


The Quran

The Book free of doubt



**Exploratory essays
into *I'jaz al-Quran*
and other topics**

Syed Munir Wasti

About the author

This book, authored by Syed Munir Wasti, reflects a lifelong interest in the Quran and Islamic aspects that have acquired a new relevance in the present age. Syed Munir Wasti, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., is currently a Professor of English at the University of Karachi. He has written over 60 research papers that have been published in learned journals. His interests include the literary interaction between East and West, the freedom movement in South Asia and Islamic culture in all its manifestations.

The Quran: the Book free of doubt

Exploratory essays into

I'jāz al-Qurān

and other topics

Syed Munir Wasti

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Exploratory essays into *I'jaz al-Quran*
and other topics”

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گوهر دریائے قرآن سفتہ ام

إقبال

Gauhar-e daryā-e Qurān sufta am

Jewels from the ocean of the Quran
I have extracted.

Iqbal

Transliteration

Transliteration has not been done on scientific principles as these are 'exploratory' essays. Hence I have tried to avoid unnecessary use of diacritics and circumflexes as phonetic symbols except in the following cases in order to differentiate between similar characters of the same word that represent short vowel sounds with *fatha*, *kasra* or *damma*.

Long Vowels

To represent the long vowel sound of the Arabic letter *alif* (ا), a macron [a dash above the letter] has been used on *a*, like [ā], as in *asbāb*, *mushkilāt*, *mufradāt* etc.

To represent the long vowel sound of the Arabic letter *yaa* (ي), a macron has been used over the letter *i*, like [ī], as in *Karīm*, *kabīr*, *tafsīr*, *takhfīf*, *tazbīd* etc.

To indicate the long vowel sound of the Arabic letter *waw* (و), a macron has been used on the letter *u*, like [ū], as in *nuzūl* and *hurūf*.

The Arabic letter '*ayn* (ع) has been indicated by one of the two apostrophes ['] or ['], as appropriate, depending upon whether it occurs at the beginning,

middle or the end of the word. Examples: 'ām – at the start of the word; i'jāz – at the middle of a word; and saba' – at the end of the word.

To indicate the sound of a *hamza* in the middle and at the end of words, a straight vertical or neutral apostrophe (') is used as in *mu'akh-khar* and *rasā'il*.

For *tashdeed* occurring in an Arabic letter represented in English by two letters, or occurring more than once within a word, a small hyphen (-) is inserted between the letters repeated due to *shaddah* thereon, as in *mu'akh-khar*, *mud-dath-thir*, *muz-zam-mil* etc.

The use of hyphen is also made in the case of *mus-haf* and *Is-haq* to avoid *sh* being misread as *sheen* [ش] since *s* and *h* occur together.

The Arabic letter [ث], used in *kathīr* and *thalātha*, has been indicated by *th* rather than *s*.

Common words such as *Allah*, *Islam*, *Quran*, *Hadith*, *surah*, *sunnah*, *fiqh* have been left unchanged within the English text except when they are used in the Arabic or Urdu titles or texts quoted in a book to which reference has been made.



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Introduction

The Quran has a far greater impact on the lives of the Muslims than the Bible has upon Christians or the Torah upon Jews or, indeed, any scripture anywhere on the lives of its believers. The reason is that there is no separation of the temporal and the spiritual in Islam and everything is under the umbrella of spirituality. The Quran is not only the foundation of Islam but also its superstructure. Nothing is 'outside the pale' and everything – law, government, economics, diplomacy – is covered by the Quran and its application in the form of the *Hadith, Sunnah, Fiqh* – so that a Muslim's entire life from birth to death – is meant to be in obedience to a Divine code that also promotes decency, morality and civilization.

The essays in this book are put together under four broad rubrics (Quran text, grammar, *i'jāz al-Qurān*, and general) that cover related topics. They represent an interest in, and investigation of, the Quran covering nearly four decades and yet the Quran's capacity for multi-faceted explication remains undiminished even though 1400 years have passed since its initial revelation. To Muslims, the Quran is literally the 'Word of God' in its absolute meaning and the attribute of Divine Speech. As

Mohamad 'Ali Jawhar says, "it is in man's ill coin" but still is the ultimate linguistic/literary masterpiece that remains eternally unsurpassed.

The end of the 20th century has seen a great upsurge of anti-Islamic bias in the West and other places [such as India] which has assumed violent and militant forms such as those envisaged in the 'clash of civilizations' [Samuel Huntington, 1992]. This 'new crusade' against Islam has also an 'intellectual' dimension that rests on an *à priori* assumption that the Quran is a human production and that constant attacks on its position as the Divine Word will someday cause the foundation to weaken and the edifice of Islam to crumble. It is vital that these aggressive machinations be understood, countered and answered. The 'Islamophobe' think tanks are pouring millions of dollars to support this mercenary propaganda which itself is indicative of a psychologically disturbed, violent and aggressive mindset that is now accepted as the norm in its place of origin. The inroads of falsehood have to be answered and blocked. Nothing like this massive onslaught on Islam has been seen previously, not even during the Crusades. It is the duty of every Muslim to rise up and serve Islam which is 'under siege'.

Syed Munir Wasti

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This is the best, and generally the easiest, part of any piece of writing requiring an expression of gratitude.

The difficulties in the way of conducting any research are many and various – ranging from power failures to inaccessibility of books especially recent publications in European languages. These may take long to be imported or may never be imported because of a limited market for them. The same applies to material in Arabic. Books are imported from Egypt, Lebanon and Iran [among other countries] but only because they form part of a prescribed syllabus in some educational institution and not because they represent the latest research in any area. The high cost of books, especially of many recent encyclopedias, absence of borrowing facilities of such books and also of standard texts in libraries, all compound the problem. I appreciate that there are several references that I have been unable to access or consult in the preparation of this book.

I have benefitted immensely from the constructive criticism of my brother, Dr. S. Tanvir Wasti [resident in Turkey].

I am grateful to the great scholar and authority on Shāh Wali Allah, viz., Hakīm Mahmūd Ahmad Barkāti for sharing his expertise with me on the life and work of the said Islamic personality.

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Dr. T. B. Irving [Al-Haj Ta'līm 'Ali], of the USA, who was the first American translator of the Quran [Brattleboro, Vermont, 1985] and a devout Muslim – with whom I carried on a fair amount of correspondence regarding the Quran. This was extremely educative for me. Dr. Irving passed away in 2002. May his soul attain the peace of paradise!

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20 June 2008.

QURAN TEXT

The evolution of the Arabic language

Arabic is the most important member of the family of Semitic languages – all of which are of great antiquity. Like other languages, Arabic has also had a long evolution and development. Its immediate predecessors are Syriac and Nabatean – both deriving mainly from Aramaic. Hebrew is also a separate offshoot of Aramaic. Thus an embryonic ‘proto-Arabic’ must have existed before the first millennium AD – which was the result of a mixture of the free flow of these three languages. Indeed the death of Syriac and Nabatean and the ‘hibernation’ of Hebrew [now used mainly for ceremonial and liturgical purposes by Jews] produced a congenial climate for the seed of a new, vibrant language to burst into flower. All this linguistic fusion, interaction and intermixture was continuing in the area covering the northern part of the Arabian peninsula [Syria, Jordan and Palestine]. Southern Arabia was also exposed to this linguistic influence because of trade and commercial activity with the northern regions [mentioned in the Surah *Al-Qureysh* No. 105]. As this proto-Arabic moved into the central heartland of

Arabia, it encountered Thamudic [used by the Thamud tribe around the areas of the present Madā'in Sālih city in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Sālih being the prophet sent to the Thamūd tribe], Lihyani'ite in North West Arabia and Safa'itic [the local language of the south]. All these separate but freely mixing streams combined to produce a powerful linguistic torrent. It was an advanced form of proto-Arabic but rapidly shedding its 'proto' traits and breaking out of its shell into the full light of history. The different Arab tribes quickly accepted this new phenomenon and gave it wide currency. As Arabic at this stage was a spoken language it grew with speed by word of mouth – unlike Syriac, Nabatean and Aramaic. This gave rise to a new 'core language' that spawned a number of dialects as a result of dominating the ancient dying languages. The extinct Nabatean was used for tomb inscriptions of which several examples are traceable in N. Arabia [see *Antiquities of Saudi Arabia*, Saudi Information Department].

Among the dialects, the Hijāzī dialect assumed prominence for its superiority to others in matters of pronunciation, diction and syntax as well as proper inflection and stress patterns. The Hijāzīs did not elide the vowels and thereby eliminated the impression of a garbled speech. Thus the Hijāzī dialect dominated others and was accepted as the true criterion of 'received' pronunciation in pre-Islamic Arabia. After

the rise of Islam, the various 'dialectal differences were blurred and the standard accepted was the Hijāzi' [A.F.L. Beeston, *The Arabic Language Today*]. The Hijāzi dialect [or Arabic as we may now properly call it] inevitably branched out into the two streams – the language of exalted discourse and literature and the demotic speech of the common man. But there was no wall of Gog and Magog to separate the common folk from the comprehension of the seemingly separate 'register' of the exalted discourse. Thus they too understood and experienced whatever ideas and sensations as were communicated by their poets, bards, singers and wandering minstrels. The *Jāhiliyya* [pre-Islamic period of ignorance] period produced a number of fine poets who wrote poems like the *Sab'a Mo'allaqāt* [= 'seven suspended poems'] which were valued for their collective poetic excellence and hung on the walls of the Ka'ba, the holy sanctuary. These poems were orally transmitted, and written down by Muslims in the second century AH.

The primitive Arabic script consisted of angular vertical strokes. With the rise of Islam, these became slanted and rotund. A cursive script evolved and there are examples of early Arabic writing such as the papyrus of 22 AH [see *The Evolution of North Arabic Script*, Nabia Abbott, University of Chicago Press, 1934]. This further developed in the first century of Islam with the use of diacritical marks for

vowelization and dots to distinguish the separate letters. All this development can be directly attributed to the revelation of the Quran. The script of modern Arabic is superior to the cumbersome scripts and difficult orthography of Aramaic, Syriac and Nabatean and it is written from right to left. A. Schimmel writes – ‘one of the miracles of Islam is how the pre-Islamic ungainly script developed into a highly refined calligraphy of superb beauty.’ [*Calligraphy and Islamic Culture*, pp. 10-11].



The history of the text

A history of the text is necessary to understand the basic building block of Islamic belief regarding the Quran. The Quran is a document whose author is Allah Himself. It is not a document composed by a human being. Its authorship is divine; its form, text and order are also divine. This disposes of all the tendentious western attempts to prove it to be, at worst a humanly composed book, and, at best, an inspired composition like that of poetry. As such, the western notions of chronological arrangement, textual variants, revision and redaction have no place in Islam. The textual purity of the Quran from the time it was revealed to the present day [and even into the future] is regarded by Muslims as nothing short of a miracle.

The Quran also refers to its presence on a 'preserved tablet' [*lawh al-mahfūz*]. This is the heavenly archetype from which it was periodically revealed. The *lawh al-mahfūz* also implies writing and there is one version only of the Quran on the *lawh al-mahfūz*. The Quran that is 'between the two covers' [*bayn al-lawhayn*] on earth is the same as exists on the *lawh al-mahfūz*. This is a basic tenet of Islamic belief and is starkly opposed to all efforts of the foes of

Islam to suggest or try to establish that there are variants in the Quran [just as a poet may revise, change, alter, scratch out his poems]. Any such attempt is 'pathetic and futile' [T.B. Irving, Preface to Quran translation, 1985]. There are no variants in the Quran.

The Quran was completely committed to writing during the Holy Prophet's lifetime. Its first collection was made during the caliphate of Abu Bakr after several Muslims who had memorised the Quran had lost their lives in various battles. The compiler was Zayd b. Thābit, the Prophet's personal scribe and secretary. This standard codex [called the *Imām*] was written down completely and placed with Hafsa, the Prophet's wife. Copies were made from this as required.

During the caliphate of 'Othmān [644–656 CE], when the Islamic empire had greatly expanded and its population now consisted of many non-Arabs, a source of confusion arose over the variant pronunciation of the different peoples whose first language was not Arabic. For example, the letter ث is pronounced 'th' by Arabs and as 's' by Persians, Turks and others. The absence of punctuation also created confusion e.g. the words *wa rasūluhu* and *wa rasūlihi* are both written in an identical way and the difference between them can only be understood by native Arabic users. The caliph

‘Othmān recalled all the copies of the Quran and prepared a standard codex using a cursive script marking long and short vowels, breaks to mark end-lines and other requisite punctuation. Zayd b. Thābit was still alive in ‘Othmān’s time and he assisted in this second ‘revision’ [if we may call it]. ‘Othmān’s stress that in all calligraphic and orthographic forms priority be given to the Hijāzi pronunciation was a continuation of the the ancient convention of pre-Islamic times. This procedure affected only the writing and not the text itself. The Quran text of today is the same as that of the ‘Othmān codex of over 1400 years ago. During the first century AH, further orthographic improvements were made and strokes to show vowels, dots to distinguish the separate letters, and inks of different colours were also used to provide an error-free text. Advances were also made in the use of papyrus, silk, paper and deerskin for writing and gold and silver ink and superior pens.

The Quran was transmitted orally and writing can be seen as an aid to memory. Thus when memory needs the support of writing, it is advisable to use this. Also no document can be permanently transmitted by memory alone. Thus it was advisable that the Quran be written down at an early time. Memory need not be downplayed or treated as essentially faulty. Western writers do not have any qualms at accepting the oral transmission of Homer’s epics over centuries long

before the invention of the linear B script. The text of the two epics is several times the length of the Quran. Neither is there any objection to the orally transmitted text of the *sab'a mo'allaqāt* from pre-Islamic times and written down by Muslims in the second century AH. The Quran repeatedly states that 'it is an easy Book to memorise' [Surah 54, *The Moon*]. This is also an admonition to the Muslims to commit the Quran to memory and also presages a time when the complete text may not be memorised – so the use of writing inevitably comes in. The millions of Muslims today who have memorised the Quran [even if they do not know Arabic] and can repeat the text unaided provides a living testimony both to the power of memory and the universal uniformity of the Quran.

All Muslims believe that the Quran was revealed in a final form completely structured and not a text subject to human error. The imperfect Arabic script was transformed into a vehicle fit to transmit the Word of Allah [Schimmel *q.v.*]. The vowel points and diacritical dots point to the lengthening and shortening of inflections, implosive/explosive sounds etc. during oral reading. Similarly, the orthographic structures relate to the writing of the text [with the inclusion of all silent letters as well] to perpetuate a standard written text. So some aspects of the Quran text relate to the oral side of the transmission while others highlight the written aspect. 'The transmission

of the Quran has always been oral just as it has always been written' [Adrian Brockett in A. Rippin ed. *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Quran*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 45].

The Quran is divided into 114 surahs roughly in the order of diminishing length. The names of the surahs were known in the Prophet's time and Companions have added their own with reference to any aspect of the contents e.g. *Al-Fātiha* is also called *Al-Kāfia* [the Sufficient], *al-Kanz* [the Treasure], *al-Du'ā* [the Prayer] etc. The order of the surahs was not decided later but given by the Holy Prophet before his departure from this life. This is the order in which the angel Gabriel gave the final recitation. The verses of the Quran vary in number because the later schools of recitation [*qara'a't*] differed as to where to insert a full stop and where to keep a run-on line. These were few in number and did not affect the text in any way.

'Chant the Quran in full measure ...' says the Quran [surah 73 verse 5]. As a result seven standard schools of recitation emerged having equal validity. The differences among them were in the form of recitation and did not affect the text or its meaning. The science of recitation is a specialized science requiring a great deal of training and practice. The

most common school of recitation is that transmitted by Imām Hafṣ.

The Quran refers to itself as a *kitāb* [= book]. It contains references to books and writing materials such as *suhuf* [= scrolls], *raqq* [= parchment], *asātīr* [= inscriptions], *qalam* [= pen] and even commands Muslims to write down and attest documents of agreements [s. 2 v. 282]. So the writing down of the Quran was a definite far-reaching process meant to preserve the text till the end of time.

To sum up, the textual purity of the Quran is itself a great proof of its miraculous nature. While all ancient books of the world have been subject to interpolation and corruption in some measure or other, the fact that the Quran remains strictly true to its original revelation and that the efforts of thousands of Muslims over the generations have gone to great lengths to ensure this, is a unique historical event.



The uncreatedness of the Quran

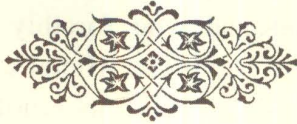
That the Quran is uncreated is the cornerstone of Islamic belief. The Quran is, for Muslims, the speech [*kalām*] of Allah. As such, it is one of the divine attributes and exists since eternity. Divine speech exists without forms, sounds or letters. The Quran before us 'between the two covers' [*bayn al-daffatayn*] is written, read and spoken aloud. Its writing, reading and sounds are created because these are necessary for men to follow it. The Quran itself is uncreated [*ghayr makhlūq*] or pre-existing [*qadīm*]. Divine speech exists in pre-eternity just like other divine attributes. Belief in this doctrine is inseparable from belief in the Quran.

During the rule of Māmūn, the 'Abbasid caliph, who inaugurated an inquisition [*mihna*] against people having this belief and who forcibly announced the createdness of the Quran as official creed, there was opposition to this by courageous scholars who finally overturned this false concept after much suffering. Among those who suffered but were vindicated were Shaikh 'Abdul-'Azīz al-Kin'āni and Imām Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

In the creedal statement – the *Fiqh Akbar* – of Abu Hanīfa [d. 150 A.H.], it is stated:

The Quran is the *Kalām Allah* – written in scrolls, remembered in the hearts, repeated on the tongues, revealed to the Holy Prophet. The words of the Quran, its writings, its reading are created. But the Quran itself is uncreated. It did not come into existence at a point in time.

Clearly, if the Quran is uncreated and pre-existing in eternity as a divine attribute, there can be no question of any change or mutation in it. It has transcended the concept of book [*kitāb*] or writing [*maktūb*] and is inseparable from divinity.



***Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (causes and occasions of revelation)**

The Quran is a book whose principles, precepts, laws, rules, admonitions and wisdom remain applicable to the end of time. However, there is a science peculiar to this revealed Book that relates certain verses to a special context. The passage of time may have made these contexts less immediate. But as recorded by the *muhaddithīn* they give important information about the early days of Islam and the revelation of the Quran. These are also recorded in the early works of *Sīrah* – such as that of Ibn Hishām. The books of the *Hadīth* also contain a separate section called *Kitāb al-Tafsīr* which contains the context in which certain verses were revealed. While the context of the revelation of the verses may be of information, it can also help in the application of the verses to later circumstances and situations. But to limit the applications of such verses only to their contemporary circumstances would be a mistake – as pointed out by Shāh Wali Allah in his *Al-Fauz al-Kabīr fī Usūl al-Tafsīr*. In the present time, the need is to liberate these verses from their historical context and make their application universal.

Extremely erudite books on this specialised subject have been written – such as *Asbāb al-Nuzūl al-Qurān*

by Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali bin Ahmad Al-Wāhidi [d. 468 A.H.] and *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fi Asbāb al-Nuzūl* by ‘Allāma Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūti [d. 1515 CE]. Suyūti also gives much space to the subject in his famous *Al-Itqān fi ‘Ulūm al-Qurān*.

It certainly is interesting to know what circumstances led to the revelation of certain verses. For example, many verses in the Quran begin with: ‘They ask you concerning ... charity/the moons/ menstruation/Dhulqarnain/the soul ... in which the eager attitude of the early Muslims seeking to know more about their religion is exhibited. So also the dialogue that was conducted with pagans/Jews/ Christians of the time is recorded. The historical background of the rise of Islam is also referred to in verses dealing with the battle of Badr/the Hudaibiyah Treaty/the conquest of Mecca. The Holy Prophet’s own life is mentioned in verses dealing with his being an orphan [*Surah Duhā*, s. 93], his migration to Medinah and his seeking refuge in a cave with Abu Bakr [*Surah Tauba*, s. 9], the predominance of Islam in Arabia and his approaching demise [*Surah Nasr*, s. 110]. The reactions of the early Muslims to the revelation of the Quranic verses and their reception and response to them form a lively and illuminating part of this discourse.

Beginning and conclusion of the surahs

Beginning of the surahs

The first words of Quranic surahs are not blandly uniform but show an eloquent and poetic distribution.

Many surahs start with the praise of Allah – as is proper with documents exalting the sender. Thus *Al-Hamdu lillah* [= Praise be to Allah] is the commencement of five surahs and other words of exaltation are present in other surahs.

A number of surahs start with the use of the mystic letters [*q.v.*].

Certain surahs begin with a direct exhortation to the addressee e.g. ‘O mankind...’; ‘O you who believe.....’; also ‘O Prophet ...’ [s. 66]; and more particularly ‘O wrapped one...’ [s. 72] and ‘O enfolded one...’ [s. 73].

Some go directly into the subject matter e.g. ‘They ask you concerning the spoils...’ [s. 8]; and ‘Certainly Allah has heard her who complains...’ [s. 58].

A number of surahs begin with oaths e.g. ‘By the mount!’ [s. 52]; ‘By the star when it sets...’ [s. 53]; ‘By the dawn!’ [s. 89]; and ‘By the snorting chargers’ [s. 100]. Others begin with reference to a point in time e.g. ‘When the help of Allah comes...’ [s. 110]; ‘When the sky will be sundered...’ [s. 84] and ‘When the hypocrites come to you...’ [s. 63].

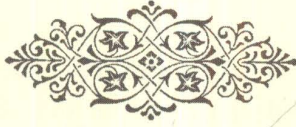
A command is sometimes given at the head of a surah e.g. ‘Say! Allah is One...’ [s. 112]; and ‘Say! O ye unbelievers...’ [s. 109]; as well as ‘Read in the name of thy Lord...’ [s. 96]. Others begin with rhetorical questions e.g. ‘Have you not seen him who...’ [s. 107]; and ‘Has there come to you the news...’ [s. 88]; and ‘About what are they asking’ [s. 78].

Other surahs promise/predict punishments e.g. ‘Destruction be to the defaulters...’ [s. 83]; and more particularly ‘Destroyed be the hands of Abu Lahab...’ [s. 111].

Conclusion of the surahs

Generally, the surahs conclude on the same themes/lines/points on which they begin. If a surah

starts with praise of Allah, it generally concludes with such praise and rounds off the surah. If a surah begins with articles of belief, it concludes with their mention [s. 2]. The surah being an organic whole maintains its thematic and structural unity within itself and also harmonises with those surahs which precede or follow it.



Repetition for reasons of stress

There are certain verses in the Quran that contain repetition of words for the purpose of stress, to heighten the emphasis or to forcefully present a point of view. This is the original meaning of *mubālagha* – not ‘exaggeration’ as frequently employed in current usage.

In the essay on metaphor, we have referred to s. 7 v. 40 in which evil persons would be debarred from heaven ‘until the camel passes through the eye of the needle.’ This is an impossibility – but it is so worded as to make the despair of the evil folk even more strong. While remaining a metaphor, it also is an example of the use of *mubālagha*.

In s. 23 v. 36, the opposition of the evil tribe of Noah is highlighted by this usage: ‘Begone, begone, with that which you are promised.’ This describes their total and absolute rejection of the message as given by Noah.

In s. 75 vv. 34-35, the two verses are identical save with the addition of ‘again’ at the beginning of the second verse. Thus: ‘Near to you and nearer/Again

near to you and nearer.’ The sense of impending doom drawing nearer and nearer is heightened.

In s. 76, v. 15 ends with the word *qawārīr* [= crystal] and the next verse begins with the same word – the repetition intended to describe the miraculous quality of transparent goblets of silver [in paradise].

The use of the *shadda* in Arabic is also meant to raise the level of stress and indicate a higher degree of force as in *kasara* = ‘he broke’ and *kassara* = ‘he smashed’. So the various words of the Quran use the *shadda* for this purpose. For example, in the following attributes of Allah, the *shadda* is used with maximum impact to create a sense of boundlessness in the attributes:

Ghaffār [s. 20 v. 82] – stressed form of *ghāfir* [Forgiver]

Allām [s. 5 v. 109] – stressed form of *ālim* [Knower]

Fa’-‘āl [s. 85 v. 16] – stressed form of *fā’il* [Doer].

The scenes of Judgement Day are also described dramatically using repetition as an instrument of detail. Thus s. 89 vv. 21-22 state: ‘Nay, but when the earth shall be ground to atoms, grinding grinding/And your Lord will come with the angels rank on rank...’

In English the word 'on' interposes between 'rank' and 'rank' [in the translation] – but in the original there is no interposing word and the suggestion is of a great multitude of angels with no space between them.

Thus, in the Quran, every single word, phrase or sentence – its location, placement and occurrence – contributes to the overall impact of the message with a unique coordination of the separate constituent elements. This is another aspect of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*.



Repetition of subjects and verses

There is no occurrence of an example, instance or narrative repeated at different places within the same surah in the Quran. This is the first point that emerges even from a superficial examination of the Quran. Each surah is a separate entity and has its own structural and stylistic features. The Quran does refer to different aspects of the same event e.g. the Fall, the Exodus, and the Abrahamic narratives, but this is done to highlight the different thought-provoking aspects – not for the recounting of a story for the story’s sake. The narratives appear as part of a larger discourse and the Quran, in its inimitable style, adduces only those aspects of a narrative as may be contextually relevant. It does not narrate stories – for that would make the pagan claim true – ‘these are the fables of old’ [s. 68 v. 15].

