

## Oral Features of the Qur'ān Detected in Public Recitation

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### Introduction

The first audience for the Qur'ān did not receive leaves with writing on them (98:2),<sup>1</sup> nor something on parchment they could touch (6:7), nor a book from the sky (4:153). They heard it. The Qur'ān arrived orally, piecemeal, and, significantly, each piece of which was heard before it was written down. Within a quarter of a century the pieces were collected, their order standardized, and uniform copies of the whole soon became available. At that point, believers could access it by ear or by eye (and by heart for those portions they had memorized).

This complementarity of hearing and reading, a bimodal approach to verbal comprehension, has endured within Muslim communities to this day, but for many scholars in the West, the primary interaction with the work has been in its printed form, as a text read, usually silently. But since the words are the same whether read or heard, what difference does it make?

This essay examines some of the textual features of the Qur'ān that emerge more prominently when listening to it, features that may enhance insight gained during slow or silent reading sessions. A comparison with ancient Greek oral works, such as those of Homer, highlights features of orality in both, demonstrating that both are meant to be heard. An examination of Classical memory methodologies reveals how rhetorical figures and other linguistic devices facilitate transmission and continuing presentation of works such as these in an “audiome” (sound-rich environment or one in which communication by sound predominates, whether in preliterate or literate societies), as well as their preservation in written text. Figures and devices involving structure, meaning, diction, syntax, and sound are sampled from the Qur'ān so readers might recognize their aural power and thus their significance within the text.

All translations are by the author, unless indicated. The rudimentary translations of Quranic material provided herein by the author (best translation of the Qur'ān into English to date is that by Abdel Haleem 2004) are intended to convey as much as possible the original word order so that the sequence of ideas flows as original listeners would have heard them in Arabic; however, this order may not account for the emphasis words normally have in a statement because of the language's typical relative placement of Topic and Focus (see Edwards 2002:9-13). Citations from the Qur'ān

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<sup>1</sup> A pair of numbers separated by a colon in parentheses refer to sura and *āyah* (division of a surah, analogous to a verse of the Bible) numbers respectively in the Qur'ān.

are from the *riwāyah* of Ḥafṣ, given in the form [sura number: *āyah* number], and appear in parentheses without other attribution.<sup>2</sup>

### **Qur'ān and *Kitāb*—and Some Homer**

The work orally received and orally transmitted by Prophet Muhammad is called by Muslims and non-Muslims alike the *Qur'ān*, the “much-recited,” whose Arabic root means “to recite or read aloud.” The name *Qur'ān* is far and away more common than the work’s second most popular name, *al-Kitāb al-Karīm*, “the generous book,” with the root of the word for book, *kataba*, meaning literally “he has written, he wrote,” but because it is the simplest form of the verb it is used as the dictionary entry and thus as shorthand for “to write.” The *Qur'ān* was received in segments, not as a single whole, because the pieces came in response to events (Madigan 2001:63). While the idea of the *Qur'ān* as a “single whole” (25:32: *جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً* jumlatan wāḥidatan) is most appropriate to writing, and the piecemeal origin of the book suits its oral reception and the oral style of the text, the *Qur'ān* is no less a book because of its oral character.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, there is no great divide between orality and literacy, nor an easy diagnostic tool to classify this or that work as strictly oral or strictly literate. To ignore either literate or oral interpretative approaches, however, will fail to provide sustainable perspectives and a growing enrichment of our understanding of the *Qur'ān*. Indeed, the complementarity of *Qur'ān* and *Kitāb* highlights for us how much this sacred work includes both “oral” and “literate” (written) stylistic elements in one perfect, seamless blend, though the preference for the term *Qur'ān* suggests that believers are meant to “hear and obey” (5:7)—to listen to the words, understand them, and reflect and act on the meaning of what is recited to them. As one early translator noted, the suras that make up the *Qur'ān* “were intended not for *readers* but for *hearers* . . . they were all promulgated by public *recital*” (Rodwell 1909:4).

Perhaps it was the introduction of the *Qur'ān* into the West as a text in 1143 CE, in the medieval era of *disputationes* between Christian and Muslim clerics, that impeded an appreciation of the natural oral character of the *Qur'ān*. This lack of attention to the work’s oral nature as expressed in public recitation has slowed readers from adding crucial insights to what they already have learned from the printed page.

The Western reception of the *Qur'ān* is similar to that of Homer’s epics during the Renaissance and the rediscovery of Classical Greek and Latin literature; readers knew that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were oral (Wolf 1795), but nonetheless evaluated them along strictly literate (that is, written) criteria. Scholars weren’t even certain how Greek sounded in the past, and so Homer’s epics were more read than heard. Yet even without an authentic pronunciation key, the style of the epics is such that students working through the Greek text can soon sightread relatively large passages with facility. And yet again, even after Milman Parry’s ground-breaking research in the opening decades of the twentieth century, to “hear” those ancient voices we strain more than when trying to decipher whispers at a far distant remove.

<sup>2</sup> The author formally acknowledges with sincere gratitude the expert advice and support provided by the reviewers as well as their patience in correcting the author’s lapsi qalami in transliteration. Their generous direction has resulted in significant improvement in this work.

<sup>3</sup> See Madigan (2001:53-77); and for a succinct, thorough overview of the codification of the *Qur'ān* as a single book, see Schoeler (2010).

One consequence of a literate approach is that a written work, by its very existence, raises the question of its origin, its composition, its author. While the question of authorship could not be conclusively resolved in terms of the Homeric epics (the “Homeric Question”; see Fowler 2004:220-32), Parry and his successors convincingly demonstrated that the poems are traditional. By contrast, the Qur'ān has not been shown to be traditional, and it is unlikely that it is. Although the Homeric Question can be reframed around the Qur'ān (who composed it and how?), however one answers such questions for either work, eventually the argument about who and how “becomes tiresome because there will never be any way of verifying one position or another, and everyone’s opinion requires an act of faith” (Beye 1987:296).

Leaving the questions of who and how aside, we find several stylistic similarities between the Qur'ān and Homer’s epics that reveal their orality, their necessity to be heard. In all other respects, these works cannot be compared; for example, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are metered poems, whereas the Qur'ān is not poetry, though its rhyme and rhythm are apparent even to new learners of Arabic. Similar oral features found in both the Homeric epic and the Qur'ān include the following:

- (1) Both represent an “authoritative sacral speech-act” (González 2013:185) designed for recitation by mantic authority (indicated in the Homeric epic by commands from the Muse [sing!] and in the Qur'ān by a similar command from the angel Gabriel [say!]; see González 2013:179-87, 642; Stewart 2011:327).
- (2) Recitation of both works is for the public at large, not for a priestly caste or some other select group of privileged individuals. Thus, both transmit cultural information that increases the cohesion of the recipients.
- (3) As a result of (1) and (2) both the epic and the Qur'ān have instilled in their admirers a desire to retain the whole in memory who, after a certain point in time, began to use the written text as a guide.
- (4) Both are meant to be heard; because they are inspired speech (1), their declamation is traditionally in relatively simple melodic recitation<sup>4</sup> that, by modern standards, is neither sung nor spoken. That declamation needs to be well ordered and distinct: κατὰ κόσμον (*Od.* 8.489), تَرْتِيلًا tartīlan (73:4).
- (5) Both contain a large proportion of direct speech: About two-thirds of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are in direct speech, compared with approximately 31 percent of the Qur'ān, by a conservative estimate (the latter figure rises to about 57 percent if we include direct address, where *you/your* is used, but exclude statements of the first person, *I/my/me* and *we/our*, that are not properly in direct speech).
- (6) Related to (5), deictic pronouns and other pointer words are common in both, a feature considered to be a means of engaging a listening audience (Martin 1989:4).
- (7) Related to (6), both have prominent rhetorical speech (see *Ilṭifāt*, below).
- (8) Both employ an archaic diction that is somewhat artificial.
- (9) The lexicon of both includes many hapaxes: on average one hapax legomenon occurs in the *Iliad* every 9 or 10 verses; in the Qur'ān the ratio is ~1 per 17 āyahs.

<sup>4</sup> There is a difference of opinion on how the epics were originally recited; diachronically there may have been more or less melodic approaches (including perhaps some instances of instrumental accompaniment), but the evidence is inconclusive (see González 2013:343ff., espec. n.44, p. 343f.). The same historical uncertainty exists for the Qur'ān. In both cases, reciters learned from reciters (see *infra*).

- (10) In both many utterances are repeated, suggestive of “formulas.” Although the Qur’ān lacks “Parry-perfect” hallmarks of oral tradition (that is, verbatim formulas under the same metrical conditions that reflect an economy of expression), even readers of translations (for example, Dundes 2003:23-54) readily recognize numerous repeated phrases and their variants that are analogous to strict formulas.
- (11) Some phrases in both almost demand a hearing, so strong are their mimetic sound effects: For example, from the *Iliad* (1.34), πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης *polýphloisboio thalássēs* (“of the loud-sounding sea”; genitive); Here the words mimic the sound of waves striking the shore. From the Qur’ān (29:41), وَإِنَّ أَوْهَنَ الْبُيُوتِ لَبَيْتُ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ *wa-inna awhana l-buyūti la-baytu l-‘ankabūti* (“indeed the weakest of houses is the house of the spider”); here the clustering of *n*, *b*, *t*, and *k* sounds echo the light, plucking sounds of the spider’s movement on its web.
- (12) Most sentences in both are paratactic (because oral speech is segmented; Rubin 1995:69), and word order is important for emphasis (Edwards 1987:55-60), since both languages are inflected.
- (13) Both are relatively long: The two-volume Oxford edition of Homer’s *Iliad* occupies 552 pp. with a total number of 15,692 lines (in dactylic hexameter); the standard Ḥafṣ edition of the Qur’ān has 604 pages of text with 8804 lines of text, roughly half the number of lines in the *Iliad*. Admittedly this is not a precise comparison, but it is perhaps closer to the real verbal space of the words—a count of the number of words in each would produce a very inaccurate comparison of respective lengths, since Arabic subsumes most personal pronouns and common words, such as “and,” “so, and “like,” that are independent in Greek and are combined with other parts of speech and written solid in Arabic (*wa-*, *fa-*, *ka-*).
- (14) Both works begin in medias res, with listeners expected to recognize the scene: The *Iliad* opens in the 10th year of the Trojan War, as the anger of Achilles at Agamemnon’s theft of his war prize has led to a divinely imposed plague. After the opening invocation (sura 1), the Qur’ān delves immediately into a contrast, or possibly an argument, between believers and non-believers, and especially hypocrites, without any background explanation (Madigan 2001:70). The first words of sura 2 are often translated as “This is the book. . .” because this accords with the majority of commentators. Among currently popular translations, only Khalidi (2008:3) recognizes the strong rhetorical force of the opener, which he translates as “Behold the book!” Even more rare is a reciter who suggests the break in syntax that the words represent (literally “That book—”), because nearly all listeners today are aware that the book is the well-known and honored Qur’ān.
- (15) The audiences who first heard these works for the most part were not literate, at least not in the modern sense of the term, since literacy is not a “single uniform skill” (Thomas 1989:15-16). The very first people who heard the Homeric epics may have been familiar with the concept of writing (the σήματα λυγρά, or “murderous symbols,” found ἐν πίνακι πτυκτῷ, “on a hinged, or folding, tablet”; *Il.* 6:168f.), and even a later, fifth-century Athenian citizen of the democracy may not have been able to do much more than scratch out his name on a shard of pottery (Thomas 1989:18). The Arabs of Makka during the time of Prophet Muhammad knew of books, but literacy was, nonetheless, limited (Stein 2010).

A final comparison, however, can *not* be made: The ancient tradition of reciting the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* long ago ceased. Originally, most ancient Greeks received the poems that way, first

hearing them as children, even before they could read, and memorizing passages. As students we memorized 50 lines to experience the flow of the poetic line, the life of the epic, but none of us—in fact no living human being—is a native speaker of ancient Greek. Most of us who have studied the poems still wonder: how could anyone memorize so much? How was it to know the poems from childhood and then to hear them recited at special times of the year—would it change your understanding of them? Is it like listening to a favorite tune whose words you've memorized, only a lot bigger, or is the response more elusive but, if you get it, incomparable?

By contrast, the Qur'ān today can be read or heard. A number of people who recognize the importance of oral aspects of the Qur'ān have shown particular interest in its recitation, which certainly should be a starting point for discovering the Qur'ān's orality: unlike the situation for students of Homer today, Quranic recitation represents a living, unbroken tradition connecting reciter to reciter back to Prophet Muhammad. The companions of the Prophet and the first believers learned their recitation from the Prophet himself and they in turn taught the next generation directly, who taught the next, and so on to the present; not until recent times, when tapes and other recordings became popular, would anyone attempt to learn to recite except from someone who was trained by one who had learned from another who was part of that traditional chain of reciters.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps because of the emphasis on the rules of recitation according to that tradition, most studies of the practice of recitation examine proper recitation technique, putting almost all of the emphasis on the reciter, with only relatively few remarks on the listeners. Some of these studies, however, are insightful; the best in English are Denny (1989) and Nelson (2001 [1985]). Notwithstanding their importance for understanding the orality of the Qur'ān, these scholars do not address the question of whether hearing the Qur'ān provides listeners with an added dimension to their understanding from what they read privately from the same book.

This essay includes some of the results of an informal experiment I conducted over the course of a number of years. After learning enough of the language to read the Qur'ān in Arabic, I attended live recitations and listened; the goal was to discover whether I would learn something that I would or could not have learned had I simply stayed “on the page.” And could this “heard” knowledge in turn elucidate understanding of the Homeric epics in any way?

