

# THE LANGUAGE OF THE QUR'ĀN

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The aim of this article is to reassess the registers of language used in the Qur'ān. I approach the reassessment in two ways: (a) by arguing that the traditional view that the language of the Qur'ān is identical with the 'arabiyya of early poetry on the one hand and with the dialect of Qurayš, the spoken language of Muḥammad, on the other, is both late and mistaken; and (b) by suggesting that there were other registers that were in common use and to which the language of the Qur'ān has much greater natural affinities. These were the registers of the sooth-sayer (*kāhin*), the orator (*ḥaṭīb*) and story-teller (*qāṣṣ*) and also, in Medinan material, that of the written documentary style.

The basic reason why attention has naturally focused on poetry is that the amount of evidence about each of these registers is minute. Nevertheless, it is highly improbable that it is all spurious, and what remains is so similar in form that it is not unreasonable to suggest that the overall impression that it gives us is tolerably accurate.

## *The 'arabiyya question*

As outlined above, the view that is traditionally held by Muslim scholars is that the Qur'ān is couched in a language that is identical with the 'arabiyya of early poetry and with the dialect of Qurayš. This pious triple equation that (a) the poetic 'arabiyya = (b) the language of the Qur'ān = (c) the spoken language of Qurayš appears to have become prevalent no earlier than the third/ninth century.

It was first seriously called into question through the sustained and detailed work of the German scholar Karl Vollers, culminating in the publication of *Volksprache und Schiftsprache im alten Arabien* in 1906. Vollers showed that the traditional Arab schematization of early Arabic dialects such as Tamīmī or Ḥiǧāzī corresponded with a real cleavage

into two groups of dialects: eastern and western. Further, although the evidence is scanty and difficult to interpret, he was able to suggest that in the western dialects *īrāb* had to a large extent broken down.

At this point Vollers took an unfortunate step. He convinced himself that (a) should be removed from the equation, leaving (b) = (c). He thus concluded that the Qur'ān was first uttered in a Ḥiğāzī vernacular that lacked various features found in the poetic 'arabiyya, in particular *hamza* and *īrāb*, and that it was only later that it was gradually brought into line with 'arabiyya. His arguments about *hamza* are justified, but he certainly went too far on the problem of *īrāb*. His work was immediately attacked by other leading scholars of the time, such as Geyer (1909) and Nöldeke (1910), and it has been savaged at intervals ever since, e.g. by Blachère (1952-66), Rabin (1951) and Corriente (1976).

The next attack on the equation was by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1927). He too removed (a) from the equation. His mistaken conclusion that all pre-Islamic poetry, except that attributed to Ḥiğāzī poets, was forged is not relevant to the present discussion. It is conveniently demolished in the Epilogue to Arberry's *The Seven Odes* (1957).

There the matter stayed until the late 1940s. At that point there was a vigorous attempt by Kahle (1948) to revive Voller's theories. In particular, he pointed to the existence of traditions that encourage the use of *īrāb* in the pronunciation of the Qur'ān by early companions. If such traditions are genuine, they are interesting. One might perhaps take them as part of an effort to have every vowel pronounced, but it could be that they are simply exhortations to pronounce the sacred texts correctly. Certainly they fall well short of proving that (b) = (c). In any case, Kahle's work was overtaken by views put forward independently at more or less the same time by Blachère (1952-66), Fleisch (1947, 1949) and Rabin (1951): that the language of the Qur'ān is that of the poetic 'arabiyya modified to some extent by the language of Qurayš. Their position might be summed up as follows. The first half of the traditional equation is undoubtedly more or less true, though there are some features of the 'arabiyya of poetry that are not found in the Qur'ān and *vice versa*. However, the second half of the equation is at best a pious

fiction. Muḥammad and the Qurayš spoke a form of Ḥiǧāzī dialect, and all Ḥiǧāzī dialects were of the west-Arabian group, at some remove from the poetic 'arabiyya. This is now the generally accepted view in the west.