The Quran does not adopt an attitude of pious moralizing after [say] referring to the fate of a sinful people. It leaves the morals to be drawn, the lessons to be learnt – left unstated but never unclear. It may ask rhetorical questions to lead to inevitable conclusions. It says, after giving some aspects of

narrative, that ‘in these are lessons for the wise’ – and no more. This ‘silence’ is extremely meaningful and more eloquent than words.

As regards the repetition of certain verses – such as the famous verse of Surah 55 [*Al-Rahmān*] – ‘Which of the favours of your Lord do you two deny?’ [repeated 31 times], this is a rhetorical question and also an example of poetic eloquence which infuses spiritual insight into the reader/listener. It may produce an enchanting effect on the sensitive – reflective of that ‘inimitable symphony that moves men to tears and ecstasy’ [Pickthall’s introduction to his translation 1936]. The reiteration of this verse after detailing some aspect of reward and punishment brings out a different aspect of divine favour in each case – which does not pose any problem for Muslims. As for the claim of Rudi Paret that it develops into a ‘mechanical repetition’ – this only shows the insensitive ear and mind of a person who does not ‘feel’ the impression the Quran has had on the sense-receptors of millions of people over the centuries yet pretends that he is capable of reproducing its verbal magic in his [German] translation. Even a non-Arabist like Carlyle who took the Sale translation to be much like the Quran in original and had an unfavourable opinion of the Quran, felt that ‘much of it is rhythmic....much perhaps lost in the translation’ [*On Heroes and Hero-worship* 1844].

The question of repetition does not pose any problem for Muslims [Arab and non-Arab alike] and is just another aspect of anti-Islamic propaganda emanating from the west. There is no need for any apologetic attitude in this regard when the objectors are those who deny the divine origin of the Quran.



Abrogation

The text of the Quran was compiled in the full light of history and generations of Muslims have had no trouble in accepting the absolute authenticity of the text. 'Abrogation' [*naskh*] is a science which had a certain temporary vogue among Muslims – but with the passage of time has ceased to be treated with the attention that it once received. It has been ardently seized upon by Orientalists who will grab any chance to advance claims of doubt against the Quran text.

Naskh also means 'writing down'/'copying'. Hence a written copy is called a *nuskha*. It also implies a certain repetition or sequence e.g. *al-nihār yansukhu al-leyl* [= the day 'abrogates' the night]. So if the day is *nāsikh*, the night is *mansūkh*. This does not mean that night will never come again or has been removed for ever. *Naskh* once possessed a two-fold connotation: the report of certain orders or directives and the removal of certain verses from a text. *Naskh* takes the following three forms:

1. *naskh al-hukm duna al-tilāwah* [abrogation of the command without removal from the recited text];
2. *naskh fi al-tilāwah duna al-hukm* [abrogation of the recited text without removal or repeal of the command];

3. *naskh fi al-tilāwah wa al-hukm* [abrogation of recitation and command].

For a long time, the principle of *naskh* was used in the interpretation of legal decrees based on the Quran – rather than on textual study. In the first and second centuries of Islam, the codification of law by the four schools of jurisprudence led to a widespread and needless application of *naskh*. As this process was completed, *naskh* fell into disuse but the fallacy that certain verses of the Quran were abrogated continued. At one time, it was supposed that 500 [out of 6,500 verses roughly] were ‘abrogated’. By the time of the polymath, Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūti [d. 1515], the verses had fallen to twenty [as given in his *Al-Itqān fi ‘ulūm al-Qurān*]. In the 18th century, the great scholar Shāh Wali Allah [1703-62] reduced Suyūti’s twenty verses to five [in his *Al-Fauz al-Kabīr fi usūl al-tafsīr*]. In the beginning of the 20th century, the Muslim exegetes rejected the concept of a verse/s abrogating others and put an end to this doctrine. All Quranic verses were held to be of universal application and would be applied in different conditions. In this area, the works of Egyptian exegetes – Muhammad ‘Abduh, Rashīd Ridā, Mustafā al-Marāghī and Jawhari al-Tantāwi – are noteworthy.

The verse of the Quran most quoted in the support of *naskh* is:

Such as Our revelations as We cause to abrogate or be forgotten, We bring [in place] one better or the like thereof. [s. 2 v. 106]

The deduction [of applying *naskh* to the text of the Quran] is erroneous. This verse must be read in conjunction with the preceding one:

Neither those who disbelieve among the People of the Book nor the idolaters love that there should be sent down unto you any good thing from your Lord. But Allah chooses for His mercy whom He will and Allah is of infinite bounty. [s. 2 v. 105]

After this, read s. 2 v. 106.

It becomes clear that the abrogation refers to creeds which may have been pure when introduced by their prophets like Moses or Jesus but which later lapsed into falsehood and superstition. So Islam is the religion of the future that replaces worn-out creeds that existed in the world at the time of its emergence.

The school of Orientalists see in *naskh* 'detailed evidence of revision' [Bell-Watt]. This is all a continuation of their age-old efforts to exhibit the Quran as a consciously contrived human composition.

The second and third categories are more difficult to argue in favour of by Orientalists in view of the

lack of genuine source-material to fit their pre-conceived theories. The main attention is given in this regard to the famous 'verse of stoning'. There is no such verse in the Quran but Islam upholds the punishment of stoning – so why would Muslims remove the supposed verse? There is no answer to this inverted logic. This verse is actually found in the old Talmud [of the Jews]. 'Omar ibn al-Khattāb is said to have stated that he would write the verse on the margin of the Quran if no blame were attached to him. This shows that 'Omar did not regard this verse as part of the Quran for he would not write it in the text but only on the margin as an annotation. The verse as given in Arabic is a translation from the Talmud and not originally Arabic. It does not fit in with the style or context of the Quran at all. The very fact that the Quran is meant for all time is glaring proof against the concept of *naskh*. Thus no intellectual proofs are required to reject verses purporting to be part of the Quran and now separated from it.

As regards the claim of certain sectarians that Quran originally had forty *juz* [parts] or that certain parts have been deliberately removed from the Quran – like the so-called *surah al-nūreyn* which exalts certain members of the Holy Prophet's family – these are undeserving of the dignity of a rebuttal.

The order of surahs in the Quran

It has been stated earlier that the Quran is free of all sorts of human interference and error. It is the *Kalām-Allah* [= 'Word of Allah'] – so it is necessarily error-free and fool-proof. The order of the surahs was given to the *ummah* by the Holy Prophet before his departure from this life and the matter was not left to the choice of the Muslims. The present [or traditional order] is in itself an extraordinary systematization if one examines the backdrop of Quranic revelation. Different surahs were revealed at different times and in different places with other verses of other surahs coming in the interim or concomitantly. So the chronological arrangement [as produced or attempted by certain persons] only creates confusion when applied to the Quran. In short, it is unnecessary, unhelpful and futile. Thus the final arrangement is one that was made by Allah Himself and revealed to the Holy Prophet who communicated it to the *ummah* and it has remained the same ever since the Quran's revelation was completed.

It is also wrong to suppose that the present order has no Divine sanction. If Muslims disturb this order

in prayer by reciting a later-appearing surah before an earlier-appearing one, no such recitation is acceptable and the prayers will have to be repeated.

Dr. Richard Bell, an Anglican clergyman, in his translation of the Quran [1937-39] was the first person who took the Quran to bits and rehashed it in pursuit of his fantastic theories. These stated that parts of the Quran were mixed up with others as a result of being written on the back of sheets containing other verses and the 'redactors' tacked them on to other sections. In a bizarre attempt to discredit the wisdom of ages, he put forward a theory that the whole of the Quran was a massive confusion of jumbled-up verses. Although he put in a lot of sterile effort to try to substantiate his 'atomistic' theory, Bell could only analyse the verses he claimed were scrambled in one surah and not correlate them to what he considered their 'rightful' order in other surahs. This outrageous theory was attacked by A.J. Arberry who called Bell's translation 'unreadable.' It later attracted certain ex-pupils of Bell [such as A. T. Welch]. W. Montgomery Watt, also an old pupil of Bell, did not agree with Bell's theory.

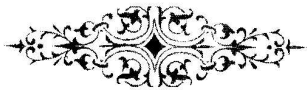
Two other English translations – that of J.M. Rodwell [1861] and that of N.J. Dawood [1956] – also upset the traditional order and created confusion without establishing anything. Dawood has since

followed the traditional order in later editions. If one denies the divine origin of the Quran, all discussion about the order of surahs is meaningless. If the text is supposedly of human origin then the arrangement whether accepted or denied leads nowhere.

Regis Blachere of France assumed that the Quran was the only reliable source for the life of the Holy Prophet. Thus he felt that by a chronological arrangement he could piece together those aspects of the Holy Prophet's life as are referred to in the Quran. As such he issued a French translation and commentary titled *Le Coran: traduction selon un éssai de reclassement des sourates* [Paris 1947-51]. But if he wished to trace out the Prophet's *sīrah* from the Quran, he could have done so without disturbing the time-honoured text of the order of the surahs.

The debate about the order of the surahs or verses by Orientalists and others has not disturbed the Muslims over the centuries nor has it caused any doubts in their minds regarding the Quran, its revelation, its order and its contents being wholly of Divine origin. However, it is worth speculating why adherents or even lapsed followers of other faiths should continue their vain and ill-intentioned attempts to stir up useless controversies within Islam.

A fact not sufficiently highlighted is that the present order of surahs is also proof of the miraculous nature [*i'jāz*] of the Quran. In spite of being revealed in different places and at different times with a complex chronological order and thematic variations, the surahs have a tendency to lead up to one another and imperceptibly 'flow' from one into the other in a remarkable display of unity. Thus to a scholar or even simple reader of Arabic the Quran does not appear to be 'a confused medley' [Carlyle: *On Heroes and Hero-worship* 1844] but a truly organic whole with a unique symmetry among the constituent parts. This phenomenal intra-textual linkage [*rabt/irtibāt*] throughout the 114 surahs of the Quran is a strong proof of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*. The *Shaykh al-Akbar*, Mohy al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabi, stated that the Quran from beginning to end reads like a single sentence.



Interpretation

The Quran admits of interpretation where different opinions exist. In Surah 3, verse 7 it is stated:

He it is Who revealed the scriptures unto you wherein are clear revelations – they are the basis of the book – and others which are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue that which is allegorical seeking to create dissension by their twisted interpretation. None knows their explanation save Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: We believe therein! The whole is from our Lord. But only men of understanding really heed.

It is not open to any Muslim to re-interpret those facts on which there is established opinion or universal consensus [*ijmā' ummah*]. For example, no one can state, claim or suggest that *Allah, Rasūl, Quran* have other meanings than those associated with them. In a similar manner, no Muslim can state that Adam, Noah, Jesus, Abraham or Muhammad were persons other than those known by these quoted names. This would be the calculated rejection of Islam no matter on what evidence such opinions may be put forward.

However, it is possible to interpret verses on whose meaning or implication the great Companions and exegetes have differed; or to prefer any opinion among a variety of sound and accepted versions. For example, s. 2 v. 238 reads: 'Be guardians of your prayer especially the midmost prayer.....' Now there are varying opinions about which is the midmost prayer. The majority inclined towards the view that it was the 'asr prayer as this comes after and precedes two prayers; some felt that this was the *tahajjud* prayer said after midnight. In all these opinions, there is difference but not conflict and one can favour or subscribe to any of these opinions after considering the reasons leading up to it.



Mushkilāt al-Qurān

These are not difficulties in reality but questions that have in the past been advanced regarding certain aspects of the Quran. For example, the conversion of many Jews and Christians to Islam resulted in these new converts trying to fit in some of their earlier traditions with Islam in an attempt to prove that Islam presented the true picture of their lost/corrupt texts. So the entry of this material into the sphere of Islam created problems of diverse interpretation. However, such matters are now primarily of historical interest.

Similarly, questions of whether the heavens were created first or the earth were problems of this nature. These contradictions [and those of similar issues] were more apparent than real and could easily be resolved. Some non-Muslims have included the nature of the 'mystic letters' among the *mushkilāt*. Clearly the so-called *mushkilāt* exist in the mind of the reader and not in the Quran.



Locale of revelation

The Quran was initially revealed at Mecca and this process continued for some 10 years until the Holy Prophet migrated to Medina in 622 CE. The revelation continued after this in Medina. However, most of the Quran was revealed in Mecca [some 80 surahs or more out of a total of 114]. This point is of relevance with regard to the theory of supposed 'abrogation'. If Meccan verses [being revealed earlier] were to be abrogated by Medinian verses, the greater part of the Quran would need to have been revealed in Medina. But it is the other way round. So the latter revealed part [chronologically] confirms the earlier part and does not abrogate it. If it be suggested that the Meccan surahs contain details of belief and the Medinian surahs contain practical commands relating to the new Islamic polity, even then this dichotomy is not so clear-cut. Medinian verses would have to be abrogated [if we suppose its possibility] by later Medinian verses – which was clearly not the case for several situations emerged suiting the application of both earlier and later verses.

All surahs and verses revealed after the *hijrah* are treated as Medinian regardless of locale.

In the famous study, *Al-Burhān fi 'ulūm-al-Qurān*, the scholar Badr al-Dīn Zarkashi has assembled considerable evidence that states that verses beginning with ... 'O mankind' were revealed in Mecca while those beginning with ... 'O you who believe....' were revealed in Medina. But both Meccan and Medinian surahs contain both forms of address – which indicates the universal application of the Quran unrestricted by geographical limitations.

The meticulous Muslim scholars have investigated the verses of the Quran in minute detail. Some of their classifications are as under:

1. *Safari* and *hadari* verses [revealed when on a journey or in residence].
2. *layli* and *nahāri* [revealed at night or in the day].
3. *sayfi* and *shitā'i* [revealed in summer or in winter].

The long surahs were usually revealed piece-meal – though the long surah *Al-An'ām* [s. 6] was revealed all at once at night. The smaller surahs were revealed in full but the famous surah *Al-'Alaq* [s. 96] was revealed in two parts – the first five verses being the initial revelation of the Quran and the remaining following much later.

Names of surahs

These were also revealed directly with the surah. In the Holy Prophet's time, various surahs were called by the names they still bear. However, the additional names of surahs were given by Companions such as the twenty-five names of *Al-Fātiha*. The names indicate a particular key-word of the surah and not a conspectus of the whole e.g. *Al-Baqarah* refers to the incident of the Jews and the cow but is a long surah containing much more material.



Oaths

The oaths in the Quran are intended to emphasise the heightened importance of the subsequent subject-matter. The object of the oath assumes greater importance in consequence. For example, in *Al-Munāfiqūn* [s. 63], this verse occurs: ‘When the hypocrites come to you, they say: We bear witness that you are surely the Messenger of Allah ... And Allah knows best that you are indeed His messenger ... and Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are liars.’ The hypocrites are not liars for bearing witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah but because they are not sincere in their assertion.

The highest oath of all is taken by Allah upon Himself e.g. ‘And I swear by the Lord of the two easts and the two wests...’ [s. 69 v. 40]. The other oaths are all of created beings/places – all of which have a certain permanence, a holiness and a surety of occurrence e.g. ‘By the sun and its brightness...’ [s. 91 v. 1]. ‘By the dawn ...’ [s. 89 v. 1]. ‘By the fig and the olive and Mount Sinai...’ [s. 95 vv. 1-2]. ‘Nay! I swear by this city...’ [s. 90 v. 1]. ‘By thy life! They were surely transgressing ...’ [s. 15 v. 72]. In all these oaths, it is supposed that it is by the Creator of these things that the oath is taken and not by the things

themselves. By reference to creatures and objects, the purpose is to draw attention to natural phenomena and to relate them to the divine scheme of things. So many different objects cannot have different creators, so they point to a sole Creator. Thus divine unity emerges from within these oaths:

*Fi kulle shay'in lahū Shāhid
Tadullu 'alā annahū Wāhid*

In everything, He is manifest,
Proving that He indeed is One.

In s. 2 v. 26, it is stated that 'Allah does not disdain coining a similitude to a gnat or that above it.' So the fact that oaths are taken upon horses, figs and olives are in keeping with this world-view.

In a brief booklet [62 pp.] entitled *Aqsām al-Qurān*, the Pakistani scholar, Hamīduddīn Farāhi, has traced out the opinions of Imām Rāzi and Imām Ibn Qayyim in the use of oaths in a theological content and the poetic practice of using oaths in a large volume of Arabic poetry. He even refers to oaths in the orations of Demosthenes in ancient Greece. However, the Quranic oaths are not to be judged by extra-textual material but are to be seen in an intra-textual context.

On the supposed 'textual variants' in the Quran

As is obvious, the above postulate is also part of the arsenal deployed by Orientalists to try to inflict damage upon Islam. The basic premise of Muslims is that the Quran is the Word [*Kalām*] of Allah. As such, divine omniscience precludes variants of any kind. Even if there are reports of rare readings [*shaadh qir'a'ah*], this implies variation from an existing text and not a sign that the text itself is in any way corrupt. No Muslim exegete [*mufassir*] has asserted over 1400 years that the supposed variant is, in reality, the actual verse which should have been inserted in the Quran text in place of the existing one. For Muslims, the text of the Quran *bayn al-daffatayn* [= 'between the two covers'] is the same as that on the *lawh al-mahfūz* [= 'protected tablet']. Hence this problem has been created by the foes of Islam and they have to solve their self-generated problem in which Muslims are clearly less than interested.

The early Orientalists [the Sieur du Ryer, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall] believed that the text of the Quran was the same as that given by the Holy Prophet though they did not accept its divine origin. Later, a subtle change took over and the *textus receptus* was regarded as that of doubtful purity and Muslims were held responsible for the corruption of

their own holy book. Thus the denial of divine origin is a fruitful and fertile source for variants of all kinds. Many have assumed that the textual explications made by early scholars in Arabic are part of the Quran text – as these notes are embedded in the text and not separated from it. The Quran text was expounded from the first generation of Muslims onwards. They have been reciting the Quran in full in the *tarāwīh* in Ramadān and never did anyone recite the text using variants. The complete recitation of the Quran during the *tarāwīh* prayers was also an efficacious mechanism intended to ensure the invariability of the Quran text.

So eager are the supposed Western ‘scholars’ to prove the existence of variants that they have exhumed early unauthorized codices to prove their point e.g. *Leaves from three ancient Kurans possibly pre-Othmanic with a list of their variants* by A. Mingana [CUP 1914]. If these variants existed owing to human error by copyists, they were eliminated by the ‘Othmān codex which even the writers of these early codices accepted as the standard text. Similarly, variant translations have also been stretched backwards to prove their point e.g. *An ancient Syriac translation of the Kuran exhibiting new verses and variants* also by A. Mingana [Manchester University Press, 1925].

This is all tendentious and sterile activity which has produced nothing. 'The text and the message stand for themselves ... and studies like Nöldeke's and Bell's exist for those who need a barren kind of criticism,' writes Dr. T. B. Irving, an American Muslim, in his introduction to his own translation of the Quran [*The Quran: translation and commentary*, USA, 1991, pp. xxii-xxiii].



The 'readings' [*qir'a'āt*] of the Quran

The readings of the Quran represent the standardized pronunciation of the written text. These were transmitted by seven readers [*sab'a qurrā'*] belonging to major Islamic cities. Each reader [*qāri* pl. *qurrā'*] had two 'transmitters' [*rāwi* pl. *ruwāh*] who ensured the purity of the text and its transmission. The tracing back of such transmission is done through fourteen readers.

The seven readers are:

1. Nāfi' d. 169 AH [from Medina]
2. Ibn Kathīr d. 119 AH [from Mecca]
3. Abu Amr d. 153 AH [from Damascus]
4. Ibn 'Āmir d. 118 AH [from Basra]
5. Kisāi d. 189 AH [from Kūfa]
6. Hamza d. 156 AH [from Kūfa]
7. 'Āsim d. 158 AH [from Kūfa].

The common readings today are:

- 'Āsim → Hafs d. 196
Nāfi' → Warsh d. 197

These are universally accepted standard readings. They do not differ at all from the 'Othmānic Codex.

These readings are called *mutawātira* [continuous] and thus 'authentic'. The other 'old codices' [to which A. Jeffery appears over-partial] are pre-'Othmānic and attributed to certain Companions. They have variants in writing and are called *shā'dh* [= rare]. They have all disappeared except when they are cited as examples of *shā'dh qira'a'āt*. The *mutawātira qira'a'āt* is the true 'Quran' totally error-free and faultless. For details, one may examine the history of the various readings – such as *Al-Shāmil fi al-qir'a'āt al-mutawātira* by Dr. Muhammad Habash [Damascus 2001].



Fawāsil

There has been an intense debate among scholars as to whether or not the Quran possesses elements of poetry though the Quran itself categorically disclaims being poetry [s. 69 vv. 40-41; s. 36 v. 69] but asserts itself as a Revelation from the Lord of the worlds. Common poets and trivial versifiers have been censured in s. 26 vv. 224-225. The Quran is a unique, self-sufficient document that owes nothing to any form of poetry or literature. It is, however, the literary masterpiece par excellence. It revolutionized both Arabic poetry and prose and expanded the entire gamut of figurative language. It turned the barren desert of Arabic into a luxuriant garden of paradise. In the present context, it is notable that scholars do not allow the use of the term *qāfiyah* [= rhyme] in the Quran but prefer the use of *fāsala/fawāsil* to indicate an end-stop between verses. This is the opinion of Suyūti in *Al-Itqān fi 'ulūm al-Qurān* and of those quoted by him. *Saja'* [or rhyme whether internal or final] is supposed to be a human invention and a usage of men. Hence such a term cannot be applied to the Quran which is form, structure, vocabulary and order is totally Divine.

A list of all the Quranic *fawāsil* has been prepared by Syed Mohyuddīn Qādri Hādi, Hyderabad, India, and given in his *Fawāsil al-Qurān*, 1998.

The *tahaddi* verses of the Quran

At different places the Quran offers a *tahaddi* [challenge] to its opponents to compose a text like it and announces in advance that their attempt is foredoomed.

In s. 52 v. 34 it is stated: 'Then let them produce speech like it, if they are truthful.'

In s. 17 v. 88 it is stated: 'Say: Even though mankind and the jinn assemble to produce the like of this Quran, they cannot do so even if they worked jointly.'

In s. 11 v. 13 the challenge is reduced to producing ten surahs like those of the Quran. In s. 2 v. 24, this is further reduced to a single surah. It may be noted that this is a Medinian surah where the reduced challenge is thrown open to all – Christians, Jews and not just pagans. In this verse, it is stated categorically that nobody could do so – pre-empting the possibility of success to the challenge-taker. Also, the smallest surah of the Quran is *Al-Kawthar* [s. 108] having three brief verses.

Clearly, no Muslim could ever imagine trying to compose anything that even remotely resembled the unsurpassable Quran – a Book that is divine in origin. It would be futile for the human to attempt to rival the divine.

The absence of a serious response to this challenge made the Quran the ‘literary sublime’ for ever [Ismail R. Al-Faruqi: *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, p. 335]. So great is the tolerance of Islam that it even staked its basis, the divine Quran, to a public contest to assess its superiority.

As time passed, no one came forth to take up this challenge with any seriousness. The few ‘imitations’ noted by Ignaz Goldziher [*Muslim Studies* vol. 1] are unworthy of notice but are put there just to show the frustration that foes of Islam feel when they fail to damage it. Neither the ignorant pretender, Musaylma, nor the erudite atheist Al-Ma‘arri nor the pseudo-prophet Al-Mutannabi nor the learned heretic Ibn Muqaffa could bring forth anything that could even evoke a minor doubt *vis-a-vis* the utter matchlessness of the Quran.

Later attempts, like the dotless *tafsīr* of Faydi [a courtier of the Moghul Emperor Akbar (d. 1605) who wrote a brief commentary on the Quran in which he

avoided all those letters of the Arabic alphabet which have dots: a remarkable *tour de force*] cannot be called a 'miracle' by any stretch of the imagination. The same applies to various inferior compositions of the Bāb and Bahāullah and Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad Qadiāni and the *surah al-nūreyn*. In short, nothing produced so far has even slightly dented the Quran's claim to inimitability.

It is not the responsibility of Muslims to project the *i'jāz al-Qurān*. This is so clear a concept that no academic argument is required. However, the diverse statements of scholars are reflective of this multi-faceted phenomenon and each age reveals new wonders in the Quran – as is said: '*lā yunfadu 'ajā'ibihi* [= 'its wonders will never be exhausted'].

The great beauty and sublimity of the Quran is proof of its divine origin rather than the other way round. There is no human 'hand' in the whole affair. Indeed, the Quran itself states with complete frankness:

Stir not your tongue to hasten with it.
Lo! Upon Us rests the putting together
And the reading. And when We read it,
You follow the reading; then upon Us
Rests the proclamation thereof.

[s. 75 vv. 16-19]

The mystic letters of the Quran

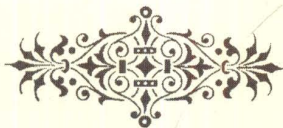
At the head of 28 surahs of the Quran appear a total of 28 letters in various combinations or alone – which number is also the total of the letters of the Arabic alphabet. Various opinions have been given regarding their meaning.

