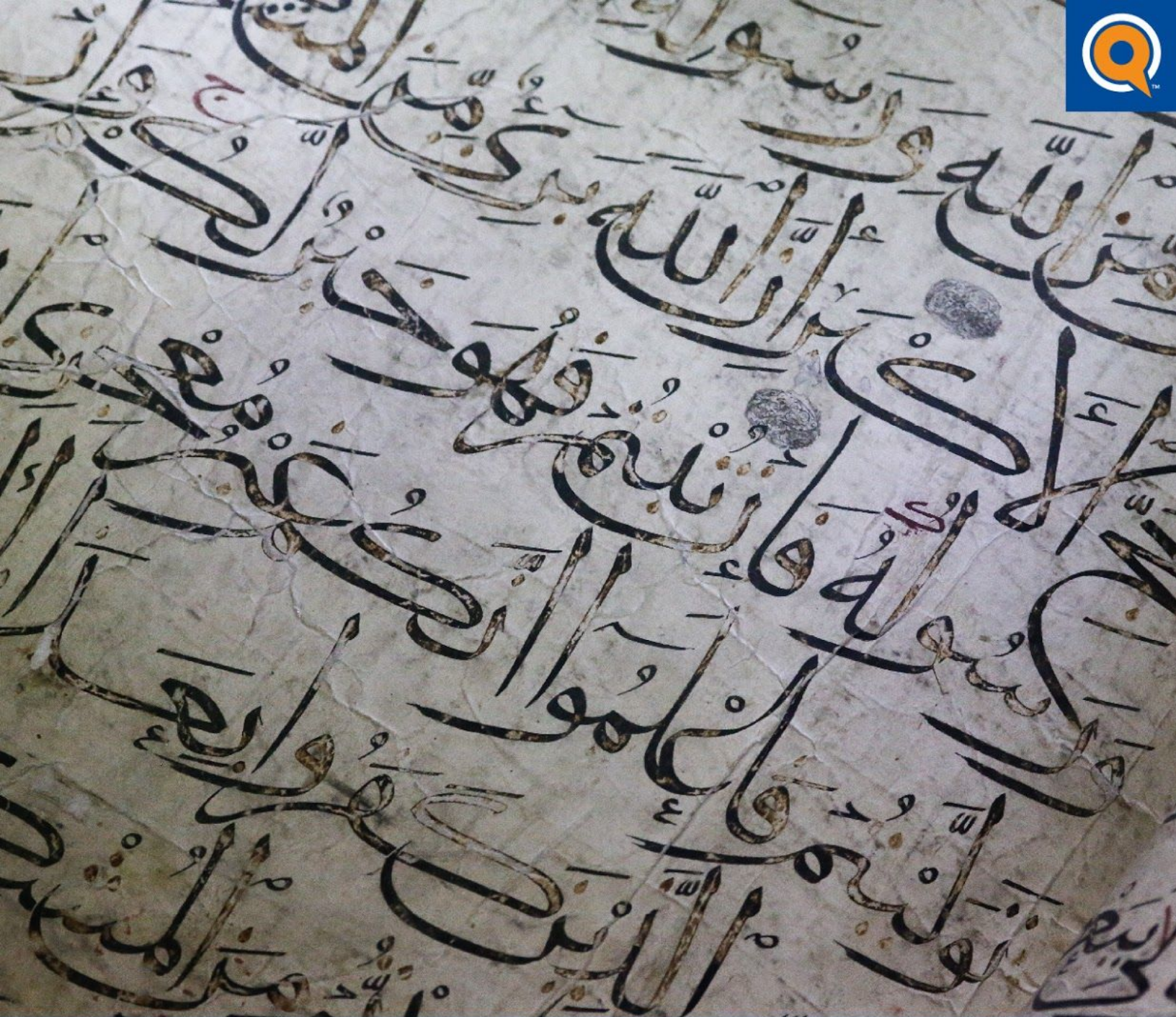




Introduction to I'jaz al-Qur'an: The Role of Muhammad ﷺ

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Say, “Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce the equivalent of this Qur'an, they could not produce its equal, however much they helped each other.”¹

Introduction

Among the most foundational and significant beliefs of Muslims is absolute conviction in the Qur'an as the Speech (*kalām*) of God, divine and preserved, unparalleled and unmatched by any human speech, and inimitable by any individual or group. What follows is the second essay in a series on the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, addressing the role of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the inimitability of the Qur'an, and a review of various imitation attempts over time. By the end of this series, the evidence will clearly demonstrate that the Qur'an's authorship cannot reasonably be attributed to anyone but God.

The final Messenger of God ﷺ

The claims regarding the origins of the Qur'an generally fall under one of two categories:

1. The Qur'an is from God conveyed through Prophet Muhammad ﷺ
2. The Qur'an is not from God but from Prophet Muhammad ﷺ or other human beings

As this is an introduction to the topic, the primary focus in this segment will revolve around Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his character and trustworthiness, since he conveyed the Qur'an to the world. The segment that follows serves as a rational basis for disproving the claim that the Qur'an was authored by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and/or other human beings.

¹ Qur'an 17:88.

Context of the claim

Oftentimes, those who claim that the Qur'an was authored by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself suggest various worldly motives (e.g., material gain or power), claims that can be rationally eliminated by utilizing historical evidence, reasoning, and objectivity. Other researchers, such as William Montgomery Watt, mistakenly assume that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was an unrivaled genius who authored the Qur'an in his subconscious mind (via "intellectual locution") and mistook it as revelation from God.² This modern orientalist claim, however, contradicts his own and other orientalists' views about the Prophet's established sincerity,³ his illiteracy ("[he] was not... taught to read and write"),⁴ his lack of exposure to scripture ("it seems certain that he had not read any scripture"),⁵ and their inability to properly and coherently explain the concept of *wahy* (revelation) via a secular or materialist psychological lens.⁶ The primary objective of including a section on the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the introductory article of this series is so that readers may keep in mind his exalted moral character, his inability to read or write, and his experience as a medium of the Qur'an's delivery to the very society in which he was raised.

As Muhammad ﷺ is one of the most documented humans in history,⁷ it is easy to examine these claims and compare them with the historical evidence. As with orientalists of recent centuries (e.g., Muir, Margoliouth, Bell), the Arabs of Quraysh initially accused the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ of being the author of the Qur'an. But eventually, this accusation was completely discontinued:

² William Montgomery Watt, *Mohammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 52.

³ Watt.

⁴ See David Samuel Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam* (London: Putnam, 1905), 59.

⁵ Watt, *Mohammad at Mecca*, 52.

⁶ See Muhammad Ali's rebuttal of Watt's intellectual locution: Muhammad Mohar Ali, *The Qur'an and the Orientalists* (Ipswich: Jam'iyat Ihya' Minhaaj Al-Sunnah, 2002), 172–93.

⁷ For instance, Chase Robinson writes: "No historian familiar with the relevant evidence doubts that in the early seventh century many Arabs acknowledged a man named Muhammad as a law-giving prophet in a line of monotheist prophets, that he formed and led a community of some kind in Arabia, and, finally, that this community-building functioned, in one way or another, to trigger conquests that established Islamic rule across much of the Mediterranean and Near East in the middle third of the seventh century." See Chase F. Robinson, "History and Heilsgeschichte in Early Islam: Some Observations on Prophetic History and Biography," *History and Religion: Narrating a Religious Past* 68 (2015): 122.