### The Utility of Memory

Apart from *kitāb*, the Qur'ān uses *dīkr* self-referentially (for example, 15:6, 9; Raḡib Iṣfahānī [2014]:328). The basic verb form related to *dīkr* is the everyday word that means “to remember.” But, depending on context, the word *dīkr* may be appropriately interpreted as remem-

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<sup>5</sup> The evidence from Xenophon (*Smp.* 3.5) suggests that in similar fashion ancient Greeks who wanted to learn to recite Homer learned from rhapsodes, who likewise learned from older reciters, perhaps back to an original Homer. Socrates included the listener in this chain, when he compared the divine inspirational force to a magnetic stone and the poet (or prophet) to an iron ring, held in suspense by that stone; the poet in turn attracts other “rings” into a magnetic chain, especially the succession of rhapsodes who pass on the inspired words. And οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ θεατὴς τῶν δακτυλίων ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃν ἐγὼ ἔλεγον ὑπὸ τῆς Ἡρακλειώτιδος λίθου ἀπ' ἀλλήλων τὴν δύναμιν λαμβάνειν . . . ὁ δὲ θεὸς διὰ πάντων τούτων ἔλκει τὴν ψυχὴν ὅποι ἂν βούληται τῶν ἀνθρώπων “the spectator is the last [of the rings], as I was saying, to take their interlinked power from the magnetic stone . . . Through all these, the God pulls the souls of people in any direction he might wish . . .” (Plato, *Ion* 535e).



bering, reminder, reminding, remembrance, admonition, warning, lesson, or even as message or revelation. Most of these equivalents have in common the recall of something already in one's mind or that may readily be construed by a reasonable mind. The Qur'ān states:

(54:17, 32, 40) وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَّكِرٍ (wa-la-qad yassarnā l-qur'āna li-d-dikri fa-hal mim muddakir), "We have made the Qur'ān easy for *dikr*, so is there any *muddakir*?"

Quickly taken in, the first clause suggests that the Qur'ān by its nature is easy to remember, though the second clause, "so is there any *muddakir* (a form VIII active participle of the same verb as *dikr*, meaning "one who remembers or reminds oneself"), shifts the meaning of *dikr* toward taking a lesson from hearing or reading the Qur'ān, thus: "We have made the Qur'ān easy for *dikr*, so is there anyone who is reminded (that is, learns and takes the advice)?"

Although most native speakers acknowledge that the entire statement is about taking lessons on right vs. wrong from the Qur'ān, many appreciate a quick-fire response to the first half of it, because they say the Qur'ān is actually easy to remember, or memorize. So, how is it easy to remember? The Qur'ān suggests one key element is to hear it. A passage mentions the story of the Flood and the ark so it might serve as a reminder (again, a lesson about good and evil):

(69:12) وَتَعْيَا أَدْنَ وَعِيَةً wa-ta'iyahā uḍunun wā'iyah, "and (so that) ears might store it in memory."

Hearing and repeating the words many times is the approach taken by the *kuttāb* (Qur'ān school for children), where even toddlers may be enrolled. The size of the work, its availability in print, and its self-endorsement as a book speaks favorably for a reading copy to guide accuracy and consistency in memorization. Furthermore, a unified text of the Qur'ān permitted many people, young and old, to learn and to recite the entire work from memory.

Again, there is a comparison with Homer: it was common in the post-Peisistratid period (last quarter of sixth century B.C. and later), when a written text was popularized, for people to memorize the entire Homeric corpus (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the most common works represented in the papyri, which reflected popularity of the works). For example, according to Xenophon (*Smp.* 3.5), one young man at a banquet attended by Socrates boasted of his proper education saying to the philosopher: Ὁ πατήρ ὁ ἐπιμελούμενος ὅπως ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς γενοίμην ἠνάγκασέ με πάντα τὰ Ὁμήρου ἔπη μαθεῖν· καὶ νῦν δυναίμην ἂν Ἰλιάδα ὅλην καὶ Ὀδύσσειαν ἀπὸ στόματος εἰπεῖν "Father, taking care that I become a good man, compelled me to learn Homer by heart, and now I am able to recite the entire *Iliad* and *Odyssey*" (cf. Plato, *Lg.* 810e, ὅλους ποιητὰς ἐκμανθάνοντας). A written text thus in no way overrode the oral reception of the work by the next generation of young people, who normally learned it by heart at a very early age from guides and teachers who taught them orally. In fact, in antiquity, there was fear that reliance on a written text might dull a young person's ability to learn and think critically, if Plato's Socrates may serve as a reliable witness. In his tale of the invention of writing by Thoth, the ancient Egyptian god of wisdom and learning, Socrates relates pharaoh's warning to Thoth: τοῦτο γὰρ τῶν μαθόντων λήθην μὲν ἐν ψυχαῖς παρέξει μνήμης ἀμελετησίᾳ, ὅτε διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς ἔξωθεν ὑπ' ἄλλοτριῶν τύπων, οὐκ ἔνδοθεν αὐτοὺς ὑφ' αὐτῶν ἀναμνησκομένους "For this (invention) will produce forgetfulness in the minds of learners through the lack of practice of the memory because of that trust in the external impressions

rather than on those within themselves” (Plato, *Phdr.* 275a), a statement that reflects the belief that learning by memory left a graven record on the soul.

Modern cognitive psychologists who specialize in memory have contributed greatly to our understanding of how a large work, such as a Homeric epic (or the Qur'ān), could be memorized; in terms of the epic poems, which are traditional, memorizers have a certain degree of slack in their memorization program—they didn't need to reproduce the poems literally word for word, but perhaps strong memory resources permitted greater creativity during their traditional re-creation of the poem in performance. Of course, in every time there are individuals with photographic or audiographic memories, but they are few and it is not known how many of them would also have the vocal qualifications necessary to perform a recitation competently.

Depending on the kind of material to be memorized, best strategies for memorizing vary (many of them are cited by ancient rhetoricians in their handbooks on rhetoric, since memory was considered an integral part of the ability to speak publicly). It should be noted that terminology is not consistent; a term couched in the context of cognitive psychology may not have the same meaning to a philologist. Generally speaking, most people can rely on logic to memorize material that may be classed as “linear,” for example, narratives and scenes that develop sequentially (such as the typical arming scenes of the *Iliad*); one's experience can aid and direct memory in such linear sequences. That is, one may keep the structural framework of a narrative in mind, and the words and phrases should come naturally in order. That the structure of such material is consciously or intuitively internalized may be supported by common errors made by skilled reciters of the Qur'ān. Most of the time, in typical narratives, the only error one hears is the dropping out of a portion within the sequence, either a phrase or an *āyah*; by contrast, transposition of phrases is rare.

A subtype of linear narrative material is the extended description (for example, the *ekphrasis* of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* 18.478-616), in which tradition imposes an ordered sequence of qualities of an object (for Homer's epics, this sequence is “summary, description, material, workmanship, feature, size/weight/value, and history,” Minchin 2001:112f.) A comparable sequence type in the Qur'ān has not been detected (at least not in recitation).

A second type of sequential material is the chiasmus (Gk. “marking with diagonal lines like the shape of the Greek letter *chi*, X”; Ar. al-binā' al-ma'qūf [aw aṣ-ṣalībī] li-l-jumlah), the crosswise arrangement of contrasted pairs to give alternate stress, for example, A-B-B'-A', and larger “ring compositions” (for Homeric epics) recently described as “symmetries” (for Qur'ān), patterns of composition that proceed with elements in a “forward” direction and then in “reverse,” for example, topics A-B-C-D. . . D'-C'-B'-A'. Such rings are characteristic of orality and are considered intuitive by cognitive psychologists, based on their studies of natural storytelling (see, for example, the discussion of the ring in Homer as a “natural” narrative device that is also typical of everyday storytelling, Minchin 2001:183-98). The methodology for remembering a ring is like any other linear sequence except one needs to make the return in the same, but reversed order. Although rings and symmetries are thought *not* to be artificial per se, memorization of the order of the elements may require a mnemonic system, such as the ancient practice of attaching *loci* (Latin “places,” sometimes translated as “backgrounds”) to items in the sequence. Images attached to each item in the sequence are visualized in separate places along a path, and the memorizer imagines moving along that path and passing each of the places where s/he sees the items. This method was known to be in use at least as early as the fifth century BC by Greeks, although the

most complete extant description of the strategy is found in a work attributed to the first-century BC orator, politician, and philosopher Cicero (*ad Her.* 3.16.28-3.24.40; see also Quintilian, *Inst. orat.* 11.2.11-26).

One of the larger rings in the Qur'ān that can readily be heard in recitation is sūrat Yūsuf (sura 12); its *loci* are not defined by the text but by the reciter. That is, a reciter in performance may bring to prominence the *loci*, labeled A–F in Fig. 1, and their complementary returns or may choose other items in the narrative for his *loci*. Classicists hypothesize from the evidence surrounding the ancient Greek experience of the Homeric epics that listeners heard the rings attentively and that this method of oral composition was much loved (the entire *Iliad* has been analyzed as a ring composition: see Whithman 1958, espec. foldout chart), but whether any or all component rings are heard in any performance depends entirely on the reciter. Outlined in Fig. 1 is what I heard in performance more than 15 years ago (and, significantly, before I was aware that anyone had recognized the ring using a literate approach: see Cuypers 1995; Farrin 2014:34-43). For example, there are reciters who intuitively intone their *loci* distinctly (whether or not they are consciously using the *loci* system), while others ignore this narrative-building tool, which is useful not only for prompting the reciter's memory but also for maintaining the audience's attention (and in the case of sura 12 of climaxing at the central core; Fig. 1).

A second category of material is the list, or catalog, with no clear rational sequence, no natural ordering of its objects. Included in this type is an unordered list of names of persons, people, objects, or qualities (for example, the catalog of ships in the *Iliad* 2.494-877). Examples of the unordered list in the Qur'ān include: the kinds of men and women meant for each other (24:26); attributes of Allah (59:23-24); characteristics of good people (9:112), both men and women (33:35); and lists of prophets (6:84-86) and those who rejected their *rusul*, prophetic messengers from God (50:12-14).

The unordered list poses the greatest difficulty for memorization, because there is no underlying logic. Typically, people memorize them by rote, hearing and repeating the words again and again. But, here too, *loci* imagery can offer a solution almost guaranteed to work (Rubin 1995:46-48). Professor Rubin (1995:47), a cognitive psychologist—not a professional mnemonist—routinely engaged his students in a memory experiment to demonstrate the effectiveness of the *loci* technique: each student named an item for him to memorize, 40 in all, and “after lecturing for a half-hour, I recall the list in the order given, typically without error.” The technique was described to the students, and they in turn were quickly able to successfully memorize unordered lists.

These two broad content categories (ordered sequences and unordered lists) constitute a large proportion of the material of the epic and the Qur'ān, and both content categories often rely on memorization through imagery and visualization techniques, such as the *loci* method. In antiquity the visualization of the written source itself was also recognized as a method for memorizing passages verbatim (Quintilian, *Inst. orat.* 11.2.32)<sup>6</sup>; by comparison, there is general agreement that early written copies of the Qur'ān (in whole or part) were employed as an aide-mémoire, not just as a prompt for something forgotten but as a visual image to fix the words in memory, while the *parole recitée* was the guide to the “real” words of God (Schoeler 2002:41).

Another class of material may be neither ordered nor enumerated in a list, but surface features may permit the exploitation of tongue and ear to retain the sound of the expressions in memory. These features include rhyme, which is exploited by humans as well as nonhuman

<sup>6</sup> *Illud neminem non iuvabat, iisdem quibus scripserit ceris ediscere* (“One thing will assist everyone, to memorize [a passage] from the very same wax tablets on which he has written it”).



mammals (specifically, whales; see Guinee and Payne 1988), indicating the primordial appeal of this approach both for memorization and for composition. From such surface features rhetorical sound patterns developed, which account for most of the rhetorical figures, and the art of style and rhetoric. A host of aural surface features make the Qur'ān especially easy to memorize: alliteration, assonance, rhythm, *insijām* (the inclusion of metered poetic phrases within an *āyah* that is primarily “prose”), *saj‘* (a type of rhyme specific to Arabic), and *jinās* (a kind of word play), the size of which usually accords well with the “intonation units” that are constantly refreshed in the short-term memory (Rubin 1995:68). These surface sound effects complement structure and style to facilitate steady, easy, consistent, and managed flow of memorized content.

The imagistic and sequential material types may play their largest roles in compositional structure, like the scaffolding of a building buried beneath a surface façade. But on the façade hang a host of rhetorical figures and themes that—while they may not convey meaning in themselves—facilitate long-term memory, which would be especially useful in a preliterate and early literate setting. These aural surface features also enrich a recitation performance because select items can be highlighted in an individualistic way to more securely convey in the moment a particular interpretation by a given reciter.

### The Recitation Environment

There is only one contemporary description of the recitation of the ancient Greek epic (*Odyssey*, Book 8), that is offered by a fictional counterpart to Homer: the reciter, or rhapsode, named Demodokos, is considered an excellent singer in part because the god gave him song, that is, she inspires him to recite with a sweet voice, and he can choose what he would like to recite (*Od.* 8.44-45). He sits on a chair in the midst of the audience (*Od.* 8.65, 472-473); a *phorminx* (a kind of lute or lyre) is hung above his head (*Od.* 8.67-68), though we do not know whether he uses it in his epic recitation. There are breaks for eating (*Od.* 8.473-478); for dancing, accompanied by Demodokos on the *phorminx* (*Od.* 8.266-267); and for athletic games. Another session of recitation follows, then more activities and a return to recitation, with a selection chosen by an audience member (*Od.* 8.487-498). Whether this was typical of the first recitations—before a written text was available—is unknown. The earliest historically attested rhapsode, Kynaithos of Chios, was the first to perform the poetry of Homer in Syracuse in 504–501 BCE (González 2013:492f.), and we know the names of several other rhapsodes, but biographical details and notes on his performance program are scant (González 2013:491-518).

