



An Introduction to 'Ulum al-Qur'an: The Field of Qur'anic Studies

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Introduction

“It does not become worn out by repetition and its wonders do not come to an end.”¹ One of the marvels of the Qur'an, beyond its transcendent nature, is its vast scope which addresses numerous dimensions of human nature. Every individual approaches the Qur'an from a unique angle driven by an intellectual query or triggered by a spiritual experience. These queries and experiences shape our engagement with the words of the Creator. A primary cause of the Qur'an's revelation is to foster a personal reflective connection with the Divine through *tadabbur*.² Our pursuit of proper *tadabbur* prompts a multi-faceted examination of the Qur'an's inimitable nature, textual history, linguistic styles, theological premises, ethical standards, and legal injunctions. *Tadabbur* subsumes well-established theological stances regarding the Qur'an's message and spiritual aptitude for its spiritual guidance. Recipients of the same message vary in their receptive and responsive modes based on their belief and spiritual statuses.³

Unlocking the Qur'anic text was the main objective behind the development of diverse Islamic studies. Hence, *tadabbur* and other forms of Qur'anic engagement utilize different research methods belonging to a wide array of disciplines. The ongoing evolution of these disciplines necessitated that topics related to the Qur'an's text and context be compiled under the designated field of Qur'anic Studies (*'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*). In this way, Qur'anic Studies emerged as a synthesis of various disciplines rather than an independent area of study. The disciplinary diversity of the field naturally generated many sub-disciplines and sub-genres engaged with the vastness of the Book.

'Ulūm al-Qur'ān is therefore an umbrella term for various disciplines and areas of studies related to the Qur'an's meaning, oral and written history, and rendition. One of the most famous disciplines among Muslims, Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), is

¹ *Jami' al-Tirmidhī*, bk. 42, hadith 2906. He ruled its *isnād* to be unknown.

² For more on the topic of *tadabbur*, see Yousef Wahb and Mohammad Elshinawy, “Keys to *Tadabbur*: How to Reflect Deeply on the Quran” *Yaqeen*, April 2021, <https://yaqeeninstitute.ca/read/paper/keys-to-tadabbur-how-to-reflect-deeply-on-the-quran>.

³ Qur'an 9:124–5.

generally considered part, and one of the goals, of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. *Tafsīr* is by far the most exhaustive intellectual enterprise given its critical object of uncovering the intended meanings behind Allah's words. It relies on exegetical principles; lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical explanations; Prophetic traditions; circumstances and settings of revelation; variant readings; and abrogation. In addition, the field of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* is a prerequisite for undertaking a wider textual and contextual study of the meanings of the Qur'an while alerting us to the integrity and inimitability of the text.

This article introduces the history and development of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, provides a mental map of its major disciplines, highlights its key classical contributions, and gives examples of how this field furnishes a deeper connection to the multi-layered nature of the Qur'anic text. First, we define the terms Qur'an and *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Second, we introduce some classical masterpieces in the field. Third, we introduce and elaborate on Imam al-Bulqīnī's taxonomy of 50 Qur'anic sub-disciplines grouped in six categories: 1) circumstances of revelation, 2) transmission, 3) phonetics and elocution, 4) rhetorical devices, 5) interpretive principles, and 6) rhetorical styles.

These technical disciplinary designations not only facilitate Qur'anic research and exegetical endeavours, but also strengthen our exercise of *tadabbur* by showcasing multiple approaches to engaging with the text and providing numerous tools of comprehension and reflection. This article's survey of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* serves two purposes. First, it provides a roadmap for Muslims seeking an accessible overview of approaches to the Qur'an. Second, it offers a pedagogical resource for students of knowledge, introducing a brief review of the literature and outlining the disciplinary designations of the field.

Definition of the Qur'an

Although the term *Qur'ān* is the most frequently used in the Book to refer to itself, Allah describes it with several alternate names such as *al-Furqān* (the Criterion),

al-Dhikr (the Reminder), and *al-Kitāb* (the Book). Many characteristics of the Qur'an are also mentioned within such as “glad tidings” (*bushrā*)⁴; “knowledge” (*ilm*)⁵; “trustworthy handhold” (*al-urwah al-wuthqā*);⁶ “the Truth” (*ḥaqq*);⁷ “the rope of Allah” (*ḥabl Allāh*);⁸ and “a clear statement for mankind” (*bayān li-l-nās*).⁹ Reflecting on these Qur'anic names increases our faith in the revelation, deepens our understanding of its message, and strengthens our connection with our Creator.

¹⁰ Prior to exploring the different approaches of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, a brief discussion of the scholarly definition of the Qur'an itself will help guide our understanding of its genres and their disciplinary designations.

Multi-disciplinary engagements with the Qur'an resulted in multi-dimensional definitions of the sacred text, with each definition highlighting a unique approach to the Book of Allah.¹¹ Some linguists held that the word *Qur'ān* is a proper noun.¹² Others held that the word is a verbal noun derived from the root-verb¹³ *qara'a* which means ‘read’ or ‘compile’ (*jama'a*).¹⁴ Although Qur'anic verses frequently use the word *qur'ān* to denote ‘recitation,’¹⁵ different derivations of *qara'a* also signify meanings of understanding, reflection, learning, worship, and following. *Jama'a* implies the compilation of the Book's chapters and verses.

The technical definition of the Qur'an aims to describe the words of Allah preserved by oral transmission and written codices. Being concerned with the canonicity and the authenticity of the text, most disciplines (including Qur'anic

⁴ Qur'an 2:97.

⁵ Qur'an 2:145.

⁶ Qur'an 2:256.

⁷ Qur'an 3:62.

⁸ Qur'an. 3:103.

⁹ Qur'an 3:138.

¹⁰ For introductory works on the Qur'an and how to approach it, see Muhammad Draz, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Muhammad Draz, *The Qur'an: An Eternal Challenge* [*al-Naba' al-'Azīm*], trans. by Adil Salahi (UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2017).

¹¹ For instance, theology focused on its inimitability and legal theory scrutinized its practical meanings. To establish the authenticity of oral and written transmission, the field of multiple readings (*qirā'āt*) sought to standardize the canonized readings.

¹² In this case, it is a defective noun (*jāmid*) that does not have inflections (*mushtaqqāt*).

¹³ There are two opinions pertaining to the origin of words in Arabic etymology: the verbal noun (*masdar*) and the verb (*fi'l*).

¹⁴ Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Manzūr, *Lisan al-Arab* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1997), 1:128–33

¹⁵ For example, Qur'an 7:204, 10:61, 16:98, and 17:106.

studies, law, theology and linguistics) demarcate the boundaries of Allah's final message by focusing on a common set of textual characteristics including inimitability (*i'jāz*), mass transmission (*tawātur*), and conformity with the 'Uthmānic orthography (*rasm*). Accordingly, a common interdisciplinary definition of the Qur'an is: The speech of Allah revealed upon His Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Its recitation is used in acts of worship and its smallest chapter is miraculous in nature.¹⁶

The scope and significance of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān

The field of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān refers to groups of principles, rules, and characteristics that coherently relate to some aspect of the Qur'an.¹⁷ However, the field was not traditionally given a particular technical definition by even its most famous works such as *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* by al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) and *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). The word 'Ulūm (s. 'ilm) denotes the multiplicity of disciplines concerning the Qur'an. Some scholars treat the term *ulūm* generally to mean what is known (*ma'lūm*), which encompasses any stated or implied information. Hence, any datum related to the Qur'an from any perspective can be included in the realm of Qur'anic sciences. For example, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) reported the opinion of some scholars that the Qur'an contains 77,000 sciences which are then multiplied by four since every word in the Qur'an has an inward meaning, an outward meaning, an aspect (*ḥadd*), and a perspective (*maṭla'* or *muṭṭala'*).¹⁸ Similarly, al-Qādī Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 544/1148) cited various scholarly opinions placing the number of the Qur'anic sciences in the range of 50 to 70,000.¹⁹

¹⁶ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Itmām al-dirāyah li qurrā al-niqāyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1985), 21.

¹⁷ For more introductory works on Qur'anic sciences, see Mufti Taqī Uthmani, *An Approach to the Qur'anic Sciences: Uloom-ul-Qur'an* (Pakistan: Darul Isha'at, 2007) and Ahmad von Denffer, *Ulum al-Qur'an: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an* (UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2009).

¹⁸ Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: al-Babī al-Halabī, 1998), 1:290. For an explanation of *ḥadd* and *maṭla'*, see Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-ihsān fī ulūm al-Qur'an* (Sharjah: Markaz al-Buhuth wal-Dirasat, 2006), 1:500-504.

¹⁹ Muhammad ibn al-'Arabī, *Qānūn al-tawīl*, ed. by Muhammad al-Silimani (Jeddah: Dar al-Qiblah lil-Thaqafah al-Islamiyyah and Beirut: Mu'ssasat Ulum al-Qur'ān, 1986), 540.

There is more to explore in the Qur'an that any human effort can encompass. It is the manifestation of endless marvels which believers are encouraged to ponder, identify, and reflect on in everyday life. Notwithstanding the classical tradition's tremendous scholarship on the Qur'an, this framework invites us to engage creatively with Allah's revelation. In this regard, al-Ghazālī's suggestion can be taken to mean that human capabilities of knowledge have the potential to develop new areas of studies and research that never existed before.²⁰

Brief history of the classical field of '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*

We do not know of any scholarly works before the 4th/10th century that addressed '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*' as an independent set of disciplines in the manner common today.

²¹ Rather, '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*' topics were addressed across *tafsīr* introductions, legal *tafsīrs* (*aḥkām al-Qur'ān*), topics of legal proofs (*mabāḥith al-adillah*) in books of legal theory, and specialized works on particular Qur'anic topics. These works focused on areas such as the Qur'an's multiple readings (*qira'āt*), abrogation (*naskh*), semantic synonymity (*wujūh* and *nazā'ir*), ambiguous words or phrases (*mushkil al-Qur'ān*), and grammatical analysis (*i'rāb al-Qur'ān*).

Although some early books included the term '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*' in their titles, such as *al-Ḥāwī fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad ibn Khalaf al-Marzubān (d. 309/921) and *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*²² by 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥufī (d. 430/1038), the voluminous sizes of their manuscripts indicate that they were *tafsīrs* rather than books exclusively dedicated to '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*'. An example of an extant book is Makkī ibn Abī Tālib's (d. 437/951) *tafsīr* "*al-Hidāyah ilā Bulūgh al-Nihāya*," in which he incorporated many of the earlier works on *tafsīr* and '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*'. In the introduction, Makkī said that he relied on *al-Istighnā* by Abū Bakr al-Udfuwī (d. 388/998), which dedicated about 300 sections to '*Ulūm*

²⁰ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Ulum, 1990), 44–45.

²¹ Muhammad Abdulazīm al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-'irfān fī ulūm al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Eisa al-Halabi, 1943), 1:26.