These letters appear singly e.g. *nūn*, *sād* or *qāf*; doubly as *hā mīm*, *yā sīn*, *tā ha*; trebly as *alif lām mīm*, *ayn sin qāf*; quadruply as *alif lām mīm sād*; and quintuply as *kāf hā yā ayn sād*. They appear in pairs of successive surahs such as surahs 2 and 3 which both start with *alif lām mīm*. Seven successive surahs [40–46] start with *hā mīm* and are called the *hawāmīm saba'* – and so on. They are not all vocatives [like *yā sīn* or *tāha*] addressed to the Holy Prophet as Hāshim Amīr 'Ali writes in *The Message of the Quran* [p. 94]. They are certainly part of the text of the surahs and counted among the ayats. Thus the shortest ayah of the Quran is '*hā mīm*' starting surah 25. They are not abbreviations e.g. *alif lām mīm* = *anā Allah ā'lam* [I am Allah the best knower]. They are not abbreviations e.g. *alif lām mīm* = *alif* [Allah], *lām* [the last letter of Jibrīl] and *mīm* [Muhammad] although such conjectures have been made. These letters are

called the *hurūf muqatta'āt* [= disjointed/separate letters]. They certainly are not the initials of the scribes who wrote down the surahs e.g. *alif lām rā* = al Mughīra – as postulated by Nöldeke and later denied by him. They are letters [*hurūf*] and not words [*kalimāt*]. The Holy Prophet when mentioning the benefit of reading the Quran stated that the reader would receive ten benefits for each letter and said: 'I do not call *alif lām mīm* one letter; *alif* is one letter *lām* one letter and *mīm* one letter.' This also indicates that they were treated as part of the Quran right from the beginning. The meaning is generally taken to be that which is known to Allah and His Prophet. As such they belong to the *mutashābihāt* [allegorical verses] of the Quran regarding which those who are firmly grounded in knowledge state: 'We believe! All is from our Lord' [s. 3 v. 7]. Zamakhshari in his *Tafsīr Kashshāf* has painstakingly traced out the use of separate Arabic letters as 'fillers' to fit in in verses where an extra syllable was required. The *Tafsīr Qurtubi* also gives interesting information in this regard.

One idea that can be stated is that the individual letters represent the great potential of the Arabic language. These separate letters combined to build up the immense structure of the Quran which is divine speech. It is common to refer to the surahs beginning with such letters by the letter itself e.g. *Surah Qalam* [The Pen, s. 68] is also called *Surah Nūn* – which is

the dominant letter in that surah. The *hawāmīm saba'* group of seven surahs follow an identity of theme and an intertextuality that bespeaks of their *i'jāz*. The *Surah Al-Zumar* [s. 39] that precedes them acts as a prolegomenon to them though not forming part of that group and revealed separately. The internal organic arrangement of the surahs indicates one more aspect of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*.



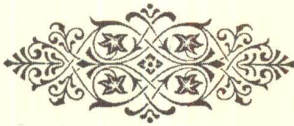
The pressure of the Divine Word

'It is Divine though it be in man's ill coin....'
This quote from Mohamad 'Ali Jawhar has a profundity that requires more than a superficial reading. The benefit that the Quran conferred on the Arabic language by using it as the vehicle of communication of the Divine Word was measureless. The sum of pre-Quranic Arabic lexis, usages and vocabulary not only increased manifold but also the existing meanings attached to the words assumed shades of richer, deeper and profounder hue. The neologisms, the new constructions, the new syntactic arrangements, the whole new idiom that came about after the revelation of the Quran put the Arabic language under a challenge to rise up, to come forward and to colour itself in the colour of the Divine Message. The 'clear Arabic speech' [s. 16 v. 103] that the Quran is made the Arabic language multi-dimensional and raised it from the earth to the heavens. The limited resources of a human language would normally be unable to sustain the pressure of a Divine Word for, in the words of Eliot,

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden.
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still

[*Burnt Norton*, ll. 143-155]

As has been stated, 'the poor and coagulated language of mortal man would break under the formidable pressure of the Heavenly Word into a thousand fragments' but each fragment would be in itself a polished jewel. The thousand truths would be made manifest by the use of 'allusions heavy with meaning, of ellipses, abridgements and symbolic syntheses...for the sake of the human receptacle.' No language other than Arabic has thus been placed into the Divine furnace and thereby transmuted into pure gold.



GRAMMAR

The Quran and Arabic grammar

One of the great contributions of the Quran to the Arabic language is the formalization of its rules regarding the vocabulary and lexis in their mutual interaction. That it was the privilege of the Quran to formulate its own rules or vary from existing usages was never challenged. The Quran was the first proper written document that came fully developed into the area of Arabic speech and where there were no rules to govern existing modes of language it could impose its own criteria. So the assault of some Western scholars based on 'linguistic errors' in the Quran [John Burton, 1977] and others like Nöldeke, Bell, Paret, Blachere *et al.* is essentially irrelevant and recoils on its own advocates. As von Grünebaum correctly writes, 'Grammar was to be judged by the Quran text rather than the Quran text by grammar.' No refutation of those who would like to treat the Quran as a compendium of grammar is needed. Quranic Arabic grammar is descriptive; it can never be prescriptive.

The 'founder' of Arabic grammar [in the sense of writing about it] based on the Quran is Abu al-Aswad al-Duāli [d. 69 AH] – reputedly a secretary of Caliph 'Ali and advised by him to compose such a work.

The name of Khalīl b. Ahmad [d. 175 AH] dominates the new areas of philology, linguistics,

phonetics, prosody and phonology and his contributions are of staggering proportion and far ahead of his time. His pioneering *Kitāb al-‘Ayn* is the first dictionary based on word-stems in all possible combinations as could then be humanly conceived. The work runs into over 2000 pages.

His great pupil, Sibawayhi [d. 177 AH] took the massive achievements of his teacher to greater heights. The *Kitāb al-Sibawayhi* is the first scientific, exhaustive study of Arabic linguistics within a broad focus covering the whole gamut of Arabic linguistics as it then existed. Sibawayhi, ‘the man made of musk and gold’ was identified with the school of Basra rather than Kufa which hosted a rival school of grammarians. After the *Kitāb al-Sibawayhi*, the mighty ship of Arabic grammar broke through all the rapids and established its towering presence.

The great Sibawayhi was followed by an illustrious company of profound scholars such as Kisā’i [d. 182 AH], Farra’ [d. 207 AH], Mubarrad [d. 285 AH], Akhfash [d. 315 AH], Ibn al-Sarrāj [d. 316 AH].

Nahw [grammar] originally meaning ‘direction’ was glorified by such illustrious names in the great history of *nahw* and *nahwiyyīn* [grammarians]. This is also a great academic by-product and, indeed, an *i’jāz* of the Quran.

The use of juxtaposition [*tibāq* or *mutābaqah*]

The use of words, phrases or examples that stress certain truths by the use of contrasts is also one of the stylistic features of the Quran. In everyday life, certain dichotomous aspects tend to increase human reflection on the nature of existence. These may be ordinary items like male/female, day/night, heat/cold, or more profound binary opposites like life/death, good/evil, physical/spiritual etc. In the Quran, the highlighting of these opposites serves a number of purposes. If they are put forward in rhetorical questions, then the answer is left unsaid – as it would be obvious to the reader/hearer. If a contrast is placed as a statement or affirmation, then it also puts forward a synthesis or a rejection of one of the two postulates. It is not necessary for the two opposites to represent an irreconcilable gulf; they may be seen as a continuum – like day/night/day/night and so on.

In s. 35 vv.19-22 it is stated: ‘The blind man is not equal with the seer/nor is darkness equal to light/nor is the shadow equal to the sun’s full heat/nor are the living equal with the dead.’ These verses show the clear difference between the two contrapuntal

positions and stress the need to eliminate one of them [that is negative] so that the correct one may emerge in full strength.

In s. 53 vv. 43-44 it is stated: 'And it is He Who makes you laugh, and makes you weep/and it is He Who gives death and gives life.' This is a reconciliation of opposites resulting in a position of unification. The treatment of the good and the evil is necessarily different [s. 68 v. 35]. So also is the recompense [s. 59 v. 20].

Hence juxtaposition as a literary/stylistic device works to highlight the strength/weakness of the postulate under consideration and arrives at a conclusion that follows both logically and naturally.



The use of metaphor [*isti'āra*] in the Quran

As with other figures of speech, the Quran uses metaphor [*isti'āra*] frequently and with telling effect. It also extends the application of previous vocabulary to new, unscaled heights and forms neologisms to widen the scope and range of their new functions. A metaphor implies a mentioning of someone or something by a different or unusual name in order to highlight a particular quality in that person or object. This is sometimes effected by exaggerating that quality to draw attention to it e.g. *Zaydun asadu* [= 'Zayd is a lion'] in Arabic; in English, we can say 'Zayd is a lion in battle.'

The literary potential of metaphor has been developed to the full in the Quran which uses a minimum of words with a maximum of power. As a case in point, we may take the metaphoric application of one word viz. *libās* [meaning covering, dress, clothes, apparel]:

1. In surah 7, verse 26 it is stated: 'O children of Adam! We have made clothes [*libās*] known to you to conceal your shamebut the covering [*libās*] of virtue, that is the best ...'. Here we have a literal use of the word followed by a

metaphoric use – which serves to highlight the moral aspect of modesty.

2. The word *libās* is taken to further associations of meaning in surah 16, v. 112 where reference to the 'covering' [*libās*] of destitution and fear is decreed for evil folk.
3. The relationship between man and woman is also cast in terms of *libās* as in surah 2, v. 187 thus: 'They [women] are a covering [*libās*] for you and you are a covering [*libās*] for them....' This indicates the closeness and intimacy that should exist between man and woman in conjugal relations.
4. In surah 2 v. 42, it is stated ...'Conceal not truth with falsehood' and in s. 3 v. 71 it is stated: 'O people of the scripture! Why do you conceal truth with falsehood...?' In both these cases, the element of concealment is linked with the word *libās* and its metaphoric implications are brought out.

This is just one word that illustrates the richness and extension of the Quranic metaphor which possesses a vast range, variety and novelty. If we examine a few more examples, we may observe more of this. In s. 33 v. 6, the wives of the Holy Prophet are referred to as 'mothers of the Muslims' – which is a case of transferred epithet to ennoble the Holy

Prophet's wives by equating them with mothers of the Muslim community for all time.

Animistic metaphors [which treat inanimate objects as animate] are also present e.g. 'When the heaven is split asunder/And attentive to her Lord in fear...' [s. 84 vv. 1-2]. Also the revival of the earth after its 'death' as referred to in s. 57 v. 17.

Jāriyah derived from the trilateral root 'j-r-y' [= 'to go', 'to move'] is a neologism used for a ship that fits in with the rhyme-scheme of the surah 69.

The impossibility of certain evil persons being unable to enter heaven 'until the camel passes through the eye of the needle' is a metaphor with rich associations and extensions of meaning. It also appeared earlier in a somewhat different form in the Bible [Matthew 9:24] which has led to certain pseudo-scholars claiming that this is the inspiration for the Quranic verse. But it would stretch the matter too far to presume from this any knowledge of the Bible by the Holy Prophet. Even if corrupted, the Bible also had a divine origin – so it is not surprising that some similarities between the Biblical and Quranic texts may exist. The needle having an 'eye' is also an animistic metaphor known to the original audience of the Quran.

Attribution of human physical organs for Allah e.g. *wajh* [= 'countenance']. Or *yadd* [= 'hand'] are not examples of anthropomorphism but literary devices to elucidate and reinforce the meaning in the several contexts where they occur.

The Quran possesses an extraordinary stock of metaphors that are appositely employed with both force and effect. They also impart a timeless quality to the Quran where they retain their freshness and vigour without turning into clichés.



The use of the *mutlaq* and the *muqayyad* [unconditional and conditional]

These two are varieties of Quranic usage. The *mutlaq* is applied in a state of unconditionality e.g. s. 16 v. 114: 'So eat of the lawful and good food that Allah has provided for you....'

In the following verse, certain conditions are applied: 'He has forbidden you carrion and blood and swineflesh and that immolated in the name of others than Allah...' Here the conditions are detailed so that the forbidden is clearly understood.

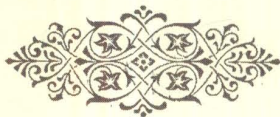


The *Mubhimāt* [obscure things] of the Quran

This is generally taken to mean the absence of proper names to persons referred to in the Quran. This may be done indirectly or without using a name. Much of this is speculative and non-specific with multiple answers that have no relation to the Quran itself but is a matter of *tafsīr*. For example, the verse 'I am going to place a vicegerent on earth' [s. 2 v. 30] refers to Adam and *wa zawjuhu* ['and his consort'] to Eve [Ar. *Hawwā*]. The number of the Seven Sleepers has been open to speculation likewise.

The persons referred to indirectly are also those contemporary personalities who participated in the rise of Islam e.g. 'the second of the two...in the cave' [s. 9 v. 40] is undoubtedly Abu Bakr. The Holy Prophet's confiding in one of his wives [s. 66 v. 3] refers to Hafsa and so on. These matters are more related to *tafsīr* and enter the area of *tafsīr bi-al-rāy* [= 'speculative interpretation'] which is prohibited for it can allow manipulation of the sacred text in support of personal theories. The Quran itself is not a catalogue of proper names for which an index has to be prepared. The only Muslim contemporary to the Holy Prophet mentioned by name is his adopted son, Zayd

b. Hāritha [s. 33 v. 37] who is buried in present-day Jordan after being martyred in the battle of Muta. The only enemy of the Holy Prophet mentioned by name is Abū Lahab [s. 111 – eponymous with him]. When the Quran states... ‘Have you not seen him who repudiates religion...?’ [s. 107 v. 1], this is a general and universal censure applicable to all such persons across time and place and is not a matter simply of identifying the person who was originally thus censured.



Mufradāt al-Qurān

The spread of Islam to non-Arabic-speaking areas necessitated the correct and proper attribution of meaning to the core language of the Quran. As such many dictionaries were prepared that tried to encompass the Quranic vocabulary to expound its meaning and relate it to contemporary conditions. Generally, such dictionaries were called *mufradāt* as they were based on the triliteral core of Arabic words. These are the roots [*masādir* sing. *masdar*] of Arabic words that contain a nucleus of three-letter words out of which more elaborate forms occur according to their grammatical and syntactical status. This exercise started early in Islam but the most famous of such dictionaries is the *Mufradāt al-Qurān* of Imām Rāghib Ispahāni [d. 500 AH], commonly called *Mufradāt Imām Rāghib*.

If we take a common example we can see the ramifications of such roots in practice. Taking the root *k t b* [= to write], we get all these derivatives:

<i>Aktubu</i>	= I write
<i>Naktubu</i>	= We write
<i>Taktubu</i>	= you write
<i>Yaktubu</i>	= he writes
<i>Yaktubān</i>	= they [dual] write
<i>Yaktubūn</i>	= they [pl.] write

- Yaktubān* = they [dual] write
Taktubu = you [fem.] write
Taktubān = you [dual fem.] write
Taktubūn = you [pl.] write
Taktubna = you [pl. fem.] write
Yaktubūn = you [pl. 3rd person Mas.] write
Yaktubna = [pl. fem. 3rd person] you write

These are just examples of the verb indefinite in the present tense. With each tense, the verb assumes different forms also varying with number. Also, the basic core of three consonants undergoes the following modifications facilitating the creation of new ideas and meaning:

- Kātib* = scribe (*n*)
Maktūb = letter
Maktaba = correspondence
Kitāb = book
Maktab = place of writing [generally 'office'].



Majāz al-Qurān

Majāz is not the opposite of *haqīqah* [reality] as might commonly be supposed. It is a sign, signal or substitute [*qā'im maqām*] and is occasionally metonymical. Hence it is a technical term [a word, a phrase, a symbol, a lexical construction] that stands for something beyond, and greater than itself. The first book to treat of the complexities of *majāz* in the Quran is *Mājaz al-Qurān* by Abu 'Obayda Ma'mar b. Muthannā [d. 210 AH] which shows the great critical attention given to Quranic usages. This work was edited and annotated by Dr. Fuat Sezgin in 1954. Its introduction was written by the famous Amīn al-Khouli [d. 1966] – the husband of Dr. Bint Shāti – who praises the 'hard work of the young Turkish scholar.'

In s. 99 v. 1, it is stated: 'When the earth will be shaken with her shaking'. Here the primary agent is not mentioned whereas this is obviously Allah Himself. This is an example of *majāz*.

In s. 111 v. 1 it is stated: 'Destroyed be the hands of Abu Lahab ...' Here 'hands' stand for the whole person of Abu Lahab. This is reinforced by the full

reference to him in the next verse. Here *majāz* acts as a metonym.

In s. 2 v. 24 [part of the *tahaddi*], it is stated: ‘Then guard yourself against the fire prepared for unbelievers’. This ‘fire’ is the personification of the sin of attempting to resist the overwhelming force of the Quran’s inimitability.

On s. 55 v. 27 it is stated: ‘There remains but the countenance of your Lord of Might and Majesty...’ The use of ‘countenance’ is a metonym for the Divine Being.

In s. 73 v. 1 and in s. 74 v. 1, reference is made to the Holy Prophet using the terms *mud-dath-thir* [wrapped one] and *muz-zam-mil* [enfolded one] – which stand for the person of the Holy Prophet and his qualities that were latent until that time. In s. 74 v. 2, it is stated: ‘Stand up at night...’, which is a *majāz* use for standing in prayer.

These stylistic aspects of the Qurān are not separate but form an integral part of the *i’jāz al-Qurān*.

The *Gharā'ib al-Qurān*

It is a universal phenomenon that languages interact [especially those belonging to the same language family] and their mutual interaction leads to borrowings, assimilation and neologisms. This is true of Arabic and other languages of the Semitic family. Thus it is no surprise that the Quran should contain vocabulary called *mu'arrab* [= 'Arabicised']. The entry of foreign words into a language is a sign of that language's richness, openness and powers of assimilation. Thus English today is increasing its vocabulary at the rate of hundreds of words annually – many of which are of foreign origin such as *intifāda*.

The Rev. Alphonse Mingana [in 1926] in an essay *Syriac influence on the style of the Kuran* went to fantastic lengths to show that the Quran had extensively borrowed from Syriac – not only in its lexis but in its style as well. None of his arguments [far-fetched as they are] have found widespread acceptance. In 1938, Rev. Arthur Jeffery wrote a thesis on '*The Foreign Vocabulary of the Koran*' in which he painstakingly traced out and imputed a foreign origin to many words of the Quran. He wrongly assumed, like Mingana, that the Quran was a humanly-composed document and subject to foreign influence

and an instrument of plagiarism. However, his arguments do not at all prove that the text, style and beliefs contained in the Quran are derived from any outside source or based on an imperfect understanding of Judaism or Christianity.

Research into this area of comparative linguistics had already been done in the early centuries of Islam. As early as 330 AH, a book on this topic had been compiled by Muhammad b. 'Azīz al-Sijistāni. Another book, *Gharā'ib al-Qurān wa tafsīruhu* by 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Abd-Allah b. Yahyā b. Mubārak Yazīdi [d. 438 AH] has also examined this subject in detail. All the great commentaries of Tabari, Ibn Kathīr, Rāzi, and Zamakhshari also investigate this phenomenon. A recent thesis [2004] entitled *Dirāsāt fi Mu'arrab al-Qurān al-Karīm* [= 'studies in the Arabicised vocabulary of the Quran'] by Sajjād b. Hijābi has appeared in Karachi. Suyūti [d. 1505 CE] in his famous *Itqān* gives a section on 'non-Hijazi' words and 'non-Arabic' words in the Quran. In a separate work titled *Al-Mutawakkili*, Suyūti gives a list of 108 words of foreign origin in the Quran derived from Ethiopic, Persian, Greek, Sanskrit, Hebrew, Aramaic, Coptic, Turkish and Berber.

For example, words taken from Persian are:

Istabraq [s. 76. v. 21] = silk brocade

sijjīl [s. 105 v. 4] = *sang* + *gil* = stone-clay mix

zanzabīl [s. 76 v. 17] = ginger

From Greek:

firdaus [s. 2 v. 197] = 'paradise'

raqīm [s. 18 v. 9] = inkhorn [in Eng. 'cave']

From Syriac:

tūr [s. 2 v. 60] = 'mountain'

yamm [s. 7 v. 132] = 'sea'

From Aramaic:

hawāriyīn [s. 3 v. 52] = 'washers of clothes'

From Turkish:

ghassāqun [s. 78 v. 25] = 'stinking'.

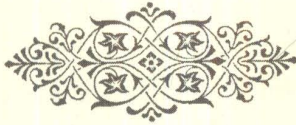
Modern research in comparative linguistics can widen this area which, far from being a defect, is evidence of the flexibility and capacity for assimilation of foreign vocabulary in Arabic and certainly is another of the multi-dimensioned aspects of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*.



The use of the *muthanna* مثنى [dual]

Arabic is unique in that an intermediate form between singular and plural i.e. dual [for two persons/objects etc.] exists. This dual form also enriches the language by providing a single word [*abawayn*] for both parents, as well as single words for all nouns that may form a pair, such as *Rabb al-mashriqayn-i wa Rabb al-maghribayn* [Lord of the two Easts and Lord of the two Wests, which refer to the maximum points of the sun in summer and winter, respectively]. While translating the Quran from Arabic into English, this dual form is often impossible to use or is mentioned with difficulty using 'both' as a poor substitute. For example, in s. 20 v. 24 it is stated: 'Go you to Pharaoh' whereas in s. 20 v. 43 it is stated: 'Go [both of you] to Pharaoh -' as English has no dual form. This extends to all the verbs as well with the suffix *humā* [two in the third person s. 2 v. 36] and *komā* [two in the second person s. 20 v. 49]. However, it is easy to translate *akalā* [= 'they both ate'] in s. 20 v. 120 in which verse there are five usages of *muthanna* which cannot be given in a translation without making it extremely cumbersome. According to Dr. T.B. Irving: 'How to be both

artistic and correct with the dual in Arabic becomes a syntactic problem when it comes to translating into English.' [Introduction p. xxix to his translation, 1985]. This problem of translation has not been settled to date.



The *amthāl* [similes] used in the Quran

The Quran is the most eloquent book of exalted discourse and draws examples and similes from the vast world of sense-perception and natural phenomena. The purpose is not merely elucidation or comparison but also an extension of the reader or hearer's sense-bound consciousness to encompass the whole universe.

The similes are novel, innovative and striking in range, variety and suitability. They serve to bring out the eternal truths contained in the Quran by an appeal to 'men of understanding'. The different levels of human capability with respect to the comprehension of Truth are intertwined with the use and application of the similes in the Quran.

For example, people who mock Muslims are thus described: 'Their likeness is as of one who has kindled a fire and when it sheds its light around Allah takes the light away and leaves them in darkness where they cannot see.' [s. 2 v. 17]. This image is reinforced after a verse thus: 'Or like a rainstorm from the sky, wherein there is darkness, thunder and lightning. They thrust their fingers in their ears by reason of the thunderclaps, for fear of death....' [s. 2 v. 19].

Natural examples, common to observation in the society in which the Quran was revealed, are also given. Thus in the case of punished peoples, they are compared to 'hollow trunks of palm-trees [s. 69 v. 7]. A variation of this is in s. 54 v. 20 describing them as 'uprooted trunks of palm-trees' – which is most apposite and because it is based on practical observation is immediately comprehensible.

Comparisons of evil people with animals are also made. The Quran mentions animals and insects and marine life in different contexts and has surahs titled *The Cow* [no. 2], *The Bee* [no. 16], *The Spider* [no. 29] and *The Elephant* [no. 105]. Evil persons are likened to animals 'or are even more astray' [s. 7 v. 179]. They are like dogs who if attacked or left alone put the tongue out [s. 7 v. 176]. They live in spiders' webs [s. 29 v. 41] and those who pretend to be learned are like 'donkeys carrying books' [s. 62 v. 5].

The moon is called 'a light' [s. 71 v.16] and the sun 'a lamp' [*ibid.*]. The simile of 'lamp' and 'light' is taken to extraordinary levels in the famous Light verse: 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star – kindled from a blessed tree – the olive – neither of the east nor of the west – whose oil would

burn though no fire touched it. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He will. And Allah speaks in allegories [*amthāl*] to mankind for Allah is the Knower of all things' [s. 24 v. 35].

The role of similes in furthering comprehension of abstractions is especially efficacious among the whole gamut of the figures of speech. The similes used in the Quran are far superior to those used in other religious books and reflect a local and universal context that is both temporal and eternal.



Placement of words

There is an underlying wisdom in the placement of words in the verses which is based on certain implied reasons that can be inferred. For example, in s. 5 v. 38, it is stated: 'As for the male thief and the female thief – cut off their hands.'

In s. 24 v. 2, it is stated: 'The adulteress and the adulterer – scourge them with a hundred stripes....'

Here the female is mentioned first whereas in the earlier verse the male is mentioned first. The implied reason is that thievery is more natural to males than females whereas adultery is committed by two parties of opposite sex acting together – in which the female is generally the cause of temptation and inveiglement [as in s. 12].



Choice of words

There are eight kinds of winds mentioned in the Quran – four of which bring joy and relief and four of which are harmful. The four happy breezes are named *mursalāt* [s. 77 v. 1], *dhāriāt* [s. 51 v. 1], *nāshirāt* [s. 77 v. 3] and *mubash-shirāt* [s. 30 v. 46]. For these four the Quran uses the term *riyāh* [*rā-yā-alif-hā*] which word is also present in the verses mentioning these winds.