When Our clear revelations are recited to them, those who do not expect to meet with Us say, “Bring [us] a different Qur'an, or change it.” Say [O Prophet]: “It is not for me to change it of my own accord; I only follow what is revealed to me, for I fear the torment of a tremendous Day if I were to disobey my Lord.” Say [O Prophet], “If God had so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you. I lived a whole lifetime among you before it [revelation] came to me. How can you not use your reason?”⁸

These two verses of the Qur'an were revealed as instructions to the Prophet (“Say [O Prophet]”) to respond to the initial claim of Quraysh, who were advised to reflect rationally and reasonably on their claim. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had lived amongst them for forty years, was known to be trustworthy and honest (*aṣ-ṣādiq al-amīn*), had never been witnessed learning language or poetry from anyone, never sought any power or authority, and—seemingly abruptly—he was commanded to convey an unrivaled and inimitable revelation from God which he could not have conjured or controlled of his own accord. His righteousness was known to the people even before prophethood and many Western scholars of Islam acknowledge his integrity, as seen in Watt's scholarly testimony:

His readiness to undergo persecutions for his beliefs, the high moral character of the men who believed in him and looked up to him as leader, and the greatness of his ultimate achievement—all argue his fundamental integrity. To suppose Muhammad an impostor raises more problems than it solves. Moreover, none of the great figures of history is so poorly appreciated in the West as Muhammad.⁹

As Professor M. Mohar Ali writes:

It must be pointed out that the Qur'an is not considered a book of poetry by any knowledgeable person. Nor did the Prophet ever indulge in versifying. It was indeed an allegation of the unbelieving Quraysh at the initial stage of their opposition to the revelation that Muhammad ﷺ had turned a poet;

⁸ Qur'an 10:15–16.

⁹ Watt, *Mohammad at Mecca*, 52.

but soon enough they found their allegation beside the mark and changed their lines of criticism in view of the undeniable fact of the Prophet's being unlettered and completely unaccustomed to the art of poetry, saying that he had been tutored by others, that he had got the 'old-worst stories' written for him by others and read out to him in the morning and evening.¹⁰

Thus, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was not considered a person who had learned or engaged in the craft and mastery of poetry and rhetoric. Therefore, the claim that he somehow managed to produce, seemingly out of thin air, an *inimitable* work of linguistic and literary perfection and mesmerizing rhetoric—with knowledge of the unseen—in the desert of Arabia after living among his people for 40 years, is far from rational thought.

The scholar Taqi Usmani contends:

...such a proclamation was no ordinary thing. It came from a person who had never learned anything from the renowned poets and scholars of the time, had never recited even a single piece of poetry in their poetic congregations, and had never attended the company of soothsayers.¹¹

Although Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was the medium (i.e., the messenger) by which the Qur'an was conveyed to mankind over twenty-three years, there are many clear signs highlighting that the Qur'an was not his speech. The types of evidence for "separation" between the Speech of the Qur'an and the speech of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ include the following:

1. Stylometric analyses of the Qur'an compared to the hadith of Muhammad ﷺ
2. The Prophet's lack of control over revelation
3. The separation between the emotional experiences of Prophet Muhammad and the speech of the Qur'an
4. The Qur'an's rebuking of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ
5. The limited references to Prophet Muhammad's name in the Qur'an
6. The *i'jāz* of the Qur'an

¹⁰ Ali, *Qur'an and the Orientalists*, 14.

¹¹ Mufti Taqi Usmani, *An Approach to the Quranic Sciences* (Karachi: Darul Isha'at, 2000), 261.

Stylometric analysis of the Qur'an compared to the hadith

A strong rational basis for eliminating the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as the author of the Qur'an involves stylometry, the statistical analysis of a text's linguistic style, oftentimes for the purpose of attributing or eliminating an author.¹² A number of scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries began examining religious texts, such as the Bible, through the lens of stylistic analysis. For example, the nineteenth-century Christian scholar Schleiermacher disputed the authorship of Paul's First Epistle to Timothy, while Ferdinand Baur and Heinrich Holtzmann conducted similar studies of the New Testament.¹³

Although it is generally known amongst fluent Arabs who are familiar with both the Qur'an and hadith that the two could not be attributed to the same author, a statistical study was conducted to support this claim with objective data.¹⁴ The conclusion of the study, which included sixteen total experiments, was that the Qur'an and the hadith compilation of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* must have two completely different authors.¹⁵ Although the study's conclusions were lengthy, one of the important findings was that 62% of the words from the hadith in *Bukhārī* are not found in the Qur'an, and 83% of the words of the Qur'an are not found in the *Bukhārī* hadith, also referred to as “discriminant words”—found in one text and not the other.¹⁶ Other findings included significant differences in the uses of singular and plural forms, differences in the frequency of word lengths in the two texts (e.g., monograms, trigrams, tetragrams, etc.), and the different results in stylometric classifiers (Canberra distance, Manhattan distance,¹⁷ RN cross entropy,

¹² Donna Eudora Mills, “Authorship Attribution Applied to the Bible” (master's thesis, Graduate Faculty of Texas Tech University, 2003).

¹³ Mills.

¹⁴ Halim Sayoud, “Author Discrimination between the Holy Quran and Prophet's Statements,” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 27, no. 4 (2012): 427–44.

¹⁵ Sayoud, 432.

¹⁶ Sayoud, 432.

¹⁷ Canberra and Manhattan distance refer to “measures of the distance between points in multidimensional space.” See: Graham Upton and Ian Cook, “Canberra Distance,” *A Dictionary of Statistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

cosine distance, Kullback Leibler,¹⁸ LDA analysis, Naïve Bayes classifier,¹⁹ and others).²⁰ The conclusion of the study was that the two examined texts (the Qur'an and *Bukhārī* hadith) must have had two different authors and that the statistical results reject attributing the Qur'an to Muhammad (peace be upon him).²¹

When Muslims encounter the claim that the Qur'an was authored by Muhammad ﷺ, one typical response is the following question: If the Qur'an was revealed over the span of twenty-three years, then how did Prophet Muhammad maintain such distinct speech for so long and in so many places and circumstances? The more remarkable point of observation that should be highlighted is that the Qur'an's verses were revealed instantaneously at times after unplanned events or historical incidents, or in response to questions and challenges posed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ; thus, there was no time to carefully plan what was being conveyed in order to maintain such strongly distinct styles and personalities. It is unreasonable to assume that a trustworthy human being, untrained in poetry and rhetoric, would have or could have maintained such an otherworldly feat for twenty-three years.

On this point, Dr. Muhammad Draz writes:

When we consider the Qur'anic style we find it the same throughout, while the Prophet's own style is totally different. It does not run alongside the Qur'an except like high flying birds which cannot be reached by man but which may 'run' alongside him. When we look at human styles we find them all of a type that remains on the surface of the Earth. Some of them crawl while others run fast. But when you compare the fastest running among them to the Qur'an you feel that they are no more than moving cars compared to planets speeding through their orbits.²²

¹⁸ Kullback Leibler is a measure of the difference between two probability density functions. See: Graham Upton and Ian Cook, "Kullback–Leibler Information," *A Dictionary of Statistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁹ Naïve Bayes classifiers are used to examine and classify documents and word frequencies as belonging to one category or another, such as spam or legal documents. See: Jason D. Rennie, Lawrence Shih, Jaime Teevan, and David Karger, "Tackling the Poor Assumptions of Naive Bayes Text Classifiers," *International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML-03)* 3 (2003): 616–23.

²⁰ Sayoud, "Author Discrimination," 441.

²¹ Sayoud, "Author Discrimination," 442.

