The Quran as Intertext: A Critical Reflection

LE CORAN UN INTER-TEXT: UNE REFLEXION CRITIQUE

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Abstract

The purpose of this critical study was to objectively put the Qur'an in an interpretive framework using intertextuality as a methodological tool and look at this holy book from the perspective of the text as intertext. First, the Qur'an was considered as the specific feature of Islam and whether it is God's word or not. Then, some definitions of Islam were given and some Islamic themes such as creation, Day of Judgment, and paradise and hell shared between different holy texts were compared intertextually. Finally, to put the Qur'an into a broader framework, it was tried to discuss about its strength in terms of miracle both from the perspectives of meaning and form.

Key words: Intertextuality; The Qur'an; Miracle; Meaning; Form

Résumé

Le but de cette étude critique a été objectivement mis le Coran dans un cadre d'interprétation en utilisant l'intertextualité comme un outil méthodologique et de regarder ce livre sacré dans la perspective du texte comme intertexte. Premièrement, le Coran a été considéré comme la caractéristique spécifique de l'Islam et si elle est la parole de Dieu ou non. Puis, quelques définitions de l'islam ont été donnés et certains thèmes islamiques telles que la création, Jour du Jugement, et le paradis et l'enfer partagé entre les différents textes sacrés ont été comparés intertextuellement. Enfin, pour mettre le Coran dans un cadre plus large, il a été tenté pour discuter de sa force en termes de miracle à la fois du point de vue du sens et de forme.

Mots clés: Intertextualité; Le Coran; Miracle; Signification; Forme

INTRODUCTION

According to traditional Muslim teaching, the Qur'an is linguistically perfect without defect and unevennesses, unique, inimitable and unsurpassable that unbelievers could not produce any similar writing, not even ten Surahs, indeed not even one. It is also considered to be untranslatable, infallible and absolutely reliable and as the revelation was given to the Prophet word for word, it must be free from all errors and also free from all contradictions. So, we may ask, is the Qur'an a book fallen from heaven, not of this world and therefore not to be subjected to worldly scholarly criteria? Is it possible to have a historical criticism of the Qur'an with a thoroughly constructive, not destructive intent (in favor of a contemporary Muslim faith)? This study takes intertextuality as a critical methodology to look at and analyze the Qur'an to argue whether it can be treated as intertext or not.

INTERTEXTUALITY

Texts, whether they are literary or non-literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorists now call intertextual. The act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover

its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext.

Allen (2000) looks at intertextuality through its major theoretical contexts, from its origins in Kristeva's blending of Saussure and Bakhtin, through its poststructuralist articulation in the work of Barthes and its structuralist articulation in Genette and Riffaterre, on to feminist and postcolonial adaptations of the term, and finally to its application within the non-literary arts, the current cultural epoch and modern computer technologies.

Saussure produced a definition in which a sign can be imagined as a two-sided coin combining a *signified* (concept) and a *signifier* (sound-image). This notion of the linguistic sign emphasizes that its meaning is non referential: a sign is not a word's reference to some object in the world but the combination, conveniently sanctioned, between a signifier and a signified (Saussure, 1974). The meanings we produce and find within language, then, are relational; they depend upon processes of combination and association within the differential system of language itself. Signs are not 'positive terms'; they are not referential, they only possess what meaning they do possess because of their combinatory and associative relation to other signs. No sign has a meaning of its own. Signs exist within a system and produce meaning through their similarity to and difference from other signs.

As Allen (2000, p. 15) notes, the term intertextuality first enters into the French language in Julia Kristeva's early work of the middle to late 1960s. In essays such as 'The Bounded Text' (Kristeva, 1980, p. 36–63) and 'Word, Dialogue, Novel' (1980, p, 64–91) Kristeva introduces the work of the Russian literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin to the French speaking world. Therefore, as Bakhtin has a central role in forming the foundation of intertextuality, I elaborate more on his ideas which are the backbone of the intertextuality theory.

