



# Introduction to *l'jāz al-Qur'ān*, Part 1: The Miraculous Nature of the Qur'an

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## Author Biography

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*This article serves as the first essay in a series on the topic of i'jāz al-Qur'ān, the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, and addresses the foundations of i'jāz, its history, scope, and facets, as well as an introduction to the literary miracle of the Qur'an. The subsequent essay addresses the inimitability of the Qur'an, various plagiarism attempts throughout history, and the role of the Prophet Muhammad*

صلى الله  
عليه وسلم.

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.”<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Among the most foundational and significant beliefs of Muslims is the 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 a survey of the foundational components of the study of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, or the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, answering the crucial question of the Qur'an's authorship. With respect to the Qur'an's authorship, one must logically fall into one of the following two categories:

1. Those who claim that the Qur'an is the Speech of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم through Angel Jibrīl (Gabriel); or
2. Those who claim that the Qur'an is not from God but was authored by Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم or other human beings.

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.

## What is the Qur'an?

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<sup>1</sup> Qur'an 17:88.

The Qur'an is the Arabic *kalām* (Speech) of Allah, which He revealed to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in wording and meaning, which has been preserved in the *muṣḥaf* (physical written copy), has reached us by means of authentic transmissions, and is a challenge to mankind to produce something similar to it.<sup>2</sup> Muslims believe that the Qur'an was revealed from God, the One Creator of the universe and all that it contains, through His Angel Gabriel to Muhammad, the last messenger and prophet of God to mankind, in a long line of messengers before him, including Noah, Abraham, David, Moses, and Jesus, peace be upon them.

The Qur'an is comprised of many *āyāt* (singular: *āyah*), or “verses,” and in the Qur'anic context an *āyah* refers to a “sign” of God in this world, such as signs of His Being and Power, signs in nature,<sup>3</sup> signs from history,<sup>4</sup> or divine revelation as a sign (“when our signs are recited...”<sup>5</sup>).<sup>6</sup> Thus, to Muslims, the Qur'an is not only the Speech of God, but it is a *sign* that is perfect, preserved, memorized on an unmatched scale, miraculous in its nature, impossible to imitate, universally beneficial for all societies, impactful on the heart and soul, contains no errors or contradictions, contains knowledge of the unseen world, predicted matters of the future, described undiscovered matters of the natural world, and is the final miracle and message of God to mankind until the Day of Resurrection.

## The *i'jāz* of the Qur'an

Amongst the beliefs of Muslims is that the Qur'an has the characteristic of *i'jāz*; that is, a miraculous nature. The Arabic word relates to *'ajaza* (incapability), meaning that it is beyond the capability of human beings. Mankind's inability (*'ajz*) to imitate the Qur'an is thus considered a sign of its divine origin. Thus, it is

<sup>2</sup> For a slightly different definition, see: Muhammad 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'irfān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1943), 21.

<sup>3</sup> See: Qur'an 76:6–16, 77:25–27, 79:27–32.

<sup>4</sup> See: Qur'an 51:34–46, 79:15–26.

<sup>5</sup> See: Qur'an 83:13.

<sup>6</sup> For detailed descriptions of the terms *āyah* and *āyāt*, see Angelika Neuwirth, “Verse(s),” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, accessed December 2, 2019, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922\\_q3\\_EQCOM\\_00211](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00211).

an ongoing *mu'jizah* (miracle)—that which “breaks the custom” (*kharq al-‘ādah*)<sup>7</sup> or natural order—until the Day of Resurrection; and it is a clear proof given to the final messenger as an authentication of his prophethood.<sup>8</sup> When applied to the Qur'an, the word *i'jāz* refers to the unique and inimitable quality of the Qur'an in that it is superior to all other books and speech and cannot be imitated or rivaled.

