than Hebrew, where only the root ʿ-Z-R was utilized, and the root W-Z-R emerged through subsequent linguistic developments (Dietrich & Sander 2013, 173). Consequently, the hypothesis of bi-literal unity and tri-literal diversification is strengthened. Thus, an investigation into the bi-literal core Z-R is essential.

In Akkadian (the earliest linguistic stratum), the bi-literal core Z-R appears as *zuru*, meaning back or a high and firm section (Black et al. 1999, 302):

- Connection to *wazīr* (ʿ-Z-R): Here, Z-R directly denotes the physical “spinal column.” One who fulfills the role of Z-R acts as the support and pillar for another.
- Connection to Refuge (*wazar*): Since the mountain was perceived as the “back of the earth” and its high firm part, this core was used to describe high crags (refuges).

In Hebrew and Aramaic (Jastrow 1903, 496; Koehler & Baumgartner 1994, 388), the bi-literal core Z-R manifested in two forms, *zer* or *zur*:

- Fortification and Rock (*tzur/zur*): In Hebrew, the word *tzur* signifies an extremely hard and massive rock. This corresponds to the Arabic *wazar* (mountainous refuge), a rock which, due to its solidity, serves as a place of salvation.
- Pressure and Confinement (*tsar/zar*): The word *tsar* means narrow, tight, or to place under pressure. This corresponds to the Arabic *wizr* (heavy burden/sin). Sin and heavy burdens are psychological or ontological spaces that place the human being under distress or pressure.

The bi-literal core Z-R in Ugaritic (Ancient Canaanite) is employed in the sense of a “firm belt” or “girding” (strengthening) (Dietrich & Sander 2013, 301). This corresponds precisely to the concept of *ʿazr* (*ushdud bihi azrī*) to which Ibn ʿĀshūr (1999, 16: 115) alluded.

In light of the foregoing, it can be posited that this bi-literal core Z-R unifies three primary meanings within the roots W-Z-R and 'Z-R. In comparative Semitic etymology, the core Z-R symbolizes “condensed and hard force.” Depending on how this hard force interacts with the subject, it creates three distinct states:

1. Support: If this hard force (mountain/pillar) is positioned behind the person, it becomes *'azr/wazīr* (supporter/helper).
2. Protection: If the person is positioned within this hard force (rock/mountain), it becomes *wazar* (refuge).
3. Pressure: If this hard force (rock/load) is positioned upon the person's shoulders, it becomes *wizr* (heavy burden/sin).

4.2. Synchronic Study: Examination of Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Relations of *Wizr*

In this section, through a textual study and the application of structural semantics, we first examine the syntagmatic concepts (collocations) and subsequently the paradigmatic concepts to elucidate the meaning of *wizr* in the Qur'an.

4.2.1. Syntagmatic Relations of *Wizr*

In this part, to identify the semantic components of the concept of *wizr* in the Qur'an, its co-occurrences (collocations) are analyzed.

4.2.1.1. Heaviness

The concept of heaviness manifests prominently through the co-occurrence of the concepts of bearing (*ḥaml*) and weight (*thiqal*) with derivatives of W-Z-R. The root Ḥ-M-L (to bear/carry) stands in a direct syntactic relationship with the concept of *wizr* in numerous verses. In verse Q. 20:100, the Almighty states: “*Whoever disregards it shall bear (yaḥmilu) its onus (wizran) on the Day of Resurrection.*” Verse Q. 16:25 speaks of the gravity of the *wizr* in this world and its complete bearing in the Hereafter: “*that they may bear (li-yaḥmilū) their entire burdens (awzārahum) on the Day of Resurrection... Look! Evil is what they bear (yazīrūn).*” Similarly, Q. 6:31 refers to the loss of those who deny the Resurrection, mentioning the bearing of burdens (*awzār*) and the heavy load carried on (*yaḥmilūna*) their backs.

In these verses, the root Ḥ-M-L stands in a complementary relationship with the root W-Z-R. In verse Q. 35:18, the root Ḥ-M-L is in an intensifying relationship with the derivatives of W-Z-R: “*No bearer (wāziratun) shall*

bear (lā-taziru) another’s burden (wizra), and should one heavily burdened (muthqalatun) call [another] to carry (ḥimlihā) it, nothing of it will be carried (lā-yuḥmalu).” Accordingly, among five verses that speak of bearing the *wizr* (Q. 6:31; 16: 25; 20:87; 20:100; 35:18), four relationships are complementary and one is intensifying.

Lexicographers are unanimous regarding the meaning of *ḥaml/ḥiml*. *ḥiml* refers to heavy external loads carried on the back, whereas *ḥaml* is applied to loads carried internally, such as a fetus in the mother’s womb (al-Farāhīdī 1990, 3: 240; al-Azharī 2001, 5: 59; al-Jawharī 1990, 4: 1167). Muṣṭafawī (1989, 2: 334) considers the application of *ḥaml* to be broader than material matters and notes that it is not exclusive to humans. So, the concept of heaviness and gravity, derived from the use of the root Ḥ-M-L, which is the most frequent collocate, is extended to the semantic network of *wizr* due to this syntagmatic association.

In six verses containing the expression, *Lā taziru wāziratun wizra ukhrā* (No bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another), *wizr* stands in a complementary relationship with its own derivatives (Q. 6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38). This specific construction is not traceable in any other concepts within the semantic domain of *sin*. The theme of this expression indicates that no individual shall be held accountable for the sins of another, and each person is only called to account for the transgressions they themselves have committed (al-Ṭabrisī 1993, 8: 634; Tabataba’i 1996, 17: 366).

In his commentary on this phrase, Javadi Amoli notes that in the Hereafter, all avenues of assistance are closed: neither can you carry this load yourself, nor will we transfer your burden to others, nor will your pleas and entreaties be of any avail (Javadi Amoli 2020, 49: 78). These verses speak of the human encounter with the gravity of one’s own deeds, pointing toward the primary semantic component of *wizr*. Consequently, the collocation of the concept of bearing (*ḥaml*) in a complementary relationship with the derivatives of W-Z-R, along with the high-frequency expression, *Lā taziru wāziratun wizra ukhrā*, evokes the component of gravity and heaviness.

Evidence for the heaviness associated with the concept of bearing (*ḥaml*) can also be traced in other verses. Verse Q. 24:54 speaks of the gravity and weight of turning away from obedience to God and His Messenger: “*Say, ‘Obey Allah and obey the Apostle.’ But if you turn your backs, [you should know that] he is only responsible for his burden (mā ḥummīla) and you are responsible for your burden (ḥummiltum).*” This verse not only highlights the exclusivity of the deed to the doer but also, through the use of the terms

hummila and *hummiltum*, indicates the weight and gravity of defying the obedience of God and His Prophet.

Verse Q. 2:286 further suggests the relation between the concept of bearing (*haml*) and divine obligations (*takālīf*) in this world that are burdens within the scope of human capacity: “*Allah does not task (lā-yukallifu) any soul beyond its capacity. Whatever [good] it earns is to its benefit, and whatever [evil] it incurs is to its harm... ‘Our Lord! Place not upon us a burden (lā-taḥiml) as You placed on those who were before us! Our Lord! Lay not upon us (lā-tuḥammilnā) what we have no strength to bear.’*” The gravity of human duties in this world becomes apparent when examining the root K-L-F. *Takalluf* is a noun for a task performed with difficulty and heaviness (al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1991, 721). Muṣṭafawī (1989, 10: 110) also points to the concept of material and spiritual hardship and toil within the root K-L-F. According to the verse, the heaviness and difficulty of human obligations are proportionate to one’s capacity, which must inevitably be borne in this world. It stands to reason that if one refuses to fulfill divine obligations in this life, they will find the embodiment of their sin in the form of a heavy burden in the Hereafter. In view of the above, the collocations within the semantic network of *wizr* point to heaviness as its core semantic component.

4.2.1.2. Non-transferability

In several verses, the Almighty employs the expression, *lā taziru wāziratun wizra ukhrā*, to emphasize that no sin-bearing soul (*wāzirah*) shall carry the burden (*wizr*) of another (Q. 6:164; 17:15; 39:7; 53:38; 35:18). If an individual becomes weary and feels the weight of their own sin, appealing to others for assistance will yield no result, even if the person appealed to is a close relative or next of kin (Q. 35:18).

Furthermore, on the Day of Resurrection, there is no porter or refuge (Q. 75:11). In other words, an individual’s action is their own effect and is exclusively linked to its agent. According to Qur’anic verses, this principle extends to racial and ethnic issues; no nation, tribe, or group is responsible for the actions of another; every community possesses its own deeds and carries its own burden (Q. 2:134, 141): “*That was a nation that has passed: for it (lahā) there will be what it has earned, and for you (lakum) there will be what you have earned, and you will not be questioned about what they used to do.*” The preposition *lām* in the phrases *lahā* and *lakum* denotes exclusivity, pointing toward the ontological and necessary link between the action and the agent, which operates within the causal system (Javadi Amoli 2020, 7: 188).

This exclusive link between action and agent is traceable in other verses

as well (Q. 17:7): *"If you do good, you will do good to your [own] souls, and if you do evil, it will be [evil] for them."* The Qur'an considers the retribution for sin to be proportionate to the corrupted deed, and no more (Q. 78:26). Regarding righteous deeds, it states: *"and that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for"* (Q. 53:39). Even the wrongdoer acknowledges and declares that their injustice does not reach others (Q. 7:160). These verses indicate that it is impossible for an agent not to witness the effect and retribution of their own work, just as it is impossible for one to see the effect of an action they did not perform: *"our deeds belong to us, and your deeds belong to you"* (Q. 2:139; 28:55); *"So whoever is guided is guided for his own sake, and whoever goes astray, goes astray to his own detriment"* (Q. 39:41; 10:108); *"Neither are you accountable for them in any way, nor are they accountable for you in any way"* (Q. 6:52); *"We have attached every person's omen to his neck"* (Q. 17:13).

Conversely, according to the literal appearance of some verses, a human occasionally bears the burden of another. Within the semantic network of *wizr*, verse Q. 16:25, states: *"That they may bear their entire burdens on the Day of Resurrection, along with some of the burdens (awzār) of those whom they lead astray without any knowledge,"* which appears to contradict the verse, *lā taziru wāziratun wizra ukhrā*.

In verses Q. 29:12-13, it is said: *"The faithless say to the faithful, 'Follow our way and we will bear [responsibility for] your iniquities.' They will not bear anything of their iniquities. They are indeed liars. But surely they will carry their own burdens and other burdens along with their own burdens."* This verse refers to the commission of two sins by the leaders of misguidance: their own misguidance and the act of misleading others. When leaders of errancy establish an evil tradition, as long as there is an agent in the world acting upon that foul tradition, the originator of that tradition, by virtue of their false leadership and the propagation of evil, will bear the entirety of that *wizr* as well (Tabataba'i 1996, 16: 107).

Similarly, verse Q. 7:38, speaks of the doubling of the punishment for both the oppressed and the arrogant: *"Every time that a nation enters [hell], it will curse its sister [nation]. When they all rejoin in it, the last of them will say about the first of them, 'Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double punishment of the Fire.' He will say, 'It is double for each [of you], but you do not know.'"* The secret behind the double punishment for certain groups is that they committed two distinct sins, not that they are bearing the punishment for an action they did not perform. The arrogant caused their own straying and the straying of others, while the oppressed first bear the burden of their own misguidance and subsequently the gravity

(*wizr*) of accepting the leadership of oppressors, which served to empower the latter.

An analysis of the syntagmatic relations and the structure of the phrase *lā taziru wāziratun wizra ukhrā* demonstrates that within the conceptual system of the Qur'an, *wizr* is understood as a personal and non-transferable load. Therefore, one can posit the components of individuality and non-transferability as essential semantic features of *wizr* in its Qur'anic application.

4.2.1.3. Undesirability

The term *sā'a* (how evil) co-occurs with the verbal derivatives of the root W-Z-R in two verses (Q. 6:31; 16:25). At the conclusion these verses, the Almighty employs the expression, *alā sā'a mā yazirūn* (*evil is what they bear*) to describe the arduous state of those who deny the Resurrection. In these verses, the root S-W-' stands in a complementary relationship with W-Z-R.

Lexicographers define *sū'* as a comprehensive noun applicable to all ailments and afflictions (al-Farāhīdī 1990, 10: 327; Ibn Manẓūr 1993, 1: 97; al-Zabīdī 1994, 1: 177; al-Azharī 2001, 13: 89; al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1991, 441). Among the meanings cited for this root are grief and sorrow; some lexicographers define it as the antonym of joy and delight (Ibn Manẓūr 1993, 1: 95; al-Jawharī 1990, 1: 55). The inherent sense of the root S-W-' conveys undesirability. The syntagmatic association of this word with the derivatives of W-Z-R, coupled with a meticulous analysis of the Qur'anic context, speaks to the undesirability of the burden (*wizr*) that human is inevitably forced to carry. On the syntagmatic axis, the collocation of *wizr* with a negative evaluative attribute, such as *sā'a*, demonstrates that this term possesses a negative evaluative component in its Qur'anic application; that is, the load of *wizr* is not regarded as a neutral physical weight, but rather as a reproachable or blameworthy burden.

4.2.1.4. Consequence of Deviation from Moderation

The collocation of the concept of *farrāṭa* (to neglect) and the intensifying relationship of *ḍalla* (to stray) with W-Z-R indicates that *wizr* in the Qur'an is regarded as the outcome of a form of transgression or deficiency. In verse Q. 6:31, the Almighty states: "*They are certainly losers who deny the encounter with Allah. When the Hour overtakes them suddenly, they will say, 'Alas for us, for what we neglected (farrāṭnā) in it!' And they will bear their burdens on their backs. Look! Evil is what they bear!*" The theme of this verse describes another adverse effect of the polytheists' denial of the Resurrection: negligence in this world, following the denial of the Meeting

with God, leads to the aforementioned burdens (*awzār*).

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (1991, 631) defines *ifrāt* as excessive haste or overstepping, and *tafrīt* as falling short or failing to reach the goal/destination. Ibn Fāris (1983, 4: 490) defines *ifrāt* as exceeding the limit and *tafrīt* as negligence/shortcoming. Muṣṭafawī (1989, 9: 65) notes that the root F-R-Ṭ signifies a departure from a specified limit. Qorashi (1992, 5: 163) views *farṭ* as overstepping the bounds, whether through *ifrāt* (greater transgression) or *tafrīt* (greater neglect or deficiency). Thus, a departure from moderation is traceable within the concept of *farṭ*.

Exegetes likewise point to negligence in matters of the Hereafter when explaining verse Q. 6:31 (al-Ṭabrisī 1993, 4: 345; al-Zamakhsharī 1986, 2: 17; Makarem Shirazi 1995, 5: 205). Ibn ‘Ashūr (1999, 6: 99) define it as wasting or being sluggish in one’s affairs. Therefore, the concept of exceeding the limit identified in the root F-R-Ṭ, due to its syntagmatic association with *awzār*, is extended to the semantic network of the root W-Z-R.

The intensifying relationship of *dalla* (to stray) with W-Z-R serves as further evidence of this deviation from moderation. In verse Q. 17:15, the Almighty states: “*Whoever is guided is guided only for [the good of] his own soul, and whoever goes astray (dalla), goes astray only to its detriment. No bearer shall bear another’s burden.*” Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (1991, 509) defines *dalla* as deviation from the Straight Path. Ibn Fāris (1983, 4: 246) describes deviation as being in opposition to moderation. Consequently, a close examination of the root Ḍ-L-L and its contrast with moderation corroborates the idea of deviation from moderation in the Qur’anic applications of W-Z-R. Thus, the component of being a consequence of the deviation from moderation can be posited for *wizr* in its Qur’anic usage.

4.2.1.5. The Embodiment of Deeds

The theme of certain verses, coupled with the co-occurrence of *al-sā‘ah* (the Hour) and *yawm al-qiyāmah* (the Day of Resurrection), points to the bearing of the *wizr*, or more precisely, the realization of its weight, in the Hereafter. In verse Q. 6:31, the Almighty states: “*They are certainly losers who deny the encounter with Allah. When the Hour overtakes them suddenly, they will say, ‘Alas for us, for what we neglected (farratnā) in it!’ And they will bear their burdens on their backs. Look! Evil is what they bear!*”

In this verse, the phrase “*when the Hour overtakes them suddenly*” refers to the moment when the bearing of the *wizr* is perceived. The textual context of the verse identifies the denial of the spiritual meeting of Allah or the denial of the realization of the Resurrection as loss (*khusrān*). This loss will

be embodied as a physical, heavy load in the afterlife. This is because belief in the Hereafter not only prepares the human being for eternal felicity and invites them to pursue intellectual and practical perfections but also exerts a profound influence on self-control against pollution and sins. In other words, the denial of the Resurrection leads to the violation of divine commands and prohibitions, each of which can become a *wizr* upon the individual's shoulders. Thus, the denial of the Hereafter can be considered the fountainhead and origin of the *awzār* (burdens) in the Resurrection.

In Surah Ṭāhā, after various discussions regarding the eventful history of Moses (PBUH), Children of Israel, the Pharaohs, and Sāmirī, the text concludes with a general summation: “*Thus do We relate to you some accounts of what is past. Certainly We have given you a Reminder (dhikr) from Ourselves. Whoever disregards it shall bear its onus on the Day of Resurrection*” (Q. 20:99–100). The intended meaning of *dhikr* (Reminder) in these verses is that the Qur'an encompasses diverse forms of knowledge, concerning realities, ethics, and laws, which God has articulated through stories and parables (Tabataba'i 1996, 14: 208). Consequently, whoever disregards the Qur'an and its teachings will, by virtue of the embodiment of deeds, carry a heavy load on the Day of Judgment. The subsequent verse alludes to the weight and hardship of this mass with the expression: “*Evil is their burden (ḥiml) on the Day of Resurrection.*”

At the opening verse Q. 16:22, the text refers to faith in the Origin and the Return (Resurrection), subsequently identifying the cause of denying these two manifest realities as the trait of arrogance (*istikbār*) and a refusal to submit to the Truth. Otherwise, the proofs of monotheism are clear to those who seek the truth and are humble before reality. Verse 24 presents the inquiry regarding the Prophetic invitation (and the Qur'an) and the response of the disbelievers. Then, in verse 25, the embodiment of these actions (denying the Origin, the Return, and Prophecy, as well as the spirit of arrogance) and the act of misguiding others is characterized as *wizr* and heaviness, the full carriage of which is realized in the Resurrection, though the human being is not deprived of the *wizr* of their deeds even in this world.

In verses Q. 39:7, the collocation with the derivatives of W-Z-R announces the discovery and perception of the realities of deeds in the Resurrection: “*...No bearer shall bear another's burden; then to your Lord will be your return, whereat He will inform you concerning what you used to do.*” In other words, *wizr* is the embodiment of human's evil deed, which manifests in the Resurrection in the form of a load and gravity; this serves as corroboration for the embodiment of sin in the Hereafter. The frequent association of this root with the context of verses concerning the Day of

Resurrection indicates that *wizr* is a heavy load resulting from an action, which is carried by the human being in the Hereafter as a sensible (perceivable) entity. This syntagmatic network demonstrates that *wizr*, in its Qur’anic application, possesses the semantic components of result of action and a sensible matter that emerges in the Resurrection. This component is precisely what is recognized in exegetical literature as the embodiment of deeds.

In light of the above, an examination of the collocations indicates that the component of heaviness is a central and shared feature in both the lexical and Qur’anic usage of this concept. However, other components, such as undesirability, departure from moderation, and non-transferability, are derived exclusively from the Qur’anic applications of the word, with little to no trace of them in general lexicography.

4.2.2. Paradigmatic Relations of *Wizr*

To identify the paradigmatic concepts (substitutes), one must examine the syntagmatic concepts of the collocations of *wizr* within contextual proximity. The result of this reflection reveals concepts such as *thiql* (weight), *ḥiml* (load), *khaṭī’ah* (error/sin), *ithm* (sin), and *sayyi’ah* (evil deed) as substitutes for *wizr*. This provides further evidence for the components of heaviness, undesirability, and the embodiment of deeds.

4.2.2.1. Heaviness

The component of heaviness and gravity is found not only in syntagmatic relations but also among paradigmatic concepts. The substitution of the concepts of *thiql* and *ḥiml* points to this additional component, as elucidated below:

The root Ḥ-M-L is among the high-frequency concepts within the context of verses related to *wizr* (Q. 16:25; 6:31; 20:100). This root is also employed in collocation with *thiql* in shared contexts. In verse Q. 29:13, the Almighty states: “*But surely they will carry (layaḥmilunna) their own burdens (athqālahum) and other burdens along with their own burdens.*”

In this verse, the root *ḥaml* stands in a complementary relationship with *athqāl* (weights). The theme of the verse speaks of bearing weight and heaviness on the Day of Resurrection; a meaning nearly identical to this is frequently mentioned in the context of the *wizr* verses. The substitution of *thiql* for *wizr* in the Qur’an serves as further corroboration of the component of gravity and heaviness in the concept of *wizr*. This is a heaviness and gravity borne by the individual person, not by a hired laborer or any other entity.

The root Ḥ-M-L, in addition to its high-frequency syntagmatic association with the derivatives of W-Z-R, can also be considered as its substitute. On the one hand, the collocation of *sā'a* with *wizr* is expressed in the expression, *sā'a mā yazirūn* (*evil is what they bear*), in Q. 16:25; 6:31. On the other hand, the phrase *sā'a lahum yawm al-qiyāmati ḥimlan* (*evil is their burden on the Day of Resurrection*) is traceable in Q. 20:101. Given the contextual proximity of these verses, *ḥiml* can be a substitute for *wizr* and further evidence for the component of heaviness. The distinction, however, is that in *ḥiml*, the correspondence between the owner of the load and the carrier is not necessary, whereas in the meaning of *wizr*, the owner and the carrier are one and the same.

4.2.2.2. Undesirability

In verse Q. 6:164, the logic of the polytheists is criticized in the context of the struggle against polytheism: “Say, ‘Shall I seek a Lord other than Allah, while He is the Lord of all things?’ No soul does (*taksibu*) evil except against itself, and no bearer shall bear another’s burden.” In this verse, an intensifying relationship between *wizr* and *kasb* (earning) can be identified on the one hand, and an omitted object can be traced in the phrase, every soul earns not except against itself, on the other (Safī 1997, 8: 350). An examination of the applications of *sayyi'ah* (evil deed) reveals that this root is expressed in an intensifying relationship with *kasb* in Q. 39:48: “The evils (*sayyi'ātu*) of what they had earned (*kasabū*) will appear to them” and in Q. 39:51: “So the evils (*sayyi'ātu*) of what they had earned (*kasabū*) visited them.”

Therefore, *sayyi'ah* can serve as a paradigmatic substitute for *wizr*. Some lexicographers regard *sū'* as a comprehensive noun for all ailments and afflictions (al-Farāhīdī 1990, 7: 327; Ibn Manẓūr 1993, 1: 97; al-Zabīdī 1994, 1: 177; al-Azharī 2001, 13: 89; al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1991, 441). Consequently, the component of undesirability in Qur'anic usage manifests through this substitution. It is noteworthy that the root S-W-' also co-occurs syntagmatically with *wizr*; this association further clarifies that *wizr* in the Qur'an is not a neutral weight, but an undesirable load with a negative value that harms the agent themselves.

4.2.2.3. Consequence of Deviation from Moderation

khaṭī'ah (Error/Sin) and *ithm* (Sin) are other paradigmatic substitutes within the semantic network of *wizr*. In Q. 29:12, the verb *naḥmil* stands in a complementary relationship with *khaṭāyākum* (your errors), and *hāmīlīn* (bearers) is in a complementary relationship with *khaṭāyāhum* (their errors): “we will bear [responsibility for] your iniquities (*khaṭāyākum*). They will not bear anything of their iniquities (*khaṭāyāhum*).”

The root Ḥ-M-L (to bear) is a shared collocate for both concepts, *wizr* and *khaṭī’ah*, within proximate contexts. Lexicographers identify the root Kh-T-’ as signifying deviation, straying, and departing from the correct path (al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1991, 287; Muṣṭafawī 1989, 3: 79). Moderation and the middle way represent the commendable path intended by the prophets. Given the meaning of deviation and departure from correctness inherent in *khaṭī’ah*, its substitution can be seen as a manifestation of the component consequence of deviation from moderation for *wizr* in its Qur’anic application.

Another piece of evidence for the component consequence of deviation from moderation in the Qur’anic usage of *wizr* is the substitution of *ithm*. It was previously stated that in Q. 6:164, *kasb* is expressed in an intensifying relationship with *wizr*. In a proximate context, in verse Q. 4:112, the root *kasb* is traceable in a complementary relationship with *ithm*: “*But someone who commits an iniquity (khaṭī’atan) or sin (ithman) and then accuses an innocent person of it, is (iḥtamala) indeed guilty of calumny and a flagrant sin (ithman).*” Therefore, *ithm* (or *khaṭī’ah*) can be considered a substitute for *wizr* and the omitted object in the phrase “*every soul earns not except against itself.*”

A careful look at the end of this verse reveals further evidence for this substitution: the root Ḥ-M-L, one of the high-frequency collocates in the semantic network of *wizr*, is expressed here in a complementary relationship with *ithm* (through the form *iḥtamala*). An examination of the meaning of *ithm* in Arabic lexicons reveals the component resulting from this substitution. The majority of lexicographers identify the concept of slowness and delay at the semantic core of *ithm* (Ibn Fāris 1983, 1: 60–61; al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1991, 63; Muṣṭafawī 1989, 1: 38; al-Fīrūzābādī 1994, 4: 73). The concept of slowness and delay is itself a manifestation of the deviation from moderation.

4.2.2.4. *The Embodiment of Deeds*

The root S-W-’ in the structural form *sā’a mā...* (evil is that which...) stands in a complementary relationship with *yazirūn* (they bear) in two verses (Q. 16:25; 6:31): “*sā’a mā yazirūn.*”

This specific linguistic structure (*sā’a mā...*) is also traceable in a complementary relationship with *ya malūn* (they do/work) in other verses (Q. 5:66; 58:15; 63:2; 9:9). Verse Q. 5:66 alludes to the profound impact of piety and faith on the material lives of human beings: “*Had they observed the Torah and the Evangel, and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would surely have drawn nourishment from above them and from*

beneath their feet. There is an upright group among them, but evil is what many of them do (sā'a mā ya 'malūn)." According to the theme of this verse, the action which serves as an instance for *wizr*, or, in other words, the deed whose embodiment in the Resurrection is *wizr*, is the failure to practically adhere to the principles and teachings of the Heavenly Books. It is noteworthy that the phrase "*what was sent down to to them,*" mentioned after the Torah and the Gospel, refers to other books attributed to the prophets of old that were available to the People of the Book at that time, such as the Psalms of David (PBUH), which the Qur'an calls it the Zabūr (Tabataba'i 1996, 6: 52).

In Q. 58:14-15, regarding the account of a group of hypocrites who maintained friendship and affection for the Jews while showing enmity toward God and His Messenger, it is said: "*Allah has prepared a severe punishment for them. Evil indeed is what they used to do (sā'a mā kānū ya 'malūn).*" Considering the preceding verse, the embodiment of this friendship and heart-felt inclination toward [those who earned God's wrath] in the Resurrection is *wizr*. Such an inclination can serve as a prelude to the commission of numerous undesirable acts, each of which can impose a heaviness upon the human being's shoulders.

In verses Q. 63:1-2, the Almighty describes the condition of hypocrites. These verses refer to their outward expression of faith (masking inward disbelief) and subsequently describe their obstruction of the path of guidance with the phrase, *sā'a mā kānū ya 'malūn*. Therefore, according to these verses, the barring of the way of Allah by the leaders of disbelief and hypocrisy are deeds whose embodiment in the Resurrection is *wizr*.

This action is also traceable verse Q. 9:9: "*They have sold the signs of Allah for a paltry gain, and have barred [the people] from His way. Evil indeed is what they have been doing.*" This verse identifies the trading of divine signs for a meager price as one of the signs of the polytheists' defiance and disobedience. According to the theme of the verse, their objective, typical of the leaders of polytheism and disbelief, is to obstruct the way of God for the sake of ephemeral material interests. According to a report from Mujāhid, Abū Sufiyān once prepared a banquet and invited a group of people to a feast in order to incite their enmity against the Prophet of Islam (al-Ṭabrisī 1993, 5: 18). It is evident that the verse possesses a broad conceptual scope and encompasses all leaders of disbelief and hypocrisy.

Action is inherently neutral, whereas *wizr* is inherently negative and a burden. In other words, it can be said that *wizr* is something that results from human action and is embodied as a sensible and carryable entity; in the Qur'anic context, this sensible entity, marked by a negative value, manifests in the Resurrection.

5. Conclusion

Etymological data of the root W-Z-R points to the component of heaviness in the meanings of large-bodied animals or beasts of burden in Aramaic and Hebrew, which is also traceable in the Sabaeen language. Furthermore, in the genealogy of the word *wizr*, the concept of a cave is identified. Arabic lexicographers have likewise defined *wazar* as a refuge, citing a mountain as one of its instances. They regard *al-wizr* in its general sense as carrying (*haml*) qualified by gravity (*thiqālah*), noting that its application to sins stems from the weight of sin upon the human being. An examination of the views of lexicographers indicates the usage of the term *dhanb* (sin) in the sense of *wizr*. Thus, the concepts of refuge (mountain), *dhanb*, and *ithm* (sin) have been articulated in the views of Arabic lexicographers across different periods, indicating a lack of semantic evolution, narrowing, or expansion within the Arabic language. By examining the meanings of the root ’-Z-R and retrieving the common ancestor of these two roots, a unity in their bi-literal root and a multiplicity in their tri-literal root are traceable. The base Z-R symbolizes a condensed and hard force. Depending on how this hard force interacts with the subject, it creates three states: support (’*azr/wazīr*), protection (*wazar*: refuge), and pressure (*wizr*: a heavy load and sin).

Synchronic investigation of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations independently reveals identical concepts within the semantic network of *wizr*. Analysis of collocations indicates that the component of heaviness is a central feature common to both the lexical definition and the Qur’anic application of this concept. However, other components, such as undesirability, deviation from moderation, non-transferability, and the embodiment of deeds, are derived exclusively from the Qur’anic usage of the term, with no trace of them in the primary lexical meaning. An examination of paradigmatic substitutes further corroborates the validity of the semantic components derived from syntagmatic relations.

Consequently, it is most appropriate to define *wizr* as the gravity and heaviness of human deeds that possess a degree of moral depravity. This manifests in concepts within the domain of sin, such as *sayyi’ah* (evil deed), *khaṭī’ah* (error), *ithm* (sin), and all divine prohibitions, and even disliked acts. These include actions such as polytheism (*al-shirk*), denial of the Resurrection, rejection of divine signs, and hypocrisy. Thus, the most suitable equivalent for this term is the application of its lexical meaning, gravity and heaviness. The high-frequency use of the root W-Z-R in a complementary and intensifying relationship with itself in the expression, *lā*

taziru wāziratun wizra ukhrā, a structure not seen in other terms within the domain of sin, serves as further evidence for this conclusion.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Dr. Razi Behabadi, faculty member of Alzahra University, for her invaluable guidance regarding the lexicological section of this study.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no competing interests.


References

- Abd al-Baqi, F. (1996). *Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. Tehran: Zhakan.
- Al-Azharī, M. (2001). *Tahdhīb al-Lughah*. Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- Al-Bayḍāwī, 'A. (1997). *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- Al-Farāhīdī, K. (1990). *Kitāb al-'Ayn*. Qom: Hejrat.
- Al-Fīrūzābādī, M. (1994). *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Jawharī, I. (1990). *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ, Tāj al-Lughah wa Ṣiḥāḥ al-'Arabīyyah*. Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyīn.
- Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, Ḥ. (1991). *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Shāmiyyah.
- Al-Ṣāḥib ibn 'Abbād, I. (1994). *Al-Muḥīṭ fī al-lughah*. Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub.
- Al-Ṭabrisī, F. (1993). *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*. Tehran: Nāṣir Khusru.
- Al-Zabīdī, M. (1994). *Tāj al-'Arūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs*. Kuwait: al-Turath al-'Arabī.
- Al-Zamakhsharī, M. (1986). *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī.
- Bagheri, M. (1998). *Introduction to Linguistics* (in Persian). Tehran: Qatreh.
- Beeston, A. F. L., Ghul, M. A., Müller, W. W., & Ryckmans, J. (1982). *Sabaic Dictionary (English-French-Arabic)*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters.

- Black, J., George, A., & Postgate, N. (2000). *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1939). *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dietrich, M., & Sander, R. (2013). *Aramäisch-neuhebräisches Wörterbuch zu Targum, Talmud und Midrasch*. Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann.
- Gaffney, P. (2003). Load of burdens. In J. D. McAuliffe (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*. Leiden: Brill.
- Geeraerts, D. (2010). *Theories of Lexical Semantics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gordon, C. H. (1965). *Ugaritic textbook: Grammar, texts in transliteration, cuneiform selections, glossary, indices*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
- Ibn 'Ashūr, M. (1999). *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Tārīkh al-'Arabī.
- Ibn Durayd, M. (1987). *Jamhara al-Lughah*. Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyīn.
- Ibn Fāris, A. (1983). *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*. Qom: Maktab al-A'lām al-Islāmī.
- Ibn Manzūr, M. (1993). *Lisān al-'Arab*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr/Dār Ṣādir.
- Ibn Sayyidah, 'A. (2000). *Al-Muḥkam wa al-muḥīṭ al-a'zam*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Jastrow, M. (1903). *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Javadi Amoli, A. (2020). *Tafsīr Tasnīm*. Qom: Isra International Publishing Center.
- Klein, E. (1987). *A comprehensive etymological dictionary of the Hebrew language for readers of English*. Jerusalem: Carta.
- Koehler, L., & Baumgartner, W. (1994). *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: Brill.
- Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Makarem Shirazi, N. (1995). *Tafsīr Nemūneh*. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah
- Muṣṭafawī, H. (1989). *Al-Taḥqīq fī Kalimāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

- Pakatchi, A. (2012). *Semantic approach in Qur'anic studies* (in Persian). Tehran: Research Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies Press.
- Qarai, A. Q. (2004). *Translation of the Holy Qur'an*. London: ICAS.
- Qorashi, A. A. (1992). *Qāmūs Qur'ān*. Tehran: Islamiyyah Publishing.
- Safī, M. (1997). *Al-Jadwal fī i'rāb al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Rashīd Mu'assasat al-Īmān.
- Sarmadi, M. (1998). Wizr. In B. Khorramshahi (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an and Qur'anic Studies* (in Persian) (Vol. 2, 2305-2306). Tehran: Dūstān.
- Sokoloff, M. (2002). *A dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine period*. Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press.
- Tabataba'i, M. H. (1996). *Al-Mīzan fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Qom: Jāmi'ah Mudarrisīn.

Fractal Dimensions as a Model for Qur'anic Semantic Depth: Reconsidering the Concept of Buṭūn of the Qur'an

Iman Dehghanzadeh Hamedan 

Master's student in Qur'an and Hadith Sciences, Faculty of Theology, Yazd University, Iran.

Samiyeh Shahbazi ¹ 

Assistant Professor, Department of Qur'an and Hadith Sciences, Faculty of Theology, Yazd University, Iran.

Mohammad Ali Heydari 

Associate Professor, Department of Qur'an and Hadith Sciences, Faculty of Theology, Yazd University, Iran.

Article History: Received 26 March 2025; Accepted 6 May 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

The Qur'an contains verses endowed with profound and complex meanings. Some exegetes and scholars in the field of Qur'anic studies believe that the science of interpretation systematizes this complexity and facilitates deeper understanding. Exegesis, in turn, engages with the various facets or dimensions of the Qur'an. The present paper employs an analytical-comparative method to investigate the issue of *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an (the inward meanings of the Qur'an) and the emergence of new dimensions within Qur'anic verses, while also applying the characteristics of fractal dimensions to the concept of *Baṭn* (inward meaning).

By utilizing the newly articulated dimensions framed within scientific and political *Laffāfeh* (envelope) under the *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an, and by applying the properties of fractal geometry to the Qur'an's inward meanings (*Buṭūn*), the presence of such dimensions can be more readily identified. Thus, it can be argued that the *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an constitute the dimensions of the Qur'an that necessitate its profound conceptual depth. As time progresses and advancements are made, human understanding increasingly reveals that the Qur'an, by virtue of these dimensions, has not only remained relevant throughout all eras but has also continuously offered meanings contingent

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: samiyeh.shahbazi@yazd.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIOS.V4I2.2>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_106615.html?lang=en

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



upon humanity's level of understanding, shaped by the achievements and advancements of each age. This profound comprehension stems from God's attribute as the Knower of the Unseen (*'ālim al-ghayb*).

KEYWORDS: The Qur'an, Multidimensional nature of Qur'anic meaning, Fractal dimensions, *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an, *Laffāfeh* (Envelope).

1. Introduction

The views of exegetes vary across different commentaries; apart from certain verses in which the opinions of some exegetes align, differences in interpretation are generally observable. These divergent perspectives originate from each exegete's specific approach and his particular mode of understanding the verses. Consequently, extensive research has been conducted to analyze the methodological frameworks of these exegetes.

Regarding the conceptualization of *Baṭn*, reference can be made to the article "*The Essence of Baṭn al-Qur'ān and Strategies for Attaining It*" (Rezaei Esfahani 2008). This article discusses the various significations of *Baṭn* and presents Qur'anic, narrative, and rational evidence to validate its existence and the possibility of multiple levels of Qur'anic comprehension. By positing the possibility of non-Infallible individuals attaining the *Buṭūn*, the article outlines specific strategies for accessing inward meanings and regards the *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an as one of the fundamental reasons for the Qur'an's eternal relevance.

The application of the concept of fractal dimensions to the *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an, along with the gradual realization of Qur'anic inward meanings over time, constitutes the primary motivation for the present study. Another objective is to formulate and clarify several existing hypotheses concerning the *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an. Accordingly, this research adopts an analytical-comparative method to propose new hypotheses concerning the Qur'an's inward meanings and to address the following questions by applying the concept of fractal dimensions to the *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an—an approach that has received little prior attention:

How can the concept of fractal dimensions be applied to *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an? What impact does the application of fractal dimensions to the concept of *Baṭn* have on Qur'anic understanding? What relationship exists between existing hypotheses (such as envelope theory), *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an, and fractal dimensions?

2. *Fractal Geometry*

In modeling many natural elements, Euclidean geometry has proven inadequate, which has paved the way for the emergence of a more advanced and refined geometry known as fractal geometry. Fractal geometry was first introduced by Benoît Mandelbrot in 1975 (Ghobadian 2013, 166). It is utilized to model structures in which similar patterns are repeated across smaller scales (Bovill 1996, 153).