²² Muhammad Abdullah Draz, *The Qur'an: An Eternal Challenge* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2001), 83.

Revelation being beyond the Prophet's control

Another form of evidence that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was not the author of the Qur'an is his lack of control over revelation, as illustrated in the following prophetic narration:

According to the exegesis of al-Ṭabarī,²³ the Quraysh sent al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith and 'Uqbah ibn Abī Mu'īt to the Jewish rabbis in Madīnah and told them: "Ask them (the rabbis) about Muhammad, and describe him to them, and tell them what he is saying. They are the people of the first Book, and they have more knowledge of the Prophets than we do." So they set out and when they reached Madīnah, they asked the Jewish rabbis about the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. They described him to them and told them some of what he had said. They said, "You are the people of the Tawrāh and we have come to you so that you can tell us about this companion of ours."

They (the rabbis) said, "Ask him about three things which we will tell you to ask, and if he answers them, then he is a Prophet who has been sent (by God); if he does not, then he is saying things that are not true, in which case how you deal with him will be up to you. Ask him about some young men in ancient times, what was their story for theirs is a strange and wondrous tale. Ask him about a man who traveled a great deal and reached the east and the west of the earth; what was his story? Ask him as well about the *Rūḥ* (soul or spirit)—what is it? If he tells you about these things, then he is a prophet, so follow him, but if he does not tell you, then he is a man who is making things up, so deal with him as you see fit." So al-Naḍr and 'Uqbah left and came back to the Quraysh, and said: "O people of Quraysh, we have come to you with a decisive solution that will put an end to the problem between you and Muhammad. The Jewish rabbis told us to ask him about some matters," and they told the Quraysh what they were. Then they came to the

²³ Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār Ḥajr, 2001), 17:592. See also: 'Abd al-Mālik Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat Ibn Hishām* (Egypt: Maktabat Mustafā al-Bābi, 1955), 1:302.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and said, “O Muhammad, tell us,” and they asked him about the things they had been told to ask.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “I will tell you tomorrow about what you have asked me,” but he did not say “If Allah wills.” So they went away, and fifteen days passed without any revelation from Allah concerning that, and the Angel Jibrīl did not come to the prophet ﷺ during that time. The people of Makkah started to doubt him, and said, “Muhammad promised to tell us the next day, and now fifteen days have gone by and he has not told us anything in response to the questions we asked.” The Messenger of Allah felt sad because of the delay in revelation and was grieved by what the people of Makkah were saying about him. Then Jibrīl (Angel Gabriel) came to him from Allah with the *sūrah* about the companions of al-Kahf (The Cave),²⁴ which also contained a rebuke for feeling sad about the idolaters.²⁵ The *sūrah* also informed him about the matters they had asked him about, the young men and the traveler, as well as the verse about the soul. In addition, as was reported from Ibn ‘Abbās, were the two verses:

And never say, “Indeed, I will do that tomorrow,” without [adding], “If Allah wills.” And remember your Lord when you forget [it] and say, “Perhaps my Lord will guide me to what is nearer than this to right conduct.”²⁶

Ultimately, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had no control over the revelation and was, in fact, grieved and saddened at the lack of revelation when questioned by people. Had the Prophet had control over the speech of the Qur'an, he would have not placed himself in such a difficult position in front of his opponents, one in which he promised revelation the next day and then had no response for fifteen days. It is absurd to assume that anyone in such a position would accept such a dilemma if it were avoidable.

²⁴ Sūrah 18 of the Qur'an.

²⁵ al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr at-Ṭabarī*, 17:592. See also: Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat Ibn Hishām*, 1:302.

²⁶ Qur'an 18:23–24.

The separation between the emotional experiences of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the speech of the Qur'an

A third disconnect between the speech of the Qur'an and the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ regards his emotional experiences over the course of twenty-three years of prophethood; none of this emotional turmoil is observed in the Qur'an except as a distinct and differentiated voice. When he first received revelation in the cave of Hirā', the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had a genuine human reaction, one of fear, and he ran home to his wife Khadījah rather than going to the town center and making some bold proclamation.²⁷ Furthermore, the Prophet's

²⁷ 'Ā'ishah reports: "The beginning of the Revelation that came to the Messenger of Allah was good dreams; he never saw a dream but it came true like bright daylight. Then seclusion was made dear to him, and he used to go to the cave of Hirā' and worship there, which means that he went and devoted himself to worship for a number of nights before coming back to his family to collect more provisions, then he would go back again. Then he would go back to Khadījah to collect more provisions. [This went on] until the truth came to him suddenly when he was in the cave of Hirā'. The angel came and said, 'Read!' The Messenger of Allah said, 'I am not a reader.' He said, Then he took hold of me and squeezed me until I could not bear it any more then he released me and said, 'Read!' I said, 'I am not a reader.' He took hold of me and squeezed me a second time until I could not bear it any more, then he released me and said, 'Read!' I said, 'I am not a reader.' He took hold of me and squeezed me a third time until I could not bear it any more, then he released me and said, 'Read! In the Name of your Lord Who has created (all that exists). He has created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous. Who has taught [writing] by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not.' (96:1-5)

Then the Messenger of Allah went back with his heart beating wildly, until he came to Khadījah and said, 'Cover me! Cover me!' They covered him till his fear went away. Then he said to Khadījah, 'O Khadījah, I fear for myself,' and he told her what had happened. Khadījah said, 'Nay, be of good cheer, for by Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You uphold the ties of kinship, speak truthfully, help the poor and destitute, serve your guests generously and assist those who are stricken by calamity.' Then Khadījah took him to Waraqah ibn Nawfal, the son of her paternal uncle. He was a man who had become a Christian during *jaahiliyyah*. He used to write Arabic script and he used to write from the Gospel in Arabic as much as Allah willed he should write. He was an old man who had become blind. Khadījah said, 'O son of my uncle, listen to what your nephew says.' Waraqah said: 'O son of my brother, what have you seen?' The Prophet told him what he had seen. Waraqah said: 'This is the Naamoos [Jibreel] who came down to Mūsā. Would that I were young and could live until the time when your people will drive you out.' The Messenger of Allah said, 'Will they really drive me out?' Waraqah said, 'Yes. Never has there come a man with that which you have brought, but he was persecuted. If I should live to see that day, I will support you strongly.' But a few days later, Waraqah died, and the Revelation also ceased for a while, until the Messenger of Allah was saddened."

Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh reported: "The Messenger of Allah said, speaking of that period when the revelation ceased: 'Whilst I was walking, I heard a voice from the sky. I looked up and saw the angel who had come to me in Hirā', sitting on a chair between the heavens and the earth. I felt scared of him, so I came home and said, "Cover me, cover me [with blankets]!" So they did, then Allah revealed the words: "O you (Muhammad) wrapped in your garments! Arise and warn all! And proclaim the greatness of your Lord! And purify your garments! And keep away from *al-rujz* [the idols]!" (74:1-5)." Abū Salamah said: "*al-rujz* were the idols which the people of Jāhilīyah used to worship. Then the revelation came frequently after that." *Bukhārī*, no. 4572; *Muslim*, no. 231.

children died, his wife Khadījah passed away, he and his community were completely boycotted and cut off, his close companions were harassed and murdered, he was stoned by the people of Tā'if, he engaged in military campaigns, and yet throughout the entirety of his human experiences as a prophet, the Qur'an's linguistic style and eloquent voice remain consistently distinct and divine in perspective, assertions, style, and character.²⁸

The Qur'an's rebuking of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

The fourth facet of separation between the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ requires the reader to reflect on the responses of rulers and leaders throughout history to being criticized. If, as some critics claimed, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ wanted authority and power over the world, then it would be reasonable to assume that he would want his image and reputation to remain excellent and this is the common reality seen today amongst rulers and politicians. However, the Qur'an does not hesitate to rebuke the Prophet ﷺ in examples such as the following:

He [the Prophet] frowned and turned away. Because there came to him the blind man, [interrupting]. But what would make you perceive, [O Muhammad], that perhaps he might be purified? Or be reminded and the remembrance would benefit him?²⁹

These verses highlight the incident in which Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was speaking with the elite of Quraysh and a blind man came to him to ask about Islam. The Prophet ﷺ turned away from him as he was busy with delivering the message of Islam to the elite of Quraysh, hoping their leaders would accept the faith.³⁰ Thereafter, revelation was sent down admonishing him for his treatment of the blind man. Thus, one can see clearly that there is a significant level of disconnect between the Qur'an's voice and character and the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

²⁸ Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1983), 53–79.