The dialogical theory of language originated in the writings of the Bakhtin Circle (Brandist, 2002) and its most famous members: Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986, 1993) and Valentin Voloshinov (1973, 1976). More recent contributions to dialogical thinking include those of Rommetveit (1992), Markova & Foppa (1990, 1991), Markova, Graumann, & Foppa (1995), Linell (1998), and Lahteenmaki (1998a, 1998b).

Dialogue in Bakhtin philosophy plays the central and fundamental role in creating different kinds of discourse. In his analysis of language, Bakhtin (1986) considered the utterance as a basic form of verbal communication. The length of the utterance varies from a single word or a short phrase to a long text, and it is the exchange between the speakers that determines the boundaries of an utterance. An utterance is therefore connected to the concept of voice, or the "talking personality, the speaking consciousness" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 434).

In Bakhtin's understanding, to produce an abstract account of literary language or any language is to forget that language is utilized by individuals in specific social contexts. A word or an utterance captures the human centered and socially specific aspect of language. "The word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of those concrete contexts into which it has entered. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 201).

Bakhtin's (1981) conception of dialogism is that "in the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active. . . . Understanding comes to fruition only in response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other" (p. 282). In contrast to the concept of dialogue, Bakhtin's concept of monologue refers to "any discourse that seeks to deny the dialogic nature of existence, and pretends to be the 'last word', the authoritative word". Morris (1994, p. 247) asserts that such discourse is typical of authoritarian regimes.

In fact, Bakhtin reminds us that "social dialogue reverberates in all aspects of discourse, in those (aspects) relating to 'content' as well as the 'formal' aspects themselves" (1981, p. 300), and that in everyday dialogue, "the listener and his response are regularly taken into account." (p. 280). In this respect, discourse and thought ipso facto are, to use Bakhtin's term, heteroglossic. That is, the word, the utterance, the verbal moment are multivoiced, infused with "shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents" (Bakhtin, 1981: 276) that reflect what Holquist (1981) calls "a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup" (p. 428). For Bakhtin, the development of discourse in societies began with 'monoglossia,' a stable and unified language, then shifted to 'polyglossia,' two or more languages simultaneously existing in the same society, and finally to 'heteroglossia,' the conflict between centralized and decentralized, or 'official' and 'unofficial' discourses (Morris, 1994, p. 246). Alive and always active, language moves in multiple directions simultaneously: in perpetual tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces – the tendency to unify, centralize, fix, formalize, privilege, and create norms – and the tendency to invent, innovate, vary, expand, and specialize. Bakhtin terms the locus of those forces heteroglossia. The meaning of any utterance

is never fixed and static, but differs in rich and complex ways according to the context and conditions within which it is used. "Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272). Bakhtin understood dialogue to occur in the spaces between two parties as a result of centrifugal outward push. It is "outside of the 'soul' of the speaker and does not belong to him only" (Todorov, 1984, p. 52) and therefore occurs outside ourselves in an environment of egalitarian reciprocity. In communication, "centrifugal forces compel movement, becoming, and history; they long for change and new life, whereas centripetal forces urge stasis" (Hazen, 1993, p. 17). So, for Bakhtin, a word is even more than a text. It is interwoven with the world.

But, the word intertextuality was introduced and developed by Julia Kristeva in 1980. Kristeva set out to establish a new mode of semiotics, which she called semianalysis. She attempted to capture in this approach a vision of texts as always in a state of production, rather than being products to be quickly consumed. As she writes: "Developed from and in relation to these modern texts the new semiotic models then turn to the social text, to those social practices of which 'literature' is only one unvalorized variant, in order to conceive of them as so many ongoing transformations and/or productions. (Kristeva, 1986, p. 87). Kristeva writes: the minimal unit of poetic language is at least double, not in the sense of the signifier/signified dyad, but rather, in terms of one and other .... The double would be the minimal sequence of a paragrammatic semiotics to be worked out starting from the work of Saussure ... and Bakhtin. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 69)

Bakhtin and Kristeva share, however, an insistence that texts cannot be separated from the larger cultural or social textuality out of which they are constructed. All texts, therefore, contain within them the ideological structures and struggles expressed in society through discourse. Before concluding, it is of great importance to name another critical figure, Ronald Barthes, whose ideas, along with other intertextual theorists, had an important influence in the realm of ideological interpretation and intertextual analysis.