The term fractal originates from the Latin word *fractus* (derived from the verb *frangere*), meaning broken or irregular. Because fractals are structures that exhibit all or some of these characteristic properties, any attempt to provide a single, comprehensive definition inevitably remains insufficient (Pickford 1996, 16). Some of the key features of fractals include self-similarity, pattern repetition, and fractal dimension. The primary focus of this paper is the characteristic of fractal dimensions, which will be examined in detail below.

2.1. *Fractal Dimensions*

Fractal dimensions lie between integer numbers, meaning that fractals possess non-integer dimensions. For example, a straight line has a dimension of 1, a square has 2, and a cube has 3; however, a fractal can have a dimension between 1 and 2 (Mandelbrot 1983, 147–247).

Understanding the concept of dimension is inherently complex. In the early twentieth century, one of the major challenges in mathematics was defining the notion of dimension and identifying its properties. Since that time, the situation has become even more intricate, as mathematicians have developed multiple concepts of dimension, including Hausdorff dimension, topological dimension, self-similarity dimension, box-counting dimension, and capacity dimension, among others (Peitgen et al. 1993, 202). All these concepts are interrelated; however, some are meaningful only in specific contexts, while others may be entirely irrelevant, thus requiring alternative and more practical definitions. In some cases, these definitions are logically consistent and equivalent, whereas in others, several may be logically valid yet yield conflicting results. As a result, these details can be confusing even for experienced research mathematicians (Peitgen et al. 1993, 202). Accordingly, the present paper does not engage with these technical complexities; instead, it focuses on one of the most widely used methods for calculating fractal dimension: the box-counting dimension.

2.1.1. Box-Counting Dimension

In this method, the fractal shape is covered by boxes of varying sizes. The specific shape of the boxes is not crucial; rather, they must share the same dimensionality as the space in which the fractal is embedded. For instance, fractals on a plane can be covered using solid squares or disks. For spatial fractals, cubic or spherical boxes, or even irregularly shaped enclosures, may be employed (Roozitalab 2010, 48). As the size of the boxes decreases, the number of boxes required to cover the shape increases, resulting in greater detail and more accurate approximations of the fractal structure. Table 1 presents the approximate calculations for the four coverings shown in Figure 1.

Table 1. Approximate box dimensions for a snowflake. As the box diameter decreases, the approximation becomes more accurate (Roozitalab 2010, 48).

Square Diagonal	Number of Boxes $N_{\delta}(F)$	Square Side Length (δ)	$dim_B F \approx \frac{\log N_{\delta}(F)}{-\log \delta}$
0.25	8	0.3535	1.998
0.125	24	0.1768	1.835
0.0625	56	0.0884	1.659
0.03125	136	0.0442	1.575

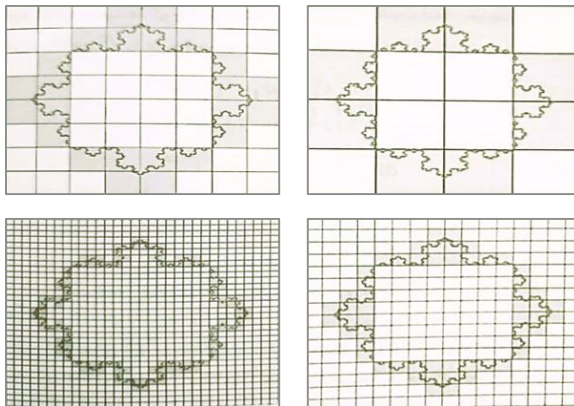


Figure 1. Four different coverings for calculating the dimension of the Koch snowflake using the box-counting method (Roozitalab 2010, 48).

2.1.2. Effective Dimensions

The concept of effective dimension concerns the relationship between mathematical sets and physical objects. In principle, physical entities such as a cloth, a thread, or a small ball should be represented as three-

dimensional objects. In practice, however, physicists often treat a cloth, a thread, or a ball as having effective dimensions of 2, 1, and 0, respectively, provided that their thickness is sufficiently small. For example, in order to describe a thread, theoretical models associated with dimensions ranging from 0 to 2 must be adjusted, revealing minor corrective terms. If conditions are favorable, the model remains operationally valid even when these corrections are ignored. Thus, the effective dimension is fundamentally subjective; it is an approximation and is therefore dependent on the level of resolution (Mandelbrot 1983, 17).

To clarify and substantiate the concept of effective dimension, consider the example of a ball of yarn exhibiting different effective dimensions. A ball with a diameter of 10 cm, composed of thick thread measuring 1 mm in diameter, possesses—by immersion—several distinct effective dimensions.

For an observer situated at a great distance, the ball appears as a zero-dimensional object, that is, a point. (Blaise Pascal and medieval philosophers famously argued that, on a cosmic scale, the entire universe appears as a point.) When observed at a resolution corresponding to a distance of 10 cm, the ball of yarn manifests as a three-dimensional object. At a resolution of 10 mm, it transforms into a tangle of one-dimensional threads. At 0.1 mm, each thread becomes a column, and the entire structure is once again perceived as three-dimensional. At 0.01 mm, each column decomposes into fibers, causing the ball to appear one-dimensional once more. This process continues, with dimensions alternating repeatedly from one value to another. Ultimately, when the ball is represented by a finite number of atom-like points, it returns to a zero-dimensional state.

A similar sequence of dimensional shifts and variations can be observed in a sheet of paper. This principle that numerical results depend on the relationship between the object and the observer, lies at the core of twentieth-century physics and serves as an illustrative example of its foundational assumptions. Most of the objects examined in this paper resemble the ball of yarn in this respect: they exhibit a succession of distinct effective dimensions (Mandelbrot 1983, 17–18).

3. *The Concept of Baṭn (Inward Meaning) in the Qur'an*

The concept of *Baṭn* (inward meaning) will be examined in both its linguistic and technical senses. The linguistic meaning of *Baṭn* shows little variation across Arabic lexicons and generally denotes what is hidden, in contrast to the apparent (*ẓāhir*) (Ibn Manẓūr 1993, 1: 433; al-Rāghib al-İṣfahānī 1992, 1: 97; Tabataba'i 2008, 102; al-Zabīdī 1994, 18: 60; al-Ṭūsī

2002, 2: 571; al-Tabrisī 1993, 1: 468; Ibn Fāris 1983, 1: 259; al-Farāhīdī 1990, 7: 440; al-Fayyūmī 1993, 52; al-Jawharī 1984, 6: 357; al-Baghdādī 1998, 5: 85; Fakhr al-Rāzī 2000, 8: 172; al-Shawkānī 1994, 1: 375; Hakki 1911, 7: 363; al-Qurṭubī 1995, 4: 178).

From a technical perspective, *Baṭn* has been defined in various ways by researchers and exegetes. Tabataba'i, a contemporary scholar, classified and evaluated these definitions after examining the views of several exegetes and concluded as follows:

It appears that the most comprehensive and accurate theory defines *Baṭn* as “meanings beyond the apparent sense.” This view encompasses all implications and necessities of the verses’ wording, aligns with the majority of scholarly opinions, and effectively subsumes them. According to this theory, some inner meanings are obtained through reflection and contemplation and, when applied, serve as guidance and instruction for humanity. Other inner meanings are profound and deeply embedded, accessible only through esoteric interpretation (*al-ta'wīl*), and belong to the secrets, subtleties, and truths of the Qur'an. Moreover, this definition is closer to the linguistic meaning of *Baṭn* and stands in contrast to the apparent (*al-zāhir*) of the Qur'an, which refers to everything manifest, whether in wording or in its immediately perceptible meaning (Tabataba'i 2008, 146).

It is also necessary to note another highly significant technical understanding of *Baṭn* that is frequently cited by numerous exegetes: the identification of *Baṭn* with esoteric interpretation (*al-ta'wīl*). Some exegetes have explicitly equated the concept of *Baṭn* with *al-ta'wīl*. Given that this position is grounded in transmitted narrations, its historical roots are well attested (al-Ālūsī 1994, 1: 8; al-‘Ayyāshī 1960, 1: 11; Qumī 1984, 1: 20; al-Suyūṭī 2000, 2: 6; Ma‘rifat 1995, 41; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī 1994, 1: 31; Tabataba'i 2008, 103).

Evidence for the existence of *Buṭūn* in the Qur'an includes the Qur'anic verses themselves, narrations, reason (*al-'aql*), and the views of scholars and exegetes in this field (Tabataba'i 2008, 151). A broad scholarly consensus, based on these sources, has affirmed—explicitly or implicitly—the existence of *Buṭūn* in the Qur'an (Tabataba'i 2008, 228; al-Khū'ī 1989, 1: 213; al-‘Ayyāshī 1960, 1: 11; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī 1994, 1: 31–36; al-Ṭūsī 2002, 1: 9; Tabataba'i 1970, 3: 73; al-Suyūṭī 2000, 2: 265; al-Ālūsī 1994, 1: 8; Tabataba'i Hakim 1993, 1: 95; Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1981, 7: 37–46; Ibn Taymiyyah 1987, 2: 39–40; al-Ghazālī 1937, 1: 289; Ma‘rifat 1995, 41).

4. Theory of Qur'anic *Laffāfeh* (Envelope)

Theory of Qur'anic *Laffāfeh* (envelope), first proposed by Mohammad Hossein Baroomand, posits that the Qur'an's challenging truths—truths that could not be explicitly articulated at the time of revelation (and for a considerable period thereafter) due to the scientific limitations and political circumstances of those eras—were embedded within multiple layers of meaning to be transmitted to future generations. According to this theory, God placed coverings over certain Qur'anic verses that possess scientific, political, or social dimensions. The purpose of these coverings was to prevent distortion (*al-tahrīf*) of the Qur'an and to fulfill the divine promise of its preservation (Baroomand 2005, 243). In the case of political and social *Laffāfehs*, it is evident that if a verse provoked the displeasure of ruling authorities, efforts would likely have been made to alter or suppress it. With regard to scientific *Laffāfehs*, some verses contain truths whose understanding and empirical substantiation can only emerge gradually, alongside scientific progress over time. Had these truths been disclosed outside their appropriate historical context, they would have been incomprehensible and might have exposed the Qur'an to criticism or rejection, owing to their unverified nature at the time. Thus, these envelopes can be understood as mechanisms safeguarding the Qur'an from textual corruption.

With continued and deeper engagement with the Qur'an, new forms of envelopes may be identified. This observation indicates that the diversity of envelopes expands in proportion to the multiplicity of Qur'anic examples (Joudavi & Faqihi 2024, 365). According to Baroomand's theory, each envelope comprises three principal components:

1. The Covering: a layer that conceals the meaning, such as a shell, veil, or outward form.
2. The Core: the concealed element beneath the covering, such as its essence or kernel.
3. The Contextual Clue: the indicator(s) required to penetrate the covering and access the concealed meaning.

Baroomand argues that God employed these envelopes mainly in two domains: first, political matters, especially verses concerning the Prophet's family (*Ahl al-Bayt*), and second, scientific subjects that exceeded the intellectual horizon of the original audience. Explicitly stating such scientific truths could have caused misunderstanding, led people to reject the Qur'an, or allowed opponents to exploit the verses for propaganda (Joudavi & Talebian 2024).

The role of contextual clues in emerging from the envelope is fundamental. Wherever God employs an envelope, He simultaneously provides clues for its comprehension, which can be discovered through contemplation and reflection. Truth-seekers are thus able to identify these clues within the verses and gradually peel back the envelopes.

The primary reason God employs envelopes is the divine promise of preserving the Qur'an: "*Indeed We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it*" (Q. 15: 9). This divine promise operates within, not outside, the causal system governing the universe, and its fulfillment does not depend on coercion or supra-natural intervention. Rather, the Wise God realizes this promise through natural means. Just as Moses (PBUH) was preserved through ordinary causes, God generally avoids disrupting the natural causal order, except in exceptional cases to complete the proof against specific individuals.

One of the natural mechanisms for preserving the Qur'an is eliminating the motivation for literal corruption and preventing unauthorized manipulation. By refraining from explicitly stating certain truths, and by employing concealment over others, God reduced the incentive for direct textual alteration of the Qur'an. These truths were embedded within envelopes so that only those who engage deeply and contemplatively with the divine verses could attain God's intended meanings and the depths of the Qur'anic message. By presenting superficial truths and apparent meanings, God directed the attention of the general audience toward these accessible aspects. In contrast, the core truths and divine intent require penetrative insight and transcending initial appearances.

In the search for envelopes within the Qur'an, it must be emphasized that no subject should be imposed or justified arbitrarily. For example, in relation to the verses Q. 5:3 and Q. 33:33, many exegetes have faced interpretive difficulties, with some proposing that the placement of these verses may be incorrect in order to resolve perceived inconsistencies. Accepting such a claim for even a single verse would call into question the order and preservation of the entire Qur'an. However, the hypothesis of political envelopes provides a coherent explanation for this issue. Whenever interpretation encounters difficulty, one must assume the presence of a concealed point. Through reflection, the subtle and elegant truths of the Qur'an are gradually unveiled.

Regarding the means of accessing envelopes, these may be divided into apparent and inward methods. The apparent means include contemplation and reflection upon the verses, as well as the identification of contextual clues; moreover, narrations frequently provide primary guidance for

uncovering concealed meanings. The inward means consist of purification and spiritual self-refinement. It may be assumed that bi-dimensional verses simply contain two equally accessible meanings. However, the distinction lies in the fact that, in such verses, God does not intend for one meaning to conceal another. Instead, two independent meanings are conveyed through brevity, enabling the maximum conveyance of meaning with minimal wording.

There is also a conceptual relationship between envelopes and the doctrine that the Qur'an possesses multiple inward meanings (*Dhū Buṭūn*). The term *Dhū Buṭūn* refers to the existence of successive layers of meaning, comparable to the layers of an onion, where each layer reveals another beneath it. By contrast, when one meaning conceals or masks another, the phenomenon is described as an envelope (Joudavi & Talebian 2024). Nevertheless, all these multi-meaning phenomena—bi-dimensionality, multi-facetedness, multiple *Buṭūn*, and envelopes—share a common feature: they all demonstrate the multidimensional nature of Qur'anic meaning. Accordingly, this study examines several scientific and political envelopes as illustrative cases.

4.1. Example of a Scientific Envelope

Numerous examples of scientific miracles in the Qur'an have been proposed by various scholars (Barati 2022; Moradi 2025). The Earth's motion constitutes another such example, which simultaneously illustrates the concept of envelopes. For thousands of years, humanity believed the Earth to be stationary, with the Sun, Moon, stars, and planets revolving around it, as articulated in the Ptolemaic model. In the sixteenth century, Copernicus proposed a heliocentric system in which the Sun occupies the center and the Earth, along with other planets, revolves around it. Galileo's telescopic observations, including the moons of Jupiter and the phases of Venus, provided empirical support for this theory.

The Earth moves continuously, yet no sensation of motion or vibration is perceived, much like passengers aboard a ship traveling at constant speed. Despite this reality, when Galileo articulated this view, efforts were made to silence him, as the historical context was unsuitable and public comprehension insufficient. Remarkably, the Qur'an articulated this truth much earlier, though its message was preserved within an envelope until it reached its appropriate historical audience:

“And you see the mountains, which you suppose to be stationary, while they drift like passing clouds the handiwork of Allah who has made

everything faultless. He is indeed well aware of what you do" (Q. 27: 88).

In its primary and apparent meaning, analogous to the first fractal dimension, this verse appears within the context of passages addressing the Day of Resurrection and thus evokes the condition of mountains at that time. However, closer examination reveals that the movement described is gradual, unlike other eschatological verses such as: "*when the mountains are set moving*" (Q. 81: 3). This constitutes a second level of meaning, comparable to a second fractal dimension.

The verse thus conveys a scientific reality that was beyond the epistemic horizon of its initial audience. Consequently, its apparent meaning functioned as an approximation, analogous to a dimension between 1 and 2 in fractal theory. Through this envelope, the verse remained preserved until its intended time of disclosure, when contextual clues and scientific advancement unveiled its deeper meaning. This unveiling resulted in scientific faith—the recognition that the articulation of such knowledge fourteen centuries earlier was humanly impossible, thereby affirming the Qur'an's miraculous nature.

At first glance, the verse may now appear to clearly indicate the motion of the Earth. However, a widely accepted principle in Qur'anic studies is that verses are embedded within a context (*al-siyāq*), meaning that a cluster of verses typically addresses a single thematic subject. More precisely, verse Q. 27: 88 is subtly positioned among verses related to the Resurrection, and the reference to the Earth's motion is introduced with remarkable delicacy from multiple angles (Baroomand 2005, 243). This structural placement led the audience of the time to assume that the described motion would occur during the Resurrection. Nevertheless, a subsequent clue is embedded within the verse to indicate that this motion is unrelated to the Resurrection: "*...the handiwork of Allah who has made everything faultless*" (Q. 27: 88).

This clause at the end of this verse functions as a contextual indicator, enabling the reader to exit the dominant eschatological context. Upon careful reflection, it becomes evident that God's handiwork (*ṣun' Allāh*) and ongoing creation are not confined to the Day of Resurrection; on the contrary, during the Resurrection, annihilation prevails and creative processes cease. Moreover, the depiction of mountains that appear rigid yet are simultaneously in motion is incompatible with Resurrection imagery, wherein mountains are described as disintegrated, scattered, and flowing: "*and the mountains are shattered into bits, and become scattered dust*" (Q. 56: 5-6) (Joudavi & Faqih 2024, 366).

Baroomand offers another illustration of a scientific envelope, stating: It

is noteworthy that, unlike scientific pioneers and geniuses who often generate upheaval and controversy in order to assert their discoveries, the bearer of the Qur'an, in this and similar instances, deliberately avoids commotion. Out of necessity, a suitable covering is placed over the truth so that the unprepared minds of contemporaries are not disturbed. When conditions mature, scientific advancement unveils the concealed truth, thereby demonstrating the veracity of the Qur'an to scientists and others alike. Importantly, an appropriate clue is always embedded to facilitate the recognition of the envelope in such cases. At times, the erroneous scientific assumptions held by people have rendered the use of envelopes unnecessary, as in the case of the Sun's longitudinal motion mentioned in verse Q. 36:38, which for an extended period was interpreted according to the incorrect astronomical models prevalent at the time (Baroomand 2005, 243).

4.2. Example of a Political and Social Envelope

The Verse Q. 5:3, known as the verse of completion (*al-Ikmāl*), contains the rulings on certain forbidden foods and also expresses the perfection of religion:

You are prohibited carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and what has been offered to other than Allah, and the animal strangled or beaten to death, and that which dies by falling or is gored to death, and that which is mangled by a beast of prey barring that which you may purify and what is sacrificed on stone altars [to idols], and that you should divide by raffling with arrows. All that is transgression. Today the faithless have despaired of your religion. So do not fear them, but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion. But should anyone be compelled by hunger, without inclining to sin, then Allah is indeed all-forgiving, all-merciful (Q. 5:3).

Beyond these apparent injunctions on prohibitions, however, Shi'i sources, citing numerous Shi'i and Sunni reports, link the occasion of revelation of the verse to the event of *Ghadīr Khumm*, interpreting "perfection of the religion" as referring to the proclamation of Imam 'Alī's (PBUH) succession and the establishment of divinely guided leadership (*al-wilāyah*) (Amīnī 1995, 1:447–456). Nevertheless, multiple explanations have been proposed concerning the placement of the phrase of perfection of the religion among such legal rulings, a matter that remains one of the principal points of disagreement among exegetes.

According to Baroomand's theory of Qur'anic envelopes, this placement is a deliberate political envelope designed to protect the Qur'an from distortion. Opponents of 'Alī would naturally read "completion of religion"

as referring to the legal injunctions (the first fractal dimension). However, given the occasion of revelation of the verse and the contextual clues, it becomes clear that the true completion of religion lies in the succession of 'Alī (corresponding to the second fractal dimension). In fact, the apparent meaning conveys an approximate sense that is neither fully the first meaning nor fully the second (a non-integer dimension between 1 and 2).

Here the decisive contextual clue is the phrase “*Today the faithless have despaired of your religion. So do not fear them, but fear Me*” (Q. 5:3) which appears immediately after the legal injunctions. This phrase enables readers to move beyond the immediate legal frame: the legal rulings are subsumed under the broader concept of rulership (*al-wilāyah*), itself a form of divine ordinance. It is implausible that religion would be completed merely by ordinary legal rulings, many of which appear elsewhere in the Qur'an, so the completion must concern a more foundational matter, namely the appointment of a successor. Thus, God embedded the ruling on appointing a successor within seemingly secondary legal material, and the clause about disbelievers' despair functions as the contextual clue signaling that the intended meaning extends beyond legal injunctions.

5. Application of Fractal Dimensions to *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an

Just as mathematicians, over time and through scientific advancement, have identified multiple conceptual dimensions within fractals, exegetes have likewise continued to uncover ever-deeper inward meanings (*Buṭūn*) of the Qur'an. To expand the scope of this analogy, one may consider the correspondence between fractal dimensions and the hypothesis of Qur'anic envelopes, which itself may be regarded as one of the *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an.

Accordingly, the Qur'an—with its vast semantic, epistemological, and philosophical layers—can be likened to a high-dimensional fractal, such that the closer one approaches it, the more previously unseen dimensions are revealed. This correspondence finds support in the box-counting method (Figure 1), which demonstrates that as the number of boxes increases, the box diameter decreases, yielding greater detail and a more accurate approximation of the underlying structure. This mechanism parallels the envelope theory, wherein contextual clues guide the interpreter toward the core semantic layer of a verse. Put simply, the presence of a clue within an envelope enables a more precise approximation of the verse's intended meaning.

The discussion of effective dimensions, though originating in purely scientific discourse, aligns well with the diversity of perspectives held by both the general public and exegetes regarding the Qur'an. To clarify this point, one may consider the contrast between a layperson's perspective and that of a specialized researcher with respect to the Qur'an, or indeed, any complex subject. The layperson resembles a distant observer, perceiving a ball of yarn as a zero-dimensional point, whereas the researcher, depending on their level of expertise, observes the same object from a significantly closer and more informative distance.

5.1. Modeling the Qur'an's Semantic Depth Based on Fractal Dimensions

The primary objective of this study is the conceptual modeling of the phenomenon of *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an through the characteristic of fractal dimensions. Just as mathematicians in fractal geometry have achieved multiple conceptual and computational dimensions (such as Hausdorff dimension and Box-Counting dimension), with the passage of time and scientific advancements, exegetes discover more inward meanings of the Qur'an. This modeling rests on two fundamental axes: the variation of effective dimension, and the increase in detail, understood as a progressively more accurate approximation of meaning.

5.2. Buṭūn of the Qur'an as Infinite Fractal Dimensions

From this perspective, the Qur'an may be understood as a high-dimensional fractal, encompassing immense semantic and philosophical depth. A defining feature of fractals is their non-integer dimensionality, which lies between whole numbers and represents levels of complexity that are neither purely linear (dimension 1) nor purely planar (dimension 2). In a similar fashion, the *Baṭn* of a verse is neither limited to the apparent meaning (low dimension) nor entirely detached from it; rather, it constitutes an intermediate semantic layer characterized by non-linear complexity.

As one approaches this fractal structure, namely, the Qur'an, and increases the scale of interpretive engagement, new dimensions emerge that were previously imperceptible. This ongoing process of discovery offers a compelling conceptual explanation for the infinite nature of *Buṭūn*, as explicitly referenced in transmitted narrations.

5.3. *Explaining Buṭūn through the Concept of Effective Dimension and the Observer*

The notion of effective dimension, as introduced by Mandelbrot, provides a powerful analytical framework for understanding the *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an. Effective dimension is not fixed, but rather depends on the relationship between the object and the observer:

- Distant Observer (Superficial Understanding): An ordinary reader or an exegete operating in an earlier historical period with limited epistemic tools resembles an observer viewing a ball of yarn from afar. At this scale, the object appears as a zero-dimensional point, and the verse yields only its surface or apparent meaning.
- Close Observer (Deep Understanding): A modern researcher or exegete, equipped with advanced scientific, linguistic, and philosophical tools, analogous to altering scale and magnification, is able to discern the inner structure of the ball of yarn, such as the interwoven fibers of the thread, and thus perceive higher dimensions. Similarly, scientific and intellectual progress alters the interpretive scale, enabling the effective dimension of the verse, its *Baṭn*, to increase for the exegete.

This gradual shift in effective dimension provides a rational foundation for the envelopes hypothesis. The envelopes, manifested through contextual clues, function as interpretive magnifying instruments that, in every era, allow the observer to derive increasingly precise approximations and richer details of the verse's core semantic content.

5.4. *Applying Contextual Clues to the Box-Counting Method*

The applicability of fractal dimensions to the envelope hypothesis is further substantiated through the box-counting method. In this method (Figure 1), reducing the size of the boxes, that is, refining the measurement scale, results in an increased number of boxes, which in turn yields greater detail and more accurate approximations of the fractal structure. Analogously, within the framework of Qur'anic envelopes, scientific, linguistic, and textual clues function as these smaller boxes. Each clue effectively refines the scale of interpretation, enabling the exegete to arrive at increasingly precise approximations of the *Buṭūn* concepts, namely, the core semantic layer of the verse. This dynamic explains how a fixed and

immutable text, the Qur'an, can continuously disclose new semantic dimensions, as human knowledge progresses and the interpretive scale of the observer contracts. Thus, the box-counting model provides a rigorous conceptual justification for the infinite semantic productivity of the Qur'an without implying textual alteration or instability.

6. Conclusion

Based on the preceding discussion concerning *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an and the application of fractal-dimension characteristics to the Qur'an's inward meanings, the following conclusions may be drawn. The concept of fractal dimensions, which possesses diverse and extensive conceptual facets, is meaningfully applicable to *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an, due to the structural alignment and internal coherence among multiple semantic layers of Qur'anic meaning. Applying fractal dimensions to *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an provides a time-sensitive interpretive framework, reminding interpreters that human comprehension operates at varying levels of scale. This framework allows for progressively more accurate approximations of meaning, in accordance with epistemic, scientific, and methodological advancements across historical periods. The hypothesis of the Qur'anic envelopes (*Laffāfeh*), which is classified under the concept of *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an, exhibits a direct correlation with varying levels of human comprehension across different eras. The envelopes neither negate the apparent meaning nor replace it, but instead regulate access to deeper layers of meaning through contextual clues. *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an encompass numerous instances, including newly identified examples discussed in this study. By modeling *Buṭūn* of the Qur'an through a fractal system, this research offers a novel theoretical framework demonstrating that the Qur'an's inward meanings function as a coherent, multi-dimensional semantic structure.

Acknowledgements

This article is derived from the master's thesis of Iman Dehqanzadeh Hamedan, completed under the supervision of Dr. Samiyeh Shahbazi and Dr. Mohammad Ali Heydari at Yazd University. The authors express their gratitude to the supervising faculty for their guidance and the Research Deputy for providing facilities and resources.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

References

- Al-Ālūsī, M. (1994). *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Al-'Ayyāshī, M. (1960). *Al-Tafsīr (Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī)*. Tehran: Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah al-Islāmiyyah.
- Al-Baghdādī, 'A. (1998). *Khizānat al-Adab wa Lubb Lubāb Lisān al-'Arab*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Farāhīdī, K. (1990). *Kitāb al-'Ayn*. Qom: Hejrat.
- Al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, M. (1994). *Tafsīr al-Şāfi*. Tehran: Maktabah al-Şadr.
- Al-Fayyūmī, A. (1993). *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr fī Gharīb al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr lil-Rāfi'ī*. Qom: Mu'assasah Dār al-Hijrah.
- Al-Ghazālī, M. uḥammad ibn Muḥammad, Ḥāfiẓ 'Irāqī, 'Abd al-Raḥīm ibn Ḥusayn, & Abī Ḥafṣ, Sayyid ibn Ibrāhīm. (1937). *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. Cairo: Lajnah Nashr al-Thaqāfah al-Islāmiyyah.
- Al-Jawharī, I. (1984). *Al-Şiḥāḥ*. Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyīn.
- Al-Khū'ī, A. (1989). *Muḥāḍarāt fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. Qom: Maṭba'ah Şadr.
- Al-Qumī, M. (1984). *Tafsīr al-Qumī*. Qom: Dār al-Kitāb.
- Al-Qurṭubī, M. (1995). *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*. Tehran: Naşir Khusru.
- Al-Rāghib al-Işfahānī, Ḥ. (1992). *Mufradāt Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Shāmiyyah.
- Al-Shawkānī, M. (1994). *Fath al-Qadīr: Al-Jāmi' bayna Fannay al-Riwāyah wa al-Dirāyah min 'Ilm al-Tafsīr*. Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr.
- Al-Suyūṭī, 'A. (2000). *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī.
- Al-Ṭabrisī, F. (1993). *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Tehran: Nāşir Khusru.
- Al-Ṭūsī, M. (2002). *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- Al-Zabīdī, M. (1994). *Tāj al-'Arūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs*. Kuwait: al-Turath al-'Arabī.
- Amīnī, 'A. (1995). *Al-Ghadīr fī al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah wa al-Adab*. Qom: Markaz al-Ghadīr lil-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah.
- Barati, G. (2022). Scientific explanation of mountains movement on verse 88 of Surah al-Naml from the Noble Qur'an. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies*, 1(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/jiqs.v1i2.10>
- Baroomand, M. H. (2005). *Critique and analysis of the methods of explaining the legitimacy of the Qur'an* (in Persian). Qom: 'Arsh Andīsheh.

- Bovill, C. (1995). *Fractal Geometry in Architecture and Design*. Boston: Birkhauser.
- Fakhr al-Rāzī, M. (2000). *Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah.
- Ghobadian, V. (2013). *Foundations and Concepts in Contemporary Western Architecture* (in Persian). Tehran: Daftar Pazhūheshhāye Farhangī.
- Hakki, I. (1911). *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Bayān*. Istanbul: Maṭba‘ah ‘Uthmāniyyah.
- Ibn Fāris, A. (1983). *Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*. Qom: Markaz al-Nashr.
- Ibn Manzūr, J. (1993). *Lisān al-‘Arab*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir.
- Ibn Taymiyyah, A. (1987). *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah.
- Joudavi, A. & Faqīhi, F. (2024). *Sequential Exegesis of Surah al-Insān* (in Persian). Yazd: Ābgīneh Kavīr.
- Joudavi, A. & Talebian Ashkezari, N. (2024). *Evaluation of Ṣābūnī’s Exegetical Studies in Al-Tibyān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* (in Persian). Shiraz: Shāhchērāgh.
- Mandelbrot, B. B. (1983). *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*. Times Books.
- Ma‘rifat, M. H. (1995). *Qur’anic Sciences* (in Persian). Tehran: Sāzmān Tablīghāt Islāmī.
- Moradi, M. & Gholampourmir, S. (2025). Electromagnetic Radiation of Extra Virgin Olive Oil: A Scientific Reflection on the Qur’anic Verse of Light (Q. 24:35). *Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur’anic Studies*, 4(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I1.4>
- Peitgen, H., Jürgens, H., & Saupe, D. (1993). *Chaos and Fractals: New Frontiers of Science*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Qarai, A. Q. (2004). *Translation of the Holy Qur’an*. London: ICAS.
- Rezaei Esfahani, M. A. (2008). *The Essence of Baṭn al-Qur’ān and Strategies for Attaining It* (in Persian). Tehran: Qabasāt.
- Roozitalab, A. (2010). *An Introduction to Fractal Geometry* (in Persian). Shiraz: Takht Jamshīd.
- Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, M. (1981). *Al-Hikmah al-Muta‘āliyah fī al-Asfār al-‘Aqliyyah al-Arba‘ah*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī.
- Tabataba‘i Hakim, M. S. (1993). *Al-Mabādī’ al-‘Āmmah lil-Fiqh al-Muqāran*. Qom: Mu‘assasah al-Nashr al-Islāmī.
- Tabataba‘i, H. (2008). *A Comparative Study of the Inward Meanings of the Qur’an* (in Persian). Qom: Pazhūheshhāye Tafsīr wa ‘Ulūm Qur’ān.
- Tabataba‘i, M. H. (1970). *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*. Beirut: Mu‘assasah al-‘A‘lamī lil-Maṭbū‘āt.

A Critical Analysis of Textual Historicity in Abu Zayd's Thought in Light of the "Spirit of Meaning" Theory in Transcendent Philosophy

Mansoor Doagoo¹ 

Lecturer, Faculty of Islamic Teachings, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

Article History: Received 14 June 2025; Accepted 20 September 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's theory of the "historicity of the text," which emphasizes the primacy of cultural context in textual formation, reduces the revelation to a historically bounded linguistic message. By producing a rupture between the textual horizon of meaning and the horizon of the contemporary interpreter, this approach raises serious challenges for the efficacy and dynamism of the language of the Qur'an. The present study, with a critical approach, evaluates Abu Zayd's linguistic model on the basis of the theory of *rūḥ al-ma'nā* (spirit of meaning) in Transcendent Philosophy (*al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'aliyyah*). The findings indicate that Abu Zayd's theory rests on two fundamental errors. First, an ontological rupture between text and author: by treating the text as an independent historical product, Abu Zayd separates it from its author's trans-historical subjectivity. In contrast, in the *rūḥ al-ma'nā* model the text is a manifestation and existential continuation of the author, and a union between text and author is established that guarantees the persistence and vitality of meaning. Second, a spurious dualization of *ma'nā* and *maghzā*: Abu Zayd holds that *ma'nā* (meaning as a historical signified) is imprisoned in the past and must be contemporized by constructing a new *maghzā* (interpretive significance). By contrast, the *rūḥ al-ma'nā* theory, by explicating the mechanism by which words are instituted for the spirit of meaning, demonstrates that the signification of Qur'anic words is not constrained to the material-historical instances of the period of revelation; rather, words are instituted for general functions and

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: mdk.doagoo@gmail.com

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I2.7>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_106948.html?lang=en

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



universals. Accordingly, textual meaning possesses a fluid referential capacity that, without requiring a separation between *ma'nā* and *maghzā*, can be applied to novel instances in any temporal context.

KEYWORDS: The Qur'an, Historicity of the text, Abu Zayd, *Rūḥ al-ma'nā* theory, Transcendent Philosophy, *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'aliyyah*, *Ma'nā* and *maghzā*.

1. Introduction

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's theory of the historicity of the text, as one of the most influential hermeneutical approaches in contemporary Islamic thought, posits that the Qur'an, viewed as a cultural product, was constituted within a dialectic with the socio-historical realities of the seventh century CE. This view, by distinguishing between meaning, which it confines to the comprehension of the earliest addressees and treats as frozen in history, and *maghzā*, which is fluid and dependent on the intellectual horizon of the contemporary reader, effectively challenges the existential linkage of the text with the intent of the speaker (God). Although Abu Zayd's approach is advanced with the aim of revitalizing religious understanding, it ultimately reduces revelation to a historical document and opens the door to unrestricted ideological readings. One might argue that Abu Zayd's approach is merely linguistic and not concerned with theological matters; however, any linguistic theory is necessarily grounded in specific ontological presuppositions. The reduction of revelation to a human text stems from an ontological rupture that this study seeks to investigate.

The significance of this research lies in the fact that Abu Zayd's theory targets the epistemological and ontological foundations of revelation and has had broad influence on currents of religious intellectualism. The necessity of this study arises because most critiques of Abu Zayd have been either theological-polemical or limited to historical analysis, whereas the core challenge resides in the philosophical and ontological premises of his theory. Therefore, a foundational critique capable of testing these philosophical presuppositions and offering a coherent, viable alternative is an undeniable scientific requirement. It should be noted that Abu Zayd emphasizes the distinction between utterance and text, whereas the *rūḥ al-ma'nā* theory considers utterance and text as continuations of one another and applicable to both.

2. Literature Review

Abu Zayd's thought, especially his theory of the historicity of the text

and his effort to apply modern hermeneutics to the understanding of the Qur'an, has elicited wide response in domestic and international academic circles. A critical survey of the existing literature indicates that studies on his views can be grouped under three broad research orientations.

A cluster of studies focuses on the explication of theoretical and humanistic hermeneutic foundations, with a descriptive-analytical approach. They attempt to explicate Abu Zayd's hermeneutical apparatus and its key concepts, such as the role of the interpreter and the *ma'nā/maghzā* binary, without advancing fundamental theological refutations. In this vein, Sukidi (2009) characterizes Abu Zayd's approach as a form of humanistic hermeneutics that, by foregrounding the human dimensions of the interpretive process, creates space for a dynamic reading of the Qur'an. Sulaiman (2023) analyzes this approach as a move from textualism toward discourse-centered analysis, showing how Abu Zayd uses semiotics and hermeneutics to treat the Qur'an as a cultural product. Similarly, Naupal (2019) and Benmadi (2025), stressing Abu Zayd's indebtedness to the hermeneutical circle (Gadamerian tradition), show that his primary concern was to desacralize human readings and to reject interpretive certainties tied to literalist readings.

Second group of studies analyzes the ideas within discursive, ideological, and political conflicts, with a sociological-historical approach. They regard Abu Zayd's thought as a response to complex social, political, and discursive conditions in the Islamic world. Mufid et al. (2023) and Falyouna (2020), by examining the historical context of Egypt, interpret his theories as a reaction to the impasses of contemporary religious discourse and as an effort to overcome the decline of Muslims when faced with the European Renaissance. Mirzaei and Hossaini (2025) critique the historicity thesis sociologically, viewing it as a passive reaction aimed at adjusting religious heritage to modern values. From a more psychological angle, Movahedinia and Fadaei Mehrabani (2023) argue that Abu Zayd, facing the consequences of his theory, displayed a kind of prudential caution shaped by cognitive clichés. The common feature of this group is their focus on external (extra-textual) motivations rather than an ontological interrogation of the text itself.

The third orientation concentrates on epistemological, theological, and intratextual inconsistencies in Abu Zayd's theory. López-Farjeat (2024) demonstrates that the foundation of Abu Zayd's work is less Western than rooted in *Mu'tazilī kalām* concepts, Ibn 'Arabī's Sufism, and Shi'ī *ta'wīl*. Va'ezī (2010) issues a careful philosophical critique of internal inconsistencies in Abu Zayd's theory. Sa'dī and Niktab Eta'ati (2018) critique his reductive treatment of revelation as a written text by

emphasizing the spoken nature of revelation. Ma'aref and Shoja'i (2020) have argued that the consequences of his position invalidate certain subsidiary sciences of the Qur'an. From the standpoint of modern linguistics, Dahhan et al. (2025) have offered an intra-discursive critique of his hermeneutical process.

A comprehensive review of the above literature indicates that studies in the first and second categories mostly confine themselves to describing Abu Zayd's apparatus or analyzing its socio-historical origins, while those in the third category tend to adopt a predominantly negative stance, focused on refutation in theological, historical, or intra-discursive registers. The fundamental limitation and lacuna in this context is the absence of an affirmative, intra-textual alternative model, capable of elucidating textual dynamism while simultaneously preserving its sacred authenticity.