²⁹ Qur'an 80:1–4.

³⁰ See: al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 80:1–10.

Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ was threatened with punishment if he did not convey the Qur'an or if he tampered with its verses, and the author of the Qur'an made it clear that nobody would be able to defend him if he were to do such a thing:

And if he [Muhammad] had made up about Us some [false] speech, We would have seized him by the right hand. Then We would have cut [his] aorta. And there is no one of you who could prevent [Us] from [doing that]. And indeed, the Qur'an is a reminder for the righteous. And indeed, We know that among you are deniers. And indeed, it will be [a cause of] regret for the disbelievers. And indeed, it is the truth of certainty. So exalt the name of your Lord, the Most Great.³¹

And if We had not strengthened you, you would have almost inclined to them a little. Then [if you had], We would have made you taste double [punishment in] life and double [after] death. Then you would not find for yourself against Us a helper.³²

If the Qur'an were authored by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, it would be extremely strange to threaten, harshly criticize, and admonish himself in a scripture recited by the entire nation of believers, and expected to be recited until the end of time. People—particularly rulers and leaders—are generally resentful of harsh criticism, and especially a form of criticism that is preserved, public, and ongoing.

Other significant examples of reproaching verses of the Qur'an include:

But [Prophet] are you going to worry yourself to death over them if they do not believe in this message?³³

O Prophet, why do you prohibit [yourself from] what Allah has made lawful for you...?³⁴

³¹ Qur'an 69:44–52.

³² Qur'an 17:74–75.

³³ Qur'an 18:6.

³⁴ Qur'an 66:1.

We know well that what they say grieves you [Prophet]. It is not your honesty they question—it is Allah's signs [i.e., revelation] that the wrongdoers deny.³⁵

The fact that these aforementioned verses and others were not removed from the Qur'an highlights the divine authorship of the Qur'an, the authenticity of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in conveying it as it was revealed, and the promise of God to preserve it against any corruption or modification.³⁶ It is important to note that the verses that reproach the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ are not insults to him; rather, they indicate his keenness in spreading the message, which sometimes caused him grief, whilst reminding him of his role and mission.

As for the claim that the Qur'an was authored by Muhammad ﷺ for power or wealth, it is well established in the prophetic narrations and biographies that the Prophet's behavior exemplified the exact opposite—his material wealth actually decreased after he began conveying the Qur'an, and he declined all worldly offers in exchange for discontinuing the preaching of Islam. One example of this is seen in the following report:

One day some of the Quraysh chiefs were sitting in their assembly, while in another corner of the Mosque there was the Prophet sitting by himself. This was the time when Ḥamzah رضي الله عنه had already embraced Islam and the elite of the Quraysh were upset at the growing numbers of Muslims. On this occasion, 'Utbah ibn Rabī'ah said to the Quraysh chiefs: "Gentlemen, if you like I will go and speak to Muhammad and put before him some proposals; maybe he will accept one of them, to which we may also agree, and so he may stop opposing us [by conveying the message of Islam]." They all agreed to this, and 'Utbah went and sat by the Prophet ﷺ.

When the Prophet ﷺ turned to him, he said: "Muhammad, you are, as you know, a noble from your tribe and your lineage assures you a place of honor but now you have brought to your people a matter of grave concern, whereby you have split

³⁵ Qur'an 6:33.

³⁶ Qur'an 15:9.

their community, declared their way of life to be foolish, spoken shamefully of their gods and religion, and referred to their forefathers as disbelievers. Listen to what I propose and see if any of it is acceptable to you. If it is wealth that you seek, we will gather our wealth and make you the richest amongst us. If you seek honor, we will make you our overlord and we will make no decision without your consent. If you seek kingship, then we will make you our king. And if you cannot get rid of this demon that appears to you, we will find you a physician and spend all our money until you are cured.”

‘Utbah went on speaking in this strain and the Prophet ﷺ went on listening to him quietly until he finished speaking. He ﷺ then asked, “Have you finished, O Abū al-Walīd (the honorific nickname of ‘Utbah)?” When he replied in the affirmative, the Prophet said, “Then listen to me:

In the name of Allah, the Ever-Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy. *Haa Meem*. A revelation from Allah, the Ever-Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy. [This is] a book whose verses are explained in detail—a Qur’an in Arabic, for people who reflect. Giving glad tidings and warning [of a severe punishment]. But most of them turn away, so they listen not...³⁷

The Prophet continued to recite until he finished the *sūrah*. ‘Utbah sat quietly, entranced by what he was hearing. Then the Prophet ﷺ said, “You have heard what you have heard, so do as you please.” When ‘Utbah returned to his people, they said to themselves, “I swear by the Lord of the Ka‘bah, this ‘Utbah is not the same as the ‘Utbah that left us!” He said, “O people! I have heard a speech the likes of which I have never heard before. I swear by Allah, it is not magic, nor is it poetry, nor is it sorcery. O gathering of Quraysh, listen to me. Leave this man alone, for I swear by Allah, the speech that I have heard from him [i.e., the Qur’an] will soon be news (among the other tribes)...”³⁸

³⁷ Qur’an 41:1-4.

³⁸ Summarized from a report in Ibn Abī Shaybah, no. 37715; Abū Ya‘lā, no. 1818; Ibn Hishām; and al-Ḥākim, no. 3002 and declared authentic by al-Dhahabī. See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-nabawīyah* (Beirut: DKI, 1990), 1:322–23; al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-ṣaḥīḥayn* (Beirut: DKI, 2002).

This narration highlights the Prophet's genuine and consistent character whenever he was offered power, glory, and wealth. Anyone with a rudimentary study of the biography of Muhammad ﷺ would never claim that he sought power, glory, or wealth, as his character exemplified the opposite. Additionally, this narration highlights that even to the proficient and high-ranking 'Utbah, the Speech of the Qur'an was unlike anything he had ever heard—a testimony carrying significant weight in light of the role of rhetoric and poetry among the Arabs of the time. Furthermore, 'Utbah acknowledged that the Qur'an would spread and become news to other people—which manifested shortly thereafter—an additional indicator of the powerful eloquence and otherworldliness of the Qur'an.

Prophet Muhammad's integrity

The fifth facet of separation is the integrity and sincerity of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and this is a crucial point from multiple angles. For instance, the name of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the Qur'an is mentioned explicitly only five times.³⁹ In comparison, the commonly known prophets and messengers, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus عليهم السلام, are mentioned significantly more frequently.⁴⁰ If Muhammad ﷺ were the author of the Qur'an, it would seem highly unreasonable that his name be referenced so few times in comparison to figures respected and esteemed by other religious communities, such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. His character, integrity, and the message of the Qur'an were all consistent in pointing to his genuine prophethood.