The other four are named ‘*aqeem* [s. 51 v. 41], *sar sar* [s. 54 v.19], *qāsif* [s. 17 v. 69] and ‘*āsif* [s. 10 v. 22]. All these words appear in the relevant verses. For these four, the term *rīh* [*rā-yā-hā*] is used – also present in the quoted verses. Thus there is an artistic classification according to good and evil that operates internally in the Quran.



The use of *ējāz* [compression] and *itnāb* [prolixity]

The use of *ējāz* involves the compression of ideas and meaning into a minimum of words with a maximum of power. This may be in the use of small phrases, rhetorical questions or complete sentences. For example, s. 2 v. 179 states: 'In retaliation there is life for you....' There is great profundity in this phrase which compresses a world of meaning in a few words. Also s. 112 v. 2, 'Allah is Independent' contains a great deal of fine exposition within one word. A rhetorical question: 'Is the reward of goodness [anything] save goodness?' [s. 55 v. 60] also illustrates this.

On certain occasions, details are given in their fullness that makes the explanation clear. For example in s. 13 v. 4, it is stated: 'And in the earth are neighbouring tracts, vineyards, and ploughed lands with date-palms, like and unlike which are watered with one water.' This is a detailed mention with all its rich variety.

The use of *ējāz* and *itnāb* is one of the many aspects of *balāgha* [eloquence] that is part of the vast repertoire of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*.

The use of *tazbīd* [extension] and *takhfīf* [reduction]

On certain occasions, a normal word at the end of a verse is extended by adding to it an extra letter to increase the number of syllables. This may be done to keep the rhyme scheme and flow of words continuous e.g. 'You were imagining diverse thoughts about Allah' [s. 33 v. 10] where normally the verse should end with *dhunūn* but this is extended to become *dhunūnā* – as it accords with the *fawāsil* [ending] of the rest of the surah. This is *tazbīd*. There are many examples of this in s. 69 vv. 19, 25, 28, 29.

On other occasions, a syllable is omitted or elided for the same reasons e.g. s. 51 v. 56 [the well-known verse]: 'I created the jinn and mankind so that they may worship Me'. The 'Me' is omitted but is understood by the silent *kasra* under the last *nūn*. All these devices, in their diversity and variety, are important elements of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*.

The use of “*hadhf harf al-nidā*”

This is a special usage of the Quran which omits the vocative particle *Yā* which is used in Arabic when someone is being addressed. Generally the Quran is specific in its address using the *harf al-nidā* [*yā* = ‘O you/O’] as in:

Yā insān = O man!

Yā ayyo-hannās = O mankind!

Yā ayyaohalladhīna āmanū = O you who believe!

But there are instances where the *yā* which is the *harf al-nidā* [term/form of address] is omitted as in:

Creator of the heavens and earth [s. 12 v. 101] instead of ‘O Creator....’

And in s. 7 v. 143: ‘My Lord! Show me Yourself...’ instead of ‘O my Lord....’

The purpose of omission of the *harf al-nidā* is to convey a sense of urgency and compactness.

The use of the *muqaddam* [prior/earlier/former] and *mu'akh-khar* [later/latter]

As noticed earlier, there is an underpinning wisdom in the placement of words in the Quran - which is done for a special purpose. For example, in s. 12 v. 24, it is stated: 'She verily desired him and he [would have] desired her....' This emphasises the prior infatuation of Potiphar's wife with Joseph and Joseph's natural inclination towards her coming later.

In s. 9 v. 100, it is stated: 'And the first to lead the way of the Muhajirīn and Ansār....' The precedence of the Muhajirīn over the Ansār stresses their earlier services to and earlier acceptance of Islam.

In s. 2 v. 185, it is stated: 'Allah desires ease for you and He does not desire hardship for you....' The prior mention of ease encourages the believer to accept hardship that is of a temporary nature. The same words [*yusr* = ease] and [*'usr* = hardship] which possess a special euphony are used in reverse order in s. 94 vv. 5-6: 'Surely with hardship goes ease. Lo! With hardship goes ease.' This indicates that hardship whatever its nature is a temporary phenomenon and will not continue endlessly.

The use of the *mubayyin* [explicit] and *mujmal* [implicit]

Mubayyin verses are those which are explicit, lucid and do not require any explication. Indeed, the explication is given by the Quran itself as the object referred to is beyond human imagination. Thus the Quran asks: 'What can tell you what ----- is?' as in s. 92 vv. 2-3: 'What can tell you what the Night of Power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months.' And in s. 101 vv. 8-11: 'As for he whose scales are light/The hungry one will be his mother/Ah, what can tell you what it is?/Raging hellfire.'

The *mujmal* or 'implicit/compressed' verses are those that offer a margin of interpretation. In s. 5 v. 38 it is stated: 'A for the thief, male and female, cut off their hands.' The word for 'hand' is *yadd* but it is not specified as whether the amputation is to be performed at the fingers, palm, wrist or elsewhere. The details for this have to be sought in the *Hadith* and *Sunnah* – which are the first clear exposition [theoretical and practical] of the Quran.

The use of the '*ām* [ordinary] and the *khās* [special]

The '*ām* applies to general statements in which no particularity is pointed out, e.g. s. 23 vv. 1-2 state: 'Successful are the believers who are humble in their prayer.' Although success in these verses is linked to prayer, this remains a generality to which all are admitted.

In the verse: 'Allah has permitted trading ...' this part is '*ām* followed by a *khās* – 'and forbidden usury' [s. 2 v. 275].

Generally the preposition *illā* [except/save] is used to distinguish a *khās* from an '*ām* e.g. s. 103 vv. 2-3: 'Lo! Mankind is in loss save those who believe and work good deeds.....'



The use of the *fay'l amr* [the imperative]

The *fay'l amr* is also indicative of a variety of usages each with its special style markers. The *fay'l amr* [imperative/commanding verb] has a wide variety of applications. The following imperative verbs are especially related to the Holy Prophet:

1. **O Messenger!** Proclaim that which has been revealed from your Lord [s. 5 v. 67]. This is the clear command of Allah to the Holy Prophet to proclaim the message of Islam.
2. **O you who believe!** Lift not your voices above the voice of the Prophet of Allah, nor shout when speaking to him as you shout to one another... [s. 49 v. 2]. Though addressed to the believers, this is the prerogative of the Prophet that voices of the believers should be lowered in his presence.
3. To the believers in general, this command is given: 'Establish worship and pay the poor-due and bow down with those that bow down.' [s. 2 v. 43]

4. To all mankind is the general proclamation given: '**B**elieve in that which Allah has revealed...' [s. 2 v. 91].
5. A particular command to facilitate financial transactions is thus given: '**O** you who believe! When you contract a debt for a fixed term, record it in writing...' [s. 2 v. 282].
6. A command of universal application addressed to all: '**L**o! Allah enjoins justice and kindness, and charity to kinsfolk, and has forbidden lewdness and abomination and wickedness....' [s. 16 v. 90].
7. Social etiquette is thus highlighted: '**O** you who believe! Enter not the houses of others without first announcing your presence and invoking peace on the inhabitants....' [s. 24 v. 27].
8. A command conferring reward is thus proclaimed: '**O** soul in peace! Return unto your Lord, content in His pleasure! Enter you among my slaves! Enter you My garden!' [s. 89 vv. 27-30.]
9. A command in the form of an innate proclivity or instinct is addressed to the bee: '**A**nd your Lord inspired the bee, saying: choose the homes in the mountains and in the trees and that which they raise up!' [s. 16 v. 68.]

10. The highest form of command is the *amr takwīni/amr ibdā'ī* i.e. creation *ex nihilo* as stated thus: 'And Our word unto a thing, when we intend it, is only that We say unto it: Be! And it is.' [s. 16 v. 40.]

It can be observed that the examples given above present the imperative in a variety of roles and functions that give this term [*fay'l amr*] a multi-faceted distinction of its own. This is not a play upon words but is rather the dramatic unfolding – within the parameters of a single text – of meaning in different shades and colours unknown before.



The use of *iltifāt* [change of person]

This is also one of the distinctive and innovative features of the Quran whose whole range of possibilities was given full expression by the Quran. The presence and use of *iltifāt* has been adduced as evidence of the Quran's 'dynamic style' by Muhammad 'Abdel Haleem [*Understanding the Quran: themes and style*, London, 1999, pp. 184-210]. The link between *iltifāt* and dynamism of style does not sufficiently emerge. Haleem's essay is a reply to an earlier claim of Nöldeke that the change and shift of person in the Quran is done in a crude and inartistic way. The proper term viz. *iltifāt* is not used by Nöldeke at all in his essay. No doubt it is not necessary to make an academic rebuttal to every attack on the Quran by so-called Orientalists for that would mean that one accepts that their premises are based on investigation rather than on bias, deliberate distortion and falsehood.

The shift of the form of address from first to third person or third to first person or second to third person is present in abundance in the Quran. Ignoring Nöldeke and his followers, one can safely assert that the phenomenon of *iltifāt* adds to the beauty and

vigour of the Quranic style and the sentiments expressed therein.

In the examples of *iltifāt* cited, the individual verses are expounded to demonstrate the artistic quality provided by the *iltifāt*. The most common example cited is that of surah *Fātiha* which begins [vv. 1-3] in the third person and continues in vv. 4-7 in the second person. This surah is also called *Al-Du'ā* [= the prayer]. It indicates the manner in which a creature is to address his Creator by first praising him and then admitting his own humility and seeking guidance on the right path to divine pleasure. So it is half doxology and half supplication. This brings out the valuable function of *iltifāt* in this brief surah. So it is with the hundreds of examples of *iltifāt* showing their varieties and shifts.

We may ask: what contribution does *iltifāt* have as a whole in the style of the Quran? The old commentators [Zarkashi, Suyūti *et al.*] suggest that change facilitates variety and maintains attention. While not untrue, this is quite incomplete and somewhat off the mark. The Quran is able to hold the hearers' or the readers' attention like no other book and is able to induce 'tears and ecstasy' by its 'inimitable symphony' [Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall in the preface to his translation of the Quran, 1936]. The novelty of the Quran, being totally

of divine origin, holds the reader especially the Arabic-knowing one in thrall. So the purpose of the *iltifāt* must be other than this.

The purpose of *iltifāt* appears to be the demonstration of the capacity of this device to be taken to previously unattained proportions of eminence. Though widely and variously used in the Quran, it does not create any problem or confusion to the believing reader. The freshness, vigour and variety that it imparts through its usage are apparent everywhere in the Quran.



The use of the *mathāni*

This word is derived from *thanā'* [= repetition] and is also allied to 'praise'. In s. 15 v. 87 it is stated: 'Surely We have given you the seven oft-repeated verses and the great Quran.' These seven verses are taken to be the seven verses of the surah *Al-Fātiha* with which the Quran opens and which is called *umm al-Qurān* [= core of the Quran].

The next reference is in s. 39 v. 23 thus: 'Allah has revealed the finest of statements, a Scripture consistent ... paired' [Pickthall]. The key words *mutashābihān mathāni* test the ingenuity of the translators. A.J. Arberry gives; 'consimilar in its oft-repeated' and T.B. Irving gives 'consistently duplicated.' The crux is in this: *mathāni* = oft-repeated and *mutashābihān* = similar; so *mathāni* + *mutashābihān* = oft-repeated similar [verses]. The idea is that the verses are frequently repeated and are also similar in content. It is only Pickthall who has seen through this complexity that also suggests 'pairing' or 'juxtaposing'. This is the core element in *mathāni* and is at the heart of it – as is evident from pairs such as these:

On that day faces will be bright as
dawn/Laughing, rejoicing
And other faces, on that day, with dust upon
them/Veiled in darkness. [s. 80 vv. 37-42]

And: Lo! The righteous will be in
delight/And lo! The wicked verily will be
in hell. [s. 82 vv. 13-14]

And: As for man, whenever his Lord tests
him by honouring him and is gracious with
him, he says: My Lord honours me. // But
whenever He tests him by straitening his
means of life, he says: My Lord despises me.
[s. 89 vv. 15-16]

Mathāni is thus an element of eloquence which is a multi-faceted phenomenon of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*. Its rapid-fire contrast drives home the truth with tremendous force. Although the aspect of duality is present, it is organically one – like the two sides of a coin – and not like opposite poles, as Muhammad Asad suggests. Ahmed Ali's translation of *mutashābihān mathāni* as 'conformable in its juxtapositions' comes closer to the intended meaning.

The use of the apostrophe [*khitāb*]

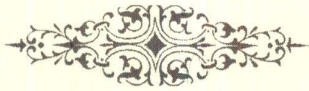
This is one of the relatively-rare usages of the Quran but it is used with great effect and is established as an instrument of eloquence. The apostrophe involves the address to insentient beings/objects based on a supposition that such things are capable of comprehension. The oft-quoted address to the postdiluvian world goes thus: O earth! Swallow thy waters and O sky! Be cleared of clouds [s. 11 v. 44]. This is a most complex and compacted cluster of figurative language having no less than twenty-one figures of speech – according to Suyūti.

And this address: ‘O ye hills and birds, echo his [David’s] psalms of praise...’ [s. 34 v. 10] is also directed towards both animate beings and inanimate objects.

A future statement is reported in the form of an apostrophe thus: ‘On the day when We say unto Hell: Are you filled? And it shall reply: Are there more?’ [s. 50 v. 30]. This is one of the most awe-inspiring verses of the Quran and brings the feeling of extreme fear to the fore.

The 'dead' persons will say: 'Woe unto us! Who raised us from our tombs?' [s. 36 v. 51]

So apostrophe is also one of the rhetorical devices that contributes to the *i'jāz al-Qurān*. It deserves further examination as a separate literary entity.



The use of the interrogative [*istifhām*]

The Quran presents a comprehensive panorama of the varied use of the interrogative with different suggestions, implications, applications and usages. This too is part of the *i'jāz al-Qurān* that has been referred to in previous contexts. Works dealing with the '*ulūm al-Qurān*' have lists of classifications of different usages of the interrogative with distinctions between the different categories [e.g. *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qurān* by Badr al-Dīn Zarkashi]. It is not our purpose to reproduce these but to highlight certain remarkable of the Quranic use of the interrogative.

1. There are certain usages that are posed as rhetorical questions and do not require any answer e.g. 'Did We not assign unto him two eyes/And a tongue and two lips?' [s. 90 vv. 8-9]
2. In certain questions, the answer is also given as an admission or reminder of guilt e.g. 'Came there not unto you messengers of your own reciting unto you revelations of your Lord and warning you.....? Yes, verily...' [s. 39 v. 71]
3. In other cases, the question posed is so charged with logic that nothing can be said in reply e.g. 'How can you disbelieve in Allah when you were dead and He gave life to you...then He gave you deaththen life again?' [s. 2 v. 28]

4. Sometimes a reference to a previous historical period is made in the form of a question to highlight certain immediate facts e.g. 'Do you not consider how your Lord dealt with 'Aad/Of many-columned Iram..... And with the Thamud.... And with Pharaoh.... All of whom were rebellious..... And multiplied iniquity?' [s. 89. vv. 6-12]
5. In certain cases, the future is brought into sharp focus in the present e.g. 'The Calamity!/What is the Calamity?/And what will convey unto you what the Calamity is?' [s. 101 vv.1-3]
6. Furthermore, a certain pattern is outlined to serve as a warning e.g. 'Did We not destroy the former folk/Then caused the latter folk to follow after? / Thus deal We ever with the guilty.' [s. 77 vv. 16-18]
7. A question is sometimes posed to encourage good deeds e.g. 'O you who believe! Shall I show you a commerce that will save you from a painful doom?' [s. 61 v. 10]
8. A question based on honest ignorance is stated thus: 'Will You place [in the earth] one who will do harm and shed blood?' [s. 2 v. 30]
9. A question promising solace is thus phrased: 'Did He not find you an orphan and protect you?/Did He not find you wandering and guide you?' [s. 93 vv. 6-7]

10. An ironic question is thus posed: 'For you the males and for Him the females? That is indeed an unjust division!' [s. 53 vv. 21-22]
11. A question drawing attention to divine majesty is thus worded: 'Who can intercede before Him save by His leave?' [s. 2 v. 255]
12. A question is asked to put the responder at ease e.g., 'What is that in your right hand, O Moses?' [s. 20 v. 17]
13. Sometimes the question is asked in order to reinforce the answer: 'And what will tell you what the Night of Power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months.' [s. 97 vv. 2-3.]

These few examples show the various forms assumed by the interrogative and the wide range and variety of such modes of address – in different contexts. This is another proof of the vastness of the Quranic idiom in its approach to both those who believe in it and those who disbelieve. Persuasion, warning, logic, an appeal to good sense, the refutation of fallacies – are all elements in the Quranic repertoire of interrogation aimed at developing the culture of criticism, self-examination and dialogue.

The use of the referent [*damīr*]

The Arabic language is remarkably clear and unambiguous in its grammar and syntax. It was, and has remained, a living language that can trace an unbroken history of development. The question of referent or *damīr* poses no problems in the Quran as the indication of the person/object referred to, is always clear and the identity of the addressee remains obvious. The reference is always at the end of the object and is further clarified by the gender of the referent. Thus *kitāb-uhū* = 'his book' // *kitāb-uhā* = 'her book' and so on in more complex cases.

By contrast, another ancient and complex language viz. Sanskrit poses many problems of reference. For example, 'the king, with throbbing arm, approached Sakuntala'. In this sentence, the three nouns [king, arm, Sakuntala] can all be put as the subject – the original meaning being traced out by the terminal 'm' that would determine the actual referent.

In short, the possibility of confusion is immense and several fillers are required to put the meaning in exact context.

The use of multiple meanings and synonyms

An interesting and often challenging usage found in the Quran is the application of a word having multiple meanings in different contexts and to exercise judgement with regard to choice. Here we select the word *haq* [truth] – generally used in the form *bi-al-haq* [‘with the truth’].

In surah 15 v. 85 it is stated: ‘We created not the heavens and earth and all that is between them save with truth....’ This refers to the creation of the universe with truth which also indicates the extreme degree of balance and distance between the heavenly bodies. The magnitude of creation in all its immensity also points to the power of the Creator who created this. The act of creation is referred to at many places in the Quran e.g. s. 44 vv. 38-39, s. 45 v. 22, s. 64 v. 3 etc.

In s. 38 v. 85 it is stated: ‘He said: The truth is this and the truth I speak....’ This refers to the final Judgement based on justice and not on caprice or vendetta.

In s. 34 v. 48 it is stated: ‘Allah hurls the truth....’ This verse indicates that those who deny the truth will be struck by its full force.

In s. 17 v. 105 it is stated: 'With truth We have sent it down and with truth it has come down....' This refers to the total and absolute truth of the Quran and its divine origin.

In short, the word *haq* has a variety of applications and associations and is a key-word of the Quran. There are hundreds of verses containing different shades of meaning therein.

As regards synonyms, it is generally agreed that no one word can replace another fully. Every word of the Quran has its own meaning and ramification. In this regard, we refer to the 'choice of words' *qv*.

In s. 15 v. 110 it is stated: 'Say: Cry unto Allah or cry unto the Beneficent [*al-Rahmān*], whichever you cry it is the same. His are the most beautiful Names...' Hence it may be concluded that the interchangeability of a *dhāti* Name with a *sifāti* Name is permissible. In s. 55 v. 1 it is stated: *Al-Rahmān* taught the Quran' – so the use of a *sifāti* name in this context is permissible.

Nazm (نظم) in the Quran

Among the diverse aspects of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*, we have noted *rabt* (ربط). This refers to the inter-connection of the various surahs which 'flow' into one another. Also in the 'placement of words', this phenomenon extends itself to words within a sentence. However, the concept of *nazm* [order, regulation, organization] absorbs and transcends these aspects by connoting a greater idea of intratextuality. This covers the whole Quran in all its 114 surahs as one organic whole and not as separate units within one framework. [Ibn al-'Arabi termed the Quran 'a single sentence']. Thus the whole Quran is seen as a macrocosm within its lexis, syntax, vocabulary and stylistics as one single piece or text.

This concept is also as old as early Islam for exegetes in their own time have been groping and edging forward towards it. Their efforts [up to the 15th century] have been summarized by Suyūti in his *Itqān*. The whole concept of *nazm* was properly assessed and expressed by Hamīdudīn Farāhi in what he planned to describe in his proposed Arabic commentary, *Nizām al-Qurān*. Farāhi was a great Arabic scholar and associate of 'Allāma Shibli No'māni [d. 1914] who

encouraged his talents. His incomplete *tafsīr* spells out the *nazm* of the Quran. [It was collected by his pupil, Amīn Ahsan Islāhi, who put it into Urdu and also separately wrote an Urdu *tafsīr*, *Tadabbur al-Qurān*, embodying the ideas of Farāhi.]

Islāhi collected all the fragmentary *tafsīr* of Farāhi and translated it into Urdu titled *Majmū'a Tafāsīr Farāhi* [Lahore, 1998]. This concept of *nazm* is ample evidence of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*. It enables one to see the whole text of the Quran in its self-contained unique independence and not as a collection of fragments each in isolation. This contribution of Farāhi is indeed ground-breaking and one which is remarkable in the history of *tafsīr*.



Omission of words [*hadhf* حذف]

Among the special and singular usages of the Quran is the omission of words in a sentence/verse for reasons of brevity or compactness, for omitting the obvious or to bring about a novel construction.

Thus in this example of s. 12 v. 82, it is stated: 'Question the city' instead of 'Question the people of the city' – in which the word *ahl* [people] is omitted on purpose as the reference to people can obviously be inferred.

Also, in s. 2 v. 4, the qualities of Muslims are described thus: 'They are those who believe in the unseen [*ghayb*]' in which the words *wa al-shahādah* [and the visible] are omitted because belief in the unseen is not based on sense-perception – whereas belief in the visible obviously is.

In s. 37 v. 5, Allah has been called 'Lord of the two easts' without the addition of 'Lord of the two wests' for the corollary is taken for granted in the reference to the 'two easts'.

In s. 20 v. 49, Pharaoh asks Moses: 'Who is the Lord of you two, O Moses?' The 'two' refer to Moses and his brother Aaron but the question is directed to Moses alone without reference to Aaron although the dual form is used. It is left to the hearer/reader to infer the implication contained therein.

The difference between *lam* [لم] and *lan* [لن]

There is a degree of difference between these two words both of which indicate negativity. The use of *lam* indicates impossibility e.g. *lam yalid wa lam yūlad* – ‘He begets not nor is begotten’ [s. 112 v. 3]. The use of *lan* also stresses impossibility but it accompanies this with conditionalities e.g. *lan tanālū al-birra hattā tunfiqū mimmā tuhibbūn* = ‘By no means will you attain righteousness until you spend that which you love the most’ [s. 3 v. 92]. And: *lan tarāni wa lākin unzur ilā al-jabal* = ‘you will not see Me – but look towards the mountain...’ [s. 7 v. 143].



The difference between *idh* [إِذْ] and *idhā* [إِذَا]

Both *idh* and *idhā* are used to indicate aspects of time. *Idh* is definitely used to refer to the past or an action that has been completed where the additional association of causing it to be remembered so as to draw lessons from it. For example: ‘And remember **when** ye were few ... [s. 8 v. 26]. And: ‘**When** the two were in the cave...’ [s. 9 v. 40]. Also: ‘And **when** Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House...’ [s. 2 v. 127].

Idhā is used for the future and also for sudden happenings or permanent features. For example: ‘**When** the help of Allah comes and the victory ...’ [s. 110 v. 1].

And: ‘**When** heaven is cleft asunder ...’ [s. 82 v. 1]. Also: ‘And **when** it is said unto them: do not make mischief in the earth ...’ [s. 2 v. 11].

These usages are also employed to build up the scenario that finally emerges with full force e.g. Judgement Day as in s. 81 vv. 1-14 where twelve verses begin with *idhā*. This accumulation of images gives the message force and visual clarity apart from audial impact. According to Bell-Watt [no favourable critics], ‘these passages impressed the conscience of the hearers.’

The difference between *in* [إِنْ] / *inna* [إِنَّ] and *an* [أَنْ] / *anna* [أَنَّ]

These four words are different in meaning and application:

1. *in*: indicates 'if' or an aspect of doubt e.g. s. 2 v. 25: 'If ye are in doubt concerning what We have revealed ...' Also: 'Say: ... if ye claim that ye are favoured of Allah ...' [s. 62 v. 6].
2. *inna*: indicates stress e.g. *inna-Allah 'ala kulle shayin Qadeer* [**Surely** Allah is potent over all things – many times repeated in the Quran]. Also: *Inna ibna-ka saraq* = **Surely** your son has stolen ... [s. 12 v. 81].
3. *an*: is also a form of 'that' but it comes in the middle of a sentence only and is a corridor/connective between the parts [earlier and later] that links them logically e.g. 'I intended **that** I may damage it' [s. 18 v. 80]. Also: 'Spend before ... it happens **that** death comes to you ...' [s. 63 v. 10].
4. *anna*: also comes in the middle of a sentence but it stresses the latter part e.g. 'so **that** you may know that Allah is indeed potent over all things.'

The use of *sa* س and *sawfa* سوف

Both these expresses the future: *sa* [indicated by the letter *sīn* س] indicates a time in the immediate future e.g. ‘The foolish ones will say ...’ [s. 2 v. 142] in the form of *sa ... yaqūlu* = ‘they will say ...’