The basis for the agreed-upon doctrine of Qur'anic *i'jāz* is found in the Qur'an itself on six different occasions,<sup>9</sup> such as when the adversaries of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ denied his prophethood and declared the Qur'an to be fabricated; the Qur'an itself challenged those who denied it to “produce something like it ... if you are truthful [in your claim].”<sup>10</sup> These verses pose what is known as the eternal *taḥaddī* (challenge), or collectively as the Verses of the Challenge (*āyāt at-taḥaddī*); thus, anyone who denies the Qur'an's divine origins is challenged to produce something like it if they believe it to be man-made (i.e., not originating from God). The famous historian Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) opined that the initial challenge was to produce something similar to the entire Qur'an; the next challenge was then reduced to ten *suwar* (singular: *sūrah*), or “chapters,” then finally to one *sūrah*.<sup>11</sup> Although this challenge was presented to the greatest Arab poets who were known for their eloquence and mastery of the Arabic language, the challenge remains open and active until the end of time.

The famous scholar as-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) summarizes the history of the challenge as follows:

... when the Prophet brought [the challenge] to them, they were the most eloquent rhetoricians so he challenged them to produce the [entire] likes [of the Qur'an] and many years passed and they were unable to do so, as God says, “Let them then produce a recitation similar to it if indeed they are

<sup>7</sup> Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-bayān 'an al-farq bayna al-mu'jizāt wa-al-karamāt wa-al-ḥiyal wa-al-kahānah wa-al-siḥr wa-al-nārinjāt*, trans. by Richard Joseph McCarthy as *Miracle and Magic: A Treatise on the Nature of the Apologetic Miracle and Its Differentiation from Charisms, Trickery, Divination, Magic and Spells* (Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1958), 45–49.

<sup>8</sup> For historical elucidations on terminology related to *i'jāz*, see G. E. Von Grunebaum, *A Tenth-Century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), introduction.

<sup>9</sup> See: Qur'an 2:23–24, 10:38, 17:88, 52:33–34.

<sup>10</sup> Qur'an 11:13.

<sup>11</sup> See: Qur'an 10:38 in Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Sayyid Muḥammad et al., vol. 3 (Giza: Mu'assasat Qurṭuba, 2000).

truthful.” Then, [the Prophet] challenged them to produce ten chapters like it where God says, “Say, bring then ten chapters like it and call upon whomever you can besides God if you are truthful.” Then, he challenged them to produce a single [chapter] where God says, “Or do they say he [i.e., the Prophet] has forged it? Say, bring a chapter like it and call upon whomever you can besides God, if you are truthful...” When the [Arabs] were unable to produce a single chapter like [the Qur'an] despite there being the most eloquent rhetoricians amongst them, [the Prophet] openly announced the failure and inability [to meet the challenge] and declared the inimitability of the Qur'an. Then God said, “Say: if all of humankind and the jinn gathered together to produce the like of the Qur'an, they could not produce it—even if they helped one another...”<sup>12</sup>

The eternal challenge, thus, is a bold call for the experts of any era to produce something similar to the Qur'an in all of its divine facets. Although there are many miracles that Muslims believe occurred during the time of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the impact of these miracles was undoubtedly greater on those who witnessed them than later generations who merely read about them. Additionally, the miracles of previous prophets and messengers were visibly undeniable and also related to their own interests. For example, Mūsá (Moses) عليه السلام was sent to a society known for its interest in sorcery and illusions so the miracles he was given were related to such illusions—such as his staff's transformation into an actual snake and consuming the false “snakes” of the sorcerers.<sup>13</sup> Īsá (Jesus) عليه السلام was sent with miracles relevant to his society, such as the miracle of healing the ill, resurrection of the dead, and giving life to a bird made out of its clay—by the permission of God.<sup>14</sup> These miracles, however, were limited in time and space and are no longer epistemologically accessible except by means of testimony (e.g., revelation). Islamic doctrine asserts that the *i'jāz* of the Qur'an removes the constraints of time and place upon the *mu'jizah* (miracle) itself—the Qur'an—and thus the Qur'an remains a permanent, ongoing miracle for all generations after the final prophet, regardless of time and place.

<sup>12</sup> Jalāl al-Din al-Suyūti, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Medina: Majma' Malik Fahad, 2005), 1875.

<sup>13</sup> Qur'an 7:107.