The innovation of this study lies in shifting the critique from contentual and theological refutation to a critique of linguistic and ontological structure. Contrary to prior studies that have been unable to apprehend the ontological dimensions of meaning or that have treated the *rūḥ al-ma'nā* (spirit of meaning) merely as an abstract philosophical topic, this research reinterprets the *rūḥ al-ma'nā* as a workable semantic model and a potent alternative designed to challenge Abu Zayd's linguistic presuppositions. This approach demonstrates how the historical knot tying word to meaning may be untied and offers a systematic framework to overcome the impasse of the *ma'nā/maghzā* binary without accepting the reductionism implicit in the historicity-of-the-text thesis. Accordingly, the central research question is formulated as follows: How does the *rūḥ al-ma'nā* theory, grounded in the ontological premises of Transcendent Philosophy, deconstruct the theoretical foundations of Abu Zayd's historicity-of-the-text and provide an alternative model for accounting for the dynamism of Qur'anic understanding?

3. *Theoretical Framework*

This section delineates the conceptual foundations of the study by contrasting two divergent hermeneutical paradigms. It situates the discourse within the tension between modern historical-linguistic approaches and the classical ontological perspectives of Islamic philosophy.

3.1. *The Dialectic of Historicity of The Text and Understanding in Abu Zayd's Thought*

The interpretive theory of Abu Zayd rests upon both the distinction and the intertwinement of two spheres: the historicity of the text and the historicity of understanding. Abu Zayd's intellectual trajectory, shaped initially by modern reformist figures such as Sayyid Qutb and later consolidated through a critical rereading of the *Mu'tazilī* heritage and Ibn 'Arabī (notably in his *Risālah fī falsafah al-ta'wīl*), aims to move beyond traditional approaches and to offer a modern, linguistic reading of Qur'anic sciences (Majmū'ah min al-mu'allifin 2019).

On the first plane, textual historicity, Abu Zayd's central claim is that the Qur'an, as a linguistic text, was constituted within a determinate spatio-temporal setting (the twenty-three years of revelation) and in dialectical interaction with the cultural reality of its age (Abu Zayd 1998). By proposing a transition from "vertical revelation" to "horizontal revelation," he contends that the moment of revelation marks the transformation of divine discourse into human text. From this perspective, insisting on the Qur'an's eternal presence on the *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz* (Preserved Tablet) overlooks the communicative and human aspect of the text and reifies it as a supra-historical object, thereby precluding a scientific mode of understanding (Abu Zayd 1998).

To justify a worldly orientation toward the text, Abu Zayd clarifies that historicity here means occurrence in time and the distinction between absolute divine existence and existence contingent upon time (Abu Zayd 1995, 71). The epistemological consequence of this stance is a separation between *ma'nā* (meaning) and *maghzā* (significance): the text's *ma'nā* is the historical comprehension of the original addressees, frozen in time, whereas the *maghzā* or semantic import is fluid and dependent on contemporary readings (Ibn Fariḥa & Aḥmad, 2018, 66).

On the second plane, historicity of understanding, Abu Zayd, influenced by philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer), regards understanding as the product of the fusion of the text's horizon with the interpreter's historical horizon. Because the interpreter is always enclosed within the paradigms of her or his cultural moment, any reading inevitably bears ideological and historical coloration, and access to the authorial (divine) intent in a pure, objective form appears impossible (Va'ezī 2010). The ultimate outcome of this theoretical complex is a theory of the reproduction of signification. Abu Zayd (1994) argues that to contemporize the Qur'an one must move beyond authorial intentionality and attend to the text's intentionality and its

interaction with the reader. While this approach is proposed to achieve religious dynamism, it effectively reduces the text from a signifier of transcendental truth to a cultural product.

A critical analysis of Abu Zayd's theory reveals that his view rests on two problematic presuppositions: first, an ontological rupture between discourse and the speaker, which sidelines the serious intent of God; and second, the confinement of lexical denotation to the material referents of the period of revelation. In contrast, the present study, relying on the premises of Transcendent Philosophy and the theory of the coinage of words for the spirit of meaning, seeks to propose an alternative model. In this model, words such as *qalam* (pen) or *mizān* (scale) are not treated merely as cultural metaphors but are interpreted as symbols for abstract and supra-historical realities; an approach that, while preserving textual dynamism, prevents falling into the trap of historical relativism.

3.2. Ontological Premises and Explication of the Spirit of Meaning Theory

To address the limitations inherent in the historical-reductive model, this section elaborates on the metaphysical foundations of the spirit of meaning theory. It explores how this framework provides a robust alternative for reconciling textual dynamism with the preservation of sacred origins.

3.2.1. The Ontology of Language in the Transition from Validity to Truth

To precisely formulate the spirit of meaning theory and apply it to textual understanding, it is first necessary to examine the philosophical origins of this theory so as to clarify on what grounds and bases this perspective has been prevalent among Islamic philosophers and theosophical sages. The point of departure for this discussion is the movement from an instrumentalist view to an ontological view concerning language.

Within the paradigm of Transcendent Philosophy, although language at the level of everyday discourse displays conventional aspects, in final analysis it maintains an intimate linkage with ontological realities. This existential bond between lexical form and meaning is so deeply rooted in the thought of the philosophers that it is reflected even in accounts of how words are coined. Indeed, there exists a spectrum of opinions among Muslim sages who, despite differing over the agent of coinage, concur on the principle that language possesses the capacity to signify abstract realities.

At one end of this spectrum, philosophers such as Mullā Ṣadrā (1996, 2: 492) and Sabziwārī (1981, 429), adopting a maximalist stance, essentially regard the source of language as supra-human and identify God as the coiner of words. In this reading, coinage is not a social contract but the manifestation of the descent of meaning from the rank of the unseen to the realm of the visible. Accordingly, words are originally established for the abstract form and the higher reality; their application to material instances constitutes a kind of descent from truth to appearance. Qāḍī Saʿīd Qummī (1994, 2: 519), for example, maintains that the word *qalam* (pen) was initially coined for the intelligible, higher pen.

At the other pole, even thinkers such as Tabataba'i (1973, 10:447), who consider the source of lexical coinage to be social needs and convention, do not altogether foreclose an ontological reading. By introducing a teleological criterion for coinage, he argues that because the ground of naming is the purpose and end of a thing rather than its material form, words can be liberated from the cage of matter and be literally applied to abstract and immaterial instances. Similarly, Imam Khomeini (2002, 1:116), through a comprehensive approach, demonstrates that even if the coiner of terms is human, it does not contradict their signification of the spirit of meaning. He believes that terms are coined for general meanings; thus, even if the initial coiner was a non-divine individual unaware of abstract realities, the term coined (such as the term existence) still encompasses the higher ontological levels.

Therefore, regardless of whether the origin of language is deemed divine or human, the output of the philosophical system of Transcendent Philosophy is that language is gradational, and terms possess the capacity to carry metaphysical weight and signify trans-historical truths. This ontological foundation serves as the cornerstone of the theory of the spirit of meaning.

3.2.2. Ontological Correspondence of God and Creation in the Formation of Words

In the worldview of the Transcendent Philosophy, existence is founded upon the fundamental principle of the unity of existence (*waḥdah al-wujūd*), which entails perceiving unity within multiplicity and multiplicity within unity. This single metaphysical reality of existence manifests, in a descending procession from the Origin, as the multiplicity of the world, and in an ascending movement returns to that same single Origin. This movement traces a circular system, expressed in revealed discourse by the statements “*Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we indeed return*” (Q. 2:156) and “*He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden*” (Q. 57:3).

Hasanzadeh Amoli (2004, 78) likens the relation of creatures to God to the relation of waves to the sea, stating: A divine wave rises from the sea, mingles with it, and escapes in it: “*Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we indeed return*” (Q. 2:156). This course is cyclical because existence, in its ascents and descents, is circular: “*He directs the command from the heaven to the earth; then it ascends toward Him...*” (Q. 32:5) (Hasanzadeh Amoli 2006, 28). Sabziwārī (2011, 2: 666) compares this descending and ascending series to two arcs of a circle, whose ranks are distinct from one another. On this basis, all creatures are the divine words that share a common existential principle and, in accordance with the principle of gradation in being (*tashkīk fī al-wujūd*), possess degrees and ranks.

This foundational principle provides the ground for extending the ontological system of creatural words into the realm of human discourse, arising from the correspondence between human speech and the divine discourse. Mullā Ṣadrā (1987, 2: 367) holds that the perfected human is a comprehensive being (*al-kawn al-jāmi‘*) who embodies the form of divine knowledge and is a complete template of the outwardness of the visible realm and the inwardness of the unseen realm; since the verse “*So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit,...*” (Q. 15:29) and the narrative “*Indeed God created Adam upon His image*” (al-Kulaynī 2009, 1: 133-134) pertain to the relation of the infusion of the Merciful spirit into the human station.

Accordingly, just as creatures are the words of God, each aspect of a human being, manifested as speech, movement, or conduct, is likewise that person’s word. Man, like God, is a creator of words. As reported in the traditions: *Know that no word of the servants issues from the tongue except that God creates that word in the form of an angel. If the word is good, the angel is of the nature of mercy; if it is evil, the angel is of the nature of punishment* (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., 2: 639). This meaning is echoed in the verse “*he says no word but that there is a ready observer beside him*” (Q. 50:18), for every human utterance is envisaged as an entity that is recorded and realized within the order of being.

This system of unity-in-multiplicity extends to human words such that human speech, like the creatural words, possesses a single essence and spirit that manifests through multiple verbal forms; this is the ontological foundation of the spirit of meaning theory. Now, this unified identity appears across gradational ranks. Mullā Ṣadrā (1990, 7: 7–11) distinguishes three orders for human discourse corresponding to the worlds of existence: the highest/intellectual order (apprehension of pure meanings), the middle/imaginal order (the non-material forms), and the lowest/corporeal order

(manifestation in words and sounds). Linguistic convention, within this philosophical horizon, counts only as the lowest mode of the manifestation of meaning.

The relation between word and meaning is like that between body and soul (Mullā Ṣadrā 1990, 8: 6); the soul is the spirit of discourse and the word is its body. Discourse, like the human being, has both spirit and body. Just as the identity and individuality of the body belong to the soul rather than to its materiality (Mullā Ṣadrā 1990, 9: 190), the reality of discourse is not annihilated by the removal of the word; rather it ascends to the imaginal and then to the intellectual order. This existential continuity among the three ranks constitutes the spirit of meaning theory: a theory that emphasizes the existence of a unitary substantial essence of meaning which constitutes the singular identity of human discourse and whose continuity across ranks corresponds to the gradational system of the divine creatural words.

3.2.3. Existential Unity of Discourse and the Discursing One

According to the premises of Transcendent Philosophy, just as the world is the Word of God and He creates beings through speech, so too is the human, by virtue of being a comprehensive being, the creator of his own words. In this perspective, human words are manifestations of the essence and perfections of the speaker, and their existence is united with the existence of the discursing one. Hasanzadeh Amoli (2006, 249) states that every effect is the manifestation of the possessor's being and perfections. This existential bond entirely rejects the modern linguistic doctrine of the death of the author (e.g., Barthes 2007), which posits the dissolution of the author within the text, because separating a work from its possessor is like separating the manifestation from the manifested, an impossibility. The Qur'anic verse "*Whoever acts righteously, it is for his own soul*" (Q. 41:46) also supports the view that every utterance (word) reflects the truth of the human self and that no real separation can be made between them.

On this basis of unity, discourse, like its author, possesses levels, and its semantic range is precisely dependent on the existential expanse of the discursing subject. Human discourse, although bearing a single identity, appears across gradational orders (material, imaginal, intellectual). Mullā Ṣadrā (1989, 8: 6) likens the relation of word and meaning to that of body and soul. The key point is that if the author exists only at the material level, his discourse will be confined to that level; but if the speaker has traversed the material, imaginal, intellectual, and divine ranks, his speech, by virtue of the principle of union, will likewise encompass all these ranks and possess an infinite longitudinal series of meanings.

Hence, the Qur'an as divine discourse is the reflection of its speaker. Because God and His vicegerent (the Prophet) possess supreme and inexhaustible ranks, their discourse likewise has a single spirit with innumerable levels. According to the spirit of meaning theory, a word in this discourse extends to all its longitudinal and lateral referents, and the true meaning flows through every ontological rank, from the world of matter to the divine realms. Mullā Ṣadrā (1989, 7: 4) depicts this unity further by asserting that the words of God, and consequently human words, stand in an emanative relation: creatures that come into being from God are signs of the unseen, and by their emergence they unveil what is hidden and interior. Consequently, the whole world is a sign and token; the purpose of their creation is to declare and disclose the unseen. Just as discourse reveals the hidden inner state of its speaker and is a sign of what is within the speaker, so too is the world of creation a sign of what is beyond and within the unseen. Therefore the entire universe consists of divine words that stand by God, and their standing is an emanative standing. The same holds for human discourse (Khomeini 2002, 2: 348).

3.2.4. *The Theory of the Spirit of Meaning*

In order to offer a fundamental critique of the historicist approach of Abu Zayd, it is necessary to articulate with precision the theoretical framework adopted in this study, namely the theory of the spirit of meaning (*rūḥ al-ma'nā*). Within this perspective, the spirit of meaning is conceived as a single essence and unified reality that, independent of material determinations, manifests itself in diverse verbal and non-verbal forms. The roots of this view can be clearly traced in the works of al-Ghazālī (2004, 1: 284), where he states in a profound analogy: just as everybody has a spirit that does not remain with it, the meaning of letters is like the spirit, and the letters are like the body. The nobility of the body is due to the spirit, and the nobility of letters is due to the spirit of meanings.

After him, major figures of Islamic philosophy and mysticism such as Mullā Ṣadrā, Fayḍ Kāshānī, and Tabataba'i brought this theory to its culmination. Transcending the superficial level of language and conventional usage, Mullā Ṣadrā (1984, 91-92) emphasizes that a word is posited for an absolute meaning that encompasses all intellectual and sensory meanings... People, due to their habituation to perceiving certain of these particular features, confine the application of the word to those familiar characteristics and remain unaware of other meanings; thereafter, they judge that usage beyond these is metaphorical. To clarify this point, he introduces the key example of the term *mīzān*, asserting that *mīzān* applies to the spirit of its meaning, namely, anything by which measurement can be

made, whether sensory or intellectual. Accordingly, transformations in the form of measuring instruments over time (from balance scales to digital or even intellectual measures) do not affect the applicability of the term *mīzān*, since the word is designated for that end and essential reality, not for its material form. In continuity with this perspective, Hasanzadeh Amoli (2006, 349) formulates a general principle, stating: Words have been posited for meanings in their most general sense.

3.2.5. Causal (*Limmī*) Methodology of Textual Understanding Based on the Gradation (*Tashkīk*) of Meaning

The theory of the spirit of meaning is not merely an abstract philosophical foundation; rather, it offers a precise interpretive methodology for understanding the Qur'an. According to the methodology derived from this theory, the path of cognition begins with apprehending the true reality of a word's meaning. In this process, the exegete first arrives at the intellectual meaning of the term, namely, a general and universal meaning that is inclusive of all instances and exclusive of what falls outside it. This general meaning, like a spirit, flows through all usages and derivatives of the word and constitutes the central axis of understanding.

This process corresponds precisely to the *limmī* demonstration (*al-burhān al-limmī*) in philosophy, that is, the movement from cause to effect. In other words, knowledge is first attained of the principle and reality of the word's meaning (the spirit of meaning), and only then does one descend to its verbal structure, evaluating linguistic levels in accordance with that central meaning. Within this framework, contrary to the view of Abu Zayd, who regards meaning as dependent on historical context, the central meaning never changes in accordance with circumstances or temporal developments; rather, it is the instances that undergo change. Consequently, phenomena such as unregulated synonymy or the ellipsis/addition of meaning have no place in this method, since every word bears its own unique spirit of meaning.

This capacity for multiplicity within the unity of truth is precisely the feature referred to in Islamic narrations as the Qur'an possessing multiple inner layers (*dhū buṭūn*), as reported by al-Majlisī (1982, 33: 155). This characteristic establishes the legitimacy of both longitudinal and lateral multiplicity of meaning in light of a single, unifying meaning, a relation that, in *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, is termed the application of a homonymous term to all its meanings (*ḥaml al-laḥẓ al-mushtarak 'alā jamī' ma 'ānīhi*) (Tayyib Hosseini 2009, 188).

Accordingly, a term in divine discourse extends, along both longitudinal

and lateral axes, to all its material and immaterial instances. The true meaning (the spirit of meaning) thus permeates all ontological levels, from the material world to the imaginal (*'ālam al-mithāl*) and intellectual realms (*'ālam al-'aql*), without engendering contradiction.

4. *Critical Analysis of the Historicist Approach*

Following the explication of the ontological and methodological foundations of the theory of the spirit of meaning in the preceding sections, and the demonstration that divine discourse possesses gradational levels and a fluid spirit unfolding across time, the ground is now prepared to assess the validity of the historicist approach to the text. Abu Zayd, by emphasizing the human and historical dimensions of the Qur'an, seeks to conventionalize textual understanding, an approach that stands in fundamental tension with the principles of semantic realism and the ontological unity of speech and speaker. In this section, Abu Zayd's principal claims across four domains, essence, meaning, existence, and teleology, will be critically examined in light of the theory of the spirit of meaning.

4.1. *Essentialist Critique: The Essential Impossibility of Reducing Revelation to a Cultural Product*

The point of departure for Abu Zayd's analysis of the nature of the Qur'an is its definition as a *cultural product*. In this reading, the Qur'anic text is the outcome of social, political, and linguistic forces operative in the Arabian Peninsula. From the standpoint of the ontological foundations of the theory of the spirit of meaning, this sociological perspective encounters two essential challenges:

4.1.1. *The Problem of Extending the Model of Production to Manifestation*

The claim that the Qur'an is a "product" rests on a methodological error that is the unwarranted generalization of a single explanatory model and the neglect of ontological gradation. From the perspective of Transcendent Philosophy, every text is a manifestation of the ontological level of its author. On this basis, a distinction can be drawn between two general types of text:

- **Productive Text:** When the author is a human being whose existence is fully circumscribed by the material world and historical-social conditions, the text is likewise a *product* of those conditions. Here, the

text is the outcome of external forces, and Abu Zayd's sociological analysis proves entirely effective for this category.

- **Manifestational Text:** When the author transcends material levels and attains higher realms of knowledge and being (as in the case of prophets and saints), the text is no longer merely a product; rather, it is a manifestation of transcendent truths that appear within the form of words.

The Qur'an, as divine speech, represents the highest degree of manifestational text, originating from the eternal knowledge of God. Abu Zayd's methodological error lies precisely here. By disregarding this ontological distinction, he extends the model of production, valid only for the lowest level of texts, to the highest level, namely divine discourse. This results in a conflation of the efficient cause (God) with the material conditions of emergence (the culture of the time).

4.1.2. The Ontological Distinction between the Context and the Factor of Origination

The most fundamental critique of the *cultural product* thesis lies in its failure to distinguish between container and content. Abu Zayd regards Arabic language and culture as constitutive and formative of the content of the text. However, according to *Transcendent Philosophy*, the culture of the time merely serves as the context/container of revelation. The relationship between revelation and culture may be likened to that between water and a vessel: when water (the revelatory content) is poured into a jug (Arabic language and culture), it assumes the shape of the container, yet its essence remains water and it does not become clay. The culture of the time functioned only as the medium within which the trans-historical truth of the Qur'an assumed verbal form.

One might object, on the basis of modern linguistics, that language is never a neutral container but actively shapes content. In response, it must be said that while this claim holds for human language, inasmuch as it is itself a product of cultural evolution, it does not apply to divine speech. In this case, it is the *content* (the eternal, pre-existent knowledge of God) that is primary, transcendent, and ontologically fundamental, while the *container* (Arabic language) is selected and employed to express that higher truth.

Thus, the relationship is reversed: it is the divine content that shapes and instrumentalizes the linguistic medium in accordance with its purposes, rather than being determined by it. Consequently, the presence of Arabic linguistic features does not justify the conclusion that the essence and content of the Qur'an are products of that culture. What Abu Zayd perceives is merely the container; he remains inattentive to the content, which is divine and trans-historical.

4.2. *Ontological Critique: The Ontological Impossibility of Separating the Text from the Speaker's Reality*

The fundamental error in Abu Zayd's position becomes even more evident at the level of ontology. In the course of humanizing revelation, Abu Zayd maintains that the Qur'anic text, at the moment of its descent and its articulation in human language, becomes detached from its speaker (God) and acquires an independent, human identity. He describes this process as humanization, asserting that once revealed, the text is governed by human laws and that the metaphysical sanctity of the speaker plays no role in textual analysis. This view, aptly described as the secularization of the text, encounters an intellectual impossibility when examined through the ontological principle of the unity of speech and speaker.

The foundational error in separating the text from the speaker lies in a mechanistic conception of speech. Abu Zayd implicitly treats discourse as a physical object, like a structure erected by an architect and subsequently abandoned, such that, once produced, it possesses an existence independent of its maker. However, as demonstrated in earlier discussions drawing upon Transcendent Philosophy, the relation of speech to the speaker is one of emanational subsistence. Speech is an act and a mode of the speaker's being; its existence is identical with dependence and relation to its agent (Mullā Ṣadrā 1975, 264).

Just as a ray of sunlight has neither meaning nor existence even for a moment without its connection to the sun, divine speech cannot be severed, even instantaneously, from the sustaining presence of the Speaker (God). Therefore, Abu Zayd's claim regarding the independence of the text after revelation entails the impossible assumption of an effect existing without its cause, or an act persisting without an agent.

A necessary consequence of this ontological unity is that the existential attributes of the speaker permeate the speech. If the speaker is living (*al-ḥayy*), knowing (*al-ʿalīm*), and holy (*al-quddūs*), then the speech is likewise a living, conscious, and sacred manifestation. Abu Zayd's attempt to strip the text of its sanctity and reduce it to a purely literary and historical phenomenon amounts to disregarding the text's existential connection to an inexhaustible divine source.

By virtue of this ontological connection, the Qur'an remains perpetually the speech of God and never undergoes an essential transformation into human discourse. Its descent into the form of Arabic language represents only its manifestation within the material realm, not a transformation of its

essence. Hence, contrary to Abu Zayd's claim, the Qur'anic text in every time and place continues to bear the presence and sanctity of the Speaker. A proper understanding of it is therefore impossible without attention to this existential attribution, which entails purity and sanctity.

One might argue that this critique conflates Abu Zayd's claim (the human character of the text) with the presupposition of this study (its divine character). However, the subtle point is that even if, following Abu Zayd's premise, the Prophet is regarded as the agent of the text, the principles of Şadrian anthropology maintain that the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*), in the arc of ascent (*qaws al-şu'ūd*), attains a level of being at which his acts (including speech) are manifestations of immaterial realities. Thus, even under the assumption of human authorship, a text issuing from such a being cannot be confined within the limits of time and space.

4.3. Semantic Critique: The Incompatibility of the Historicity of the text with the Principle of the Absoluteness of Meaning

A further challenge in the approach of Abu Zayd lies in the confinement of meaning within the bounds of history. By distinguishing between meaning (the historical signification of the text) and *maghzā* (its contemporary significance), Abu Zayd argues that the meaning of the Qur'anic text is identical to what its seventh-century audience understood, and that this meaning is fixed within that historical horizon. This historicization of meaning, resulting from the reduction of a word's general concept to its salient instance at the time of revelation, stands in clear tension with the semantic principle that words are designated for the spirit of meaning.

4.3.1. Incompatibility with the Immateriality of Speech and the Ontological Levels of Meaning

Another fundamental problem in Abu Zayd's theory is the neglect of the ontological levels of speech and the restriction of attention to its material layer. By focusing exclusively on the verbal and human dimension of revelation, he extends the assumption of materiality, and thus temporality, to the entirety of the Qur'an's identity. His underlying assumption is that because words are historically situated, meaning itself must be historically confined. However, according to Transcendent Philosophy, such historical restriction would only hold if words were designated for matter and particular instances, since matter is subject to motion, decay, and change. Yet, as established earlier, the reality of divine speech possesses longitudinal

ontological levels and is rooted in the intellectual realm and the *Umm al-Kitāb* (*the Mother Book*). Mullā Ṣadrā (1989, 1: 300) explicitly states that imaginal and intellectual realities are free from the properties of matter, such as motion, time, and space.

Likewise, Tabataba'i (1973, 18: 84), citing the verses “*We have made it an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason and indeed it is with Us in the Mother Book [and it is] surely sublime and wise*” (Q. 43:3–4), emphasizes that the pre-verbal reality of the Qur'an transcends language and is free from temporal limitation. This immaterial reality is precisely the spirit of meaning. By distinguishing between the container of manifestation (Arabic language and historical culture) and the reality of the content (*rūḥ al-ma'nā*), the theory of the spirit of meaning demonstrates that what Abu Zayd calls the historicity of the text pertains only to the outer shell, the body of words. Although the Qur'an was revealed in the linguistic form of a particular historical period, its reference to the spirit of meaning, being immaterial and trans-historical, endows it with perpetual applicability.

4.3.2. *Refutation Based on the Mechanism of the Designation of Words for General Meanings*

A direct consequence of Abu Zayd's approach is the historicity of meaning itself. While his concern for rendering religious understanding contemporaneous and avoiding intellectual stagnation is understandable, his proposed mechanism, namely, separating a historically fixed meaning from a fluid, contemporary *maghzā*, deprives meaning itself of vitality and transfers dynamism to the mind of the interpreter.

In contrast, the theory of the spirit of meaning, grounded in the principle that words are designated for general meanings, provides an intrinsic and authentic mechanism for semantic dynamism. Abu Zayd's fundamental error lies in conflating the salient instance at the time of revelation with the general meaning of the word. He mistakenly assumes that words were designated for the particular, material instances of their historical context.

Within this alternative framework, semantic dynamism is explained through longitudinal layers, including: the universal end or governing spirit, which constitutes the trans-historical purpose of the verse; the general meaning of the word, which is the true, comprehensive meaning for which the term is designated; and the salient historical instance, which represents only one concrete manifestation of that general meaning for the initial audience. For example, in the verse: “*Prepare against them whatever you can of [military] power and war-horses...*” (Q 8:60), the universal end is deterrence and defensive preparedness; the general meaning of *quwwah*

(power) includes any capacity or instrument that realizes this aim; the general meaning of *ribāṭ al-khayl* is not limited to warhorses but extends to the preparation of any rapid and strategic means of mobility; while the salient instance in that historical context consisted of trained warhorses. Thus, applying *ribāṭ al-khayl* to tanks or fighter jets is not the production of a new *maghzā*, but rather the discovery of the scope of the original general meaning. Another example is the concepts of *lawḥ* (tablet) and *qalam* (pen) in functional rather than material terms: whatever serves as an instrument of inscription is a *qalam*, and whatever receives inscription is a *lawḥ*, both possessing material and immaterial levels (Hasanzadeh Amoli 2006, 350).

Since these general meanings (the spirit of meaning) are immaterial and trans-historical realities, they are never subject to historical expiration. The transformation of salient instances over time is not evidence of the death of meaning, but rather proof of its extensiveness and absoluteness. In this way, the theory of the spirit of meaning dismantles the alleged historical fixity proposed by Abu Zayd and demonstrates that divine discourse is inherently dynamic and living, without any need for the artificial bifurcation between a “dead” meaning and a “living” *maghzā*.

4.4. Methodological Critique: The Inadequacy of Horizontal Reading in Uncovering the Teleology of the Text

The final, and perhaps most tangible, challenge in the theory of Abu Zayd emerges at the level of method. His proposed approach may be described as a *horizontal reading*, meaning that the interpreter, in seeking to understand the text, operates solely within the plane of relations between the text and the socio-historical reality of the time of revelation. Within this framework, the signifiers of the text refer exclusively to signifieds embedded in the cultural and social milieu of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia. The interpretive trajectory thus becomes a horizontal line connecting words to historical events. Such a method confines the interpreter within the prison of linguistic forms and historical context, which function merely as the outer shell of the text. By insisting that the text is the product of a dialectic with historical reality, Abu Zayd directs interpretive effort toward analyzing this outer layer, namely, the occasion of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and the culture of the time.

This horizontal approach, however, is fundamentally at odds with the very aim of interpretation, precisely because of its inability to transcend the surface level. In contrast, the proper method of interpretation, grounded in the theory of the spirit of meaning, is vertical and ascending. Just as realities descend from the realm of abstraction and universality into the domain of

language and multiplicity, true understanding requires a reverse movement, an ascent from words toward the spirit of meaning. Only through such a movement can the interpreter pass beyond the shell and penetrate into the core of discourse, which consists of trans-historical truths. This is precisely what Abu Zayd's horizontal method and his insufficient account of extracting *maghzā* fails to achieve.

Moreover, the ultimate goal of interpretation is to uncover the intended meaning of the speaker. Within the theory of the spirit of meaning, words are designated for the spirit of meaning, and the divine intent consists in conveying universal, guiding truths that find realization in every age. By contrast, Abu Zayd's method, by binding meaning to a specific historical context, effectively substitutes the literal meaning that is, the meaning understood at the moment of revelation, for the enduring and ultimate intent of the discourse.

This methodological deficiency results in reducing the Qur'an, in Abu Zayd's reading, to a mere historical document that reports the concerns of the seventh century, rather than a text bearing a living message for contemporary humanity. The horizontal method, lacking a ladder for ascent from the outward to the inward, is thus incapable of attaining the teleological depth of divine discourse. In summary, the historicist approach, by severing the ontological connection between text and speaker, freezing meaning within historical confines, and adopting a one-dimensional, horizontal method, ultimately fails to access the living and eternal message of the Qur'an, which constitutes the very purpose of its revelation and interpretation.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this research suggest that the theory of the spirit of meaning (*rūḥ al-ma'nā*) invites a re-evaluation of Abu Zayd's approach across several foundational domains:

At the ontological level: By relying on the principle of emanational subsistence of the act with respect to its agent, this theory refutes Abu Zayd's central presupposition regarding the existential independence of the text after revelation. From the perspective of Transcendent Philosophy, divine speech exists in a state of essential dependence upon its agent; its separation from the source of divine life and knowledge entails an intellectual impossibility (the persistence of an effect without its cause). Consequently, reducing the Qur'an to a mere cultural product is incompatible with these metaphysical foundations, since the text at every

moment remains a manifestation of the presence and sustaining power of the eternal Speaker.

At the semantic level: The theory of the spirit of meaning, by drawing a precise distinction between the universal spirit of meaning (an immaterial and trans-historical reality) and its instances and manifestations in history, exposes Abu Zayd's error in equating meaning with its historical instance at the time of revelation. Within this framework, the dynamism of the text is not achieved through attaching a fluid and external *maghzā* to a fixed historical meaning; rather, it arises from the infinite capacity of the spirit of meaning to apply to new instances across time. This ensures both the stability of divine meaning and the flexibility of interpretation.

At the methodological level: In contrast to Abu Zayd's horizontal reading, which confines the interpreter to the plane of text–history relations, this study advances a vertical model of interpretation. In this method, genuine understanding requires an ascending movement from the body of the word to the spirit of meaning in higher ontological realms. Having apprehended that universal reality, the interpreter can then return to the historical domain and apply it to contemporary instances. Unlike Abu Zayd's approach, which substitutes literal meaning for intended meaning, this method opens the way to uncovering the enduring and teleological purpose of divine discourse.

In conclusion, Transcendent Philosophy, through the theory of the spirit of meaning, provides a coherent and philosophically robust framework for understanding revelation, one that avoids both the pitfalls of historical relativism and rigid literalism, and instead enables a living, profound, and responsible engagement with divine speech across all ages.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no competing interests.

References

- Abu Zayd, N. H. (1994). *Naqd al-khiṭāb al-dīnī*. Cairo: Sīnā lil-Nashr.
- Abu Zayd, N. H. (1995). *Al-Naṣṣ, al-sulṭah, al-ḥaqīqah: al-fikr al-dīnī bayna irādāt al-ma'rifah wa irādāt al-haymanah*. Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī.
- Abu Zayd, N. H. (1998). *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ: dirāsah fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī.
- Al-Ghazālī, M. (2004). *Kīmīyā-yi sa'ādāt* (H. Khadivjam, Ed.). Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications.
- Al-Kulaynī, M. (2009). *Uṣūl al-kāfī*. Tehran: Islāmiyyah.
- Al-Majlisī, M. B. (1982). *Bihār al-anwār al-jāmi'a li-durar akhbār al-'immah al-aṭhār*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- Barthes, R. (2007). *Mythologies* (Trans. Daqiqyan). Tehran: Nashre Markaz.
- Benmadi F. Z. (2025). The Premises and Outcomes of Textual Interpretation in the Thought of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8(8), 696-702. <https://doi.org/10.56352/sci/8.8.63>
- Dahhan, Z., Parvini, K., and Motaghizadeh, I. (2025). Analyzing the Historicity of Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd in the Textual Interpretation Process based on the Use of Grammatical Mood in Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar: A Study of Surah Al-Anfal. *Literary Quranic Researches*, 11(4), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.22034/paq.2024.2035065.3873>
- Falyouna, N. (2020). Analytical study on Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's understanding of religious texts in Islam. *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, 15(2), 45-55. <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol15no2.4>
- Hasanzadeh Amoli, H. (2006). *Ten Persian essay* (in Persian). Qom: Alif Lām Mīm.
- Hasanzadeh Amoli, H. (2007). *A hundred words on the cognition of nafs* (in Persian). Qom: Alif Lām Mīm.
- Ibn 'Arabī, M. (n.d.). *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir.
- Ibn Farīḥah, A. (2018). *Ishkāliyyat qirā'at al-Qur'ān fī ḍaw' al-tārīkhiyyah 'inda Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd*. *Majallah al-Tadwīn*, University of Oran 2.
- Khomeini, R. (2002). *Taqrīrāt falsafah Imām Khomeini: Sharḥ al-manzūmah* (in Persian). (M. M. Ardabīlī, Ed.). Tehran: Institute for Compilation & Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works.
- López-Farjeat, L. X. (2024). Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's Use of Classical Theological and Philosophical Islamic Sources in His Qur'ānic Hermeneutics. *FILOZOFIA*, 79(8), 892–906. <https://doi.org/10.31577/filozofia.2024.79.8.4>


- Ma'aref, M., and Shoja'i, R. (2020). A Critique of Abu Zayd's View on Naskh and its Relation to the Historicity of the Quran. *Pazhouhesh Name-ye Quran va Hadith*, 14(27), 235-256.
- Majmū'ah min al-mu'allifin. (2019). *Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd: dirāsah al-naẓariyyāt wa naqdihā*. Iraq: al-'Atabah al-'Abbāsiyyah, Islamic Center for Strategic Studies.
- Mirzaei, M. A. and Hossaini, S. R. (2025). A Critical Review of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's View on the Challenge of Tradition and Modernity. *Interdisciplinary Studies of Quran & Hadith*, 2(3), 433-460. <https://doi.org/10.30497/isqh.2025.248997.1064>
- Movahedinia, M. and Fadaei Mehrabani, M. (2023). Expedient Historicity; a Critique of the Thought and Opinions of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and Mohammed Arkoun. *Islamic Political Studies*, 5(2), 189-216. <https://doi.org/10.22081/jips.2023.75469>
- Mufid, A., Massoweang, A. K., Mujizatullah, M., Muslim, A., & Yani, Z. (2023). Rereading Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's method of interpreting religious texts. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 79(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8102>
- Mullā Ṣadrā, M. (1975). *Al-mabda' wa al-ma'ād*. Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy.
- Mullā Ṣadrā, M. (1984). *Maḥāṭib al-ghayb*. Tehran: Institute for Cultural Studies in Philosophy.
- Mullā Ṣadrā, M. (1987). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm*. Qom: Bīdār.
- Mullā Ṣadrā, M. (1989). *Al-ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah fī al-asfār al-arba'ah*. Qom: Maktabat al-Muṣṭafawī.
- Mullā Ṣadrā, M. (1996). *Al-shawāhid al-rubūbiyyah fī al-manāhij al-sulūkiyyah*. Beirut: Arab History Foundation.
- Naupal, N. (2019). The Criticism of Literalism in Reading the Qur'an through Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd hermeneutics. *International Review of Humanities Studies*.
- Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī, M. (1994). *Sharḥ tawḥīd al-Ṣadūq* (N. Ḥabībī, Ed.). Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.
- Qarai, A. Q. (2004). *Translation of the Holy Qur'an*. London: ICAS.
- Sabziwārī, H. (1981). *Maḥāṭib al-uṣūl*. Qom: Imam Khomeini Educational & Research Institute.
- Sabziwārī, H. (2011). *Sharḥ al-manzūmah*. Tehran: Nashre Nāb.
- Sa'di A, and Niktab Eta'ati, S. (2018). A Critical Study of Nasr Hamed Abu Zeyd's View of Historicity of the Quran with an Emphasis on Verbality of Divine Revelation. *ANDISHE-NOVIN-E-DINI A Quarterly Research*. 13(51), 73-88.

- Sukidi (2009). Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd and the Quest for a Humanistic Hermeneutics of the Qur'ān. *Die Welt des Islams*, 49(2), 181-211. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006009X458393>
- Sulaiman, A. (2023). From Textuality to Discursivity; The Hermeneutics of Quran Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. *Sophist: Jurnal Sosial Politik Kajian Islam dan Tafsir*, 5(2), 304-327.
- Tabataba'i, S. M. H. (1973). *Al-mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-A'lamī.
- Tayyib Hosseini, M. (2009). *Polysemy in the Qur'an* (in Persian). Qom: Hawza and University Research Center.
- Va'ezī, A. (2010). Criticism of the Exposition of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd on the Historicity of the Quran. *Qur'an Shinakht*, 3(2), 41-65.

The Discursive Value-Oriented Analysis of the Story of Moses and Khidr in the Reconstruction of Emotional Meanings: A Semiotic-Semantic Approach

Mahnaz Amiri ¹ 

Ph.D. in Qur'anic Studies and Hadith, Faculty of Theology, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran.

Hamid Reza Shairi 

Professor, Department of French Language, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran.