The fact that the theory of intertextuality propounded by Barthes causes what he, in an essay of 1968, famously styled 'the death of the Author' (Barthes, 1977a, p. 142–8) is perhaps one of the more widely known features of intertextual theory.

Barthes describes the text as: woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages, antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the 'sources', the 'influences' of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read:* they are quotations without inverted commas. (Barthes, 1977a, p.160)

Barthes writes: The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*. The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. (Barthes, 1977a, p. 145)

Since the genesis of intertextuality, which started from Saussure, theorized by Bakhtin, and brought about by Kristeva and Barthes, many critical scholars such as Derrida (1973, 1976), Foucault (1977, 1979), Genette (1988, 1992, 1997), Riffaterre (1978, 1983, 1990b), among many others, have tried to follow and extend this theory. What they all agree is that there is no text which belong to a particular voice and no text or book can be written by an individual mind or head.

THE QUR'AN- THE SPECIFIC FEATURE OF ISLAM

'In the name of God (*bi-smi llah*), the Most Gracious (*ar-rahman*), the Dispenser of Grace (*ar-rahim*). All praise is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace, Lord of the Day of Judgement! Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid. Guide us the straight way—the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings, not of those who have been condemned [by Thee], nor of those who go astray (Surah 1.1–7).'[3]

So runs the first Surah of the Qur'an, 'the opening' (*al-fatihah*), which also regularly introduces Muslim prayer. Some classical and contemporary Muslim authors see in it the foundation, the sum and the quintessence of the Qur'an: 'It (the opening) contains, in a condensed form, all the fundamental principles laid down in the Qur'an: the principle of God's oneness and uniqueness, of His being the originator and fosterer of the universe, the fount of all life-giving grace; the One to whom man is ultimately responsible, the only power that can really guide and help; the call to righteous action in the life of this world; the principle of life after death and of the organic consequences of man's actions and behavior; the principle of guidance through God's message-bearers and, flowing from it, the principle of the continuity of all true religions; and, finally the need for voluntary self-surrender to the will of the Supreme Being and, thus, for worshipping him alone.'

As Kermani (1999) notes, it is *one* book. Unlike the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'an is not a collection of very different writings which to the outsider initially seem

to have no common denominator. Nor is it like the New Testament, which offers its message in four very different Gospels that contradict one another in many details and are therefore the occasion for some confusion. The Qur'an is a single book, handed down by one and the same prophet within twenty-two years, and therefore is a coherent unity, despite differences in period and style. It was put in order later (by and large according to length) in 114 sections denoted by the Arabic term *Surah*, plural *Suwar*; these in turn consist of verses, the smallest textual units ('signs': *ayah*, plural *ayat*). There is mention of a book (*kitab*) in the Qur'an itself.

THE QUR'AN—GOD'S WORD OR NOT?

It is historically certain that between 610 and 632 Muhammad proclaimed the prophetic message set down in the Qur'an in the Arab trading cities of Mecca and Medina on the incense road (Küng, 2007). According to the Quran's own words, the Qur'an was transmitted to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel: 'Gabriel (*Jibril*), verily, by God's leave, has brought down upon thy heart this [divine writ] which confirms the truth of whatever there still remains [of revelation], and is a guidance and glad tiding for the believers' (Surah 2.97).