<sup>14</sup> See: Qur'an 3:49 and *Infancy of Thomas* 2.

Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), the famous Muslim historian, stated in his *Muqaddimah*:

Know that the greatest of all miracles, and the most sacred and blessed, and the clearest in proof, is the Qur'an that was revealed to the Prophet [Muhammad] ﷺ. This is because all other miracles, in general, were brought forth separate from the actual inspiration (that the Prophet received), as a means of proving the truthfulness of the inspiration. As for the Qur'an, it is the inspiration and the miracle in one, and is therefore not in need of any external miracles (to prove itself), unlike all the previous inspirations. It is, therefore, the clearest and most powerful miracle, since it combines the boast and the proof into one. This is the meaning of the Prophet's statement, "...I hope, therefore, that I will have the largest number of followers on the Day of Judgment." This shows that a miracle as clear and powerful as this one—for it is the inspiration in its essence—must have the greatest number of believers and followers...<sup>15</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn's argument for the miraculous nature of the Qur'an touches upon an important point in epistemology, and that is that the Qur'an does not require external miracles (*mu'jizāt*) to prove itself to be miraculous. In fact, miracles themselves are seen as proofs of prophets' truthfulness to their respective nations. What this implies is that the evidence for the Qur'an's divine origins can be found by objectively and sincerely studying *i'jāz al-Qur'an* and studying and reciting the Qur'an itself.

## History of the doctrine of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*

During the first centuries after the Prophet Muhammad's passing, a number of scholars wrote on the topic of *mu'jizāt* (miracles) that occurred during Muhammad's ﷺ life as proofs of his prophethood. This theological doctrine of *a'lām an-nubuwwah* (signs of prophethood) or *ithbāt al-nubuwwah* (establishment

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<sup>15</sup> Ḥasan Diyā' al-Dīn, *al-Mu'jizah al-khālidah* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmīyah, 1994), 113.

of prophethood) gradually increased within the scholarly discourse on prophecy,<sup>16</sup> such as through al-Jāhiz's (d. 255/868) *Hujaj al-Nubuwwah* (Proofs of Prophethood).<sup>17,18</sup> Furthermore, this doctrine suggests that the miracles of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ—like those of Moses and Jesus—could only be accessed by means of testimony or revelation since the events had passed. The exception, however, was the Qur'an itself since its miraculous nature (*i'jāz*) is still accessible to all people. Thus, the development of the concept of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* was initiated by numerous scholars, such as al-Jāhiz,<sup>19</sup> in part as a theological defense and primary proof of Muhammad's prophethood عليه وسلم. Although none of the second- and third-century texts on the topic of *al-lām al-nubuwwah* are fully preserved and extant today,<sup>20</sup> references are made to the earliest contributions on the subject; e.g., by al-Jāhiz's teacher, the Mu'tazilite scholar Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 221/836).

Additionally, two other factors expedited the development of *i'jāz* doctrine during this era. First, scholars who commented on the *tafsīr* (exegesis) of the verses of *taḥaddī* (the Challenge)<sup>21</sup> discussed the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, such as Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923).<sup>22</sup> During this same era, another major catalyst in the development of *i'jāz* doctrine seemed to stem from disputes about whether the Qur'an was created or uncreated, with the Mu'tazilites designating the Qur'an as “created” and—through political power<sup>23</sup>—launching a severe inquisition (*miḥnah*) against the numerous scholars who disagreed, most notably Imām Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal (d. 241/855).<sup>24</sup> Ibn Ḥanbal's famous defense of the Qur'an's “uncreatedness,” as the eternal *kalām* (Speech) of Allah, is significant as it was utilized by early Ash'arite scholars and others in their contributions to *i'jāz*

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Stroumsa, “The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature,” *Harvard Theological Review* 78, nos. 1/2 (January–April 1985): 101–3.

<sup>17</sup> See: Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhiz, *Hujaj al-nubuwwah*, in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. 'A. S. M. Harun, 4 vols. (Cairo: n.p., 1399/1979).