Article History: Received 11 April 2025; Accepted 8 October 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

The narrative of Prophet Moses and Khidr constitutes a complex structure amenable to semiotic analysis. By employing a discourse-oriented semiotic-semantic approach to this Qur'anic account, three distinct discursive modalities can be identified. Initially, an actional discourse emerges, driven by Moses' interaction with the external world. Subsequently, an interactional system develops through Moses' dialogue with Khidr, other subjects, and various phenomena. Within this system, the meaning-making process undergoes a significant transformation. Finally, a cognitive-affective system arises from Moses' engagement with his inner world and his perceptual relationship with phenomena. The actantial pattern of the story centers on Moses' agency and his oscillation between internal and external realms. Furthermore, the narrative exhibits inductive and cognitive-interactional discursive systems capable of generating and interpreting plural meanings. The primary aim of this study is to elucidate, through semiotic-semantic discourse analysis, how the narrative discourse of Moses and Khidr manifests phenomenologically. It explores how the emergence of internal impulses and tensive states in the protagonist develops aesthetic and affective dimensions, ultimately endowing his actions with meaning, cognition, and value. The findings indicate that the dominant narrative trajectory involves a transition from an actional regime to interactional-cognitive and inner-affective systems, thereby prioritizing the internal and

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: mh.am888@ahl.ui.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I2.10>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_107100.html?lang=en

emotional realms. Consequently, the meaning-making process within this narrative not only encompasses actional, interactional, and cognitive-affective modalities but also undergoes elevation and evolution. In this dynamic flow of meaning production, Moses evolves into an active subject, reconstructing and generating the truth of Divine Unity within the interactional and cognitive-affective discursive systems.

KEYWORDS: Qur'an, Moses, Khidr, Action, Thymic experience, Semiotic-semantic analysis, Narrative.

1. Introduction

The semiotic-semantic approach to discourse analysis is a highly effective methodological framework for examining religious texts, particularly the Holy Qur'an. This model yields profound insights into the structural analysis of Qur'anic verses, particularly Qur'anic narratives, and offers a robust framework for understanding the mechanisms of both meaning production and reception. The narrative of Moses and Khidr, recounted in Surah al-Kahf (Q. 18:62–80), stands as one of the most compelling and structurally complex accounts within the Qur'anic corpus. Regarding the temporal setting, exegetical traditions suggest that this journey occurred after Moses had traversed significant stages of prophethood, including divine communion, the liberation of the Children of Israel from Pharaonic oppression, and the reception of the Torah and the Tablets. This period corresponds to a moment when Moses perceived himself as possessing the highest degree of knowledge on earth (Tabataba'i 1996, 13: 359). Spatially, the narrative unfolds at *Majma' al-Bahrayn* (the Junction of the Two Seas).

This narrative effectively integrates stative, actional, and interactional discursive regimes, presenting a sensory-cognitive discourse embedded with multiple layers of meaning. Beyond investigating these sensory-cognitive regimes through affective-state and actional processes, this study elucidates how the subject (Moses) undergoes a transformation in his mode of presence and receptivity to meaning vis-à-vis the Divine. It is posited that, within the framework of discourse analysis, meaning generation is not confined to actional structures; rather, stative and interactional configurations are equally constitutive. Consequently, this article employs a semiotic-semantic approach to explore the dominant discursive systems within the Qur'anic narrative of Moses and Khidr. Accordingly, the primary research questions are as follows:

1. How does the narrative discourse of Moses and Khidr transition from

an actional regime to a stative regime, thereby engaging the realm of inner phenomena and affective states?

2. How does the integration of stative and interactional regimes elevate the meaning-making process? Consequently, in what ways does the shift from an actional system to stative and interactional configurations facilitate the expansion and complexification of semantic layers?

The present study posits that the discourse governing the narrative of Khidr and Moses, characterized by its sensory-cognitive, interactional, and axiological nature, is particularly suited for analysis within a semiotic-semantic framework. Consequently, in addressing these research questions, the primary objective is to elucidate how external and objective phenomena contribute to the formation of discursive values, thereby generating distinct sensory and cognitive discursive systems. Within this narrative model, the subject establishes an objective presence vis-à-vis the external world, other subjects, and objects. Through this transformative process, the individual self evolves into a transcendent self. Thus, the narrative of Moses and Khidr fulfills an objective, pragmatic, and transcendent function, transmuting objective activities within the stative framework into a new supra-value, specifically that of spiritual growth and development. Methodologically, this research is based on documentary analysis, employing a semiotic-semantic discourse analysis approach.

2. Literature Review

While the scholarly literature on semiotic-semantics is extensive, a comprehensive review exceeds the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, this section highlights select foundational studies to contextualize the current research and delineate its distinct contribution.

Notably, Greimas and Fontanille (1991), in their seminal work *Sémiotique des passions*, investigated the constitutive role of affect in meaning production. They elucidated how the thymic category, encompassing states of euphoria and dysphoria, modulates the subject's evaluation of societal values and norms. Furthermore, Babak Moein (2017) expands upon the discursive semantic systems inherent in narrative analysis, offering a critique of classical approaches. Shairi (2007; 2009) has elucidated the theoretical shift from structural semiotics to semiotic-semantic discourse analysis, investigating the configuration of discursive regimes within literary texts. In the realm of narrative fiction, Zokhtareh (2018) utilized a semiotic-semantic framework to examine the motivational

functions within *One Thousand and One Nights*, tracing the narrative trajectory from mortality to immortality.

Regarding Qur'anic discourse, Nasiri, Moti, and Amiri (2020) analysed Surah al-Naba' employing the tensive model (*sémiotique tensive*), while Nasiri and Amiri (2018) applied a similar tensive discursive framework to the account of Moses' mission in Surah Tā Hā. Most recently, Faridasr et al. (2023) offered a narratological reading of the narrative of Moses and Khidr, focusing primarily on its mystical dimensions. Additionally, Davoudimoghadam et al. (2017) examined the narrative through the lens of counter-discourse (*contre-discours*) in their study of Surah al-Kahf, juxtaposing the story of Moses and Khidr with that of the Companions of the Cave.

While these scholarly works provide a vital foundation, the present study diverges from them by transcending a purely structuralist analysis. It investigates the mechanism of meaning production across actional, inductive, sensory-cognitive, and stative discursive frameworks. Furthermore, it elucidates how the subject's relation to objects and the external world facilitates the transmutation of linguistic signs into transcendent signs. Whereas prior scholarship has predominantly emphasized the mystical or exegetical dimensions of the narrative, this research, grounded in established semiotic-semantic theories, specifically focuses on the interactional, stative, and actional dimensions of the discourse in order to reveal its dynamic value-generating process.

3. *Semiotic-Semantics*

Algirdas Julien Greimas, the founder of the Paris School of Semiotics, gained prominence for his work on narrative semantics following the publication of his seminal book, *Structural Semantics (Sémiotique structurale)*. Drawing upon the binary oppositions of Saussurean and Jakobsonian linguistics, and adapting Propp's narratology, Greimas proposed a structural model for narrative analysis (Abbasi 2014). Despite the apparent diversity and complexity of narratives, they all adhere to a specific underlying structure. Complementing Greimas' actional regime, the stative discourse structure (*parcours d'état*) serves as one of the most effective tools for identifying and retrieving latent meanings within the text.

Meaning is fluid and elusive, deriving its influence precisely from this elusiveness. It emerges at the phenomenological intersection of the subject and the external world (object), possessing no definitive terminus. Rather, meaning traverses a continuum from the natural to the supernatural. Within

sensory-cognitive discourse, the subject interacts with the external world, and, based on the subject's affective states, a specific mode of reception and perception is formed. The reception of meaning is thus a sensory-cognitive event: the subject's senses engage with the world, producing an aesthetic perception that shapes meaning. This meaning temporarily detaches the subject from immediate reality. Following a profound aesthetic experience (that is, an internal movement), the subject returns to the world, though now transformed by this aesthetic encounter (Greimas 2010). Whenever discursive elements impact the perceptions and feelings of the agents, a stative condition arises. In such a state, shifts in emotions and thymic feelings propel action. The stative subject, in a phenomenological relationship with meaning, operates based on a sensory-cognitive and tensive-affective presence (Nasiri et al. 2020).

3.1. Features of the Actional Regime

One fundamental discursive regime is the actional regime. This mode was among the first to be rigorously theorized and extensively studied. Prominent theorists, including Georges Dumézil, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Paul Ricoeur, Marcel Mauss, Roland Barthes, and Algirdas Julien Greimas, have contributed seminal theories to the domain of narrative action. There is a consensus that narrative discourse possesses a central core designated as “action,” wherein the actant (or subject) strives to acquire or control a value-object (Shairi 2016). This discursive system operates with a mechanical logic, establishing meaning through the relationship between actants within a predetermined narrative program (Bertrand 2000, 175).

In this regime, the subject acts in accordance with a mandate or a prior fiduciary contract (Shairi 2007). From a semiotic-semantic perspective, the actant's motivation stems from the premise that the subject faces uncertainty regarding the stability of affairs. This state of lack (*manque*) generates a sense of threat, which is resolved only when the subject restores the lost certainty (Fontanille 1999). Greimas asserts that most narratives initiate with a state of lack, necessitating a contract—either with oneself or with another agent—to resolve it (Abbasi & Yarmand 2011).

In this system, regardless of whether the action originates from the subject or another agent, the primary focus is on the transformative role of action in generating desirable meaning. Thus, action serves as the narrative nucleus, altering the status and meaning of the actants. To fulfill its function, action must effectuate a transformation of meaning and establish a system of value exchange. Consequently, three concepts—action, value, and transformation—are pivotal to understanding actional narrative systems

(Shairi 2016). A defining characteristic of this system is the segmentation of action into two phases: competence (potentiality) and performance (execution). In this process, the actant first acquires the necessary modalities to act (competence) before actualizing the deed (performance).

3.2. Features of the Stative Regime

From a discursive perspective, cognition is an active process that manifests through specific linguistic strategies. These strategies operate within distinct domains, including actional, affective, cognitive-interactive, and stative patterns. The actional system is characterized by a logical sequence and rational calculation. In stark contrast, the stative (or mythic) regime constitutes a discourse that defines the mode of existence and the conditions of presence vis-à-vis the world and phenomena, thereby shaping the subject's phenomenological relationship with the object. It establishes a potent presence that "compels belief," rendering avoidance impossible; its nature is fundamentally evental (Fazeli & Alizadehzadeh 2015).

The stative mode represents a presence wherein the lived body experiences the immediacy of living, encountering every sign in its phenomenological essence. Thus, the stative regime signifies a mode of presence in which the subject's body, acting as the phenomenological anchor of interaction, is poised to respond to a world experienced as immediate, novel, and emergent. The stative subject is perpetually attuned to unpredictable reactions and impulses. Consequently, this state involves an affective fusion between the subject and the world, characterized by a readiness to register this presence. The factors determining the interactive process and the mode of semiotic presence depend on discursive conditions and the perspective through which situational parameters are negotiated. This indicates that meaning is not confined solely to language. Rather, language itself is contingent upon an external world, which shapes the subject's lived experience (Shairi 2016).

3.3. Sensory-Perceptual Processes and Their Semiotic Implications

Sensory fluxes possess the intrinsic capacity to generate meaning. A significant portion of linguistic production originates in affectivity, with the five senses—sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste—collectively contributing to the meaning-making process. In literary discourse, these sensory streams play a pivotal role and cannot be overlooked. Greimas

posits that such sensory elements are governed by a mechanism described as an “escape from reality”—a divergence that itself engenders aesthetic forms. Encountering reality behind the veil of appearances produces a nuanced or deviant meaning rather than a literal one. Since observing an object from a single vantage point inevitably conceals other aspects—thereby rendering every meaning partial or perspectival—aesthetics and phenomenology must be invoked to access the fundamental essence of sensory experience (Shairi 2006).

To complement the classical narrative system, which relies on an instrumental relationship between subject and object, Eric Landowski introduces an alternative regime based on “co-presence” and the sensory-perceptual interaction between subject and object. In this system, the subject-object connection is no longer defined mechanically by states of junction (having or lacking), nor is it predetermined by narrative programs. Rather, it involves immediate and mutual interactions among subjects and even between objects and subjects (Babak Moein 2015, 79).

At the narrative’s inception, Moses functions as a stative subject (*sujet d’état*). A significant semantic pivot at this stage is the emergence of the modal verb “to want” (*vouloir*). Through the modality of “wanting,” Moses initiates an internal movement and acquires the modal competence (that is, the necessary energy) required for action. God informs Moses of a servant in a distant land possessing knowledge that Moses lacks, indicating that he will find him at the “Confluence of the Two Seas” (*Majma‘ al-Bahrayn*), marked by the location where a fish is lost. Moses’ desire for growth propels him to depart from his familiar territory toward the Confluence. Here, the stative condition transmutes into action, serving as the modal precursor to Moses’ subsequent performance.

Consequently, the modality of “wanting” (*vouloir*) evolves into the modality of “obligation” or “having-to” (*devoir*), propelling Moses’ movement through the necessity of action. This deontic force compels Moses to depart from his initial locus, thereby triggering the dynamic process of the discourse. Spatial displacement is a prerequisite for the emergence of narrative discourse. Since relocation enables access to a value-object, it can be interpreted as a “quest” (*quête*) (Abbasi & Yarmand 2011). Seeking self-knowledge and an understanding of the world, Moses abandons his familiar setting. As a cognitive subject, he reaches a liminal or intermediate space, establishing a “meta-discursive” situation that prepares the ground for accessing a superior locus.

At this juncture, the cognitive subject is situated between two realms: the realm of habituation and the realm of semantic transformation and

transcendence (Esmaili et al. 2013). In the discourse of Moses and Khidr, intermediate loci correspond to stages of a journey that is simultaneously internal (stative) and external (that is, tangible and biological). Through this trajectory, the external passage gives way to an internal stative journey, resulting in a personal and existential transformation that ultimately enables Moses to comprehend the underlying meaning of Khidr's actions.

Fundamentally, narrative discourse aims to transmute chaotic conditions into structured order—a process vividly evident in the narrative of Moses and Khidr. The narrative discourse is dynamic: the stative subject transitions from stasis to active engagement with the external world, thereby gaining insight into higher values. Through his interactions with phenomena, such as the scuttling of the ship, the restoration of the wall, and the slaying of the youth, Khidr reconfigures the subject's axiological (value) system, assigning greater meaning and weight to his experiences.

In this dynamic discourse, the narrative recounts fundamental transformations. Moses undergoes a stative shift, and his perspective is fundamentally altered. This qualitative, value-centric knowledge possesses tangible and existential functions, producing a profound internal effect on Moses. According to Greimas (2010), such sensory-perceptual interactions lead to a fusion or intertwining between subject and object, thereby creating multi-layered relationships involving the audience and all discursive elements.

3.4. A Semiotic-Semantic Analysis of the Narrative of Khidr and Moses

Discourse initiates with the actant's initial state. This primary condition is characterized as a "deficiency of meaning" (*manque*) or a disruption of discursive equilibrium. In this phase, Moses, functioning as the subject, perceives a disjunction from the value-object. The subject in this modality is designated as a "stative subject" (*sujet d'état*). To achieve conjunction (union), he must undergo a transformation from a stative subject into an "operative subject" (*sujet de faire*). The discourse of Khidr and Moses is fundamentally narrative: the operative subject strives to transmute an undesirable semantic state into a desirable and complete one. Although opposing forces (that is, anti-subjects) initially impede his progress, and Moses occasionally experiences hesitation, his affective competence enables him to persevere. He advances through the narrative trajectory, ultimately attaining esoteric knowledge and a profound comprehension of the world (Bahmani et al. 2016).

The structural trajectories of this discursive narrative are generated through the interventions of the operative subject (*sujet de faire*), aimed at liquidating the deficiency (*manque*). The subject must endeavour to alter the status quo through a transformational process in order to attain transcendence. In this discourse, Moses' privation of perfective values constitutes the central narrative deficiency. The stative subject (*sujet d'état*) recognizes his disjunction from these values. Consequently, to achieve a state of conjunction (union), he transforms into an operative subject. He embarks on a quest for an agent capable of facilitating his transition from this stative condition.

Accordingly, he acquires the requisite information (that is, cognitive competence) necessary to initiate the preliminary action. Upon ascertaining the locus where Khidr may be found, the operative subject mobilizes toward the Confluence of the Two Seas (*Majma' al-Bahrayn*), as evidenced by the verse: "*When Moses said to his lad, 'I will go on [journeying] until I have reached the confluence of the two seas, or have spent a long time [travelling]'*" (Q. 18:60; Tabataba'i 1996, 13: 339).

3.5. Spatial Dimension of the Narrative

Regarding the geographical localization of the "Confluence of the Two Seas" (*Majma' al-Bahrayn*), certain scholars hypothesize that it represents the easternmost extremity of the Mediterranean Sea and the westernmost point of the Persian Gulf. Consequently, this location is interpreted as a landmass situated between these two limits, a distinctive locus described as the meeting point of two distinct bodies of water. Lexically, the term *huqub* denotes an extended epoch or era. The exegetical import of the verse, in which Moses declares to his attendant, "*I will go on [journeying] until I have reached the confluence of the two seas, or have spent a long time [travelling],*" implies a commitment to a protracted journey, regardless of its temporal duration. Prompted by divine revelation, Moses exercises agency, resolving to traverse the distance toward this pivotal location.

The subject's condition is defined spatially, as narrative transformation necessitates displacement; he must abandon his "familiar space," the locus of established authority and stability. This "space of authority" serves as the point of departure for the protagonist's trajectory; thus, Moses' trial originates within this familiar domain. However, the primary ordeal unfolds in a location distinct from his homeland, referred to as the "space of the other" (or the heterotopic space of action). In this alien environment, the hero's competence (potential) is actualized into performance (action) (Abbasi & Yarmand 2011).

Predominantly, the actant's pragmatic or actional activity is concomitant with spatial displacement, as remaining within a space of habituation and repetition impedes transformation (Esmaili et al. 2013). Moses directs his trajectory toward a target value, aiming for an object imbued with semiotic significance. Without this axiological objective, the operative subject cannot be fully constituted (Greimas 2010). The goal organizes and orients actions toward the object of value. For Moses, this object is the acquisition of knowledge and esoteric insight, necessitating the initiation of his journey from his homeland toward the Confluence of the Two Seas ("*until I have reached the confluence of the two seas*") (Q. 18:60).

3.6. Meeting of Moses and Khidr

Following the departure for the Confluence of the Two Seas, the narrative transcends its initial state and enters the median phase, which constitutes the dynamic core of the discourse. Prior to entering the primary space of action, Moses must traverse a transitional zone, conceptually termed the "intermediary space" (Abbasi & Yarmand 2011). Upon reaching the approximate location of the confluence, the attendant (identified in exegetical traditions as Joshua) inadvertently left the fish intended for sustenance near a spring, an act of forgetfulness encapsulated by the Qur'anic phrase: "*...they forgot their Fish...*" (Q. 18:61). According to Tabataba'i (1996, 13: 339), the disappearance of the fish functioned primarily as a semiotic index signaling the meeting with Khidr, rather than merely constituting a biological event of revivification.

Moses and his attendant forgot their fish, and proceeded along their path. The event described in the verse "*...which found its way into the sea, sneaking away*" (Q. 18:61) delineates an intermediate space within the narrative discourse of Khidr and Moses—a transitional zone they were required to traverse prior to the commencement of the main action. Consequently, Moses and his companion, Joshua, inadvertently passed beyond the Confluence of the Two Seas (Q. 18:60), the very locus where Khidr was situated. This process of seeking and epistemic curiosity, driven by the necessity to alter the condition of the operative subject, constitutes the dynamic dimension of the discourse, as it entails a transition from one phase to another in order to effectuate transformation (Bahmani et al. 2016). Thus, the protagonist transcends the initial sequence and enters the median sequence, which represents the dynamic core of the narrative.

Lexically, the verb *fartaddā* is derived from the root *irtidād*, signifying a return to the point of origin. The term *qaṣaṣ* denotes the act of following footsteps or tracking. From the verse statement, "*He said, 'That is what we*

were after!' So they returned, retracing their footsteps" (Q. 18:64), it can be deduced that Moses had previously been commanded through Divine Revelation to meet Khidr (the Divine Sage) at the Confluence of the Two Seas (*Majma' al-Bahrayn*), and that a specific sign had been provided to him. Precisely upon hearing the account of the fish, Moses declared, "*That is what we were after!*" (Q. 18:64). Recognizing this phenomenon as the designated semiotic sign for locating Khidr, they immediately turned back, retracing their steps to reach the location from which they had come.

Thus, they returned along the same path, continuing their search for Khidr while tracking their own route. After traversing the distance, they arrived at the precise spot where the fish had been forgotten, referred to in the verse: "*When we took shelter at the rock...*" (Q. 18:63). This location recalled for Moses the state in which they had stopped near the rock to rest briefly (Tabataba'i 1996, 13: 341).

3.7. Manipulative and Interactional Regime

At the core of the actional dimension lies a manipulative (or inductive) modality grounded in prompting, persuasion, or solicitation. The narrative further exemplifies a cognitive-interactional system of inductive discourse. All events pivot around two primary axes: Khidr's actions and Moses' reactions, interconnected through the functions of objects and the external world. Upon returning to the initial locus near the rock, they encountered Khidr: "*they found one of Our servants whom We had granted a mercy from Ourselves, and taught him a knowledge from Our own*" (Q. 18:65). This discursive segment depicts the confrontation between the two principal actants.

Initially, Moses remains receptive to Khidr's presence, as this mode of inductive discourse relies on elicitation. The narrative's organizing force resolves the subject's disorientation, culminating in the encounter with Khidr. Moses greets Khidr with deference and requests permission to follow and learn from him: "*May I follow you for the purpose that you teach me some of the probity you have been taught?*" (Q. 18:66). Khidr responds that his actions are arduous to witness and that Moses may lack the patience (*ṣabr*) necessary to endure them. Fearing the forfeiture of this opportunity, Moses pledges steadfast patience, as expressed in the verse: "*He said, 'You will find me, God willing, to be patient, and I will not disobey you in any matter'*" (Q. 18:69).

In this preliminary phase, Moses solicits guidance. Khidr, functioning as the sender (*destinateur*), conditions the acceptance of the journey on Moses'

commitment to silence (that is, refraining from questioning). This stage constitutes the preparatory phase, illustrating manipulative (inductive) discourse, wherein the interaction between actants generates or modulates action (Shairi & Vafaei 2009). According to Courtés (2003, 95), manipulative strategies encompass suggestion, request, intimidation, temptation, enticement, provocation, and flattery. Here, Moses employs a polite request for instruction. Only after this contractual phase does the operative subject enter the decisive test (*épreuve décisive*), leading both Moses and Khidr into the narrative's primary operations.

3.8. Analysis of the Dynamic Discursive Process

Moses' modal desire (*vouloir*) for growth and elevation serves as the catalyst for his agency. This modality possesses such potency that it effectively subordinates other discursive actants to its logic. Khidr imposes a mandate of absolute silence upon Moses, prohibiting any interrogation until the designated moment. This interaction establishes a fiduciary contract (*contrat fiduciaire*) and delineates the conditions of the probationary test (*épreuve qualifiante*) between the two subjects.

The fiduciary contract serves to test Moses' agency, cognitive evaluation, and practical judgment. This tension is exemplified by his immediate objection to Khidr's scuttling of the ship, where he exclaims: "...Did you make a hole in it to drown its people? You have certainly done a monstrous thing!" (Q. 18:71). Moses perceives this act as a transgression and a moral aberration. However, Khidr later elucidates the teleological rationale behind the act: namely, the preservation of the vessel from seizure by a tyrannical king. The underlying semiotic principle is that a seemingly destructive act constitutes a protective measure, thereby serving a higher instrumental value.

Moses repeatedly reacts to Khidr's performance with objection, prompting Khidr to reiterate the conditions of the contract regarding patience: "...Did I not say, indeed you cannot have patience with me?" (Q. 18:72). Moses renews the contract, demonstrating persistence toward the target value of epistemic and spiritual elevation. Following their disembarkation, the narrative trajectory progresses to a second incident involving the slaying of a youth. This dynamic progression transforms Moses into an active cognitive subject, preparing him for a higher tier of understanding. Khidr justifies this act by revealing the hidden truth: "As for the boy, his parents were faithful [persons], and We feared he would overwhelm them with rebellion and unfaith" (Q. 18:80). He then continues: "So We desired that their Lord should give them in exchange one better than

him in respect of purity and closer in mercy” (Q. 18:81).

In the final verse under discussion, regarding the repair of the wall and in response to Moses' objection, Khidr unveils the mystery of his action as follows: “As for the wall, it belonged to two boy orphans in the city. Under it there was a treasure belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man. So your Lord desired that they should come of age and take out their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do that out of my own accord. This is the interpretation of that over which you could not maintain patience” (Q. 18:82). Finally, to dispel any lingering doubt or ambiguity for Moses, and to ensure certainty that all these actions were executed according to a specific divine plan and mission, Khidr added: “...*I did not do that out of my own accord*” (Q. 18:82), indicating that his actions were performed in accordance with divine command (Makarem Shirazi 1995, 12: 505). Despite the inhospitality of the town's inhabitants, Khidr proceeded to reconstruct the wall. He declares that he undertook this task out of regard for the righteousness of the two orphans' parents, lest the wall collapse, expose the treasure, and place it in jeopardy.

3.9. Transcendental and Stative Regimes of the Narrative

The specific quality of Moses' renewed commitment reflects the intensity of his modal desire (*vouloir*), placing the narrative trajectory explicitly under the direction of Khidr (the Sender). However, despite the removal of operative barriers, Moses fails to sustain the requisite modal competence, specifically patience, perseverance, and adherence to the fiduciary contract. Consequently, his impulses are sanctioned, and he is shifted from the position of an aspiring operative subject to a disqualified role, thereby rendering his evaluative agency ineffective. In other words, the interaction between Moses and Khidr illustrates the tensive dialectic between the modalities of “wanting” (*vouloir*) and “prohibition” (negative *devoir* or *ne pas devoir*). When the prohibition (“must not”) is transgressed, the intensity of desire propels the subject toward unauthorized action. The Prohibitor (Khidr) thus assumes the responsibility of enforcing the rule and restraining the subject's desires.

Citing the Qur'anic decree, “*He said, ‘This is where you and I shall part. I will inform you about the interpretation of that over which you could not maintain patience’*” (Q. 18:78), Khidr pronounces the final sanction (*sanction pragmatique*). He concludes, based on the inductive evidence of the preceding events, that Moses lacks the capacity to endure the esoteric rationale underlying the actions. It is at this juncture that Khidr initiates the separation and unveils the hidden truths (*ta'wīl*) underlying the events that

exceeded Moses' tolerance. The narrative, by positioning Moses as a subject in tension, demonstrates how the modal conflict between "prohibition" and "desire" precipitates human impatience.

Throughout the narrative trajectory, Moses experiences cognitive crises and commits discursive transgressions stemming from a deficit of patience. These crises compel him to negate his initial state, thereby propelling him toward a new discursive position. After experiencing an internal void (*vide*), which creates the capacity for a new existential reception, Moses advances toward transcendence. This movement, which is fundamentally transcendental, confers new meaning upon his existential trajectory, rendering prior surface-level interpretations obsolete. Ultimately, Moses enters the realm of pure meaning as a transformed stative subject (*sujet d'état*). Distinct from the pragmatic structure governing Khiḍr's actions, he generates supra-individual and trans-valuative meaning.

3.10. Theological and Semiotic Dimensions of Unity (*al-Tawhīd*)

Many mystics posit that the ultimate telos of the spiritual path is the realization of Divine Unity (*al-Tawhīd*), which unfolds in three graduated stages: the Unity of Acts, the Unity of Attributes, and the Unity of Essence. In the companionship of Moses and Khiḍr, both phenomena and stative conditions are unveiled to Moses. At the conclusion of their journey, Khiḍr discloses the ontological reality of existence and interprets the hermeneutics of his actions. Moses observes Khiḍr's performance and reacts primarily because the meanings initially generated in his cognition suffer from an axiological inversion relative to the truth.

For instance, Moses decodes Khiḍr's actions, the scuttling of the ship, the slaying of the youth, and the gratuitous restoration of the wall, as transgressive, unjust, or irrational. Operating within a limited epistemic perspective and a context-bound understanding, he assumes that Khiḍr is maliciously sinking a vessel, murdering an innocent soul, or failing to demand fair compensation for labour (Tabataba'i 1996, 13: 346).

This narrative exemplifies a dynamic discourse, wherein constituent elements undergo a trajectory of transformation. In such a discursive system, meaning evolves, guiding human agents from initial states toward secondary and elevated states (Portner & Partee 2002). Khiḍr possesses profound knowledge of esoteric realities (*bāṭin*) and the essence of events, whereas Moses lacks this immediate awareness. Often, the exoteric appearance (*ẓāhir*) of events diverges from their inner significance; what appears

incoherent or illogical on the surface may, within the deep structure, be profoundly sacred, calculated, and teleologically rational (Makarem Shirazi 1995, 12: 487).

3.11. *From Ritualism to Phenomenological Engagement*

Moses sought spiritual elevation and proximity to the Divine, initially equating this pursuit with ritualistic worship and ascetic practices such as prayer, vigil, and seclusion. Khidr, conversely, guided him toward empirical pedagogy and phenomenological observation, demonstrating that spiritual progression is not confined to solitary devotion but may also be achieved through direct semiotic engagement with the world (Gunābādī 1989, 2: 474–475). From a semiotic-discursive perspective, meaning emerges even in the absence of a predetermined subjective plan, specifically through the subject's interaction with the world. Greimas (2010) terms this emergent significance “stative meaning.”

All interactions between Khidr and Moses depict a transition from one actional state to another. The narrative's dynamism, linked to the progression between stages, introduces the fundamental concept of “becoming” (*devenir*). By experiencing concrete phenomena alongside Khidr, Moses, functioning as the stative modulator, attains a transcendental stage, which constitutes the narrative's central axis. The meanings and values within the story are generated according to the stative regime (*régime d'état*) and its transformative function. Khidr, as a divine pedagogue, conveys higher meanings not merely through dialogue but also through performative action, thereby employing both the actional and stative dimensions of discourse.

3.12. *Axiological Process of the Narrative Discourse*

Mystics delineate the practical realization of Divine Unity (*al-Tawhīd*) into three strata: the Unity of Acts, the Unity of Attributes, and the Unity of Essence. The stages of Moses' journey can be interpreted through this theological framework. In the initial stage—the scuttling of the ship—Moses perceives the act through the lens of human agency, whereas it is fundamentally a divine act contingent upon God's will. This episode initiates Moses into the Unity of Acts. The subsequent stage, situated between the Unity of Essence and the Unity of Acts, representing the transition to the Unity of Attributes. The final stage culminates in complete Unity of Essence (al-Ālūsī 1994, 8: 338).

Moses' movement is propelled by an internal modal drive rather than

external coercion, necessitating the navigation of prohibitions and interactions with other discursive actants. Khiḍr systematically transmits values and meanings through empirical exemplars, recalibrating Moses' perception in order to categorize and integrate experiences in accordance with divine criteria. By immersing Moses in the phenomenological reality of events, Khiḍr enhances his intuitive cognition, instructing him to transcend judgments based solely on exoteric appearances. Khiḍr's actions, manifested as external experiences, frequently generate inverse values. They appear incongruent with standard narrative logic because they confront Moses with a complex and turbulent reality. However, although meaning does not invariably adhere to a linear structure, the generated values remain consistent with the stative regime (*régime d'état*).

To attain elevated stations, Moses endures tribulations alongside Khiḍr, thereby acquiring essential gnostic insights. Each stage demands the acquisition of new experiences. Even when he breaches the fiduciary contract, Moses must realign himself with the established normative framework. Initially, the dynamic discourse foregrounds the operative subject's modal desire (*vouloir*). Since movement is oriented toward attaining a value-object, it constitutes a "quest" (*quête*). Moses transitions into a novel realm, experiencing "becoming" (*devenir*) through spatial displacement. In this process, the stative subject encounters internal states, thereby achieving a renewed mode of presence and meaning through the stative process.

Within the narrative economy, inverse values are supplanted by cognitive values, marking a transition from semantic expansion to internal tensive impulses and deep meanings. Disparate discursive elements converge, as all signs and external factors contribute to the narrative's resolution. Through this transformative discourse, Moses progresses from a dysphoric state of disjunction (separation) and absence toward a new state of conjunction (union) with the value-object. Achieving this transformation necessitates navigating multiple stages, collectively termed the discursive transformation process. In shifting from an undesirable state, the operative subject undergoes a qualifying test (*épreuve qualifiante*).

4. Conclusion

The semiotic-semantic analysis of the narrative of Khidr and Moses reveals the operation of multiple discursive regimes, specifically the sensory-perceptual, stative (mythico-symbolic), and actional-inductive systems. Within this narrative, discourse assumes a phenomenological dimension; an internal impulse impacts the protagonist, Moses, generating sensory-perceptual and aesthetic effects that ultimately catalyze meaning production through the stative regime.

In this context, the stative mode articulates the sensory-perceptual system. Actions such as the scuttling of the ship, the slaying of the youth, and the restoration of the wall function as phenomenological points of contact, establishing the conditions for the stative subject (*sujet d'état*) to transition from the external realm to the internal sphere. Analysis of the stative system demonstrates that Moses, through a trans-valuative process triggered by Khidr's actions, evolves into a stative and cognitive subject. Through direct confrontation with these events, he attains the Unity of Divine Lordship (*al-Tawhīd al-Rubūbī*) and acquires experiential and esoteric knowledge. Consequently, an axiological system is constituted, generating and receiving semantic discourse through the interactions and dialectical challenges between the actants.

When the subject perceives himself amidst external and tangible signs, encountering a new mode of *Dasein* (Being-there), he becomes cognizant of the existential void (*vide*) enveloping his being. In this discourse, Moses, as a stative subject, occupies the locus of sensory-perceptual tensions, maintaining a corporeal and lucid presence while engaging with situations that index the external world. Through this existential presence, Moses participates in the fluid process of meaning generation and value production. The stative subject not only experiences affective discontinuity across temporal and spatial dimensions but also actively confronts these discontinuities, eventually achieving cognitive detachment. Ultimately, the stative mode facilitates an intimate lived experience (*vécu*) with phenomena, producing a sensory fusion between the subject and natural phenomena, thereby situating him within a distinct semantic space.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

References

- Abbasi, A. & Yarmand, H. (2011). From semantic square to tension square: Semiotic-semantics analysis of 'The Little Black Fish', *Quarterly Journal of Comparative Language and Literature Research*, 2(3), 147–172.
- Abbasi, A. (2014). *Applied Narratology* (in Persian). Tehran: Shahid Beheshti University Press.
- Al-Ālūsī, M. (1994). *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī fī Tafsīr al-Qurʿān al-ʿAẓīm*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah.
- Babak Moein, M. (2015) *Meaning as Lived Experience: From Classical Semiotics to Semiotics with a Phenomenological Perspective* (in Persian). Tehran: Sokhan.
- Babak Moein, M. (2017). *Missing dimensions of meaning in Classic Narrative Semiotics* (in Persian). Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications.
- Bahmani, K., Alami, Z. & Abbasi, A. (2016). Semiotic-semantics analysis of the story of Sakineh Banu from the Iskandarnama collection by Manouchehr Khan Hakim, *Kavosh Nameh*, 22, 1–22.
- Bertrand, D. (2000). *Précis de sémiotique littéraire*. Paris: Nathan.
- Courtés, J. (2003). *Sémiotique du discours*. Limoges: PULIM.
- Davoudimoghadam, F., Shaeiri, H. & Ghotbi, S. (2017). The Role of Anti-Discourses in the Discursive Analysis of Surah Kahf. *Linguistic Research in the Holy Quran*, 6(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.22108/nrgs.2017.21520>
- Esmaili, E., Shaairi, H. R. & Kanāani, E. (2013). A Semiotic Approach to Daghughi Tale of Mathnavi (from semiotic square to tension square). *Research on Mystical Literature*, 6(3), 69-94.
- Fazeli, M. and Alizadehzadeh Kolor, S. (2015). Analysis of the emotional system of discourse in Shafiei Kadkani's poem "Safar be Khair" from a semiotic-semantics perspective. *Journal of Linguistic Studies*, 6(1), 205–228.
- Faridasr, F., Hoseyni, S., & Barahimi, M. (2023). Narratological Reading of Quranic Stories; A Case Study of the Story of Moses and Khidr. *Religious Research*, 11(21), 9-37. <https://doi.org/10.22034/jrr.2023.314602.1946>
- Fontanille, J. (1999). *Sémiotique et littérature: Essais de méthode*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Greimas A. J. & Fontanille, J. (1991). *Sémiotique des passions: des états de choses aux états d'âme*. Paris: Editions du Seuil
- Greimas, A. J. (2010). *De l'imperfection* (H. R. Shairi, Trans.). Tehran: Nashre Elm.
- Gunābādī, S. M. (1989) *Tafsīr Bayān al-Saʿādah fī Maqāmāt al-ʿIbādah*. Beirut: Muʿassasah al-ʿAlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt.

- Makarem Shirazi, N. (1995). *Tafsīr Nimūneh*. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyyah.
- Nasiri, R. A., Moti, M. & Amiri, M. (2020). Reconstructing Affective Meanings in the Axiological Discursive Process of Abraham's Quranic Story: a Semiotic Approach. *Language Related Research*, 11(2), 177-203.
- Nasiri, R. A. & Amiri, M. (2018). Semiotic Analysis of the Tensive Model in the Story of the Be'atāt (Resurrection) of Moses (AS) in Surah al-Taha. *Language Related Research*, 9(4), 33-59.
- Portner, P., & Partee, B. H. (Eds.). (2002). *Formal Semantics: The Essential Readings*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Qarai, A. Q. (2004). *Translation of the Holy Qur'an*. London: ICAS.
- Shairi, H. & Vafaei, T. (2009) *Pathway to Fluid Semiotic-Semantics: Case Study of "Phoenix" by Nima* (in Persian). Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications.
- Shairi, H. (2006). *Semiotic-Semantic Discourse Analysis* (in Persian). Tehran: SAMT.
- Shairi, H. (2007). Review of types of discursive systems from a semantic perspective (in Persian). In *Collection of Articles* (106–119). Tehran: Allameh Tabataba'i University.
- Shairi, H. (2009). Passing from a predetermined relationship of signifier and signified to a processional discursive meaning. *Literary Criticism*, 2(8), 33-52
- Shairi, H. (2016) *Semiotic-Semantics of Literature* (in Persian). Tehran: Tarbiat Modares University Press.
- Tabataba'i, M. H. (1996). *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-A'lamī lil-Maṭbū'āt.
- Zokhtareh, H. (2018). Semiotic Analysis of Conative Function of Enunciation in One Thousand and One Nights: From Mortality to Immortality. *Language Related Research*, 9(1), 139-159.

Riffaterre's Semiotic Theory in Angelika Neuwirth's Intertextual Qur'anic Studies: A Case Study of Surah al-Ikhlāṣ

Seyed Hamed Alizadeh Mousavi¹ 

Assistant Professor, Department for Comparative Studies, Research Center for Qur'anic Sciences and Culture, Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy, Tehran, Iran.