In Classical Greek practice, apart from sessions with a tutor and in-home readings, the primary venues in which people heard the Homeric epics were festivals, especially the annual Panathenaic festival, when they were recited in their entirety by a succession of rhapsodes (Plato, *Hippiarch.* 228b; see also González 2013:382-92 for the evidence for *hypolepsis*, the “relay” method of successive reciters); it seems likely that this was the only regular public performance of whole works. The festival had both religious and festive aspects (Parke 1977:34f.), and in this regard, there are superficial similarities to public recitation of the Qur'ān during Ramadan.

Hadiths describe early reciters of the Qur'ān, but they fail to indicate how their recitations actually sounded. As in the case with the earliest reciters of epic, we know the names of the pri-

mary reciters of the Qur'ān and their successors (handbooks of *tajwīd*, proper methods of reciting, often provide a list or even a chart, for example, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd 2010:22), but biographical details are relatively thin. These reciters are often known for their memory (pronouncing all the words correctly and leaving nothing out), and for a strong, pleasing voice. But, significantly, there has been no break in the chain of reciters since the earliest years of Islam, and that may be because the text was codified so soon after the death of Prophet Muhammad.

The Qur'ān, as noted, may be learned in a *kuttāb*, and there are also regular public lessons in recitation in many mosques, but often people hire tutors so their children can memorize accurately as much as possible. Sunni Muslims who are native Arabic speakers traditionally hope their children will memorize at least part 30 (*al-juz' al-'amma*), or suras 78 through 114, with girls now expected to memorize the same as their brothers. In homes, there are a variety of occasions for reading the Qur'ān in groups, for example, each participant reading a *juz'* (a 30th part of the Qur'ān) with lips moving and audibly, though perhaps very softly ("To an Arab. . . reading always means reading aloud," Pedersen 1984:17), but these private venues are not truly public performances, even when a reciter graces a special event with a recitation of some portion(s) of the Qur'ān. Significantly, the memorization is verbatim, with 95 percent of the world's Muslims learning the *riwāyah* (textual transmission of a noted early reciter's method of reciting the Qur'ān) of Ḥafṣ, but the vocal line is not fixed.<sup>7</sup> The text is thus a framework for some degree of vocal individualization and interpretation by the reciter.

The most prominent recitation performances by professional reciters are the *ṣīwān* (literally, "tent, pavilion"; a memorial service for the dead) and *tarāwīḥ* (literally, "refreshment [for the heart and spirit]," recitation during the nights of Ramadan). Both require the reciter to perform from memory, without the aid of a text. In the former, family and friends of the deceased sit in rows facing each other, with small tables nearby for refreshments in a room (or makeshift room with canvas walls like a large tent), while listening to the reciter; there are separate areas for men and women in those places that provide for female attendance. There is a time for condolence and a time for recitation; the reciter performs for perhaps 15–20 minutes, and then takes a break (or performs in the room for the opposite gender), and then returns for another cycle of recitation. The recited sections are often suras chosen by the deceased, if s/he had indicated some preference in life, or by the decedent's family or the reciter, but they are performed primarily for the comfort of the family and their guests. People sometimes talk, albeit quietly, during the recitations, as they sip their drinks. That is, the listeners may not give total attention to the words they are hearing. The entire event may take an hour or two.

For the purpose of listening to large portions of the Qur'ān in sequence, *tarāwīḥ* is essential, because it is an event especially for listening to the Qur'ān (held over the nights of the month of Ramadan and often the entire Qur'ān will be recited over the course of these nights). Listeners normally try to stand during the recitation (*tarāwīḥ* is also known as *ṣalāt al-qiyaṃ*, "the standing prayer") so they can better focus on the words they are hearing. This is in accord with the encouragement given in the Qur'ān to believers to listen with attention: (7:204) وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ.

<sup>7</sup> Traditionally, there has been "resistance to associating the Qur'ān with the musical art in any way" (Nelson 1985:32) because of music's capacity to enchant. But everyone recognizes the vocal elements of recitation—the text is not recited aloud like conversational speech, but rather has a vocal, even melodic "line" as one would find in musical expression (for an exploration of the topic see Nelson 1985:32–51).

وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ wa-idā qurī'a l-qur'ānu fastamī'ū lahū wa'anṣitū la'allakum turḥamūn "And when the Qur'ān is recited, listen to it and be silent so that you may receive mercy."

It is not unusual to find one person reciting the entire Qur'ān over 29 or 30 nights of *tarāwīḥ*, but more commonly two, three, or even more share in the nightly performances, and this sharing may involve alternating during each night's performance after regular breaks, or alternating nights for each reciter, or some other agreed-upon scheme. If only one reciter performs the whole program or the bulk of the program, there is greater opportunity for the audience to take the work in as a whole within a single interpretative framework. But not all members of the audience attend the entire program of 30 nights; many people skip one or more nights or come only occasionally, while others visit a number of different mosques over the course of Ramadan. It is important to note that many mosques in the Arabic-speaking world favor the recitation of at least one *juz* ' per night, but because the prayers that accompany the recitation are not obligatory, many mosques offer shorter programs to accommodate the busy schedules of people who would like to complete the *tarāwīḥ* prayers, but do not have time to listen to the lengthy recitations. Performances may also be arranged around a particular topic, or theme, for example, *ṣifā'* ("cure, a healing"), with all recited selections including at least one reference to the topic (such as 9:14, 10:57, 16:69, 17:82, 26:80, 41:44). The atmosphere of *tarāwīḥ* is usually both solemn and festive because, for many, this is the only time in the year certain portions of the Qur'ān are heard in live recitation by a skilled and experienced *qārī'* (reciter). It is normally the only time in the year when anyone can hear the entire Qur'ān recited live publicly.

The reasons why anyone today recites or comes to listen to that recitation may be strikingly different from the reasons that Prophet Muhammad and the first Muslims had for reciting and listening to the Qur'ān. For the Prophet there was an imperative to convey the message and its meaning clearly and distinctly, without garbling words, and without ambiguity that could result in erroneous meaning and ridicule. The goal was to persuade and attract people to the faith, by making compelling, for example, the Qur'ān's historical narratives that instruct or that distinguish truth from falsity, good from evil.

By contrast, the audience for *tarāwīḥ* today usually already believes and is familiar with much of the underlying meaning (sometimes they read along), so the reciter often seeks to convey his interpretation. This can be imparted through a variety of intonations, with muted but true emphasis, on a variety of words and phrases, just as one can do in the course of everyday speech. He can also exploit some of the rules of *tajwīd* (the proper way to pronounce and recite), for example, by repeating a portion of an *āyah* because he took a breath before a permissible stop (see any manual of *tajwīd*, such as 'Abd al-Ḥamīd 2010:291ff.).

In these times one may hear a reciter emphasize a phrase or an *āyah* for political reasons, and he (and the reciter is normally male except in the rare mosques that cater exclusively to women) may want to express the words as beautifully as his voice permits—though technically he must not actually sing the words—to impart to the audience a sense of awe, wonder, delight, or spiritual transcendence. Because non-Arabic speakers may experience these emotion-driven responses to a recitation as easily as native speakers, there may be some ground for superficially comparing the recitation of the Qur'ān with that of the Avestan *Gathas* or the Sanskrit *Vedas*,<sup>8</sup> but when non-Arabic speakers submit to the length of a typical *tarāwīḥ* event (often more than two

<sup>8</sup> These works might all sound much the same in recitation, but there are fundamental differences as well. For example, the *Vedas* are recited to a set melodic line whose intonation is critical so the reciter can maintain the stability of the universe; as a result there is secrecy around at least some of the ceremonial and sacrificial recitations (Bake 1979:199-201).

hours), they try to follow along with a translation. Even among Arabic speakers not everyone has the same level of comprehension, but this situation probably closely parallels that of the typical ancient Greek audience for recitations of Homer's epics: some members of the audience are highly educated and have memorized portions (or even the whole) and studied with a reciter while others have merely listened to the recitations many times over their lifetimes, gradually absorbing the meaning through prolonged contact and a native's understanding of the language, albeit a different form of that language (see Scodel 2002:10-11, who explains how "popular" is not the same as "fully understandable" in terms of oral works).

Certainly at many points members of the *tarāwīḥ* audience may simply listen without thinking about the words or they may feel some kind of peace in the mellifluous or "chantlike" line. But it is misleading to apply the word *chant* to the simple monodic vocal line of Quranic recitation because chant has since ancient times connoted singing as well as enchantment, akin to the Arabic word *ṭarab*—properly against the rules of *tajwīd*. It may seem like splitting hairs to Western ears to claim it is not chant, but properly Quranic recitation strives for thought and contemplation and as an act of worship, and so is recited *tartīlan*, in a slow and distinct manner (73:4). *Tartīl* comes from a root meaning "to be well arranged and distinct" and the word describes the careful reciting of the Qur'ān in a clear and distinct manner without exceeding bounds of propriety, so both reciter and listener may readily understand the words and meaning. By contrast, chant, like magic, does not prioritize the communication of meaning, whereas for recitation the message is critical.

Many people enjoy the recitations and their satisfaction in them cannot be compared to other activities that have a spiritual component. It's not surprising to find *tarāwīḥ* has occasionally been trendy among the youth, especially since it's an opportunity to dress up and the event is free. Some habitués report they attended regularly when they were young (before marriage), and then stopped, years passed, and now again they've returned. A certain cohesion or unity among congregants forms during recitations when an entire *juz'* is heard, perhaps because of the listening atmosphere, but also conceivably because of the conviviality and the sweet drinks, snacks, and conversation shared during breaks. Nevertheless, even some of the people who come for the communal interaction are attentive to the interpretation that they are hearing. In addition, a remarkable number of women at the longer-style *tarāwīḥ* events of at least a *juz'* have memorized the entire Qur'ān (and all such women I've encountered are literate). Finally, the reciter is responsible for sensing how his audience is responding, and even though he recites with his back to the crowd of listeners, he must strive mightily with only his voice to keep their attention on the words they hear.

### Oral Features of the Qur'ān

Although the audience may hold the book and read along, the reciter must work from memory. To maintain focus and humility (or perhaps to better visualize the page being recited in the mind's eye), most reciters keep their eyes closed as they recite. Typically works that are transmitted orally rely on linguistic patterns or intonation units of learned phrases and ideas that assist the reciter in retaining the work in memory; in traditional poetry, such as Homer's epics, the most distinctive such patterns include formulas and a meter that can echo normal speech, even if that speech is elevated or atypical (for example, not necessarily conforming to a single dialect).

Thus, Homer's epics reveal prominent use of epithets within appropriate portions of the dactylic hexametric line, drawing expressions from an artificial dialect that mixed primarily Aeolic and Ionian irregularly. The meter provides the mnemonic support for the verbal formulas' sounds, which adopt dialectally appropriate words to accompany the meter.

Meter is not unique in offering mnemonic support, however. As Stetkevych has observed (2010:212):

virtually all the linguistic features that we classify as “poetic”—rhyme, meter, assonance, alliteration, antithesis, parallelism, “poetic diction”—and in particular those figures of speech that we term “rhetorical devices”—metaphor, simile, metonymy, antithesis—are originally and essentially mnemonic devices that serve to stabilize and preserve the oral “text.”

The Qur'ān is not poetry, it does not have regular meter, and should not properly be described as poetic, but many of the features Stetkevych cites as “poetic” also operate outside of strict poetry, where rhythm performs the function of regular meter. In addition to those features we should classify as rhythmic, we should include *saj'*, whose frequent use in the Qur'ān is often noted (for an overview in English, see Stewart 1990; and samples below, under Sound). But the Qur'ān is not entirely in *saj'*, nor are passages in *saj'* always consistently observing its established patterning within a pattern.

A host of figures, including the rhetorical devices that Stetkevych mentions, complement the rhythmic features of the Qur'ān and do more than preserve and stabilize the text. In preliterate and early literate societies, figures functioned like a net to which various ideas would adhere and cohere, coalescing into larger connected units in the minds of listeners. What follows is a sampling of figures in the Qur'ān that may demonstrate how they, by either their distinctive or memory-worthy character or their repetition, can create for the listener a larger fabric of interconnected ideas. Broadly classified these figures involve structure, meaning, diction, syntax, and sound. I have heard all of them, on one occasion or another, accentuated in recitation, though in most cases the figures are stressed not from the conscious marking of a figure as a figure but rather they emerge as part of the natural “conversation” with the listening audience, as a way to mark important points in the text and to convey a reciter's interpretation.

### *Structure*

Several linguistic features that are sometimes classed as rhetorical figures or stylistic devices involve the structure of a work as a whole or, more often, smaller units of thought within the whole. Much has been made of the numerous symmetries of the Qur'ān, the chiasmus and the larger ring composition (alluded to above, The Utility of Memory); see Farrin 2014; Cuypers 2015. But into this category we might include the narrative generally (for example, the story of Yūsuf, but also brief narratives of prophets individually or in groups), as well as the “hymn” pattern (explored by Neuwirth 2010). While these structures can indeed be heard in recitation, often they disappear behind more strikingly apparent features. That is, structural devices, which may come to the surface only after numerous listening sessions, serve as scaffolding to a façade of more recognizable aural types of rhetorical figures, but both “scaffolding” and “façade” enable easy memorization and comprehension.