²² There is a disagreement on the exact title of al-Ḥufī's book; some scholars held that it is titled *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an*.

al-Qur'ān.²³ Makkī added that he drew from more than 1000 works on '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*', in addition to *tafsīrs*.²⁴

Fahm al-Qur'ān by al-Muḥāsabī (d. 243/587) is arguably the earliest work on '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*',²⁵ prior to the technical designation of the term, that is available today. Beginning from the 5th/11th century, tremendous scholarship was undertaken on '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*' such as *al-Burhān fī Mushkilāt al-Qur'ān* by 'Abdulmalik ibn Mansūr al-Jīlī, known as Shaidhalah, (d. 494/1100), *Funūn al-Afnān* by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), *Jamāl al-Qurrā* by al-Sakhāwī (d. 643/1245), and *al-Murshid al-Wajīz* by Abū Shāmāh (d. 665/1266). Except for the first book, all of these works remain available in print today.

Since designation and classification of disciplines were matters of individual reasoning (*ijtihād*), scholars continued to disagree over the number of Qur'anic sciences. Al-Zarkashī cited several scholars in *al-Burhān* who classified the Qur'an as having three main themes.²⁶ For example, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) said that Qur'anic themes include monotheism (*tawḥīd*), reports (*akhbār*), and rituals (*diyānāt*). 'Alī ibn 'Eisā (d. 384/994) extended the list to include 30 themes (though according to al-Zarkashī, Shaidhalah considered all of 'Eisa's themes to be encompassed in al-Ṭabarī's three). Ibn al-'Arabī divided the Qur'an's topics into monotheism (*tawḥīd*), reminders (*tadhkīr*), and rulings (*aḥkām*). Abū al-Ḥakam ibn Barjān (d. 627/1229) said that the overall message of the Qur'an is covered by knowledge of Allah's names and attributes, prophethood and its proofs, and moral responsibility (*taklīf*) and its tests.

Al-Burhān, of Al-Zarkashī, is considered a hallmark of '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*' literature that set the tone for all subsequent scholarship. In this work, al-Zarkashī admitted that the Qur'anic sciences are uncountable and that the detailed synthesis of each

²³ Makkī ibn Abī Tālib, *al-Hidāyah ilā bulūgh al-nihāya* (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 2014), 1:74.

²⁴ Makkī ibn Abī Tālib, *al-Hidāyah*, 1:74.

²⁵ There are eight different opinions on the determination of the first *Ulūm al-Qur'an*'s work due to the discussion on the definition of the term and the development of the field. See, Hazim Haydar, *Ulūm al-Qur'an bayn al-burhān wal-itqān* (Medina: Dar al-Zaman, 1999), 83–95.

²⁶ Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1984), 1:16–21.

science is an unattainable life-long endeavor. Hence, he limited his scope to the major principles of 47 sciences. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Bulqīnī (d. 824/1316) authored *Mawāqī' al-'Ulūm fī Mawāqī' al-Nujūm* in which he delineated 50 sciences. Al-Suyūṭī expanded on al-Bulqīnī's work in *al-Taḥbīr fī 'Ulūm al-Tafsīr*, where he extended the list to 101 sciences. The title of *al-Taḥbīr* is devoid of the term '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*'; rather, it uses the term 'exegetical sciences' ('*Ulūm al-Tafsīr*') to emphasize that the main objective of '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*', according to al-Suyūṭī, is assisting with the textual interpretation of the words of Allah.

Afterward, al-Suyūṭī authored the field's most cited work, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. He settled for the title of '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*' and limited the number of its sciences to 80.²⁷ Every one of those sciences, according to al-Suyūṭī, is worthy of individual treatment²⁸ and their amalgamation subsumes more than 300 sciences.²⁹ Al-Suyūṭī added that most of these sciences attracted scholarship individually dedicated to a particular science and that he reviewed much of this literature.³⁰ Expanding on *al-Itqān*, Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī (d. 1150/1737) authored *al-Ziādah wal Iḥsān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* and extended al-Suyūṭī's list to 154 sciences. Al-Makkī devised new sciences and sub-disciplines, the total of which, according to him, may exceed 400 topics.³¹ Concomitant and subsequent works shifted to thematically covering '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*' topics without much emphasis on the number of the sciences or the designation of areas of studies.

Al-Bulqīnī's taxonomy of '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*'

Al-Bulqīnī's taxonomy of the Qur'anic sciences captures the most common subjects in the field and encompasses the disciplines that al-Suyūṭī, al-Makkī, and

²⁷ Parts of *al-Itqān* have been translated. See, for example, al-Suyūṭī, *The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'an: al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'an*, trans. by Osman A. Al-Bili and Hamid Algar (UK: Garnet Publishing, 2012); Omar Husain, *Gateway to the Qur'anic Sciences: Based On Al-Itqan Fi Ulum Al-Qur'an* (London: Turath Publishing, 2017).

²⁸ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006), 1:40–41.

²⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 44.

³⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 44.

³¹ Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-iḥsān*, 1:90–1.

other scholars added. It rests on six areas of study and includes a total of 50 disciplines organized as follows:³²

- 1- Places, Occasions, and Circumstances of Revelation (12 sub-disciplines)
- 2- Textual Transmission and Transmitters (6 sub-disciplines)
- 3- Phonetics and Elocution (6 sub-disciplines)
- 4- Linguistic Forms and Rhetorical Devices (7 sub-disciplines)
- 5- Meanings related to Rulings: Interpretive Principles (14 sub-disciplines)
- 6- Meanings related to Words: Rhetorical Devices (5 sub-disciplines)

³² Jalāl al-Dīn al-Bulqīnī, *Mawāqī' al-'ulūm fī mawāqī' al-nujūm* (Tanta: Dar al-Sahabah, 2007), 28–29.



Below is a breakdown of each of the above areas of study alongside a layout of what they encompass, a review of the traditional literature related to each, and brief examples of their applications.

Places, occasions, and circumstances of Revelation

The Qur'an is not a philosophical text dedicated to a particular topic and a given audience. Rather, it was revealed over 23 years in response to various occasions, making its text “above all a text rooted in context.”³³ This discipline employs a historical approach, examining the different circumstances that prompted the revelation which contributes to accounts of the Qur'an's arrangement and collection. The final arrangement of *sūrahs*, as instructed by the Prophet ﷺ and applied to the compilation of 'Uthmān's codex (*muṣḥaf*), does not follow the chronological order of revelation. Juxtaposing the two orders gives occasion for *tadabbur* and deepens understanding.

The following twelve sub-disciplines were developed by extrapolating historical and Sunnah reports to highlight the setting in which a given verse or *sūrah* was revealed. They are also necessary to identify the different types of divine address that appear in the Qur'an and contour their intended prescriptions:

1. The Meccan revelation
2. The Medinan revelation

[Further classifications of the above two types include: what was revealed in the beginning, middle, or end of each period, what was revealed in Mecca but whose ruling is Medinan and the opposite, what was revealed in Mecca for the people of Medina and the opposite, Meccan *sūrahs* which resemble Medinan revelation and the opposite, Meccan verses in Medinan *sūrahs* and the opposite].

3. Verses revealed during travel

³³ Muhammad A. Haleem, “Presenting the Qur'an Out of Context,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, eds. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad A. Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 565.

4. Verses revealed in the city

[The above two sub-disciplines documented places other than Mecca and Medina where the Prophet received Qur'anic revelation such Jerusalem, Juhfa, Hudaybiyya, and al-Tā'if]

5. Verses revealed at night

6. Verses revealed during the day

7. Verses revealed in the summer

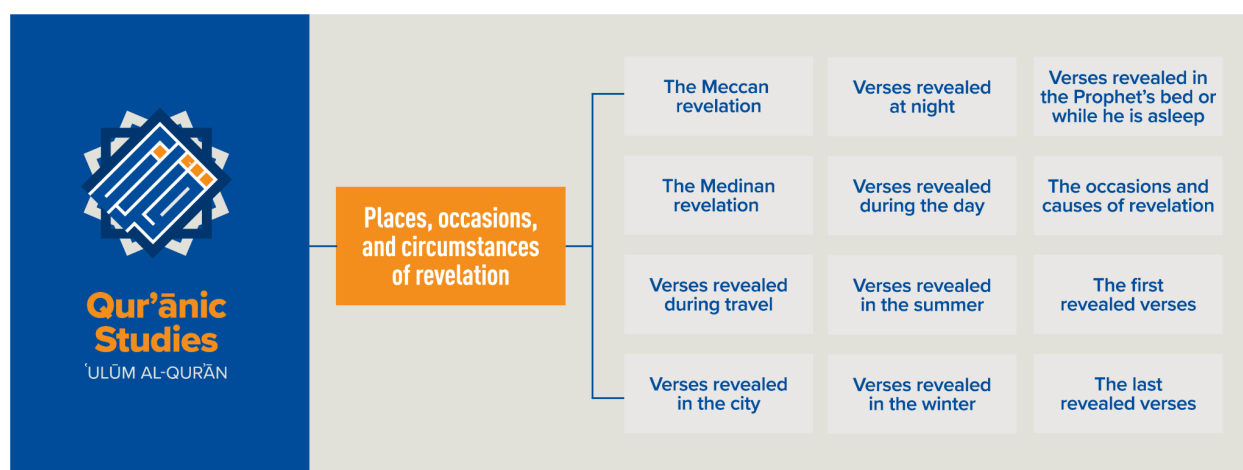
8. Verses revealed in the winter

9. Verses revealed in the Prophet's bed or while he was asleep

10. The occasions and causes of revelation

11. The first revealed verses

12. The last revealed verses



One of the main themes of this discipline is the inner-Qur'anic chronology and the sequence of the Qur'an's chapters and passages. The genre of the Meccan and Medinan settings provides a thorough analysis of the stages of revelation and the Qur'anic discourse-modes addressing a growing audience. Abū al-Qāsim al-Naisabūrī (d. 406/1016) asserted that the discipline of the Meccan and Medinan Qur'an comprises 25 sub-disciplines, knowledge of which is indispensable for an exegete of Allah's book.³⁴ Early independent works dedicated to the Meccan and

³⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:48 (citing al-Naisabūrī's book *al-Tanbīh 'alā Fadl 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, whose manuscript no longer exists).

Medinan Qur'an include the works of Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib and 'Abdul 'Azīz al-Dirīnī (d. 697/1297).³⁵

However, scholars debated which of the three following aspects should form the basis of the Meccan and Medinan classification: 1) chronological distinction between before and after the immigration to Medina, 2) geographical location of a particular revelation, and 3) a verse's intended audience. These features generated the various chronological, thematic, and literary characteristics of the categories of Meccan and Medinan revelation. Such characteristics set the stage for different hermeneutical techniques,³⁶ such as 'abrogation' (*naskh*) and reconciliation between seemingly contradicting verses, and provide a critical account of the development of the Qur'anic discourse.

Meccan revelation is more abstract, theologically focused, and spiritually intensive than its Medinan counterpart. It reflects a time when the Prophet ﷺ was struggling to build local support as most addressees opposed his message. Interestingly, many of the instances of prostration of recitation (*sujūd al-tilāwah*) are in the Meccan Qur'an to humble the arrogant nature of human beings. An example of the Qur'an's literary style can be found in the frequent mention of word "Nay" (*kallā*-كَلَّا) in its latter half. The reason, probably, is that most of the second half comprises Meccan revelation, which addresses tyrants and oppressors who needed the threatening and rebuking tone.