Article History: Received 19 June 2025; Accepted 17 October 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, with its emphasis on ungrammaticality and multi-layered reading, has provided an influential model for analyzing the distinctive structure of poetic language. This study investigates the application of Riffaterre's semiotic framework to Qur'anic interpretation, with a specific focus on Angelika Neuwirth's intertextual readings of the Qur'an. Neuwirth views the Qur'an as a poetic and dialogical text that engages with earlier religious and cultural traditions. She employs Riffaterre's model to reveal the text's semantic depth and internal coherence through the notions of ungrammaticality and dual signification. Using Surah al-Ikhlāṣ as a case study, this paper critically evaluates Neuwirth's application of Riffaterre's theory by examining her treatment of the supposed "ungrammaticality" regarding the use of the word *aḥad*. The paper argues that the notion of ungrammaticality in the Qur'an can be reinterpreted not as a violation of linguistic norms, but rather as a semiotic cue that signals deeper intertextual and theological meanings. Accordingly, evaluating alleged irregularities requires a contextual analysis of lexical patterns across the entire Qur'an, where usage, frequency, and semantic range reveal a consistent theological logic. By integrating insights from classical Arabic grammar, lexicography, and tafsīr with modern semiotic theory, this study reassesses the scope and limits of applying Riffaterre's model to sacred text analysis. It concludes that while semiotic and intertextual approaches can illuminate the Qur'an's structural and semantic complexity, they must operate within a balanced hermeneutical framework that respects the text's

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: ha.mousavi@jsca.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I2.8>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_106983.html?lang=en

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



revelatory nature and linguistic precision. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that the intentional utilization of ungrammaticality in the Qur'an effectively serves specific theological functions.

KEYWORDS: The Qur'an, Semiotic theory, Ungrammaticality, Intertextuality, Surah al-Ikhlāṣ, *aḥad*, *wāḥid*, Angelika Neuwirth, Michael Riffaterre.

1. Introduction

Michael Riffaterre's theory of semiotics is one of the most influential approaches in contemporary literary criticism. By emphasizing structuralism and the reader's active engagement with the text, Riffaterre provides a systematic framework for analysing and interpreting literary works, particularly poetry. In his view, poetic language differs essentially from ordinary language because it possesses a signifying nature. Consequently, it frequently violates the conventional grammatical and syntactic rules of everyday speech. This "ungrammaticality," defined as the deliberate breaking of linguistic norms, constitutes the foundation of poetic art and aesthetics in Riffaterre's theory (Riffaterre 1978; Allen 2000).

Riffaterre argues that poetry should be read as a multi-layered, multidimensional text due to its inherent features, such as the use of metaphor, symbol, ambiguity, and unusual syntactic structures. Under this framework, meaning emerges through internal references and semiotic networks within the poem itself. Each poem is built upon a "semantic nucleus," expressed as a word, phrase, or central statement. However, this nucleus remains implicit and cryptic due to the indirect nature of poetic language (Riffaterre 1978; Selden 2005).

According to Riffaterre, reading a text involves two main stages. The first is heuristic reading; in this stage, the reader follows the surface meaning linearly while relying on standard linguistic competence. The second is retroactive (or hermeneutic) reading, which entails a deeper exploration of the text's hidden layers, symbolic meanings, and internal sign networks. At this stage, grammatical irregularities and linguistic deviations transform into meaningful indicators that lead to a more precise and comprehensive understanding of the text (Payandeh 2019). Ungrammaticality consequently plays a central role in Riffaterre's semiotics. It represents a deliberate departure from ordinary linguistic norms, thereby producing a unique and multi-layered poetic structure that invites deeper interpretation and reflection (Riffaterre 1978; Allen 2000).

Angelika Neuwirth, a contemporary German Qur'anic scholar, has

produced extensive scholarship on the comparative and intertextual study of the Qur'an and the Bible. Her approach is fundamentally literary and structuralist, as it draws heavily on modern theories of intertextuality and semiotics. In particular, Neuwirth employs Riffaterre's concept of ungrammaticality as a key to deciphering the Qur'an's linguistic and aesthetic complexity. By viewing the Qur'an as a text with poetic dimensions and multiple semantic layers, she proposes that the sacred text contains deliberate linguistic deviations that necessitate a deep and reflective reading.

Neuwirth argues that applying Riffaterre's semiotic model to Qur'anic studies facilitates the discovery of profound layers of meaning generated by unique linguistic choices and grammatical irregularities. Due to its unparalleled rhetorical features, diverse literary devices, symbolic language, and polyvalent expressions, the Qur'an provides fertile ground for semiotic analysis. Such an approach demonstrates that a purely surface or linear reading of the verses may obscure many of the text's subtle messages and implications. In contrast, a deeper reading reveals the Qur'an's intricate semantic structure.

Nevertheless, applying literary semiotics to a sacred text raises certain methodological challenges. Chief among them is the potential neglect of the Qur'an's revelatory dimension; specifically, this approach risks treating the sacred text merely as a literary artifact. Furthermore, hypotheses regarding possible lexical changes or the presence of grammatical irregularities introduced to fit the model present significant methodological difficulties. The present paper, therefore, seeks to examine the potential insights and contributions of applying Riffaterre's semiotics to Qur'anic interpretation. Concurrently, it considers the accompanying risks and limitations inherent in such a methodological adaptation.

2. Literature Review

In recent decades, the comparative and intertextual study of the Qur'an has experienced considerable growth, especially through the scholarship of Western Islamicists. Among these figures, Angelika Neuwirth stands out as a prominent contemporary Qur'anic scholar. By adopting a literary and structuralist approach, she situates the Qur'an within the broader framework of Late Antiquity's sacred texts and cultural traditions. Her works, particularly her multi-volume studies on the Meccan Surahs, portray the Qur'an as a linguistically and aesthetically constructed text that engages in dialogue with pre-Qur'anic traditions (Neuwirth 2000; Neuwirth et al. 2010; Neuwirth 2019).

Within literary criticism, Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory holds a distinctive position; it has been applied to the analysis of modern poetry, symbolic literature, and sacred texts. However, a direct and systematic examination of Riffaterre's theory within the context of Qur'anic analysis remains largely unexplored. Some conceptual intersections appear in Neuwirth's writings, in which she implicitly draws on semiotic and intertextual approaches to uncover the Qur'an's various layers of meaning.

Payandeh (2019) and Namvar Motlagh (2015) have discussed the application of structuralist and post-structuralist theories to religious texts; however, none have specifically addressed Riffaterre's semiotics in relation to the Qur'an. Consequently, the present study constitutes a pioneering attempt to establish a comparative framework between Riffaterre's semiotic theory and Neuwirth's intertextual approach to Qur'anic interpretation. The study aims to clarify their conceptual intersections and divergences while assessing both the potential insights and methodological limitations of employing literary semiotics in Qur'anic analysis.

3. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative and theoretical in nature, employing a descriptive–analytical and comparative research design. The data are drawn from library sources, including scholarly articles and the primary works of Michael Riffaterre and Angelika Neuwirth. The research proceeds in two main stages. First, it systematically explicates the key concepts of Riffaterre's semiotic theory, specifically ungrammaticality, heuristic reading, and retroactive (hermeneutic) reading. Second, the study examines how these concepts may be applied to Neuwirth's literary reading of the Qur'an.

In the analytical section, Surah al-Tawhīd (al-Ikhlāṣ) serves as a case study. Through a Riffaterre's lens, this study investigates the Surah's linguistic structure, its intertextual references, and its layers of signification. The aim is not only to reveal the potential of semiotic analysis for Qur'anic studies but also to critically assess its theological implications. Particular attention is given to the limitations of this approach concerning the Qur'an's sacred dimensions.

4. Riffaterre's Intertextuality: Dual Signs & Ungrammaticality

The term "intertextuality" was first introduced in the 1970s by Julia Kristeva. She argued that a text is not a closed and autonomous system that

can be understood in isolation (Frow 2005). Rather, every text functions as a point of intersection and interaction among multiple other texts. Kristeva's conception was influenced by the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin—specifically his theory of polyphony—and Roland Barthes. Her work sought to extend Bakhtin's notion of multiple voices into the domain of textual plurality (Kristeva 1998; Namvar Motlagh 2015).

Since its inception, two major perspectives on intertextuality have emerged. One focuses on the role of intertextuality in the production of the text, whereas the other examines its impact on the reading process. Michael Riffaterre (1924–2002), a leading figure in this field, belongs to the latter category by emphasizing the reader's reception and interpretive engagement with the text. His theoretical framework, which combines structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotics, and psychoanalytic criticism, secures him a distinctive position in the study of intertextuality.

Riffaterre differentiates between two kinds of signification in language: explicit (referential) meaning, which follows a linear and transparent path typical of everyday discourse, and implicit (literary) meaning, which relies on the text's internal references or its relation to other texts. Consequently, literary meaning depends heavily on the reader's prior knowledge and interpretive competence (Allen 2000). Within this framework, Riffaterre conceives literary texts as generating meaning through coherent semiotic structures composed of keywords, symbolic phrases, and rhetorical patterns. In his model, Riffaterre identifies two levels of reading: heuristic (surface) reading and retroactive (interpretive) reading. The first level yields a linear and superficial understanding. Conversely, the second seeks to uncover deeper, concealed meanings and the complex interplay of signs within the text (Ahmadi 2005; Namvar Motlagh 2015). Retroactive reading requires revisiting the initial interpretation to reinterpret the text through a semiotic lens, thereby revealing its implicit significations.

Riffaterre further distinguishes between “meaning” and “significance.” Meaning resides on the text's surface, while significance arises from the fusion of form and content, which is constituted by indirect linguistic markers and poetic imagery. For Riffaterre, words in a literary text do not merely refer to external objects; instead, their signification emerges through presuppositions derived from other texts. Intertextuality, therefore, necessitates an informed reader. It may appear in two forms: obligatory intertextuality, where textual references are fixed and undeniable, and optional intertextuality, which depends on the reader's experience and interpretive background (Namvar Motlagh 2015).

Riffaterre warns that if interpretation focuses solely on literal meaning, poetry risks degenerating into a mere factual report. Such a reductionist approach strips the text of its artistic and aesthetic distinctiveness (Selden 2005). Furthermore, he underscores the intrinsic ambiguity of poetic language and argues that the poet's lexical choices introduce multiple layers of meaning and generate polysemy (Ahmadi 2005). In his view, poetic semiotics resists direct communication; thus, meaning is delayed, dispersed, and mediated through figurative and formal complexity (Riffaterre 1978).

Central to Riffaterre's theory is the concept of "ungrammaticality," which refers to the deliberate violation of linguistic norms and syntactic conventions. This deviation from ordinary grammar transforms poetic language into a multi-layered, self-referential system (Allen 2000). Comprehending such complex semiotic networks requires both linguistic proficiency and literary competence. This mastery enables the reader to move beyond the surface level toward the poem's implicit and symbolic meanings (Selden 2005).

During the stage of retroactive reading, Riffaterre identifies mechanisms such as semantic expansion and descriptive structures as vehicles of poetic signification. Semantic expansion occurs when a set of lexically related words converges on a shared thematic category (Eftekhari and Barekat 2011). For instance, words like rose, lily, sunflower, and tulip collectively form an associative cluster linked by semantic affinity (Nabiloo 2011). Such clusters often develop into descriptive networks, which are systems organized around a central word and its related elements. These networks, primarily metaphorical, may intersect or extend beyond the boundaries of the poem itself (Riffaterre 1978). By identifying these accumulations and descriptive systems, the reader traces the lexical and conceptual associations that structure the text's imagery. This process leads to a deeper understanding of the text's internal organization. The structural network underlies the text's unity and coherence, even though it is not directly visible. It is inferred indirectly through narrative connections and conventional associations, serving as the framework through which the poem's holistic meaning emerges. In summary, Riffaterre's interpretive process unfolds in four main stages:

1. Reading the text to grasp its ordinary and surface meaning;
2. Identifying linguistic deviations that disrupt conventional sense;
3. Discovering lexical and thematic associations that recur throughout the text;
4. Reconstructing the structural network of meaning through these associations to enable a deeper, more unified understanding of the poem (Selden 2005).

This approach allows for a more precise examination of hidden semiotic structures in poetry, standing as a vital analytical tool within modern literary criticism.

5. *Riffaterre's Semiotic Phases and Elements in Neuwirth's Qur'anic Studies*

After reviewing Michael Riffaterre's theory of semiotics within the framework of intertextuality, it is essential to examine how this theoretical model has been applied to the Qur'anic studies of Angelika Neuwirth. To this end, this section explores the interpretive elements and stages of Riffaterre's semiotic approach as reflected in Neuwirth's analyses. The discussion begins by addressing the poetic nature of the Qur'an, which prompted Neuwirth's semiotic reading, followed by an examination of her two-level reading of the Qur'an. Finally, it provides a case-based study of her application of concepts such as ungrammaticality to the Qur'anic text.

5.1. *The Qur'an and Poetry*

One of Neuwirth's key observations regarding the Qur'an concerns its poetic and literary dimensions. She argues that the Qur'an manifests a profound dialogue with ancient Arabic poetry, as well as with the Jewish, Christian, and pagan poetic-philosophical traditions that shaped the intellectual milieu of Late Antiquity. In her influential work, *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community*, the inclusion of the term "poetry" in the title underscores its central importance in her thought. The word signifies not only the Qur'an's poetic texture but also its interconnection with the late pre-Islamic Arabic poetic corpus (Neuwirth 2002; Neuwirth 2004).

Understanding Neuwirth's notion of the Qur'an as "poetic" requires a careful distinction. On the one hand, Muslims have traditionally regarded the Qur'an as transcending poetry. They emphasize that one of the polemical accusations made by early opponents was precisely that Muhammad was a poet. On the other hand, the rhetorical and aesthetic qualities of the Qur'an have long been recognized as integral to its miraculous nature (*al-i'jāz*), especially in terms of its eloquence (*al-balāghah*) and stylistic inimitability (*al-faṣāḥah*). For Neuwirth, describing the Qur'an as "poetic" does not imply that it is poetry in the conventional sense; rather, it suggests that the text engages with the poetic knowledge of its earliest audiences. In her view, this poetic awareness formed part of the common cultural literacy of Late Antique Arabs, and the Qur'an interacts dynamically with that shared

repertoire. Moreover, she identifies the rhythmic and musical features of Qur'anic recitation, including its rhyme, cadence, and repetition, as elements that create a distinctly poetic experience. For instance, she considers Surah al-Rahmān highly lyrical due to its rhythmic and sonorous qualities (Neuwirth 2002; Neuwirth 2004).

In addition, Neuwirth highlights the rhetorical sophistication of the Qur'an and regards its eloquence as evidence of its textual authenticity and divine uniqueness (Neuwirth 2010b; Neuwirth 2013). Thus, in her analysis, the Qur'an's poeticity points both to its "Sitz im Leben," its social and performative context at the time of revelation, and to its formal rhythmic structure, which facilitates layered interpretation. However, this "poetic reflection" is acceptable only insofar as it does not imply the derivation or imitation of pre-Islamic poetry. Instead, it reflects the Qur'an's dialogical engagement with the linguistic and poetic conventions familiar to its original audience. From this perspective, the Qur'an's allusive use of poetic expression served as an effective communicative strategy by employing familiar cultural forms to convey transcendent meanings.

This dialogical approach aligns with early Islamic hermeneutical practices. Arabic lexicography and philology, essential to Qur'anic exegesis from the earliest centuries, often relied on ancient Arabic poetry to elucidate obscure Qur'anic vocabulary. As Ibn 'Abbās famously stated, "When you seek the meaning of a rare word in the Qur'an, look for it in poetry, for poetry is the repository of Arab knowledge" (al-Suyūfī n.d., 2: 302). Similarly, al-Suyūfī emphasized that preserving ancient poetry was vital for understanding Qur'anic and prophetic language.

Accordingly, Neuwirth regards the Qur'an as a living oral discourse that interacts with two primary domains of Late Antique knowledge: biblical-literary traditions and poetic culture. The Qur'an engages these knowledge systems through dialogue, questioning, and reinterpretation. Its rhythmic and poetic form renders it multi-layered, thereby requiring interpretive strategies that move beyond the surface level, specifically the kind of semiotic depth that Riffaterre's theory seeks to uncover. In this sense, Neuwirth's identification of the Qur'an's poeticity directly aligns her with Riffaterre's semiotic model, enabling her to explore the Qur'an's deeper and hidden layers of meaning.

5.2. The Two-Level Reading of the Qur'an: Qur'an and Muṣḥaf

In articulating her theory of Qur'anic reading, Neuwirth (2010) distinguishes between two dimensions of the text: the Qur'an and the

Muṣḥaf. The Qur'an, she argues, represents the oral process of divine communication, whereas the *Muṣḥaf*, the written codex, reflects the stage of textual compilation and inscription. Neuwirth interprets the oral Qur'an as a performative event comparable to a dramatic enactment, while she views the written *Muṣḥaf* as a retrospective narrative or a sacred monologic account. Drawing from theories of drama and performance, she explains that, much like in a play, there exist two levels: an internal level (the actors and their interactions) and an external level (the author, the written script, and its readers).

When applying this framework to the Qur'an, the internal level comprises the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his audience, whose interaction constitutes a dialogical exchange. The external level, conversely, corresponds to the written *Muṣḥaf* and its later readers. Within this performative model, the dramatis personae include the Prophet and a heavenly voice that continually addresses him. This divine voice functions as a hidden but active interlocutor at the internal level; however, at the external level, it becomes fused with the Prophet's own voice, thereby creating a unified textual persona (Neuwirth 2010a).

Consequently, Neuwirth effectively applies Riffaterre's two-level reading model, comprising surface and deeper interpretive layers, to Qur'anic hermeneutics. The internal level corresponds to Riffaterre's heuristic reading by capturing the immediate communicative event. Meanwhile, the external, reflective level parallels the retroactive reading, in which the text is reinterpreted through accumulated intertexts and semiotic associations. Therefore, understanding the inner level of the Qur'an requires, according to Neuwirth, the recognition of its intertextual web. This web constitutes a network of echoes, allusions, and semiotic deviations that collectively sustain its poetic and revelatory character.

5.3. *The Qur'an and Ungrammaticality*

After identifying the Qur'an as poetic and recognizing its two levels of reading, Neuwirth proceeds to interpret the text through Riffaterre's semiotic and intertextual theory to uncover its deeper layers of meaning. Within this framework, she focuses on detecting "ungrammaticalities" in the Qur'an, linguistic irregularities that, according to Riffaterre, point symbolically toward other texts. Through these irregularities, Neuwirth seeks to access the Qur'an's intertexts, thereby enabling a more profound understanding of its discourse.

One of the surahs analysed by Neuwirth through Riffaterre's semiotic model is Surah al-Ikhlās. Following Riffaterre's four-stage interpretive path, she first performs a surface (heuristic) reading to grasp the apparent meaning of the text. From her perspective, this surah was revealed in a cultural milieu shaped by oral religious traditions. The Qur'anic community appropriated these pre-existing ideas and rearticulated them in a new form; however, as Neuwirth notes, echoes of pre-Qur'anic oral formulae remain audible within the Qur'an.

In the second stage, the retroactive or hermeneutic reading, Neuwirth explores the surah's grammatical irregularities. She argues that, at first glance, Surah al-Ikhlās appears entirely consistent with the stylistic structure of early Meccan surahs, which are characterized by short, rhythmic, and semantically dense verses. However, she identifies one major distinction: the surah begins with the imperative "*qul*" (say). This feature is more typical of later argumentative surahs (Neuwirth 2010a). Neuwirth maintains that, despite its apparent simplicity, the text of this surah is not stylistically uniform. She interprets the opening phrase "*qul huwa Allāhu aḥad*" as a deliberate echo of the Jewish prayer Shema Yisrael: "*Shema' Yisra'el, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Eḥad*": "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One*" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

According to Neuwirth, the Jewish text remains audible within the Qur'anic version, which suggests an intentional intertextual resonance. She argues that the Qur'an deliberately employs *aḥad* instead of the more grammatically expected *wāḥid* to maintain its rhyme and rhythm. This choice, she claims, constitutes an "ungrammaticality." This term refers to a deliberate deviation that functions semiotically as a "dual sign" in the sense defined by Michael Riffaterre.

In Riffaterre's semiotic theory, the concept of the dual sign designates the twofold operation of meaning within poetic language. Each linguistic unit in a poem functions simultaneously on two semiotic levels. The first is the referential or surface sign, which conveys a literal meaning accessible through conventional grammar. The second is the hypogrammatic or underlying sign, which emerges from the interrelations among words, textual structures, and intertextual echoes within the poem itself.

Consequently, meaning in poetry is not fixed at the lexical level. Instead, it is generated through a network of internal correspondences that transform ordinary linguistic signs into symbolic and interpretive ones. This dual functioning of the sign becomes particularly evident through ungrammaticality, the deliberate deviation from linguistic norms that forces the reader to move beyond the surface level toward deeper layers of

interpretation. In this process, the reader decodes the latent or “second” sign embedded within the text to uncover its hidden intertextual and semantic dimensions. Thus, the dual sign encapsulates Riffaterre’s broader view of poetry as a self-referential system in which meaning is produced through the tension between grammatical disruption and interpretive reconstruction. Angelika Neuwirth has adapted this specific mechanism in her analyses of the Qur’an’s poetic and multi-layered structure (Riffaterre 1978, 92).

Neuwirth thus identifies Surah al-Ikhlāṣ as containing a specific type of grammatical irregularity that can be recognized through Riffaterre’s dual sign. This sign functions much like a pun or paronomasia; although it initially appears to be a linguistic irregularity, it becomes intelligible when viewed in light of an external textual source. The form of the sign is crucial, as it gestures toward the structure of another text and invites an interpretive comparison. Neuwirth then poses the question: why does the Jewish text remain audible within the Qur’anic version? She contends that such intertextual echoing is strategic rather than accidental. The Qur’an, she argues, deliberately engages in translanguaging quotation as part of its dialogical strategy. By universalizing the Jewish creed of divine unity, the Qur’an reframes it for a non-Jewish audience. It replaces the address to “Israel” with a universal call to “believers,” thereby recontextualizing the monotheistic formula to render it both familiar and distinctive. This form of interpretive correction—or hermeneutic adaptation—is, according to Neuwirth, one of the Qur’an’s characteristic modes of engagement with earlier traditions.

Furthermore, she interprets this audible resonance as a rhetorical address to Jewish listeners. She suggests that the Qur’an sought to bridge the gap between the Qur’anic and Jewish communities through intertextual familiarity and shared sacred vocabulary. To support her thesis regarding the orality of the Qur’an, Neuwirth also compares the surah with the Nicene Creed and the Book of Deuteronomy. She concludes that the Qur’an, as an oral discourse, incorporates the religious knowledge of its audience, particularly their awareness of biblical and creedal formulations. She connects this view with Riffaterre’s theory of ungrammaticality, arguing that the Qur’an intentionally presents a structural irregularity to guide its audience toward these prior intertexts. In this reading, the word *aḥad* evokes the Hebrew *ehad* from Deuteronomy 6:4, which reinforces the intertextual link (Neuwirth 2010a).

6. Evaluation of Neuwirth's Application of Riffaterre's Theory in *Surah al-Ikhlās*

Neuwirth's application of Riffaterre's semiotic theory serves two primary purposes. First, she utilizes it to support her thesis on the Qur'an's orality, treating its intertexts as evidence of its oral, dialogical nature. However, as critics have noted (Alizadeh Mousavi 2020), the use of familiar concepts or audience knowledge does not necessarily imply orality. Written discourse can also employ shared cultural references to enhance communication. Therefore, the Qur'an's engagement with the intellectual world of its audience does not logically entail a purely oral character; rather, it demonstrates the text's rhetorical awareness and communicative adaptability.

Second, Neuwirth employs Riffaterre's model to uncover the Qur'an's deeper semantic layers by identifying its supposed grammatical irregularities and inferring meaning from them. Specifically, she argues that *aḥad* is less grammatically fitting than *wāḥid*, contending that this choice represents a deliberate semiotic deviation. However, this view is contestable. None of the classical Arabic linguists or exegetes regarded the verse as grammatically irregular; on the contrary, most have argued that *aḥad* is not only appropriate, but also theologically more precise in this context.

Arabic lexicographers and exegetes, such as al-Fīrūzābādī (1983), al-Zabīdī (1994), and al-Ālūsī (1997), note that *aḥad* and *wāḥid* share the same root *w-ḥ-d*, meaning "one" or "unique," yet differ semantically and theologically. While *wāḥid* may denote numerical singularity, *aḥad* conveys absolute oneness by denying both multiplicity and divisibility. Some scholars, like al-ʿAskarī (1985, 565), hold that *aḥad* derives from *awḥad*, with the initial *al-wāw* elided to distinguish it as a divine attribute. Early authorities also report variant readings, such as Ibn Masʿūd's recitation of "*Qul huwa Allāhu wāḥid*" (Maybudī 1982, 10: 662), nevertheless, even these were interpreted as semantically equivalent.

Exegetes further distinguish *aḥad* from *wāḥid* in several ways:

- *Wāḥid* is used in numerical enumeration (e.g., *wāḥid, ithnān*), whereas *aḥad* is not.
- *Wāḥid* often affirms existence (e.g., *ra'aytu rajulan wāḥidan*), while *aḥad* is used in negation (e.g., *mā ra'aytu aḥadan*).
- *Aḥad* implies universal negation, meaning "none whatsoever," while *wāḥid* negates only one instance.

- *Aḥad* is a more general and absolute form that encompasses *wāḥid* within its meaning.
- *Aḥad* functions as an attribute exclusively for God in affirmative statements, whereas *wāḥid* can describe other entities (al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī 2009; al-Rāzī 1993; al-Zabīdī 1994).

Tabataba'i (1995) devotes a detailed section to this distinction, in *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, explaining that *aḥad* refers to that which is utterly indivisible and does not admit multiplicity either in mind or in reality. Unlike *wāḥid*, which implies the possibility of plurality (such as a sequence of one, two, or three), *aḥad* signifies absolute unity beyond enumeration or composition. He explains that the word *aḥad* is an adjective derived from the notion of unity (*al-waḥdah*), just as *wāḥid* is; however, there is a distinction between the two. *Aḥad* refers to something that is not susceptible to plurality or multiplicity, neither externally nor conceptually. It cannot be counted, whereas *wāḥid* denotes something that can, at least in theory, be followed by a second or third, whether in reality, imagination, or abstraction. Hence, when one says 'no one from the people came to me' (*lam ya'tīnī aḥadun*), this denies not only one person but all possible persons, whereas 'no single one of the people came' (*lam ya'tīnī wāḥidun*) negates only one individual, but not necessarily all. For this reason, *aḥad* is never used in affirmative speech about anything other than God, while *wāḥid* may describe any singular entity.

Hence, the use of *aḥad* in Surah al-Ikhlāṣ perfectly expresses the doctrine of divine simplicity and incomparability by rejecting any form of multiplicity or composition. In this sense, the term *aḥad* aligns not only with theological precision but also with Neuwirth's broader hermeneutic framework. If, as she suggests, the surah engages with creedal discourse such as the Nicene Creed, its subsequent verses can be read as a rejection of the Trinitarian plurality affirmed in that creed. Thus, the Qur'anic use of *aḥad*, rather than representing a grammatical irregularity, is semantically and theologically deliberate, as it negates all forms of multiplicity and composition within the divine essence (al-Rāzī 1993, 32: 180; al-Ālūsī 1997, 30: 488).

A closer lexical and exegetical examination of the term *aḥad* in Surah al-Ikhlāṣ provides critical insight into the applicability of Riffaterre's semiotic theory to the Qur'an. The study of "ungrammaticality" in a revealed text like the Qur'an must consider the broader linguistic and semantic network of the entire corpus instead of isolating a single word within one surah. If Riffaterre's semiotic model aims to uncover secondary layers of meaning through linguistic deviations, then in the Qur'an, such meanings emerge

only through the coherence and interdependence of its internal textual system.

A comparative analysis of Qur'anic usage reveals that *aḥad* is used only once as a descriptive attribute of God, occurring precisely in this surah. Far from being an instance of grammatical irregularity, this singular use reveals deliberate linguistic precision. By virtue of its semantic connotation of denying any form of composition or duality, the term *aḥad* perfectly accords with the thematic and theological core of a surah devoted to *al-Tawḥīd* (divine unity) and *al-Ikhlāṣ* (pure devotion). Thus, what Neuwirth interprets as an "ungrammaticality" may, in fact, represent a purposeful semiotic marker that intensifies the surah's assertion of God's absolute oneness.

Accordingly, the productive application of literary semiotic theories like Riffaterre's in Qur'anic studies depends on their integration with Arabic linguistic principles, intra-Qur'anic analysis, and the insights of classical Islamic exegesis. This integrative approach avoids oversimplifying the Qur'anic text and enriches scholarly understanding of its subtle linguistic architecture and multi-layered meaning. Such a synthesis opens a valuable space for dialogue between modern literary criticism and traditional Qur'anic hermeneutics, thereby fostering a deeper appreciation of the Qur'an as both a sacred and a linguistically intricate text.

On the other hand, it may be argued that the notion of "ungrammaticality" in Riffaterre's theory does not necessarily imply an actual grammatical deviation in the Qur'an. Instead, it can be understood as a semiotic signal pointing toward a hidden intertext or subtext. In Riffaterre's framework, ungrammaticality functions as an intentional disruption that alerts the reader to a deeper level of meaning, serving as an interpretive gap through which the text gestures beyond itself. When applied to the Qur'an, this concept can be reinterpreted as a marker of intertextual resonance rather than a linguistic irregularity.

From this perspective, the use of *aḥad* in Surah al-Ikhlāṣ does not represent a grammatical anomaly, but rather a deliberate semantic intensification that invites reflection on the concept of divine oneness. Its rarity and exclusivity in reference to God operate as a semiotic device that guides the reader toward the surah's deeper theological focus. The apparent "irregularity" thus functions as a rhetorical strategy by signalling the presence of a broader discursive context, potentially the theological debates of Late Antiquity, such as the Trinitarian formulations of the Nicene Creed. In this sense, Qur'anic ungrammaticality, when viewed through Riffaterre's lens, becomes not a departure from linguistic norms but a sophisticated intertextual mechanism through which meaning is both concealed and revealed.

While it is true that classical Muslim exegetes devoted considerable attention to explaining the exceptional use of *aḥad*, this interpretive effort does not imply that they perceived the term as a linguistic anomaly or a breach of Arabic grammatical norms. Rather, the exegetical and lexicographical traditions consistently treat the distinction between *aḥad* and *wāḥid* as a semantically grounded differentiation within the internal logic of classical Arabic.

Lexicographers such as al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (2009, 24) explicitly state that *wāḥid* denotes numerical oneness, whereas *aḥad* conveys an intensified form of unity that excludes compositionality, resemblance, or multiplicity in any form. Similarly, Ibn Manẓūr (1993, 3:24–26) emphasizes that *aḥad* in affirmative usage is almost exclusively applied to God because of its unique semantic force in denoting absolute incomparability. This lexical basis is directly reflected in major exegetical works. Al-Ṭabarī (1969, 30:223–224) glosses *aḥad* as “He who has no peer, likeness, or equal,” thereby highlighting its positive semantic role rather than any grammatical irregularity. Al-Zamakhsharī (2009, 4:805–806) likewise interprets *aḥad* as denoting complete indivisibility and the negation of any possible partner, a meaning he considers intrinsic to the term itself. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1993, 32: 180) advances this semantic hierarchy explicitly by arguing that *aḥad* signifies a stronger and more exclusive form of unity than *wāḥid*, since it negates even the theoretical possibility of multiplicity.

Consequently, classical exegetes did not treat the Qur'anic use of *aḥad* as a syntactic deviation necessitating ad hoc theological justification. Their interpretive attention reflects a recognition of the term's rhetorical prominence and theological precision within Arabic usage, rather than an assumption of “ungrammaticality” in the technical sense employed by Neuwirth or Riffaterre. Thus, while a semiotic reading may legitimately interpret the verse's stylistic markedness as a cue for deeper hermeneutical engagement, the premodern Arabic tradition consistently situates the distinction between *aḥad* and *wāḥid* within the semantic and rhetorical resources of the language, rather than outside its normative patterns.

7. Conclusion

This study has explored Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory and its application in Qur'anic scholarship, particularly within the intertextual studies of Angelika Neuwirth. It has demonstrated how Riffaterre's structuralist model, which focuses on the notions of “ungrammaticality,” dual signification, and two-level reading, illuminates the Qur'an's semantic and rhetorical depth. Neuwirth's utilization of this framework to interpret

the Qur'an as a poetic and dialogical text opens significant possibilities for understanding its engagement with the intellectual and religious milieu of Late Antiquity.

The analysis of Surah al-Ikhlāṣ shows how these theoretical tools may be used to examine Qur'anic diction and structure in detail. By focusing on the term *aḥad* and its contrast with *wāḥid*, the study reveals that what might appear to be a "grammatical irregularity" is, in fact, a deliberate semantic intensification. This choice conveys the surah's theological focus on divine unity and incomparability. When *aḥad* is viewed through Riffaterre's lens, its singularity and exclusive usage in reference to God function as a semiotic marker that invites readers to engage in a deeper interpretive process. In this sense, the so-called "ungrammaticality" does not reflect a deviation from linguistic norms but instead operates as a rhetorical and intertextual signal pointing toward hidden layers of meaning.

Moreover, reinterpreting Riffaterre's notion of ungrammaticality as an indicator of intertextual resonance rather than a structural anomaly allows for a more nuanced and theologically coherent reading of the Qur'an. It acknowledges the text's engagement with the conceptual and linguistic frameworks of its audience while affirming its unique mode of revelation and discourse. This perspective suggests that the Qur'an's distinctive linguistic expressions, such as *aḥad*, should not be analysed in isolation. Rather, they should be examined across their full Qur'anic context to enable scholars to discern deliberate semantic patterns that reinforce the text's theological unity.

While Riffaterre's semiotic model offers valuable insights into the multi-layered structure and interpretive depth of the Qur'an, its application must remain sensitive to the text's revelatory and sacred nature. Treating the Qur'an merely as a literary artifact risks obscuring its theological purpose and spiritual function. Therefore, a balanced methodology—one that integrates semiotic, linguistic, and hermeneutical approaches within the framework of traditional Arabic grammar and *tafsīr*, provides the most fruitful path forward.

In conclusion, the semiotic theory of Riffaterre, when critically adapted, serves as a powerful analytical tool for exploring the Qur'an's rhetorical complexity, intertextual depth, and semantic coherence. It enables a richer understanding of how linguistic form and theological content intertwine within the Qur'anic text. However, such inquiry must proceed with philological rigor and theological awareness to ensure that literary interpretation complements, rather than competes with, the Qur'an's revealed nature.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Research Center for Culture and Knowledge of the Qur'an at the Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy for its valuable and continuous support throughout this research project.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no competing interests.

References

The Holy Qur'an

The Holy Bible

Ahmadi, B. (2005). *Structure and Interpretation of Text* (in Persian). Tehran: Markaz Publications.

Al-Ālūsī, M. (1997). *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm wa-al-sab' al-mathānī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

Al-'Askarī, A. H. (1985). *Al-Furūq al-lughawiyah*. Riyadh: Dār al-Fikr.

Al-Fīrūzābādī, M. (1983). *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.

Alizadeh Mousavi, S. H. (2020). *The Relationship between the Qur'an and the Bible: A Study of Angelika Neuwirth's Perspective*. Qom: Islamic Research Institute for Culture and Thought.

Allen, G. (2000). *Intertextuality*. Tehran: Markaz Publications.

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 'A. (2009). *Al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur'ān*. Damascus: Dār al-Qalam.

Al-Rāzī, F. (1993). *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr (Maḥāṭib al-ghayb)*. Qom: Daftar Tablighāte Islāmī.

Al-Suyūṭī, J. (n.d.). *Al-Muḥḥir fī 'ulūm al-lughah wa al-adab*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah.

Al-Ṭabarī, M. (1969). *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif.

Al-Zabīdī, M. (1994). *Tāj al-'arūs min jawāhir al-qāmūs*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

Al-Zamakhsharī, M. (2009). *Al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa.


Eftekhari, T. and Barekat, B. (2011). Semiotics of Poetry: Applying Michael Riffaterre's Theory to a Poem by Forough Farrokhzad. *Comparative Literature and Language Research Quarterly*, 4, 109-130.

- Frow, J. (2005). *Genre*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Ibn Manzūr, M. (1993). *Lisān al-‘Arab*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir.
- Kristeva, J. (1998). *New maladies of the soul*. Columbia U. P.
- Maybudī, A. R. (1982). *Kashf al-asrār wa ‘uddah al-abrār*. Tehran: Amirkabir.
- Nabiloo, A. (2011). Application of Michael Riffaterre's Semiotic Theory in Analyzing Nima's "Phoenix". *Journal of Foreign Language Research*, 1(2), 81-94.
- Namvar Motlagh, B. (2015). *An Introduction to Intertextuality* (in Persian). Tehran: Sokhan.
- Neuwirth, A. (2002). Form and Structure of the Qur’an. In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an* (Vol. 2). Leiden: Brill.
- Neuwirth, A. (2004). Rhetoric and the Qur’an. In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an* (Vol. 4). Leiden: Brill.
- Neuwirth, A. (2010a). Two Faces of the Qur’an: Qur’an and Muṣḥaf. *Oral Tradition*, 25(1), 141–156.
- Neuwirth, A. (2010b). *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur’an as a Literary Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Neuwirth, A. (2013). Locating the Qur’an in the Epistemic Space of Late Antiquity. *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 54(2), 189–208.
- Neuwirth, A., Sinai, N., & Marx, M. (Eds.). (2010). *The Qur’an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’anic Milieu*. Leiden: Brill.
- Payandeh, H. (2019). *Critical Theory: An Interdisciplinary Coursebook* (in Persian). Tehran: Samt Publications.
- Riffaterre, M. (1978). *Semiotics of Poetry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Selden, R. (2005). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Trans. A. Mokhber). Tehran: Tarhe No.
- Tabataba’i, M. H. (1995). *Al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Trans. S. M. B. Mousavī). Qom: Islamic Seminary Publications.

The Methodological Divide in Comprehending the Prophecy of the Defeat and Victory of al-Rūm (Q.30:2-4): A Comparative Analysis of Historical Reading and Esoteric Interpretation

Reza Mollazadeh Yamchi ¹ 

Postdoctoral researcher in Quran and Hadith sciences, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran.