Chiasmus and ring composition are two symmetric ways of structuring expressions that are frequently found in pre- and early literate oral works. As noted above, chiasmus is the crosswise arrangement of contrasted pairs to give alternate stress, for example, A-B-B-A. By this figure both the extremities (A- -A) and the middle elements (B-B) are correlated, or “matched,” in words, themes, or ideas. For listeners, the appeal of chiasmus is that it presents a satisfying mental symmetry, and in preliterate antiquity even large examples of chiasmus were enjoyed, perhaps because they challenged the mind to remain attentive. For example:

(22:61) *يَا أَيُّهَا اللَّهُ يُؤَلِّجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُؤَلِّجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ* bi-anna llāha yūliju l-layla fī n-nahāri  
wa-yūliju n-nahāra fī l-layl, “because Allah causes the night to merge with the day and the day to merge into the night.”

Element A (night) is followed by B (day), then B repeats and is followed by A. Another example is found at 3:106-107:

(106) *يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ أَكَفَرْتُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ* yawma tabyaddu wujūhun  
wa-taswaddu wujūh. fa-ammā l-ladīna swaddat wujūhuhum a-kafartum ba‘da īmānikum. . . /, “On the day some faces will be bright [with the light of Truth and happiness] and some faces will be dark [in misery and despair]. Then as for those whose faces are dark [it will be said]: ‘did you reject your faith after (accepting it)?’. . . /

(107) *وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ أَبْيَضَتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ فَبِمَا رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ* wa-ammā l-ladīna byadḍat wujūhuhum fa-fī  
raḥmati llāhi hum fīhā kālīdūn. “And as for those whose faces are bright, then in the mercy of Allah they will be forever.”

First are mentioned (A) the bright faces, then (B) the dark ones; again (B) the dark ones, and then (A) the bright ones (A–B–B–A).

The ring composition is a large chiasmus (see The Utility of Memory, above), which consists of more than two topics mentioned in consecutive order and then in reverse order; there may be a central core that contains a main point to be highlighted in recitation. As with the chiasmus, “matching” topics need not be congruent in length; the symmetry can be completed without segments of the same length for each topic, because one member of the pair may require greater (or lesser) exposition than the other in context. Notably, one element of a pair may also have a smaller ring set within it that is not found in its sister element in the pair.

It often seems amazing to modern readers and listeners that preliterate people could almost immediately hear and grasp the structure of a ring composition of a large work (such as the whole of the *Iliad* or smaller stories such as sura 12 on Yūsuf), especially since even people alive today who have memorized the entire Qur’ān but who are based in a literate world often do not grasp the ring structure of sūrat Yūsuf until it is pointed out to them. But it is clear that ancients not only could detect the ring structure very quickly, but they also found this style of composition both entertaining and pleasing to the ear.

Sura 12 (Yūsuf) is a superb example of a ring composition with a central core (12:37-40) that carries the most important point of the story, the *tawḥīd*, or Oneness, of God and a profession

of faith. Fig. 1 roughly maps out major topics that form the ring of sura 12. There are many “topics” that can be identified in this sura; the illustration represents only one way of selecting topics in the first half of the story to be paired with counterparts in the second half. Another analysis might be more “fine-tuned,” with more or different pairs detected, but overall the selected clusters of ideas represented in the diagram illustrate the flow of topics in one direction and then, after the central core (marked in the diagram with an asterisk), a flow in reverse.

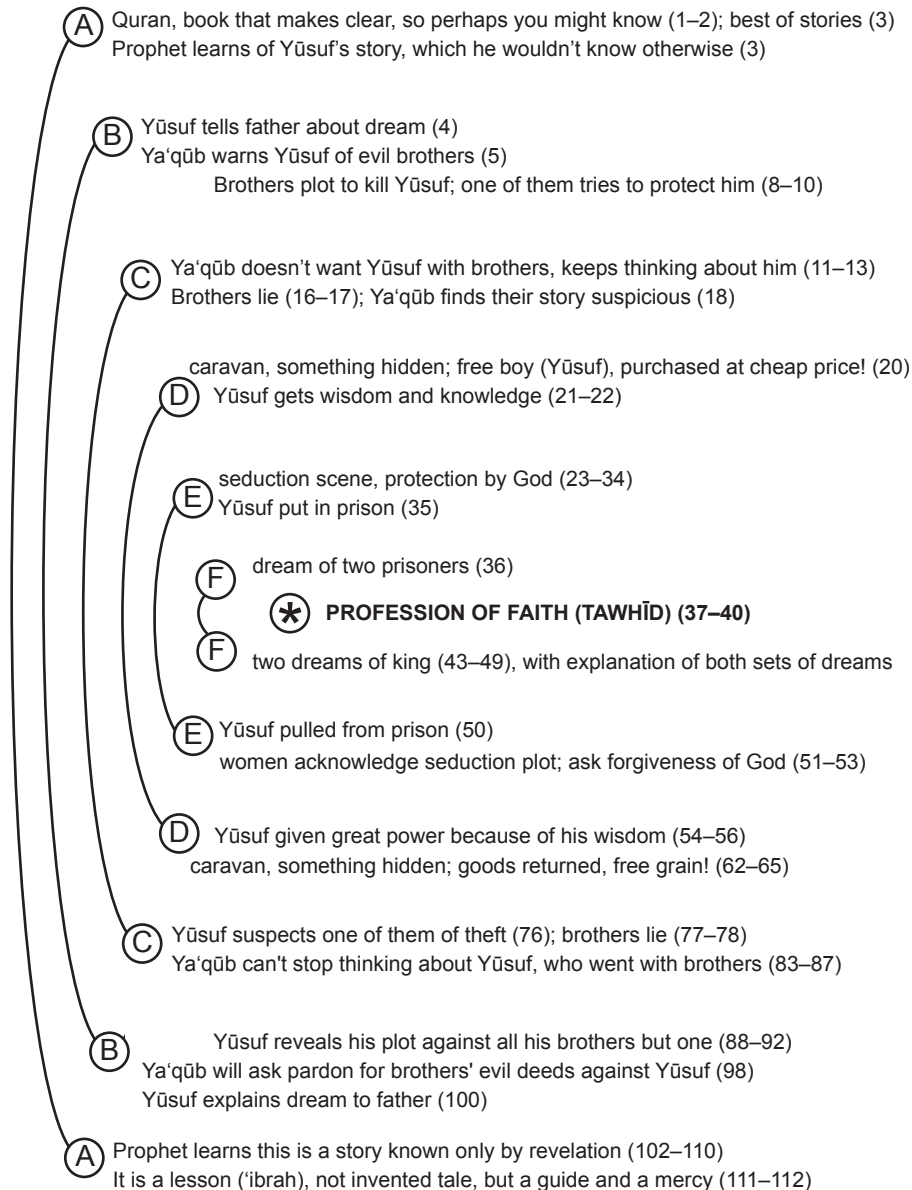


Fig. 1. Outline of sura 12: Yūsuf (ring composition).

Thus, topic A relates to the sura’s description of itself as part of a book that clarifies things, that is, that makes the truth clear, distinct from the false (12:1; and at the end, 12:111–12). Moreover, one of the goals of the sura is that, maybe, you will come to know, understand, and be guided (12:2; at end, 12:111). In line with this is a statement that the story of Yūsuf is revealed to the Prophet, who

did not know it before this time (12:3; at the end, 12:109-10); these same component ideas recur in reverse order at the end of the sura (as noted in parentheses). Topic B here is a cluster that describes Yūsuf as he related his dream to his father, Ya‘qūb (12:4; and at the end, its explanation, 12:100), and the warning Yūsuf’s father gives him not to trust his brothers (12:5; and at the end, the father’s vow to pray for their forgiveness for the wrongs they committed: 12:98). When the opportunity arises for the brothers to rid of Yūsuf, Ya‘qūb protests that he doesn’t want him to go with them, fearing some harm will come to him (12:13; and at the end, Ya‘qūb can’t stop thinking about the loss of Yūsuf after he went off with his brothers: 12:83-87).

The topics develop sequentially in forward and then in reverse order, ultimately forming a kind of “ring,” in this case with a “central core” topic that is the primary message of the sura, namely, a profession of faith by Yūsuf and his declaration of his firm belief in a single deity. The matched elements on the other side of this profession of faith successively tie up each thematic thread introduced before that profession.

### *Meaning*

A variety of stylistic features play off the meaning while they increase the listeners’ interest and facilitate memory. These include the epithet, the rhetorical question, direct speech, the simile and related figures such as metaphor and catachresis, as well as irony, Classical paronomasia (that is, defined by ancient Greek understanding of the term), metonymy, and *kināya* (a kind of allusion specific to Arabic).

The epithet (Gk. “something applied or added”) is a short description that distinctively identifies a person, place, or thing, and in most cases is added to the proper name. Rhetorically, epithets may function to: convey quickly someone’s attributes and character by means of a condensed phrasing; make the passage more stately through the heroic style of expression; or fill out a line, either metrically (for epic poetry like the *Iliad*) or rhythmically (for nonpoetic expressions, as in the Qur’ān).

Epithets are especially characteristic of heroic epics (for example, “Achilles, fleet of foot”). Examples of heroic epithets include: (89:10) وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ wa-fir‘awna dī l-’awtād “And Pharaoh (gen., after the preposition *bi* of 89:6), possessor of the stakes” (that is, the mountains out of which ancient Egyptian rulers cut tombs and extracted stones for temples and pyramids) and (89:7) إِرَامَ إِرَامَ irama dāti l-’imād “Iram, possessor of the high pole (or column).” Possibly because heroic epithets are associated with the world of gods and demigods, the heroic formulation of name and description tends to be applied to tyrants and other worldly leaders humbled by Allah.

The rhetorical question is a statement in the form of a question where no answer is expected because the reply is obvious. Even when an answer is supplied, because of the self-evident nature of the reply, it is still considered a rhetorical question. Rhetorical questions, either one or several in a series, have a variety of purposes; they may: prove a point or make an argument for or against something more cogent or understandable; express amazement or indignation at some fact or event; target opponents to show contempt for them, to humiliate them in their ignorance, or to stop them from pretending not to understand; or ask something that is impossible to deny (these may overlap). In all cases these questions provide interest for the audience against a background primarily of narrative and simple statements, but they may also be persuasive, provocative, and/or instructive:

(2:13) أَنْتُمْ كَمَا آمَنَ السُّفَهَاءُ a-nu' minu kamā āmana s-sufahā', "should we believe as fools believe?"

(4:125) وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَاتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا wa-man aḥsanu dīnam mim-man aslama wajhahū li-llāhi wa-huwa muḥsinun wa-ttaba'a millata ibrahīma ḥanīfā, "and who is better in faith than the one who has submitted wholly (literally, his face) to Allah, who does good and follows the religion of Ibrāhīm rightly guided?"

A series of rhetorical questions (7:97-99) asks: "did the people of the town feel secure that our severity would not come while they were sleeping? / Or did the people of the town feel secure that our severity would not come at dawn while they were playing? / Then did they feel secure against the plan of Allah?"

Another powerful series of rhetorical questions closes Fuṣṣilat (41:52-53), in this instance with an exclamatory reply (at 41:54) "ah truly! they doubt the meeting with their Lord?! ah, truly, He knows and holds everything!" Similarly, a large list of rhetorical questions in sūrat an-Naba' (78:6-16) make up an introduction to the main theme of the sura, the Day of Judgment, and this section, with its series of questions, serves as a counterweight to the rest of the sura that describes that day on which no unanswered questions remain.

Direct speech (or dialog) is the use of statements made by persons in a work without any change to their words, keeping them verbatim. The use of direct speech in oral works is often cited as a typical feature. Conversations proceed much as they do in "live" speech—without a narrator interjecting identifications of each speaker in turn, especially when the conversation is between two persons.<sup>9</sup> We thus find passages marked by the alternation of *qāla* "he said" and *qālū* "they said" (for example, 2:30-33), but the change between speakers may not always be clear to readers when the speakers can both be identified with the masculine singular *qāla* (as at 18:67, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78). In the latter instance, the shift between speakers may not be apprehended by a reader as quickly as by a listener. The identification of speakers at the beginning of each respective remark is rare, though such marking does occur (for example, 14:9-13; *wa-staftahū* at the beginning of 14:15 can refer to either party, that is, either the messengers asked assistance or the rejectors forced a judgment against themselves).

Closely related is reported speech that quotes a long series of original statements verbatim with only the addition of a marker (such as the particle *an* in Arabic) to show that it is a report of someone else's speech, for example, at 72:2-19. Long passages of direct speech and reported quoted speech are characteristic of traditional oral works. Because the Qur'ān is not composed by tradition, examples of such direct plus reported speech are not common, though they do exist (for example, 12:43 quoted exactly at 12:46).

Direct speech makes reports of events livelier than straight narratives, which may account for its predominance in works based in orality. But because one person's way of speaking differs from another's, direct speech also serves to characterize individuals in place of descriptive passages. Thus, Mūsā's (Moses') speech is distinctive from that of Ya'qūb (Jacob) and both are distinct from that of Ibrāhīm (Abraham), and so on. In all cases, direct speech adds to the

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Parry's remark "The hearer already has the speaker in mind as the natural subject of the sentence, and there is no place for the second use of the name" (1937:59).

picture one has of the speaker. For example, Mūsā is self-deprecating, saying he is not a good speaker (20:27-28; 26:13; 28:34) and therefore needs Hārūn (Aaron), but directly quoted statements show that, on the contrary, he is a very good speaker (though notably these well-turned statements tend to occur after Allah has granted him verbal facility, as at 20:36). At 17:101-02 he mimics Pharaoh's speech with wit and sarcasm, disarming the tyrant with his response: Pharaoh has just concluded his insults with "indeed I think you, Mūsā, are *mashūrā* (bewitched)" and Mūsā replies "Indeed I think you, pharaoh, are *maṭbūrā* ("doomed"). Pharaoh's style of speaking is consistent with his speech at 28:38 and 40:37 ("indeed I think he is a liar"); he insults Mūsā saying, "he's scarcely articulate," at 43:52, showing both his own irritation at Mūsā's vexing quality of speaking strongly to him and perhaps a desire to humiliate the prophet on a trait about which he is self-conscious.