When orientalist began publishing their attacks against the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the religion of Islam, they did so hastily and, as a result, produced weak arguments against the Prophet ﷺ. For instance, Theodore Noldeke (d. 1930), author of *Geschichte des Qorans* (History of the Qur'an),⁴¹ drew on various Islamic sources considered extremely weak, fabricated, or

³⁹ The name Muhammad appears in Qur'an 2:144, 33:40, 47:2, 48:29, and Ahmad appears in Qur'an 61:6.

⁴⁰ Musa (Moses), for example, is referenced in the Qur'an in 136 verses across 34 *suwar*. 'Īsā (Jesus) is referenced 25 times across 11 *suwar*.

⁴¹ Originally published in 1860 and later edited and expanded upon by Schwally, Pretzl, and Bergstrasser in a republished set of three volumes between 1909 and 1938.

unreliable by scholars—particularly when these sources served his preconceived conclusions about the Qur'an, and formulated his own ideas about the chronological revelation and literary facets of the Qur'an. Later in life, Noldeke refuted his own bizarre views⁴² after continued study of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Similarly, German Orientalist Joseph Schacht falsely claimed in his writings that the Qur'an was essentially “ignored” as a source of Islamic jurisprudence in the first century, a claim rejected and refuted by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars as untenable.⁴³ Schacht, when citing numerous texts and authoritative figures, “took many arguments out of context, has misunderstood or misinterpreted the texts, and has otherwise advanced conclusions not substantiated by the authorities he has adduced in their support.”⁴⁴ Noel J. Coulson, a professor of Islamic Law and Oriental Studies from London, systematically examines Schacht's thesis and exposes its obvious flaws from a historical and practical standpoint.⁴⁵ Regarding Schacht's erroneous thesis, Montgomery Watt wrote: “What in fact Western biographers [of the Prophet] have done is to assume the truth of the broad outlines of the picture ... given by the *sirah*, and to use this as the framework into which to fit as much Qur'anic material as possible. The sounder methodology is to regard the Qur'an and the early traditional accounts as complementary sources.”⁴⁶ In *The Qur'an and the Orientalists*, Muhammad Mohar Ali examines the history of the Qur'an and effectively deals with these types of explicit errors of Orientalist writers.⁴⁷

Other Orientalist claims were that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ sought power, glory, or wealth, or that he had epilepsy, or that he desired to control Arabia. As

⁴² Noldeke modified his previous claims decades later; for his updated writings, see: *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th ed. (1891), 16:597.

⁴³ See Muhammad Mustafa A'zami, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1978).

⁴⁴ Ali, *Quran and Orientalists*, 246.

⁴⁵ Noel J. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (London: Edinburgh University Press, 1964), 64–65. See also his “European Criticism of Hadith Literature,” in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the end of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 317–21.

⁴⁶ Cited in Ali, *Qur'an and Orientalists*, 246. See also Watt, *Mohammad at Mecca*, XV.

⁴⁷ Ali, *Quran and Orientalists*.

subsequent non-Muslim (and Muslim) scholars began studying the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ more carefully and objectively, many of them began refuting their predecessors' false claims about Islam as they were not based on strong evidence. As Norman Daniel (d. 1992) wrote, "All [Western] writers tended, more or less, to cling to fantastic tales about Islam and its Prophet... The use of false evidence to attack Islam was all but universal."⁴⁸

William Montgomery Watt, who also studied previous Orientalist works on Muhammad's biography, wrote that "not merely must we credit Muhammad with essential honesty and integrity of purpose, if we are to understand him at all; if we are to correct the errors we have inherited from the past..."⁴⁹ Watt as well corrected in his numerous works many of his predecessors' false notions about Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, particularly those concerning his integrity and honesty.

Although lengthy, the following passage from Dr. Muhammad Draz aptly and objectively summarizes the rational and reasonable viewpoints about this claim:

When we consider carefully the timing of the revelation of the Qur'anic passages and surahs and their arrangement, we are profoundly astonished. We almost belie what we see and hear. We then begin to ask ourselves for an explanation of this highly improbable phenomenon: is it not true that this new passage of revelation has just been heard as new, addressing a particular event which is its only concern? Yet it sounds as though it is neither new nor separate from the rest. It seems as if it has been, along with the rest of the Qur'an, perfectly impressed on this man's mind long before he has recited it to us... It has been fully engraved on his heart before its composition in the words he recites. How else can it unite so perfectly and harmoniously parts and pieces that do not naturally come together? Is it a result of an experiment that follows a spontaneous thought? That could not be the case. When each part was put in its position, the one who placed them never had a new thought or introduced any modification or re-arrangement.

How then could he have determined his plan? And how could he have made his intention so clear in advance?... When we consider such detailed

⁴⁸ Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (London: One World Publications, 1993), 267.

⁴⁹ Watt, *Mohammad at Mecca*, 52.

instructions on the arrangement of passages and surahs we are bound to conclude that there is a complete and detailed plan assigning the position of each passage before they are all revealed. Indeed the arrangement is made before the reasons leading to the revelation of any passage occur, and even before the start of the preliminary causes of such events... Such are the plain facts about the arrangement of the Qur'an as it was revealed in separate verses, passages and surahs over a period of 23 years. What does that tell us about its source?⁵⁰

The *i'jāz* of the Qur'an

More importantly than the five aforementioned points is that the Qur'an's *i'jāz* (miraculousness) itself—the object of this series—adequately demonstrates that its authorship cannot be attributed to any human being, prophet or otherwise. In other words, the miraculous facets of the Qur'an, such as its literary inimitability, then-undiscovered knowledge of the natural world (e.g., the detailed description of the embryo's development), knowledge of the future (e.g., the Romans, Abu Lahab, the Conquest of Makkah, the victory (*al-Naṣr*) and spread of Islam, the preservation of the Qur'an), lost knowledge of the past (e.g., Prophet Yūsuf (Joseph), the Sleepers of the Cave, the correct historical usage of 'pharaoh' v. 'king'), and other corrections to the Old and New Testaments), universal maxims and moral laws, its impact on hearts and souls, etc., are standalone arguments against any claim of human authorship. The Qur'an's miraculous facets must be considered collectively as well in order to fully appreciate the argument for *i'jāz*, as one can deny individual dimensions of *i'jāz* for only so long before realizing how unreasonable those denials are. A justified, rational belief does not necessitate that a seeker of Truth believes in the Qur'an only after all facets of Qur'anic *i'jāz* are examined, but any number of proofs of *i'jāz* would suffice.

From a literary perspective, the Qur'an is unrivaled and its original language is inimitable and unique even from the perspective of non-Muslim scholars.⁵¹ For

⁵⁰ Draz, *Qur'an: An Eternal Challenge*, 126–27.