In s. 102 v. 3 it is stated: ‘Nay, but you will [come to] know!’ in the form of *kallā sawfa ta’lamūn* indicating a time in the distant future [Judgement Day].



The difference between *dhā* / *dhāka* / *dhālika*

All these words refer in meaning to that /that which implying distance.

In the Quran, *dhā* is used for objects close at hand.

Dhāka is used for objects/persons not so far away.

Dhālika is used for distant objects [234 times]. Its plural *dhālikum* has 41 usages; its dual *dhālikumā* is used once.

Dhānik = *dhā* [see above] in its dual form i.e. *dhān*; the *kā* is the second person referent. This construction has been used only once – s. 28 v. 32.

The feminine *tilka* is used which covers all three forms [39 times].



Sun- and moon-letters [*Hurūf al-shamsiyya wa al-qamariyya*]

The Arabic alphabet has twenty-eight letters – from *alif* [ا] to *yā* [ي] – that are divided into two groups called sun- and moon- letters. The sun- [*shamsi*] letters are those that merge into the article prefacing them e.g. ‘the sun’ is spoken as *ash-shams* [not *al-shams* – omitting the sound of *lām* ل though it (ل) is written].

The moon-letters maintain the sound of *lām*. Thus ‘the moon’ is *al-qamar* [with the *lām* being pronounced].

The sun-letters are: *ta* ت, *tha* ث, *dāl* د, *dhāl* ذ, *rā* ر, *zā* ز, *sīn* س, *shīn* ش, *sād* ص, *dād* ض, *ta* ط, *dha* ظ, *lām* ل and *nūn* ن.

The moon-letters are: *alif* ا, *bā* ب, *jīm* ج, *hā* ح, *khā* خ, ‘*ayn* ع, *ghayn* غ, *fā* ف, *qāf* ق, *kāf* ك, *mīm* م, *hā* ه, *wāw* و and *yā* ي.

I'JĀZ AL-QURĀN

I'jāz al-Qurān according to al-Bāqillāni

In two essays printed in *Islamic Culture* [Hyderabad Deccan] of January and April 1933, 'Abdul-'Aleem gave a conspectus of the doctrine of *i'jāz al-Qurān* tracing it from its early origins to the time of writing. This was the first such attempt in English. Earlier, 'Abdul-'Aleem [Ph.D. Berlin] had written '*Aqīda i'jāz al-Qurān ki tārikh* [= 'The history of the belief in the miraculousness of the Quran'] in the Urdu journal of the Jamia Millia, Delhi [Nov. 1932] – which material he reproduced in the two English essays referred to above. He uses the spelling *i'jazu'l Quran* [sic] instead of the correct form.

The essay of 'Abdul-'Aleem was used in a partial translation of al-Bāqillāni's *I'jāz al-Qurān* issued in 1950 by Gustave E. von Grünebaum [Chicago, University Press]. The purpose of von Grünebaum was to present the critique of ancient Arabic poetry as given by al-Bāqillāni rather than to discuss the finer points of the Muslim concept of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*. In *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Quran* [ed. Andrew Rippin, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988], an essay by Issa J. Boullata is entitled *The rhetorical interpretation of the Quran: I'jaz and related topics*. Here the author following 'Aleem

and Grünebaum traces the concept taking it up to the time of Dr. 'Āyesha [*Bint Shāti*].

The approach of al-Bāqillāni [d. 403 AH] is regarded as the most incisive and profound analysis of this concept of *i'jāz*.

In the first part [= *fasl*] Bāqillāni unequivocally states that the *i'jāz al-Qurān* is the basic miracle of Islam. It is upon the Quran that the whole structure of Islam is erected – its laws, its ethics, its personal codes, its philosophy and its wisdom. For this superstructure, it is vital that the foundations be perfect in strength and capacity. If the foundations of any ideological State are flawed, the structure erected upon it will collapse.

The author then discusses the reasons for the Quran being a miracle. Among them are:

1. The faultless transmission of the Quran Text;
2. the presence in the Quran of all legal and moral principles that enable man to lead a successful life;
3. the absence of conflicting issues and disputes;
4. the incapacity of foes to respond to its *tahaddi*;
5. the inability of the great poets to approach it in poetic quality;

6. the fact that the Quran dominated the life of the early Muslims in every way. It was not a legal or theological text confined to learned debates among scholars but it entered every home and became familiar with mundane life – in everyday speech and expression – and impacted on young and old, male and female, as no other Book did. It revolutionized life and thought.
7. the fact that various allegations brought against the Quran by its foes all proved false and incapable of proof. For example, the Quran was charged with:
 - a. being magic [s. 28 v. 36]
 - b. being old stories [s. 8 v. 31]
 - c. being the product of an insane mind [s. 15 v. 6]
 - d. being the product of poetic skills [s. 36 v. 68]
 - e. being the product of 'a man possessed' [s. 37 v. 24]
 - f. being falsehood manufactured with external help [s. 25 v. 4]
 - g. being fables of old dictated by others and compiled later [s. 25 v. 5].

Despite the vast variety of charges levelled against the Quran by its foes, not one of them could be substantiated and all these false accusations were swept away before the all-powerful torrent of its Truth.

- h. The Quran claims to be 'the best of speeches' [*ahsan al-hadith* s. 39 v. 23] that is incomparable in its linguistic excellence and the effect it has on its audience whose 'flesh creeps with fear of their Lord and their flesh and hearts soften to Allah's warning' [s. 39 v. 23]. Nothing of such extreme emotion is roused even by the best poetry.

A large space is devoted to the sublime language of the Quran in all its linguistic and stylistic perfection. The critique of the *Mo'allaqa* of Imr al-Qais occupies the author's analytical attention – although the said piece of poetry was never a serious contender to the unrivalled eloquence of the Quran.

In short, the encyclopedic range of al-Bāqillāni's specialized knowledge of the minutiae of literary criticism comes into full play in his assessment of ancient Arabic poetry and in his expounding the great literary qualities of the Quran. The sincerity of the author emerges at the end when he confesses the incapacity of any individual to fully bring out the *i'jāz al-Qurān*.

The reasons for the *i'jāz al-Qurān* by Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Ansāri al-Qurtubi

The reasons for the *i'jāz al-Qurān* as given by Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Ansāri al-Qurtubi [d. 1274 CE], author of the famous *Tafsīr al-Qurtubi*, are as follows [material given in square brackets is mine]:

1. *Nazm* of the Quran [There is no detailed examen of this all-important phenomenon. It represents an early groping towards the later-developed concept of *nazm*.] Qurtubi states that the *nazm* of the Quran is not like the *nazm* of poetry with its strictures of rhyme [*qāfia*], end-rhyme [*radeef*] and metres [*buhūr*]. The Quran is independent of all these things yet retains an order which is unique to it.
2. The uniqueness of the *uslūb*. [*Uslūb* is an all-embracing term which covers the whole gamut of the idiom of the language. This too is not detailed.]
3. Eloquence and fluency. [*Fasāhah*] and flow of words as indicated in the 'imperial' and awe-inspiring verses cannot be uttered by humans.

4. Uniqueness in expression [*munfarid tasarruf*]: The combination of words in their syntax [and their 'torrential' accumulation of meaning with new associations].
5. Knowledge of previous peoples.
6. Truth of Quranic promises [e.g. the defeat of the Persians at the hand of the Byzantines as predicted in surah 30].
7. Prediction of future events [e.g. the entry of Muslims into Mecca given in s. 48].
8. As Allah suffices for the whole universe, His Book also suffices for it.
9. Unique wisdom and insight [e.g. creation of the universe; disliking a thing that may prove beneficial, s. 2 v. 216].
10. Absence of contradiction. [Although revealed over many years in different circumstances, no contradiction between its contents has ever emerged.]



Shāh Wali Allah, his family and their services to the Quran

Shāh Wali Allah [1703-1762] was the greatest scholar of the Islamic sciences produced by the subcontinent. His staggering scholarship covers the major areas like the Quran and *tafsīr*, *Hadīth* and criticism, *tasawwuf* [mysticism] and *ijtihād* [analogical reasoning], *fiqh* [law] and ethics, history and phenomenology – with massively-researched and extremely original and erudite works on all these subjects.

In the area of Quranic studies, Shāh Wali Allah was the pioneer of translation [from Arabic to Persian] in the subcontinent at a time when this act was utterly taboo and treated as un-Islamic. The translation by Shāh Wali Allah [titled *Fath al-Rahmān*] not only required a vast knowledge of the extensive area of Quranic sciences but a great deal of courage as well. While pseudo-scholars opposed his translation, no opposition came from genuine scholars and Sufis such as Mirzā Mazhar *Jān-i-Jānān* and Fakhr al-Dīn Chishti *et al.* It can safely be said that this translation changed the destiny of the South Asian Muslims by bringing the Quran into every home at a time when the production of books in large quantities by printing was not possible.

The translation of Shāh Wali Allah is in simple Persian with a brief commentary attached that represents the quintessence of his extraordinary knowledge on the subject. His brief introduction to the Quranic sciences is titled *Al-Fauz al-Kabīr fi Usūl al-Tafsīr*, in which he makes an original interpretation by stating that the Quran deals with five core areas:

1. *‘Ilm al-ahkām* [commands and prohibitions];
2. *‘Ilm tadhkīr bi-‘ala-Allah* [mention of Allah’s favours];
3. *‘Ilm tadhkīr bi-ayyām-Allah* [mention of the previous historical events];
4. *‘Ilm al-mubāhitha* [art of debate];
5. *‘Ilm tadhkīr al-maut* [relating to death and afterlife].

This certainly is a unique and comprehensive division – and an advance on the earlier books that dissect the Quran to pieces but fail to present a picture of coherence [*nazm*]. The book is written separately in both Arabic and Persian and in it Shāh Wali Allah makes the historic claim of reducing the twenty *mansūkh* verses of Suyūti to five. A continuation of this is seen in its continuation in his *Fath al-Khabīr* [Arabic] in which certain words of the Quran are examined in context.

In the Persian version of *Al-Fauz al-Kabīr*..., Shāh Wali Allah writes: 'Arabiyat wa lisān har dū fakhr-i-māast...ki ba Seyyid-i-Awwal wa Ākhir nazdeek mi gardand...' [The knowledge of Arabic and linguistics both are our pride ...as they bring us closer to the Holy Prophet]. Shāh Wali Allah stayed for two years in Medina and obtained his *sanad* [degree]. In his *Fuyūd al-Haramayn* he recounts his dream in which the Holy Prophet gave him a pen [to serve Islam through writing].

Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz was the eldest son of Shāh Wali Allah who received his education from his father in the Madressa Rahīmiyyah founded by Shāh 'Abd al-Rahīm [father of Shāh Wali Allah] and a member of the committee that compiled the *Fatāwa-i-'Alamgīri*. Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz was the scholar who issued the famous fatwa declaring the subcontinent to be a *dār al-harb* after the conquest of Delhi by Lord Lake in 1803. He also wrote an extended commentary on the *Fath al-Rahmān* called the *Fath al-'Azīz* in Persian of which the first two and the last two *juz* [1/30 part] are extant.

Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn, another of Shāh Wali Allah's five sons, translated the Quran into Urdu – the first such attempt to do so as Urdu was gradually replacing Persian as the language of the educated classes.

Shāh ‘Abd al-Qādir, another son, translated the Quran into idiomatic Urdu and also wrote an Urdu commentary on the model of the *Fath al-Rahmān*. This is titled *Mudeh al-Qurān*.

All the sons, *murīds* and pupils of Shāh Wali Allah were devoted to the service of the Quran and the spread of its message by the spoken and written word and even by practice through the *jihad* movement against the Sikhs and the *jihad* against the British colonizers [1857]. The names of Shāh Ismā‘īl [buried at Bālākot, Pakistan], Shāh Muhammad Is-hāq [both family members] and Syed Ahmad Brelvi [a *murīd* of the Wali-Allahi *silsila*], Fazl-i-Haq Khayrābādi [a pupil of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz] are prominent in this regard. The tomb of the great *mujaddid* [renewer], *imām* [leader], *mufassir* [exegete], *muhaddith* [scholar of Hadith], *mufti* [religious judge], *muwarrikh* [historian], *sūfi* and genius lies neglected in the graveyard of the Mehendiyan in Delhi. With the Elect in the heavens!

It is vital that the Shāh Wali Allah canon be recovered, edited and translated in full. The efforts of individuals such as Hakīm Mahmūd Ahmad Barkāti, ‘Allāma Ghulām Mustafā Qāsmi and Sūfi ‘Abd al-Hamīd Swāti are commendable in this context. Of these, the last two have passed away.

Shāh Wali Allah and *i'jāz al-Qurān*

In *Al-Fauz al-Kabīr fī Usūl al-Tafsīr*, Shāh Wali Allah enumerates a number of reasons for the miraculous inimitability of the Quran. These are:

1. The Quran revolutionized the recognised forms of rhetoric. The Arabs were great rhetoricians and were masters of four areas: *qasīda* [ode], *rasā'il* [prose], *khutba* [oratory] and *muhāwarāt* [idiom]. The new forms of eloquence [*badā'i'*] as contained in the Quran upset their old standards and presented them with an utterly new literary phenomenon.
2. The Quran relates the fate of past nations that also conforms to the accounts given in their own books.
3. The Quran informs us about future events.
4. The Quran has its own standard of eloquence which is in a class by itself. It is not made possible through long practice but is of divine origin.

5. The Quran adopts a novel approach in the topic under debate and is able to clothe it with language suitable to it. When it deals with a new topic, its style changes according to the new topic discussed.
6. The Quran uses highly figurative language which appeals to the educated. It also addresses uneducated people in language that is comprehensible to them without lowering its high standards and maintains the two levels with artistic simplicity.
7. The Quran uses the *'ulūm al-khamsa* [see prev. essay] to civilize its addressees. Any student of these five areas who examines the Quran to facilitate the advancement of civilization will easily arrive at this goal by a study of these *'ulūm*. Shāh Wali Allah states that this will be done in the same way as a doctor [*tabīb*] who studies the 'Canon' to seek out remedies for human illnesses and thereby concludes that the author [Ibn Sīnā] is truly a great physician.



***I'jāz al-Qurān* according to Mufti Muhammad Shafī'**

Mufti Shafī' [d. 1976] was a great scholar and Quranic exegete. Earlier associated with the Madressah at Deoband, he established the Dār-al-'Ulūm in Karachi, Pakistan, and wrote his tafsīr, the *Ma'ārif al-Qurān* in several volumes. In his commentary on the *tahaddi* verses [s. 2 vv. 23-24], he gives the following reasons for the *i'jāz al-Qurān*:

1. The culture of Arabia was not refined or educated; it was a most primitive condition where survival was the main objective in life. To humanly produce a sublime work like the Quran was an impossibility.
2. The people of Mecca opposed the revolutionary teachings of the Quran because they feared losing their privileged status. They could have countered the Quran by unleashing a propaganda barrage that would drown out the solitary voice of the Prophet. But what came about was that the opponents of the Quran were defeated and the Quran prevailed over everything.

3. The Quran tells of future events such as the conquest of Mecca by the Muslims which were fulfilled in the lifetime of those who were thus promised.
4. The Quran reports about past communities such as the tribes of 'Aad and Thamud – which are not referred to in the Torah or the Bible.
5. The Quran even reports the secret thoughts of the contemporary audience e.g. fear, hope, expectation and conviction.
6. The Quran describes the contrast between the external and internal condition of a people e.g. the Jews who felt they were the 'Chosen People' but who could do nothing to prevent their defeat and humiliation caused by their self-generated evil.
7. The Quran contains a magical euphony and an 'inimitable symphony' that transports the hearer to the heights of rapture.
8. The Quran reveals itself anew in every fresh reading and its cadence and harmony even attract those who do not know Arabic.
9. The Quran has been orally transmitted through memory more than any other book. All books need materials [paper, writing

tools, printing etc.] for transmission but the Quran is unique in that it has transcended the centuries through oral transmission alone. The minds and hearts of persons are the repository of the Quran.

10. The Quran is brief in volume but contains a wealth of knowledge both of this world and the next.



Muhammad Asad and the *i'jāz al-Qurān*

The famous convert to Islam, Muhammad Asad [the former Leopold Weiss – an Austrian Jew], was also the author of several books on Islam such as the widely-read *The Road to Mecca* and a translator of the Quran into English [Dārul Andalus, Gibraltar, 1980]. In the preface to his translation, Muhammad Asad writes:

We Muslims believe that the Quran is the Word of God, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the medium of a human language. It was the language of the Arabian peninsula: the language of a people endowed with that peculiar quick-wittedness which the desert and its feel of wide, timeless expanses bestows upon its children: the language of people whose mental images, flowing without effort from association to association, succeed one another in rapid progression and often vault elliptically over intermediate – as it were, ‘self-understood’ – sequences of thought towards the idea which they aim to conceive or express. This ellipticism [called *i'jāz* by the Arab philologists] is an integral character of the Arabic idiom and therefore,

of the language of the Quran – so much so that it is important to understand its method and inner purport without being able to reproduce within oneself, instinctively, something of the same quality of elliptical associative thought. Now this ability comes to the educated Arab almost automatically, by a process of mental osmosis, from his early childhood: for, when he learns to speak his tongue properly, he subconsciously acquires the mould of thought within which it has evolved and, thus, imperceptibly grows into the conceptual environment from which the Arabic language derives its peculiar form and modes of expression.



‘Abd al-Qadeer Siddīqui’s reasons for the *i’jāz al-Qurān*

‘Abd al-Qadeer Siddīqui [d. 1962] was a Professor of Islamic Studies at ‘Osmania University, Hyderabad Deccan, and the *pīr* [spiritual mentor] of the learned Dr. Muhammad Hamīdullah [d. 2002]. He is the author of a *Tafsīr-i-Siddīqui* which has been printed by his sons in Pakistan. Siddīqui has given his own reasons supporting the *i’jāz al-Qurān*. In addition to the reasons given by earlier exegetes, Siddīqui mentions the following:

1. The Quran can never become obsolete. If Islam is to remain till the end of time, it is logical that its foundation [the Quran] will remain ever-new and ever-applicable. Several other sacred books have become dated as they did not possess an eternal character.
2. The Quran was revealed to an unlettered Prophet who had no role in its composition but presented a Book that outdid the great literary masterpieces of all time.
3. The Quran has remained unaltered throughout the ages.

4. The Quran and the Hadith issue from the same personality. Yet the difference between the two is striking – one is clearly divine, the other human.
5. Anyone using a great store of words and an unexcelled competence in Arabic cannot make a single verse of the Quran. No artificial rose can match the natural rose.
6. Human writers change with maturity and their ideas also change. They accept foreign influences as well. [The author gives the example of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson].
7. The impact of the Quran upon listeners has been great e.g. 'Omar ibn al-Khattāb went out to kill the Prophet but on reading the first 8 vv. of s. 20 [*Tā Hā*] accepted Islam. The poet Lebīd [of *sab'a mu'allaqāt* fame] on reading s. 108 [*Al-Kawthar*] gave up poetry, accepted Islam and said: "*Mā hādhā qaul al-bashar*" [= 'This is not the word of a mortal.']
8. The author mentions the use of Quranic verses as cures for illnesses or for protection/the spread of Islam to millions of people/the spread of education and knowledge with the spread of the Quran.

‘Allāma Tamannā ‘Imādi and the *i’jāz al-Qurān*

‘Allāma Tamannā ‘Imādi [d. 1973] was a great scholar of Arabic and author of a number of books on Islam and polemics.

In his book, *I’jāz al-Qurān wa ikhtilāf al-Qar’a’āt*, he states that the Quran’s *i’jaz* is its *lāreybiyat* based on s. 2 v. 2 – ‘this is the Book whereof there is no doubt [*lā reyb*]’. This absence of doubt he bases on its *tatawwur* [continuity] seen in:

1. *tatawwur lisāni* [linguistic continuity]
2. *tatawwur ta’līmi* [continuity of teaching]
3. *tatawwur makāni wa zamāni* [continuity in time and space]
4. *tatawwur dhāti* [continuity in a single text]
5. *tatawwur qarā’ati* [continuity in readings of the text]
6. *tatawwur kitābati* [continuity in the writing of the text]

7. *tatawwur tilāwati* [continuity in the orality of the text]

and so on. The fact that the Quran retains its credibility despite the highest critical standards applied to it proves the *i'jāz al-Qurān*.

Hamīduddīn Farāhi arguing in his *Majmu'a Tafāsīr* states that *i'jāz* is not the purpose of the Quran but its *nazm* is. There is as much *i'jāz* in the creation of an ant as there is in the creation of the cosmos. The purpose of the *i'jāz* is not to frustrate others from trying to match it but to convince others of its irrefutable superiority as evidenced by its *nazm*.



Dr. Muhammad Hamīdullah and the Quran

The fame of Dr. Muhammad Hamīdullah [d. 2002] as among the premier scholars of Islam in the 20th century is based on his long and superior research in diverse areas where his many books, translations, essays, collections are cited as authoritative. His French translation of the Quran [*Le sainte Qurān*] is a distinguished work. His personal life was austere and self-effacing and he avoided people who wished to patronize him. His lectures on Islamic topics in several countries have made him well-known. The following extract is based on a part of his Urdu lecture *Zabān aur Allah kā kalām* [= language and the Word of Allah] presented before the Oriental College, Punjab University, Lahore, in 1972:

The Quran ordered its illiterate audience to learn reading and writing so as to acquire all that knowledge which it did not possess. The early Muslims possessed no literature and no books – so the Quran became their guide in all matters and their key to education as well. Learning the

Quran resulted in their learning expanding to many other areas including writing, grammar, lexis, eloquence, history, geography, law, logic, taxation, inheritance, international relations and even book-binding. All these ramifications of knowledge emerged as a result of a study of the Quran. The superior civilization that was created by the Quran further morphed to include the whole of the globe and made its fruits available to everyone.



***I'jāz al-Qurān* according to Muhammad Hanīf Nadvi**

A famous scholar of the *Ahl-i-Hadīth*, Muhammad Hanīf Nadvi, has given a chapter on the *i'jāz al-Qurān* in his book, *Mutā'li'a al-Qurān* [2002]. In this he gives a scholarly assessment of various dimensions of *i'jaz* without presenting any novel feature. His statement [with examples] that the Quranic verses fit in with various poetic lines by having the same prosodic features does not contribute to the doctrine of the *i'jāz*.



***I'jāz al-Qurān* according to Shams al-Haq Afghāni**

Shams al-Haq [1898-1983] was a scholar attached to the *madressa* of Akora Khattak and a well-known figure in religious circles. He was a graduate of Deoband *madressa*, India.

According to his book, '*Ulūm al-Qurān*', there are many reasons [chiefly literary] for the *i'jāz al-Qurān*:

1. *siyāsi i'jāz* [establishment of political institutions]
2. *ghidhā'i i'jāz* [suffices for body and soul]
3. *nizāmi i'jāz* [relates to man and God]
4. *i'tidāli i'jāz* [sense of proportion]
5. *mulki i'jāz* [sense of Divine Majesty]
6. *takwīni i'jāz* [universality].

The other Muslim scholars of South Asia who have taken up this topic chiefly develop their arguments on literary eloquence and rhetorical qualities of the Quran. Among them are:

1. Mufti Rafī' 'Usmāni – '*Ulūm al-Qurān*
2005

2. 'Allāma Shabbīr Ahmad 'Usmāni – *I'jāz al-Qurān* 1342 AH
3. Dr. M. A. Ghāzi – *Mahādirāt-i-Qurān* 2004
4. Pīr Zulfiqār Ahmad Naqshbandi – *Qurān Majīd ke adabi asrār wa rumūz* 2001
5. Muhammad Hanīf Nadvi – *Mutālī'a al-Qurān* 2001
6. Muhammad Yūnus – *'Azmat-i-Qurān* n.d.
7. Muhammad Abul Hasan Siddīqui – *I'jāz al-Qurān* 1901.

'Allāma Shibli feels that *i'jāz* is not the basic characteristic of the Quran but its *nazm* is the most important – as understood by Hamīdudīn Farāhi [*Maqālāt* vol. 1].

Syed Abul Hasan 'Ali Nadvi of the *Nadwat al-'Ulemā*, Lucknow, states that the chief *i'jāz* of the Quran is that it was able to satisfy human needs on earth over the centuries.

That the literary features of the Quran comprise the basic component of the *i'jāz al-Qurān* is a view supported by:

1. 'Abdul-Haq Haqqāni in *Tafsīr al-Haqqāni* 1313 AH
2. Shabbīr Ahmad 'Usmāni in *Tafsīr-i-'Usmāni* n.d.

Kemal A. Faruki [1923-1986] and the *i'jāz al-Qurān*

Kemal A. Faruki [B.A. (USC), M.A. (AUB), Bar-at-law (Middle Temple)] was not a scholar of the Quranic sciences but a Muslim interested in the application of Islamic law in the fledgling state of Pakistan based on Islamic ideology. He investigated the bases of relevant knowledge in various books such as *Islamic Jurisprudence, Islamic Constitution, Ijma' and the gate of Ijtihad, The constitutional role of the 'Ulema* etc. He rose to prominence during the Islamic summit [Lahore, 1974] when his fluent Arabic and English brought him into the limelight. The following self-explanatory extract encapsulating the *i'jāz* of the Quran is from his book, *Ijma' and the gate of Ijtihad* [1954]:

The Quran, the eternal Word of God, applicable for all times to all places, which men and jinn, whether singly or in combination, can never hope to equal, even to the extent of one verse, will always yield greater and greater treasures of knowledge and guidance. The longer mankind is fortunate to possess the guidance of this Book, the more we read and seek to understand its meaning, it is but inevitable that

our knowledge of its verses, its chapters and indeed the Book as a totality will constantly heighten, widen, deepen and be purified.