Direct speech also makes lists of instructions that one normally finds in religious works more vivid; for example, we find Luqmān advising his son (31:17-19):

(17) يَبْنِيْ اَقِيْمِ الصَّلٰوةَ وَاْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوْفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَاَصْبِرْ عَلٰى مَا اَصَابَكَ اِنَّ ذٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزَمِ الْاُمُوْرِ yā-bunayya aqimi ṣ-ṣalāta wa-'mur b'il-ma'rūfi wa-nha'an il-munkari wa-ṣbir 'alā mā aṣābak. inna ḏālika min 'azmi l-umūr, "Oh my son, perform prayers regularly, prescribe good behavior and prohibit bad (irregular) behavior, and be patient in what happens to you. Indeed that's the way to discharge your affairs."

(18) وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْاَرْضِ مَرَحًا اِنَّ اللّٰهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُوْرٍ wa-lā tuṣa'ir kaddaka li-n-nāsi wa-lā tamši fī l-'arḍi maraḥā. inna llāha lā yuḥibbu kulla muḫtālin faḫūr, "And don't twist your cheek awry to people or walk about insolently on the earth; indeed Allah does not love boastful upstarts."

(19) وَاَقْصِدْ فِي مَشْيِكَ وَاغْضُضْ مِنْ صَوْتِكَ اِنَّ اَنْكَرَ الْاَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتُ الْحَمِيْرِ wa-qṣid fī mašyika wa-ḡḍḍ min ṣawtik. Inna ankara l-aṣwāti la-ṣawtu l-ḥamīr. . . ., "Be moderate in your way of walking and keep your voice low; indeed the most horrible voice is that of the donkey. . . ."

A string of declarative sentences in place of these imperatives would be dull and flat (prayers should be performed, good behavior encouraged and bad behavior avoided, and so on). Moreover, for ancient listeners, direct speech was a mark of the truth and authenticity of the content and of the high intelligence of the person providing the report.

The simile (Ar. *tašbīh*), a comparison that uses a word equivalent to "like" or "as" or "as if" (for example, *ka*, *maṭal*, *ka'anna*), is common in oral works, such as the epics of Homer. In the oral setting similes help listeners visualize a comparison in a concrete form. The use of words meaning *like* or *as* make the simile an accessible, instructive figure of speech and it is one of humanity's oldest. Similes have been classed into two broad types, simple, short ones, and extended ones; the latter are often considered a "hallmark of epic" because of their prominence in Homer's poems (Scott 1974:vii). Both types appear in the Qur'ān.

The simple ones are often linguistically close to clichés, such as "he pounced like a lion," though it should be noted that expressions we consider overused or trite were once new, and in the setting of rapid recitation, the images may be more vivid to the listener than to a reader many centuries



after their first appearance. Occasionally we find short similes that are repeated with slight variation, for example, (16:77) كَلَمْحِ الْبَصَرِ ka-lamḥi l-baṣar, “like the twinkling of an eye” (similar at 54:50); (55:24) الْجَوَارِ الْمُنشَآتُ فِي الْبَحْرِ كَالْأَعْلَامِ ul-jawāri l-munša’ātu fī l-baḥri ka-l-a’lām, “ships (nom.) smooth-sailing through the sea like long mountains” (similar at 42:32); (37:49) كَأَنَّهُنَّ بَيْضٌ مَّكْنُونٌ ka-annahunna bayḍum maknūn, “as if they were eggs well-guarded” (pearls used in place of eggs at 52:24 and 56:23). Sometimes, of course, even a short simile can be evocative, for example, (37:65) طَلْعُهَا كَأَنَّهُ رُءُوسُ الشَّيَاطِينِ ṭal‘uhā ka-annahū ru’ūsu š-šayātīn, “Its fruits are like the heads of Šayātīn (= devils).” This simile is also an example of catachresis because it pushes the concept of a plant, the food of the inhabitants of hell, well beyond the sphere of normal, earthly plants. Images are mixed up and merged with the same speed and energy they have as they flash successively through the mind of one who is unable to reduce the multiple images to a single idea. Because it engages the dynamism of oral speech to propel it forward, catachresis is often conspicuous in oral works; consider for example, the forceful words of Achilles in addressing Agamemnon as a “dog-eyed wine-sack with the heart of a deer” (*Il.* 1.225). The blend may not appeal to purists, but the expression conveys succinctly and intensively that Agamemnon is an erratic leader of the Greeks assembled against Troy, like one drunk on power, who rabidly bullies and attacks others in his ranks, while at the same time shying away from personal combat on the battlefield. Just so, the simile of hell’s fruit conveys a complex of thoughts: the fruit persuades one to eat of it, like a devil who lures with seductive temptations, but it is horrible in taste—and can also bite back or burn the one who tries to eat it.

While there is no such thing as an extended simile that is diagnostic of orality, longer similes from works based in orality often share a number of linguistic and structural elements: (1) it is frequently possible to delete them from their surrounding contexts without any loss of substantive meaning (that is, they are self-contained); (2) they are often built up to “epic” proportions by parataxis; and, finally, (3) similes and other figurative imagery in works with an oral character often present vistas that provide a contrasting backdrop to the larger themes surrounding them (Edwards 1987:102-03). For example, the pair of similes that run consecutively from 2:17-20 could be removed without any effect on the surrounding meaning, satisfying element (1). Both before and after the similes, the context encourages belief in and worship of one God, and just before the similes there is a description of hypocrites who pretend to believe but, when they are alone together, belittle believers and their belief. The similes give two comparisons of the situation of these hypocrites as people who have light momentarily (from a kindled fire and lightning, respectively), after which they are in even greater darkness. With regard to element (2), the structure of the statements in both similes is paratactic. Finally, with regard to element (3), the imagery presented in the two similes helps listeners grasp the point of the similes because of their experience with the natural world, where fire is a source of light and lightning brings both fear and promise of life-giving rain, and in contrast to the scenes of faithful messengers sent by God to obstinate people (paratactic structure shown with slashes):

(17) كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ

ka-maṭali llaḍī stawqada nāran / fa-lammā aḍā’at mā ḥawlahū / ḍahaba llāhu bi-nūrihim, / watarakahum fī ḡulumātil/ lā yubṣirūn, “like the example of one who kindles a fire / and then when it illuminates what is around him, / Allah takes away his light / and leaves him in complete darkness: / they see nothing.”

(18) ضُمُّكُمْ عَنِّي فَهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ

ṣummum bukmun ‘umyun / fa-hum lā yarji‘ūn, “Deaf, dumb, blind— / and then they will not return.”

(19) أَوْ كَصَيْبٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَاتٌ وَرَعْدٌ وَبَرْقٌ يَجْعَلُونَ أَصْبَعَهُمْ فِيْءِءَادَائِهِمْ مِّنَ الصَّوَاعِقِ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ

aw kaṣayyibim mina s-samā‘i / fīhi ḡulumātun wa-ra‘dun wa-barqun/ yaj‘alūna aṣābi‘ahum fī āḡānihim mina ṣ-ṣawā‘iq / ḡaḡara l-mawt / wa-llāhu muḡīṭum bi-l-kāfirīn, “Or like a raincloud from the sky / in the company of which is total darkness and thunder and lightning; / they put their fingers in their ears from the stunning bolts / as a precaution against death. / But Allah encompasses the disbelievers.”

(20) يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ يَخْطَفُ أَبْصَارَهُمْ ۖ كُلَّمَا أَضَاءَ لَهُمْ مَّشَوْا فِيهِ وَإِذَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا ۚ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَرِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

yakādu l-barqu yaḡṭafu abṣārahum / kullamā aḡā‘a lahum maṣaw fīhi / wa-iḡā azlama ‘alayhim qāmū / wa-law ṣā‘a llāhu la-ḡahaba bi-sam‘ihim wa-‘abṣārihim / inna llāha ‘alā kulli ṣay‘in qadīr, “The lightning nearly takes away their sight— /as often as it illuminates for them, / they walk onward, / but when it’s dark again they stand still. / And were Allah to will it / He would take away their hearing and their sight. / Indeed Allah is capable of everything.”

Prior to these two similes there is an extended treatment of hypocrites who pretend they want guidance but really prefer error (2:8-16). This pair of similes gives a natural world view of how dark their spiritual vision is, but they could be left out without affecting the essential meaning or overall flow of the sura. A related topic is introduced at 2:21, where listeners are urged to “worship your Lord.”

At 29:41 the simile of the spider, another image from the natural world, is presented. The preceding *āyahs* show there was no escape from God’s punishment for the people who rejected: (29:33-35) Lūt (Lot); (36-37) Shū‘ayb; (38) the messengers to ‘Ād and Thamūd; and (39) the example of Qarūn, Pharaoh, and Haman, who rejected Mūsā (Moses); all had no refuge:

(29:41) مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ كَمَثَلِ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ اتَّخَذَتْ بَيْتًا وَإِنَّ أَوْهَنَ الْبُيُوتِ لَبَيْتُ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

maṭalu llaḡīna ttaḡaḡū min dūni llāhi awliyā‘a / ka-maṭali l-‘ankabūti ttaḡaḡat baytan/ wa-inna awhana l-buyūti la-baytu l-‘ankabūti / law kānū ya‘lamūn, “The comparison of those who adopt as gods partners apart from Allah / is like that of the spider that builds a house for itself, / and indeed the weakest of houses is the house of the spider, / if only they understood.”

At 29:42 the topic returns to that of no escape for those who reject God’s messengers.

We find another heroic simile at 22:31 built up by paratactic extension that could be deleted without loss of substantial meaning. The subject examined prior to the simile picks up again after a transition word (*dālika*):

فَكَأَنَّمَا خَرَّ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَتَخَطَّفَهُ الطَّيْرُ أَوْ تَهْوَىٰ بِهِ الرِّيحُ فِي مَكَانٍ سَحِيحٍ

fa-ka'annamā karra mina s-samā'i / fa-taḡtafuhu ṭ-ṭayru / aw tahwī bihi r-rīḥu fī makānin saḥīq,  
 “then, it is as if he falls from the sky / and then a carnivorous bird snatches him up / or the wind  
 swoops on him (to drop him) in a far-off place.”

The surrounding context concerns the rites of the annual pilgrimage, which has a purpose of celebrating the one God's name (and thus, God's attributes and favors to humanity). This heroic simile refers to anyone devoted to other gods alongside Allah, including things not normally considered idols, such as wealth. These gods are like birds of prey (for example, materialism, obsession with riches) that carry their victims off to soaring heights before letting them fall to the ground, where they die. Or such false worship is akin to being blown away, with no one to help.

Likewise, a simile comparing a good tree with firm roots with a bad tree whose roots cause it to be unstable complements a description of heaven and its gardens against hell and its torments (14:24-26). The simile is not required to convey the meaning—that good people will be rewarded and evil people will be punished—and the theme immediately prior to it is again picked up after it; the simile's language is paratactic, and the imagery in it refers to something in nature.

In fact, the imagery of the similes in the Qur'ān is normally something from the listeners' natural world and environment, set in the present time as a universal (Edwards 1987:103; Scott 1974). Thus, we find such images as the following:

animals: gnat (2:26), dog (7:176), bird of prey (22:31), snake (27:10), spider (29:41), locust (54:7), donkey (62:5), camel (77:33 [but sometimes glossed as “copper”]);

climate/weather: rain (2:19, 10:24, 57:20), lightning (2:20), wind (3:117; 14:18; 18:45);

earth/natural environment: ashes (14:18); trees (14:24-26; 54:20; 69:6-7), oceans (18:109; 31:27), rocks (2:74), gardens (2:265; 18:32);

man and his activities: fire (2:17) and light (24:35), and the measurement of time by day (22:47); grain and harvest (2:261; 3:117; 10:24); eggs (37:49); rubies and corals (55:58), pearls (56:23), as well as the search for gold in the froth of streams (13:17); writing pens (18:109; 31:27); slave and master (16:75-76); and

architectural structures or components: fort (77:32), solid structure or wall (61:4), timber (63:4).

This list is by no means comprehensive, but it shows the prominence in the extended simile of the ordinary and the familiar with which listeners could readily identify, while much of the surrounding context relates to matters of good and evil and the society that fosters these behaviors. This does not mean that the similes present nature as a tame, benevolent force, forever peaceful, nor does it mean that similes are the only source of natural-world vistas in the Qur'ān (indeed there are numerous passages that catalog the bounties and benefits of God, most of which belong to “ordinary life”).