More recent work on 'arabiyya by Fück (1950), Blau (1981) and Corriente (1976) has been focused more on the period after the death of the Prophet and need not detain us here. The whole complex debate about 'arabiyya is summarized at length by Zwettler in chapter 3 of *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry*, by far the best chapter in that book (1978). Zwettler is occasionally tendentious because of his wish to press the (unprovable) hypothesis that *i'rāb* had disappeared from all early dialects – a proposition that is basically unnecessary, as, regardless of the *i'rāb* question, I doubt whether anyone would now wish to subscribe to the view that there was any dialect that was more or less identical with the poetic 'arabiyya.

My own view about the triple equation is that the case for removing (c) from it is unanswerable. I would go further and say that I do not think that we should link (a) and (b) too closely. In particular, the encroachment of *hamza* into the text as we now know it, even in such a highly conservative recension as that of Warš 'an Nāfi', and the arguments about euphonic variations in various *qirā'āt* and *taǧwīd* manuals raise the probability of other strands of harmonization over the years. However, this is not so important as the removal of (c) from the equation, with the crucial implication that the language of Muḥammad, the revealer of God's message, was not the same as that of Muḥammad, citizen of Mecca and later of Medina. That is a central point in any discussion of the language of the Qur'ān.

### *Writing in pre-Islamic Arabia*

The extent of writing in pre-Islamic Arabia is obscure, but it must have been strictly limited and probably largely confined to the settlements. Nevertheless, the poets refer to writing on sheets regularly enough for us to deduce that even the illiterate *bedu* were aware of what

it looked like. The occasional use of the word *'unwān* 'title, heading' perhaps indicates a solemn role, for treaties and formal agreements *etc.* It is not unreasonable to postulate that there was a documentary register of language, based on written material but perhaps influenced by the process of dictation. [There is also awareness in poetry of epigraphic writing, but that need not concern us here.]

### *Literary activity in pre-Islamic Arabia*

All the material in pre-Islamic Arabia that one might class as literary was oral. It included not only poetry but also, as outlined earlier, the pronouncements of soothsayers (*kāhin* material), the speeches of orators (*ḥaṭīb* material) and the stories of storytellers (*qāṣṣ* material). The rate of the loss of oral literature through the vagaries of transmission is always high, but, as is shown by pre-Islamic poetry, a fair quantity can survive if circumstances are not unfavourable. However, the emergence of Islam was catastrophic for the survival of *kāhin* material and *ḥaṭīb* material from the pre-Islamic period. All that remains is a handful of fragments of doubtful authenticity. There was a different problem with pre-Islamic *qāṣṣ* material. Much survived, but as it was not subject to the preservative constraints of metre and rhyme, the material was recast into the idiom of later generations.

Because of the paucity of surviving *kāhin* material and *ḥaṭīb* material and the transformation of *qāṣṣ* material, these genres have been virtually ignored in assessments of the linguistic situation at the time of Muḥammad. This cannot be right, and I hope to draw them into a more central focus here.

### *The Kāhin*

We know little about the *kāhins* of pre-Islamic Arabia. An interesting and convenient summary of their putative roles is given by Fahd (1990) in the article "Kāhin" in *EI*<sup>2</sup>, a piece of considerable *élan*, though inevitably embellished with a fair leavening of conjecture. It would ap-

pear that the division between nomadic and settled life once again comes into play. The scraps of evidence point to *kāhins* being based in settlements and almost certainly having a wider role among the people of the settlements than among the tribesmen, who appear to have consulted them sporadically as diviners and, to a lesser extent, as arbiters. It is difficult to be sure about much beyond that, and I feel that Fahd himself has recourse to divination, with implausible results, when he claims in his last paragraph that in pre-Islamic times "the *kābin* in central Arabia was the spiritual and intellectual guide of the tribe, a role filled by all agents of a cult in underdeveloped societies at every period and place".

#### *Kāhin utterances*

A handful of examples will suffice to give a picture of utterances ascribed to *kāhins*. The first comes from the *Murūğ ad-dahab* of al-Mas'ūdī (II, para.1266), ascribed to a woman soothsayer named Ṭarīfa or Zarīfa:

*wa-n-nūri wa-z-zalmā'*  
*wa-l-ardi wa-s-samā'*  
*inna š-šāğara la-tālif*  
*wa-la-ya'ūdanna l-mā'*  
*kamā kāna fī d-dabri s-sālif*

By light and darkness,  
 by the earth and the sky;  
 the trees are perishing.  
 In truth, the water will return,  
 as it [did] in time gone-by.