Mansoureh Arjomandi Fard 

Assistant Professor, Department of Jurisprudence and Fundamentals of Islamic Law, Payam Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

Mohammad Sadeq Hedayatzadeh 

Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Education, Farhangian University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

Article History: Received 9 June 2025; Accepted 2 November 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

The prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* (the Romans has been vanquished) (Q.30:2) in the opening verses of Surah al-Rūm has become a point of controversy within the Sunni and Shi'i exegetical tradition, due to its reference to a historical-unseen (*ghaybī*) event. By posing the question of what intellectual and methodological foundations underlie this exegetical conflict, this study conducts a comparative analysis of the two primary approaches to understanding these verses. The research hypothesis posits that this dichotomy is rooted not in minor details, but in a profound rupture in epistemological sources, textual function, and semantic horizons. Employing a qualitative content analysis method and examining classical exegetical sources, the article demonstrates that the first approach (historical-narrative), relying on the principles of contextualism and the primacy of the apparent meaning (*aṣālat al-ẓāhir*), understands the prophecy as a retrospective proof validating the veracity of the prophetic mission. Conversely, the second approach (esoteric-hermeneutic), based on the exclusive authority of “those firmly grounded in knowledge” (*al-rāsikhūn fī*

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: reza.mollazadehyamchi@alumni.um.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I2.12>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_107095.html?lang=en

al-‘ilm), interprets these verses as a prospective charter for eschatological glad tidings and the political guidance of the *Ummah*. The findings reveal that this duality is clearly traceable across epistemological foundations (the authority of history vs. the authority of the Imam's *naṣṣ*), textual function (a static proof vs. a dynamic charter), and semantic horizons (linear temporality vs. cyclical trans-historicism). Ultimately, this research redefines these verses as a methodological focal point for recognizing fundamental schisms within the exegetical tradition.

KEYWORDS: Qur’an, Methodology of Interpretation, Historical Exegesis, Esoteric Interpretation, *Ta’wīl*, Inimitability of the Qur’an, *I’jāz al-Qur’ān*.

1. Introduction

The Holy Qur’an has always been the central axis of understanding in Islamic civilization, and its news of the unseen is one of the prominent aspects consistently cited as evidence for the divine origin of revelation and the veracity of the prophethood of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). The opening verses of Surah al-Rūm serve as a brilliant yet challenging example of such unseen news. These verses report a major military defeat of the Roman Empire by the Persian Empire and then decisively predict that within a period of a few years, the tide will turn and the Romans will emerge victorious:

غَلِبَتِ الرُّومُ * فِي أَدْنَى الْأَرْضِ وَ هُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ غَلَبِهِمْ سَيَغْلِبُونَ * فِي بضعِ سِنِينَ لِلَّهِ الْأَمْرُ
مِنْ قَبْلُ وَ مِنْ بَعْدُ وَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يُفْرِخُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ (الروم/2-4)

*Byzantium has been vanquished * in a nearby territory, but following their defeat they will be victors * in a few years. All command belongs to Allah, before and after, and on that day the faithful will rejoice (Q. 30:2-4).*

This prophecy unfolded within the context of a real and tense historical event. During the period of the verses' revelation, the Sassanid Empire of Persia (followers of Zoroastrianism) and the Eastern Roman Empire (Christians, i.e., the People of the Book/*Ahl al-Kitāb*) were engaged in devastating wars. In this midst, the Persians defeated the Romans in a decisive battle in the nearest land to Mecca, namely, the border regions of the Levant (*Shām*), Palestine, and Jordan, and subsequently conquered Jerusalem. This defeat was perceived not merely as a minor retreat, but as the end of Roman power (Ibn Kathīr 1998, 3: 461).

This event had a profound resonance in the social atmosphere of Mecca. The polytheists (*al-mushrikīn*) of Mecca, who were themselves unlettered (*ummī*) and lacked a divine scripture, rejoiced at the victory of their

counterparts, the Persians, viewing this incident as evidence of their own righteousness (al-Ṭabrisī 1993, 8: 480). They would say to the Muslims: Just as our unscriptured brothers (Persia) defeated your scripted brothers (Rome), we too shall overcome you. In contrast, the believers, due to their shared ideological affinity with the Romans as People of the Book, were saddened by their defeat but remained hopeful for their victory. Under such circumstances, where no logic or analysis could predict the return of power to the defeated Romans, the verses of Surah al-Rūm were revealed, decisively and unprecedentedly announcing the renewed victory of the Romans within a short timeframe, in *biḍ'ī sinīn* (between three and nine years). This news was a precise, time-bound prophecy, knowledge of which is beyond human reach; in this respect, acting as a miracle (*al-mu'jizah*), it proved the veracity of the prophetic mission.

However, consulting the extensive exegetical tradition reveals that this single prophecy, rather than leading to a shared understanding, has become the point of a profound methodological schism. On one hand, the majority of exegetes have understood the verses within the framework of a historical event; on the other hand, other exegetical currents, adopting a radically different approach, extract this prophecy from its historical context and apply it to the future political developments of the Islamic *Ummah* (Tabataba'i 1970, 16: 282).

The central problem of this research is not merely to report these two approaches, but to fundamentally investigate this methodological schism. By analyzing the exegetical content, this study seeks to answer the fundamental question: what foundations and principles in the methodology of comprehending the text have caused a seemingly clear unseen news to result in two completely contradictory approaches, the historical-narrative and the esoteric-hermeneutic?

The significance of this research extends beyond the study of a mere exegetical disagreement, serving as an opportunity to delineate the fundamental methodological schisms within the tradition of Qur'anic studies. To achieve this objective, through a systematic comparative analysis, this study substantively reveals the roots of this conflict across three fundamental levels: epistemological sources (the authority of history vs. the authority of the Imam's *naṣṣ*), textual function (the Qur'an as a retrospective proof vs. a prospective charter), and semantic horizons (linear temporality vs. esoteric trans-historicism). This innovative approach offers a deeper understanding of the dynamics and tensions governing the history of exegesis.

2. *Historical-Narrative Reading*

In opposition to the esoteric current, this exegetical approach is founded on the principle that understanding the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* is impossible without relying on its historical context and objective evidence (al-Zamakhsharī 1987, 3: 466; al-Wāḥidī 2009, 18: 7). In this method, the text is perceived not as an esoteric decoding, but as an empirical and verifiable prophecy designed to establish the veracity of the prophetic mission.

2.1. *The Principle of Contextualism*

The historical-narrative reading of the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* is fundamentally based on the premise that comprehending the verses is impossible without a complete understanding of the occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) and the socio-geopolitical context of the revelation era (al-Ṭūsī 2002, 8: 227; Makarem Shirazi 2000, 16: 466). This context acts as a master key for accessing the meaning, and by establishing an objective historical event, it closes the door to any esoteric approach. This foundation manifests across three levels within the exegeses of this current:

First, it took shape in the context of a real and tense historical event. During the era of the verses' revelation, the Sassanid Empire of Persia (who were polytheists) and the Eastern Roman Empire (who were Christians and People of the Book) were engaged in devastating wars. According to the nearly unanimous reports of the exegetes, the Persians defeated the Romans in a decisive battle in the “nearest land” (*fī adnā al-arḍ*), and subsequently conquered Jerusalem (al-Fīrūzābādī n.d., 338; Muqātil ibn Sulaymān 2002, 3: 406; al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11). Exegetes have identified the location of this battle as the environs of *al-Shām* (al-Zajjāj 1988, 4: 175), Jordan and Palestine (Muqātil ibn Sulaymān 2002, 3: 406; al-Samarqandī 1996, 3: 3), *al-Jazīrah* (al-Ṣanʿānī 1991, 2: 84; al-Ṭabarānī 2008, 5: 115), and specifically *Adhriʿat* and *Buṣra* (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Wāḥidī 2009, 18: 7).

Second, this event had a profound resonance in the socio-ideological atmosphere of Mecca, causing the nascent community of Muslims and the polytheists to divide into two opposing fronts based on ideological solidarity (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; Sadeghi Tehrani 1985, 23: 113). The polytheists of Mecca, who considered the Persians as their brethren due to their shared lack of belief in a heavenly scripture, rejoiced at their victory, viewing this event as proof of their own righteousness (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Wāḥidī

2009, 18: 7). They would taunt the Muslims thus: Just as our unscriptured brothers (Persia) overcame your scripted brothers (Rome), we too shall overcome you (Muqātil ibn Sulaymān 2002, 3: 406; al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Zamakhsharī 1987, 3: 466). Conversely, the Muslims, due to their shared fundamental belief in divine scripture, felt a greater affinity with the Romans; they were saddened by their defeat and hopeful for their victory (al-Fīrūzābādī n.d., 338; Muqātil ibn Sulaymān 2002, 3: 406).

Third, in such a tense psychological atmosphere, the opening verses of Surah al-Rūm were revealed to simultaneously confirm the defeat and announce the definitive promise of the Romans' renewed victory, thereby establishing this historical context as the point of departure for understanding the text (al-Ṭūsī 2002, 8: 227; Makarem Shirazi 2000, 16: 466).

2.2. *The Linguistic Principle*

The second pillar of the comprehension methodology of this current is an uncompromising adherence to the primacy of the apparent meaning of the text (*aṣālat al-zāhir*) and the determination of meaning within the framework of the common understanding of the Arabic language at the time of revelation. This approach seeks the meaning of the prophecy not in hidden layers, but in the direct, comprehensible significations of the vocabulary and syntactic structures, thereby presenting an objective and verifiable interpretation. This principle manifests in three key areas within the exegeses:

First, in encountering the phrase *fī adnā al-arḍ*, the majority of exegetes of this current have construed it based on the lexical meaning of the “nearest land” and have sought to apply it to a real geographical location (al-Ṭūsī 2002, 8: 227; al-Naḥḥās 2001, 3:178; al-Biqā'ī 2006, 5: 582).

The second area is the exact determination of the timeframe *biḍ' sinīn*. Relying on linguistic knowledge, exegetes of this spectrum have defined *biḍ'* as a number between three and nine or ten years (Muqātil ibn Sulaymān 2002, 3: 406; al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Ālūsī 1995, 11: 19). The incident of Abū Bakr's (RA) wager, along with the Prophet's (PBUH) reminder that *biḍ'* is a number under ten years and that he should have exercised greater caution in determining the duration of the wager, serves as a crucial evidence of the importance of precise lexical signification for the correct understanding of this prophecy (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Ṣan'ānī 1991, 2: 84; al-Bayḍāwī 1997, 4: 201).

Finally, the precise and technical syntactic discussions, which occupy a

significant portion of the exegeses, bring this comprehension-based principle to its pinnacle. The disputes between grammarians such as al-Farrā' and al-Zajjāj over whether *ghalabihim* is an original infinitive (*al-maṣḍar*) or a contracted form of *ghalabatihim* (al-Farrā' 1980, 2: 319; al-Zajjāj 1988, 4: 175) reflect the profound belief that the meaning of the text is confined within the rule-bound structures of language and is discoverable and provable through it. In sum, by relying on the objective tools of historical linguistics, this approach endeavors to block the path to any arbitrary interpretation and restrict the meaning of the prophecy to precisely what the original audience would have understood from the apparent words within its historical context.

2.3. The *i'jāz*-Centric Teleology

The two principles of contextualism and the primacy of the apparent meaning, employed in the historical-narrative reading, ultimately culminate in a distinct and powerful teleology: establishing the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* as a definitive proof and an undeniable miracle to prove the veracity of the Prophet's mission and the divine origin of the Qur'an (al-Māturīdī 2005, 8:248). In this approach, this prediction is not merely news of the future, but it holds a theological and polemical function, utilized as an empirical and historical evidence against deniers (al-Zajjāj 1988, 4: 175; al-Wāḥidī 2009, 18:7).

Al-Māturīdī articulates this aspect with greater subtlety; in his view, the difference between this miracle and other verses is that opponents could not inflict any reproach or flaw upon it, such as calling it "tales of the ancients" (*asāṭīr al-awwalīn*) or a "forged lie" (*ifk muftarā*). This is because it was news of a future event that was incomprehensible through either analogy (*qiyās*) or human knowledge, and its realization proved the revelatory nature of its source (al-Māturīdī 2005, 8:248).

This *i'jāz*-centric teleology reaches its zenith in the frequently cited narrative of the wager (*mukhāṭarah*) made by Abū Bakr with polytheists such as Ubayy ibn Khalaf (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21:11; al-Zamakhsharī 1987, 3:466; al-Bayḍāwī 1997, 4:201). This incident transforms the Qur'anic prophecy from a mere informative proposition into a public challenge and an objective test before the eyes of everyone. The insistence and absolute certainty of Abū Bakr in his response to the polytheists (Quṭb 2004, 5:2756), and his subsequent entry into the wager, indicates the conviction that existed within the hearts of believers regarding the fulfillment of the divine promise. The ultimate victory of the Romans at the appointed time served as a tangible and social seal of approval on this miracle, proving the Qur'an's claim in the realm of reality.

Furthermore, even the rejoicing of the believers (*yafrāḥu al-mu'minūn*) in this reading finds a function serving this very *i'jāz*-centric teleology. Their joy was not solely due to the victory of a group of the People of the Book over the polytheists, but was fundamentally the joy of the fulfillment of the divine promise and witnessing the veracity of the Prophet's news (al-Naḥḥās 2001, 3:178; al-Māturīdī 2005, 8:248). This elation was an emotional reaction to the substantiation of a truth that the polytheists doubted. Therefore, within the framework of the evidentiary comprehension methodology, all exegetical elements, from the historical context and linguistic analysis to the wager narrative and the emotional reaction of believers, converge toward one ultimate goal: presenting the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* as an empirical, historical, and undeniable proof designed to consolidate the faith of the believers and to persuade or establish the ultimate argument against the deniers.

3. Esoteric-Hermeneutic Reading

In stark contrast to the historical reading, which confines the meaning of the prophecy within the framework of an objective event and its linguistic context, another exegetical current emerges in the Shi'i narrative sources, founded on fundamentally different principles of comprehension. This current, by transcending the apparent and historical surface of the text, seeks to discover a deeper layer of meaning, which it refers to as *ta'wīl* (esoteric interpretation).

3.1. The Epistemological Foundation

The epistemological cornerstone of this approach is manifested in a key narration from Imam al-Bāqir (PBUH), who, in response to a question regarding the meaning of opening verses of Surah *al-Rūm*, states: *O Abū 'Ubaydah, this verse possesses a ta'wīl known to none save Allah and those firmly grounded in knowledge (al-rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm) from among the Ahl al-Bayt* (al-Qummī 1984, 2: 152; al-Ḥuwayzī 1995, 4: 169; al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335).

This proposition establishes a profound epistemological rupture with the preceding approach; firstly, because it explicitly declares that the text possesses an esoteric layer (*ta'wīl*) transcending its apparent layer (*tafsīr*). Secondly, it shifts the authority and legitimacy of comprehending this esoteric layer from the public domain (which relies on linguistic and historical knowledge) to an exclusive and specific domain, namely, divine knowledge and the wisdom of those firmly grounded in knowledge, explicitly identified as the Imams.

This methodological distinction becomes even more apparent when the narrator, citing the apparent discrepancy between *bid' sinīn* (a few years) and the timeline of Muslim conquests, challenges the narration, prompting the Imam to reiterate this distinction: *Did I not tell you that for this [verse], there is a ta'wīl and a tafsīr?* (al-Qummī 1984, 2: 152; al-Ḥuwayzī 1995, 4: 169). This emphasis indicates that in this paradigm, *tafsīr*, which deals with apparent and historical comprehension, is merely the preliminary and rudimentary level of meaning, whereas *ta'wīl*, serving as the discovery of the verse's true and ultimate meaning, is the exclusive prerogative of the infallible epistemological source.

3.2. The Mechanism of Ta'wīl

Once the epistemological foundation of the esoteric reading was established upon the authority of *ta'wīl*, the operational mechanism of this comprehension methodology becomes a process of decoding. During this process, the key words of the verses, acting as signifiers (*dāl*), are emptied of their historical-geographical signifieds (*maddūl*), and new signifieds of a political and eschatological nature replace them. This substitution transforms the prophecy from a prediction about foreign empires into a symbolic narrative regarding the destiny and internal conflicts of the Islamic *Ummah*.

The most prominent example of this mechanism is the *ta'wīl* of the word *al-Rūm*. While in the historical reading, this word clearly denoted the Eastern Roman Empire, in a narration attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq (PBUH), *Rūm* is esoterically interpreted as the Umayyads (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). Another narration, by presenting an esoteric genealogy, justifies this substitution and traces the lineage and ancestry of the Umayyads back to Rome, explicitly stating that the *ta'wīl* of this verse concerns them (al-Ḥuwayzī 1995, 4: 169). Based on this, the cycle of defeat and victory is also completely redefined: the initial defeat signifies the domination of the Umayyads over the realm and governance, and the forthcoming victory is interpreted esoterically as the victory of the Abbasids over them (al-Ḥuwayzī 1995, 4: 169).²¹

This decoding mechanism reaches its zenith in the exegesis of the rejoicing of the believers (*yafrāḥu al-mu'minūn*). This joy is no longer a reaction to a temporary victory in the past; rather, it is tied to an eschatological horizon. The narrations explicitly link this triumph and

21- This may be based on a reading in which the first occurrence of *ghalabah* is rendered in the active voice (*ghalabat al-Rūm*), while the second is read in the passive voice (*sayughlabūn*) (al-Zamakhsharī 1987, 3:467).

rejoicing to the time of the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (PBUH) (the promised savior) (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). This prospective horizon is so powerful that it encompasses even the deceased believers, where it is stated that they will rejoice in their graves with the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335).

3.3. *The Emancipatory Teleology*

The complex and symbolic mechanism of *ta'wīl* ultimately leads to a teleology entirely distinct from the historical reading. If the goal of the first reading was to prove a retrospective miracle and establish the veracity of the prophetic mission against deniers, the goal of the esoteric-hermeneutic reading is to provide a prospective roadmap and an eschatological glad tidings for the community of believers. This reading transforms the verses from an isolated historical report into an identity-giving charter and a guide for action throughout history. The primary function of this prophecy is not to persuade opponents, but to sustain hope and give meaning to the internal struggles of the Islamic *Ummah*.

This emancipatory teleology reaches its zenith particularly in the *ta'wīl* of the phrase “*and on that day the faithful will rejoice*” (Q. 30:4). In this view, the joy of the believers is no longer related to the victory of a foreign empire in the seventh century CE, but is tied to the ultimate victory of the front of truth at the end of times. Narrations explicitly link this triumph and rejoicing to the time of the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (the promised savior) (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). This glad tidings possesses such a broad horizon that it even transcends the boundaries of worldly life and includes believers who have passed away; as stated in another narration, believers will rejoice in their graves with the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). This perspective transforms the Qur'anic promise from a short-term prediction into an enduring divine law and a source of solace and hope for all generations. Furthermore, in a mystical narration that esoterically interprets divine assistance as assistance for the lovers of Lady Fāṭimah (PBUH), this emancipatory aspect also acquires a spiritual and *wilāyī* dimension (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). Additionally, some mystical exegeses have elevated this teleology to an inner, psychological level, considering the victory of Rome over Persia as a symbol of the victory of the “Rome of the heart” and spiritual faculties over the “Persia of the self” (*nafs*) and carnal desires, which in itself is a form of individual and spiritual emancipation (Ibn 'Arabī 2001, 2: 137; Ḥaqqī Bursawī n.d., 7: 4).

Therefore, in this paradigm, the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* is no longer an archived event in history, but a living and dynamic text whose

function is to provide political insight, bestow identity upon the community of faith amidst turbulence, and above all, inject hope for ultimate victory and the realization of justice at the end of history.

4. *Analyzing the Conflict*

A comparative analysis of the two exegetical approaches outlined in the previous sections clearly demonstrates that the most fundamental point of conflict between these two readings lies not in the details, but in the epistemological source that each deems authoritative and valid for its interpretation.

4.1. *The Opposition in Epistemological Sources*

The historical-narrative reading derives its validity from objective, public, and verifiable data in two primary domains: history and language. The legitimacy of this approach hinges on referencing historical reports concerning the occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) as well as relying on the well-known and common rules of the Arabic language during the era of revelation. Exegetes of this current, through frequent references to the events of the Perso-Roman war and the social reactions in Mecca (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Wāḥidī 2009, 18: 7), alongside precise lexical and syntactic discussions (al-Farrā' 1980, 2: 319; al-Zajjāj 1988, 4: 175), strive to present an interpretation based on external and public evidence accessible to any researcher proficient in these sciences. In this approach, authority arises from the heart of historical data and reports.

Conversely, the esoteric-hermeneutic reading defines its epistemological source and criterion of authority in a completely different locus. This reading derives its validity neither from public historical reports nor from common linguistic rules, but rather from the explicit text (*naṣṣ*) issued by the infallible Imam as the sole competent authority for discovering the esoteric meaning of the Qur'an. The key proposition of Imam al-Bāqir, stating that these verses possess a *ta'wīl* known to none but Allah and "*those firmly grounded in knowledge*" (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm*, interpreted as the Imams), clearly demonstrates this epistemological rupture (al-Qummī 1984, 2: 152; al-Ḥuwayzī 1995, 4: 169). In this view, the apparent understanding, which is accessible to the public, is insufficient and does not pave the way toward the true and ultimate meaning of the text. Therefore, the primary root of the conflict between the two currents lies in this fundamental opposition: the authority of public and acquired knowledge based on history and language versus the authority of specific and divinely endowed knowledge based on the *naṣṣ* and the Imam.

4.2. Duality in Textual Functionality

This fundamental distinction in epistemological sources directly leads to a profound duality in the textual functionality of the sacred text between these two exegetical currents. The historical-narrative reading views the primary function of the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* as fulfilling the role of a retrospective proof. In this approach, the verse is an empirical and historical evidence that, upon its realization within the context of history, namely, the victory of the Romans within the specified timeframe, has accomplished its primary and ultimate function. The goal was to prove the veracity of the Prophet's mission and the divine nature of the Qur'an to everyone, especially the denying polytheists (al-Zajjāj 1988, 4: 175; al-Wāḥidī 2009, 18: 7; al-Māturīdī 2005, 8: 248). Following the fulfillment of this promise, this prophecy is recorded in the history of Islam as a closed case and a document of pride, its primary function, i.e., proving the truth, having been completely fulfilled.

In contrast, the esoteric-hermeneutic reading posits an entirely different function for these verses, understanding them as a prospective charter. In this approach, the function of the verse does not end with the realization of a past event; rather, it continues throughout history, remaining perpetually meaningful and guiding for the community of believers. By interpreting the verses esoterically (*ta'wīl*) as referring to the internal conflicts of the Islamic *Ummah* and its ultimate destiny, which culminates in the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335), this prophecy transforms from a mere proof for verification into a roadmap for steadfastness and an endless source of hope. Its function is not to persuade opponents at a specific historical juncture, but to sustain identity, impart meaning to sufferings, and offer an eschatological glad tiding to a community continuously facing challenges on the path to realizing its ideals. Thus, while the first reading views the verse as a realized and static historical proof, the second reading perceives it as a dynamic text and a charter for the future, whose function is perpetually in a state of becoming and realization.

4.3. Divergence in Semantic Horizons

The climax and deepest layer of this conflict manifest in the fundamental divergence of the semantic horizon, specifically in how each of the two currents perceives the categories of time and history. The historical-narrative reading situates the Qur'anic prophecy within the framework of an event-driven, historical-linear temporality. In this approach, history is a direct, non-repetitive path, and the meaning of the verse is tied to a specific,

unique, and elapsed event. Accordingly, the key phrase *wa yawma 'idhin* (and on that day) points to a specific point in time in the past; upon its arrival, the primary function of the prophecy, namely, proving the truth of the divine promise, has reached its perfection. Exegetes of this current have specifically applied this day to one of the events in early Islamic history, such as the day of Rome's final victory over Persia, or more precisely, to the day when the news of this victory coincided with a great triumph for the Muslims, namely the day of Badr (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11; al-Ṭabarānī 2008, 5: 115) or the day of al-Ḥudaybiyyah (al-Ṭabarī 1992, 21: 11). In any case, that day is a historical event that occurred and concluded in the past. Thus, the text in this reading possesses a retrospective function, transforming into a historical document for proving inimitability (*al-i 'jāz*).

Conversely, the esoteric-hermeneutic reading completely transforms the semantic horizon of the verse by presenting a model of esoteric-cyclical trans-historicism. In this view, history is not a line of isolated events, but the stage for the repetition of a fundamental pattern: the continuous confrontation between the fronts of truth and falsehood. Apparent events gain significance not in and of themselves, but as symbols of this continuous, esoteric truth. In this approach, *yawma 'idhin* no longer refers to a day in the past; rather, it is projected into the future and an eschatological horizon where the ultimate meaning of history is revealed. The narrations of this current explicitly link the ultimate joy of the believers to the time of the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). This glad tidings possesses such a broad horizon that it even transcends the boundaries of worldly life and includes believers who have passed away; as stated in another narration, believers will rejoice in their graves with the uprising of the *al-Qā'im* (al-Baḥrānī 1995, 4: 335). This perspective transforms the Qur'anic promise from a short-term prediction into an enduring divine law and a source of solace and hope for all generations. Therefore, the divergence of the two viewpoints reaches its zenith at this juncture: the first reading, by historicizing the text, confines the meaning to the past; whereas the second reading, by trans-historicizing it, yields a dynamic, continuous, and prospective meaning that remains perpetually inspiring and guiding for the community of believers.

5. Conclusion

By moving beyond mere description, this research demonstrated that the exegetical conflict surrounding the prophecy of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* is rooted in a profound schism in the foundations of comprehending the text. Rather than being an isolated event, these verses have acted as the focal point for the crystallization of two intellectual approaches within the Islamic exegetical tradition. The results of this comparative analysis clearly reveal three focal points of this opposition:

First, the opposition in epistemological sources: The historical-narrative reading derives its validity from objective and verifiable data in the two domains of history and language. This approach presents an interpretation based on external and public evidence, extracting authority from the heart of historical reports and linguistic rules. Conversely, the esoteric-hermeneutic reading defines its epistemological source not in the public domain, but in the explicit text (*naṣṣ*) of the infallible Imam as the sole competent authority for discovering the esoteric meaning. This fundamental rupture demonstrates that these two currents disagree over the question: From where should the Qur'an be understood?

Second, the duality in textual functionality: This difference in the epistemological foundation leads to a duality in the function and purpose of the sacred text. On one hand, the historical-narrative reading views the prophecy as a retrospective proof whose aim is to establish the veracity of the prophetic mission through a historical event in the past. Upon the fulfillment of this promise, the verse transforms into a historical document and a closed case. On the other hand, the esoteric-hermeneutic reading understands the verses as a prospective charter whose function does not conclude with the realization of a past event, but remains perpetually meaningful and guiding for the community of believers. By esoterically interpreting the verses as the internal conflicts of the *Ummah* and its destiny, the prophecy transforms from a mere proof for verification into a roadmap for steadfastness and an endless source of hope.

Third, the divergence in semantic horizons: The deepest layer of this opposition manifests in the differing perceptions of the two currents regarding the categories of time and history. The first reading situates the verse within the framework of a historical-linear temporality and ties its meaning to a specific, unique, and elapsed event. In this view, "that day" (*wa yawma 'idhin*) points to a historical point in the past that occurred and concluded with the victory of the Romans or its coincidence with events such as Badr or al-Ḥudaybiyyah. In contrast, the second reading, by presenting a model of esoteric-cyclical trans-historicism, completely

transforms the semantic horizon of the verse. In this view, history is not a line of isolated events, but the stage for the repetition of the confrontation between truth and falsehood. *Yawma'idhin* no longer refers to the past; rather, it is projected into the future and an eschatological horizon where the ultimate meaning of history is revealed at that moment, namely during the uprising of the *al-Qā'im*.

Therefore, this research demonstrates that the apparent conflict in the exegesis of *Ghulibat al-Rūm* actually signifies a schism in the methodology of Qur'anic comprehension: a schism between a positivist, history-oriented approach versus a symbolic, future-oriented approach. This schism is not a flaw, but a dynamic mechanism that transforms the Qur'an from a mere historical document into a living and perpetually guiding text for the community of faith throughout the passage of history.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

References

- Abū al-Su'ūd, M. (1983). *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Qur'ān al-karīm*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- Al-Ālūsī, M. (1995). *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm wa-al-sab' al-mathānī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Baḥrānī, H. (1995). *Al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Qom: Mu'assasat al-Bi'thah.
- Al-Bayḍāwī, 'A. (1997). *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- Al-Biqā'ī, I. (2006). *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa-al-suwar*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Farrā', Y. (1980). *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*. Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah lil-Kitāb.
- Al-Fīrūzābādī, M. (n.d.). *Tanwīr al-miqbās min tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās* (Attributed to 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās). Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Ḥuwayzī, 'A. (1995). *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*. Qom: Ismā'īliyyān.
- Al-Māturīdī, M. (2005). *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-sunnah (Tafsīr al-Māturīdī)*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Naḥḥās, A. (2001). *I'rāb al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Qummī, 'A. (1984). *Tafsīr al-Qummī*. Qom: Dār al-Kitāb.

- Al-Samarqandī, N. (1996). *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī (Baḥr al-'ulūm)*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
- Al-Ṣan'ānī, 'A. (1991). *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah.
- Al-Ṭabarānī, S. (2008). *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*. Irbid: Dār al-Kitāb al-Thaqāfī.
- Al-Ṭabarī, M. (1992). *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah.
- Al-Ṭabrisī, F. (1993). *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Tehran: Naṣīr Khusraw.
- Al-Ṭūsī, M. (2002.). *Al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār Ihya' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- Al-Wāhidī, 'A. (2009). *Al-Tafsīr al-basīṭ*. Riyadh: 'Imādat al-Baḥth al-'Ilmī - Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad b. Su'ūd al-Islāmiyyah.
- Al-Zajjāj, I. (1988). *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān wa i'rābuh*. Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub.
- Al-Zamakhsharī, M. (1987). *Al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq ḡhawāmiḍ al-tanzīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī.
- Haqqī Bursawī, I. (n.d.). *Tafsīr rūḥ al-bayān*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
- Ibn 'Arabī, M. (2001). *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabī*. Beirut: Dār Ihya' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- Ibn Kathīr, I. (1998). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyyah.
- Makarem Shirazi, N. (2000). *Al-Amthal fī tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-munzal*. Qom: Madrasat al-Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (AS).
- Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (2002). *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*. Beirut: Dār Ihya' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- Qarai, A. Q. (2004). *Translation of the Holy Qur'an*. London: ICAS.
- Quṭb, S. (2004). *Fī ḡilāl al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq.
- Sadeghi Tehrani, M. (1985). *Al-Furqān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-al-Qur'ān wa-al-sunnah*. Qom: Farhang-i Islāmī.
- Tabataba'i, M. H. (1970). *Al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'Alamī lil-Maṭbū'āt.

A Metallurgical Re-evaluation of Dhū al-Qarnayn's Barrier: From the Alloy Hypothesis to an Fe-Cu Composite Model

Mostafa Jafari ¹ 

Faculty of Chemistry and Petroleum Sciences, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

Article History: Received 7 September 2025; Accepted 4 November 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

The construction of the barrier by Dhū al-Qarnayn, as depicted in Surah al-Kahf (Q. 18:96), involves a unique combination of iron and copper. Traditionally, this process has been interpreted as the formation of a homogenous metallurgical alloy. However, from the perspective of materials science, this “Alloy Hypothesis” faces severe technical challenges, including the extreme melting point of iron and the inherent immiscibility of the iron-copper (Fe-Cu) system. This study employs a multidisciplinary methodology, combining Qur'anic analysis with historical metallurgical data from the Achaemenid era (6th century BCE) as a representative technological baseline. We argue that the barrier was not a product of anachronistic alloying but rather a masterpiece of composite engineering. By introducing a “Composite Model” based on interfacial thermal bonding and capillary infiltration, we demonstrate how ancient engineers could achieve structural unification (*radm*) and corrosion resistance without violating the physical laws of thermodynamics. Our findings suggest that the use of copper as a low-temperature intermediary binder provided a feasible solution for creating an impenetrable, monolithic barrier within the technological constraints of antiquity.

KEYWORDS: Qur'anic engineering, Dhū al-Qarnayn's barrier, Scientific interpretation, Archaeometallurgy, Iron-Copper System, Composite Materials, Achaemenid Metallurgy, Interfacial Bonding.

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: ms_jafari@sbu.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I2.9>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_106982.html?lang=en

1. Introduction

The narrative of Dhū al-Qarnayn in Surah al-Kahf stands as one of the most remarkable and multi-layered accounts in the Qur'an. For centuries, this story has sparked deep inquiry across numerous dimensions, including, but not limited to, the historical identity of Dhū al-Qarnayn, the nature and origin of the tribes of Gog and Magog (Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj), and the means (*asbāb*) of his global travels (van Donzel & Schmidt 2010). Among these varied aspects, the Barrier (*al-Sadd*) has remained a central point of fascination, encompassing two distinct areas of research: its geographical location and its unique technical construction.

The quest for the barrier's location has historically garnered significant interest; a notable example is the journey of the Abbasid explorer Sallām al-Tarjumān around 842 CE, who was commissioned by Caliph al-Wāthiq bi-llāh specifically to locate the structure (van Donzel & Schmidt 2010). While efforts like Sallām's sought to identify its physical remains, the methodology of its assembly has received less analytical attention. The Qur'anic account (Q. 18:96-97) depicts a precise engineering sequence:

أَتُونِي زُبَرَ الْحَدِيدِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا سَاوَىٰ بَيْنَ الصَّدَفَيْنِ قَالَ انْفُخُوا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَعَلَهُ نَارًا قَالَ آتُونِي
أُفْرَغَ عَلَيْهِ قَطْرًا * فَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا أَنْ يَظْهَرُوهُ وَ مَا اسْتَطَاعُوا لَهُ نَقْبًا (الكهف/96-97)
"Bring me pieces of iron!" When he had levelled up between the flanks, he said,
"Blow!" When he had turned it into fire, he said, "Bring me molten copper to pour
over it" (96). So they could neither scale it, nor could they make a hole in it (Q.
18:96-97).

Dhū al-Qarnayn reached a region between two mountain slopes (*al-sadafayn*) and requested the inhabitants' physical labour and power (*quwwah*). The construction involved stacking massive iron blocks (*zubar al-ḥadīd*) until they levelled the gap between the mountains. He then applied heat until the iron reached a state of incandescence (*nār*), followed by pouring molten copper (*qitr*) over the assembly. The resulting barrier was described as a massive, unified structure that the adversaries could neither scale, due to its height and smoothness, nor pierce, implying a monument of immense structural continuity.

Traditionally, this iron-copper construction has been interpreted as the creation of a homogenous metallurgical alloy (Moghaddasi 2022). However, the feasibility of such a process, producing a unified alloy on such a monumental scale, requires a detailed investigation into materials science

and the historical technology available in antiquity. This paper aims to conduct a technical evaluation of these claims, specifically examining the metallurgical prerequisites of the iron-copper (Fe-Cu) system and the thermal constraints of ancient engineering.

By establishing a historical baseline in the 6th century BCE (the Achaemenid era), we investigate the “Alloy Hypothesis” against documented technological constants. Following this evaluation, we propose a “Composite Engineering Model” based on interfacial bonding. This model offers a detailed technical explanation of how copper and iron could interact to form a unified structure, providing a new perspective on how such a barrier could be realized within the framework of ancient engineering principles.

2. Theoretical Framework and Historical Context

2.1. Technological Baseline and Chronological Reference

The technical evaluation of Dhū al-Qarnayn’s barrier requires a stable historical reference point to define the boundaries of ancient engineering. For the purposes of this study, we adopt the hypothesis proposed by Tabataba’i (1996, 13: 391), which identifies Dhū al-Qarnayn as Cyrus the Great (6th century BCE). This selection provides a concrete chronological setting for assessing available materials and techniques.

However, it is crucial to note that the specific historical identity, whether Cyrus or another figure from the same broad era, does not fundamentally alter the metallurgical core of this research. This is due to the prolonged stability of ancient technology; during this period and for centuries thereafter, the rate of innovation in thermal processing was relatively slow. The technological ceiling of that era remained essentially static regarding iron smelting and fusion techniques. Consequently, the engineering arguments presented in this paper remain valid across a wide chronological window. A more rigorous analysis of these technological constants, and the reasons they preclude modern industrial methods, will be detailed in the following sections.

Having established this historical baseline, we must now examine the specific metallurgical boundaries of the Achaemenid period to distinguish the feasible from the impossible in ancient construction.

2.2. Historical Context and Archaeological Absence

The identification of Dhū al-Qarnayn with Cyrus the Great (6th century BCE), following Tabataba'i's hypothesis, is adopted primarily as a technological baseline rather than a definitive historical attribution. Metallurgical capabilities based on bloomery iron production, characterized by a practical temperature ceiling of approximately 1100–1300°C, remained largely stable for several centuries across the ancient Near East and neighbouring regions. Therefore, the core engineering arguments of this study remain valid even if the barrier is attributed to a slightly earlier or later period.

Furthermore, the location of the barrier is not necessarily limited to the Achaemenid heartland. Considering the empire's vast frontiers and the Qur'anic description of remote mountain passes (*al-ṣadafayn*), the structure could plausibly be situated in peripheral mountainous zones such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, or other frontier regions where systematic archaeological surveys remain incomplete.

The absence of definitive archaeological remains does not negate its existence. A barrier of limited length, likely no more than a few hundred meters, could readily have been concealed by millennia of alluviation, landslides, and sediment accumulation in a mountain pass environment. The Qur'anic text emphasizes that the barrier could neither be scaled nor pierced (Q. 18:97), which is consistent with its potential burial under natural geological processes without structural failure.

This multidisciplinary study, therefore, focuses on the engineering feasibility of the described construction, offering a plausible composite model that is fully consistent with the technological capabilities of the era.

3. Technological Constraints and the Engineering Problem

The construction of the barrier, as detailed in the Qur'anic narrative, involves the manipulation of massive quantities of iron, referred to as *zubar al-ḥadīd* (literally massive pieces or blocks of iron). The process describes the application of heat until these masses reach a state of *nār* (translated as fire, here implying a glowing, incandescent thermal state). From an engineering perspective, the primary challenge lies in the integration of these discrete blocks into a single, unified *radm* (a term denoting a stacked, reinforced, and tightly packed structure).

3.1. The Metallurgical Complexity of the Iron-Copper System

To evaluate the feasibility of the Alloy Hypothesis, it is necessary to examine the fundamental materials science of the Iron-Copper (Fe-Cu) system. According to the Springer Materials Database, iron and copper are characterized by a significant lack of solid solubility. The iron-copper system consists of alloys and mixtures that are immiscible in the solid state, meaning they do not form a continuous solid solution, but rather exist as separate phases within the material. This immiscibility is due to the pronounced differences in their crystal structures, iron being body-centered cubic (BCC) and copper being face-centered cubic (FCC), and their atomic sizes (Springer Materials n.d.).