Related to the simile is the metaphor (comparison without *like* or *as*), but as in Homer's poems, the metaphors of the Qur'ān tend to fall into what we might broadly class as “fixed diction” (as

defined by Parry 1933:34), by which “a certain diction, in short, became the style,” so, for example, the sea might be styled a “way,” “wave,” or “deep,” and by continued use the styled expressions lose their pleasing metaphorical force and simply become the correct way of expressing a thing. Along these lines we find metaphors in the Qur’ān having to do with vision, breath, and clothing or other covering:

vision: (22:46) *لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ* lā ta‘mā l-’abṣāru walākin ta‘mā l-qulūb ullaṭī fī ṣ-ṣudūr, “not blind are the eyes, but rather the hearts in the breasts are blind.”

breath: (21:46) *نَفْحَةً مِنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّكَ* nafḥatum min ‘aḏābi rabbika, “a breath of the punishment of your Lord” (the scent of something is its least molecular bit, but precedes the actual thing, animal, or person) (cf. at 67:7, where the sound of the fire of hell is characterized as breathing).

clothing or other covering: (3:71) *لِمَ تَلْبِسُونَ الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ* lima talbisūna l-ḥaqqā bi-l-bāṭil, “Why do you cover [that is, confound or confuse] the truth with falsehood?” (verb form), and (16:112) *لِبَاسَ الْجُوعِ* libāsa l-jū‘ “the clothing of hunger” (noun form), signifying the utmost degree of hunger; cf. (2:88) *قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ* qulūbunā ḡulf “our hearts are covered” (this statement, made by unbelievers, is meant to ridicule believers because they want their hearts uncovered, not literally, as during open-heart surgery, but open to the truth).<sup>10</sup>

Paronomasia (Gk. “close naming”) is a kind of euphony involving primarily an etymological play on words, thus in Arabic a kind of *jinās* (see below, under Sound). Unlike *jinās* paronomasia is often self-consciously clever or witty or its goal is humor or abuse (as in 9:61; cf. 2:58, 4:46); like *jinās*, however, paronomasia may play on word roots semantically to create subtle as well as powerful rhetorical effects (as at 11:1, 17:24; 19:23, 26):

(9:61) *وَمِنْهُمْ الَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ النَّبِيَّ وَيَقُولُونَ هُوَ أُذُنٌ قُلْ أُذُنٌ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ* wa-minhumu l-ladīna yu’dūna n-nabiyya wa-yaqūlūna huwa ‘uḏunun. qul uḏunu khayril lakum, “And among them are those [Hypocrites] who annoy (yu’dūna) the Prophet and say ‘he is an ear (uḏun).’ Say ‘the ear of a good thing for you. . . .’” The expression “he’s an ear” means that he hears and believes whatever is said to him (the response deflects the abuse by clarifying that is a good thing that he listens to you because he gives a correct and fair judgment or decision). Translating the expression as “he is an ear” fails to replicate the force of that Arabic expression within the context of the *āyah*, however, because of the paronomasia between *yu’dūna* and *uḏun*.

<sup>10</sup> The noun *libās* is used in its sense of clothing, garments, or dress, at 22:23 and 35:33 (in both cases referring specifically to garments of silk, though at 22:23 the silk garments, of the inhabitants of heaven, are contrasted with the *ṭiyāb*, “robes,” of fire of the inhabitants of hell at 22:19), and in reference to chain mail (21:80); in its metaphorical sense as the covering of anything, it is applied as something that is visible to others in the way apparel is to the *libās* of *taqwā*, or God-fearing righteous behavior (7:26), the lack of which leads the first humans to become aware of their “nakedness” (7:27). *Libās* is also applied as a covering that provides rest and comfort, as in the case of night (25:47; 78:10); and the word takes on the implicit sense of both what others see as “apparel” as well as something that gives comfort and rest (2:187), where it is applied wives as *libās* for their husbands and husbands as *libās* for their wives.

### *Diction*

The choice of words, their phonological shape as well as their spelling, and how they relate to words around them are integral to the rhetorical style of a work. The language also determines the level and the degree to which any subtle communication can take place between reciter and listener, something that would have been far more significant for the first listeners of transmitted orally work. Such features include the use of rare words (for example, hapaxes, lexical isolates) as well as distinctive synonyms, variant plurals, and intensive forms (naturally formed in Arabic, called *mubālaḡah*), plus haplogogies, syncopated forms, and other inconsistencies in spelling that reflect a dialect that is artificial yet produces a euphonious soundscape for the work's first reception.

Because the Qur'ān was codified in a standard written edition around 650 CE, soon after the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 (see Schoeler 2010; Al-A'zamī 2003:67-107), there is little likelihood that the Qur'ān contains lexical isolates similar to those found in the Homeric epics that are hypothesized to have been garbled over time by traditional reciters who picked up the words imperfectly (Reece 2009:7-13). Furthermore, the Qur'ān consistently qualifies itself and its *lisān* ("tongue, language") as '*arabī* (Retsö 2010:285) and not foreign (see Saleh 2010 for a compelling analysis of typical etymological approaches and foreign vocabulary for explicating notionally difficult words and phrases in the Qur'ān). Thus, words perceived as unusual or striking should be considered for the precise contextual meaning they provide and for their value in an oral setting, where their rarity confers on them a bookmarking function to signal to a mindful listener the place in the text (see below, The Use of Oral Signs in the Qur'ān).

Synonyms (Gk. "same name") in the Qur'ān are words whose meanings are nearly the same, though never exactly the same. Although synonymy cannot be classed with figures of speech, their use is a mark of high style, especially when their respective precise meanings are essential. The meanings of synonyms may vary subtly or significantly and connotation, intensity, and context may play a role in differentiating one synonym from another. Most important for anyone who reads a translation is the fact that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between any given Arabic word and an English counterpart, with the result that many words of similar meaning in Arabic are rendered with the same word in English and not with a synonym. Even if the same number of words having a similar meaning for a particular concept existed in each language, which is never the case, they would not "match" in terms of their respective precise meanings and in terms of their connotations.

One example may illustrate how synonyms specify particular qualities not reproducible with a single English word: The words *tu'bān*, *jānn*, and *ḥayyah* are all often translated simply as "snake" or "serpent," and all refer to the same animal. The Arabic words do not refer to separate genera of snakes, but, instead, each highlights certain aspects of the snake's behavior and appearance that enrich the meaning of the passages in which it is found. *Tu'bān* refers to a heavy, stout, or bulky snake, imposing in appearance, that moves quickly like a flowing stream; in both places where it is used (7:107; 26:32) *tu'bān* describes the snake that pharaoh sees. *Jānn* refers to a thin, gracile snake whose light, graceful movements, especially of the upper body, can be compared to a dance. In the two places in which *jānn* is used (27:10; 28:31), it refers to a snake that astonishes Mūsā with its lithe, delicate, and speedy movements, filling him with wonder and amazement.



*Ḥayyah* refers to a large serpent in its habit of coiling itself up or in its ability to twist, bend, or curve itself and thus move quickly, and in this regard resembles the utility of the upper part of the shepherd's staff, the crook, and indeed it is in the context of the staff's utility that the word *ḥayyah* is used (20:20; see 'Alī Muṭāwī' 2006:113-16).

The common natural desire among speakers of a language for euphony (Gk. "good sound") alters the spelling and pronunciation of words in a variety of ways that in turn can be used for rhetorical effect. Syncope (Gk. "a cutting short") is the shortening of words for ease of pronunciation and for better sound. It is not a figure of speech, but a feature of the Arabic language. Nevertheless, such shortened forms have rhetorical effect, especially in enhancing the sound and facilitating recitation. Haplology involves the deletion of a second, similar-sounding syllable, such as the deletion of *ta-* to indicate a feminine singular at the beginning of imperfect verbs of forms V and VI, as at 97:4: *تَنَزَّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ* *tanazzalu al-malā'ikah* (for *تَنْزِلُ* *tatanazzalu*, form V, 3 masc. pl. impf.), "The angels descend." The same phrase appears without haplology at 41:30; the haplology is euphonic, so its presence at the beginning of an *āyah* (as at 97:4) is to be expected, while in the middle of an *āyah* (as at 41:30) the longer, less forceful form is appropriate. Usually, synco-pated forms have the same meaning as their unsynco-pated versions, and they appear in contexts where their euphonic effect is desirable. A one-syllable word may be synco-pated: (2:271) *فَنِعْمًا* *fa-ni'imma hiya* for *فَنِعْمَ مَا هِيَ* *ni'ima mā hiya*, literally, "so how beautiful is what it is (how beautiful it is)!" (the *tašdīd* above the *mīm* indicates a synco-pation has taken place). A short vowel may appear instead of a long vowel: (79:43) *فِيمَ* *fīma* for *فِيمَا* *fīmā* "in what" or "in which." Apo-cope involves the loss of one (or more sounds/letters) at the end of a word; for example, the forms *yaku*, *taku*, *naku*, and so on are abbreviated forms for jussive *yakun*, *takun*, *nakun*: (40:28) *وَإِنْ يَكُ* *wa-in yaku kāḍibā*, "if he is a liar"; (4:40) *وَإِنْ تَكُ* *wa-in taku ḥasanah*, "and if there is (feminine) any good"; (74:43) *لَمْ نَكُ* *lam naku*, "we were not." Likewise, for euphony or to replicate urgent speech, and so on, at the end and in the middle of *āyahs* we find *pausal forms* (forms typical of the end of a line of poetry or the end of an *āyah*, in this case spelled as those end-of-line words are typically pronounced): (28:33) *فَأَخَافُ أَنْ يَقْتُلُونِ* *fa-akāfu an yaqtulūn*, "I fear lest they kill me" (long *-nī* shortened to *-ni*); (20:93) *أَلَا تَتَّبِعُنِ* *al-lā tattabi'an*, "That you follow (subjunctive) me" (long *-nī* shortened to *-ni* in middle of *āyah*).

In addition, there are also changes in the spelling of nonsynco-pated words to ensure proper pronunciation in recitation: (101:10) *وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا هِيَ* *wa-mā 'adrāka mā hīyah*, "And what will make you understand what it is?" where *هِيَ* *hiyah* stands for standard *هِيَ* *hiya*, which would be pronounced at the end of an *āyah* as *hī*; the final *hā'* of the Quranic spelling indicates that one must read the second syllable of the word. Sometimes words are pronounced in recitation in a way that is easier on the tongue than the normal root letters would be. These pronunciation changes may appear in the text itself or be directed by *tajwīd*: (2:247, 7:69) *baṣṭatan* "excellence, high stature; increase in physical height or in standing within a community or in knowledge." At 2:247 (بَسْطَةً) the word is spelled using the true root letters, but at 7:69 (بِضْطَةً) it is spelled with a *ṣād* instead of *sīn* for euphony—the word, already emphasized by its position in the statement, is made more emphatic by the sound change. At 2:245 the verb of the same root uses *ṣād* but here the sound shift is probably due to the proximity of another emphatic consonant (*dād*) in the preceding word *يَقْبِضُ* *yaqbiḍu*. It should be noted that most words cannot be so readily made more euphonic by such consonantal shifts; the alternate pronunciations must already have existed at the time of the Prophet. Likewise, some words in

the Qur'ān may not strictly accord with their original, root-derived meanings because they fall at the ends of phrases (that is, thought and tone units) or *āyahs*, where a radically related word, a cognate, that rhymes with a word in an adjacent phrase in the same phrasal position. The meaning is clear to listeners and the cognate substitution may in fact enrich the meaning (see Stewart 2009 and 2015).

### *Syntax*

Arabic offers great flexibility in natural (grammatically ordained) and artful, or rhetorical, expression. Some features especially noticeable in an oral setting include: anacoluthon, asyndeton, and polysyndeton, as well as certain characteristics of Arabic grammar, such as the prominent positioning of object or subject and the use of gender, and of Arabic style, such as *iltifāt* (a figure of speech particular to Arabic).

Anacoluthon (Gk. “not following”) is an *artful* grammatical inconsistency, a grammatical structure that is altered midway or a construction started at the beginning of a sentence that is not continued consistently to its end. Anacoluthon is natural to Arabic by reason of the elasticity of the language, but is not as common in English, since English, with fewer inflected forms, is more rigid in syntax than Arabic. Anacoluthon represents the liveliness of extemporaneous speech and often is found in relation to complex thoughts or events in a narrative. In these cases it is strong and forceful because a more polished account might require structure or vocabulary so artificially elevated that listeners would be put off.

Because there are more kinds of anacoluthon than can be conveniently outlined here, a sampling must suffice to illustrate how they can be exploited in recitation. An anacoluthon results when a “parenthesis” (short digressive explanation) intervenes in the course of a sentence, obscuring or breaking the smooth flow of a larger structure, although it may be only the length and complexity of the sentence that “hides” the underlying structure:

(6:15) *إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ*

innī akāfu / in ‘aṣaytu rabbī / ‘adāba yawmin ‘aẓīm “I fear, / if I should disobey my Lord, / the punishment of a great day.” Here the statement “I fear the punishment of a great day” is interrupted by a “parenthesis” explaining the circumstances of the fear. Because this example is short, it is easy to recognize utterance units (with slashes), measures of thought that a reciter can emphasize with intonation, breathing, or repetition to broadcast his understanding of the passage. A reciter might, for example, decrease his volume on the parenthetical portion to suggest the improbability that the speaker would disobey.

Another type of anacoluthon results when coordinate clauses (for example, connected by *wa-* or *fa-*) lack parallelism, but this is often a natural way to express certain combinations of ideas:

(5:3) *حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ . . . وَأَنْ تَسْتَقْسِمُوا بِالْأَزْلَامِ*

ḥurrimat ‘alaykumu l-maytatu. . . wa-an tastaqsimū bi-l-azlām “Forbidden to you are dead (animals). . . and that you draw lots with headless arrows.” That is, it is forbidden both to eat of dead animals and to use the headless arrows for making decisions.