<sup>18</sup> The term *hujjah* (proof) was utilized more frequently in the writings of al-Jāhiz, such as on the topic of proofs of prophethood, but he also referred to other similar terms, such as *āyah*, *burhān*, and *'ajz* (the root of *mu'jizah*). See: al-Jahiz, *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. Ḥasan al-Sandubī (Cairo: Al-Maktabah at-Tijaariyyah, 1933).

<sup>19</sup> See: 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-hayawān*, ed. A. S. Hārūn, 7 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1954).

<sup>20</sup> Stroumsa, “The Signs of Prophecy,” 106.

<sup>21</sup> Qur'an 2:23–24, 10:38, 11:13, 17:88, and 52:33–34.

<sup>22</sup> Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākīr, ed., *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymīyah, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> The Mu'tazilite inquisition began during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn (d. 833).

<sup>24</sup> See: Abū Zahrah, *Ibn Ḥanbal* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1997).

doctrine.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the varying theories on *i'jāz* doctrine in its early stages were developed through particular theological paradigms.

For instance, the (theological) Ḥanbalite scholars had prohibited discussing the issue of whether the expression (*lafz*) of the Qur'an was created or not, while other scholars attempted to distinguish between the Qur'an that was revealed, recorded, recited, and/or memorized. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936), the eponymous founder of the Ash'arite theological strand of Islam, followed partially in the footsteps of Ibn Ḥanbal<sup>26</sup> and refrained from speaking about the *lafz* of the Qur'an. Less than a century later, however, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) further developed Ash'arite theology when he delved into *al-lafz* and distinguished between the recited speech and the eternal uncreated Speech.<sup>27</sup> Prior to al-Bāqillānī, scholars including Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād (d. 228/843), Hishām ibn 'Ammār (d. 245/859), Muḥammad al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), and al-Muzanī (d. 264/877) opined that one could believe that the pronunciation of the Qur'an was created (as a *fi'l*/action), but that the Qur'an itself was eternal.<sup>28</sup>

Due to the theological and philosophical debates of the third and fourth centuries, as well as the writings on proofs of prophethood, the early fourth century saw inevitable progress in *i'jāz* doctrine, as seen in Muḥammad al-Wāsiṭī's (d. 306/918) *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān fī nazmihi wa-ta'līfīhi*.<sup>29</sup> However, the more lucid and cogent arguments for *i'jāz al-Qur'an* seem to have matured in three particular texts within the span of two decades (384-403 AH/994-1013 CE): 'Alī al-Rummānī's (d. 384/994) *al-Nukat fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, Ḥamd bin Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī's (d. 388/998) *Bayān I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, and Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī's (d. 403/1013) *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*,<sup>30</sup> a classical treatise elucidating the literary inimitability of the Qur'an.

<sup>25</sup> See: Walter Melville Patton, *Ahmed ibn Ḥanbal and the Mihna* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1897).

<sup>26</sup> See: Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibānah 'an usūl al-dīyānah* (Cairo: Idārat al-Ṭibā'ah al-Munīriyah, 1970).

<sup>27</sup> Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd al-awā'il wa-talkhīṣ al-dalā'il*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Khuḍayrī and Muḥammad Abū Rīda (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1989), 251.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Melchert, "The Adversaries of Ahmad ibn Hanbal," *Arabica* 44 (1997): 234–53, at 241–2.

<sup>29</sup> 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), 21–71.

<sup>30</sup> See: al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb i'jāz al-Qur'an* and Von Grunebaum, *A Tenth-Century Document*.

Later scholars expounded on these texts and contributed to *i'jāz* doctrine, such as 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078),<sup>31</sup> al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111),<sup>32</sup> Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1328),<sup>33</sup> Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392),<sup>34</sup> and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).<sup>35</sup>

## The scope of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*

Throughout the early centuries of Islam, scholars deliberated what exactly the *i'jāz* of the Qur'an encompasses, such as its literary miracle, its impact on the hearts, knowledge of the unseen, predictions of the future, universal moral laws, and so forth.