Although grouping Meccan and Medinan chapters or passages is primarily dependent on verified transmission from the Prophet's companions, characteristics of both classifications may be independently utilized to determine the verses or *sūrahs* belonging to each group. For example, "O mankind" is a sign that the passage, or the *sūrah*, is Meccan while "O you have believed" is a sign of Medinan revelation. Many stories of previous prophets, Adam عليه السلام and Iblīs, and ancient peoples are mentioned in the Meccan revelation while legislation concerned with law and administration, and handling the hypocrites in society, are detailed in

³⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:48.

³⁶ Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of textual interpretation.

Medinan revelation. The latter themes paralleled the development of the Muslim community, the expanding role of the Prophet ﷺ (as a leader, judge, *muftī*, chief of the army, etc.), and the new Jewish-Christian context after the move to Medina.

Tracing these historic, thematic, and literary characteristics in parallel with our study of the Prophet's life (*sīrah*) brings the Qur'an to bear on real-life experiences, shapes our conceptions of how our faith principles evolved, and guides our engagement with *da'wah* methodologies.³⁷

In addition to the chronological schema of Meccan and Medinan Qur'an, the exploration of extra-scriptural traditions leads to setting out a diachronic order known as the 'occasions of revelation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) of particular verses and chapters. This framework views the Qur'an as "a dialogic text which engages the audience, rather than a linear narrative. It frequently uses *jumal inshā'iyya* (affective sentences), in which it orders, persuades, prohibits, and questions its audience rather than introducing detached general instructions that might go over their head."³⁸

The merits of studying *asbāb al-nuzūl* include: 1) knowing the wisdom behind certain legislation, which helps dissect the different ramifications of a legal ruling, 2) reconciling between seemingly contradicting phrases according to certain exegetical and legal principles, 3) balancing the scope of application as determined by the generality of the phrase versus the specific occasion that causes its revelation, and 4) informing personal *tadabbur* through engaging with the life of the Prophet ﷺ and how the meanings of the verse might apply to oneself.

Independent scholarship dedicated to *asbāb al-nuzūl* dates back to the early stages of the development of Islamic disciplines. Many *asbāb al-nuzūl* works lost or unpublished until today include those of Maymūn ibn Mahrān (d. 117/735) and 'Alī ibn al-Madīnī (d. 234/848). The works of *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* of al-Wāḥidī (d.

³⁷ For more on the different characteristics of Meccan and Medinan revelation, see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:73–75.

³⁸ Haleem, "Presenting the Qur'an out of Context," 566. For an extensive study on the Meccan and Medinan Qur'an, their identification, characteristics, and literature, see 'Abdulrāziq Ahmad, *al-Makkī wal-Madanī fī al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar Ibn Affān, 1999).

468/1075), *Asbāb al-nuzūl wa Qisās al-Furqāniyya* of Muḥammad ibn As'ad al-'Irāqī (d. 566/1171), *al-'Ujāb fī Bayān al-Asbāb* of Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqlānī (d. 852/1449) and *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī asbāb al-Nuzūl* of al-Suyūṭī became the most referenced by subsequent works in the field. Additionally, *tafsīr* books as well as the margins of printed Qur'an (*muṣḥafs*) included reports and discussions on *asbāb al-nuzūl*.

From the perspective of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the Qur'an can be divided into two categories: that which was revealed due to an incident or in response to a question, and that which was not. Al-Suyūṭī devised a third category of multiple verses that share one *sabab*.³⁹ Examples in this category, according to Ibn 'Aqīlah, include the three verses (2:219; 4:43; and 5:91) that ruled on the prohibition of alcohol based on 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's question.⁴⁰ On the other hand, a common phenomenon in the books of *tafsīr* is the mention of multiple occasions of revelation for one verse. In these situations, conflicting reports are reconciled through one of five mechanisms:⁴¹

- a) Adopting one as the original occasion (*sabab*) and considering the other to be its explanation (*tafsīr*).⁴²
- b) Considering the earlier incident to be the original *sabab* and the later one an understanding of the application of the verse. This may be due to the possibility of a companion hearing the Prophet ﷺ reciting a previously-revealed verse following a particular situation and assuming it to be a new revelation.⁴³
- c) Considering the two occasions as one *sabab* for the same verse.⁴⁴
- d) Considering the verse to be revealed on two different occasions (that share the same Qur'anic ruling or objective).⁴⁵

³⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:121–23.

⁴⁰ Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-ihsān*, 1:310.

⁴¹ Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-ihsān*, 1:298.

⁴² Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-ihsān*.

⁴³ Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-ihsān*, 1:299.

⁴⁴ Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-ihsān*, 1:300.

⁴⁵ Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-ihsān*, 1:302–303.

- e) Considering that the same verse was revealed more than once on different occasions.⁴⁶

Sūrah al-Ikhlās is an example of the third or fourth mechanism—multiple occasions might have constituted a single *sabab*, or the *sūrah* may have been revealed multiple times. While the *sūrah* is known to have been revealed in response to theological questions raised to the Prophet ﷺ, multiple reports attribute these questions to different faith groups. One report narrates that a group of Meccan idolaters asked the Prophet ﷺ to “name the lineage of your Lord to us,” so Allah revealed the *sūrah*.⁴⁷ Another report documents a Jewish group asking the Prophet ﷺ to “describe your Lord who sent you to us.”⁴⁸ A third report references a Christian group from Najran coming to the Prophet ﷺ asking, “Describe your Lord to us. Is he made of aquamarine, ruby, gold, or silver?” The *sūrah* addresses these various questions by declaring the pure, uncompromising monotheism at the heart of Islam; this is why Al-Suyūṭī described *Sūrah al-Ikhlās* as a response to “[the arguments of] the Jews, Christians, pagans, idolaters, as well as anthropomorphism, incarnation, and pantheism advocates, and all false religions.”⁴⁹

The debate over *Sūrah al-Layl*'s occasion of revelation presents another demonstration of the above mechanisms in action. While many scholars hold that the chapter's theme of generosity captures Abū Bakr's wise charity of freeing old and female slaves in Mecca, others held that it was revealed regarding Abū al-Daḥdāḥ al-Ansarī. He bought and donated a palm tree to a family in need in exchange for a palm tree in Jannah, as promised by the Prophet ﷺ. Since *asbāb al-nuzūl* also helps determine if the verse is Meccan or Medinan, the existence of these two reports has prompted a disagreement over whether *Sūrah al-Layl* was Meccan or Medinan. The majority opinion holds that it is Meccan and reconciles the incidents by extending the generosity theme to encompass both. However, if the conflicting reports cannot be reconciled, the authentic report is given

⁴⁶ Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-ihsān*, 1:303–305.

⁴⁷ *Jami' al-Tirmidhī*, bk. 47, hadith 416.

⁴⁸ Al-Bayhaqī in *al-Asmā wal-sifāt*, bk. 2, hadith 38.

⁴⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Iklāl fī istinbāt al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-'Arabi, n.d.), 230.

precedence over the weak one. If all reports are authentic, various rules of verification and preponderance apply to select one report over the other.

Finally, al-Suyūṭī added seven more sub-disciplines to the aforementioned ones, namely, that which was revealed at a known time of the day, exclusively to the Prophet ﷺ, to other prophets, more than once, multiple different times, or at once. He also dedicated a chapter to the different methods of revelation, from Jibrīl to the Prophet ﷺ or directly from Allah. These sub-disciplines, like the others, help develop a vibrant connection between the Muslim and the Qur'an by bringing the meanings of the verses to life.

Textual transmission and transmitters

Allah frequently commands the Prophet ﷺ in the Qur'an to 'recite' it to people, denoting the centrality of oral communication in the reception and delivery of the text. The Prophet ﷺ, in turn, ordered his companions, "Read as you were taught."⁵⁰ A common principle that Qur'an scholars often reference is that the "Qur'an's reading is based on transmission," a statement attributed to multiple companions including 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb⁵¹ and Zayd ibn Thābit, one of the Prophet's scribes of the Qur'an.⁵² Al-Bayhaqī explained this statement to mean that following the reading styles of our predecessors is Sunnah, and that it is not permitted for a reading to contradict 'Uthmān's *mushaf* or the popular *qirā'āt*, even if the rules of grammar allow or prefer it.⁵³ Allah honored this *ummah* and privileged it over other nations with the unique chain of transmission (*isnād*) system.

Since the Qur'an was preserved through an interwoven method of oral and written transmission, this genre scrutinizes the transmission process and investigates the

⁵⁰ Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an*, ed. 'Abd Allāh al-Turkī, 26 vols. (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 2001), 1:22.

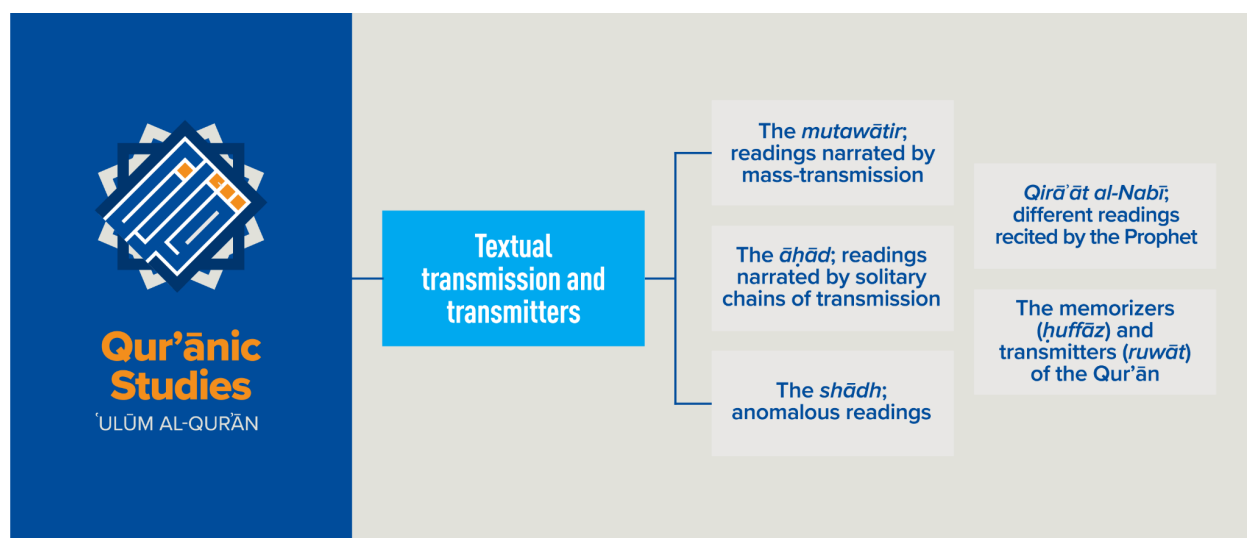
⁵¹ Abū Bakr b. Mujāhid, *al-Sab'a fī al-qirā'āt*, ed. Shawqī Dayf (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1979), 51.

⁵² Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad 'Atā, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), 2:539, hadith no. 3995. The same, or similar, statement, is also reported from numerous scholars throughout history.