According to the current Muslim view, the original book ('the mother of the Book': *umm al-kitab*), which is regarded as the original of all holy scriptures, is not kept on earth but in heaven, as one can read in the Qur'an itself: 'Behold, it is a truly noble discourse, [conveyed unto man] in a well-guarded divine writ which none but the pure [of heart] can touch: a revelation from the Sustainer of all the worlds!' (Surah 56.77–80). Or at another point: 'Nay, but this [divine writ which they reject] is a discourse sublime, upon an imperishable tablet [inscribed]' (Surah 85.21).

DEFINITIONS OF ISLAM

Definitions of Islam by sociologists and political theorists, philologists and historians, are important, but they often show significant limitations of understanding. The British social scientist Ernest Gellner (1981) begins his book *Muslim Society* with the words 'Islam is the blueprint of a social order'. The Göttingen political theorist Bassam Tibi (1985), who is of Syrian Muslim origin, writes: 'Islam is not only a political ideology but also and above all a cultural system'.

Islam is certainly also all that, but do the majority of Muslims understand Islam primarily in this way? The Heidelberg Semitic scholar and expert on Islam, Anton Schall, writes: 'I vigorously reject this view, not as a retarding representative of the orchid specialists who are hostile to the social sciences in a way that seems anachronistic' and who therefore reject Bassam Tibi's

view, but 'because Gellner and Tibi are mistaken about Muhammad's religious beginnings'.

One may agree with this verdict but then hesitate when one reads Schall's own definition of Islam in his article in the current multi-volume Protestant reference work *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* XVI (1987, as cited in Küng, 2007). His first sentence runs: 'Islam is the religion founded by Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah ibn al-'Abdalmuttalib, whose followers call themselves Muslim or Muslims. Islam is a syncretistic and eclectic collection of several religions from the world of Muhammad. The centre of the religion of Islam is Allah, generally thought to derive from the Arabic *al-Ilah*, the supreme or high God of the city of Mecca before the appearance of Muhammad'.

Is the Qur'an, in every respect—linguistic, stylistic, logical, historical, and scientific—a miraculous, absolutely perfect, holy book, which has to be accepted literally? Traditional Islamic scholarship does not regard critical investigation as its task. Its perspective is, above all, the description, explanation and justification of an ideal Islam. So may we seriously criticize Islam from the inside or even from the outside? In what follows, we try to investigate some traces of intertextuality comparing some important thematic beliefs of the Qur'an with some other holy books.

CREATION

The Hebrew Bible says of God's act of creation, 'And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light' (Gen.1.3). Likewise the Qur'an says: 'It is He who grants life and deals death; and when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be"—and it is' (Surah 40.68). However, this very verse, to which there are many parallels, shows that the Qur'an has a different perspective. The Bible is intensely interested in the beginning of the creation; the Qur'an is very much more interested in its progress and continuation, in God's creative power today. God not only created the world but sustains it as long as he wills.

Sometimes Muslims claim that the Qur'an says nothing about the six-day work of the Creator and therefore does not conflict with modern science. But the Qur'an also says: 'It is God who has created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six aeons, and is established on the throne of His almightiness (to rule the world)' (Surah 32.4). However, whereas the 'six-day work' in the Bible, related at length and in detail, is programmatically put right at the beginning, in the Qur'an it is mentioned briefly and almost in passing in the middle of other discussions (Surahs 7.54; 10.3; 11.7; 25.59; 50.38; 57.4). Only at one point is it described at rather more length (Surah 41.9–12).

Initially, it is enough to say that in the Qur'an, as in the Bible, the statements about divine omnipotence

and human responsibility are juxtaposed and nowhere balanced. Thus interpreters speak of two complementary truths, both of which should be taken seriously.