The second is to be found in al-İşfahānī's *Agānī* (IX, 84) as part of a story about the killing of Ḥuğr, prince of Kinda and father of the poet Imru'u l-Qays, by the Banū Asad:

*mani l-maliku l-aṣḥab  
al-ġallābu ġayru l-muġallab  
fī l-ibili ka'annahā r-rabrab  
lā ya'laqu ra'sahu ṣ-ṣaḥab  
hādā damuhu yanṭa'ib  
wa-hādā ġadan awwalu man yuslab*

Who is the red-haired king,  
the undefeated conqueror,  
leading camels that resemble a small herd of oryx,  
whose head has no uproar round it?  
This man – his blood will flow;  
this man tomorrow will be the first to be plundered.

Next a piece from Ibn Hišām (*Sīra* II, 577), who quotes it among a number of brief pieces ascribed to one of Muḥammad's unsuccessful rivals, Musaylima. Some of these appear to be distorted to show Musaylima in a pejorative light, but the following does not ring particularly false:

*laqad an'ama llāhu 'alā l-ḥublā  
abraġa minhā nasamatan taṣ'ā  
min bayni ṣifāqin wa-ḥašā*

God has been gracious to the pregnant woman.  
He has brought forth from her a living being  
that can move,  
From between the navel and the bowels.

Finally, I quote two examples from Ibn Ḥabīb's *Kitāb al-Munammaq*, which contains a number of stories of *kāhins* being asked to act as *ḥakam* concerning some dispute of honour (*nifār, muḥābara*). There appears to have been a set procedure whereby the *kāhin* was asked to show his power and suitability by guessing what strange object the

contestants had brought with them. If he did this successfully, he was then asked to judge between the two contestants. In the most complex and interesting passage (pp. 109-111) two men named Mālik b. ʿUmayla and ʿUmayra b. Ḥāḡir al-Ḥuzāʿī ask a *kāhin* whose name is not given to judge which of them has the better horse. They approach him in the company of a member of the Banū Naṣr clan of the Ḥuzāʿa tribe and ask him what they are concealing (a dead vulture). The *kāhin*'s answer is in two sections:

- (a) *ḥaba'tum lī dā ḡanāḥin a'naq*  
*tawīli r-riḡli abraq*  
*idā taḡalḡala ḥallaq*  
*wa-idā nqadda fattaq*  
*dā miḥlabin mudallaq*  
*ya' iṣu ḥattā yuḥlaq*

You have concealed for me that which has wings and a long neck,  
 long-legged, black and white.  
 When it moves quickly, it soars and circles;  
 when it swoops, it rends.  
 - that which has sharp talons,  
 living until it is worn out.

- (b) *aḥlifu bi-n-nūri wa-l-qam(a)ri*  
*wa-s-sanā wa-d-dahri*  
*wa-r-riyāḥi wa-l-fat̄ri*  
*laqad ḥaba'tum lī ḡuttata nasri*  
*fī ʿikemin min ṣa'ri*  
*ma'a l-fatā min Banī Naṣri*

I swear by the light and the moon,  
 by the lightning-flash and by fate,  
 by the winds and the cleaving,

you have concealed for me the corpse of a vulture  
 in a bundle of hair  
 in the company of the youth from the Banū Naṣr.

After answering correctly in this way the *kāhin* is asked to give judgement, and this he does in a piece of *rağaz*.