⁵³ Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, 2:539, hadith no. 3995.

reliability of the Qur'an's transmitters and expert reciters. Although transmission studies are popularly known as a Hadith specialty, they were inevitably integrated within *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* given the communal obligation to preserve the Qur'an's authenticity and the sensitivity of canonization in Muslim history. The genre is divided into five subdisciplines:

- 1- The *mutawātir*, readings narrated by mass transmission
- 2- The *āḥād*, readings narrated by solitary chains of transmission
- 3- The *shādh*, anomalous readings attributed to some of the companions' successors (*tabi'īn*) which did not meet the conditions of authentic readings
- 4- *Qirā'āt al-Nabī*, different readings recited by the Prophet ﷺ
- 5- The memorizers (*ḥuffāz*) of the Qur'an
- 6- The transmitters (*ruwāt*) of the Qur'an



Paralleling Hadith nomenclatures, scholars categorized the transmission of the Qur'an based on the status of its *isnād*. They demarcated its textual authenticity based on mass or popular transmission which signifies certainty (*yaqīn*) that the transmitted text consists of the words of Allah as conveyed by His Prophet ﷺ. This synthesis contributed to the preservation of the text by identifying *isnāds* that lack connectedness, credible transmitters, or profuse narration, all of which

indicated anomalous or fabricated readings. *Isnāds* without popular recognition, or even unpopular variants with *isnāds* connected through a small number of credible transmitters, also fell into the same suspect category. None of the above are considered part of the Qur'an.

Allah ordered the Prophet ﷺ to convey the Qur'an to people by reciting it to them. Conveyance through recitation subsumes verbal dictation, accurate articulation, and commitment to memory. The Prophet ﷺ did not read or write, nor did the majority of the initial recipients of the message. This made oral delivery the primary method of transmission, one that was immediately relevant to an established culture of oral transmission. It was this culture that preserved the Arabs' history and literary heritage. Although the Prophet ﷺ also encouraged written documentation and appointed official Qur'anic scribes, he maintained verbal delivery as the principal method even after much of the Qur'an was written.

Thus, the Qur'an was made accessible to all people through writing and personal codices, and the facilitation of recitation in private and public teaching. The Prophet ﷺ taught his companions the Qur'an in many ways (one-on-one teaching, group teaching, reciting in prayer, reciting in sermons, reciting in teaching circles, reciting to non-Muslims as a way of *da'wah*, reciting the newest revelation that was revealed to him in the same setting, etc.). These various methods disseminated the Qur'an among companions in different proportions based on individual capacity.

Examining the Qur'an's transmission helps answer the following question: If the Prophet's companions numbered in the tens of thousands, why did only a few of them read the entire Qur'an to the Prophet ﷺ or commit it to memory? The answer lies in the chief methods by which the companions learned the Qur'an from the Prophet: *iqrā'* (the Prophet reciting to the companions) or *'ard* (companions reciting what they memorized to the Prophet ﷺ). The terms can be used interchangeably to describe either method. *'Ard* of the entire Qur'an required close companionship for a lengthy period of time, since the Qur'an was revealed in intervals over 23 years. Biographical works listed about 16 companions who did

'ard of all or most of the Qur'an and who became common links in the *isnāds* of the canonical *qirā'āt*.⁵⁴ Other biographies preserved the names of 21 companions who memorized the entirety of the Qur'an during the time of the Prophet ﷺ, including the aforementioned 16. Some biographies added to the list 13 companions who finished memorization after the death of the Prophet ﷺ.⁵⁵ These numbers are considered conservative given the strict counting criteria applied by biographers.

Nonetheless, the overall number of companions who practiced *iqrā'* or 'ard with the Prophet ﷺ surpasses the minimum number for *tawātur* (ranging from 4 to 70), according to the opinion that establishes *tawātur* based on the number of transmitters. The significance of this observation lies in proving that the Qur'an's *isnād* was never interrupted nor subjected to solitary transmission (*āḥād*) since the time of the Prophet ﷺ.

Hence, the classes of the Qur'an's transmitters from the companions may be summarized as follows:

- 1- The companions who did 'ard of the entire or most of the Qur'an to the Prophet ﷺ (such as 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Ubay, Zayd b. Thābit, Ibn Mas'ūd, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, and Abū al-Dardā').
- 2- The companions who received *iqrā'* from the Prophet, whether one-on-one or in groups.
- 3- The companions who memorized the entire Qur'an (*ḥuffāz*).
- 4- The companions who read the Qur'an to other companions (such as Abū Hurayrah and 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās).
- 5- The companions who were dedicated public Qur'an teachers (teaching the masses with no restrictions, such as Zayd ibn Thābit and 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd).

⁵⁴ Muhammad Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-nass al-Qur'anī min Rasul Allah ilā ummatih* (Tanta: Dar al-Sahabah, 2001), 49–51.

⁵⁵ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-nass al-Qur'anī*, 86–90.

- 6- The companions who were private teachers (instructing dedicated students such as 'Uthmān, 'Alī, and Ubay ibn Ka'b).

According to Abū al-Qāsim al-Hudhalī (d. 465/1073), the number of companions and their successors known to be the Qur'an's transmitters is 229. The reason this number decreases in later biographical references is its later restriction to those who were better known for teaching the Qur'an than Hadith or law (*fiqh*) and whose students dispersed across the Muslim world.⁵⁶

The companions' (and the following generation's) dedication to the transmission of the Qur'an is evident in the biographies of the early *qurrā'* and the *isnāds* of the canonical readings as we know them today. In his biographical work on the Qur'an's reciters, "*Ma'rifat al-qurrā' al-kibār*," Imam al-Dhahabī classified 18 generations of reciters (up to the 8th/14th century), compiling a total of 734 reciters.⁵⁷ Other resources expanded on al-Dhahabī's work and included more biographies. Biographical literature contributed to the synthesis of *isnād* studies and to tracing the Qur'an's transmission history. *Isnāds* of the ten *qirā'āt* form an uninterrupted link between the ten readers and the Prophet ﷺ, and between them and us today.

Some of the *qurrā'* from the companions were dedicated Qur'an teachers who became the common link between hundreds of chains of narration. The transmission authority of those companions solidified the ordering of the variant *qirā'āt* and synchronized the structure of subsequent system-readings (*ikhtiyār*) attributed to the ten eponymous *qurrā'*.⁵⁸ The ten canonical readings were systemized via intertwined chains of narration, all of which are associated with a group of *qurrā'* from the companions through proper *isnād* requirements. An *isnād's* lack of credibility or conformity with *rasm* and proper grammar may de-canonize a reading, rendering it *shādh*. The identification of probable

⁵⁶ Abū al-Qāsim al-Hudhalī, *al-Kāmil fī al-qirā'āt* (Cairo: Mu'assasat Samā, 2007), 1:128.

⁵⁷ Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-qurrā' al-kibār 'alā al-ṭabaqāt wa-l-a'shār*, eds Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūt et al., 2nd ed, 2 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1988).

⁵⁸ For more on the canonical variant readings of the Qur'ān, see Ammar Khatib and Nazir Khan, "The Origins of the Variant Readings of the Qur'an," *Yaqeen*, August 2019, <https://yaqeeninstitute.ca/read/paper/the-origins-of-the-variant-readings-of-the-Qur'an>.

discrepancies in mass transmission was complemented by stipulating compliance with 'Uthmān's codex and Arabic grammar. The categorization of *shādh* not only helps determine what is Qur'an and what is not, but also provides secondary sources for law and grammar.

A manifestation of the *ummah*'s commitment to the Qur'an, and a reflection of Allah's promise to preserve His Book, is the continuity of transmitting the Qur'an via uninterrupted *isnād* until today. This unique privilege favored the entire Muslim *ummah* with equal accessibility to every word of the Qur'an as initially delivered by the Prophet ﷺ to his companions.

The above-mentioned fourth sub-discipline documents the different *qirā'āt* reported from the Prophet ﷺ in a Hadith transmission style. Some Hadith collections dedicated chapters to this topic such as Abū Dawūd's "*al-Hurūf wal-Qirā'āt*" [Individual Variants and Readings] in which he compiled 39 narrations; al-Tirmidhī's "*al-Qirā'āt 'an Rasūl Allah*" [Readings Reported from the Prophet] in which he compiled 22 narrations; and al-Hākim's "*Qirā'āt al-Nabyy*" [The Readings of the Prophet] in which he compiled 110 narrations.⁵⁹ The first work dedicated to this topic was written by Abū 'Amr al-Dūrī (d. 264/877) *Juz' fīhi Qirā'āt al-Nabyy*, in which he compiled the largest number of narrations: 130.

⁶⁰ Interestingly, this book is the only one that survived from al-Dūrī's works and is from among the classical works on this topic. Among the lost works are the books of Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936) and Abū N'uaym al-'Aṣbahānī (d. 430/947).⁶¹

Al-Suyūṭī added different queries to this category's list of sub-disciplines, such as the high and low *isnāds* and the methods of Qur'anic delivery. In addition to the credibility of transmitters, *isnāds* are classified in terms of their length (number of transmitters). Abū al-Faḍl ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī (d. 507/1113) and Abū 'Amr ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) as well as other scholars classified *isnāds* in terms of their proximity to the sources of reading into five categories such as the proximity to the

⁵⁹ Abū 'Amr Ḥafs al-Dūrī, *Juz' fīhi qirā'āt al-Nabyy* (Medina: Maktabat al-Dar, 1988), 7.

⁶⁰ Al-Dūrī, *Juz' fīhi qirā'āt al-Nabyy*, 7.

⁶¹ Al-Dūrī, *Juz' fīhi qirā'āt al-Nabyy*, 8.

Prophet ﷺ, proximity to one of the seven canonical readers, and proximity to one of the renowned books of *qirā'āt*.⁶² Al-Suyūṭī also laid out the various styles of Qur'anic delivery, teaching, and learning.

While Hadith sciences solicit nine styles of reception and narration, only two of them are afforded the recognition of authentic transmission of the Qur'an: reading to a master of Qur'anic recitation or listening to his/her recitation (within prescribed rules).⁶³ The latter method was restricted by Qur'anic scholars as they differentiated between the companions and others in this regard. Only the companions were able to recite the Qur'an exactly as the Prophet ﷺ recited it, since the Qur'an was revealed in their native language and given their pure inner nature.⁶⁴ Other Qur'an transmitters should be scrutinized according to the first method (reading to a master of Qur'anic recitation) since, unlike hadith transmission, not everyone is able to pronounce the words as articulately as their teacher.

Phonetics and elocution

In responding to the disbelievers' preposterous inquiry, "Why was the Qur'an not revealed to him at once," Allah explained the wisdom of gradually revealing it: "That We may thereby strengthen your heart," and affirmed, "We have recited it in a distinct recitation" (*wa rattalnāhu tartīla*) (25:32). While *tartīl* in this context means distinct gradual revelation, it also implies a command to properly recite Allah's words. This command was made clearer by the imperative to "recite the Qur'an with measured recitation" (73:4). Hence, as commonly known among Muslims, the proper pronunciation of Qur'anic words is an obligation. It glorifies Allah's words and determines the validity of prayer, at least in reciting the opening chapter (*al-Fātiha*).

⁶² Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-ihsān*, 3:88–107.

⁶³ Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-ihsān*, 326–28.