⁵¹ See, for instance: Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). Arberry writes in his preface to the English translation of the Qur'an: "The Book is here rendered almost literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the Glorious Koran, that

instance, Dr. Alfred Guillaume writes, “[I]ndeed it may be affirmed that within the literature of the Arabs, wide and fecund as it is both in poetry and in elevated prose, there is nothing to compare with it.”⁵² Alan Jones writes in an attempted translation of the Qur'an, “Its outstanding literary merit should also be noted: it is by far, the finest work of Arabic prose in existence.”⁵³ Therefore, the claim that the Qur'an was authored by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is unreasonable based on the reasons elucidated above. Furthermore, every literary masterpiece in history has required at least one attempt at revision and improvement, and yet the Qur'an was never “edited” and remained unchanged over the span of twenty-three years (and since). It is common knowledge that any literary excellence requires an entire process of editing and revision and any sophisticated masterpiece is not simply produced all at once by someone with no knowledge of rhetoric. However, this is the case with the Qur'an, which was revealed over a period of twenty-three years in different locations, during different historical moments, in front of countless mixed audiences, at times during direct questioning and challenges, and yet once the verses were recited by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, he could not ask for them back to make changes and improvements.⁵⁴ These points alone provide strong evidence that the Qur'an, due to its clear inimitability and mode of transmission and revelation, could not have been the product of a human being, especially Prophet Muhammad ﷺ—the trustworthy, the honest. When this evidence is taken into consideration, alongside what was stated previously, the rational and reasonable conclusion is that the Qur'an was not authored by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ or any other human being.

Based on the above-mentioned points, it is only reasonable to assume that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ could not have been the author of the Qur'an. Nor was it

inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy. It is only an attempt to present the meaning of the Koran—and peradventure something of the charm—in English. It can never take the place of the Koran in Arabic, nor is it meant to do so.”

⁵² Alfred Guillaume, *Islam* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 73–74.

⁵³ Alan Jones, *The Koran* (London: Phoenix, 1994), i.

⁵⁴ A relevant counterargument is raised here regarding the scribes of the Qur'an and if their role invalidates the claim in the paper; however, the new revelation was recited to numerous Muslim and non-Muslim audiences at times, confirmed by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ when the scribes wrote it down, recited by the Prophet in public prayers, and taught to various companions as the Prophet Muhammad received it (rather than only by means of the scribes' record of it). Therefore, the point about the mode of delivery and context of revelation stands.

possible for him to have escaped the eyes of both believers and disbelievers for 63 years in gaining the highest level of inimitable mastery that has ever been observed by the Arab world, particularly the greatest Arab poets, nor was he shadowed or seen by any individual teaching him the words of the Qur'an throughout his proclamation of prophethood from Makkah, to Madīnah, and back again. Finally, it is reasonable to assume that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would have eventually accepted worldly offers for power, dominion, wealth, or glory had he not been a messenger, or that he would have discontinued his mission as a preacher when he was physically attacked, his followers murdered, and his community constantly harassed. He remained consistent upon prophethood, conveying the speech of God until it was decreed for him to return to Him.

History of the challenge

Over the past fourteen centuries, many Arabs and non-Arabs have attempted to meet the challenge of the Qur'an, but no attempt has succeeded, as will be demonstrated in this series. Oftentimes, the questions raised pertaining to this subject matter are, “How did the elite poets of Quraysh react to the recitation of the Qur'an? Furthermore, how do we know that the Qur'anic challenge was not met?”

Although it remains active, the Qur'anic challenge was posed to the greatest Arabic linguists of history: the seventh-century Arabs who were present at the time of its revelation. Ibn Khaldūn, the famous historian and scholar, writes about poetry in the Arab culture: “One should acknowledge the fact that Arabs thought greatly of poetry as a form of speech. Thus, they made poetry the primary form of documenting their history, the evidence for what they considered correct and incorrect, and the foremost basis of reference for most of their disciplines and wisdom.”⁵⁵ Essentially, poetry was the “life” of the Arabs of Quraysh;⁵⁶ through it,

⁵⁵ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), chap. 6, sec. 58.

⁵⁶ Usmani, *Approach to the Quranic Sciences*, 260.

they would document history, settle their disputes, distinguish morality from vice, and they utilized it as a foundation to study other existing disciplines.

Despite their status as the greatest of Arab poets and the most capable of potentially meeting the Qur'anic challenge, the seventh-century Arabs failed to do so. In fact, while the language itself might be difficult to appreciate for some non-Arab readers at first, the reader can look to famous examples of noteworthy Arab poets and their testimony to the Qur'an's otherworldly language.

al-Walīd b. al-Mughīrah

Another famous story on this subject is that of al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah.⁵⁷ al-Walīd was one of the most eloquent and highly esteemed poets of Makkah at the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He once passed by the Prophet ﷺ and heard him reciting the Qur'an. This had a visible effect on him and he went away shaken and startled by what he had heard. The news of this incident spread throughout Makkah. Abū Jahl, afraid that the people of Makkah might be affected by this news and convert to Islam, rushed to al-Walīd, and told him, "O my uncle! Say something (against Muhammad) so that the people will know that you are against him and hate (his message)."

Al-Walīd replied, "And what can I say? For I swear by Allah, there is none amongst you who knows poetry as well as I do, nor can anyone compete with me in composition or rhetoric—not even in the poetry of *jinn*s. And yet, I swear by Allah, Muhammad's recitation [of the Qur'an] does not bear any similarity to anything I know and I swear by Allah, the speech that he says is very sweet and is adorned with beauty and charm. Its first part is fruitful and its last part is abundant [i.e., full of deep meanings]. It dominates and cannot be dominated, and it will certainly crush all that is beneath it."

⁵⁷ *Sīrat Ibn Hishām*, vol.1, 270. al-Ḥākim stated, "The *isnād* (chain of narration) is *ṣaḥīḥ* according to the conditions of al-Bukhārī," and al-Dhahabī affirmed the same. al-Ḥākim Muḥammad al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyah, 1990), 2:550.

Abū Jahl responded, “Your people will not be satisfied until you speak *against* him!” Al-Walīd therefore requested Abū Jahl to, “Leave me for a few days, so that I may think of an appropriate response to give to Quraysh.” After a few days, Abu Jahl came back to him and asked him what he had prepared. al-Walīd, during this time, could not think of any explanation to give except, “This [the Qur’an] must be a type of magic that has an effect on its listeners.” In response to this, Allah revealed,

Nay! Verily he [i.e., al-Walīd] has been stubborn in opposing our verses and signs... Verily, he thought and plotted; So let him be cursed, how he plotted! And once more let him be cursed; how he plotted! Then he thought! Then he frowned and was irritated; then he turned back and was arrogant! Then he said, “This is nothing but magic from old; this is nothing but the word of a mortal!”⁵⁸

This narration of al-Walīd illustrates the powerful eloquence of the Qur’an even to someone as skilled in poetry and as proficient as al-Walīd, despite his agenda-driven stubbornness to accept it as the Speech of God; al-Walīd finds no other possible excuse to give to the public except that perhaps it is a powerful form of magic that impacts its listeners. Additionally, al-Walīd had wished for the Qur’an to be revealed upon him instead of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ since al-Walīd saw himself in a lofty and superior position among over others; this desire of al-Walīd points to his recognition of the Qur’an as a lofty and superior speech. Interestingly, one of the dilemmas of atheists using al-Walīd’s story is their inability to explain his claim of “magic” as the source of the Qur’an, since that would indicate that they accept that magic does in fact exist and does not reasonably explain the authorship of the Qur’an. Furthermore, the previously mentioned story of ‘Utbah highlights that even ‘Utbah acknowledged—after swearing by God—that the Qur’an was not magic or sorcery, nor was it like any speech he had ever heard before.

⁵⁸ Qur’an 74:16–26.