The second piece from the *Kitāb al-Munammaq* (103-107) concerns a dispute between Hāšim b. ʿAbd Manāf and Umayya b. ʿAbd Šams. There may be some doubt about the details of the story and particularly about the names of the protagonists, but the judgement (p. 106) is a typical oath passage and I have doubts only about the final segment containing the names:

*wa-l-qamari l-bāhir*  
*wa-l-kawkabi z-zāhir*  
*wa-l-ğamāmi l-māṭir*  
*wa-mā bi-l-ğawwi min tā'ir*  
*wa-mā htadā bi-ʿalami musāfir*  
*munğidin aw ġā'ir*  
*laqad sabaqa Hāšimun Umayyata ilā l-mafāhir*

By the moon that shines brightly,  
 by the star that shows clearly,  
 by the clouds that give rain,  
 by all the birds in the air,  
 by what is rightly guided by the waymark of [the]  
 wayfarer,  
 going to the uplands or descending to the lowlands,  
 Hāšim has outstripped Umayya to the [heights] of glory.

These pieces are very similar in their phraseology to many passages in the Qur'ān. Take, for example, *Sūra* 91, verses 1-10:

*wa-šamsi wa-duḥābā*  
*wa-l-qamari idā talāhā*  
*wa-n-nahāri idā ḡallāhā*  
*wa-l-layli idā yaḡšāhā*  
*wa-s-samā'i wa-mā banāhā*  
*wa-l-ardī wa-mā taḥāhā*  
*wa-nafsin wa-mā sawwāhā*  
*fa-alhamahā fuḡūrahā wa-taqwāhā*  
*qad aflahā man zakkāhā*  
*wa-qad ḥāba man dassāhā*

### The *ḥatīb*

There appear to have been two types of *ḥatīb* in pre-Islamic Arabic. Much the more important was the tribal *ḥatīb*, who, together with the *sayyid* and the *šā'ir*, was one of the leading members of the tribe, a person who had come to prominence because of his ability as a spokesman. His role was similar in some respects to that of the poet, though the medium of the *ḥatīb* was eloquent prose and not verse. It was his duty to praise his tribe and denigrate its enemies and to take part in any negotiations concerning the tribe. Usually this was his sole responsibility, though there are reports of the occasional *ḥatīb* who doubled as *qāss*, or as *šā'ir* or even as *sayyid*. Our prime source of information for this type of *ḥatīb* is the not totally reliable al-Ġāḥiẓ (*Bayān, passim*) but there is some confirmatory evidence in poetry (e.g. Labīd, al-Quṭāmī, the *Mufaddaliyyāt* and the *Hamāsa*).

We have less information about the second type, the peripatetic *ḥatīb*. One has to presume that his role was essentially like that of the peripatetic poet, *i.e.* his services could be bought. However, it may well be that some of the itinerant *ḥatībs* preached ethical messages, urging, for example, that one should do what is right and avoid what is wrong; and in a few cases the message may have been overtly religious. This would certainly appear to have been the case with Quss b. Sā'ida, 'eloquent as the Bishop of Naḡrān', about whom there is a story that when

a delegation from Bakr b. Wā'il met the Prophet he recited to them a piece of a speech by Quss that he had heard at one of the fairs at 'Ukāz.

### Ḥaṭīb utterances

The piece of Quss's oration remembered by the prophet is said (al-Gāhiz, *Bayān* I, 308-9, al-Iṣfahānī, *Aḡānī* XIV, 40 etc.) to have run:

*ayyuhā n-nāsu ḡtami'ū wa-smā'ū wa-ʿū.*  
*man ʿāša māṭ, wa-man māta fāt,*  
*wa-kullu mā hwa ātin āt.*

This is not far from a *kāhin*-type utterance, and it is thus a reminder that the registers under discussion are not discrete from one another. In various ways they overlap, particularly in the use of assonance, and in any case it would appear to me that with the *ḥaṭīb* and the *qāṣṣ* it would be a mistake to think of them as using a single unified register.

It is reasonably clear that the most striking feature of the *ḥaṭīb*'s art was the use of parallelism, a feature deeply embedded in high-register Semitic literature. It is hard to see this clearly from the scrappy fragments that survive from pre-Islamic times, but it shows up well in early Islamic *ḥutbas*, which may be anachronistic in their contents but are not so in their style. The topic of parallelism has been examined by my esteemed colleague A. F. L. Beeston in an illuminating article 'Parallelism in Arabic Prose' (1974, reproduced in a shortened form as chapter 5 of volume 1 of the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*), which should be studied carefully by readers of this article.