Asyndeton (Gk. “not bound together”) is the absence of conjunctions or other connectors in a series of coordinate words or phrases. To insert a conjunction may be more natural, but statements are often livelier and more starkly forceful without one. In the opinion of some Muslim scholars, the appropriate lack of conjunctions and other words or phrases that link ideas in an expression as well as the appropriate use elsewhere of these same connectors define *balāḡah* (“rhetoric” or “style”). A long series of descriptive words without conjunctions may be especially striking and powerful; one example is the most beautiful names of Allah that occurs at 59:22-24:

(31:27) *إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ* inna llāha ‘azīzun ḥakīm, “Indeed Allah is powerful [and] wise.” The second adjective “wise” could theoretically be read as an adverb modifying the first adjective: “wisely powerful.”

(2:18) *صُمُّ بُكْمٌ عُمْيٌ* ṣummun bukmun ‘umyūn, “deaf, dumb, blind.”

Polysyndeton (Gk. “much bound together”) is the repetition of conjunctions (*wa*, *fa*, *lā*, and the like) in a series of coordinate words or phrases. Polysyndeton allows a reciter to compel listeners to hold in the mind for a time each item separated by the conjunction; for example, at 33:35 listeners can visualize different individuals they know who excel at one or another of the traits specified in the catalog list. By contrast, the lack of conjunctions (asyndeton, above) in the long series describing Allah (59:22-24 [excluding the final *wa-huwa al-‘azīz al-ḥakīm*]) lets the reciter pile on attribute after attribute, not as separate characteristics, but altogether as one idea, thereby emphasizing the Oneness (*tawhīd*) of God. Polysyndeton may also be found with other connectors other than *wa*- (e.g., *fa*- as at 23:14), including negative conjunctions (that is, negative polysyndeton); for example, we find the repetition of *lā* 5:2 “do not violate the sanctity of the rites of Allah, nor the sacred months, nor the sacrificial animals, nor the garlands” (see also 35:20-21). The repetition of the negative, even when strictly required (for example, with verbs in the perfect; see Wright 1967.2:300B), adds force and intensity to the expression: (75:31) “he neither believed nor did he pray.”

‘*Irāb* (Ar. “inflection, or case”) is technically not a figure of speech, but the use of inflected forms gives the Qur’ān much of its special character. Without ‘*irāb* (nouns, pronouns, and adjectives whose spelling indicates respective function within an expression), many figures of speech listed in this essay would not be possible or would be considerably weakened. ‘*Irāb* ensures that any ambiguity that exists in the text is intentional. Because the Qur’ān’s ‘*irāb* is strong (consistent throughout the text, with meaning highly dependent on the correct understanding of its inflected forms) the Qur’ān is also characterized by an economy of expression: Words are not expressed if they are not necessary (the category of necessary includes rhetorical effects because they enhance the phrase’s meaning). Because of ‘*irāb* every noun, pronoun, and adjective encodes its function in the sentence within itself (like English *I*, *my*, and *me*), and normally this function is easily discerned because of spelling differences in the cases. (Some words are spelled the same in nominative, genitive, accusative, and vocative cases, but in context a noun, pronoun, or adjective has only one case.) The functionality of ‘*irāb* permits it to support some of the strongest rhetorical effects—the movement of words, especially subjects and objects, from their normal neutral positions (verb-subject-object). Fronting the accusative object or backing the nominative subject to the end of the clause are the most common of these syntactic movements (see Hoffmann 2007:74; Al-Rifae 2008):

(39:14) قُلِ اللَّهُ أَغْبَدُ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ دِينِي qul illāha 'a'budu muḵliṣal lahū dīnī, "Say: *Allah* I worship as one pure to Him in my religion." Fronting an element that is not the subject of the sentence has the effect of focusing on that element with emphatic force, closer in meaning to "It is Allah alone that I worship as one pure. . . ." Even in English "Allah I worship. . ." is stronger than the neutral version of the statement ("I worship Allah as one pure. . ."; note, however, that the words here translated "as one pure" could be misread to modify "Allah" rather than "I," so one should translate: "I, as one pure. . . , worship Allah").

(112:4) وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ wa-lam yakun lahu kufuwan aḥad (reading according to word order) "And not is there to Him an equal *anyone*." The positioning of the nominative subject at the end of the statement is emphatic, suggesting that there is not anyone at all anywhere ever that is equal or like to Him. The effect of this back-positioning of the subject is especially powerful when used in statements with a negative.

Another grammatical characteristic of Arabic worthy of remark is gender. Historically the terms to describe the categories of grammatical gender in Arabic, *masculine* and *feminine*, may have been afterthoughts, arising only after a language that uses grammatical gender has developed a trove of words that divide into two patterns (or three, as in ancient Greek, which also has a "neuter" gender) and only after many words denoting males tended to follow one pattern while words denoting females followed another. Gender is a natural feature of Arabic, apparent in nouns, adjective, pronouns, and verbs. Superficially the primary function of gender is to show agreement between nouns and their modifiers. In inflected languages (that is, with *'irāb*, see below), because of this "sort" function of gender, grammatically gendered statements permit more liberal positioning of words for rhetorical effect without ambiguity (unless ambiguity is desired; cf. Aristotle *Rh.* 3.5.4/1407b). Even a listener with limited language skills will easily grasp the relations between pronouns and their antecedents if the reciter is good:

(31:16) إِنَّمَا إِنْ تَكُ مِنْقَالِ حَبَّةٍ مِّنْ خَرْدَلٍ فَتَكُنْ فِي صَخْرَةٍ أَوْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ أَوْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَأْتِ بِهَا اللَّهُ innahā in taku miṭqāla ḥabbatim min ḵardalin fa-takun fī ṣaḵratin aw fī s-samāwāti aw fī al-arḍi ya'ti bihā llāh, "If there is (feminine verb) the weight (masculine) of a seed (feminine) of mustard (masculine) and it is (feminine verb) on a rock or in the heavens or on the earth, Allah will bring it (feminine) forth." There is only one feminine noun (seed) in the sentence, barring any ambiguity that could cause confusion in English (weight, mustard). The "it" on the rock that Allah brings forth is a *seed*.

*Itifāt* (Ar. "turn") refers to a turn, for example, to right or left, in the course of a conversation, and so is applied most often to a change of person (say, from singular to plural, or vice versa) or a change from indirect to direct speech, though it may refer to other kinds of turns in the speech from what is directly in front of the listener to something at the side. *Itifāt* occurs in spoken English, often when referring to persons in bureaucratic agencies ("They say . . ." but when one particular individual is singled out, the speaker will switch to "he said . . ."). It is commonly found in the Qur'ān and, unlike in written English, there is much to be admired in *itifāt* in Arabic: It increases the liveliness of the speech and provokes interest in the listener who may interpret the ambiguity of person as a shift in emphasis. For example, at 7:26 there is a turn in the discus-

sion of clothing from it being both a benefit (to cover those parts of the body that are indecent to expose) and an adornment to the figurative idea that the best clothing (adornment for one's person and covering of anything shameful) is *taqwā*, a reverence for God that includes the good behavior one has in all aspects of life in gratitude to and out of love for God. At 6:6 it is stated that God has destroyed many generations before those who now reject the truth, and then the focus turns to *you*, who must make the choice to accept or reject the truth:

(36:22) وَمَا لِي لَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِي فَطَرَنِي وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ wa-mā liya lā a‘budu lladī faṭaranī wa-ilayhi turja‘ūn, “And what’s the matter with *me* that I not worship the One who made me and to Him *you* (pl.) are going to return.” The shift from “me” to “you” emphasizes the punishment in store for you, because I have submitted to the One. So the real force here is “what’s the matter with *you*?!”

*Itifāt* is a dynamic figure of speech that is particular to the Arabic language, but this figure is only one variety of deixis (cf. the “thick pronominality” of Hoffmann 2007:149-51), the use of pronouns and other pointer words, such as *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* in English, to engage the audience so they will remain attentive. Deixis, like direct speech, brings objects and persons described into the listener’s immediate field of view. Both devices support the underlying rhetoric of the work heard, for example, the *Iliad* or the Qur’ān. Homer (no matter who Homer was) could not have known Aristotle’s Τεχνὴ ῥητορική (“Art of Rhetoric”), nor did the Arabs know of it when they first heard the Qur’ān.

According to Aristotle, rhetoric seeks to persuade using language (it does not involve gesticulations and other body movements), and so its methods are likely limited, perhaps intuitive. Aristotle (*Rh.* 1.2.3/1356a) held that statements could be rhetorically framed to persuade another in three ways, through an appeal to: (1) ἦθος, *ēthos*, or moral character of the speaker (whose trustworthiness must be due to the speech itself), and thus an appeal to the listener’s soul; (2) διάθεσις, *diathesis*, the listener’s disposition or temperament that can be roused by passion (πάθος, *pathos*), and thus an appeal to the emotions; and (3) λόγος, *logos*, reasonable argumentation within the speech itself, with either an inductive argument or an enthymeme, and thus an appeal to the intellect.

Since Kennedy’s (1994) groundbreaking examination of Greek rhetoric, several studies have analyzed the rhetorical content of the *Iliad* through the lens of Aristotle’s *Ars Rhetorica*. For example, Mifsud (2015) starts with a catalog of Homeric extracts that appear in the *Ars Rhetorica* to explore, from a literary perspective, how Aristotle appropriated Homer to define his art of rhetoric. *Iliad* books 9 and 24 have been cited for their use of persuasion as a “central theme” in a philosophical approach that sees the birth of rhetoric in Homer’s epics (Naas 1995:133-39). Knudsen (2014), a philologist, presents the most careful, incisive, and illuminating study comparing the two works. She examines in detail how certain character’s speeches in the *Iliad* conform to the three Aristotelian approaches cited above (as well as to other elements of his art of rhetoric), compared to other *Iliad* speeches (“controls”) that do not conform; clues in the text reveal the intent of the former group is indeed to persuade whereas those in the latter group do not have that personal intent.

The first book of Arabic rhetoric (*Kitāb al-badī‘*, by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, 861-908 CE) rejects the notion that rhetoric is an invention of the Greeks, but rather is something that “could already be found in the Qur’ān” (Cuypers 2015:11). Indeed, another name for the Qur’ān is *al-furqān* (25:1; 3:4), “that



which discriminates” between right and wrong, belief and nonbelief, the true and the false, and surely deliberative rhetoric strives to make such distinctions clear to an audience (Arist., *Rh.* 1.3/1358b). As in the case of Homer, the Qur’ān includes numerous passages that conform to Aristotle’s three rhetorical approaches (and it is easy to demonstrate their accord with other elements of the *Ars Rhetorica* as well). However, that conformity does not reflect any connection between the Qur’ān and Aristotle’s work. As with Homer, there may be something intuitive in the rhetoric, perhaps related to orality.

For example, we hear (41:33; translation: Abdel Haleem 2004:309): “Who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right, and says ‘I am one of those devoted to God’?” The original listeners recognized that the *ēthos*, or moral character, of the speaker, Prophet Muhammad, is exemplified by his desire to speak well and encourage people to what is good and right. The next statement indicates he will “repel evil with what is better,” and thereby perhaps persuade enemies to become friends.

In the same sura, bitter anger (one of the passions detailed by Aristotle, *Rh.* 2.2/1378b-1380a) is expressed in response to disbelievers who try to drown out the Qur’ān (41:27-28; Abdel Haleem 2004:309): “We shall certainly give the disbelievers a taste of severe punishment. We shall repay them according to their worst deeds—that is the reward of the enemies of God—the Fire will be their lasting home, a payment for their rejection of Our revelations.” These emotionally charged statements, in the voice of God, draw on *pathos* to affect listeners’ *diathesis*.

The principle of reasoned argument in hortatory, deliberative rhetoric, according to Aristotle (*Rh.* 1.2.13/1357a) has two varieties. The first type, the inductive argument, usually is a “paradigm” from the past and, based on its outcome, listeners can judge what their own course of action should be. Examples of this type of rhetorical *logos* in the Qur’ān are numerous (for example, 26:5-191, nearly the entirety of the sura, is given over to this kind of argument). In this sura, we find the examples of ‘Ād and Ṭamūd (41:13-17), peoples who rejected their prophets and, as a result, were destroyed. The first listeners knew the tales of the prosperity of these societies and some may have passed by the ruins of those societies, and so must reason whether to accept Prophet Muhammad who has come to them. The second type of *logos* is the enthymeme. An example of this type in the sura cited is (41:9; translation: Abdel Haleem 2004:307): “How can you disregard the One who created the earth in two Days? How can you set up other gods as His equals? He is the Lord of all the worlds!” Here the reasoning is: “It is good to venerate those from whom benefits are received. God created everything everywhere, including you, so how could you neglect Him and prefer lesser gods?” One needs to recognize that for ancient peoples in the West there was no explicit reasoned argument for what we now call *atheism*, and the existence of god/s was a given (*atheos* and related words in ancient Greek generally centered on neglect, abandonment, and occasionally the denial of the state-sanctioned gods).

There are many rhetorically persuasive passages like the ones cited here, but there are also “control” passages that do not exhibit an underlying goal of persuasion, for example, passages comprised primarily of imperatives, as at 17:22-38. In the listening environment both types of passages would support cohesion in the group who are persuaded.

### *Sound*

A wide array of figures permit tonal utterances to be easily memorized by both reciters and listeners, and they contribute to the overall euphony (Gk. “good sound”) of the Qur’ān. These fig-

ures include alliteration, assonance, *jinās*, *insijām*, and *sajʿ* (rhymed prose), as well as anadiplosis, isocolon, onomatopoeia (and mimesis), parisosis, paromoiosis, among others.