This inherent immiscibility poses a severe engineering challenge. Even if the temperature were raised to the melting point of iron (1538°C) to achieve a liquid state, the challenge of homogenization would remain unresolved. Due to the metastable miscibility gap in the liquid phase, the two metals tend to separate like oil and water. In a large-scale construction like a barrier, this leads to gravitational segregation, where the denser iron-rich phase settles at the bottom, while the copper-rich phase floats toward the surface, preventing the formation of a unified, high-strength alloy.

Furthermore, as highlighted by contemporary research (Sun 2020), producing high-performance Fe-Cu alloys with a uniform dispersion of phases requires advanced industrial preparation techniques that were non-existent in antiquity. These include:

Vacuum Induction Melting: To prevent oxidation and ensure compositional stability.

Upward Continuous Casting: To manage the solidification process and minimize defects.

Laser-based 3D Printing or Air Atomization: To achieve a fine-scale distribution of iron within the copper matrix.

Therefore, the validity of any construction theory depends not only on chemical possibility but also on its scalability. We must now critically analyse whether the technological framework of the 6th century BCE could support such extreme thermal, chemical, and structural demands.

3.1.1. Metallurgical and Engineering Prerequisites

To evaluate the feasibility of any unification theory regarding the barrier, it is necessary to examine the fundamental materials science of the iron-copper (Fe-Cu) system and the mechanics of thermal joining. Historically and scientifically, creating a monolithic structure of this magnitude would necessitate fulfilling the following rigorous prerequisites:

3.1.1.1. Chemical and Phase Homogenization

If the barrier is interpreted as a homogeneous alloy (Moghaddasi 2022), it must overcome the inherent immiscibility of the Fe-Cu system. According to the Springer Materials Database, the iron-copper system consists of alloys and mixtures that are immiscible in the solid state. This immiscibility is due to the pronounced differences in their crystal structures (BCC iron vs. FCC copper) and their atomic sizes (Springer Materials n.d.).

To prevent gravitational segregation (where denser iron settles at the bottom), modern industry requires vacuum induction melting or upward continuous casting (Sun 2020). Any model of the barrier must account for how this atomic-level integration was managed without such advanced infrastructure.

3.1.1.2. Large-Scale Fusion and Thermal Joining

If the model assumes that the iron blocks (*zubar al-ḥadīd*) were joined through fusion welding or a monolithic thermal bond to form a *radm*, the following infrastructure is required:

Uniform Heat Saturation: To achieve a welded or fused state, the entire contact surface of the massive iron blocks must be heated to temperatures near or at the melting point (1538°C).

Surface Cleaning and Fluxing: Fusion joining requires the removal of iron oxides (scales) from the surfaces. Without modern chemical fluxes or a controlled atmosphere, a unified metallurgical bond across thousands of tons of iron is virtually impossible.

3.1.1.3. Geometric and Spatial Scale-Up

The feasibility of these metallurgical processes is strictly bound to the geographical constraints of the site:

The al-ṣadafayn Gap: The term *al-ṣadafayn* (the two mountain slopes) implies a significant gap, often estimated at approximately 30 meters. Maintaining a uniform thermal field across such a vast width to reach the state of *nār* (incandescence) is an unprecedented challenge in energy engineering.

Vertical Load and Containment: The model must explain how ancient engineers managed the hydrostatic pressure and vertical structural load if large portions of the barrier were in a molten or semi-molten state during construction.

3.2. *Technological Impossibility and the Historical Deadlock*

The technological landscape of the 6th century BCE under Cyrus the Great (r. 559–530 BCE) was dominated by bloomery iron production, a low-temperature process that precluded the large-scale fusion, homogenization, or alloying required for a monolithic Fe-Cu barrier. Bloomery furnaces, the primary method for iron smelting across the Achaemenid Empire and the broader Near East, operated at maximum temperatures of 1100–1300°C, well below the melting point of iron (1538°C) (Tylecote 1992). These furnaces produced spongy iron blooms intermixed with slag, which required extensive hot hammering (smithing) to consolidate the metal, rather than molten iron suitable for casting or the thermal joining of massive blocks (Pleiner 2000).

In contrast, the blast furnace, capable of reaching temperatures over 1500°C in the bosh to produce molten pig iron and low-iron glassy slags, emerged only in post-medieval Europe (post-12th century) and was absent in the ancient Near East (Tylecote 1992). These limitations persisted well into later periods, with no evidence of breakthroughs in high-temperature melting or controlled atmospheres until much later eras (Erb-Satullo 2019). Thus, the prerequisites outlined in Section 3.1, atomic homogenization, fusion welding, and monumental thermal management, far exceeded the capabilities of Achaemenid engineering, rendering such a barrier infeasible without anachronistic modern interventions.

Beyond the limitations of furnace temperature, the physical dimensions of the barrier (e.g., a 30-meter span) presented an insurmountable logistical challenge. In ancient metallurgy, thermal energy was typically localized and transient. To achieve the state of incandescence (*nār*) or to perform fusion welding across thousands of tons of *zubar al-ḥadīd*, an engineer would have needed to:

Sustain a Continuous Thermal Field: Maintaining a uniform temperature exceeding 1000°C across a 30-meter-wide and several-meter-high gap would require a massive, coordinated combustion of fuel that far surpassed the energy density available from charcoal and manual bellows.

Overcome Heat Dissipation: In an open-air mountainous environment (*al-ṣadafayn*), the rate of heat loss to the atmosphere and the surrounding rock would be immense. Without a closed refractory chamber, which is impractical for a 30-meter barrier, the iron blocks would dissipate heat faster than ancient fuel sources could supply it, preventing any meaningful metallurgical bonding or melting.

Manage Structural Loads: If any significant portion of the iron were to reach a semi-molten state for welding or alloying, the hydrostatic pressure and the weight of the overhead blocks would cause the lower sections to deform or collapse, as there is no evidence of large-scale, heat-resistant formwork or support systems in Achaemenid engineering.

The Problem of Bulk Thermal Assembly: Beyond the chemical barriers, the transition from small-scale smithing to macro-scale metallurgical joining introduces the problem of uniform heat distribution. Achieving a simultaneous incandescent state across a 30-meter span, without the benefit of modern thermal insulation, is a logistical impossibility. Modern engineering solutions for joining such massive structural components require highly specialized and complex welding procedures to manage thermal stresses and ensure structural integrity (see Medlock et al. (2019), for the complexity of such operations). The rapid heat dissipation into the surrounding mountain rock, acting as a massive heat sink, would prevent ancient iron blocks from reaching the necessary bonding temperature. This further reinforces the hypothesis that the construction must have relied on a localized, sequential application of molten filler rather than an attempt at monolithic thermal fusion.

As established by the Springer Materials (n.d.) data on the immiscibility of the Fe-Cu system, any attempt at alloying without modern stirring and vacuum technology would result in phase separation and structural failure. Therefore, the Alloy Hypothesis (Moghaddasi 2022) remains a metallurgical anachronism, rendering such a barrier infeasible without the use of modern interventions.

Given these insurmountable thermal and logistical deadlocks, the Alloy Hypothesis fails to provide a viable engineering explanation for the barrier's construction. This necessitates a shift in perspective from metallurgical fusion to a composite structural model. In the following section, we demonstrate how the specific sequence of the Qur'anic narrative describes a sophisticated process of interfacial bonding, which bypassed the thermal ceiling of the ancient world.

4. The Proposed Model: Composite Structure and Interfacial Thermal Bonding

The dismissal of the Alloy Hypothesis leaves two critical engineering questions unanswered: firstly, if the copper was not intended for alloying, what was its specific functional role? Secondly, how were the massive iron blocks (*zubar al-ḥadīd*) integrated into a stable, vertical structure without

recourse to large-scale fusion welding? To address these inquiries, we propose a Composite Engineering Model in which copper and iron maintain their distinct material identities while acting in synergy. This model can be analysed through two primary functions:

4.1. Copper as a Protective and Passivating Layer

In the environmental conditions of a mountain pass, an unprotected iron structure would be highly susceptible to rapid oxidation. The choice of copper as a coating material provides a superior electrochemical shield due to the following factors:

Electrochemical Stability: From a thermodynamic perspective, copper possesses a positive standard reduction potential (+0.34 V), making it significantly more noble than iron (-0.44 V) (Skoog et al. 2013). While iron reacts spontaneously with atmospheric oxygen and moisture to form porous, non-adherent oxides (rust), copper is energetically more stable. This potential difference ensures that the copper layer remains intact, acting as a passive barrier that isolates the iron core from corrosive agents.

Self-Passivation: Unlike iron oxide, which facilitates further corrosion by allowing oxygen to penetrate deeper, any initial oxidation of the copper surface forms a dense, stable patina, typically copper carbonates or oxides (Copper Development Association n.d.; Strandberg & Johansson 1998). This thin layer passivates the surface, effectively sealing the structure and ensuring the barrier's longevity over centuries.

4.2. Copper as a Structural Intermediary (Capillary Infiltration)

The most significant engineering advantage of this model is its circumvention of the 1538°C melting point of iron. Instead, it utilizes the principles of interfacial thermal bonding and capillary infiltration:

The Brazing Effect: While ancient furnaces could not liquefy bulk iron, they could easily sustain the 1085°C required to melt copper (Lucas-Milhaupt n.d.; Way et al. 2020). When molten copper (*qitr*) is poured over the iron blocks pre-heated to an incandescent state (*nār*), it gains high fluidity and flows into the microscopic and macroscopic interstices between the blocks.

Gap-Filling and Mechanical Integrity: Through capillary action, the liquid copper fills every void within the iron assembly. Upon solidification, it creates a powerful metallurgical bond at the interface. This transforms a pile of discrete iron masses into a unified, monolithic *radm* (a term

denoting a filled-in, voidless structure). It should be noted that while pure capillary action requires narrow clearances, the integration of ancient, irregularly shaped iron blocks would rely on gravity-assisted infiltration and liquid-phase sintering. The molten copper acts as a gap-filling medium that occupies the macroscopic voids between the blocks, while simultaneously utilizing capillary forces to penetrate the microscopic surface roughness of the iron. This dual mechanism ensures a continuous metallurgical bond regardless of the precision of the initial iron masonry, effectively potting the blocks within a solid copper matrix.

Inaccessibility and Resistance: By filling the gaps, the copper prevents the use of levers or mechanical tools by an adversary to dislodge individual blocks (American Welding Society 2025; Harris Products Group n.d.). The resulting composite structure combines the high compressive strength of the iron core with the ductile, sealing properties of the copper matrix, creating a barrier that is both impenetrable and immune to the structural decay typical of dry-stack masonry.

4.3. Modern Applications and Comparative Performance of Fe-Cu Composites

To contextualize the proposed composite model within contemporary materials science, it is useful to examine modern analogues of iron-copper systems, even though the Qur'anic barrier is best understood as a macroscopic composite rather than a homogeneous alloy.

Modern Fe-Cu materials are primarily produced as composites using advanced techniques such as powder metallurgy, mechanical alloying, or brazing, due to the very limited solid solubility in the Fe-Cu system (Raghavan 2004). Typical compositional ranges include:

Low Copper Additions (0.25–0.55 wt% Cu): Widely used in weathering steels (e.g., COR-TEN, ASTM A588) to enhance atmospheric corrosion resistance through stable patina formation (ASTM A588/A588M).

Moderate Copper as a Binder Phase: Applied in sintered or Cu-infiltrated ferrous composites, where molten copper penetrates the iron matrix via capillary action, the same principle underlying our model (Li et al. 2024; Jang et al. 2024).

High Copper Matrix: Found in copper-rich alloys such as C19400 (ASTM B465), combining electrical/thermal conductivity with moderate strength.

4.3.1. Comparison with Alternative Alloys in Construction and Structural Applications

Versus Carbon Steel: Fe-Cu composites provide superior long-term corrosion resistance due to copper's noble potential (+0.34 V) and the formation of a stable patina.

Versus Stainless Steel (Cr-Ni): Stainless steels offer higher performance in aggressive conditions but require alloying elements (Cr, Ni) and modern production methods that were unavailable in antiquity.

Versus Bronze (Cu-Sn): The Qur'anic model prioritizes the high compressive strength and availability of iron blocks (*zubar al-ḥadīd*), using copper only as an intermediary binder. This is more resource-efficient than constructing the entire barrier from bronze, which would require vastly greater quantities of copper and tin.

In modern engineering, the principle of liquid-phase infiltration and capillary bonding is widely employed in brazing and sintered components (Way et al. 2020). This confirms that the ancient technique described in the Qur'an relies on universal physical phenomena, wetting, capillarity, and interfacial diffusion, without requiring homogeneous alloying or anachronistic technology.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that interpreting the Dhū al-Qarnayn barrier as a homogeneous metallurgical alloy poses significant scientific and historical challenges. The inherent immiscibility of the Fe-Cu system, as evidenced by the Springer Materials (n.d.) database, and the thermal ceiling of 6th-century BCE bloomery technology (Tylecote 1992), render bulk alloying or large-scale fusion welding an engineering impossibility for that era. These technical deadlocks suggest that the Alloy Hypothesis may be a result of applying modern metallurgical concepts to an ancient narrative.

In contrast, the proposed Composite Engineering Model offers a solution that is both scientifically sound and historically plausible. By shifting the focus from atomic-level alloying to interfacial thermal bonding, this model aligns seamlessly with the sequential steps described in the Qur'anic text. The process of pouring molten copper over pre-heated iron blocks acts as a sophisticated system of capillary infiltration (brazing). This method allowed ancient engineers to: achieve structural unification (*radm*) without the need to melt the massive iron core; provide a permanent electrochemical shield against corrosion, utilizing copper's noble reduction potential (+0.34 V); and create an impenetrable, voidless barrier resistant to mechanical leverage.

Ultimately, the strength of this model lies in its adherence to the natural laws of physics and metallurgy. It reveals that the construction of the barrier did not require a departure from the physical realities of the ancient world; rather, it was a masterpiece of composite design. By using copper not as an alloying element, but as a structural and chemical intermediary, the project achieved a level of durability and integrity that remains a testament to advanced ancient engineering, realized through a deep understanding of the materials at hand.

Acknowledgements

The author extends sincere thanks to the Research Affairs of Shahid Beheshti University for their support. Special gratitude is also due to Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Alavi Nejad (Shahid Beheshti University) for his valuable suggestions and insightful feedback.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.


Conflict of Interest: The author declares no competing interests.

References

- ASTM A588/A588M. (2019). *Standard Specification for High-Strength Low-Alloy Structural Steel*. ASTM International.
- ASTM B465/B465M. (2016). *Standard Specification for Copper-Iron Alloy Plate, Sheet, Strip, and Rolled Bar*. ASTM International.
<https://doi.org/10.1520/B0465-00>
- American Welding Society (AWS). (2025). *Brazing Handbook* (6th ed.). Miami, FL: American Welding Society.
- Copper Development Association. (n.d.). *Corrosion Resistance of Copper*. Retrieved July 22, 2025, from https://www.copper.org/applications/architecture/arch_dhb/corrosion/
- Erb-Satullo, N. L. (2019). The innovation and adoption of iron in the ancient Near East. *Journal of Archaeological Research*, 27(4), 557–607.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10814-019-09129-6>
- Harris Products Group. (n.d.). *How Brazing Works - Capillary Action*. Retrieved July 22, 2025, from <https://www.harrisproductsgroup.com/en/Resources/Knowledge-Center/Tech-Tips/Tech-Tips-OLD/How-Brazing-Works-Capillary-Action>
- Jang, J. M. et al. (2024). Fabrication of Cu-Infiltrated Journal Bearing by Binder Jetting Additive Manufacturing. *Crystals*, 14(11), 912.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/cryst14110912>

- Li, J., Feng, H., Zhang, J., Chen, P., & Cheng, J. (2024). Effect of Cu content on the microstructure and properties of sintered Fe-0.8C-xCu antifricition materials. *Materials Research Express*, 11(9), 096502. <https://doi.org/10.1088/2053-1591/ad72cf>
- Lucas-Milhaupt. (n.d.). *Brazing Fundamentals*. Retrieved July 22, 2025, from <https://www.lucasmilhaupt.com/Brazing-Academy/Brazing-Fundamentals>
- Medlock, R., et al. (2019). *Bridge Welding Reference Manual* (Publication No. FHWA-HIF-19-088). Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation. <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/bridge/steel/pubs/hif19088.pdf>
- Moghaddasi, A. (2022). Why the Dhul-Qarnayn's dam is impenetrable? A Chemical and physical study. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies*, 1(1), 71-82. <https://doi.org/10.37264/jiqs.v1i1.5>
- Pleiner, R. (2000). *Iron in Archaeology: The European Bloomery Smelters*. Archeologický ústav AV ČR.
- Raghavan, V. (2004). Fe-Cu (Iron-Copper). *Journal of Phase Equilibria and Diffusion*, 25(6), 561-562.
- Skoog, D. A., West, D. M., Holler, F. J., & Crouch, S. R. (2013). *Fundamentals of Analytical Chemistry* (9th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Springer Materials. (n.d.). *The Iron-Copper (Fe-Cu) System*. Springer Nature Database. Retrieved July 22, 2025, from https://materials.springer.com/substance/111201/iron-copper_system
- Strandberg, H., & Johansson, L.-G. (1998). Reactions of copper patina compounds—I. Influence of some air pollutants. *Atmospheric Environment*, 32(18), 3007–3017. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1352-2310\(98\)00057-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1352-2310(98)00057-0)
- Sun, J. (2020). *Preparation Technology and Industrial Application of New High-Performance Copper-Iron Alloy*. Shanghai Metals Market (SMM). [https://news.metal.com/newscontent/101204653-\[copper-Summit\]-preparation-Technology-and-Industrial-Application-of-New-High-performance-Copper-Iron-Alloy](https://news.metal.com/newscontent/101204653-[copper-Summit]-preparation-Technology-and-Industrial-Application-of-New-High-performance-Copper-Iron-Alloy)
- Tylecote, R. F. (1992). *A History of Metallurgy* (2nd ed.). Institute of Materials.
- Tabataba'i, M. H. (1996). *Al-Mizān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*. Qom: Jāmi'ah Mudarrisi'n.
- Van Donzel, E., & Schmidt, A. (2010). *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources: Sallam's Quest for Alexander's Wall*. Brill.
- Way, M., Willingham, J., & Goodall, R. (2020). Brazing filler metals. *International Materials Reviews*, 65(6), 295–332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09506608.2019.1613311>

The Manifestation of God in the Parable of “Light”: A Re-reading of the Verse “Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth” (Q. 24:35) Based on Modern Science

Asieh Zouelm¹ 

Assistant Professor, Department of Quranic Studies and Hadith, Faculty of Theology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran.

Article History: Received 18 March 2025; Accepted 24 June 2025

ABSTRACT:

Original Paper

The Noble Qur'an employs parables (*al-amthāl*) as a method for bringing the human mind closer to the comprehension of transcendent truths. The expression “*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*” (Q. 24:35) is among the most prominent Qur'anic parables that has long invited reflection among scholars of the Islamic sciences. Using a descriptive–analytical method, this study examines the historical trajectory of the interpretation of this verse in relation to the development of theories in optics. It also analyzes the system of parables in the Qur'an and demonstrates, in light of recent scientific findings, the possibility of novel understandings of this verse that have been neglected in existing exegetical works. A review of the historical course of interpretation reveals that empirical scientific knowledge had little influence on exegetical understandings up to the 13th century CE. The interpretation of *al-nūr* (light) by *Suhrawardī* as “that which is manifest and makes manifest” has endured due to its consonance with the empirical understanding of the nature of light.

This study shows that, from an ontological perspective grounded in the metaphorical nature of the cosmos, the manifestation of higher truths within it, and the expression of these truths in the Qur'an through parables, attention to recent findings in optical science leads to the discovery of new dimensions of this Qur'anic parable. Features of light, such as the reflection of light in bodies depending on their properties, the visibility of only a small portion of the electromagnetic spectrum, the absoluteness of the speed of light irrespective of the observer's motion, and the absence of perceived temporal

1. Corresponding Author. Email Address: a.zouelm@alzahra.ac.ir

<http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I2.6>

https://iqs.sbu.ac.ir/article_106876.html?lang=en

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



passage in a hypothetical motion at the speed of light, respectively evoke the levels of divine manifestation in beings, the limitations of human perception, and the absoluteness and atemporality of God.

KEYWORDS: The Qur'an and science, light, parable (*mathal*), optics, Verse of Light (*Āyah al-Nūr*)

1. Introduction

One of the important parables in the Qur'an is the parable of God as light, expressed in the Verse of Light (Q. 24:35):

Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth «اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ...»
Earth

This parable has long attracted the attention of exegetes, Qur'anic scholars, philosophers, and mystics, each of whom has offered different interpretations. However, the manner in which scholars have understood this Qur'anic expression has been influenced by their intellectual orientations, their hermeneutical approaches to the Qur'an, and their knowledge of the phenomenon of light. Despite the multiplicity of readings offered by various intellectual traditions, ranging from metaphorical to literal interpretations, the question remains: what is the intended meaning of this parable, and on what basis can it be explained?

Answering this question requires, on the one hand, correlating the various interpretations of this expression with the historical development of optical science, and on the other hand, understanding the Qur'anic method of employing parables and the principles by which the intended meaning of God may be accessed through them. Accordingly, the present study seeks to provide a new reading of the parable of divine light in the Qur'an by addressing two questions: First, what relationship exists between the historical trajectory of the interpretation of the expression "*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*" and the evolution of theories of light? Second, based on the system of parables in the Qur'an, what new explanation of this expression can be offered in light of the discoveries concerning the properties of light in recent centuries?

2. Literature Review

The background of this study encompasses all writings concerning the Verse of Light (*Āyah al-Nūr*) and the parable of God as light. However, this section focuses exclusively on contemporary studies that, due to their closer

relevance to the present research, have addressed various interpretations and examined aspects of the resemblance in this parable.

Soufian (1998), drawing on Qur'anic verses, comparatively examines the characteristics of spiritual light in the Qur'an and physical light in physics, highlighting points of convergence between the two. Nevertheless, the study does not provide a precise theoretical foundation for correlating these two domains. Khademzadeh (2016) demonstrates that Mullā Ṣadrā, in explaining the resemblance between light and God, employs the metaphor "existence is light," and considers this an instance of the unconscious use of conceptual metaphors by philosophers. This interpretation, however, overlooks the fact that Mullā Ṣadrā, based on his doctrine of the "spirit of meaning" (*rūḥ al-ma'nā*) in language, does not regard such expressions as merely linguistic metaphors, in contrast to the assumptions of cognitive linguistics.

Faramarz Gharamaleki and ketabchi (2017) identify two general approaches to interpreting the meaning of light: the metaphorical approach, prevalent until the 11th century CE, and the realistic approach. They characterize the latter, associated with thinkers such as al-Ghazālī, Suhrawardī, Ibn al-'Arabī, and Mullā Ṣadrā, as involving a process of the metaphysicalization of the concept of light. They further raise two critiques against this approach: its lack of grounding in lexicographical and semantic evidence, and its restriction of the aspect of the resemblance (*wajh al-shabah*) to a feature rather than to the qualitative nature of light. Despite its critical engagement with classical views, this study does not offer a satisfactory alternative explanation of the parable.

Vaezi and Jeedi (2020) examine the arguments of proponents of both the metaphorical and realistic approaches to the term light. While endorsing the latter, they propose an additional aspect of resemblance: the impossibility of directly looking at light, emphasizing instead the vision of divine light through the heart. Despite attempting to elaborate the parable, this study only marginally extends earlier interpretations and does not incorporate newly discovered properties of light.

In addition, from a methodological perspective, the article by Nasiri Gheydari, "*Spectrum of the Existence's Consciousness*" (2022), may be noted. It integrates ontological views of early philosophers with evidence from modern empirical science to describe a spectrum of consciousness in existence. Similarly, Moradi and Gholampourmir (2025) employs modern science to interpret another part of the Verse of Light (Q. 24:35) on the property of olive oil emitting light without contact with fire.

The innovation of the present study lies in correlating the historical

development of interpretations of the parable of divine light with theories in optics; explaining this parable through a model derived from the Qur'anic system of parables within an ontological framework; and articulating additional aspects of resemblance in light of discoveries in modern science.

3. Theoretical Framework

An understanding of the historical development of theories of light, as well as an examination of the system of parables (*al-amthāl*) in the Qur'an, constitutes a necessary prelude to the issues addressed in the present study.

3.1. Historical Development of Theories of Light

The phenomenon of light has long engaged human thought and has consistently been the subject of scholarly efforts aimed at deeper understanding and explanation.

3.1.1. The Phenomenon of Light in Ancient Greece

In the ancient world, the understanding of light, like other natural phenomena, was intertwined with mythology. From approximately the 6th century BCE, the Greeks initiated systematic inquiry into nature. Broadly speaking, ancient Greek views on light may be classified into two principal theories: the emission theory (*ḡudūrī/shu'ā'*) and the entrance theory (*dukhūlī/inṭibā'*) (Lindberg 1999). The emission theory posits that vision results from rays emitted from the eye, whereas the entrance theory holds that vision occurs through the entry of light into the eye.

The emission theory was articulated in various forms. Pythagoras (d. 475 BCE) considered vision to result from a fire emanating from within the eye that reaches objects in its path, thereby preparing the mind or soul to receive their images (Sa'adatmand 2021). Plato (d. 347 BCE) proposed that the fire emitted from the eye combines with sunlight to form a continuous medium between the object and the eye, allowing the motions of the visible object to reach the eye and subsequently the soul, an explanation that appears to address the problem of vision in darkness. Euclid (d. 300BCE), based on this framework, developed a geometric theory of vision grounded in the rectilinear propagation of light and the conical emission of rays from the eye (Lindberg 1999). Hero of Alexandria (d. 62CE) emphasized the infinite speed of light, arguing from the immediate visibility of stars upon opening the eyes (Sa'adatmand 2021). Ptolemy (d. 170CE) likewise adopted this framework and attempted to integrate the physical and psychological

aspects of vision with geometric theories. He also investigated the phenomena of reflection and refraction experimentally and formulated mathematical descriptions of them (Lindberg 1999).

In contrast, the entrance theory also had its proponents. The atomists, most notably Democritus (d. 357 BCE), held that vision occurs through the emission of a thin layer of atoms from the surface of objects, which then affects the eye. Aristotle (d. 322 BCE), however, maintained that light from a luminous source such as the sun acts upon a potentially transparent medium (e.g., air or water), rendering it actually transparent. Vision then occurs through the interaction of objects with this medium, producing alterations that are transmitted to the eye (Lindberg 1999).

With regard to color, divergent views were also prevalent. Democritus regarded atoms as devoid of color and considered colors not as real entities but as representations of properties such as smoothness, heat, and solidity. Plato similarly denied that objects possess inherent color as a surface property, proposing instead that objects emit streams of fiery particles; objects are transparent when their particles are uniform in size, whereas colored objects contain particles of varying sizes (Sa'adatmand 2021). Aristotle, for his part, attributed color perception to the interaction between colored objects and the potentially transparent medium, which undergoes modification and transmits this change to the eye (Lindberg 1999).

3.1.2. *The Phenomenon of Light among Islamic Scholars*

Early Muslim scholars largely followed the views of ancient Greek thinkers regarding the nature of light. Al-Fārābī (d. 950CE), in *al-Jam' bayna ra'yay al-ḥakīmāyn*, sought to reconcile the positions of the Platonists (emission theory) and the Aristotelians (entrance theory), presenting their disagreement and mutual critiques as largely terminological, and proposing a mediating position between the two (al-Fārābī 1984, 46–50).

Avicenna (d. 1037CE), along with the Peripatetic (*mashshā'ī*) tradition more broadly, adopted the entrance theory in line with Aristotle. In *al-Shifā'*, he describes light as “visible in itself” (*mar'ī bi-dhātih*), which, when combined with bodies, renders them visible. He also attributes the perception of color to the arrival of light upon objects (Ibn Sīnā 1983, 2: 257). Al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048CE), however, strongly criticized both the emission and entrance theories, dismissing the latter as merely philosophical and rooted in conjecture (Sajjadi 1989, 2: 581, citing al-Bīrūnī 1988).

Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1040CE) represents a decisive turning point in the science of optics and, more importantly, in scientific methodology. He sought to ground knowledge in experimental verification. Through this

method, his distinctive contributions to optics led to the complete rejection of the emission theory and the reformulation of the entrance theory, providing a precise and reliable account of the propagation and perception of light. In addition to synthesizing the physical and mathematical dimensions of vision, he distinguished between self-luminous bodies and those that shine by reflected (secondary) light. His works on optics were translated into Latin in the late 12th century CE and exerted a profound influence on the development of optics in the West (Lindberg 1999).

Despite the remarkable rigor of Ibn al-Haytham’s method and the compelling accuracy of his findings in optics, neither his scientific achievements nor his empirical methodology gained widespread acceptance among scholars for approximately three centuries. It was only later, with the contributions of Kamāl al-Dīn al-Fārisī (d. 1319CE), that his work received broader recognition. Various reasons have been suggested for this delayed reception, among which adherence to established methods and resistance to intellectual innovation are considered the most significant. The perspective of Suhrawardī (d. 1191CE) is also noteworthy, as he is among the most influential figures in interpreting the opening phrase of the Verse of Light. Regarding the physical characteristics of light, Suhrawardī holds that sensory phenomena such as light and sound are indefinable without direct perception, and he describes light as the most manifest of all things and the least in need of definition (Abdollahi 2024).

In effect, by adopting a version of the emission theory, he explains vision as resulting from the interaction between light emitted from objects and light emanating from the eye. Without engaging with the anatomical structure of the eye or the mechanism by which light reaches the retina, he refers to sight as the “light of the eye” (Suhrawardī 1996, 2: 104, 134–135). The absence of Ibn al-Haytham’s influence in Suhrawardī’s account further confirms the limited dissemination of the former’s theories during that period.

3.1.3. Theories of Light after the Scientific Revolution

The study of light has occupied a central place in multiple domains within the history of science. In this section, selected developments are highlighted. Following Ibn al-Haytham, discoveries in optics entered a new phase beginning in the 17th century. Isaac Newton (d. 1727CE) demonstrated, through experiments involving the passage of light through a prism, that colors are intrinsic properties of light itself rather than attributes of the objects with which light interacts. He explained the dispersion of white light in a prism as resulting from its composite nature, being constituted of all colors, and from differences in the refrangibility of light

rays (Newton 1672, 3081–3085). He further proposed that light consists of extremely small particles, whose sizes are related to color: the smallest particles correspond to violet light (with the greatest deviation in refraction), while the largest correspond to red light (with the least deviation) (Newton 1718, 347–349).

Newton also provided the first systematic explanation that the color of objects depends on their interaction with incident white light (Figure 1). Each object absorbs certain rays and reflects others, the latter constituting the perceived color (Newton 1704, 135). This account shifted the understanding of color from being a property of object surfaces to being a property of light itself.



Figure 1. How objects with different color reflect incident white light

Almost contemporaneously, Christiaan Huygens, noting similarities between the behavior of light and sound, proposed the wave theory of light (Huygens 1912, 19–21).²² However, Newton's authority and the explanatory power of his theory in accounting for phenomena such as reflection and refraction ensured its dominance for over a century. In 1800, William Herschel, by passing light through a prism and detecting higher temperatures beyond the red end of the spectrum, demonstrated the existence of invisible radiation, possessing heat but not visible to the eye (Herschel 1800, 284–289).

In another experiment, Johann Wilhelm Ritter and Böckmann (1801) showed that radiation beyond the violet end of the spectrum affected silver chloride, indicating the presence of invisible, higher-energy radiation in sunlight (Ritter & Böckmann 1801, 527). Ultimately, in the 1860s, James Clerk Maxwell, through the formulation of electromagnetic field equations, demonstrated that these equations predict waves propagating at the speed of light. Consequently, visible light came to be understood as only a small

22- Among Islamic scholars, Ibn al-Haytham regarded the motion of light as analogous to the motion of physical bodies. However, Kamal al-Din al-Farisi, in his reexamination and critique of Ibn al-Haytham's optical theory in *Tanqīh al-Manāzīr*, proposed a view closer to the wave-like behavior of light by likening it to sound, on account of its simultaneous capacity for transmission and reflection from a surface. On this basis, two tendencies, particle-like and wave-like, in the interpretation of the nature of light had already been addressed within the scholarly tradition of Muslim scientists centuries before European physicists (Pazari 2013).

portion of the broader electromagnetic spectrum (Maxwell 1861, 499) (Figure 2). These findings strongly supported the wave nature of light.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Albert Einstein, by confirming the particle aspect of light, showed that light energy is emitted in discrete packets (*photons*), with energy proportional to frequency (Einstein 1905a, 148). Thereafter, light was understood to possess a dual nature, both wave-like and particle-like. Another fundamental property that transformed our understanding of the universe concerns the speed of light. From the 17th century onward, it became established that light travels at a finite speed. In the early 20th century, Einstein, in his theory of relativity, demonstrated that the speed of light in a vacuum is always constant and cannot be exceeded. In other words, all observers, regardless of their motion or direction, measure the same value for the speed of light. On this basis, he formulated the theory of special relativity.

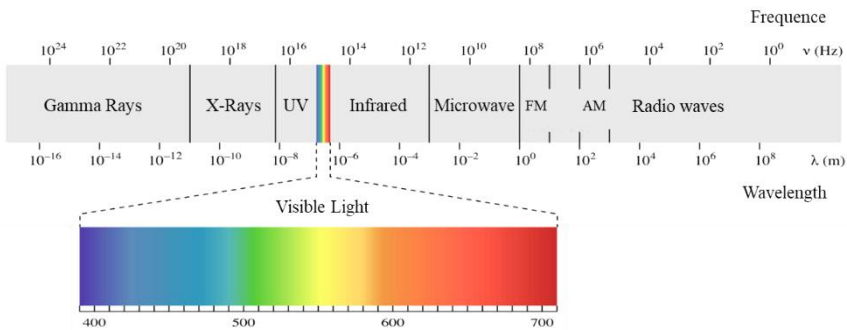


Figure 2. Spectrum of electromagnetic waves

Today, the speed of light in a vacuum (c) is regarded as one of the fundamental constants of nature, with no known physical phenomenon exceeding it. The designation “relativity” arises from the fact that measurements of space and time depend on the observer’s state of motion: for an observer moving at high velocity relative to an object, the object’s length appears contracted, and the temporal progression of events appears slower (*time dilation*) (Einstein 1905b, 894–900). This slowing of temporal processes at high velocities is such that, hypothetically, if an object could move at the speed of light, time would cease to have meaning for it, implying atemporality in motion at light speed. However, such a state would require infinite energy and thus remains purely theoretical.

3.2. Parables (*al-Amthāl*) in the Qur’an

The use of parables constitutes one of the stylistic methods of the Qur’an

in conveying its elevated truths. The purpose of the revelation of the Book, and particularly the articulation of parables within it, is to render these truths comprehensible to human beings. Since the human mind is not capable of grasping ultimate realities as they are in themselves, the use of parables, while maintaining brevity of expression, draws upon the relationship between the mind and tangible reality. One of the manifestations of the Qur'an's invitation to reflection is found in its parables, in many of which God presents elements of nature to approximate spiritual and metaphysical realities to human understanding. The mention of parables is thus regarded as a prelude to human contemplation. In certain verses, after presenting a parable, the Qur'an further generalizes, describing parables as a means of admonition and reflection for people, while reserving true understanding of them for those endowed with knowledge (Q. 14:25; 59:21; 29:43).

God illustrates the manner of His use of parables in verse Q.13:17 with the expression “*kadhālika yaḍribu Allāhu al-amthāl*” (That is how Allah draws comparisons). This statement follows a description of rainfall from the sky and the utilization of it by various entities, serving as a model for how one should reflect upon parables in order to arrive at truth. On this basis, an “archetype of divine parable-making” may be discerned:

أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَالَتْ أَوْدِيَّهُ بِقَدَرِهَا فَاحْتَمَلَ السَّنِئِلُ رَبْدًا رَابِيًا وَمِمَّا يُوقِدُونَ عَلَيْهِ فِي النَّارِ ابْتِغَاءَ حُلِيَّةٍ أَوْ مَتَاعٍ رَبْدٌ مِثْلَهُ كَذَلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْحَقَّ وَالْبَاطِلَ فَأَمَّا الزَّبَدُ فَيَذْهَبُ جُفَاءً وَأَمَّا مَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ فَيَمْكُثُ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَذَلِكَ يَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ (الرعد/١٧)

He sends down water from the sky whereat the valleys are flooded to [the extent of] their capacity, and the flood carries along a swelling scum. And from what they smelt in the fire for the purpose of [making] ornaments or wares, [there arises] a similar scum. That is how Allah compares the truth and falsehood. As for the scum, it leaves as dross, and that which profits the people remains in the earth. That is how Allah draws comparisons (Q. 13:17).

Tabataba'i (1969, 11: 335–338) regards this verse as among the most significant in expressing general principles of divine knowledge through the manifestation of truths. First, it indicates that the mercy descending from God is initially devoid of form and measure, acquiring shape and limitation according to the properties of the entities upon which it descends. Second, the descent of truth is inevitably accompanied by extraneous elements of falsehood, which ultimately dissipate. He further explains that the rule exemplified by this parable applies both to divine action and divine speech. In other words, God manifests truths in two forms: the material world and language. Both are manifestations of reality that, in accordance with their respective characteristics, represent truth in different ways. Although God created the heavens and the earth in truth and not in falsehood (Q. 46:3),

elements of falsehood become concomitant with truth within them, without being the intended purpose of creation. Similarly, in divine speech, ambiguous verses (*al-mutashābihāt*) may convey meanings that are not the primary intent.

In general, the recognition of truth requires distinguishing it from the form in which it is manifested. Just as in any parable, one must seek its intended meaning, for fixation upon the external form of the parable obstructs access to its truth. This verse thus indicates that the existence of ambiguity is inevitable, arising from the manifestation of truth within a limited medium (Tabataba'i 1969, 3: 61–63).

This perspective—regarding the correspondence between the order of creation and the divine Book—reflects an ontological approach that can be observed earlier in the works of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE) and, more systematically, in the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640 CE). In their thought, a correspondence is established between the “Book of Creation” (*kitāb al-takwīn*) and the “Book of Revelation” (*kitāb al-tadwīn*, i.e., the Qur'an), grounded in the gradation of existence. Al-Ghazālī, possibly influenced by Plato's theory of Forms, states: There is nothing in the material visible world except that it is a likeness of a spiritual reality in the world of the unseen, as though that spiritual reality is its soul and meaning (al-Ghazālī 1985, 48).

Mullā Ṣadrā, by establishing a one-to-one correspondence between Qur'anic parables and realities, interprets the multiplicity of parables in the Qur'an as means of ascending from the outward form of this world to the truths of the hereafter: There is no form in this world except that it has a reality in the hereafter, and no true meaning in the hereafter except that it has a form and likeness in this world (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 2004, 1: 324–325). From this perspective, the most fundamental relationship between the Qur'an and the natural world may be understood as the manifestation of a single truth in two distinct media, each characterized by its own properties.