Many of the earlier authors on the subject of *i'jāz* doctrine argued that the inimitability of the Qur'an is due to its literary miracle, primarily including the harmonious intertwining of the Qur'an's composition (*naẓm*), its arrangement and structure of words and verses (*ta'liḥ*),<sup>36</sup> and its words (*lafẓ*) and meanings (*ma'ná*). The earliest examples of the literary argument for *i'jāz* include al-Khaṭṭābī's *Bayān I'jāz al-Qur'ān*,<sup>37</sup> as well as al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, while other scholars contended that the miracle of the Qur'an was multifarious, including the contents and effects of the Qur'an in addition to its literary *i'jāz*.

Of the earliest scholars who held the view that the Qur'an was miraculous and inimitable in multiple ways was al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), who argued

<sup>31</sup> 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-i'jāz*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād* [The middle path in theology], ed. L. A. Cubukcu and H. Atay (Ankara: Nur Matbaasi, 1962).

<sup>33</sup> Abū al-'Abbās Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymīyah, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ* (Dār al-'Āsimah, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Maktabah al-'Asrīyah, 1972).

<sup>35</sup> al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1875.

<sup>36</sup> The terms *naẓm* and *ta'liḥ* are sometimes used interchangeably.

<sup>37</sup> al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*.

that the Qur'an was inimitable due to its otherworldly eloquence (*faṣāḥah*),<sup>38</sup> its description of hidden matters (*ikhbār 'an al-ghuyūb*),<sup>39</sup> and the absence of any errors or contradictions in it (“Had it been from other than God, they would have certainly found within it much discrepancy”<sup>40</sup>).<sup>41</sup> He was followed shortly thereafter by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078), who espoused a similar view in *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*.<sup>42</sup> Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), likewise, looked beyond only the literary *i'jāz* and contended that the Qur'an's impact on the hearts of people was an additional proof of its divine origins; he warranted his claim by pointing to the many reports of conversions to Islam caused by listening to a recitation of the Qur'an.<sup>43</sup> al-Bāqillānī similarly points to the amazement and awe of disbelievers—particularly the master poets—who were moved and mesmerized when listening to the Qur'an for the first time; but, he argues, not every listener of truth will convert when encountering this miracle as there are many forces working against them.<sup>44</sup>

Subsequently, the famous polymath Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1328) opined that the Qur'an is miraculous not only because of its language, its organization, its approach, and teachings, nor only due to its elucidation on matters of the unseen world, but rather it is miraculous from all perspectives.<sup>45</sup> On that matter, he concluded that “everything that has been cited as part of the Qur'an's *i'jāz* is an additional proof that it is miraculous, and there is no contradiction in that matter.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī wrote about the many aspects of *i'jāz* and then concluded: “The statement of those who have examined the issue thoroughly is that the *i'jāz* of the Qur'an is due to all of the previous factors simultaneously and not

<sup>38</sup> al-Qaḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, ed. Amīn al-Khūlī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1960), 197.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, 330.

<sup>40</sup> Qur'an 4:82.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 328.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1995). See also: Margaret Mary Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning: ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's Theory of Discourse* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1995).

<sup>43</sup> See Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwah* (Hyderabad: Maṭba‘at Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmānīyah, 1950), 183.

<sup>44</sup> al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 51.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Taymīyah, *al-Jawāb*, 428.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Taymīyah, *al-Jawāb*, 429.

by any one of them alone; the *i'jāz* is in combining all of these facets...”<sup>47</sup> As the Qur'an itself does not limit the *i'jāz* of the Qur'an to one facet, nor does any authentic hadith or consensus of the companions or scholars, the author of this essay also agrees with the widely held view that the miraculous nature of the Qur'an is observed by considering all facets of *i'jāz* simultaneously.