DAY OF JUDGMENT

According to the Qur'an the 'Day of Judgement' (*yaum ad-din*) is the 'Day of Reckoning' (*yaum al-hisab*). On this last day of human history the graves will open and the dead will be raised to life. God, who has created the world and constantly sustains it, is capable of new creation and resurrection. This means that at the end all humankind will be gathered before God. God is nowhere described but appears with his angels to make the great division between the saved and the damned. As in Jewish apocalyptic and in the apocalypses of the New Testament, this gathering together of all human beings to God, the universal judge and consummator, is depicted in a great picture of judgment (Küng, 2007). It is introduced by the sound of trumpets and horns and by cosmic catastrophes: seas overflow, mountains crash down, the sun is darkened and clouds fall from heaven (Surahs 56.1–7; 69.13–16; 77. 8–13; 78.18–20; 81.1–14; 82.1–5; 84.1–6).

PARADISE AND HELL

There are statements about a blessed vision of God and about forgiveness and peace, but they are very sparse and marginal (Surah 75.22) by comparison with the extraordinarily vivid depictions of a paradise full of earthly bliss. In the 'Garden of Delight' ('Garden of Eden') the just will be granted 'great happiness' under God's good pleasure: a life of completely untroubled sensual joy. They will lie on couches decorated with precious stones, eat delicious food, and drink cups of water and milk which never go stale, with clarified honey and even delicious wine. All this is served by boys who are eternally young. The blessed may even enjoy the company of charming, untouched paradisiacal virgins ('companions pure, most beautiful of eye') (Surahs 44.54; 55.46–78; 78.31–4).

Are we to understand all these statements symbolically, like the parables of the New Testament, which also mention the end-time feast with new wine, (Mark 14.25), the wedding (Matt. 25.1–13), the great banquet to which all are invited? (Luke 14.15–24). Many present-day Islamic warriors for God have undoubtedly taken them literally. The descriptions of paradise in the Qur'an are images of hope, not yet afflicted by paleness of thought, images which express the deepest longings of the human heart and even include intense human relationships.

Considering the ideas of the intertextuality school such as Bakhtin, Kristeva among others, the above analysis shows that the Qur'an is also interwoven with different voices and it is not the production of one single voice.

Such an analysis has led some scholars to conclude that the Qur'an is a book like other holy books and can be subject to interpretation.

At the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century a series of pioneer thinkers tried to work for a contemporary and viable Islam. Some of them are particularly concerned with a contemporary exegesis of the Qur'an: they include the Pakistani professors Fazlur Rahman and Riffat Hassan and the Iranian philosopher Abdolkarim Soroush; the South Africans Farid Esack and Abdul Karim Tayob; the Egyptians Hasan Hanafi and Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd; the Sudanese jurist Abdullahi Ahmed an-Naʿim; the Tunisian Mohamed Talbi; the Kuwaiti Abul-Fadl. In France the Algerian Mohammed Arkoun and in Ankara several young Turkish scholars are engaged in hadith criticism. Rahman concludes: 'There is no doubt that whereas on the one hand, the Revelation emanated from God, on the other, it was also intimately connected with his deeper personality (Rahman, 1958). Rahman did a historical-critical hermeneutics of the Qur'an.

Mohammed Arkoun saw three scriptural traditions, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Qur'an, together. Like Paul Ricoeur before him, he differentiates three levels of the word of God for all prophetic religions:

1st. the first is the word of God itself that, transcendent and infinite, has been revealed to prophets only in fragments;

2nd. the second is formed by the historical manifestations of the word of God through the prophets of Israel (in Hebrew), through Jesus of Nazareth (in Aramaic) and through Muhammad (in Arabic): messages that were originally oral statements, heard and handed down by the disciples (Qur'anic discourse);

3rd. the third is formed by the textual objectification of the word of God in which the Qur'an, like the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, becomes a written text (*mushaf*, Qur'anic text) finally present in a closed corpus (canon), on which countless further books (exegesis, theology, law, translations) are then based (as cited in Küng, 2007, p. 530).

However, the theological syntheses, exegeses and law books should not be confused with the Qur'anic text. Also, other scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1986) have tried to make a connection between Christianity and Islam. Nasr comments that the destinies of Islam and Christianity are intertwined, that God has willed both religions to exist and to be ways of salvation for millions of human beings.