I quote two of the important examples that he cites in the article but omits from the chapter. With his customary kindness Professor Beeston has agreed that I may quote the texts and translations from his article. However, for an understanding of the parallelism readers should study the explanation Professor Beeston gives in his article. The first

piece is said to be a *ḥuṭba* given by Abū Bakr on his accession to the caliphate (for variations in the text see aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīḥ* I, 1829):

*ayyuhā n-nāsu, innī qad wullītu ʿalay-kum, wa-lastu bi-ḥayrikum.*

*fa-in ra'aytumūnī ʿalā ḥaqqin fa-aʿīnūnī;  
wa-in ra'aytumūnī ʿalā bātilin fa-saddidūnī.*

*atīʿūnī mā ataʿtu llāha fikum;  
fa-idā ʿaṣaytuhu fa-lā ṭāʿata lī ʿalaykum.*

*a-lā inna aqwākum ʿindī d-dāʿīfu ḥattā āḥuda l-ḥaqqa labu  
wa-aḍʿafukum ʿindī l-qawiyyu ḥattā āḥuda l-ḥaqqa minhu*

*aqūlu qawli ḥadā, wa-astagfiru lī wa-lakum.*

Men, I have placed in command over you, though I am not the most worthy of you.

So if you see me acting rightly, assist me;  
and if you see me acting vainly, correct me.

Obey me so long as I obey God in your concerns;  
but if I disobey him, no obedience is due to me from you.

The most potent of you in my regard is the weakest – until I can ensure justice for him;  
the weakest of you in my regard is the strongest – until I can exact justice from him.

That is my declaration of policy, and I ask God's pardon for myself and for you.

The second is an address by 'Utmān to those rebelling against him (for variations in the text see at-Ṭabarī, *Tārīḥ* I, 2939-40):

*inna li-kulli šay'in āfa; wa-inna li-kulli ni'matin 'āba.  
fi hādā d-dīni 'ayyābūna zannānūn,*

*yuzhirūna lakum mā tuḥibbūn,  
wa-yusirrūna mā tukrihūn.*

*yaqūlūna lakum wa-taqūlūn -  
taḡām, miṭla n-na'ām;*

*yatba'ūna awwala mā nā'iq -  
aḥabbu ma'wāridihim ilayhimu n-naziḥ.*

*laqad aqrartum li-bni l-Hattābi  
aktāra mimmā naqamtum 'alayya;*

*wa-lākinnahu waqamakum wa-zaḡarakum  
zaḡra n-na'āmi l-muharrama.*

*wa-llāhi innī la-aqrabu nāsirā wa-a'azzu nafarā;  
wa-aqmanu in qultu halumma an tuḡāba da'watī min 'Umarā.*

*hal tafqidūna min huqūqikum šayyā?*  
[probably originally *šiyyā* (for the later *šay'an*) - see *Sūra* 19,  
verse 42 below]

*fa-mā lī lā afalu fi l-ḥaqqi mā ašā* [for *ašā'u*?]

*idan fa-lima kuntu imāmā?*

Everything has a blemish; every grace has a defeat  
There are those who slander and think ill of this faith,

Showing you on the surface that which you love,  
but harbouring in their hearts that which you hate.

They speak to you and you respond –  
an ostrich-like rabble;

Following the first voice they hear –  
the water-holes they love best are the most inaccessible.

You conceded to Ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb  
more than you begrudge me;

Yet he oppressed you and trampled on you,  
and drove you like silly ostriches.

By God I am closer to victory and I have a stronger party;  
I am better entitled, when I say 'Come' to have my call  
answered than 'Umar.

Do you lack anything to which you have a just right?  
So why should I not do justice as I wish?

If I do not do so, why did I become leader?

### *The qāṣṣ*

The existence of story-tellers in pre-Islamic times is well-attested; and even if it were not, the use of the root *qāṣṣ* in the Qur'ān would go most of the way to establishing it. One can also be reasonably sure that a fair number of early stories that survive, e.g. about the war of al-Basūs, contain genuine information that has passed through generations of story-tellers. It is the process of transmission that causes the problem. The material was inevitably recast generation by generation, and it is extremely rare that one finds scraps that would appear to be early

because of the archaic cast of their language. Thus one has to take the view that there is no *qāṣṣ*-material that we can use as control samples against which Quranic narratives can be judged. Nevertheless, it is reasonably straightforward to discern a story-telling register in the Qur'ān.