It is over-exulting arrogance to imagine that we have, singly or collectively, in the past, exhausted the meaning of the eternal Quran in any particular matter with our puny, halting, fallible human intelligence...

Through the ages the Muslim community will understand more and more of the eternal Word of God through constant exertion and patient endeavour....



Mohamad 'Ali Jawhar and the Quran

Mohamad 'Ali Jawhar [1876-1931] was a most influential and powerful politician and orator who made no secret of his anti-colonial position. His long and colourful career was punctuated by several spells of imprisonment. It was during one such term in jail that he 'discovered' the wonderful effect of the Quran on his sensibilities. His description of this overwhelming experience is given below:

This wonderful book is full of repetitions in spite of being but a small volume, abrupt in its transitions from topic to topic, and I can well understand that Europeans who read it in translations, more or less out of curiosity, and are able to go through it in a few days, so often pronounce it to be incoherent and disjointed. But they do not realise that it was not revealed as a complete volume all at once, but piecemeal and in the course of no less than twenty-three years of the Prophet's mission. Moreover, they do not realise that even God's Word, when it appears in human language, has to take on the characteristics of the particular language in which it makes its appearance and those who are

familiar with the Arabic language and Arab literature know that jerkiness is characteristic of both. In fact, it is characteristic of the very mentality of the people whose thought flits from topic to topic with breathless rapidity. Ideas do not continue to glow with a steady light but seem to flash dazzlingly, as it were, through the gloom from time to time. ...

Finally, for the Prophet himself, these revelations coming as they did from time to time provided a Prophet's sustenance, the spiritual food that strengthened his heart and supplied the necessary stimulus throughout a long and arduous mission. And this piecemeal revelation fully served its threefold purpose. At the most trying moments in his prophetic career it comforted and consoled him, and at no time did it take on a surer tone in predicting ultimate triumph than when, to all outward appearances, the Prophet's condition was hopeless. As for the infidels, unrelaxing repetition and reiteration wore down their prejudice and hostility and truth at last triumphed and falsehood finally vanished from Arabia. ...

A classic has been well described as literature which reveals a fresh charm every time it is read and one is never tired of reverting to it. Judged by this standard, the Qur'an is the greatest classic for the charms it reveals seem to be inexhaustible. ...

The Qur'an is God's Word truly enough, but it is and must be in man's ill coin.....

The Qur'an must, therefore, be simple enough, if it was meant by Allah whose message it contains, to be intelligible to the dwellers of the desert....



I'jāz al-Qurān according to Fazlur Rahmān

In his book, *Major Themes of the Quran* [Chicago 1980] the well-known Pakistani scholar [1919-1988] at the University of Chicago does not treat of *i'jāz* as a separate heading but refers to it in the course of his discussion about various Quranic themes such as 'God', 'Man as individual', 'Prophethood and revelation' etc. [It may be remembered that Fazlur Rahmān had to flee Pakistan as he had expressed certain unorthodox opinions – unwisely as it seems in retrospect]. He writes:

‘There is a vast literature in Islam known as *i'jāz al-Qurān* setting out the doctrine of inimitability of the Quran. This doctrine takes its rise from the Quran itself, for the Quran proffers itself as the unique miracle of Muḥammad. No other revealed Book is described in the Quran as a miracle in this way except the Quran itself; it follows that not all embodiments of Revelation are miracles, even though the event of Revelation itself is a kind of miracle. The Quran emphatically challenges its opponents to

'bring forth one sura like those of the Quran... There is a consensus among those who know Arabic well, and who appreciate the genius of the language, that in the beauty of its language and the style and power of its expression the Quran is a superb document. The linguistic nuances simply defy translation. Although all inspired language is untranslatable, this is even more the case with the Quran.... It appears certain that the claim of the miraculous nature of the Quran is connected with its linguistic style and expression. It is extremely desirable that as many as possible of the non-Arab educated and thinking Muslims equip themselves with the language of the Quran.' [pp. 104-105]

There seems to be nothing unorthodox here.



I'jāz al-Qurān according to Gawhar Rahmān

Moulana Gawhar Rahmān is the head of an important madressah in Mardān [Pakistan] and a capable and qualified Arabic scholar holding the title of *Shaykh al-Qurān*. He is the author of an erudite work titled, '*Ulūm al-Qurān* [2 vols., Mardān, October 2003, 1165 pp.]. In this work, there is a chapter *I'jāz al-Qurān* which unfortunately is the shortest of the ten chapters comprising the two volumes. The book was primarily targeting the converted rather than the uninitiated.

Rahmān states that the Quran is a miracle which is based on intellectual premises that are provable. Even the inveterate foes of Islam in its early days accepted the unmatched eloquence of the Quran as nothing short of a miracle. It was not at all comparable to the current examples of prose or poetry, of charms and spells, of magic formulae or mantras. It was unique – one of a kind. The large numbers of converts who accepted the Quran as the Word of Allah of their own free will and chose to lead a life subject to its code of laws from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ganges provide proof of its miraculous all-compelling force not backed by coercion or compulsion.

The easy-flowing language, the eminent suitability of its phraseology and its consummate stylistic perfection – all point to the inimitability of the Quranic discourse. After this, the author quotes the fraudulent productions of the pretenders Museylma and ibn Muqaffa and exposes them to rightful ridicule.

The Quran being the final revelation has given information about extra-Jewish and extra-Christian prophets and their mission – such as Hūd and Sālih not mentioned in any previous scripture. Thus the Quran is a vital source of extra-historical evidence.

One wishes that the chapter would have been longer.



I'jāz al-Qurān according to Muhammad 'Ali al-Sābūni

The author is Professor of Islamic Studies in the Faculty of Sharī'ah in a university in Saudi Arabia. The name of his book is *Al-Tibyān fi 'ulūm al-Qurān*. The book has been translated into Urdu with the Arabic text given. The translator, Mohammad Āsif Nasīm, has commented upon the text at various places.

After examining the *i'jāz* and the *tahaddi*, ten reasons for the *i'jāz al-Qurān* are given. While most of them have been given by other scholars over the ages, we may note:

1. the absence of contradiction with any scientific observation;
2. the fulfilment of divine promises;
3. the attraction the Quran possesses for both friend and foe.

I'jaz al-Quran according to Subhi Sālih

In the section dealing with the *i'jāz* in his book '*Ulūm al-Qurān* [1956], Dr. Subhi Sālih repeats the opinions of both the old and new scholars. After this, he comments on the acoustic effect and musicality of the Quran as that 'inimitable symphony' [Pickthall]. This was originally presented by Seyyid Qutb. Apart from this, there is no new or novel idea presented. The bibliography of the 2nd edition [1965] contains seven items – all of them in Arabic.



***I'jāz al-Qurān* according to Muhammad Safā Ibrāhīm Haqqi**

The author is Professor of *Tafsīr* and '*Ulūm al-Qurān* at a university in Saudi Arabia. His book [*'Ulūm al-Qurān min khilāl al-Tafāsīr*, 2 vols. Beirut, 2004] is a broad historical compendium of the various issues [collection, writing, history etc.] of the Quran Text and the books composed on these topics over the centuries right up to the time of writing. So it is valuable for the dual purpose it performs. In addition, it examines various prefatory essays [*muqaddimāt*] to various *tafāsīr* and notes their contents. There is also a critical examen of thirteen Arabic *tafāsīr* [along with their *muqaddimāt*]. Among them are:

1. *Tafsīr Tabari*
2. *Tafsīr Abi Laith Samarqandi*
3. *Tafsīr Māwardi*
4. *Jāmi' al-Ahkām* of Qurtubi
5. *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*.

Noticeable omissions are *Tafsīr Kash-shāf* [Zamakhshari], *Tafsīr Baidāwi*, *Tafsīr Rāzi* and 20th

century trends in *tafsīr* as shown in *Tafsīr Manār* [Mohammad 'Abduh], *Fi zilāl al-Qurān* [Seyyid Qutb] and *Tafsīr al-Bayāni* [Bint Shāti].

The bibliography contains 423 items. All the works are in Arabic and mostly those written by Arabs. No familiarity is shown with the Western schools of destructive criticism.

In one sub-section dealing with the *i'jāz al-Qurān*, the author gives a survey of previous writings on the subject and enumerates seventeen reasons for this phenomenon. Among them are:

1. compaction of extensive meaning in few words;
2. compelling force of its beautiful rhetoric;
3. novel expressions not found in Arabic literature;
4. an independence that makes it free from reference to other works;
5. the inclination of the heart towards it;
6. its self-sufficiency in material and metaphysical issues;
7. the presentation of the Divine Being [Allah] existing with all His Attributes in a state of perfection.

While it has been stated earlier that no defence or academic proof is required for the *i'jāz al-Qurān*, Muslims have given their own reasons for this as new aspects of *i'jaz* emerge over the ages. That such an abundance of works is actually a “cover-up” for lack of *i'jāz* [as fatuously put forward by J. Wansbrough], is a statement based on malice and unworthy of refutation.



***I'jāz al-Qurān* according to Ismāil Rāji al-Fārūqi**

Ismāil Rāji al-Fārūqi was a Palestinian professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the USA. He and his wife were brutally murdered in the 1980s, it is alleged, by the fundamentalists of the Jewish Defence League [JDL]. Nobody has been investigated so far in this connection.

He elaborates the *i'jāz al-Qurān* in his book, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, thus:

1. The Quranic words have remained attached to their meanings. Otherwise they would have become dated human conventions that change as soon as their meanings shift in the flux of time and space. The Quran being divine is eternal so its meanings are unchangeable and eternal.
2. The entire gamut of language and linguistics of Arabic is based on the Quran which became the standard of judgement in all these matters. It was from the Quran that the Arabist derived his grammar, the linguist his morphology, the poet his figures of speech. The classical Arabic language passed beyond

the flux of time and became as eternal and unchangeable as the Quran itself. Neither was possible without the other.

3. Thus the 'living verity' of Arabic as derived from the Quran has saved the sacred text from hermeneutical disputation [unlike the Bible and Torah which have been buried under the deadwood of ages] and no varying or conflicting interpretations are born out of the differences of scholars studying 'dead' languages.
4. The quality of *tawāzun* [= 'balance', 'order' or '*nazm*'] operates throughout the Quran. Its words, phrases and verses fit in, compare or contrast perfectly with what goes before or comes after in the most harmonious and unobtrusive way possible.
5. The *badā'i'* [neologisms] form a rich mass constructions, figures of speech, allusions and idioms unknown previously that strike one with the maximum force of their novelty, their suitability and their location within the text.

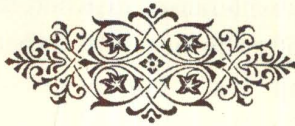


‘Abd al-Karīm Khatīb and the *i’jāz al-Qurān*

The author issued his book *I’jāz al-Qurān* in two volumes [Cairo, 1963]. He examines the vast literature on the subject and discusses the difference between Divine and prophetic/human speech. He treats of miracles per se and examines how the Quran is a miracle transcending time and space. The earlier opinions of writers [ancient and modern] are analysed. Among them are: al-Jāhiz, al-Khattābi, al-Bāqillāni, al-Jurjāni [all of whom wrote separate essays on the subject] and the opinions of old *mufasssirs* [Zamakhshari, Rāzi] and also modern [al-Rā’fa’ī, Farīd Wajdi]. Related questions of interest such as the intrinsic characteristics of the Quran, its unmatched beauty and its incomparability in all areas of eloquence are all examined. The relation of the Book with the Prophet who transmitted the Divine message is also a novel feature of this book. It is compulsory reading for all those who are dealing with the Quran especially the *i’jāz*.

Quoting s. 20 vv. 17-21 in which Moses encounters the Voice of Allah and is asked to cast down his staff

which then turns into a writhing serpent, the author writes that the state of the Arabic language before the revelation of the Quran was like that of Moses' staff – wooden, old, stultified – before it turned into a robust, vital and dynamic organism. Certainly, this is a 'distinct touch'.



***I'jāz al-Qurān* according to Mustafa Sādiq al-Rāfa'ī**

The author [1881-1937] was a versatile scholar and an ardent defender of Islam from the many attacks it was receiving from Western pseudo-scholars in the heyday of their colonial period. On the publication of the book, the author received a commendatory epistle from the Egyptian Prime Minister, Sa'ad Zaghlūl. His book is entitled, *I'jāz al-Qurān wa al-Balāgha al-Nabawiyya* [= 'the *i'jāz al-Qurān* and the eloquence of the Holy Prophet']. Rāfa'ī first gives the account of the revelation and collection of the Quran and the various features of the Quran Text [QT]. In his study of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*, the author discourses at length on the *nazm* of the Quran as its chief *i'jāz* [thus independently presenting the arguments that concerned Hamīduddīn Farāhi]. He then examines three components:

- i. letters and their sounds
- ii. words and their sounds
- iii. sentences and their words.

After this, a study is made of the three in combination as used in the Quran that produces new and unique forms of eloquence. This study of the

i'jāz is unique for the attention given to Quranic acoustics. After this, the author examines the eloquence of the Holy Prophet – in which he brings out the fact that the latter eloquence was human and could not be compared to the Quran.

This is a very useful and analytical study of the phenomenon of *i'jāz* and it should be given greater currency among the Muslims.



***I'jāz al-Qurān* according to
'Ali Ahmed Said [b. 1930]**

'Ali Ahmed Said [who uses the pseudonym 'Adonis'] is a poet of Arabic and an important voice in contemporary Arabic poetry. In a series of four lectures given at the College de France and translated into English [Saqi Books, London, 1990], he deals with Arabic poetics and the influence of the Quran in his second lecture. Although he does not deal directly with the *i'jāz al-Qurān*, there are certain novel features that can be extrapolated from his exposition relevant to the *i'jāz*.

The Arabs, states Adonis, were slaves to orality and looked upon any deviation from orality as a 'betrayal of identity' and a 'deviation from the poetic ideal'. It may be noted that the writing down of pre-Islamic poetry was done by Muslims after Islam. The great pride that the Arabs felt in their oral poetry could not be destroyed except by something so powerful and revolutionary packed with such literary originality and innovation that it could reduce this Mount Sinai to powder. This the Quran did. It also, Adonis states, revolutionized Arab culture by switching from an oral to a written culture – 'from a culture of intuition and

improvisation to one of study and contemplation; from a point-of-view which made contact with the pagan surface of existence to one which reached into its metaphysical depths.' Because the Quran assumed the character of the new literary ideal, it attracted the attention of poets and critics – who now abandoned the old, forsaken ideal of orality to a study of the Quran for poetic inspiration. The new phenomenon of revolutionary poetry that emerged from the arid embryo of pagan poetry is also proof of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*.



Seyyid Qutb and style

Seyyid Qutb, the great exegete and author of *Fi zilāl al-Qurān* [a great Quran *tafsīr* or commentary meaning ‘in the shade of the Quran’] was brutally put to death in Egypt by Nasser in 1966. He was a fine critic and exegete in the line of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashīd Ridā who worked very hard for the cause of Islam. In his book *Al-taswīr al-fanni fi al-Qurān* [the aesthetic picture/portrayal of the Quran – a book that deserves better notice], he states that the Quran uses *amthāl* and other literary devices to illustrate abstractions in concrete terms. The Quran foretells future events such as Judgement Day in such language as to make these events appear real to human sense-perception. However, the comparison of the Quran to painting [which is visual] or to music [which is audial] restricts the full impact of the Quran on the senses. It is the *i’jāz al-Qurān* that causes the intellect to assimilate and comprehend realities beyond sense-perception. The Quran states: ‘If We had set the Quran upon a mountain, you would see the latter torn to fragments [out of fear] of Allah; thus We coin similitudes for mankind that they may reflect’ [s. 59 v. 21]. The Quran comes from beyond the world of the sense-bound and the senses are too feeble to take in the full impact of the Quran though they may partially assimilate the sensory impact.

‘Āyesha ‘Abd al-Rahmān and the Quran

‘Āyesha ‘Abd al-Rahmān [*Bint Shāti* = ‘daughter of the shore’] was the first Muslim woman [from Egypt] in modern times to have written a commentary on the Quran as well as other related books. She was Professor of Arabic at ‘Ain Shams University, Cairo. She also authored valuable books on Islamic history and biography – such as the biographies of the ladies associated with the Holy Prophet including his mother, wives, daughters, granddaughter [Zeynab] and great-granddaughter [Sukayna]. These are collectively called *Sayyidāt Beyt al-Nubuwwa* and printed together in a volume of 990 pp.

Her work on the Quran *Tafsīr al-Bayāni li-al-Qurān al-Karīm* started appearing in 1962. Her other books are *Al-Qurān wa al-tafsīr al-‘asari* [Quran and contemporary *tafsīr*] and *Al-i’jāz al-Bayāni li-al-Qurān* [the miraculous eloquence of the Quran] and others on the relation between the Quran and modernity. Her Ph.D. thesis [1950] was on al-Ma‘arri. She was a student of Prof. Amīn al-Khouli [d. 1966] who later became her husband and she adopted his method of approaching the Quran with regard to *tafsīr*.

This involved making the Quran the locus of attention and explaining it directly and intra-textually

rather than by reference to external sources like poetry. The Arabic context of the Quranic language and metaphor was to be preferred over other extraneous contexts – as the Arabic of the Quran had ‘frozen’ the language for all time thus preserving its pristine purity. Even elements from the tafsīrs of Rāzi, Tabari and Zamakhshari were to be treated with caution and to be avoided if they appeared to be far-fetched or in contradiction to the apparent meaning. This is the proper approach in accordance with the modern age.

It is necessary that her *tafsīr* [like that of her compatriot Seyyid Qutb] be translated into English and Urdu as soon as possible. Her book on the *i'jāz al-Qurān* has been put into Urdu with the title *Qurān-i-Karīm kā i'jāz-i-bayān*.

Dr. 'Āyesha 'Abd al-Rahmān [*Bint Shāti*] in her book, *Al-i'jāz al-Bayāni fi Qurān al-Karīm* has summarized the debates of various scholars who have written about the phenomenon of *i'jāz*.

Khattābi [d. 388 AH] claims *nazm* as the principal reason for the *i'jāz al-Qurān*. The Quran is uniformly of the highest literary standard and does not weaken anywhere in this regard.

Rummāni [d. 4th century AH] claims *balāgha* [rhetoric] as evidence of the *i'jāz* with all the

panorama of the lexical-semantic idiom. Bāqillāni [d. 1013 CE] is also a famous scholar who surveys the entire gamut of ancient Arabic poetry and proves its inferiority to the Quran. Jurjāni [5th cent. AH] argues for *i'jāz* on grounds of exaltedness of its discourse, pleasing figures of speech and unique turns of language. Abu Bakr Sakkāki [d. 626 AH] states that the great diversity of literary devices and variety of their associations is contained by *nazm* which keeps the balance between the various elements. Imām Muhammad 'Abduh [d. 1905 CE] states that literary texts are no longer taught in madressas so people have lost the *dhawq* [taste] of exalted literature and hence appreciation of the exaltedness of the Quran. 'Abduh argues for re-reading of Jurjāni's *I'jāz al-Qurān* and Zamakhshari's *Asās al-Balāgha* to develop this *dhawq*.

After this, Bint Shāti gives her own concept of *i'jāz* which is based on:

1. *hurūf*
2. *alfāz*
3. *asālīb* [i.e. letters, words and style].

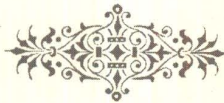
The *i'jāz* in the *hurūf* is that they represent all the sound system of Arabic [glottal, velar, uluval etc.]. Then they are used for numerical calculation according to the value of numbers. They indicate the frequency of the letter in the surah and to subsequent

verses. This inconclusive debate continues for over 60 pp.

As regards words, Bint Shāti shows how words change their meaning in different conditions and how synonyms cannot substitute for original words be they pronouns or prepositions. She notes the proper syntax and position of the subordinate clauses in a sentence.

In style, Bint Shāti advocates the *hadhf fā'il* [removal of the doer] as *i'jāz* e.g. in verses dealing with Judgement Day, she quotes 'When the sun is overthrown' [s. 81 v. 1]; 'When the heaven is cleft asunder' [s. 82. v. 1] and states that the *fā'il* [Allah] is not mentioned. But how this qualifies for *i'jāz* is not mentioned. The *hadhf* strengthens the idea of a doer not visible.

Then she refers to the oaths 'By the fig/By the olive ...' and states that the oath by created things does not redound to divine glory which is not dependent on created things. However, all this deep discussion does not bring out the *i'jāz* as it should.



‘Allāma Shibli and the *i’jāz al-Qurān*

In a brief 4-page essay in vol. 1 of his collected essays [Pak. ed. 1989 ed. Syed Suleimān Nadvi], ‘Allāma Shibli No’māni states that the Quran calls itself by many names and claims divine origin by giving guidance to mankind but it does not claim eloquence as a reason of its divine origin. The *tahaddi* of the Quran was well-known to the ‘Allāma. However, Shibli states that as a miraculous work of *inshā’* [= composition] the Quran cannot claim miraculousness because *inshā’* is not a miracle associated with a Prophet or guaranteeing his Prophetic status. Herein lies the basic flaw in Shibli’s argument. The Quran never claims, nor can it be regarded as, a work of *inshā’* [literary composition] for the reason that only men can compose *inshā’*. *Inshā’* does not come from Allah. It is a human activity carefully cultivated by extensive reading, writing and revision. The Quran is a Call to humanity by its Creator. The writing down of the Quran was to preserve the Message and as an aid to memory. It cannot be regarded as the equivalent of *inshā’*. The Quran is a Divine Call to humanity – what is divine is incomparable.

G.E. von Grünebaum and the *i'jāz al-Qurān*

G.E. von Grünebaum was a Professor of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. In 1950, he translated certain sections relating to a critique of ancient Arabic Poetry [Chicago: University Press, 1950] taken from Bāqillāni's *I'jāz al-Qurān*. In his entry under this heading in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* [2nd edition], he traces out the history of the *i'jāz al-Qurān* and refers to the books and writers who dealt with this topic – in meticulous detail. His general comments are fair and unobjectionable as he does not get involved in polemical debate but describes the literature available on the subject.

Among the various useful comments of von Grünebaum, we may note: “The term *i'jāz* developed into a technical term ... [which] tended more and more to evoke the associations of the rhetorically unsurpassable ... Grammar was to be judged by the Quran text rather than the Quran text by grammar ... The central position of the Quran as the focal point and justification for grammatical and literary studies was never contested.”

Theodor Nöldeke and the *i'jāz al-Qurān*

Theodor Nöldeke [1836-1930] is the pioneer of destructive / criticism of the Quran. His early *Geschichtes des Qorans* [1860] was a ground-breaking task and paved the way for later followers and imitators. In the 9th edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* [1892] he wrote a general essay on the Quran referring to points of interest that emerged during his long study of the Quran. He mostly repeated himself in *Neue beitrage zur semitischen sprachwissenschaft* [Strassburg 1910]. Towards the end of his life, he was able to pass on his ideas to certain pupils such as Friedrich Schwally [d. 1919], G. Bergstrasser [d. 1933] and Otto Pretzl [d. 1941] – all three of whom helped in revising and updating the old 1860 *Geschichtes*. The pupils of Nöldeke [with the encouragement of Rev. Arthur Jeffery] presented the startling idea of preparing a ‘critical edition’ of the Quran – as though the present copy in millions of Muslim homes was defective. The same negative approach is seen in Rudi Paret who met Nöldeke when Nöldeke was at the end of his life. Nöldeke never met an Arab or an Arabic-knowing Muslim and all his ‘knowledge’ was derived from dictionaries, grammars and faultily edited MSS.

In the years 1860-1960, Germany [and writers using German], rather than Britain, was the nerve-centre of the anti-Quran crusade with names like Weil, Horovitz, Wellhausen, Buhl, Goldziher, Wensinck, Hirschfield, Flugel, Sprenger and von Kremer [to name a few] being prominent.

To return to Nöldeke and the *i'jāz al-Qurān*, the author in his essay states that the *tahaddi* of the Quran was not replied to because doing so would make the person 'a laughing stock'. He does not say that this would be because any imitation would excite censure or laughter. Even more non-serious and academically ludicrous is his claim that the Holy Prophet would 'have been put to shame...by the first poem that came to hand.' Ignoring the evidence of centuries, he naively and wishfully supposes that any inferior imitation would adversely reflect upon the Prophet rather than on the composer. In fact, the compositions of the Prophet's contemporary foes such as Museylma, Aswad and Tulayha [all claiming Prophethood] made them the laughing stock of their supporters and led to their defeat. Furthermore, with an audacity that beggars description, Nöldeke states that 'a defective literary production was turned into...an unrivalled masterpiece' because anyone trying to rival the Quran would 'lose his head' and so possibly superior compositions were suppressed out of fear. One wonders why – in the safety of

Strassburg – Nöldeke himself did not take up the challenge and produce a few masterpieces. The whole structure of his argument is devious, malicious and not based on academic reasons. It is a clear expression of the frustrated foe who feels that come what may he has to keep up a losing battle. Thus the feeble edifice of Nöldeke and his ilk collapses on its shaky foundations.