Unays al-Ghifārī

Unays al-Ghifārī was also one of the many people who clearly recognized the linguistic magnificence of the Qur'an. Unays was one of the famous poets of Arabia. He once went to Makkah to do some trading, happened to come across the Prophet ﷺ, and listened to his recitation of the Qur'an. So attracted was Unays to this recitation that he was delayed from returning to his caravan. When he finally arrived, he was asked the reason for his delay. Unays responded, "I have met a person in Makkah who claims to be sent by Allah. The people claim that he is a poet, a sorcerer, or a magician. Yet, I have heard the words of sorcerers, and these words in no way resemble those uttered by a sorcerer. And I also compared his words to the verses of a poet, but such words cannot be uttered by a poet. By Allah, he is the truthful, and *they* are the liars!"⁵⁹

These three examples of 'Utbah, al-Walīd, and Unays illustrate that even the greatest masters of poetry and eloquence—the Arabs of Quraysh in the seventh century—were captivated and mesmerized by the Speech of the Qur'an. Had any similar speech been heard before, the poets would have not just pinpointed its sources and teachers, but they themselves would not have been so moved or astonished. Additionally, consider the testimony of experts in a field, or sports players of the greatest ranks, bearing witness to the magnificence of something or someone new to the landscape; the testimony carries significantly more weight than if it were to originate from an average individual.

In addition to their amazement, the Arabs of Quraysh—and across the region during the era—were incapable of meeting the Qur'anic challenge, and this fact is well-affirmed by eastern and western scholarship. al-Zamakhsharī writes, "If they (the Arabs of Quraysh) actually met the challenge of the Qur'an, then it would have immediately spread amongst the people just as other news spreads quickly; in fact, hiding such a remarkable occurrence (i.e., that of meeting the Qur'an's challenge) would have been impossible due to the fact that its opponents were

⁵⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2473.

greater in number than its defenders (i.e., the Muslims).”⁶⁰ In a famous statement on the subject, Professor H. Palmer, a specialist in Arabic and Qur’anic language, asserts: “That the best of Arab writers has never succeeded in producing anything equal in merit to the Qur’an itself is not surprising.”⁶¹ Dr. Hamilton Gibb: “Like all Arabs, they were connoisseurs of language and rhetoric. Well, then if the Koran were his own composition, other men could rival it. Let them produce ten verses like it. If they could not (and it is obvious that they could not), then let them accept the Koran as an outstanding evidential miracle.”⁶²

As was known about Arabia in that era, news of such great significance would have spread throughout the region, leaving no doubt whatsoever if the Qur’an’s challenge had been met. Additionally, when considering the epistemic weight of mass corroboration and testimony, it becomes irrational and absurd to reject the fact that the Arabs failed to produce anything like the Qur’an, especially in light of the social and political dynamics of the era.

Objection

On this topic, suppose the following objection is raised: How much do we really know about the failure of the Arabs to meet the Qur’anic challenge if history is ‘written by the victors?’ This objection was quoted by al-Khaṭṭābī as well more than a millennium ago:⁶³ Suppose an attempted imitation was not transmitted but concealed by Muslim scholars, and when Islam expanded, they—those who attempted imitations of the Qur’an—were afraid for their lives, and thus the imitations were suppressed and their traces effaced.⁶⁴ This objection does not hold for at least two obvious reasons.

⁶⁰ Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an haqā’iq al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma’refah, 2009), 1:107.

⁶¹ Edward Henry Palmer, *The Qur’an* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 4.

⁶² Hamilton Gibb, *Islam: A Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 28.

⁶³ al-Khaṭṭābī died in 388/998.

⁶⁴ al-Khaṭṭābī, Abū Sulaymān Ḥamd ibn Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i’jāz al-Qur’ān*, in *Thalāth rasā’il fī i’jāz al-Qur’ān*, ed. Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh and Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1976), 55.

First, the religious history surrounding the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Qur'an, and the various tribes of Arabia are not mysterious or undocumented like that of other civilizations. In fact, many non-Muslim academics and historians assert, regardless of their personal religious beliefs, that Islamic history in Arabia is well-known and well-nigh impossible to completely modify and change under the adage that "history is written by the victors." The famous Orientalist, Professor Bernard Lewis, writes, "Unlike other religions which were cradled in mystery, Islam was born in the full light of history. Its roots are at surface level, the life of its founder is as well-known to us today as those of the reformers of the 16th century."⁶⁵

Furthermore, the argument that "history is written by the victors" is a superficial argument that requires evidence for each and every subject matter discussed. Many historians, researchers, academics, and scholars of the east and west, Muslim and non-Muslim, held the view that the history of Islam, even via Islamic sources, is not shaded in mystery and vagueness. This is further strengthened by the fact that the Muslims of Arabia were, even at the time of the Prophet's demise, a tiny minority even with the massive surge of delegations entering Islam. In other words, any claim that "history is written by the victors" regarding Islamic history must carry the burden of proof to modify the views of the vast majority of scholars and historians. Furthermore, not only is evidence required to establish a new possible explanation, but inference and other forms of epistemology must be used methodically and properly in order to establish an alternative best explanation to the current views.

Second, as al-Khaṭṭābī writes:⁶⁶

How could such a serious matter that would have disturbed human hearts and would have been known in the East and the West be conceivable? If that was conceivable regarding such an important and momentous matter, it would be conceivable too that another prophet or numerous other prophets could have appeared to whom scriptures were revealed from Heaven and who could have come with laws different from this Sharī'ah, and the news

⁶⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 32.

⁶⁶ al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 55.

of all that was suppressed. This is something that cannot be suspected [to have happened], because it is contrary to human nature and current customs, and likewise is what they object to.⁶⁷

Dr. Taqi Usmani writes: “None of them was able to compose even a few sentences to match the Qur’anic verses. Just think that they were a people who... could never resist ridiculing the idea in their poetry if they heard that there was someone at the other end of the globe who prided himself on his eloquence and rhetorical speech. It is unthinkable that they could keep quiet even after such repeated challenges and dare not come forward... They had left no stone unturned for persecuting the Messenger ﷺ. They tortured him, called him insane, a sorcerer, a poet, and a soothsayer, but failed utterly in composing even a few sentences like the Qur’anic verses.”⁶⁸

Earliest imitation attempts

The earliest imitation attempts were considered futile even to the non-Muslim Arabs of the time. Musaylimah (d. 632)—a false prophet also known as *al-Kadhdhab* (“the Liar”)—presented amateurish imitation attempts (e.g., the frog, the elephant, and the pregnant woman) which contained deficiency in meanings, patchwork pilfering of parts of the Qur’an, and weakness in word usages, aside from other obvious literary deficiencies. He claimed to receive revelation from God and then requested “half of the earth” from Prophet Muhammad for his tribe,⁶⁹ who responded with the verse of the Qur’an: “Indeed, the earth belongs to Allah [alone]. He grants it to whomever He chooses of His servants. The ultimate outcome belongs [only] to the righteous.”⁷⁰ Musaylimah later married another false prophet(ess), Sajah bint al-Ḥārith, an Arab Christian, who gave up her public claims to prophethood after marrying Musaylimah.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Translation by Issa J. Ballouta.

⁶⁸ Usmani, *Approach to the Quranic Sciences*, 262.

⁶⁹ Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*, ed. Mustafā al-Sayyid Muḥammad et al., vol. 3 (Giza: Mu’assasat Qurṭuba, 2000). See also: al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, 2:277.

⁷⁰ Qur’an 7:128.

⁷¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, 3:272.