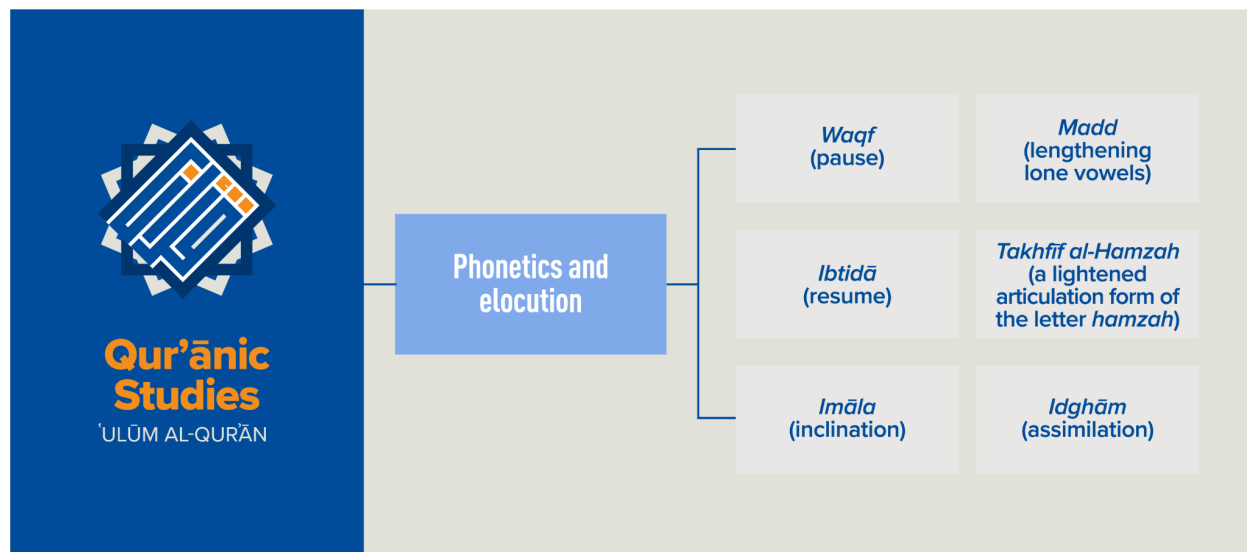
⁶⁴ Abū al-Abbās Ahmad b. Abū Bakr al-Qaṣṭalānī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārā li funūn al-qirā'āt*, ed. Markaz al-Dirasat al-Qur'aniyah, 10 vols. (Saudi Arabia: Wizarat al-Awqaf wa-al-Shuun al-Islamiyah, 2012), 1:378.

As a unique form of performative hermeneutics, this genre focuses on the correct pronunciation of Qur'anic words, the accurate articulation of different dialectic phonetics, and the proper pausal and resuming modes of recitation. The significance of these sophisticated rules goes beyond ritualistic performances. They serve as tools of standardizing the Qur'anic text and eliminating any irregularities of speech that could have undermined its preservation. The following six sub-disciplines are commonly treated in the works of *tajwīd* and *qirā'āt*.

1. *Waqf* (pause) identifies instances of pausal modes in recitation in coherence with *tafsīr* and accommodation of different teaching and learning methods.
2. *Ibtidā* (resume) describes how to resume the recitation after a pausal mode was adopted.
3. *Imāla* (inclination) is an Arabic dialectic phenome that shifts the long vowel *ā* to incline towards the long vowel *ī*, articulating a vowel's sound between the two. *Imāla* also includes the inclination of one consonant towards another such as the *ṣ* toward the *s* which is known to be a type of *ishmām*. *Imāla* exists in most canonical *qirā'āt* but is mostly present in certain readings such as Hamzah and Kisā'ī. The different styles of *imāla* showcase the Qur'an's encompassment of distinct dialects, which accommodated the tribal diversity of the Arabs.
4. *Madd* (lengthening lone vowels) classifies vowels and delineates the grades or levels of their duration. In many instances, *madd* transcends phonetical performances to draw the reader's attention towards certain words, lengthen the spiritual experience of their meanings, and beautify the intonation of syllables.
5. *Takhfīf al-Hamzah* (a lightened articulation form of the letter *hamzah*), an Arabic phoneme marking the devocalization of the *hamzah* for the sake of lightening the pronunciation of a word. In addition to accommodating dialectical diversity, *takhfīf al-hamzah* makes fluent one's articulation of the Qur'anic words. Arabs used to lighten the articulation of *hamzah* in different styles such as lightening (*tashīl*), substituting (*ibdāl*), omitting (*isqāt*), and transferring the vowel to an unvocalized consonant preceding

it (*naql*). *Takhfīf al-hamzah*, which was adopted by many Arabs including Quraysh and Hijaz tribes, was triggered by the fact that *hamzah* is the heaviest letter in pronunciation and the farthest point of articulation (*makhraj*) in the deep throat.

6. *Idghām* (assimilation), an Arabic phoneme indicating the assimilation of identical or similar consonants.



Multiple scholars examined the different modes of pronunciation and the spelling conventions in different Arab regions. Al-Suyūṭī noted that Abū Bark al-Wāsiṭī's (d. 320/932) treatise *al-Irshād* enumerates 50 Arabic dialects used in the Qur'an,⁶⁵ with Quraysh being the most frequent. Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) in *Ta'wīl Muskhil al-Qur'ān* and Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002) in *al-Muḥtasib* discussed regional differences of dialects that influenced local readings, and Sībawayh (d. 180/796) in his *Kitāb* and al-Mubarrid (d. 286/899) in *al-Muqtaḍab* covered phonological conventions of spelling and pronunciation.

In the final stages of compiling the Qur'an, the third caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (d. 35/565) formed a committee, the majority of whose members were from Quraysh.

⁶⁵ This number is commonly attributed by scholars, such as al-Suyūṭī and Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, to Abū Bark al-Wāsiṭī's *al-Irshād*. However, the printed version of *al-Irshād* does quantify the dialects of the Qur'an. It is possible that al-Suyūṭī had access to a different version of *al-Irshād* or meant another Wāsiṭī. Al-Suyūṭī listed only forty-eight dialects. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2:101.

In case of disagreement over any phonetic articulation, 'Uthmān instructed the committee to follow the dialect of Quraysh because “the Qur'an was revealed according to their dialect.”⁶⁶

Arguably, 'Uthmān's instruction was based on an interpretation of 14:4, “We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people” wherein the word ‘people’ referred to Quraysh. This interpretation may be supported by another verse (6:66) describing Quraysh as “your [Muḥammad's] people.” However, the meaning of ‘Arabic’ in (43:3), “Indeed, We have made it an Arabic Qur'an,” is said to encompass all the dialects.⁶⁷ Moreover, the Qur'an contains dialectical pronunciations that do not agree with the dialect of Quraysh. Thus, some scholars interpreted 'Uthmān's statement to indicate that most of the Qur'an, rather than its entirety, was revealed in the dialect of Quraysh.⁶⁸

In addition to the tremendous scholarship on *tajwīd*, *qira'āt*, and orthography of the *muṣḥaf*, the first two sub-disciplines of pausal (*al-waqf*) and resuming modes (*al-ibtidā*) were given significant attention by Qur'an scholars. Al-Hudhalī states, somewhat hyperbolically, that “there is no scholar except that he authored on *al-waqf* and *al-ibtidā*.”⁶⁹ Indeed, the long list of these specialized works include that of al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923), Abū Ja'far al-Naḥḥās (338/950), ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/940), al-Dānī (d. 444/1053) and al-Sajāwandī (d. 600/1204). The sub-discipline was established on the authority of a report by al-Ḥākim from 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar in which he said,

we have lived a long period of time when one of us is taught faith (*imān*) before the Qur'an. The *sīrah* would be sent down upon Muhammad ﷺ so we learned its [rulings of] permissibility and prohibition, and where to pause upon reading it as you now learn the Qur'an. Today, we see men to whom the Qur'an is given before *imān*

⁶⁶ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 3315.

⁶⁷ Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Nukat al-intiṣār li naql al-Qur'an*, ed. Muḥammad Zaghloul Sallam (Alexandria: Mansha'at Ma'arif, 1994), 385.

⁶⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd*, (Morocco: Wizārat al-Awqāf wal-Shu'un al-Islāmiyyah, 1980), 8:280.

⁶⁹ Al-Hudhalī, *al-Kāmil*, 139.

so that they recite it from beginning to end knowing nothing of its commands and prohibitions, nor where to pause when reading it.⁷⁰

Al-Nahḥas commented on this report saying, “This hadith indicates that they used to learn *waqfs* as they used to learn the [meanings of the] Qur'an.”⁷¹ Al-Suyūṭī added, “Ibn 'Umar's saying ‘a long period of our lives’ implies that this was an established consensus by the companions.”⁷² Imam Ibn al-Jazarī said that many late scholars stipulated that a *qārī* could not receive their license (*ijāzah*) until they knew how to practice *waqf* and *ibtidā* properly.⁷³

The beauty of *waqf* and *ibtidā* manifests itself in the scholarly interpretations deduced from certain pausal positions. Such positions are determined by the particular perspective of each disciplinary designation. In al-Hudhalī's works on *waqf* and *ibtidā*, he highlighted what he termed “the pauses of jurists, sufis, theologians, reciters, and rhetoricians.”⁷⁴

This reflective and interactive approach categorizes optional pausal modes, as explained by *tajwīd* scholars, as complete (*tāmm*), sufficient (*kāfī*), good (*ḥasan*), or repulsive (*qabīḥ*), based on the soundness of the meaning signified upon pausing and the veneration shown to Allah's words.⁷⁵ Thus, pausal modes are determined by a reasonable *ijtihād* of analogizing positions to general principles established by Qur'anic scholars. This explains how our different printings of the Qur'an (*muṣḥaf*) today have different pausal signs preferred by the scholars who reviewed the printing process.

⁷⁰ Reported by al-Ḥākim and al-Bayhaqī.

⁷¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:249.

⁷² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:249. It should be noted that some scholars did not agree with this interpretation of the report. Rather they held that “where to pause upon reading” means abiding by the limits Islam sets for us and not violating them. See Ibn 'Aqīlah al-Makkī, *al-Ziyādah wal-Ihsān*, 3:412–13.

⁷³ Abū al-Khayr b. al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-qirā'āt al-ashr*, ed. Ali al-Dabba' (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2006), 1:225.

⁷⁴ Al-Hudhalī, *al-Kāmil*, 140.

⁷⁵ Scholars of *tajwīd* differed on whether the number of *waqf* categories is three, four, five, or eight. All categorizations are based on the soundness and coherence of meanings.

Waqf and *ibtidā* require thorough knowledge of grammar, *tafsīr*, *qirā'āt*, storytelling styles, and *fiqh*.⁷⁶ Consider 3:7, “And no one knows its interpretation except Allah (and/but) those firm in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord.’” Pausing or resuming after pronouncing the word “Allah” will indicate a certain meaning of conjunction (“and”), or disjunction (“but”). In 5:26, “It is forbidden to them for forty years in which they will wander through the land,” the determination of whether the prohibition is for 40 years or permanent, and wandering through the land is for forty years, can be implied by where to pause in reading the verse.

Waqf and *ibtidā* thus reflect our understanding of the Qur'an's meaning, and our spiritual etiquettes in glorifying Allah's words knowing that He is instantly hearing our recitation and is aware of our inner thoughts.