It should be noted that scholars such as al-Khaṭṭābī opined that *i'jāz* of the Qur'an must be found in every verse, but not every verse of the Qur'an includes prophecies of the future, or lost knowledge of the past, or knowledge of the natural world; therefore, *i'jāz* cannot be confined to these facets. al-Khaṭṭābī opines that the primary *i'jāz* of the Qur'an is its literary facet as it is found throughout the Qur'an, blended magnificently and entwined with miraculous content. He summarizes these points in his famous treatise:<sup>48</sup>

The Qur'an is miraculously inimitable because it has come forth with the most eloquent words compounded in the most beautiful composition containing the most valid ideas such as believing in the unity of God, declaring Him to be Transcendent in His qualities, calling (humanity) to His obedience, elucidating the way of worshipping Him, as well as prescribing what is permitted and what is prohibited, what is forbidden and what is allowed, in addition to admonishing and correcting, commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil, and guiding to good qualities and restraining from bad ones. In all this, it has put every one of these things in its place which cannot be substituted by a more appropriate one, and nothing can be imagined that is more suitable than it.<sup>49</sup>

However, al-Khaṭṭābī also emphasizes in his treatise another facet of the Qur'an's *i'jāz*—one that is less emphasized than the literary miracle in *i'jāz* discourse—and that is the Qur'an's effects on the hearts and souls of people.<sup>50</sup> Thus, by suggesting another facet of *i'jāz* found in every verse of the Qur'an (i.e., the effects of the Qur'an), al-Khaṭṭābī seemed to also believe that *i'jāz* was not *truly* limited to only one type of miraculous characteristic.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, 106.

<sup>48</sup> al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*.

<sup>49</sup> Translated by Issa J. Boullata.

<sup>50</sup> al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 70.

## The facets of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*

As for the facets of Qur'anic *i'jāz*, the scholar Muḥammad ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī (d. 741/1340) divided the *i'jāz* of the Qur'an into ten categories,<sup>51</sup> while other scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah wrote at length about more than fifty individual proofs of the Qur'an's miraculous nature.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the classifications used in this study are an amalgamation of numerous different dimensions of *i'jāz* from dozens of scholars, many grouped together for the sake of succinctness. Among the facets of *i'jāz* are the following:

1. The inimitability of the Qur'an
2. The literary miracle of the Qur'an
3. The preservation of the Qur'an
4. Predictions about the future
5. Lost knowledge of the past
6. Knowledge about the natural world
7. Elucidations about the origins of life
8. The existence of God, His Names, and His Attributes
9. Universal laws, objective morals, and guidance
10. The ease by which the Qur'an is memorized
11. The lack of errors and contradictions within it
12. Personal experiences related to the Qur'an

As the series progresses and various facets of *i'jāz* are addressed, it becomes clear to the objective reader that the only epistemologically sound belief is that the Qur'an's authorship can be attributed only to God.

## The inimitability of the Qur'an

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<sup>51</sup> See: 'Abd al-Mun'im Faraj Darwish, *Lulu' wa-al-marjān fī tanbīh 'alā i'jāz al-Qur'ān* (Dubai: Markaz al-Da'wah wa al-Irshād, n.d.), 56.

<sup>52</sup> Ibn Taymīyah, *al-Jawāb*.

Inimitability within the study of Qur'anic *i'jāz* suggests that, because it is the Speech of God, the Qur'an cannot possibly be rivaled or imitated by the speech of God's creation, for the skillfulness possessed by the creator of discourse essentially determines the degree of eloquence (*faṣāḥah*) of the final product.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, if each of the facets of *i'jāz* is considered carefully, it becomes clear that imitating them simultaneously in one text is an impossible feat for human beings. An attempt to imitate the Qur'an, it seems, must at least be an Arabic text reflecting unparalleled literary mastery; containing yet-undiscovered knowledge of the past, predictions of the future, and undiscovered knowledge of the natural world; impactful on society and on individual hearts; universal and objective in its moral laws; containing no errors or contradictions, and so forth. *Imitability*, therefore, would imply that a human being is capable of producing discourse “like it” (*mithliḥī*) in the aforementioned facets of Qur'anic *i'jāz*.

In his treatise,<sup>54</sup> al-Khaṭṭābī writes that it has been impossible for human beings to imitate the Qur'an for a number of reasons, some of which include the following: first, their knowledge is not sufficiently comprehensive to include all the terms of the Arabic language and all its words which are the vehicles and conveyors of ideas. Second, their minds are unable to understand the meanings of the things conveyed by those words. Third, their knowledge is imperfect and cannot apprehend all the ways these words can be harmoniously combined. For all these reasons, human beings will never be able to produce speech like the Qur'an.