One, however, may question if the Qur'an is a book like other holy books and prone to historical and hermeneutic interpretation, how the passage of time has not been vanished its strength and there are many followers who admit that it is not a simple work. There must be something hidden in the message of this holy book, a hidden voice which cannot be heard by textual

analysis or some other tools. The popular historian Karen Armstrong (1973: 171) states, "It is as though Muhammad had created an entirely new literary form…Without this expe¬rience of the Koran, it is extremely unlikely that Islam would have taken root". In the rest of my discussion, we try to look at the Qur'an from the point of view of uniqueness both in content and form.

THE QUR'AN'S AS MIRACLE

The unique literary form forms the backdrop to the doctrine of I'jaz al-Quran, the in-imitability of the Qur'an, which lies at the heart of the Qur'an's claim to being of divine origin. The Qur'an states, "If you are in doubt of what We have revealed to Our messenger, then produce one chapter like it. Call upon all your helpers, besides Allah, if you are truthful" (Surah 2. 23). And "Or do they say he fabricated the message? Nay, they have no faith. Let them produce a recital like it, if they speak the truth." (Surah 52. 33-34)

The inability of any person to produce anything like the Qur'an, due to its unique liter¬ary form is the essence of the Qur'anic miracle. A miracle is defined as "events which lie outside the productive capacity of nature" (Bilynskyj, 1982). Or it is something that goes beyond the laws that Allah has placed in the universe, and is not subjected to causality. It cannot be attained by personal effort and, regardless of its time and nature, is a gift from God (Al-Suyuti, ….p. 148).

The argument posed by Muslim theologians and philosophers is that if, with the finite set of Arabic linguistic tools at humanity's disposal, there is no effective challenge; then providing a naturalistic explanation for the Qur'an's uniqueness is incoherent and does not explain its inimitability (Craig, 1986). This is because the natural capacity of the text producer, or author, is able to produce the known literary forms in the Arabic language. The development of an entirely unique literary form is beyond the scope of the productive nature of any author, hence a supernatural entity, God, is the only suf¬ficient and comprehensive explanation.

It should be noted that the much celebrated word "*mu`jizah*" was neither mentioned in the Qur'an, nor in the Sunnah. It was used towards the end of the second century (Muslim, 1999, p.17). The Qur'an uses instead of it words such as *ayah*, *bayyinah*, *burhan*, and *sultan*:

They swear their strongest oaths by Allah, that if a (special) Sign [*ayah*] came to them, by it they would believe. Say: "Certainly (all) Signs are in the power of Allah: but what will make you (Muslims) realize that (even) if (special) Signs came, they will not believe?" (Surah 6.109). To the Thamud people (we sent) Salih, one of their own brethren: he said: "O my people! Worship Allah; ye have no other god but Him. Now hath come unto you a clear (sign) from your Lord! This she-camel of

Allah is a Sign [*bayyinah*] unto you (Surah 7. 73). Thrust thy hand into thy bosom, and it will come forth white without stain (or harm), and draw thy hand close to thy side (to guard) against fear. Those are the two credentials [*burhanan*] from thy Lord to Pharaoh and his chiefs: for truly they are a people rebellious and wicked." (Surah 28. 32). They said: "Ah! Ye are no more than human, like ourselves! Ye wish to turn us away from what our fathers used to worship; then bring us some clear authority [*sultan*]." (Surah 14. 11).

Mustafa Muslim (1999, p. 17-18) points to the fact that the term "ayah" is also used for "verse" in the Qur'an. Therefore, "*mu`jizah*" was chosen in order to avoid terminology with more than one meaning.

THE UNIQUENESS OF FORM

The literary scholars believe that the Qur'an has its own unique form which cannot be described as any of the known lit¬erary forms. However, due to similarities between saj' and early Meccan chapters, some Western Scholars describe the Qur'an's literary form as saj'. Angelika Neuwrith (2008) states, "Saj' is given up completely in the later Surahs where the rhyme makes use of a simple –un/-in – scheme to mark the end of rather long and syntactically complex verse….saj' style is thus exclusively characteristic of the early suras".