Linguistic forms and rhetorical devices

The subtle linguistic secrets of the Qur'an cannot be unearthed without the science of rhetoric (*balāgha*), especially its sub-disciplines on the science of meanings (*'ilm al-ma'ānī*) and the science of eloquence (*'ilm al-bayān*).⁷⁷ *'Ilm al-ma'ānī* analyzes the conformity of speech to the context of the situation (*mutābaqat al-kalām li-muqadā al-hāl*), a crucial discovery by Arab rhetoricians that preceded modern European linguistics by over 1,000 years.⁷⁸

Scholars upheld a nuanced balance of uncovering varying contexts of verses and maintaining consistent interpretation of multiple verses pertaining to one topic.⁷⁹ The prominent rhetorician al-Khatīb al-Qazwīnī (d. 793/1338) states:

⁷⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:258.

⁷⁷ *Balāgha* is divided into three sciences: the science of meanings (*'ilm al-ma'ānī*), the science of eloquence (*'ilm al-bayān*), and the science of embellishment (*'ilm al-badī'*).

⁷⁸ Muhammad A. Haleem, “Rhetorical Devices and Stylistic Features of Qur'anic Grammar,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, eds. Mustafa Shah & Muhammad A. Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 332.

⁷⁹ See Muhammad A. Haleem “Context and Internal Relationships: Keys to Qur'anic Exegesis. A Study of Surat 'Iṣṣah (Qur'an chapter 55),” in *Approaches to the Qur'an*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 71–99.

The context (*maqām*) that demands the definition, generalisation, pre-positioning of part of a discourse, and inclusion (of particular words) differs from the context that demands the indefinite, specification, post-position and omission; the context of disjoining differs from that of joining; the situation that requires conciseness differs from that requiring expansiveness. Discourse with an intelligent person differs from discourse with an obtuse one. Each word with its companion is suited to a particular context. A high standard of beauty and acceptability of speech depends on its appropriateness to the situation and vice versa.⁸⁰

This contextual analysis through *‘ilm al-ma‘ānī* rebuts much of the criticism against the Qur'an's composition by centering the status of the addressees in its assessment and by engaging different styles, such as departure from what is normally expected in phrasing (*ikhrāj al-kalām ‘alā khilāf muqtaḍā al-ẓāhir*) or departure from the original norm (*‘udūl ‘an al-asl*). For example, a seemingly straightforward question (*istifhām*) can in fact possess 24 different meanings.⁸¹ *‘Ilm al-ma‘ānī* further analyses the different parts of the sentence: the subject, predicate, and complementary parts. In terms of the subject, for instance, there is discussion as to whether it is stated or omitted, and why; whether it is definite or indefinite; its placement in the sentence; whether it is restricted by adjectives or other elements, or not—all in great detail and with purposes and justification.⁸²

‘Ilm al-bayān “deals mainly with factual and figurative language, including simile, metaphor, and *kināya* (‘metonymy’).”⁸³ This fourth genre (linguistic forms and rhetorical devices) explores, in an overlap with the sixth group discussed below, some rhetorical tropes and figurative features employed by the Qur'an to better understand its linguistic miracle. The genre provides meticulous analyses of the Qur'anic vocabulary as follows:

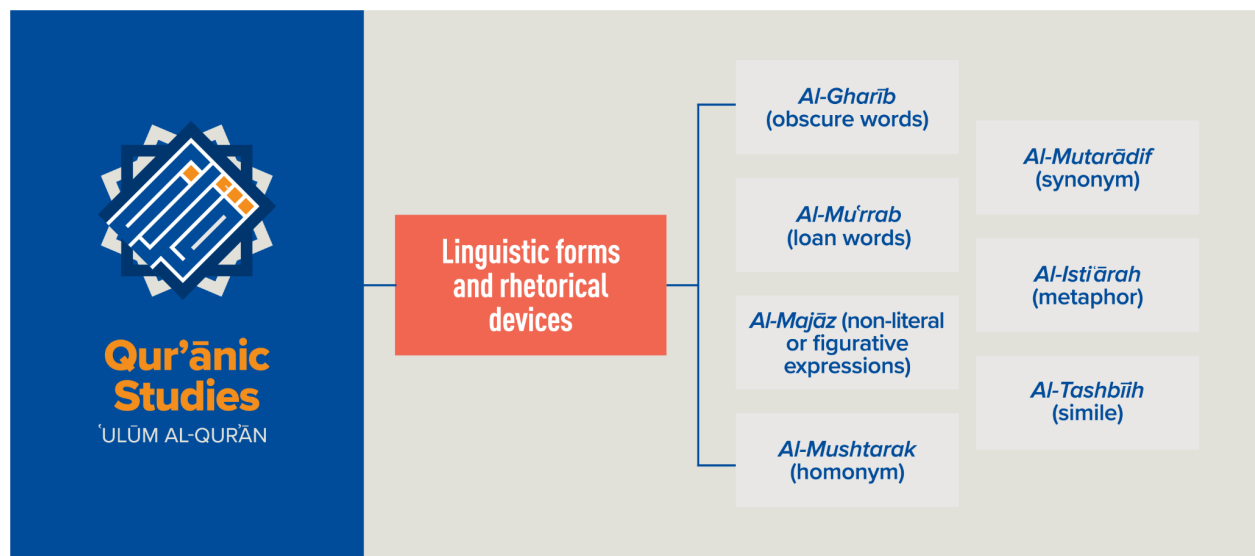
⁸⁰ Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, *al-Īdāh fī ‘ulūm al-balāgha* (Cairo: Subaiḥ, 1971), 7–8; translated by Haleem, “Rhetorical Devices,” 567.

⁸¹ Basil Hatim, *Arabic Rhetoric: The Pragmatics of Deviation from Linguistic Norms* (Munich: Lincom Europa, 2010), 151–68.

⁸² Haleem, “Rhetorical Devices,” 332–33.

⁸³ Haleem, “Rhetorical Devices,” 332.

1. *al-Gharīb* (obscure words), a sub-genre of Qur'anic lexicology that examines uncommon or exceptional words, as well as idiomatic expressions. *Gharīb* works catalogue these words alphabetically or according to *sīrah* appearance.
2. *al-Mu'rrab* (loan words), a sub-genre that investigates if the Qur'an contains originally non-Arabic words and examines their process of Arabization.
3. *al-Majāz* (non-literal or figurative expressions)
4. *al-Mushtarak* (homonym)
5. *al-Mutarādif* (synonym)
6. *al-Isti'ārah* (metaphor)
7. *al-Tashbīh* (simile)



The earliest work on the topic of *Gharīb*, Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar ibn al-Muthannā's (d. 209/824) *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, introduced *majāz* in a more general sense than 'figurative speech.' He treated examples of *Gharīb* as *majāz*, providing explanations for selected exceptional words. Later scholars dedicated writings to particular devices and styles. For example, Abū al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī (d. 485/1092) authored a book on the metonyms (*tashbīh*) in the Qur'an, *al-Jumān fī Tashbīhat al-Qur'ān*. *Tashbīh* is one of the most eloquent rhetorical devices which

al-Mubarrid considered the most common in the Arabic language.⁸⁴ Further developed writings on *majāz* and Qur'anic aesthetics came in the works of Ibn Abī al-Isbi' (d. 654/1256), in which he mentioned 100 different rhetorical devices.⁸⁵ 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām (d. 660/1262) authored one of the most extensive works on the topic, *al-Ishārah ilā al-Ijāz ilā Ba'd Anwā' al-Majāz*. He discussed the rearrangement of word order, transpositions, inclusion, omission, substitutions of individual words or phrases, and other stylistic variations. This inspired al-Suyūṭī to summarize the text in an abridged version, *Majāz al-Fursān ilā Majāz al-Qur'ān*.

Some of the aforementioned sub-disciplines, such as polysemy⁸⁶ and synonymity, developed through scholarly disagreements over their very existence in the Qur'an or the Arabic language. One of the most contentious debates concerned *al-Mu'rrib*. While many scholars denied that the Qur'an contains any non-native or Arabized words, some early and late scholars held that the Qur'an uses non-Arabic words that were converted into Arabic.⁸⁷ The latter opinion referenced some words that exist in other languages, while the former considered these words cross-lingual. Al-Suyūṭī, who adopted the opinion that the Qur'an contains non-Arabic words converted into Arabic,⁸⁸ wrote a book on the matter titled *al-Muhadhab fī mā waqa'a fil-Qur'ān min al-Mu'rrib*. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī had versified 27 *Mu'rrib* words in five lines of poetry, to which Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī added 24 words.⁸⁹ Al-Suyūṭī added over 60 words to both lists, thus identifying more than 100 *Mu'rrib* words in the Qur'an.⁹⁰

The discussion on *al-Mu'rrib* suggests the universality of the Qur'anic message—its ability to address both Arabs and non-Arabs—by highlighting its multilingual inclusivity.⁹¹ After all, both scholarly opinions agree that the Qur'an uses phrases

⁸⁴ Abu al-Abbas al-Mubarrid, *al-Kāmil* (Beirut: Mu'ssasat al-Risalah, 2004), 2:996.

⁸⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 3:211.

⁸⁶ Polysemy is the association of one word with multiple meanings.

⁸⁷ Al-Bulqīnī, *Mawāqī' al-'ulūm*, 107; Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shafī'ī, *al-Risālāh* (Cairo: Mustafa al-Halabi, 1938), 41–46; Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *al-Taqrīb wal-irshād* (Beirut: Mu'ssasat al-Risalah, 1998), 1:399–408.

⁸⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2:431.

⁸⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2:443.

⁹⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2:444.

⁹¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Taqrīb wal-irshād*, 1:407–408.

relevant to its original audience—the Arabs during the time of the Prophet ﷺ—and their cultural engagements with other civilizations. Assuming that the Qur'an borrowed words originally belonging to other languages, its inimitable eloquence indicates that such words could not have been replaced with presumably “better” Arabic words.

Al-Majāz, in its general sense as a language of metaphoricity, is one of the Qur'an's most influential rhetorical styles. Muslim philologists and rhetoricians, in showcasing the linguistic inimitability of the Qur'an, theorized many native literary devices used in the revelation as well as early Arabic poetry: metaphors, similes, metonymies, allegories and beyond. This theorization went beyond identifying instances of literary devices in the Qur'an to formulating their structural roles in different contexts. Qur'anic imageries were viewed as networks of relationships within the same *sīrah* or across different *sīrahs*, with a focus on unique patterns that depart in their aesthetic effects from any conventional poetic forms. Due to theological disputes over whether Allah uses metaphor rather than literal phrases to communicate His message, a debate over whether *majāz* exists in the Qur'an or not arose in the tradition. The overwhelming majority of scholars adopted the opinion that *majāz* exists in the Qur'an to enhance its aesthetic appeal without detracting from its spiritual emphasis or its transcendent nature.