Indeed, speech consists of these three things:

- 1) words conveying meanings;
- 2) ideas in passages;
- 3) composition organizing those words and ideas.

If you contemplate the Qur'an, you will not discover anything more eloquent or more harmonious than its words, nor will you discover any composition more beautiful, more concordant, or more appropriate than its composition. As for the ideas in it, it is clear to any intelligent person that they are what minds will testify

<sup>53</sup> Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-i'jāz*, 57–65.

<sup>54</sup> al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 26–28. The following two paragraphs from al-Khaṭṭābī's treatise are translated by Issa J. Boullata.

to having precedence in their subject matter and to rising up to the highest ranks of refinement in their qualities. These three virtues may exist separately in a variety of types of speech. But one will only find all of them in the Speech of the All-Knowing, the Almighty, Whose knowledge comprehends everything in essence and number.<sup>55</sup>

## The literary miracle of the Qur'an

To demonstrate one summarized claim of *i'jāz*, readers may look to the literary style and eloquent language of the Qur'an. To critique this claim, one must first grasp what the literary *i'jāz* entails according to a number of scholars. The following lists various claims of literary *i'jāz* from diverse scholars and educational institutions:<sup>56</sup>

1. The placement of a particular word over its synonyms. The connotations of the chosen word are better than those of its synonyms.
2. The sentence structure and syntax, which does not follow any one pattern but varies throughout the Qur'an. Each style is unique and its rhythm is clear and resounding.
3. The use of different tenses (past vs. present; plural vs. singular, etc.) to illustrate deeper meanings of a passage.
4. The pronunciation of words matching their meanings. In other words, when discussing topics that are encouraging and bearing glad tidings, it uses words that are easy to pronounce and melodious to hear, whereas harsh topics tend to be associated with harsher phonemes.
5. The perfect combination of concision and detail. When the subject requires elaboration, the Qur'an discusses the topic in detail, and when a short phrase will get the message across, it remains brief. The sentences are constructed in an elegant manner that uses the smallest number of words, without sounding too brief, to express rich ideas.

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<sup>55</sup> al-Khattābī, 27.

<sup>56</sup> Manna Qattaan, *Mabāḥith fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālat, 1983), 264–69.

6. The rhythms of the syllables are more sustained than in prose and less patterned than in poetry. The pauses come neither in prose form nor in the manner of poetry but with a harmonious and melodic flow.
7. The Qur'an's words are neither mundane nor completely unfamiliar but are recognized as completely balanced and noble.
8. The conciseness of expression attains such striking clarity that the least learned Arabic-speaking person can understand the Qur'an without too much difficulty. At the same time, there is such profundity, flexibility, inspiration, and radiance in the Qur'an that it serves as the basis for the principles and rules of Islamic sciences and arts for theology and juridical schools. Thus, it is almost impossible to express the ideas of the text by only one interpretation, either in Arabic or in any other language even with the greatest care.
9. There is a perfect blend between the two antagonistic powers of reason and emotion, intellect, and feeling. In the narrations, arguments, doctrines, laws, and moral principles, the words have both persuasive teaching and emotive force. Throughout the whole Qur'an, the speech maintains its surprising solemnity, power, and majesty which nothing can disturb.<sup>57</sup>
10. The combination of word choice, word order, grammatical shifts, subtleties, figurative and literal language, storytelling structures, and symmetry, in not one verse, but throughout the entirety of the Qur'an, regardless of the subject matter.

Historically, many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars opined that the literary *i'jāz* is the strongest and most clear aspect of the Qur'an's divine nature, but it is also the most difficult aspect to elucidate in non-Arabic research. Thus, generally, a deep understanding of the Arabic language is essential to understand any objective discussion on the aforementioned facets of literary *i'jāz*. In fact, if every facet of language were documented in this research and evaluated, it would demand several dissertations, since the Qur'an contains a wide range of rhetorical features.