4. Historical Development of the Interpretation of the Verse of Light

In this section, the relationship between exegetical perspectives and theories of light is examined in two periods: first, the metaphorical approach dominant among exegetes up to the 11th century CE, and second, the realistic approach that became prevalent after the 11th century CE.

4.1. *The Exegetical Views up to the 11th Century*

Exegetes up to the 11th century CE, offered interpretations of the expression “*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*” that were grounded in the acceptance of metaphor in the Qur’an, aiming to avoid attributing physical, sensory light to God. The description of the term *al-nūr* as *al-munawwir* (illuminator) can be regarded as the simplest way to avoid equating material light with God, employing the metaphor of using a verbal noun (*al-maṣḍar*) in place of an active participle (*ism al-fā‘il*). Attention to familiar properties of physical light, such as the visibility of objects in light, their invisibility in darkness, and the association of light with beauty, can be seen as the basis for the two concepts of *al-hādī* (guide) and *al-muzayyin* (beautifier), which are later mentioned in the Verse of Light. In these interpretations, Qur’anic verses describing divine scripture as light and a means of guidance (Q. 6:91), and God as the one who adorns the heavens with stars (Q. 37:6), have also played an influential role.

However, some exegetes have understood light in broader terms, such as director, regulator, and sustainer (*al-mudabbir*, *al-nāẓim*, *al-qawwām*) (Faramarz Gharamaleki & ketabchi 2017), extending beyond the lexical meaning and drawing on other Qur’anic verses describing God. It appears that these dominant interpretations were developed without explicit consideration of the contemporary scientific understanding of light, and were instead grounded in the general perceptual experience of the phenomenon.

4.2. *Exegetical Views after the 11th Century*

After the 11th century CE, alongside earlier approaches, a realistic interpretation of the expression “*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*” emerged. This shift in perspective, compared to earlier exegetes, reflects two broader attitudes toward the presence of metaphor in the Qur’an.

One view, while accepting the presence of metaphor in the Qur’an—understood as the use of a word in a meaning other than its literal sense—argues that in the Verse of Light the term *al-nūr* itself possesses a meaning beyond its apparent, sensory sense. Al-Tha‘labī (d. 1035CE), citing a view from mystics, interprets the root meaning of *al-nūr* as “purification and clarification,” and explains the Qur’anic usage as denoting the transcendence (*al-tanzīh*) of God from imperfection (al-Tha‘labī 2001, 7: 100).

Similarly, Al-Jurjani (d. 1078CE) defines *al-nūr* in this expression as that

which makes both the perceptible and the intelligible manifest, without requiring the presence of physical light or radiance (al-Jurjānī 2009, 2: 365). However, al-Tha‘labī himself elsewhere explicitly acknowledges the presence of metaphor in the Qur’an; for example, he interprets “hearing” (*sam‘*) as a metaphor for obedience (al-Tha‘labī 2001, 1: 236), and describes God as “thankful” (*shākir*) in a metaphorical sense (al-Tha‘labī 2001, 3: 407). Al-Jurjānī (2001, 53), for his part, considers metaphor to be more eloquent than literal expression and presents it as having rhetorical superiority.

Another influential perspective is that of Al-Ghazālī, whose views significantly impacted later scholars. After considering all elements of the visible world as analogues of the world of the unseen (*‘ālam al-malakūt*), he regards every material term in the Qur’an as possessing a spiritual “soul” (*rūḥ al-ma‘nā*) that is non-sensory and non-physical (al-Ghazālī 1985, 48–51).

Accordingly, he rejects metaphor understood as a deviation from the original meaning and instead posits the spirit of meaning (*rūḥ al-ma‘nā*) as the deeper and primary meaning, with various usages representing different levels of this underlying reality. He considers interpreting words in a purely sensory sense to be simplistic and inconsistent with the truths of the Qur’an. This perspective appears to have been developed, in part, to avoid interpreting Qur’anic expressions, especially those describing divine attributes, as metaphorical. Since God is pure truth and only speaks truth, Al-Ghazālī identifies God as the true light in the phrase “*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*,” while considering the application of *al-nūr* to anything other than God, such as physical light, as metaphorical. In his description of physical light, he classifies objects into three categories: Dark objects that are invisible; Objects that are visible in themselves but not capable of illuminating other objects (e.g., stars or embers when not ignited); Objects that are both visible in themselves and capable of illuminating others (e.g., the sun, moon, lamps, and fire) (al-Ghazālī 1986, 41–42). In essence, he divides objects into luminous and non-luminous categories, with luminous entities further subdivided. His account, while supporting the concept of spirit of meaning (*rūḥ al-ma‘nā*), appears to be based on general human perception of light rather than on the scientific understanding of light available in his time.

Suhrawardī follows al-Ghazālī in his general approach to metaphor in the Qur’an and specifically in interpreting the verse “*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*.” However, in his explanation of the role of light in vision, he demonstrates familiarity with the scientific concepts of his time.

By implicitly adopting a form of the emission theory (*ṣudūrī*), he argues that vision requires three factors: an external one (light emitted from a luminous object) and an internal one (light reaching the object from the eye), and their interaction (Suhrawardī 1996, 2: 134–135). Nevertheless, his definition of light in this context appears to be independent of his broader theoretical commitments regarding the nature of light and is instead rooted in common experiential understanding. He defines light as “that which is manifest in its own essence and makes other things manifest by its essence” (*al-zāhir fī haqīqat nafsih al-muẓhir li-ghayrih bi-dhātih*) (Suhrawardī 1996, 2: 113), a definition that exerted significant influence on subsequent scholars.

A noteworthy point in this discussion is the relationship between two ideas associated with al-Ghazālī and his followers: first, the notion that elements of the material world are analogues of the spiritual world, and second, the belief in the existence of a “spirit of meaning” (*rūḥ al-ma‘nā*) in linguistic expressions. The first pertains to the created world and appears unrelated to language, while the second concerns Qur’anic vocabulary. However, to clarify the relationship between these two views, another issue must be considered: whether linguistic meanings are divinely instituted or conventionally established by humans. Only if divine designation of meanings is accepted can the two perspectives be meaningfully connected; otherwise, accepting the first does not necessarily entail acceptance of the second.

Regarding the relationship between exegetical views of the Verse of Light and scientific theories of light, the position of Ibn al-Haytham warrants examination. Although he formulated his theory in the 10th century CE, prior to al-Ghazālī and Suhrawardī, and grounded it in experimental evidence while supporting the entrance theory, the limited dissemination and acceptance of his ideas until the time of Kamāl al-Dīn al-Fārisī (d. 1319 CE) meant that his theory did not significantly influence later scholars. Nonetheless, Suhrawardī’s definition of light as “that which is manifest and makes manifest” corresponds in practice to Ibn al-Haytham’s insights and became one of the most widely accepted definitions of light in explaining the divine light in this parable, persisting even into contemporary times. Thus, with the presumption that the defining feature of light in the material world (*rūḥ al-ma‘nā*) is its quality of manifesting itself and making other things manifest, Ibn al-Haytham’s theory indirectly influenced the acceptance of Suhrawardī’s interpretation among later generations.

Following the empirical discovery of the role of light in vision and the subsequent rise of empirical science, more advanced theories of light were developed; however, these had little impact on exegetical perspectives. The

reasons for this lack of influence may include limited familiarity of Qur’anic scholars with contemporary scientific knowledge, caution against *tafsīr bil-ra’y*, and an aversion to excessive or overly scientific interpretation.

5. Foundations for Understanding the Parable of Divine Light and Its Correspondence with Modern Science

What earlier exegetes stated in interpreting the parable of God as light was based on the characteristics of light with which they were familiar. The role of recent discoveries in optics in elucidating this Qur’anic parable necessitates first clarifying the foundational principles underlying its understanding. The foundation for understanding God’s intended meaning in the parable “*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*” is the same as the foundation for understanding other Qur’anic parables. A parable (*mathal*) is formed based on the resemblance between familiar phenomena and those under consideration. In the Qur’an, in particular, the relationship between the source and the referent is especially strong, originating from God’s role as the Creator. As the Creator of existence, God also presents parables drawn from creation in the Qur’an in order to clarify higher truths. With respect to light, an important question arises: Did God merely describe light as a metaphor for Himself in the revelation of this verse, or did He create light in such a way that it serves as a parable reflecting His own existence?

From a perspective analogous to the correspondence between the “Book of Creation” (*kitāb al-takwīn*) and the “Book of Revelation” (*kitāb al-tadwīn*), and particularly in light of the verse Q. 13:17, the parable of God as light is not merely a linguistic expression but is also related to the very mode of creation of light. Thus, the properties of light can be regarded as symbolic reflections of divine attributes. It is important to note that a parable corresponds to its referent only in certain respects. As indicated in God’s statement concerning the limited scope of parables and the emergence of ambiguity within them (Q. 13:17), not all aspects of the phenomenon of light can be applied to God. This non-correspondence stems from the limitations of the receptacle, not from any deficiency in the Creator.

The relationship between this perspective and the metaphorical and realistic approaches to Qur’anic parables can also be examined. The view presented here in explaining the system of parables in the Qur’an reflects the thought of earlier scholars such as Al-Ghazālī and his followers regarding the creation of the world. This mode of thought may be understood as an extension of the concept of metaphor to the level of creation—namely,

the divine act—while Qur'anic parables reflect these truths within the domain of language. On the other hand, attributing metaphor to the process of understanding profound meanings from tangible words in the Qur'an is based on the assumption that language was initially established by humans and subsequently expanded through metaphor to encompass new layers of meaning. Therefore, accepting metaphor in divine action from an ontological perspective is not inconsistent with metaphor in divine speech, contrary to the assumption of many proponents of this interpretive model.

The role of modern science in understanding Qur'anic parables can be explained within this framework. Just as God has repeatedly affirmed that His signs are elaborated for “*those who know*” (Q. 6:97; cf. 7:32; 9:11; 10:5; 41:3), particularly in the field of optics, correlating the properties of light with the parable “*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*” may unveil deeper dimensions of this manifestation in the knowledge of God.

5.1. Correspondence between Properties of Light and Divine Attributes

In addition to the defining property of light, its being both manifest and manifesting (*al-zāhir wa al-muẓhir*), which proponents of the “spirit of meaning” (*rūḥ al-ma'nā*) consider to be the essential meaning of the term light in the phrase “*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*,” some researchers have proposed another aspect of resemblance: the impossibility of directly looking at light, and consequently, the emphasis on perceiving the divine light through the heart (Vaezi & Jeddi 2020). However, the properties of light that may serve as points of resemblance in this parable are not limited to these. Other aspects of similarity, once freed from the constraints of the parabolic framework, may reveal manifestations of divine attributes.

5.1.1. The Emergence of Color in Objects

Contrary to the views of earlier scholars who considered color to be an independent property separate from external light, modern scientific discoveries show that white light is composed of a combination of various colors. When light strikes objects, part of it is reflected from their surfaces, and it is this reflection that produces the color of the object. In essence, each entity reflects a portion of light in a specific way, thereby manifesting a facet of the colorless light within itself. The Qur'an itself regards the diversity of colors in nature as a sign for those who reflect: “*And whatever He has created for you in the earth of diverse hues there is indeed a sign in that for a people who take admonition*” (Q. 16:13). It also refers to the descent of

water from the sky, from which fruits of different colors emerge (Q. 35:27; 39:21); a single, colorless water gives rise to diverse forms of life depending on the capacity of each plant, while all are nourished by the same water: "*In the earth are neighbouring terrains [of diverse kinds] and vineyards, farms, and date palms growing from the same root and from diverse roots, [all] irrigated by the same water, and We give some of them an advantage over others in flavour. There are indeed signs in that for a people who apply reason*" (Q. 13:4). Just as the Qur'an points to the manifestation of diverse effects of water in living beings according to their capacities, colorless light also appears in various forms in objects according to their properties.

Similarly, God manifests His attributes in the components of creation in diverse ways, according to their respective capacities. While God has manifested Himself to humanity through creation (al-Sharīf al-Raḍī 1994, 155), created beings do not possess the capacity to reflect all of His attributes. The Qur'anic account of God's manifestation to Prophet Moses through the destruction of the mountain (Q. 7:143) illustrates this limitation of capacity. Conversely, God has also manifested Himself through His speech (al-Sharīf al-Raḍī 1994, 204), revealing it to the heart of His most exalted servant, who becomes the perfect mirror of divine attributes. This is described as a weighty word (Q. 73:5), which other creatures cannot bear (Q. 59:21). The continuation of the phrase "*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*" in the Verse of Light, as interpreted in traditions in relation to the heart of the believer, particularly the Prophet and his household (PBUTH), indicates such a level of manifestation of divine light within these sacred beings (al-Qummī 1984, 2: 102–103). This understanding of creation corresponds to the Qur'anic statement in the verse Q. 13:17 regarding the manifestation of divine truth in created beings according to their varying capacities.

5.1.2. *Visibility of Only a Portion of Light Spectrum*

What is commonly referred to in everyday language as "light" is, in scientific terminology, designated as *visible light*, which constitutes only a small portion of the broader electromagnetic spectrum. The human eye's ability to perceive this limited segment exists alongside the fact that no upper boundary can be conceived for the spectrum of light itself (i.e., electromagnetic waves). What has enabled humans in recent centuries to recognize non-visible light is the existence of "signs" of its presence, detectable through its effects on temperature or through inducing changes in certain materials. The knowledge of God without direct observation, and instead through His signs at various levels, evokes a parallel with this characteristic of light. These signs are sometimes as clear and direct as

visible light perceived by the eyes, and at other times require the engagement of multiple layers of intellectual reflection for their recognition.

The Qur'an refers to such divine signs using the term *al-āyah*. God emphasizes in the Qur'an that signs exist within the components of creation, including the entirety of the material world and human beings (Q. 51:20–21), as well as in events such as the victory of truth over falsehood in human interactions (Q. 3:13), for those who reflect. However, the miracles of the prophets may be considered the most evident signs of God. These are described not only with the term *al-āyah* but also with the term *al-bayyinah* (Q. 57:26), which denotes a clear rational or sensory indication (al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1992, 1: 157). It is important to note that the comprehension of truths, and particularly the knowledge of God through these signs, depends on the observer's qualities of reflection, faith, and certitude.

5.1.3. Independence from the Observer's Condition

The constancy of the speed of light in a vacuum formed the foundation of Albert Einstein's theory of special relativity at the beginning of the twentieth century, a theory according to which spatial dimensions (length) and temporal intervals are relative to observers moving at different velocities. Although the title of this theory may initially suggest that all things in the universe are relative, closer examination of its foundations reveals a deeper truth. In this theory, the speed of light is a universal constant, and no transmission of information or causal influence can occur at speeds exceeding the speed of light. The constancy of the speed of light implies that differences in the relative velocity between observers and the light source do not alter the measured speed of light. Thus, rather than rendering the speed of light relative, the theory reveals the relativity of spatial dimensions and temporal intervals as observed in motion.

The status of light, being beyond the reach of all observers and independent of their conditions, serves as a metaphorical reminder of the absolute and unattainable nature of God in relation to all phenomena in existence. Another implication of the theory of relativity is timelessness at the speed of light (in theoretical terms, not in practice). In other words, if an entity were to move at the speed of light, time would not elapse for it. This concept evokes the notion of God's transcendence over time and the absence of past and future with respect to the Divine Essence.

6. Conclusion

The expression "*Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth*" in the Verse of Light (Q. 24:35) has long been a subject of inquiry among exegetes, Qur'anic scholars, philosophers, and mystics in explaining the relationship between God and the phenomenon of light. Exegetes up to the 11th century CE, without reference to the prevailing scientific theories of their time, and primarily based on the common understanding of light, namely its beauty, the visibility of objects in light, and their invisibility in darkness, adopted a metaphorical interpretation, understanding light in this context as "adorner" (*al-muzayyin*) or "guide" (*al-hādī*). After the 11th century, a realistic interpretation of this expression became prevalent, grounded in the notion of the "spirit of meaning" (*rūh al-ma'nā*) for the term *al-nūr*. This interpretation also remained largely based on a general, non-scientific understanding of light. The well-known definition of light by Suhrawardī, "that which is manifest in itself and makes other things manifest," despite his acceptance of an emission-based theory (*ṣudūrī*) of vision, provides evidence for this claim. However, the widespread acceptance and longevity of this definition may be attributed to the dissemination, in the 13th century CE, of the experimentally grounded entrance theory of Ibn al-Haytham. Following this development, no significantly new interpretation of this parable gained widespread prominence until the present day.

The Qur'anic system of parables (*al-amthāl*), which presents truths at a sensory level to facilitate understanding and stimulate reflection, is grounded in a deeper ontological principle, which is the manifestation of truths within the structure of the created world. In other words, God has created the universe as a parable of higher truths and has also represented these truths in the Qur'an through linguistic expression. From this perspective, a metaphorical approach is not limited to the level of language but extends to the level of existential phenomena. Accordingly, the parable of divine light not only serves as a linguistic tool for deep understanding but also reflects the very manner in which light itself is created. Thus, the properties of light can be regarded as indicators of divine attributes.

The emergence of colors from the combination of light in white light reflected from various objects recalls the diverse manifestations of divine attributes in creation. The human capacity to perceive only a portion of the light spectrum, depending on sensory and cognitive abilities, inspires an analogous understanding of the varying levels at which divine signs may be comprehended. The absolute and invariant nature of the speed of light suggests the absolute nature of God in relation to all things and His transcendence beyond all limitations. Likewise, the absence of time at the speed of light metaphorically reflects God's encompassing relationship with time and His supra-temporal nature.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no competing interests.

References

- Abdollahi, J. (2024). The mystery of the scientific revolution in Islamic civilization (in Persian). *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, 3(11), 69–101.
- Al-Fārābī, A. (1984). *Al-Jam' bayna ra'yay al-hakīmayn*. Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq.
- Al-Ghazālī, M. (1985). *Mishkāt al-anwār*. Tehran: Amirkabir.
- Al-Ghazālī, M. (1986). *Jawāhir al-Qur'an*. Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-'Ulūm.
- Al-Jurjānī, 'A. (2001). *Dalā'il al-i'jāz fī 'ilm al-ma'ānī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Jurjānī, 'A. (2009). *Darj al-durar fī tafsīr al-āyi wa al-suwar*. Amman: Dār al-Fikr.
- Al-Qummī, 'A. (1984). *Tafsīr al-Qummī*. Qom: Dār al-Kitāb.
- Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, Ḥ. (1992). *Mufradāt al-fāz al-Qur'an*. Beirut: Dār al-Qalam.
- Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, M. (1994). *Nahj al-balāghah*. Qom: Hijrat.
- Al-Tha'labī, A. (2001). *Al-Kashf wa al-bayān*. Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- Einstein, A. (1905). Über einen die Erzeugung und Verwandlung des Lichtes betreffenden heuristischen Gesichtspunkt. *Annalen der Physik*, 17, 132–148. <https://doi.org/10.1002/andp.19053220607>
- Einstein, A. (1905). Zur Elektrodynamik bewegter Körper. *Annalen der Physik*, 17, 891–921. <https://doi.org/10.1002/andp.19053221004>
- Faramarz Gharamaleki, A. and ketabchi, F. S. (2017). The Metaphysical Model in the Historical Evolution of the Commentators' View in "Allahu Noor al-samawat wa al-ard". *Journal of Qur'anic Interpretation and language*, 6(1), 29-50. <https://doi.org/10.30473/quran.2017.4708>
- Herschel, W. (1800). Experiments on the refrangibility of the invisible rays of the sun. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 90, 284–292. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstl.1800.0015>
- Huygens, C. (1912). *Treatise on light* (Trans. Thompson, S. P.). Leyden: Pieter van der Aa.
- Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Ḥ. (1983). *Al-Shifā'*. Qom: Mar'ashī Najafī.
- Khademzadeh, V. (2016). The Existence as Light Metaphor in Mulla Sadra's Philosophy. *Philosophy and Kalam*, 49(1), 19-34. <https://doi.org/10.22059/jitp.2016.58350>

- Lindberg, D. C. (1992). *The Beginnings of Western Science* (Trans. Badre'i, F.). Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publishing Company.
- Maxwell, J. C. (1861). On physical lines of force. *Philosophical Magazine*, 4(21), 459–512.
- Moradi, M. and Gholampourmir, S. (2025). Electromagnetic Radiation of Extra Virgin Olive Oil: A Scientific Reflection on the Qur'anic Verse of Light (Q. 24:35). *Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies*, 4(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/JIQS.V4I1.4>
- Nasiri Gheydari, S. (2022). Spectrum of the Existence's Consciousness. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies*, 1(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.37264/jiqs.v1i2.1>
- Newton, I. (1672). *A letter of Mr. Isaac Newton... containing his new theory about light and colours*. The Newton Project.
- Newton, I. (1704). *Opticks: Or, a treatise of the reflexions, refractions, inflexions and colours of light* (Book II). London: Sam. Smith & Benj. Walford.
- Newton, I. (1718). *Opticks: Or, a treatise of the reflections, refractions, inflections and colours of light* (2nd ed.). London: W. & J. Innys.
- Pazari, S. (2013). Ibn al-Haytham, Kamāl al-Dīn al-Fārīsī and Wave Motion of Light. *Journal for the History of Science*, 11(2), 159-190.
- Qarai, A. Q. (2004). *Translation of the Holy Qur'an*. London: ICAS.
- Ritter, J. W., & Böckmann, F. (1801). Auffindung nicht sichtbarer Sonnenstrahlen außerhalb des Farbenspektrums, an der Seite des Violetts. *Annalen der Physik*, 7(4), 527–528.
- Sa'adatmand, F. S. (2021). Optical theories in ancient Greece (in Persian). *Physics and Physics Education Quarterly*, 9(14).
- Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, M. (2004). *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Tehran: Institute for Cultural Studies and Research.
- Sajjadi, S. J. (1989). Ibsār. In Musavi Bojnurdi, K. (ed.), *The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia*. Tehran: The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia.
- Soufian, M. (1998). *Comparative study of material and spiritual light in the Qur'an and Physics*. Tehran: Soufian.
- Suhrawardī, Sh. (1996). *Majmū'at muṣannaḑāt Shaykh al-Ishrāq* (Vol. 2: *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*). Tehran: Institute for Cultural Studies and Research.
- Tabataba'i, M. H. (1969). *Al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī lil-Maṭbū'āt.
- Vaezi, M. and Jeddi, H. (2020). Rereading the Concept of "Light" in the Holy Qur'an. *Qur'anic Doctrines*, 17(32), 187-218. <https://doi.org/10.30513/qd.2020.1089>

Author Guidelines

Aim and Scope

The Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies (JIQS) is a bilingual, peer-reviewed journal published by Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies Research Institute of Shahid Beheshti University in collaboration with Contemporary Thoughts Press and the Scientific Association of Miracles of the Qur'an of Iran.

JIQS aims to promote interdisciplinary studies of the Qur'an conducted with a wide range of scholarly approaches as well as to provide an interdisciplinary platform for critical, innovative, and scholarly researches. The editors welcome articles on all aspects of Qur'anic studies associated with different fields of science and humanities such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, management, literature, archeology, economics, ethics, philosophy, law, politics, history, physics, biology, geology, astronomy, meteorology, medical science, engineering and computer science. Furthermore, the journal gives special emphasis to the field of artificial intelligence, particularly Computational Qur'an Mining.

This is an Open Access journal. Users have the right to access to the full texts of articles and use their content under the following conditions: Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Publication Ethics

The Journal of Interdisciplinary Qur'anic Studies (JIQS) follows the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and complies with the highest ethical standards in accordance with ethical laws. The editorial board, editor-in-chief, authors, reviewers, editors, and readers should follow these ethical policies while working with JIQS. For information on this matter in publishing and ethical guidelines, please visit <https://publicationethics.org>.

Acceptance of the Papers

The editor-in-chief is responsible for accepting or rejecting of the papers. The editor-in-chief with the consultation of the editorial board, reviewers and editors while considering copyright, plagiarism, and other related issues, decides on the acceptance of the papers. The editor-in-chief is responsible for judging the papers only according to their scientific features and should act without any prejudice, personal hatred and a bias to nationality, gender, religious, tribal, racial and political issues.

Peer review process

The journal uses the double blind Peer review process to evaluate the articles. The reviewers should review the papers objectively and in an unbiased and just manner. They should avoid personal biases in their comments and judgements.

The reviewers should avoid reviewing the papers that, in their opinion, entail conflict of interests including common, organizational, or personal financial interests or any link with the companies, institutions, or the people related with the papers in one way or another.

The reviewers should identify and examine the writer's references. Any conclusion or discussion already proposed should be accompanied with the source. Moreover, in case of observing any similarity or overlap between the submitted paper and another paper, the reviewer should report it to the editor-in-chief.

Privacy

During the reviewing process, the editor-in-chief and members of the editorial board should not reveal any material about the article to anybody except the reviewers, authors, and editors. All or part of the materials that have not been published should not be used in the editor-in-chief's, editorial boards' or reviewers' personal research without the author's written consent. The confidential information or ideas obtained through reviewing the papers should be kept in confidence and should not be used for their personal interests.

Originality

Submission of a manuscript implies that the work described has not been published before, that it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere,

that its publication has been approved by all co-authors, if any, as well as (tacitly or explicitly) by the responsible authorities at the institution where the work is carried out. The authors are not allowed to send all or part of the paper that is under review process to another place.

All authors are expected to have substantially contribution to at least one of the following: researching the literature, discussions of the article content, writing or substantial editing or reviewing of the draft manuscript. All contributors who do not meet the criteria for authorship should be listed in an 'Acknowledgements' section. Examples of those who might be acknowledged include a person who provided purely technical help or writing assistance, or a department chair who provided only general support.

Submission to JIQS is taken by the journal to mean that all the listed authors have agreed all of the contents, including the author list and author contribution statements. The corresponding author is responsible for managing all communication between the journal and all co-authors, before and after publication.

Conflict of Interest

A competing interest exists when the authors' interpretation of data or presentation of information may be influenced by their personal or financial relationship with other people or organizations. Authors should disclose any financial competing interests but also any non-financial competing interests that may cause them embarrassment if they were to become public after the publication of the article.

It is important that the Editor, reviewers and future readers are fully aware of any potential competing interests that you and your co-authors may have in relation to the work presented in your manuscript. Editors and reviewers are also required to declare any competing interests and will be excluded from the peer review process if a competing interest exists.

Declaring a competing interest does not mean that your manuscript will not be published. It will help the editor assess your work and invite reviewers who do not have the same competing interest. Editors may ask you for further information relating to competing interests.

A copy right release and conflict of interest disclosure form must be signed by all authors to be legally responsible towards the Journal ethics and privacy policy.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is unacknowledged copying or an attempt to misattribute original authorship, whether of ideas, text or results. Plagiarism can include, "theft or misappropriation of intellectual property and the substantial unattributed textual copying of another's work". Plagiarism can be said to have clearly occurred when large chunks of text have been cut-and-pasted without appropriate and unambiguous attribution. Such manuscripts would not be considered for publication in JIQS.

Aside from wholesale verbatim reuse of text, due care must be taken to ensure appropriate attribution and citation when paraphrasing and summarizing the work of others. "Text recycling" or reuse of parts of text from an author's previous research publication is a form of self-plagiarism. Here too, due caution must be exercised. When reusing text, whether from the author's own publication or that of others, an appropriate attribution and citation is necessary to avoid creating a misleading perception of unique contribution for the reader.

All submitted manuscripts are checked for similarity through trustworthy softwares named iThenticate and Samimnoor to be assured about its originality and then rigorously peer-reviewed by the international reviewers.

When plagiarism becomes evident post-publication, we may correct, retract or otherwise amend the original publication depending on the degree of plagiarism and its impact on the overall integrity of the published study according to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines.

Referencing system

The referencing system used by JIQS is the Harvard style of referencing. Harvard style referencing is an author/date method. Sources are cited within the body of your assignment by giving the name of the author(s) followed by the date of publication. All other details about the publication are given in the list of references or bibliography at the end.

Citations, which are used with direct quotations, or are referring to a particular part of a source, should include the volume (if any) and page number in your citation, e.g. (Smith 2017, 2:42).

If the author(s) name appears in the text as part of the body of the assignment, then the year will follow in round brackets, e.g. According to Smith (2017, 2:42).

If more than one of your citations has the same author and year of publication, then you should distinguish between them by using a lower-case letter following the year, e.g. (Smith 2017a) and (Smith 2017b).

Some authors have the same surname and works published in the same year, if this is the case use their initial to distinguish between them, e.g. (Williams, A. 2009) and (Williams, J. 2009).

In some instances, you may need to cite more than one piece of work for an idea. If this occurs, you should separate the references with a semicolon and cite them in chronological order, e.g. (Jones 2014; Smith 2017).

When citing in-text, include the name of up to three authors. If there are more than three authors for the work, you are citing then use the name of the first author followed by "et al.", e.g. (Taylor et al. 2015).

If the year of publication is not given then use the name of the author followed by "n.d.", e.g. (Wells n.d.).

Secondary Referencing: This is when you reference one author who is referring to the work of another and the primary source is not available. Secondary referencing should be avoided where possible. You must make it clear to your readers which author you have read whilst giving details of original term by using "cited in", e.g. (Ecott 2002, cited in Wilson 2009) or (Cannon 1989, cited in Wilson 2009, 269). In the reference list, you should give details of the item you looked at. Looking at the above examples, you would reference Wilson (2009) in your reference list.

Use the following order to give details of books and articles in the reference list:

- Author's surname, author's first name (year of publication). *Name of the work*. Place of publication: publisher.
- Author's surname, author's first name (year of publication). Name of the work. *Name of the journal*, vol(issue), pp. DOI.

In the table below, you can see examples of references to different types of sources. Please ensure that the references are produced in the same style as the following table.

Books

Single Author	(Al-Zamakhsharī 1986, 5:245)
	Al-Zamakhsharī, Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar (1986). <i>Al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaḡā’iq Ghawāmiḡ al-Tanzīl</i> . Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī.
Two or Three Authors	(Laudon & Laudon 2003) (Coveney, Ganster & King 2003)
	Laudon, K.C. and Laudon, J.P. (2003). <i>Essentials of management information systems: Managing the digital firm</i> . United States: Prentice Hall. Coveney, M., Ganster, S. and King, D. (2003). <i>The strategy gap: Leveraging technology to execute winning strategies</i> . Germany: Wiley.
More than Three Authors	(Jones et al. 1999: 34) Jones et al. (1999: 34) suggested that ...
	Jones, P., Smith, A., Hudson, T., Etherton, J., Connelly, W. and Gardener, J. (1999). <i>Business management for the new era</i> . Adelaide: Wyland Publishing.
Book Editor	(ed. Shaw 2003) Shaw (ed. 2003: 87) indicates that ...
	Shaw, M.J. (ed.) (2003). <i>Ebusiness management: Integration of Web technologies with business models</i> . London: Kluwer Academic.
Second, further or revised editions	Dyson, Geoffrey H.G. (1977). <i>The mechanics of athletics</i> . 7th edn. New York: Homes and Meier. Cohen, Jacob (1977). <i>Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences</i> . rev. edn. New York: Academic Press.
Translated works	Bakhtin, M. (1984). <i>Rabelais and his world</i> . transl. H. Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
No date can be established	(Lansdown n.d.).
	Lansdown, M. (n.d.). <i>Bridging courses</i> . Rockhampton: Central Queensland University.

Journals

Single author	(Rohani Mashhadi 2018)
	Rohani Mashhadi, Farzaneh (2018). The Analogy between Jesus and Adam Based on the Analysis of Key Concepts in the System of Human Creation Verses. <i>Qur'anic Sciences and Tradition</i> , 51(1), 67-87.
Two or three authors	(Lamb & Kling 2003) (Darzi, Pakatchi, & Faramarz Gharamaleki 2017)
	Lamb, R. and Kling, R. (2003). Reconceptualizing users as social actors in information systems research. <i>MIS Quarterly</i> , 27(2), 197. Darzi, G., Pakatchi, A. and Faramarz Gharamaleki, A. (2017). The Methodological Necessities of Quranic Interdisciplinary Studies. <i>Quran and Hadith Studies</i> , 10(1), 35-71.
More than three authors	(Lips et al. 2020)
	Lips, C., Ritterhoff, T., Weber, A., Janowska M.K., Mustroph, M., Sommer T., Klevit, R.E. (2020). Who with whom: functional coordination of E2 enzymes by RING E3 ligases during polyubiquitylation. <i>The EMBO Journal</i> , 39(22).
No volume or issue number	(Sprague & Shameen 1999)
	Sprague, J. and Shameen, A. (1999). Boosting growth, courting disasters?. <i>Asiaweek</i> , 31July, 50–51.
Journal articles and book chapters from books of readings	Kuebler, S.A. (2004). OSHA's enforcement strategy. <i>Occupational Health & Safety</i> , 73(12), 12–3. in I. Eddington (ed.) (2005). <i>MGT 8015 Corporate occupational health and safety: Selected readings</i> . Toowoomba: University of Southern Queensland.

Other References

Conference paper	(Fitzsimmons 2005)
	Fitzsimmons, D. (2005). Who chooses who belongs: Tactics and strategies and migrant literature. The AULLA & FILLM conference. James Cook University. Cairns. 15–19th July.
Theses and Reports	(Rouse 2002)
	Rouse, A.C. (2002). Information technology outsourcing revisited: success factors and risks. PhD thesis. Dept. of Information Systems. University of Melbourne.
Encyclopedias	(Karlof 2002)
	Karlof, B. (2002). Benchmarking. in H. Bidgoli (ed.). Encyclopedia of information systems. New York: Academic Press. 1, 65–80.
Document on the web	(Arch & Letourneau 2002) (Greenpeace n.d.)
	Arch, A. and Letourneau, C. (2002). Auxiliary Benefits of Accessible Web Design. in W3C Web Accessibility initiative. viewed 26 February 2004. from http://www.w3.org/WAI/bcase/benefits.html . Greenpeace, (n.d.). The future is GE free. viewed 28 September 2005. from http://www.greenpeace.org.au/ge/farming/canola.html

Referencing the Qur'an

You can refer to the verses of the Qur'an by the number of surah and verse, according to the following example. e.g. (Q. 2:19).

Transliteration System

Authors are expected to adhere to the convention of transliterating Arabic words and phrases in italic roman script in accordance with the Journal transliteration scheme. Authors are responsible for the accuracy and consistency of their transliteration.

Avoid writing words in Arabic script. If it is necessary, you can transliterate the word in the text and write it in Arabic script in the footnote. As for the verses of the Qur'an, only the main verse that is essential for the purpose of the article can be written in Arabic script.

Transliteration of Arabic words that do not have standard spellings in English should be done according to the following system.

ء	‘	ذ	dh	ظ	z / Z	ن	n
ب	b	ر	r	ع	‘	و	w
ت	t	ز	z	غ	gh	ه	h
ث	th	س	s	ف	f	ى	y
ج	j	ش	sh	ق	q	ة	h (without idāfah)
ح	ḥ / Ḥ	ص	ṣ / Ṣ	ك	k	ة	t (with idāfah)
خ	kh	ض	ḍ / Ḍ	ل	l		
د	d	ط	ṭ / Ṭ	م	m		

اَ	a	يَ	ī / Ī
اِ	i	وُ	ū / Ū
اُ	u	وِ	aw
آ / اِي / اِيْ	ā / Ā	اِيْ	ay

- Transliterated words should be italicized (except for names). They should not be capitalized except at the beginning of sentences, in titles, and for names.
- Note that some foreign words have been naturalized in English and have standard spelling. These words are not transliterated and italicized. e.g. Allah, Qur'an (Koran), Muhammad, imam, Islam, shariah, hadith, hajj, Shia (Shi'a), Shiite (Shi'ite), Sunni, qibla, Ramadan.
- In transliteration of phrases, i' rāb is not considered. If necessary, i' rāb can be marked for the Qur'an and poetry e.g. *ẓulumāt thalāth* not *ẓulumātin thalāthin*.
- **Al- :**

Al- is always written in lower case, unless it appears at the beginning of a sentence. In the table below, you can see examples of transliteration of al- in different situations.

القبلة	al-qiblah	من الشمس	min al-shams	والبيت	wa al-bayt
الشمس	al-shams	عن البيت	'an al-bayt	للبيت	lil-bayt
على الجدار	'alā al-jidār	في البيت	fī al-bayt	بالبيت	bil-bayt
الى البيت	ilā al-bayt	لا البيت	lā al-bayt	كالبيت	kal-bayt

➤ **Ibn, bint, abū, abī, abā, umm:**

Ibn and bint should not be capitalized, unless they appear at the beginning of a name or sentence. Bin and 'b.' should not be used. Abū, abī, abā, umm is always written separately and without hyphen. See some examples in the table below.

	Correct transliteration	Incorrect transliteration
الخليل بن احمد	al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad	al-Khalīl Bin Aḥmad, al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad
ام البنين	Umm al-Banīn	Ummul-Banīn, UmmulBanīn
ابوالقاسم	Abū al-qāsim	Abul-qāsim, Abulqāsim

- It is optional to write an abbreviation after the names of the holy people to show respect and prayer for them. If authors want to add the abbreviation, only the following two abbreviations will be acceptable.
 - (PBUH): peace be upon him
 - (PBUTH): peace be upon them
- The names of those who spell their names in a particular way are not transliterated. For example, Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

Editorial Board

1	Dr. Gholamreza Hassanzadeh	Full Professor, Department of Anatomy, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran
2	Dr. Mohammad Ali Rezaei Isfahani	Professor, Al-Mustafa International University, Qom, Iran
3	Dr. Ahmad Shaabani	Full Professor, Faculty of Chemistry Science and Petroleum, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran
4	Dr. Sohrab Morovati	Full Professor, Department of Qur'an and Hadith sciences, Ilam University, Ilam, Iran
5	Dr. Zahra Talebpour	Full Professor, Department of Analytical Chemistry, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran
6	Dr. Behrouz Minaei-Bidgoli	Associate Professor, School of Computer Engineering, Iran University of Science and Technology, Tehran, Iran
7	Dr. Abbas Ahmadvand	Associate Professor, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Shahid Beheshti University
8	Dr. Mohammad Mahdi Babapour	Associate Professor, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran
9	Dr. Mohammad Reza Faghihi Habibabadi	Associate Professor, Faculty of Mathematical Sciences, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran
10	Dr. Marzieh Mohases	Associate Professor, Faculty of Theology and Religions, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran
11	Dr. Abdulla Galadari	Associate Professor, Khalifa University of Science and Technology, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
12	Dr. Farhad Ghoddoussi	Associate Professor, Wayne State University, United States



Shahid Beheshti
University

Shahid Beheshti
University



Contemporary
Thoughts
Press

Contemporary
Thoughts Press