Ahmad von Denffer and Nöldeke

Ahmad von Denffer is a German convert to Islam and author of a slim book in English titled *'Ulum al-Quran*. In it he surveys some of the European literature on the subject in which Nöldeke's *Geschichtes des Qorans* stands out most significantly. von Denffer is aware that his fellow countryman, Nöldeke, is biased against Islam but he cannot withhold a grudging admiration for the latter's efforts and deep incisive study of the Quran. Thus von Denffer writes: "While some of the authors' [Nöldeke and his student-collaborators] comments would not be welcomed by Muslims, the vast area that had been covered and the presentation based on the classical Muslim literature on the topic are of a merit that has to be acknowledged."

The fact that Nöldeke and his band treated the Quran as a human composition is enough to show how inveterate their prejudice was. So, none of their 'scholarship' has any validity within the Muslim context beyond that of a grammatical or linguistic survey. The classical Muslim sources which von Denffer praises the Germans for citing as authorities all treat the Quran as a document of divine origin. The value of 'scholarship' which ignores this and treats the Quran just like any other book is doubtful, to say the least.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khān and the *i'jāz al-Qurān*

Sir Syed Ahmad Khān [1817-98] was a well-known British loyalist who founded Aligarh College to spread English education among the Muslims of South Asia. He also wrote on religious topics and was author of a *Tafsīr* which gave his own novel interpretation of the Quran. There are other works by him that have been collected in a set of sixteen volumes by *Majlis Taraqqi Adab*, Lahore.

Sir Syed, in obedience to his ideas embodying 'nature' and reason after 1860, argues on the *i'jāz* stating that the composition or failure to do so [in the manner of the Quran] would not in itself prove that the Quran came from Allah. The real *i'jāz* of the Quran lay in its guidance – it is understood by, and appeals to, all men regardless of their educational capacity. The Quran appeared at a time of moral and religious depravity and gave spiritual education to all classes of men. This proves its divine origin as the education it contains can never be improved. According to Sir Syed, the Quran is the 'Word of God' and the universe is the 'Work of God' so there can be no conflict

between the Word and the Work – both issuing from a common origin. If, according to the Old Testament, the sun halted its course for Joshua, the universe would have been destroyed. This is a case of the Word contradicting the Work.

Sir Syed has many unorthodox ideas about the Quran and its contents which have been criticized ever since they were enunciated. His admirer, Syed Mahdi 'Ali [Nawāb Mohsin al-Mulk], in a letter dated 19 September 1892, addressed to Sir Syed, writes:

At certain places [in your *Tafsīr*] you have given such interpretations of the Quran which are not derived from its vocabulary nor from the idiom of the Arabs. They do not agree with the context of the Quranic discourse. Nay! They are contrary to the aim of Islam, the purpose of the Quran and the guidance of the Prophet....

In my next letter, I will discuss Nature, the law of nature and the Work of God and the Word of God....and will demonstrate that [all these] are old-fashioned fallacies. What Word of God and what kind of work of God? These illusions are being jettisoned by modern science which states that God does not exist, Providence and divinity are meaningless falsehoods

... prophethood is a deception the resurrection is a fraud ... heaven and hell are unreal, man is a developed ape. So, my *buzurg* [elder] Sir Syed and my dear *murshid* [mentor] – these are the beliefs of those whose hearts are strong, reason perfected and [are] swimmers in the sea of wisdom and knowledge.

This long extract has been given as it is so interesting. There is much more but this will suffice.



Mohammed Ārkoun and the Quran

Mohammed Ārkoun is a famous Islamic scholar and writer attached to the University of Paris [Sorbonne]. His many books and essays have an appreciative readership. Robert D. Lee has translated many items by him and has also written about him in his book *Meeting tradition and modernity: the search for Islamic authenticity* [Boulder, 1998] where Lee also treats Iqbal, Seyyid Qutb and ‘Ali Sharī‘ati. In addition a recent book by Mohammed Ārkoun is titled *The Unthought in contemporary Islamic Thought* [2002]. In 1982, Mohammed Ārkoun published his *Lectures du Coran* based on his lectures on the subject.

Mohammed Ārkoun is a deep scholar of anthropology, sociology and religion and applies the technical terminology of these disciplines to the Quran. The result is that ordinary readers may have difficulty in penetrating the layers of jargon that may obfuscate his meaning. He presents a ten-point programme for the modern approach to the Quran – which whatever it may stand for, does not give primary prominence to the Quran. Rather, it is meant as a bridge-building process to eliminate the ‘clash of civilizations’ that has emanated from the west. His terminology for the Quran as COC [Closed Official Corpus] appears to have emerged from the pages of

Nöldeke's book and assumes that the 'closure' of the Quran was a matter of human judgement. His applying the term *mus-haf* to the Quran is also not proper as this term is used in the Quran for the scrolls of Abraham and Moses [s. 87 v. 18] but 'Quran' cannot be used for any other Book or scripture. Then his using 'Quranic fact' and 'Islamic fact' to indicate a dichotomy is also not a happy usage. In any case, without going into details, the end-result is that in Ārkoun's work it appears to the reader that the Quran is not given that status of the bedrock of Islam as the basis of its religion, metaphysics, culture, economics, politics and society which in Islamic practice it is known to possess.

Ārkoun's statement that the order of surahs in the Quran does not reflect 'either chronological or rational, formal criteria' is unfortunately a petty and mundane attempt at analyzing the workings of a divine text. The Quran cannot be treated as a work of *inshā'* [secretarial composition] with a beginning, a middle and an end. Although it was revealed over twenty years with intermingling of surahs and verses, its final arrangement shows how its diverse components coalesced into place with the beauty of a diadem of pearls. This is not true of any other work – human or 'divine' – and for those who are able to appreciate it, it is in itself proof of the *i'jāz al-Qurān*.

Arthur Jeffery and the *i'jāz al-Qurān*

The Rev. Arthur Jeffery spent a great deal of his life learning Arabic and studying the Quran. But his study started off with the desire to lower the status of the Quran by trying to prove that its text was unreliable and corrupt. Hence he spent many years in trying to trace out old codices, variants and even 'verses missing from the Quran' in what in end-result proved a futile and self-defeating task.

In his book, *The Quran as Scripture* [New York, 1952, reprinted 1980], Arthur Jeffery writes: '[This is] the famous doctrine of *i'jāz al-Qurān* which to the present day has been the strongest factor working against any real critical approach among Muslim peoples to the study of the Quran as Scripture.'

This is a more subtly crooked assertion than that of John Wanbrough *cf.* It puts the blame squarely on the Muslims for accepting the *i'jāz al-Qurān* and abandoning a critical study of the Quran [leaving it no doubt to the likes of him and his ilk]. The fact is that detailed Muslim study and exegesis of the Quran started with the revelation of the Book itself. The majority of the people who were addressed by the

Quran were unbelievers who posed questions and received their answers. The Prophet himself was given the supreme task of *ta'līm al-Kitāb* [s. 62 v. 2 & others] to the people who had no critical training and this primary task was performed so effectively that the whole of pagan Arabia, initially staunch in its opposition to Islam, came over to it. Furthermore, the early centuries of Islam were those when books dealing with literary aspects of the Quran such as *mushkilāt*, *mubhimāt*, *gharā'ib* etc. were compiled. The fact that this critical appreciation highlights the great literary excellence of the Quran goes badly with Arthur Jeffery and others – who cannot answer it but indulge in destructive criticism based on false suppositions. The point of divergence is obviously the nature of the Quran – whether it is a human or a divine document – and this is not a matter on which Muslims have any doubt.



***Materials for the history of the text
of the Quran: the old codices***

by Arthur Jeffery, Leiden, 1937

Reference to Jeffery and his negative attitude towards the Quran has been made earlier while referring to his book *The Quran as Scripture*. In this heavy dual language [English-Arabic] book, Jeffery has unearthed the text of an old and unreliable book, the *Kitāb al-Masāhif* of Ibn 'Ali Dā'ūd [d. 316 AH] and pounces upon the chance to assert, if not prove, that the Quran has variants. But the ship of his logic founders on these rocks.

The various variants are actually *tafsīr* of Quranic words and not variant texts. The 'old codices' predate the standard text issued by 'Othmān and thus they exhibit variants in orthography, punctuation marks, silent letters, long and short vowels etc. All these were standardised in the first century AH. These are not lexical/semantic variants that change the meaning. Thus they cannot be treated as variants. The oral transmission of the Quran, which does not require any punctuation, never had any variant readings.

The supposed *isnād* (chain of transmission) attributed to the 'old codices' cannot be accepted

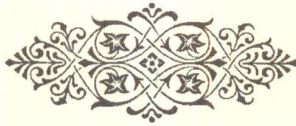
chiefly for the reason that all *isnād* [whether in the Quran, the Hadith, or historical matters] are themselves treated as forgeries by the Orientalists. So how can the supposed *isnād* of the *masāhif* be projected as genuine while all other *isnād* are treated as fictitious?

The 'old codices' are individual collections. The 'Othmān codex was based on collective evidence and is the product of *ijmā'*. An individual act [*ijtihād*] cannot supersede a collective act [*ijmā'*]. The Quran belongs to the entire community of Muslims and not to any one individual. No individual is authorised to claim that his copy of the Quran is the copy for the entire community.

The fact that the 'old codices' are attributed to companions who themselves were on the official committee that promulgated the 'Othmān codex is ignored. They could not be issuing the official codex and at the same time insisting on the prior validity of their individual collections.

The term *mus-haf* is applied to the old codices of the companions e.g. *Mus-haf ibn Mas'ūd*, *Mus-haf Ubayy b. Ka'ab*. This indicates that *mus-haf* in this connotation cannot be applied to the Quran – which stands alone and cannot be attributed to a single individual.

Arthur Jeffery [d. 1952] had worked on a thesis *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Koran* [Baroda, 1938] where he traced out the supposed foreign loan words in Quranic Arabic. He followed this up by his *Materials*. The critical edition of the Quran – which was his brainchild and which he embarked upon with the students of Nöldeke – was the most startling enterprise. Later in the 1950s, a small selection of *surahs* from the Quran was posthumously printed [New York, 1958]. It was meant for non-specialists.



John Wansbrough and the *i'jāz al-Qurān*

In *Quranic Studies: sources and methods of scriptural interpretation* [OUP, 1977, p. 80], this sentence occurs: 'That its [the Quran's] incomparable composition was not self-evident seems clear from the amount of literature produced to support the argument that it was.'

It was stated earlier that no evidence of the *i'jāz al-Qurān* is incumbent upon the Muslims who believe that it is the '*Kalām Allah*' [Word of Allah] and not '*kalām makhlūq*' [word of created beings]. So this inevitably leads to the conclusion that nothing divine can be surpassed by anything human. This proves correct the *tahaddi* [s. 17 v. 80] that all mankind and jinns working together would not be able to match the Quran.

As regards the insinuation that books written in support of the *i'jāz al-Qurān* actually prove the *à priori* weakness of this claim, this is based on malice. The hundreds of *tafsīrs* written over the centuries do not mean that the Quran has progressively

become more difficult or more in need of explanation. It merely indicates the applicability of a non-varying text to varying circumstances.

John Wanbrough's book is full of false premises and fallacious arguments – which should be rejected out of hand by serious readers especially Muslims.



Rudi Paret and the *i'jāz al-Qurān*

Rudi Paret [d. 1983] was a Professor of Arabic and Islamics at Tübingen University, Germany, and a translator of the Quran [*Der Koran*, 2 vols. Stuttgart 1963-66; vol. 3: *Kommentar und Konkordanz*, 1971] where his labours, such as they are, are to be found. He also has written the first essay on the Quran in the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* [Cambridge: University Press, 1983] where his dry-as-dust, one-sided, insinuating and unsympathetic approach is visible. A review of this volume [including Paret's essay] has been made in *Karachi University Journal of Islamic Studies* [vol. 4, 2002] by the present writer.

Paret does not even accept the 'inspired' nature of the Quran but treats it as a conscious human production patterned on ancient Arabic poetry and the style of sorcerers and enchanters. The *i'jāz* is treated as part of 'linguistic errors'. The author, following his fellow-German, Th. Nöldeke, is shrill in his attack on the Quran style. It is termed 'clumsy, inappropriate, ugly, very unusual, very hard, rough' and so on. Unfortunately, these very adjectives appear to fit his writings on the Quran. That countless Muslims as well as non-Muslims have, over the

centuries, testified to the power, eloquence and beauty of the Quran is something that Rudi Paret does not even bother to consider. It is, to say the least, amazing that the editorial board did not see fit to ask Rudi Paret to produce even a minimally balanced appraisal. As a sop to Muslim feelings, it is stated at the end of this section that the Quran 'as a whole [is] a unique linguistic and artistic achievement'. This statement contradicts the earlier one and the two cannot coexist. It is also objectionable to many if not most of his readers that the Quran is seen as a human 'achievement' rather than as a divine revelation. If this fallacious, unfair and lopsided argumentation is all that emerges from Rudi Paret's years of study, it only provides fuel for those who wish to stoke the fires of the Western-proclaimed 'clash of civilizations'.



The essay on *i'jāz al-Qurān* in the *Encyclopedia of the Quran*, vol. 2

The essay under consideration has been written by Professor Richard C. Martin, an authority on Mu'tazilite thought. On a subject as intrinsically Islamic as the *i'jāz al-Qurān*, readers would probably have felt more comfortable if this essay had been authored by a Muslim scholar such as Mohammed Ārkoun. Ārkoun wrote the essay on 'Islam' in the EQ – where his broad and all-inclusive approach found expression. The various responses [*mu'ārada*] to the Quranic challenge [*tahaddi*] are described and treated as failures. In fact, the question of *mu'ārada* has become academic after so long; there is no question of any more *mu'āradas*. The essay gives a long and rambling account of the literature on the subject and a discussion on miracles. Many later works on the *i'jāz* such as works by Mustafā Sādiq al-Rāfi'ī and 'Abd al-Karīm Khatīb [both 20th century] are not mentioned. The major achievement of the Quran – that it has maintained its unrivalled position over the millennia without difficulty – has not been highlighted.

Style in the Quran [1]

Style is the manner in which language – with all its resources – is used by a particular person/s in a particular way. As Buffon stated: '*Le style c'est homme*' [= 'style is the man'] – which indicates the association of style with an individual in a unique fashion. Styles may vary according to age/period e.g. the Renaissance style, the Romantic style; or according to school e.g. Metaphysical or Parnassian; or according to individuals e.g. Shakespearean, Miltonic etc. [in English literature]. Grand subjects e.g. the epic, require a 'grand style' – so Homer and Milton are both associated with this. A lower form of poetry e.g. satire may require a lower or 'base' style e.g. Butler's *Hudibras*. But in each of the above cases, style is suited to the subject which it treats.

In the holy books of different religions, the style may vary according to the subject treated but it must always remain lofty and reverent. It is easier for 'holy' books composed in poetry to build up an atmosphere of holiness. A part of the Old Testament is in poetry e.g. the Psalms – which are sung and put to music in

church. The ‘truths’ expressed in most ‘holy’ books are generally accepted or treated with reverence even by those who do not believe in them. For example, the wording of Genesis may affect the emotional sensitivity of the hearer/reader without his delving deep into the details of how ‘the spirit of God hovered over the waters.’

In the case of the Quran, we encounter a unique phenomenon in that the Quran is wholly of Divine origin and there is no human interference in its text at all. As such, there is no other book – ‘holy’ or otherwise – in existence that is of equivalent or even related status. So any examination of the Quran must necessarily be intratextual and not inter-textual. It is undesirable and futile to compare the whole range of the Quranic idiom with anything of the ‘grand style’ in ancient Arabic poetry – highly regarded for its eloquence and metaphor – or anything post-Islamic.

In the case of humans, mutual interaction and interchange of influence is observable, e.g. in the case of Wordsworth and Coleridge, or in the impact of Greek culture upon Keats. The Quran, however, cannot be compared with other ‘holy books’ – even those originally accepted by it as such – like the Torah and the Bible, because firstly, their textual purity is suspect; secondly, they never were the literal Word of God in the way the Quran claims to be. This great

claim pre-empts all attempts at answering its *tahaddi* or challenge for that which is Divine is inimitable.

The attack upon the Quran was made early by those who realized the great threat to their ancestral, anachronistic and atrophied 'beliefs.' The Quran itself states that the Prophet was accused of being tutored by a foreigner [s. 16 v. 103]. These attacks against the *i'jāz* [miraculous unsurpassibility] of the Quran took the form of attack on the Prophet's personality. He was accused of being an epileptic [Sieur de Ruyer] and a uxorious person [Arnold Toynbee]. When this failed, he was damned with faint praise as a 'sincere but imperfect teacher' [Rodwell]. The most that the foes of Islam have accepted is to treat the Prophet at par with the Old Testament prophets [W. Montgomery Watt]. How does this manage to fit in with their own Christianity is not explained. The great labours of Theodor Nöldeke and his school to disprove the sublimity of the Quran have not worked. Neither have the attempts of A. Jeffery and others [to prove that the Quran is somehow 'corrupt'] succeeded. Similarly, the 'uneven' style of the Quran comes in for attack in a subtle way by praising the Meccan surahs especially the short ones as exhibiting 'Prophetic power' and denigrating the Medinian surahs as being 'common' or 'legalistic' and hence below the standards of eloquence – such as they hold. For a Muslim, no part of the Quran may be preferred over others in

eloquence, style or literary merit. There are no 'peaks' and 'troughs' in the Quran. The *tafsīr al-Qurān bi'l Qurān* [= explaining the Quran by the Quran] as advocated by Shāh Wali Allah and others is the right approach for reaching out to the multi-layered meaning present at different levels in the Quran.

To judge by Western standards, the Quran is at once 'sublime' without involving 'terror' – and 'beautiful' without being 'small' as stated by Burke in his *Philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful* [1757]. This is only one aspect. According to Longinus [*On the Sublime*], the five elements that constitute 'sublimity' in any composition are: grand conception, inspired emotion, figures of speech, noble diction, dignity and elevation. All these carried to unimaginable heights and much more are to be found in the Quran. It is not an exercise in 'sublimity' but performs the role of bringing peace of mind in a world distraught with anxiety, and guides wayward mankind to a noble life in this world and salvation in the next.



Style in the Quran [2]

This is a very different issue from the style of work produced by men who write. Each writer bears the mark of his own style or idiolect. Also, a writer may improve his style with time. Bacon's essay 'Of Seeming Wise' does not contain the maturity of his essay 'Of Death'. It has been common for writers to complain that the limitations of the language they use, does not permit the expression of their separate ideas, feelings, emotions and sensations. Even descriptive language fails to convey the sensory image of a scene of unutterable beauty. As Keats said of Milton, 'Our language sunk under him'. Thus a language must possess its inborn ability of commanding the expression of the whole range of sense-perception and even beyond – as the Quran does in the case of representation of the scenes of Judgement Day. French is called by Frenchmen *la langue perfide* [= 'the treacherous/perfidious language'] as in the hands of men it fails to convey the intention of the speaker fully despite all its abundant vocabulary.

The Quran has the unique status in Arabic style of which it is the most beautiful form of expression. The Quran does not use the vast Arabic vocabulary to press

its point or play with words but stresses the qualitative use of words with maximum impact. Thus the Arabic vocabulary has over 1000 synonyms for 'sword' but there is no reference to that object in the Quran despite its being a common everyday item. Despite the revelation of the Quran over two decades and the variety of its topics from *Tauhīd* to inheritance, its style does not falter or sink. The divine presence saturates all aspects of divine speech; in every word, an ineffable infinity is present leaving the reader astounded as in the presence of a miracle. The Quran builds up its ambience as no other work does. It shows the interactive operation of divinity in the universe. Clearly "there is a destiny that shapes our ends rough-hew them how we will."



I'jāz al-Qurān : a contemporary perspective

The commentators on the Quran and the scholars [both ancient and modern] who have written erudite volumes detailing the Quranic sciences have stressed the language, style and other qualities of the Quran basing their arguments on the vast panorama of stylistic, literary, and figurative idiom with which the Quran is replete. A few have noted other aspects of the Quran's inimitability. In my opinion, there has been a disproportionately larger emphasis on the medium as compared to the message. Regardless of how excellent the medium may be in terms of beauty of language, stylistic artistry and aptness of metaphor, all these instruments are a medium through which a message is being conveyed. The medium is so enchanting and fascinating that 'a world of lovers has become distracted at the veil's embroidery' [Jāmi: *Salamān wa Absāl*] and does not seek to unveil the momentous truths that lie behind the veil. The imperfect [as it must be] appreciation of the Quran as an unsurpassed literary monument can only be made by a limited circle of erudite elites. The *i'jāz* of the Quran is much greater, much more momentous and much vaster than this.

The true *i'jāz* of the Quran is in the perfection of its message – revealed at a primitive age of human society – but instrumental in transforming that barbaric society into one exhibiting all the traits of an advanced civilization. This miraculous transformation from one extreme to the other is the *i'jāz* of the Quran.

Within a century of the beginning of Islam, the Arabs who were among the most backward peoples intellectually had composed excellent works on history, religion, philosophy and science. The sheer stress on acquisition of knowledge that began with the initial Quranic revelation: 'Read in the Name of thy Lord....' dispelled the role of magic, mythology and mystery from their lives. The Quranic approach to knowledge was most eclectic – seeking it out in China or by the preservation of the ancient classical literature of Greece which would otherwise have been lost forever.

The dichotomy between this world and the next was done away with and life was seen as a pulsating continuum with increased consciousness even after death. The uncompromising insistence on *Tauhīd* [unity of Allah] made Islam remain true to its origins and has prevented its decay and degeneration – unlike the fate of earlier religions. The Holy Prophet was totally man and totally Prophet. He could correlate to

the humanity of his *ummah* and never sought a quasi-divine status [as that of an incarnation/avtar] nor claimed any status other than that of a human being chosen to convey a divine message. The stress he laid on truth in all aspects of life assured the Muslims of a deathless moral superiority.

The Quran is the only miracle in Islam. It is not only a verbal/linguistic miracle but its miraculousness defies limitation on its universal applicability, its perpetual freshness and its futuristic ideas. It is the Word of Allah – self-existent, unaltered, available to those who seek and heed the guidance for making this world a better place for all and thus achieving salvation in the next.



GENERAL

GENERAL

Aspects of Quran Translation

In this essay, we will not deal with the wider aspects of Quran translation but confine ourselves to these two points:

1. The Quran is untranslatable;
2. Translating the Quran is objectionable and should not be done.

The contradiction between the two points is at once apparent. If the Quran is untranslatable, how can one translate it? If translating the Quran is objectionable (on the grounds that one must understand it only in the original Arabic), then how will it be possible for millions of Muslims to devote a large part of their lives to language acquisition and lose out on indirect comprehension through translation? So how did these conflicting viewpoints emerge and what exactly do they mean?

The view that the Quran is untranslatable has been given wide currency especially by Orientalists purporting to express Muslim sentiments. For example, A.J. Arberry writes:

It is ancient Muslim doctrine that the Koran is untranslatable. (*The Holy Koran: selections*, London, 1953, p. 27)

Arberry bases this view on the Muslim belief that the Quran is a 'miracle'. But a literary miracle like the Quran also poses a challenge to translators rather than pre-empts their attempts at translation. Hence the assumption that the Divine origin of the Quran imposes a ban on its translation is thus erroneous. The correct Islamic position is that the translation of the Quran is possible – indeed desirable – but that no translation can replace the original or claim finality in matters of interpretation. In the Quran, it is stated at many places e.g. s. 12 v. 2 that the Quran has been revealed in Arabic. While this is an encouragement for all Muslims to learn some Arabic at least, it does not mean that there is a prohibition on the attainment of understanding of the Quran through other languages.

The famous British Muslim and translator of the Quran, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, writes in the preface to his own translation:

The Koran cannot be translated. That is the belief of the old-fashioned sheykhs and the view of the present translator. [Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, London, 1930, p. 1].

However, Pickthall goes on to give an explanation of what he means and how he evaluates his own translation:

The Book is here rendered almost literally, and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the glorious Koran, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy.

It would appear that Pickthall does not feel that even the best and most correct rendering in English can convey more than a faint glimmer of the glitter of the original. The meaning, the words, the context can be shifted from Arabic to English – the allusions, the figures of speech, shades of meaning, cadence, rhythm, verbal magic, lexical and phonological symmetries cannot. Certainly in this sense no one can dispute Pickthall's contention.

It can be supposed that the above is true of translation of any piece of literature from one language to another. But this objection can easily be answered. Works produced by men are easily 'transposed' into another language as in both cases the language used is that which is of human origin and limited by human sense-perception. For example, the

translation of Homer's *Iliad* (from ancient Greek into English) must have reached one hundred by now and it appears that no new meaning, interpretation or hint hitherto undiscovered can be exhumed from the original Greek text. But as regards the Quran, Divine in origin, the process of discovery, of plumbing new depths, or learning new implications appears to be unlimited even after 1400 years of profuse and profound Quran exegesis in dozens of languages.

Going back to the first point, we now understand that the Quran can be translated though the translation may only give a literal meaning and not convey other connotations or beauties of style and expression. In fact, the Quran has continuously been translated ever since it was revealed. There were Persians, Greeks, Jews, and Ethiopians in Arabia and soon the Islamic empire would encompass an enormous variety of linguistic groups. The Quran was made intelligible to these people in their own language through translation. The large scale conversions to Islam were due to the mainly oral translations used by the first preachers. Even today, the imams of mosques quote the Quran in the original and then translate its meaning for the comprehension of the congregation which may not know Arabic. This should clear up the first fallacy.