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<sup>57</sup> Mohammad Khalifa, *The Sublime Qur'an and Orientalism* (New York: Longman, 1981), 24.

To simplify and properly frame the arguments of literary *i'jāz* in non-Arabic research, one may consider the following points:

1. The perfection of the Qur'an and the context of its delivery;
2. The non-chronological revelation of the Qur'an; and
3. The question of the Qur'an's origins.

The Qur'an was revealed and conveyed over the course of 23 lunar years (610-632 CE) at various times and places, and this point must be kept in mind whilst reflecting on all aspects of literary and non-literary categories of *i'jāz*. The method of delivery was verbal—and oftentimes it was conveyed after a question was posed to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The oral delivery of the Qur'an is significant for two primary reasons.

First, a high-quality product in its final form is oftentimes researched and revised a number of times before its dissemination to the masses. A professor's request to a university student to stand and present on a random topic for ten minutes would produce a final product of significantly inferior quality than a professor requesting a student to submit a research paper due after a month. Although this example is not completely analogous to the point at hand, the Qur'an's oral delivery is important to note because no error can be found in a scripture claiming to be from God, perfect without error, harmoniously flowing and intertwining the verse's meanings, rhythm, rhetorical features, and precise word choice, and being conveyed not only to its followers but also to those who challenged its origins. Any infinitesimal literary error would have invited the Qur'an's opponents to take advantage and gain the upper hand, thus ending any claim that the Qur'an could withstand any challenge by Quraysh. Had the challenge been fulfilled—or any error occurred—it could not have been retracted or ignored by the masters of Arabic poetry and the opponents of Prophet Muhammad or even his many Muslim followers. Some examples of direct questions to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ with immediate responses include the following:

And they ask you [O Muhammad] about the soul. Say, “The soul is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind has not been given knowledge except a little.”<sup>58</sup>

They ask you [O Muhammad] about wine and gambling. Say, “In them is great sin and [yet, some] benefit for people. But their sin is greater than their benefit.” And they ask you what they should spend. Say, “The excess [beyond needs].” Thus Allah makes clear to you the verses [of revelation] that you might give thought.<sup>59</sup>

The second important point to note regarding the oral delivery of the Qur'an is that the final product—the complete Qur'an with more than six thousand verses—manifests the highest order of perfection and unparalleled eloquence in its composition and organization. With many forms of literature, a beginning, middle, and end are formulated somewhat cohesively and chronologically in development or dissemination. With the Qur'an, however, verses and chapters were revealed non-chronologically throughout the 23 years of revelation in different regions and to different audiences, and those who memorized it would be instructed by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ on where to place each new revealed passage or verse. For example, the final verse of revelation according to many scholars is verse 281 of chapter 2,<sup>60</sup> a chapter of 286 verses spanning a gradual revelation of two decades. However, the recitation of the verse fits in perfectly in this chapter as though it had been divinely planned and orchestrated before the entirety of the revelation was complete. Thus, as each literary facet of the Qur'an is examined in this series, one must consider the non-chronological delivery of these verses and how they came about with complete, harmonious perfection in the final product after twenty-three years.

While the above serves as a highly condensed introduction to the Qur'an's literary *i'jāz*, the topic will be addressed at length in a future article. Ultimately, the literary *i'jāz* of the Qur'an demonstrates that its authorship cannot be attributed to a human being.

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<sup>58</sup> Qur'an 17:85.

<sup>59</sup> Qur'an 2:219.

<sup>60</sup> See: al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 2:281.

## Conclusion

The following question—and the crux of this series—is, “What makes the Qur’an miraculous?” This introductory article aimed to present the various facets of Qur’anic *i’jāz*, the history of the doctrine of *i’jaz*, and a brief introduction to linguistic *i’jāz*. The next essay in this series will address the inimitability of the Qur’an and the role of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in conveying the Qur’an. Ultimately, this series demonstrates the claim—that the Qur’an is from God—is not only the “best explanation” by means of 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.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Qur’an 29:51.