Metaphor (*isti'ārah*) is just one example of the Qur'an's figurative language. It typically layers words with additional meanings so as to clarify the ambiguous, stress particular meanings, or illustrate what is somewhat clear. An example of the last style can be found in 17:24, when Allah commands us to be humble in interacting with our parents: “And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy.” The wisdom of this *isti'ārah* is making visible what is unseen. The spoken word “wing” implies the unspoken word ‘side’ (*jānib*) to animate the humble side of human beings.⁹² By painting the image of a bird lowering its “wing,” the metaphor emphasizes all meanings of respect and humility beyond merely lowering one's ‘side.’ Any degree of leaning aside is not sufficient, rather,

⁹² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 3:114.

lowering the wing implies the closest proximity to the earth which is the highest level of humility.

Another sub-discipline, not listed above, is semantic synonymity (*wujūh* and *nazā'ir*), which highlights different facets of a word's meaning. Recurrent words in the Qur'an, such as Allah's names and attributes, have numerous meanings. This multiplicity of meanings necessitates a multiplicity of translations. For example, should the translation of *Hakīm*, which occurs 97 times in the Qur'an, be derived from wisdom (*ḥikma*) or decision/judgment (*ḥukm*)?⁹³ Should the translation of *Al-Raḥmān*, which occurs 57 times, be 'the Merciful' or 'the All-Merciful'?⁹⁴ Syntactical and lexicographical examination, as well as contextual reading, assist in attaining the most probable interpretation of a Qur'anic phrase.

Meanings related to rulings: Interpretive principles

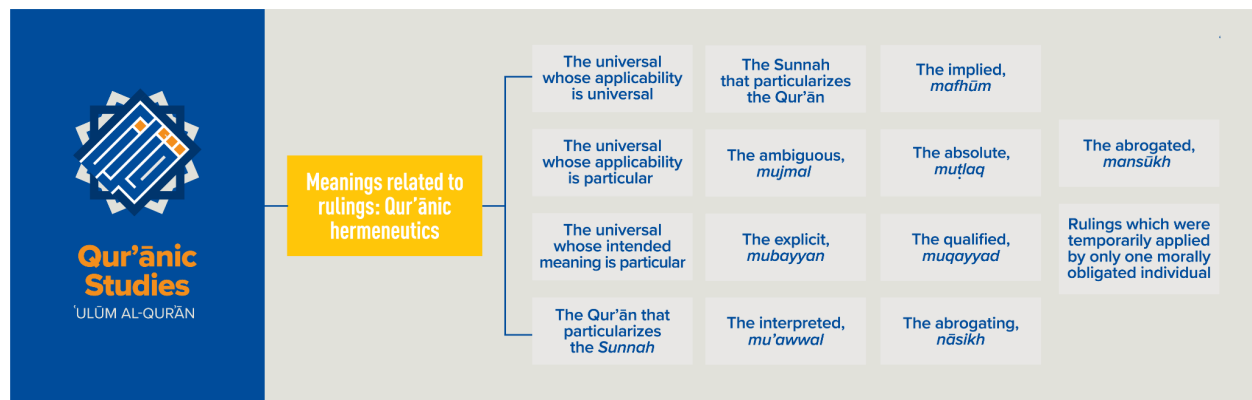
The discipline of Qur'anic interpretive principles categorizes linguistic signs and indications and delineates the Qur'an and Sunnah's overlapping authority over legal matters. Analyzing grammatical rules—articles, particles, prepositions, and the like—helps identify the implications of various phrases and their native Arabic usages which, in turn, determine their applications. The following 14 sub-disciplines are essential in *tafsīr* and legal theory (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*), especially in the process of deriving legal rulings:

- 1- The universal whose applicability is universal
- 2- The universal whose applicability is particular
- 3- The universal whose intended meaning is particular
- 4- The Qur'an that particularizes the Sunnah
- 5- The Sunnah that particularizes the Qur'an
- 6- The ambiguous, *mujmal*
- 7- The explicit, *mubayyan*
- 8- The interpreted, *mu'awwal*

⁹³ Haleem, "Rhetorical Devices," 568–69.

⁹⁴ Haleem, "Rhetorical Devices," 569–70.

- 9- The implied, *mafḥūm*
- 10- The absolute, *muṭlaq*
- 11- The qualified, *muqayyad*
- 12- The abrogating, *nāsikh*
- 13- The abrogated, *mansūkh*
- 14- Rulings which were temporarily applied by only one morally obligated individual.



Allah reveals His commands in various forms in the Qur'an and through His Prophet ﷺ. A command may be stated unequivocally or in general terms. Depending on whether the phrase is qualified or not, the deduced ruling may apply universally or only to particular scenarios. Identification of the universal and the specific is crucial to reconciling the presumed universality of Qur'anic utterances with their occasionally limited applicability to a particular situation, time, or place.

Categorizing the intended addressees is especially relevant to this query. For example, the Qur'an may call unto 'people,' 'those who have believed,' 'those who have not believed,' or 'people of the book.' The Sunnah plays a critical role in determining the exact group of people intended at the time of revelation and until the Day of Judgment. Al-Suyūṭī listed 34 categories of addressees and discourse modes, directing the speech towards a particular person, object, or point.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 3:86–90.

Applicability is determined by synthesizing the overlapping authority of the Qur'an and Sunnah, the context of the revelation, and human reason. This analysis results in several applications, including deriving legal rulings, understanding the chronology of historic events, reconciling different accounts of the unseen, and determining the exclusivity and inclusivity of addressees.

For example, according to reports, *Sīrah al-Kāfirūn* was revealed when a group of Meccan polytheists proposed a deal to the Prophet ﷺ to alleviate ongoing tensions: that they worship the 'Prophet's God' sometimes and that he, in return, worship their gods other times.⁹⁶ So, Allah revealed the *sīrah* (109: 1-3) saying, "Say, O disbelievers. I do not worship what you worship. Nor are you worshippers of what I worship." Rendering the universality of 'disbelievers' to mean all non-Muslims in this context ("I do not worship what you worship") may contradict the fact that Jews and Christians worship Allah and that some of the idolaters may embrace Islam ("Nor are you worshippers of what I worship"). Two possible consistent interpretations are that these verses narrate a specific conversation with a specific group of individuals who never became Muslim (al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, al-'Ās ibn Wā'il, and Umayyah ibn Khalaf), or that their universal meaning is subject to particularization by other textual and extratextual tools.

Ambiguous words exist in the Qur'an resulting from such factors as homonymity,⁹⁷ uncommon usages, indefinite pronouns, and modes of conjunction or disjunction. For example, in 35:10, "To Him ascends good speech, and righteous work raises it," the pronoun 'it' may refer to the 'good speech' (righteous work raises the good speech, such as *du'ā*, to Allah) or to the 'righteous work' (Allah raises the righteous work of a person). Legal theorists asked, can the ambiguous remain unclarified? The preponderant opinion holds that if the ambiguous word or phrase entails a legal practice, it would have been clarified before the death of the Prophet ﷺ. Otherwise, it would be considered a delegation of duty beyond the capacity of individuals (*taklīf bimā lā yuṭāq*).⁹⁸ Clarification may occur consecutively in the

⁹⁶ Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-saghīr*, no. 751; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān* (Cairo: Dar Hajar, 2001), 24:703.

⁹⁷ Homonyms are words that share the same spelling but have different meanings.

⁹⁸ Zakariyyā al-Ansārī, *Ghāyat al-wsūl sharh Lubb al-Usūl* (Kuwait: Dar al-Diāa, 2019), 225.

same context or separately in a different part of the text, as well as extra-textually in the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

Textual significations are rigorously treated across *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* and *Usūl al-fiqh*. A phrase's meaning may be understood directly (*manṭūq*) or inferred (*mafhūm*) by way of implication. Inferences are based on the congruent or divergent meanings of the *manṭūq*. If the implication conforms with the obvious meaning of the phrase, it is a congruent implication (*mafhūm muawāfaqah*). For example, if 'devouring the property of orphans' is prohibited, then any other form of mismanagement or appropriation of their property is also forbidden. A divergent implication (*mafhūm mukhālafah*) indicates that the unpronounced ruling is opposite to the obvious meaning. In 2:287, "And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night], then complete the fast until the sunset," the *mafhūm* is that during Ramadan, eating and drinking are permissible from night until dawn. The divergent implication is that eating between dawn and sunset is forbidden. In legal theory, a much wider discussion exists on the scope of *mafhūm* and the different textual instruments that qualify to establish its congruent or divergent implications.

Another area of Qur'anic interpretive principles that has a significant impact on deriving legal rulings is the absolute (*muṭlaq*) and the qualified (*muqayyad*). When a verse provides a ruling qualified with an adjective or conditional applicability (*muqayyad*) and another verse provides a similar ruling for a different scenario but in absolute manner without qualification (*muṭlaq*), the latter may be restricted with the same qualification as the former. For example, the Qur'an stipulates uprightness for the credibility of witnesses over marriage dissolution, re-marriage to the same spouse (65:2), and wills (5:106). However, in other verses that cover testimonies in sales (2:282) and paying the dowry to women (4:6), there is no mention of uprightness as a condition for the witnesses. By employing the *muṭlaq* and *muqayyad* intertextual interpretation of extending the qualification to the absolute, uprightness becomes required in all these different types of testimony.

Abrogation (*naskh*) linguistically means ‘to efface’ or ‘to transfer.’ Technically, it is defined by Imam al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) as “a discourse [*khiṭāb*] indicating the subsequent repeal of a ruling established by a previous discourse, in such a way that without which the ruling would remain established.”⁹⁹ *Naskh* provides a coherent reading of Qur’anic verses with no logical, legal, or historic contradictions. Many books dedicated to the topic were written by eminent scholars including Abu ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (224/838), al-Naḥḥās, Ibn al-Anbārī, Makkī, and Ibn al-‘Arabī. Al-Suyūṭī referenced some leading scholars who stated that “it is not permissible for anyone to explain [provide *tafsīr* of] the Book of Allah before they know of its abrogating and abrogated [verses].”¹⁰⁰ However, abrogation is not a matter of human intellectual reasoning (*ijtihād*). Rather, it is determined exclusively by the Prophet ﷺ per Allah’s commands, as explained in 2:106.

Abrogation exists as an intra-Qur’anic phenomenon (a verse abrogates another verse) or in interaction with the Sunnah (an authentic hadith abrogates a verse). This categorization necessitates a careful investigation of transmission (of both Qur’an and Sunnah) and a thorough legal analysis of the given rulings. When a verse’s ruling is abrogated or no longer in effect, the verse may remain part of the canon and be recited as Qur’an. In other cases, both the canonicity and ruling of a verse may be abrogated, with the verse no longer considered part of the Qur’an. The graduality of revelation, as shown in the aforementioned first group of *‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, is contrasted with the final review of the last rendition (*al-‘ardah al-akhīrah*) of the Qur’an between Jibrīl and the Prophet ﷺ prior to his death.

The wisdom of abrogation lies in its responsiveness to circumstantial changes, which in turn reflects the development of Islamic legislation.¹⁰¹ Allah, the Most Wise, said, “If We replace a verse in place of another verse, and Allah knows best

⁹⁹ Musa Furber, *Sharh al-Waraqāt Al-Mahallī’s notes on Imām al-Juwaynī’s Islamic jurisprudence pamphlet*, (Islamosiatic, 2014), 36.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 3:53.