Musaylimah's few fabrications can still be found with commentaries from the earliest Muslim scholars. One of them is as follows: "O frog, croak. Much as you croak, neither the water will you render muddled, nor will the drinker drive you away."⁷²

As al-Khaṭṭābī stated, Musaylimah's fabrication is known to have no benefit at all, nor does it fulfill the three conditions that constitute the basic elements of rhetorical eloquence.⁷³ al-Bāqillānī also quoted Musaylimah's frog poetry in order to demonstrate the clear ignorance and foolishness of Musaylimah, the absurdity of his imitation attempt, and how any honest individual should praise God for common sense.⁷⁴ al-Khaṭṭābī added, "A composer of rhymed prose makes it a custom of his to subordinate his ideas to his rhymed prose (i.e., dependent on the rhyme), and he does not care what he says so long as his prose rhymes and flows without interruption."⁷⁵ Musaylimah's own tribesmen and contemporaries heard his frog poetry and said to him, "By God, *you* know that *we* know that you are a liar."⁷⁶

An imitation attempt cannot merely steal from the language of its opponent, such as the language of the Qur'an, or imitate some of its linguistic constructions while replacing one or two words—as Musaylimah did with the Elephant poem ("The elephant. What is the elephant? And what shall make you know what the elephant is?").⁷⁷ As al-Khaṭṭābī wrote, "One who wants to imitate another in poetry or oration must compose a new discourse with original meanings, and to emulate (him) in its wording and rival him in its meaning, seeking to outweigh him when the two discourses are compared."⁷⁸ Musaylimah, like other human beings who attempted imitations of the Qur'an, failed to fulfill the basic objective conditions of rhetorical eloquence, failed to intertwine meanings, words, composition and sound, and he demonstrated weakness in his lack of understanding of what he pilfered.

⁷² al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 55. See also: al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, 2:276.

⁷³ al-Khaṭṭābī, 2:276.

⁷⁴ al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (Egypt: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1997), 156.

⁷⁵ al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 55.

⁷⁶ al-Khaṭṭābī, 55. This statement is attributed to 'Amr b. al-ʿĀṣ.

⁷⁷ al-Khaṭṭābī, 55.

⁷⁸ al-Khaṭṭābī, 58.

Although there are numerous examples to demonstrate this point, one clear example is that the phrase used in the Qur'an, *wa mā adrāka* ("And what will make you know"), is consistently reserved to "introduce a matter of great importance and elusive description, whose meaning is exceedingly deep."⁷⁹ Examples from the Qur'an include *al-Hāqqah* (The Inevitable Reality) and *al-Qāri'ah* (The Striking Calamity), both of which are opening preambles ("What will make you know what *al-Hāqqah* is?") followed by alarming descriptions pertaining to the Day of Resurrection.⁸⁰ Musaylimah, demonstrating his weakness with this one attempt, associated this powerful introduction ("And what will make you know?") with an elephant. His imitations, lack of religious following (then and today), and disappearance from history as a "prophet of God" are all reflections of his false prophethood. Similarly, others' efforts to imitate the Qur'an then and today will be viewed in hindsight as feeble attempts in light of the Qur'an's clear magnificence. Attention is given later in this series, *in shā' Allah*, to detailed analyses of historical and modern imitation attempts, objections and responses, and clarity about the objective criteria of the Challenge.

Ultimately, the Qur'an is unlike any man-made text. A common question of individuals who don't fully grasp the literary magnificence of the Qur'an—or the English language—is, "What about the inimitability of the works of human beings, such as Shakespeare?" In short, the response to this question is that no human texts are considered by linguists to be inimitable, including the works of Shakespeare. In fact, while Shakespeare's writings are literary masterpieces, the view of many academics and researchers is that Shakespeare's work is not just imitable but surpassed by other authors, such as the famous Spanish writer, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra.⁸¹ Not unsurprisingly, Professor Hugh Craig of Newcastle University ranked Shakespeare as the seventh greatest English-speaking playwright, behind Webster, Dekker, Peele, Marlowe, Jonson, and Greene.⁸²

⁷⁹ al-Khattābī, 66.

⁸⁰ Surah 69 and Surah 101.

⁸¹ Clara Calvo, "Shakespeare and Cervantes in 1916" in *Shifting the Scene: Shakespeare in European Culture* (Delaware: Delaware University Press, 2004), 78.

⁸² Hugh Craig, "Shakespeare's Vocabulary: Myth and Reality," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2011): 53–74.

Moreover, Shakespeare was taught and known to have teachers in Greek and Latin, whereas Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had no teachers. Shakespeare was a known playwright who continued to refine his skills with each production, while Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had never written anything in his life. Shakespeare had the opportunity to edit, modify, and proofread his works, whereas Prophet Muhammad ﷺ could never retract the verses of the Qur'an for "quality control" once conveyed to Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. Shakespeare's writing style was precedented and paralleled, whereas the Qur'an's unique composition was unprecedented and remains unparalleled. Shakespeare's works were developed and published based on his charted plans, whereas the Qur'an's verses and chapters were revealed non-chronologically over the course of 23 years, revealed at times instantaneously to various audiences ("They ask you [O Muhammad] about... Say:..").⁸³ Most importantly, Shakespeare's writings are limited in scope to a few target audiences, whereas the Qur'an is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional divine book of guidance addressing all audiences, the intellectual and the spiritual, the individual and the collective, the societies of the north, south, east, and west, and contains knowledge of the unseen, conveyed through a morally upright man who lived among his people for forty years before reciting the Qur'an and who was consistently known as The Honest, the Trustworthy.⁸⁴

Furthermore, the effect of the Qur'an on human hearts and souls cannot be rivaled by any man-made text—a point which will be elaborated on later in the series—such as Allah's saying:

Allah has sent down the best message—a Book of perfect consistency and repeated lessons—which causes the skin [and hearts] of those who fear their Lord to tremble, then their skin and hearts soften at the mention of Allah. That is the guidance of Allah, through which He guides whoever He wills. But whoever Allah leaves astray will be left with no guide.⁸⁵

⁸³ Qur'an 2:189, 2:215, 2:217, 2:219, 2:220, 2:222, 4:153, 5:4, 7:187, 8:1, 17:85, 18:83, 20:105, and 79:42.

⁸⁴ For more on a comparison between Shakespeare's writings and the Qur'an, see: Mohamed Elshinawy, "The Inimitable Qur'an: The Revelation to Prophet Muhammad," *Yaqeen*, May 5, 2020, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/mohammad-elshinawy/the-inimitable-quran-the-revelation-to-prophet-muhammad/>.

⁸⁵ Qur'an 39:23.

To summarize the above-mentioned points, the Qur'an's challenge to mankind was presented to the greatest of Arab poets and rhetoricians. The challenge was never met and remains unmet to the present day, demonstrating once again to the objective reader that the Qur'an cannot be reasonably attributed to anyone but God.

Conclusion

The following question—and the crux of this series—is, “What makes the Qur'an miraculous?” This second essay addressed the role of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in conveying the Qur'an, the inimitability of the Qur'an, and various plagiarism attempts throughout history. Ultimately, this series demonstrates the claim—that the Qur'an is from God—is not only the “best explanation” by the process of elimination but that the Qur'an's miraculous nature adequately and clearly points to Allah as its source.

Undoubtedly, this series carries extensive implications not only for Muslims who are interested in studying and preserving their own faith but also for sincere non-Muslims who seek Truth and wish to better understand the nature of the Qur'an, the final revelation of God.

Is it not enough for them that We have sent down to you the Book, [which is] recited to them. Surely in this Qur'an is a mercy and reminder for people who believe.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Qur'an 29:51.