### *Documentary Style*

Two clauses taken from the 'Constitution of Medina' are an adequate example of what I term the documentary style. They run:

*al-muhāğirūna min Qurayşin 'alā raba'atihim  
yata'āqalūna baynahum, wa-hum yafdūna 'āniyahum  
bi-l-ma'rūfi wa-l-qisṭi bayna l-mu'min in*

*wa-Banū 'Awfin 'alā raba'atihim yata'āqalūna ma'āqilahumu  
l-ūlā, wa-kullu ṭā'ifatin tafdī 'āniyahum bi-l-ma'rūfi  
wa-l-qisṭi bayna l-mu'min in.*

The Muhāğirūn of Qurayş are in charge of their own affairs, paying jointly among themselves their blood-money; and they will ransom a prisoner of them in accordance with what is customary and by fair sharing among the *Mu'minūn*.

The Banū 'Awf are in charge of the management of their affairs, paying jointly among themselves their previous blood-monies; and each section will ransom a prisoner of them in accordance with what is customary and by fair sharing among the *Mu'minūn*.

One may compare this with *sūra* 2, verse 158, which deals in part with the *hağğ*:

*inna ṣ-Ṣafā wa-l-Marwata min ša'ā'iri llāhi fa-man haḡḡa l-bayta awi 'amara fa-lā ḡunāḡa 'alayhi an yattawwafa bihimā wa-man taṭawwafa ḡayran fa-inna llāha šākirun 'alim.*

as-Ṣafā and al-Marwa are among the waymarks of God; so whosoever makes the Pilgrimage to the House, or the Visitation, it is no fault in him to circumambulate them; and whoso volunteers good, God is All-grateful, All-knowing.

Use of the third person in this register, however, normally gives way to direct address in the second person, as can be seen from a subsequent passage on the *haḡḡ*, in *sūra* 2, verse 196:

*wa-atimmū l-ḡaḡḡa wa-l-'umrata li-llāhi, fa-in uḡširtum fa-mā staysara mina l-badyi; wa-lā taḡliqū ru'ūsakum ḡattā yabluḡa l-badyu maḡallahu; fa-man kāna minkum marīḡan aw bihi adan min ra'sihi fa-fidyatun min ṣiyāmin aw ṣadaqatin aw nusukin; fa-idā amintum fa-man tamatta'a bi-l-'umrati fa-ṣiyāmu talātati ayyāmin fī l-ḡaḡḡi wa-sab'atin idā raḡatun: tilka 'aṣaratun kāmilatun - ḡālika li-man lam yakun aḡluhu ḡādirī l-masḡidi.*

Perform the pilgrimage and the visit to Mecca for Allah. And if ye are prevented, then send such gifts as can be obtained with ease, and shave not your heads until the gifts have reached their destination. And whoever among you is sick or hath an ailment of the head must pay a ransom of fasting or almsgiving or offering. And if ye are in safety, then whosoever contenteth himself with the visit for the pilgrimage (shall give) such gifts as can be had with ease. And whosoever cannot find (such gifts), then a fast of three days while on the pilgrimage, and of seven when ye have returned; that is, ten in all. That is for him whose folk are not present at the Inviolable Place of Worship.

It is in fact quite easy to find verses where the subject matter is much closer – the reader may care to do so – but even with quite different subject matter the similarity of register is clear enough.

### Conclusion

Though I am convinced that the basic registers on which the Qur'ān draws are those of the *kāhin*, the *ḥatīb*, the *qāṣṣ* and the documentary style, that is only part of the story. There is a striking parallel if we look at the *Maqāmāt* of al-Hamaḍānī. With virtually every phrase it is possible to say that al-Hamaḍānī is drawing on such-and-such a genre, style, motif *etc.* Yet the amalgam he creates is quite different from any of the material on which he draws. The various existing strands are turned into a new style.