¹⁰¹ For more on the topic of *naskh*, see Justin Parrott, “Abrogated Rulings in the Quran: Discerning Their Divine Wisdom.” *Yaqeen*, April 2021, <https://yaqeeninstitute.ca/read/paper/abrogated-rulings-in-the-quran-discerning-their-divine-wisdom>.

what He reveals, they say: ‘Indeed, he has forged it!’ No, most of them do not know.” A verse may be replaced by the “revelation of another in the best interests of people.”¹⁰² Hence, “[a]brogation serves the welfare of people by bringing forth the rule most appropriate to their specific situation, making changes as necessary and building a more comprehensive legal and moral framework.”¹⁰³ A well-known Qur’anic example of abrogation is the gradual prohibition of alcoholic drinks.

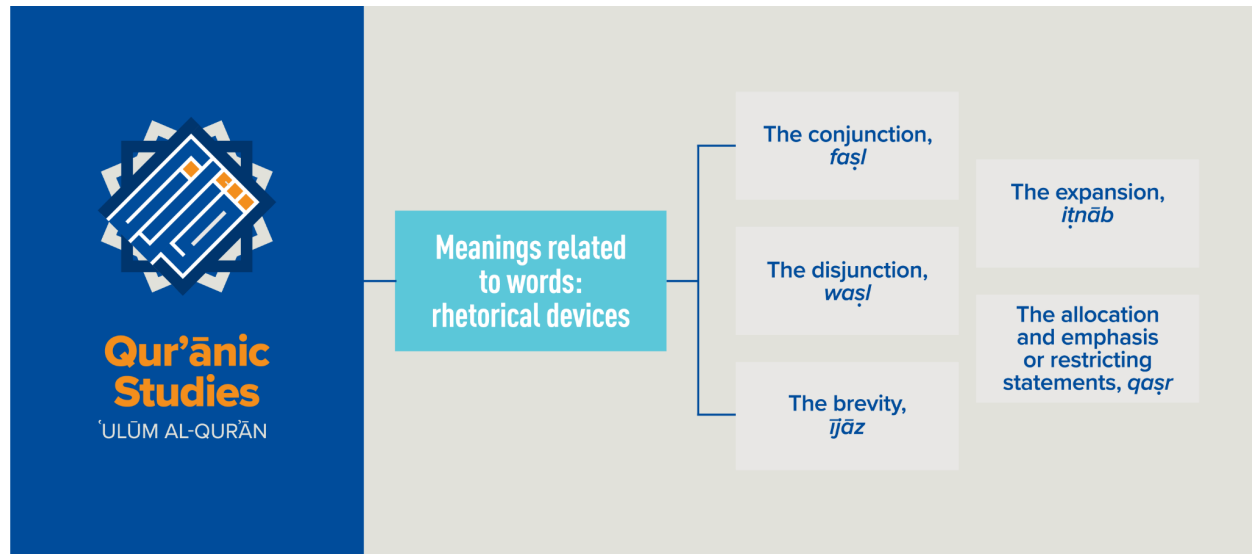
Meanings related to phrases: Rhetorical styles

While the linguistic forms (in the fourth group of disciplines) primarily deal with rhetorical devices and patterns of speech, the following sub-disciplines examine rhetorical styles with respect to the effective delivery of meanings and ideas. *‘Ilm al-Ma‘ānī*, as noted above, primarily focuses on the audience’s disposition. It engages with the permutations of words and sentence order allowed by the rules of grammar to provide the most appropriate style for the context, situation, and circumstances of speech.

- 1- The conjunction, *faṣl*; disjoining of parts of a sentence
- 2- The disjunction, *waṣl*; joining of parts of a sentence using conjunctions
- 3- The brevity, *ījāz*
- 4- The expansion, *itnāb*
- 5- The allocation and emphasis or restricting statements, *qaṣr*

¹⁰² Al-Suyūṭī and al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2001), 1:360.

¹⁰³ Parrott, “Abrogated Rulings in the Quran.”



‘Ilm al-Ma‘ānī treats a sentence as a composition of inner and outer networks with internal and external relationships. The internal relations are governed by grammar which regulates the speech patterns. The external relations are governed by rhetorical rules which regulate the arrangement of word structures and the relationships between sentences to efficiently communicate intended meanings. In the introduction of his *Tafsīr*, al-Ṭabarī listed 17 rhetorical styles that the Qur’an insuperably employs, including concision and brevity, deliberately ambiguous expression, extended expression, repetition of the same meaning, and inversion of logical order.¹⁰⁴

Upon being asked, “What is rhetoric (*balāgha*)?,” Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī (d. 377/987) answered, “Knowing the joining (*waṣl*) and disjoining (*faṣl*) of sentences.”¹⁰⁵ ‘Abdulqāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078), the leading authority on the topic of the inimitability of the Qur’an, acknowledged that determining the proper modes of conjunction and disjunction is one of the meticulous secrets of *balāgha* that only native Arabs are able to perfectly use.¹⁰⁶ The Qur’an remarkably employs many modes of concluding sentences, resuming new sentences, or joining two or more sentences together. *Balāgha* achieves more than mere stylistic alterations. It

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 1:12–13.

¹⁰⁵ Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wal-tabīn* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1998), 1:88.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Abdulqāhir al-Jurjānī, *Dalā’il al-iḥzāz* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji), 222.

constructs means of persuasion in such critical issues as Allah's attributes and the description of the Day of Judgment. Moreover, the Qur'an may combine the two styles of *waṣl* and *faṣl* in one instance and strikingly alternate their uses in the same context. Examples of consecutive use of descriptive attributes are profoundly powerful.

Think of *Sīrah Ghāfir* (40:1-4), a Meccan chapter revealed during an extremely difficult time, right after the death of the Prophet's uncle Abū Ṭālib, to condemn the obstinacy of the Arabs, rebut their false arguments against the authenticity of the Qur'an and the Day of Judgment, and relate the story of the believer among Pharaoh's people. Against this tense backdrop, the *sīrah* begins with the disjoined letters of *hā* and *mīm*—a stimulating style which, according to some linguists, was not known to the Arabs. It challenged them, the masters of eloquence, with seemingly simple alphabetical letters.

Then the second verse states, “The revelation of the Book is from Allah, the Exalted in Might, the Knowing.” Against the listener's expectation of the conjunctive mode starting a new verse, the following verse continues in disjunctive mode, affirming another attribute of Allah—“the Forgiver of sins”—before suddenly adding the conjunction ‘and’ (*wā*), “Accepter of repentance.” It then returns to the disjunctive mode, adding two further attributes: “severe in punishment, Owner of abundance.” This alternation of styles and frequent mention of Allah's attributes, in normal or emphatic forms, provokes thoughts of the manifestations of Allah's will and power in our lives, filling our hearts with awe of Him. This prepares the recipient of the message for the next verse's declaration: “No one disputes about the signs of Allah except those who disbelieve, so do not let their moving about in the lands delude you.”

Brevity and expansion are important pairs that measure the continuum of words and sentences to denote conciseness, clarity, and emphasis. Al-Suyūṭī introduced his section on *ijāz* and *itnāb* with the statement, “Know that they [*ijāz* and *itnāb*] are among the most significant topics of *balāgha*. The author of *Sirr al-Fasāḥah* [The Secret of Eloquence] quoted a scholar to have said, ‘[the entirety of] language

is *ijāz* and *itnāb*.¹⁰⁷ What distinguishes an expert rhetorician is their accurate identification of the intended audience and determination of the relevance of either brevity or expansion to the purpose of their speech.¹⁰⁸

Restrictive statements (*qaṣr*) emphasize certain qualities to convince different audiences that such qualities belong only to one entity. *Qaṣr* varies in styles based on the status of the addressee and applies different techniques such as negation, exception, retraction, and re-arrangement of the sentence order. If the addressee believes that multiple beings share the same quality, the style of restriction to oneness (*qaṣr ifrād*) may be used such as, “He is but one God” (6:19). Another addressee may believe that the quality belongs to another being. Restriction of reversal (*qaṣr qalb*) may then be used, such as Ibrahim’s counter-argument against Namroud’h’s conviction that he can give life and cause death: “My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death” (2:258). A third situation is when the addressee is equally uncertain about two possibilities so restriction will sufficiently highlight the attribution of a quality to a being or an object (*qaṣr ta’īn*).

The complexity of the Qur’an’s rhetorical styles should not deter a believer from engaging them. One of the unique features of Qur’anic rhetoric is that every reader can engage, at a certain level, with its beauty. As demonstrated by *Sīrah Ghāfir*, for instance, even a basic understanding of an intricate style may suffice to connect with its deeper dimensions.

Conclusion

‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān is a multi-faceted and diverse area of study. Its broad scope includes various sub-disciplines examining the Qur’an’s history (compilation and canonization), nature of its miraculous revelation and its underlying theology,

¹⁰⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 3:137, citing Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Sa’id al-Khafaji al-Halabi (466/1073).

¹⁰⁸ Some rhetoricians discuss *ijāz* and *itnāb* in comparison to the standard expression used by an average speaker to express a thought (*al-musāwāh*). The debate over whether or not *musāwāh* exists as a rhetorical style in the Arabic language has left it under-examined by scholars of Qur’anic rhetorical styles. Al-Suyūṭī explained that he excluded *musāwāh* from the title of his section on *ijāz* and *itnāb* because, in addition to the disagreements over its extant function, it does not exist in the Qur’an. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 3:137–8.

circumstances and occasions of its descension, precise articulation of its verbal utterances, aspects of its inimitability, as well as its linguistic styles, devices, and literary theories, names of its chapters and order of its verses, virtues and etiquettes of recitation, rules of *tafsīr* and the qualifications of the one exercising it, and others. Understanding the role and utility of each discipline or subdiscipline accommodates our diverse intellectual interests, facilitates a proper disciplinary approach to the Qur'an, makes us appreciate the massive literature written about the text in our history, and, most prominently, strengthens our endeavors of *tadabbur* while exploring the infinite wisdom of the Book.

The vastness of the Qur'an bridges numerous intellectual perspectives and disciplinary frameworks. The ultimate utility of such diversity is to identify what piques our individual interests in attempting to engage with the text. The occasions and circumstances of revelation showcase the context of human reception and engagement with Allah's words, illuminating our understanding of their meanings and evaluating our receptiveness to their guidance. The subtle transmission process of the text affirms our belief in its preservation and manifests the Divine promise, "Indeed, it is We who sent down the Qur'an and indeed, We will be its guardian."

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The delicate rules of Qur'anic recitation constantly remind us that its words are not at all ordinary, but rather comprise the sacred words of Allah Himself who, out of His mercy, enables us to commune with Him through them. Meanwhile, by joining knowledge with practice, Qur'anic interpretive principles organize the revelatory commands and guide our commitment to the sacred law. Finally, the branches of *balāgha* help us better appreciate the Qur'an's remarkable range of discursive modes, each designed to reach a different audience in a different context—and thus, ultimately, all of humanity. It adjusts the audience's disposition through uncovering diverse networks of meanings, while providing the most effective rhetorical and aesthetic styles for any given context.

¹⁰⁹ Qur'an 15:9.

The Qur'an's timeless verses will continue to stimulate profound human and intellectual experiences through the shoreless field of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, confirming that the text “does not become worn out by repetition and its wonders do not come to an end.”¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ *Jami' al-Tirmidhī*, bk. 42, hadith 2906.