Translating the Quran was never objected to for the purpose of understanding or propagation. The fact

that no translation could justly reproduce the comprehensive connotations of the original was never held to be a reason for the unilateral ban on such activity. What was objected to was heretical interpretation or unorthodox ideas read into the original which militated against the overall belief-structure of Islam. The dozens of great Arabic commentaries (Tabari, Rāzi and Zamakhshari – to name a few) of the Quran are proof that exegesis and elucidation of the Quran continued even in the language in which it was revealed. There are vast numbers of Quranic manuscripts which have the original text followed by an interlinear translation in such languages as Persian, Urdu or old Turkish.

It must be admitted that Quran translation was, in fact, discouraged at different times and for different reasons. In Iran, this was done after the proclamation of Shī'ism as the official religion by the Safavids as a result of the then-prominent *Akhhāri* ('literalist') school of thought that insisted on studying the Quran in Arabic.

In India, this belief spread during the decline of the Mughal Empire along with other aspects of decadence largely due to Hindu influence. The upper-caste of Brahmins had restricted sacred learning to themselves to protect their monopoly in such matters. This concept spread to the Muslims who were now on the decline in all areas whereas one of the major

revolutionary aspects of Islam is that it has no priesthood, no Church, and no intermediary between Man and his Creator.

This ignorance was countered by Shāh Wali Allah (1703-62), the greatest Islamic scholar produced by the subcontinent. He wrote a Persian translation and commentary on the Quran called *Fath Al-Rahmān* which was intended to bring the public (who used Persian and which was the Court language of the Mughals) closer to the message of the Quran. In fact, between Shāh Wali Allah's translation and that attributed to Sheikh Sa'adi (d. 1292), no other Persian translations are recorded in the *World Bibliography of Quran Translations* (Istanbul, 1992). However, it is clear that the earliest Persian convert to Islam, Salmān al-Fārisi, used to translate the Surah al-Fātiha and other small surahs of the Quran for his fellow-countrymen who accepted Islam after the conquest of Iran by Sa'ad b. Abi Waqqās during the caliphate of 'Omar ibn al-Khattāb.

Shāh Wali Allah's two sons, Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn (1750-1818) and Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir (1754-1814) were the pioneers of Quran translation into Urdu.

In conclusion, it will be observed that these two false and fallacious concepts have nothing to do with Islam and have never held good among the vast number of Muslims in any part of the world.

Animal life in the Quran

Animal life [including insects and marine life] is included among the natural phenomena mentioned in the Quran. These references may be literal or metaphoric. S. 2 v. 26 states: 'Allah does not disdain to coin a similitude of a gnat'. Quranic surahs are titled 'The Cow' [no. 2], 'Cattle' [no. 6], 'The Spider' [no. 29], 'The Ant' [no. 27] and 'The Elephant' [no. 105]. The Quran invites everyone to study creation, and non-human life comprises a very large part of the environment. For example, the Quran states: 'Do they not observe the camels, how they are created?' [s. 88 v. 17]. Although the camel [*jamal, ibl, ba'eer*] is the most familiar animal to the Arabs, it is only referred to twice in the Quran [above] and in s. 6 v. 144.

Apart from the ants, a reference to the hoopoe [*hud-hud*] in connection with Solomon is made. The fish [*hūt*] that swallowed Jonah [Yūnus] is mentioned at different places. The prohibition of pork is made in s. 5 v. 3. Horses are mentioned many times and a surah

[no. 100] is named after war-horses. Metaphorically, unbelievers who turn away from divine warning are like 'frightened asses/fleeing from a lion' [s. 74 vv. 50-51].

In short, there is a wealth of flora and fauna presented in the Quran – not for mere description or example but for studied observation of natural phenomena leading to questions relating to the whole cosmic process of creation.



Plant life in the Quran

The Quran possesses many insightful observations on plant life. As many as thirty different species of crop are referred to in the Quran with their uses and benefits as well.

Among the various fruits and vegetables, there are as many as twenty references to dates which are the most familiar product of the desert. Dates are also a fruit of paradise [s. 55 v. 68].

Olives [Ar. *Zeyt*, Heb. *zeyth*] have seven references. The divine light of the famous Light Verse [s. 24 v. 35] that burns without the oil touching it comes from a 'blessed tree – the olive' which mention contains its own elaborate exegesis.

Grapes have eleven references both singular [*'anab*] and plural [*a'nāb*] and are also a fruit of paradise [s. 78 v. 32].

Pomegranates [Ar. *Rummān*, Heb. *rimmon*] have three references and are paradisial.

The fig [Ar. *tīn*, Heb. *teenah*] is eponymous with s. 95 and has a certain Levantine aura along with the references to olives.

The mysterious *sidrah* referred to as once on this earth and three times at the extremity of paradise [thus being called *sidrah al-muntahā*] is disputed. Most translators [M. Pickthall, A. Yusuf Ali, Sale, Rodwell, Palmer, Arberry, Dawood *et al.*] give this as 'lote-tree' which word is obsolete and not found in the OED. Rodwell calls it 'a prickly plum called *ber* in India'. T. B. Irving translates it as 'hawthorn'. John Richardson in *A Dictionary of Persian, Arabic and English* [1777] and John Penrice in *A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran* [1873] give it as 'lote tree' – so the correct definition is elusive still. The Urdu book *Nabātāt-i-Qurān* by the botanist Dr. Iqtidār Fārūqī calls it 'cedar' as found in the Fertile Crescent. But this too appears unacceptable.

The mustard seed has two references – earlier it also appears in the Bible. The 'burning bush' where Moses had a vision of Allah is referred to in s. 28 v. 30 but not named.

As used in *amthāl*, a good word is called 'a goodly tree, its root set firm, its branches reaching to the sky'; a bad speech is 'a bad tree uprooted from the earth, having no stability' [s. 14 vv. 24-26].

In s. 6 v. 96, the involvement of divine providence in human affairs is mentioned thus: 'Allah splits the seed of corn and the datestone [for sprouting]'.

The references to plant life and vegetation are of great importance to the life of the early Muslims who lived in an arid desert. Thus heaven is also many times described as 'a garden under which rivers flow' presenting fertility as an ideal condition for nature.

Other references to plant life in the Quran are to ginger [*zanjabīl* s. 76 v. 17], lentils, onions, garlic, cucumber [s. 2 v. 61]; basil [*rayhān* s. 55 v. 12] etc.

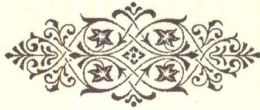


Internal Curiosities

In his book, *Kayfa tahfuz al-Qurān* [Cairo, 2003], the author, Dr. Mustafā Murād of Al-Azhar University, mentions, among other things, a number of interesting points relating to the Quran – such as the names of persons, cities, countries, animals etc. – in it. In one chapter [*al-nawādir* = curiosities], the following are mentioned:

1. the longest verse – s. 2 v. 282;
2. the shortest verses – s. 20 *Tā ha, Hā mīm* [7 surahs (nos. 40 – 46) that begin with a verse containing only two letters];
3. the largest compound word – s. 15 v. 22: *fa-asqay-nā-ku-mū-hu* [so We gave it to you to drink];
4. the letter *ha* [ح] is followed by *ha* at only two places: s. 2 v. 235, s. 18 v. 60;
5. the letter *kāf* [ك] is followed by *kāf* only at two places: s. 2 v. 200, s. 74 v. 42;
6. the letter *ghayn* [غ] is followed by *ghayn* only once: s. 3 v. 85;

7. in the surah *Al-‘Asr* [no. 103] the letter *wāw* [و] appears ten times;
8. only three places in the Quran do the verses begin with the letter *dād* [ض]: s. 16 v. 75, s. 66 v. 10, s. 39 v. 29;
9. only two verses start with the letter *ghayn*: s. 30 v. 2, s. 40 v. 3;
10. the ‘crown’ of verses in the Quran is s. 2 v. 255, the ‘Throne Verse’ [*Āyat al-Kursī*].



The question of *tahrīf* in the earlier scriptures

The word *tahrīf* means 'to incline something towards something else', 'to change its consistency' [so as not to be recognizable]. This is a very important question and one that the Quran consistently charges the Jews and Christians ['People of the Book'] with. *Tahrīf* includes interpolation – the bringing in of extraneous matter not part of the original – and excision or the removal of material integral to it. Thus the Quran accuses the Jews of Arabia who listened to the Quran and altered its words [s. 2 v. 75]. Further, the Quran accuses the Jews of falsifying their own scriptures when they confirmed the validity of the Holy Prophet's claim to prophethood by denying that such references existed [s. 2 v. 101]. Further, 'People of the Book' are accused [s. 3 v. 78] of attributing certain things to Allah whereas all such attribution is false. Again, the charge is made that they [Jews] 'change words from their context' [*yuharrifūna al-kalima 'an mawādihi* s. 4 v. 46]. This charge is repeated in the same words in s. 5 v. 13 with regard to the Jews' violation of their Covenant with their God. The accusation is made once more in s. 5 v. 41. So the weight of accusation is against the Jews as reflected by repeated allegations against them.

The scripture of the Jews, called the Torah by the Quran, is not at all at par with the Quran. In its existing form it is the Word of Man and not the Word of Allah. The message – of divine origin – is communicated by means of men using their own words. The prophets of the Jews spoke in an elevated degree of inspiration and emotion. But at no time was the Torah treated as the Word of Allah nor was it regarded as uncreated whereas the Quran is basically uncreated [q.v.]. The Books of the Old Testament are not equivalent to the Torah nor are they anything but the words of men. The Torah is not even ascribed to Moses by the Jews. The Torah morphed into the Talmud which further expanded into the Mishnah – both of which are ascribed to Rabbi Judah [135-217 CE]. Then there are two Talmuds – the Babylonian and the Palestinian – both ‘dissimilar in subject matter, method, presentation and language’ [*Judaism* by Isidore Epstein, London, 1964]. While there is an abundance of legal, ethical and moral commentary on all these texts, there is nothing there that remotely resembles the Word of God. The claim of the Hebrew prophets to be speaking with the ‘voice of God’ is like William Blake’s categorical assertion that he was not the author of his poems but that they were dictated to him by angels. His poetry will always be treated as his own regardless of what he may have considered as its origin.

The Quran also accuses the Christians of falsifying their scriptures e.g. s. 5 v. 14: 'And those who say: Lo! We are Christians. We made a covenant with them but they forgot a part of it whereby they were punished.....'

Also both Jews and Christians are accused: 'The Jews and the Christians say: We are the sons of Allah and His beloved! Say: Why does He then punish you for your sins?' [s. 5 v. 18.]

The Trinity and the attribution of divinity to Mary and Jesus are both attacked by the Quran at several places.

The denial of the Holy Prophet by both Jews and Christians is also censured: 'Those whom We gave the scripture recognise him as they recognize their own sons... But lo! A party of them conceal the truth.' [s. 2 v. 146].

Both Judaism and Christianity are treated as having declined to polytheistic beliefs, e.g. 'And the Jews say: 'Ezra is the son of Allah' and the Christians say: 'the Messiah is the son of Allah'... How perverse they are!' [s. 9 v. 30].

It is reported in the Hadith that 'Abd-Allah b. Salām, a Christian, accepted Islam when he saw

the Prophet entering Medina after the Hijrah as recognizing him as the one whose advent had been foretold. He also gave evidence against the Christians by pointing out references to him in the Christian texts. The same is true of Ka'ab al-Ahbār and Wab b. Munabbih – Jewish converts to Islam.

The present New Testament or the four Gospels are four biographies written many years after the supposed crucifixion of Jesus. If placed in four parallel columns, the discrepancies among them become obvious. In any case, they were never treated as the Word of God as their authorship was ascribed to the men who wrote them – John, Matthew, Luke and Mark. If there is any poetic merit in them, such merit is of human origin. The *Injīl* [as stated by the Quran] given to Jesus is not extant. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has not added any significant knowledge to the corpus of traditional Christianity or Judaism.



Dr. Mahmoud Bustāni and *tahrīf* [?] in the Quran

It has been stated that the Quran as it exists today ‘between the two covers’ [*bayn al-daffateyn*] is the same which exists on the preserved tablet [*lawh al-mahfūz*]. The Quran states: Lo! those who disbelieve in the Reminder when it come to them [are guilty] for lo! It is an unassailable Scripture./Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or behind it – a revelation from the Wise, Owner of Praise’ [s. 41 vv. 41-42]. No doubt need be entertained in this regard.

In *Dirāsāt fi ‘ulūm al-Qurān* [‘Studies in the Sciences of the Quran’, Qum, 2007], the author, Dr. Mahmoud Bustāni gives a chapter on the *tahrīf al-Qurān*. *Tahrīf* may be rendered as ‘alteration, tampering or falsification.’ In this day and age when the matter of Muslim unity is a matter of life and death for the Muslims [especially for the Iranians who are unfairly being targeted currently], it is amazing that ancient prejudices, ignorant opinions and obsolete ideas are being given currency to by the Twelver Shi‘a officially with the approval of their ‘*ulemā*’.

In this chapter, the author accepts at once that the major *tahrīf* exists in the area of *tā’wīl* [interpretation]. He states that many verses refer to ‘Ali [son-in-law of the Holy Prophet] and his family – which are not recognized for their particularity by the

majority of Muslims [the Sunnīs]. Allied to this is the statement attributed to Ja'far al-Sādiq that the names of the fourteen *ma'sūmīn* [infallibles i.e. the Prophet, Fātima and the twelve imāms] were present in the Quran and have been removed. Many statements are attributed to 'Omar ibn al-Khattāb and 'Āyesha Siddīqa that there are 'verses missing from the Quran' [A. Jeffery], that pages of the Quran were eaten by goats, that the surah 33 [*Al-Ahzāb*] had 100 verses [it now has 73] or that at one time it was longer than surah *Al-Baqara* [286 vv.]. If these persons ['Omar or 'Āyesha] were opposed to the *Ahl al-beyt*, why would they admit of such *tahrīf* that went in favour of the privileges of the *Ahl al-beyt*? Also why should such testimony be accepted so totally? Then, how can a chapter on *tahrīf* be followed by a debate on the *i'jāz al-Qurān* if the purity of the Quran Text is in doubt?

It is clear that there is nothing historically valid about these statements nor are they based on academic foundations. Later divergent beliefs have retrospectively revised attitudes towards the Quran. All this is unworthy of refutation. No one can hold such a false and pernicious belief and then also claim to speak for Islam. In the present climate of violent and militant attitudes towards Islam, it is extremely unfortunate – if not downright disastrous – that such views be proclaimed. May Allah guide the Muslims to protect themselves!

Dr. Mahmoud Ayoub and the Shi‘ī belief in the *tahrīf* [?] of the Quran

This assertion of corruption revolves round what is purported to be the deliberate omission from the Quran at some stage of verses/surahs/references to the members of the Holy Prophet’s family. It has to be admitted that this assertion or allegation is of comparatively late origin and only indicates how belief can be stretched to bizarre limits. There are about fifteen Quranic manuscripts calligraphed by the Caliph ‘Ali in various museums in the world. All of them are identical – down to the last stroke – with the Quran that we have now ‘between the two covers’ [= *bayn al-daffateyn*]. However, the die-hard Twelvers who are aghast at the purity have tried to write extensive treatises against this. Among some of the books written in Urdu, we may note:

1. *Tahrīf al-Qurān ki haqīqat* by Syed ‘Ali Naqi d. 1988
2. *Tahrīf-i-Qurān* by Syed Rāhat Hussain Gopālpuri d. 1374 AH
3. *Tahrīf-i-Qurān* by Syed ‘Ali Hairi d. 1340 AH

4. *Mas'ala Tahrif-i-Qurān* by Tālib Hussain Karpālvi.

[These references have been taken from *A Bibliography of Imāmia Books published in Indo-Pak sub-continent*, vol. 1, Urdu Books, by Syed 'Ārif Hussain Naqvi, Islamabad, 1997.]

An exhaustive exposition of the 'validity' of *tahrif* is contained in the book, *Fasl al-Khitāb fi ithbāt Tahrif al-Kitāb Rabb al-Arbāb* [Arabic] by 'Allāma Nūri Tabarsi [d. 1901]. He states that the two kinds of *tahrif* i.e. *tahrif fi al-nass* [corruption of the text] and *tahrif fi al-ma'na* [distorted interpretation] are both amply present in the Quran in almost each and every surah. On the other hand, one of the great Shi'ī scholars [of a previous age], Shaykh Sadūq, in his *Risāla-al-I'tiqādāt* [trans. Asaf A. A. Fyzee titled *A Shi'ite Creed*, Bombay, 1942] categorically states: 'And he who asserts that we say it [the Quran] is greater in extent than this [the present text] is a liar.'

The famous blind Shi'ī scholar, Mahmoud Ayoub writes: 'The Imams are regarded by the Shi'ī community as the only legitimate authorities on the Quran after the Prophet.' [*The Quran and its interpreters*, vol. 1, State University of New York: 1984, p. 37.] Thus according to the Twelver Shi'a

belief, all discussion on the Quran has to flow from an Imām and not independently.

In an essay, *'The speaking Quran and the silent Quran: a study of the principles and development of Imāmi Shi'ī tafsīr'* by the same Mahmoud Ayoub – contributed to *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Quran* [ed. Andrew Rippin, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], the author has this to say of the Quran:

The Imāms have a special relation to the Quran... It [Quran] was with God... it is for humanity a source of healing and blessing in this life and solace and bliss in the life to come. The Imāms share these qualities with the Quran and have indeed been identified with it. They were with it before creation, formed from God's light. It was for their sake that all things were brought into being ... [pp. 179-180] The Shi'ī community considers the Imāms associates of the Quran [p. 182].

Mahmoud Ayoub quotes the fifth Shi'ī Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir as saying: 'Had it not been that things were added to the Book of God and others deleted, our right would not have been obscured from anyone....[p. 182].

Ayoub further quotes the sixth Shi'ī Imām, Ja'far al-Sādiq, as stating: 'Had the Quran been read as it was sent down, you would have found us named in it.' [p. 183].

The Twelver Shi'a also believe in the sacred quality of the following:

1. The *Jāmia*: a scroll 70 cubits long [one cubit being as long as the Prophet's forearm]. It contained all details of future situations that will befall the Shi'a.
2. The *Mus-haf Fātima*: a scroll three times as long as the Quran containing the names of all Twelver supporters till the end of time and their activities.
3. The red and white *jafrs* [containers] in & which all previous revealed books and the
4. *Mus-haf Fātima* will be contained as well as belongings of the Holy Prophet.

All these documents of massive size and content are with the missing twelfth Imām who will bring them when he appears at the end of time. [*Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism*, 'Abdulaziz 'Abdulhussein Sachedina, State University of New York Press, 1981, pp. 21-22.]

The difficulty with the Twelver Shi'a lies in the fact that they have rewritten their history

retrospectively to accord with its later development. It is impossible for them to accept the Quran as a document of divine purity when the authorities who promulgated the official text were, in their eyes, criminals, usurpers and apostates. The evil attributed to the early *Rāshidūn* caliphs has, perforce, to be extended to the Quran [collected and issued error-free by them]. If they accept the textual purity of the Quran, they will have to accept that it is the same as is on the 'Preserved Tablet' [*Lawh al-mahfūz*] and that no references to persons or surahs named after persons attached to the Prophet's family were ever contained in it. This is a dilemma that the Twelver Shi'a will have to sort out themselves which, so far, they have been unable to resolve.

As might well be expected, the Shi'ī claims of textual corruption in the Quran have been used extensively by Orientalists to suggest tampering with the Quran Text.

Finally, it may be added that the *ghulāt* [= extremist] Shi'a such as the Nuseyris [of Syria] and the Druze [of Lebanon] and extinct sects like the Kaysānia and the Khattābiya attributed divinity to 'Ali b. Abi Tālib. No one from the majority of Muslims has attributed divinity even to the Holy Prophet let alone any of his companions and family.

The Quran : now and in the future

The end of the 20th century saw a plethora of publications, usually hostile, on the Quran and the appearance of several 'companions' and 'encyclopedia' relating to the Quran. Far from accepting the place of Islam in a much-touted 'pluralistic' world, the animosity generated against it has become deeper and the violence against it more destructive. The basic point of divergence focuses on the nature of the Quran – whether it is wholly a Divine scripture or a human composition. There is no middle ground. Clearly, the opponents of Islam have made up their mind. What they feel they should do is to employ a repertoire of new weaponry in their arsenal, regarding offence as the best defence. These 'new' weapons masquerade as 'study' and 'scholarship' – rather than open hostility – though this also shows through the thin veneer of intellectuality. Certainly, the foes of Islam have done their homework and have produced works that may be remarkable as propaganda but ineffective as 'learning.' This can be seen in the continuum of the writings of Nöldeke, Paret, Bell and Blachere – as well as the new school of

‘encyclopedists’ such as Jane D. McAuliffe, Oliver Leaman, Andrew Rippin, Bernard Lewis and others. The governments of the ‘Islamophobe’ countries have poured massive funds into ‘think tanks’ for their aggressive ambitions and they promote as well as utilize the tendentious efforts of such hired mercenaries. The key principle of Islam i.e. the *jihād bi al-qalam* [= endeavour through writing/scholarship] has been turned against itself – much to its own detriment. Have the Muslims to re-learn the principles of their faith in distorted form at second-hand from their foes? In spite of all this – and the large funds available to missionaries/spies – Islam continues to be the world’s fastest growing religion. The simple appeal of Islam to man’s innate capacity for good finds its maximum response in the oppressed, deprived and wretched masses of the world. Certainly, no advanced ‘research’ with a pre-programmed agenda is going to work here. How many educated persons have accepted the false and malicious reasoning of the Orientalists and lost their faith in Islam? On the other hand, the study of Islam has opened the way to the Truth for many remarkable persons – including Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, Julius Germanus and T.B. Irving. The key is to be found in intellectual honesty and openness. Those who start off with pre-determined notions of antagonism have to defend these all the time and work them into an impregnable fortress where Truth cannot enter.

The message of the Quran is universal; its audience is all mankind. It addresses both unbelievers and the converted. The onus is on the believers to believe fully in Islam; to exemplify it in their personal and public conduct; to offer it to the world as the ultimate panacea for all the problems of this age of anxiety now and in the future. Despite reversals and the machinations against it, the future of Islam [given its record of the past fourteen centuries] is extremely bright.

‘Truth hath come and falsehood hath vanished away’ [s. 17 v. 81] is valid both for the past and the future.



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The study of the Quran is a life-long occupation. The collection of material, its study and assimilation, is a task taking many years, indeed decades, and even then one does approach even the fringe of completion. Completion is an impossibility in itself for any human within a limited life-span. Below is an extremely select bibliography that generally omits works dealing with Islamic history, the *Hadith* and *Fiqh*. The works cited refer to the edition used rather than the first edition of the work. Many books have been reprinted in different places and at different times and, in the case of classical works in Arabic, no copyright applies. The names of books and authors [as written in South Asia] are given according to their local spellings – whether in English or in Urdu. The books included in the **Bibliography** refer to the edition actually used rather than the first edition. Where information has been available regarding the first edition, it has been included. After the sub-sections, the ‘omitted’ books refer to those that were consulted but not regarded necessary for entry. The Arabic prefix *al* has generally

been omitted. All internal references are to be found in the **Bibliography**. As long as Muslims exist anywhere in the world, the Quran will be read, discussed and written about – for it is central to the life of the Muslims and has influenced millions in a way no other book has done or possibly can do. Details of books [subject-wise] have been given so that those who wish to pursue a certain line of investigation may do so.

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Lectures

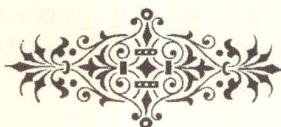
In October 1985 – January 1986, a series of lectures was arranged by the Dr. I. H. Qureshi Chair, University of Karachi. Among the lecturers invited to speak was Dr. Mohammad ‘Abd-al-Raūf of Al-Azhar University, Cairo. His lecture was titled *Al-Quran: the abiding code*. In it, Dr. A. Raūf referred to many of the fallacies and faults of the Orientalists [Hirschfield, Bell *et al.*] in their writings on the Quran. It contained the interesting information about the discovery of an early [first half of the 1st century A.H.] copy of the Quran written on leather in the Yemen – later called *Masāhif al-San’aa*. This is on display at the Museum in Kuwait. Its text is identical with the present Quran.

The text of this lecture and others is reprinted in one volume titled, *Shari’ah, Ummah and Khalifah*, Karachi, 1987. [The other lecturers were Dr. Halil Inalcik (Turkey) and (late) Dr. Ismā‘il Rāji al-Fāruqi (USA)].

Postscript

The IRCICA [Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture], Istanbul, Turkey, has recently [2007] issued a handsome volume reproducing the text of the 'Othmān Quran present in the Topkapi Museum, Istanbul, in its original writing with the modern Arabic text in interlinear format. This is a work of great effort and skill and is wholly welcome and necessary. Credit goes to the scholars involved in this project of arduously presenting the sacred volume. The two texts are totally identical with each other and should permanently dispel all doubts about the matchless purity and faultless preservation of the Quran.

Praise be to Allah Who has revealed the Quran – the Book free of doubt.



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The index omits frequently used terms such as Quran, *i'jaz*, Arabic etc.; all names/terms contained in the list of contents and bibliography; the Arabic definite article – *al*.

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