The same thing happens with the Qur'ān from the earliest revelations onwards and can be seen on virtually every page. This fusion of registers, which occurs in many different ways, was of course inevitable when *kāhin*-type assonance became a general stylistic feature of the Qur'ān, regardless of the basic register of any given passage. Thus the following passage from *Sūra* 19 has a style that marks it as essentially an argumentative *ḥatīb*-type piece, full of parallelism:

88 *wa-qālū ttahada r-rahmānu waladā*

89 *laqad ḡi'tum šay'ā iddā*

90 *takādu s-samawātu yatafattarna minhu wa-tanšuqqu  
l-ardu wa-tahirru l-ḡibālu haddā*

91 *an da'aw li-r-rahmāni waladā*

92 *wa-mā yanbagī li-r-rahmāni an yattahida waladā*

93 *in kullu man fī s-samawāti wa-l-ardi illā atī r-rahmāni 'abdā*

- 94 *laqad aḥṣāhum wa-ʿaddahum ʿaddā*  
 95 *wa-kullubum ātīhi yaʿwma l-qiyāmati fardā*  
 96 *inna lladīna āmanū wa-ʿamilū ṣ-ṣāliḥāti*  
*sa-yağʿalu labumu r-rahmānu wuddā*

Assonance, too, appears as an integrated and effective part of the Qur'ān's narrative style, whereas our best guess is that assonance was only an incidental feature in pre-Islamic *qāṣṣ* material. Take, for example, another passage from *Sūra* 19 with longish verses ending with a difficult assonance in *-iyyā*:

- 41 *wa-dkur fī l-kitābi Ibrāhīma; innahu kāna ṣiddīqā nabīyyā*  
 42 *id qāla li-abīhi yā abatī lima taʿbudu mā lā*  
*yaṣmaʿu wa-lā yuḥṣiru wa-lā yuḡnī ʿanka ṣayʿā*

[probably read originally as *ṣiyyā* – see the *ḥuṭba* of ʿUṭmān above]

- 43 *yā abatī innī qad ḡāʿanī mina l-ʿilmi mā lam yaʿtika fa-ttabīnī*  
*abdika ṣirātā sawīyyā*  
 44 *yā abatī lā taʿbudi ṣ-ṣaytāna; inna ṣ-ṣaytāna kāna li-r-rahmāni*  
*ʿaṣīyyā*  
 45 *yā abatī innī aḥāfu an yamassaka ʿadābun mina r-rahmāni fa-*  
*takūna li-ṣ-ṣaytāni waliyyā*  
 46 *qāla a-rāḡibun anta ʿan ālihatī yā Ibrāhīmu; la-in lam tantabi la-*  
*arḡumannaka; wa-ḡurnī maliyyā*  
 47 *qāla salāmun ʿalayka sa-astaḡfiru laka rabbī; innahu kāna bi*  
*ḥafīyyā*

48 *wa-a<sup>c</sup>tazilukum wa-mā tad<sup>c</sup>ūna min dūni llāhi wa-ad<sup>c</sup>ū rabbī; <sup>c</sup>asā  
allā akūna bi-du<sup>c</sup>ā'i rabbī šaqiyyā*

Here I feel that I should stop, for this article at least. Further examples will simply distract readers from following the essential line of argument that I wish to set out on what I believe to be an important question: how and why did the Qur'ān make its impact during Muḥammad's lifetime? I trust that I have written enough here to persuade readers that my initial arguments bear scrutiny. However, further consideration is needed. One should also ask, for example, why the Meccans called Muḥammad a poet – or whether they simply called him *mağnūn* with the *šā<sup>c</sup>ir* appearing as a rhetorical embellishment. (Their calling him a *kābin* is much easier to understand.) One ought also to consider whether the way some people linked the *kābin* and the *ḥakam* might have influenced the inhabitants of Medina in the fateful period before the Hiğra.

I should like to end by stressing to my Muslim colleagues that what I have set out above is in no way an attack on the uniqueness of the Qur'ān nor on their belief that the Qur'ān is the Word of God. I have simply suggested that we substitute one explanation of the Qur'ān's linguistic affinities for another, and I believe that my explanation for doing so is valid for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

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