These scholars who categorize the Qur'an as saj' do so on the basis that the Qur'ans uniqueness is acknowledged. To illustrate this Nicholson (1930, p.159) states, "Thus, as regards its external features, the style of the Koran is modeled upon saj', or rhymed prose…but with such freedom that it may fairly be described as original."

Although there is an attempt to try to describe the Qur'an as rhymed prose, western scholars concluded that it is a unique or an original form of saj'. To highlight this fact Bruce Lawrence (2005, p. 64) states, "Those passages from the Qur'an that approach saj' still elude all procrustean efforts to reduce them to an alternative form of saj'".

Theologians and Arab Linguists such as, Abd al-Jabbar (1960, p. 224), al-Rummani (1956, p. 97-98), al-Khatibi (1953: 36) and al-Baqillani (1968, p. 86-89) held that the Qur'an does not contain saj' and is unique to all types of saj'. Their reasoning is that in the Qur'an, the use of language is semantically orientated and its literary structure is distinct, whereas in saj', conformity to style is a primary objective. Furthermore the Qur'an uses literary and linguistic devices in such a way that has not been used before and achieves an unparallel communicative effect.

The Qur'an is truly unique in composition. It is neither prose nor poetry and an aspect of this unique form is achieved by fusing metrical and non-metrical composition. This view is also supported by the famous Arabic Literary scholar Arthur J. Arberry (1998, p. x), "For

the Koran is neither prose nor poetry, but a unique fusion of both".

Devin J. Stewart (2008) who is one of the only western scholars to discuss the literary form of the Qur'an and highlight the formal differences between saj' and what he calls, "Qur'anic saj'" concludes, "The analysis undertaken in this study makes possible some preliminary observations on the formal differences between Qur'anic saj'" (p. 102). According to Stewart, features that render the Qur'an unique, in the context of the discussion of saj' are:

a. Greater Tendency to Mono-Rhyme

The Qur'an differs from saj' due to its use of mono-rhyme, meaning that it's rhyming scheme conforms to a few rhymes rather than a selection of many rhymes. According to the analysis of Fretwell (2000), just over 50% of the whole Qur'an ends with the same letter. This particular use of rhyme, in a text the size of the Qur'an, has not been replicated in any Arabic text. Stewart states: "Qur'anic saj' has a much greater tendency to mono-rhyme than does later saj'. A small number of rhymes… are predominant in the Qur'an whereas rhyme in later saj' shows great-er variation.

b. Inexact Rhyme

The general description of saj' is that it has an end rhyme. However the Qur'an does not conform to a constant or consistent rhyme, which reflects the work of ar-Rummani (1956, p. 97-98) who states that "the Qur'an's use of language is semantically orientated and does not conform to a particular style". Stewart (2008, p. 102) states, "The Qur'an allows inexact rhymes which are not found in later saj'".

c. Higher Frequency of Rhetorical Features

The Qur'an is a 'sea of rhetoric'. The Qur'an exhibits an unparalleled frequency of rhetori-cal features, surpassing any other Arabic text, classical or modern. The use of rhetoric in the Qur'an stands out from any type of discourse (see also Abdul-Raof, 2000, p. 95-137; 2003, p. 265-398 and Esack 1993, p. 126-128).

As it can be seen from the above analysis, the form of Qur'an is also not susceptible to textual analysis let alone the meaning. We conclude that the nature of this holy book, both from the perspective of meaning and form is not subject to textual analysis. If textual analysis is going to take every text back to an earlier history, the history itself and the passage of time is a stamp proof to the ever novelty and miraculousness of this book. What we can confess is that it has come from God and the carrier of this holy message is without any dispute, Mohammad, peace be upon him.

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