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds, often at the beginning of words, and sometimes involves two or more close-sounding or complementary consonants in clusters. The clustering of consonants similar in sound is very common in the Qurʾān. It increases the listener's attention and facilitates memory:

(57:27) رَأْفَةٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَرَهْبَانِيَّةٌ raʿfatan wa-rahmatan wa-rahbānīyatan, “compassion and mercy, and monasticism” (*r* sound at beginning of words; note that the connector *wa-* does not count as a word).

Assonance is the repetition in close proximity of the same or similar vowel sounds. Assonance increases the listener's attention and enhances memory of what one has heard:

(32:13) لَا أَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ laʾamlaʾanna jahannama. . . , “Of a certainty, I will fill hell. . . .” Nine short *a* sounds begin the statement.

*Jinās* is word play, often often translated as *paronomasia*, but *paronomasia* is traditionally limited to the contrast in meaning between two (or more) words similar in sound of equal (or near equal) length. The ancient Greeks applied the term *paronomasia*<sup>11</sup> to what we would consider a pun, with a desired effect of surprise or humor, as in this statement by the fourth-century BC politician Aeschines: οὐ γὰρ τὸν **τρόπον** ἀλλὰ τὸν **τόπον** [μόνον] μετήλλαξεν “for he did not change his *disposition* (*tropon*), just his *position* (*topon*)” (Aeschin. 3.78). Although *paronomasia* and puns repeat the same or similar consonants, normally in the same order, it is the shift in meaning that is responsible for any rhetorical force the figure may have. *Jinās* embraces *paronomasia*, certainly, but because of the trilateral-root structure of most Arabic words (with a trilateral root), there is far greater flexibility and variety in playing the component letters off one another as well as other letters that are similar (in sound or written shape). As a result, the rhetorical effects of *jinās* are less frequently humorous or manifestly clever, but, rather, are more often purely sonorous. This may be due in part to an intrinsic “organic” character that Arabic possesses, both in its root and word-forming systems and in its treasury of distinctive phonemes (spoken and/or written) that multiply possible plays between words, providing a rich substrate in which *jinās* flourishes naturally in Arabic style.

English and other Indo-European languages, including Greek and Latin, rely on fixed, “inorganic” block roots and similarly fixed prefixes and suffixes. For example, the Latin root *duc* (“to lead”) appears in a number of English words, as *abduct*, *adduce*, *conduction*, *deduct*, *induce*, *introductory*, *irreducible*, *produce*, *reduce*, *seduce*. The root *duc* is unchanged, with its vowel an integral part of it. Puns made from words in this list might “work,” but only the best authors could use them so the pun isn’t silly.

Compare *duc* to the typical Arabic root, as in the word *jinās*: it is composed of three letters, *jīm*, *nūn*, and *sīn*, and the vowels of the word *jinās* (the short *i* and the long *a*) are not con-

<sup>11</sup> The Arabic word *jinās* is thought to derive from the ancient Greek word γένος (“race or kin; kind or species”), suggestive of the similarity (that is, same classification) that characterizes the Arabic figure.

sidered part of the root. As in English, phonemes may be added in the front and at the back (for example, *ab-duc-tion*), but in Arabic phonemes can also be added in between the root letters (a process that would destroy the root of English *duc*). The result is a variety of different-sounding, but related words: *jannasa* (“to make similar or to classify”), *jānasa* (“to be related”); *tajannasa* (“to become naturalized, obtain citizenship”), *tajānasa* (“to be related”), *jins* (“a kind”), *jinsī* (“generic”), *jinsīya* (“nationality”), *tajnīs* (“paronomasia”), *mujānasah* (“relatedness”), *tajannus* (“naturalization”) *mutajānis* (“similar”). In addition, the Arabic script may make the etymological connection more prominent than their Latin script transliterations.

Because the Arabic root letters are linked “organically” (they can appear with many combinations of prefixes, infixes, and suffixes), at some level the native speaker of Arabic identifies words through these root letters. When the root letters are shifted, jumbled, or altered (for example, a play between one kind of *t* sound and another or one root letter with a dot above and another with a dot below), a native speaker apprehends the shift intuitively as subtle, satisfying, even sublime, like watching the colors of the setting sun slowly, almost imperceptibly shift from yellow and orange to red and violet through to deep violet blue and the dusky grays of eventide. The point is that *jinās*, although sometimes funny or witty like our puns, normally stirs up a sense of beauty and amazement in the listener.

Because the roots of Arabic may be perceived in the mind with the three letters of the root, words can be played against each other when the letters of the root are transposed. Thus, the root of *jinās* (*jīm – nūn – sīn*) can be heard in direct relation to any words created out of the following roots, five in use and one that is hypothetical: *nūn – jīm – sīn* (words meaning “unclean,” and so on) *sīn – jīm – nūn* (*prison* and related words), *nūn – sīn – jīm* (*fabric, texture, weaving*, plus related words), *sīn – nūn – jīm* (*soot, smut*), and *jīm – sīn – nūn\** (\*not used). Furthermore, a root letter may be changed to another of a similar sound or similar written shape to likewise create the same word-play effect.

By its broadest definition, *jinās* may be said to include almost all euphonious effects found in the Qur’ān. Scholars through the ages (for example, Suyūṭī 1967:ch. 58 v. 2:271ff. and 1986) have categorized *jinās* into more than two dozen types (though not all of these are found in the Qur’ān), and many seem merely academic rather than necessary to grasp the figure’s essential features. The following classifications incorporate most all types: (1) meaning; (2) vocalization; (3) written shape; (4) reordering of letters; (5) one-letter substitution; (6) number of letters; (7) etymology; and (8) false etymology:

(1) Regarding meaning, a word’s connotations or denotations may be played against each other (*al-jinās al-tāmm* (Suyūṭī 1986:73ff.; Mehren 1970:154):

(30:55) مَا لَبِثُوا غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ . . . مَا لَبِثُوا غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ wa-yawma taqūmu s-sā‘ah. . . mā labiṭū ḡayra sā‘ah, “And on the day when the *Hour* comes. . . they had not stayed but an *hour*.” The first *sā‘ah* (“hour”) refers to the Day of Judgment, whereas the second refers to the brevity of their lives in the *dunya* (the “lower” life, this earthly life).

(2:215) مَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ . . . وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ mā anfaqtum min khayr. . . wa-mā taf‘alū min khayr, “what you spend of *good*. . . and what you do of *good*. . .” The first *khayr* refers to your wealth, money,

or property, whereas the second *kayr* means good works performed for the sake of Allah to purify one of evil.

(2) In terms of vocalization, two words differ in their vowels (short, long; *fathah*, *damma*, *kasrah*), or there may be an increase or decrease in quality or a change of a letter involving *sukūn* (a stop), or *tašdīd*, (a doubling of a letter). This type has been dubbed *al-jinās al-muḥarraf*, and is also called, among other names, *al-jinās al-muḡāyir* (Suyūṭī 1986:161; cf. Mehren 1970:156):

(5:50) وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ wa-man aḥsanu min allāh, “and *who* (man) is better *than* (min) Allah.”

(42:53) أَلَا إِلَى اللَّهِ alā ilā llāh, “*is it not to Allah*. . . ?” The question particle (a) and the negative adverb (lā), “is it not. . . ?” played against the preposition *ilā*, “to or toward.”

(3) The written letter shape may also come into play. Two words differ in their letter forms (as they appear in print), for example, in the number or placement of dots, resulting in changes in the root (*al-jinās al-kaṭṭī*), a *jinās* of the written form (Suyūṭī 1986:180; Mehren 1970:157):

(18:104) وَهُمْ يَحْسِبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا wa-hum yaḥsabūna annahum yuḥsinūna ṣun‘ā, “and they *thought* (yaḥsabūna) that they *were doing good* (yuḥsinūna) by their work.” Change between *bā*’ and *nūn*.

(45:11) هَذَا هُدًى hādā hudā, “*this* (hādā) is *guidance* (hudā).” Change between *dāl* and *dāl*.

(26:79-80) وَالَّذِي هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِي وَيَسْقِينِي وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِي walladī huwa yuṭ‘imunī wa-yaṣqīn/ wa-iḏā mariḏtu fa-huwa yaṣfīn, “And He is the one who feeds me and gives me drink (yaṣqīnī) / And when I am ill, then He cures me (yaṣfīnī).” Change between *sīn* and *šīn* and *qāf* and *fā*’.

(4) Letters may be reordered. Thus, two (or more) successive words mix up the letters found in the other half (anagram) or the letters of the words read the same forward and backward (palindrome), a *jinās* of variation (called *al-jinās al-maqlūb* or *tajnīs al-qalb*, Suyūṭī 1986:197, 1967:ch. 58 v. 2:272; Mehren 1970:158):

(2:130) إِلَّا مَنْ سَفِهَ نَفْسَهُ illā man safiha nafsahū, “except for one who *makes a fool of* (safiha) *himself* (nafsahū).” (anagram; the *nūn* of the word *man* can be included in the letters counted in the anagram: *nūn*, *sīn*, *fā*’, and *hā*’).

(36:40) وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ wa-kullun fī falakin, “and *each one in an orbit*” (palindrome: *kāf-lām-fā*’-*yā*’-*fā*’-*lām-kāf*).

(74:3) وَرَبِّكَ مَكْبَرٌ wa-rabbaka fa-kabbir, “And *glorify your Lord* (accusative)” (palindrome: *rā*’-*bā*’-*kāf-fā*’-*kāf-bā*’-*rā*’).

(5) One letter may substitute for another. Two words, not necessarily contiguous, differ by a single letter (that is, change of a root letter), which may or may not be close in their point of articulation (*al-jinās al-maṭma* ‘, also called *tajnīs al taṣrīf*, Suyūṭī 1986:210; cf. Mehren, 1970:159f., who divides this type based on point of articulation); the words often rhyme in English:

(6:26) **وَهُمْ يَنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ وَيَنْعَوْنَ عَنْهُ** wa-hum yanhauna ‘anhu wa-yan’auna ‘anhu, “And *they keep* (others) (yanhauna) from it [Qur’ān] and *they go away* (yan’auna) from it themselves.”

(33:51) **وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَلِيمًا** wa-kāna llāhu ‘alīman ḥalīman “and Allah is *knowledgeable* (‘alīman) and *mild tempered* (ḥalīman).”

(27:22) **وَجِئْتُكَ مِنْ سَبَإٍ بِنَبَأٍ يَقِينٍ** wa-ji’tuka min saba’in bi-naba’in yaqīn, “and I have come to you from *Saba*’ (sabā’in) with certain *news* (nabā’in).”

(6) There may be a difference in the number of letters. For example, two words may show a difference in the number of written (usually consonantal) letters, such as a long vs. short vowel, or one has an extra consonant compared to the other (called by Suyūṭī 1986:244 *tajnīs al-tarjī* ‘ or, citing Ḳalīl ibn Aybak aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-jinās al-muzdawij*; cf. Mehren 1970:157f., who divides this type into *al-jinās al-nāqīṣ* and *al-jinās al-muḍayyil*):

(28:45) **وَلَكِنَّا كُنَّا مُرْسِلِينَ** wa-lākinnā kunnā mursilīna, “*but* (lakinnā) *We were* (kunnā) senders of messengers.”

(16:69) **كُلِّ مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ** kulī min kulli l-ṭamarāti, “*eat* (kulī) of *all* (kulli) the fruits.”

(7) Etymological *jinās* involves root letters that are split, separated, or dissociated (*al-jinās al-iṣṭiqāq*; Suyūṭī 1986:270):

(56:89) **فَرَوِّحْ وَرِّيحَانٌ** fa-rawḥun wa-rayḥānun, “Then, rest (rawḥ) and plenty (rayḥān, all what want could need or want).”

(30:43) **فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ الْقَاسِمِ** fa-aqim wajhaka li-ddīn al-qayyim, “set (aqim) your (masculine singular) face to the straight (qayyim) faith.”

Etymological *jinās* includes examples that students of Arabic readily notice (because the words are often confused), such as related verb forms in close proximity, for example, I and II (96:5), I and IV (17:105), I and III (2:9), II and III (3:175), III and X (18:29), IV and X (9:6), and so on. Most of these relations cannot be reproduced in English, for example, causatives against the plain form (I-II or I-IV), such as ‘*alima* (to learn: form I) and ‘*allama* (to teach: form II, literally, to



cause to learn), though there are a few rare English examples: *fall* and *fell* (= to cause to fall); *rise* and *raise* (= to cause to rise); *lie* and *lay* (= to cause to lie). In Arabic the verbs of any of the usual 10 forms may be contrasted with any other and qualify as a form of *jinās* that in nearly every case cannot be reproduced in English.

Closer to English, the passive may be contrasted with the active, but in English a compound verb is required to express the passive (for example, he *was warned*), whereas in Arabic a single word suffices: (VIII at 2:166) الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا *alladīna ttubi‘ū* (those who are followed). . . الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا *alladīna ttaba‘ū* (those who follow); (IV at 37:72-73) مُنْذِرِينَ *mundirīn* (those sent to warn) / . . . الْمُنْذَرِينَ *mundārīn* (those warned).

Finally, a variety of cognates (including cognate accusative) may be used in a statement creating a strong rhetorical effect: (6:82) الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوا إِيمَانَهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الْأَمْنُ *lladīna āmanū wal-lam yalbisū īmānahum bi-ḡulmin ūlā’ika lahum al-amn*, “Those who have believed (*āmanū*) and have not confused their belief (*īmān*) with wrongdoing, theirs is the security (*amn*).”

(8) In a false etymology, two words have similar-sounding letters, to the extent they appear to be from the same trilateral root, though they are not (called *al-jinās al-muṭlaq* or *tasnīs al-iṭlāq* according to Suyūṭī 1986: 272, [1967]:ch. 58 v. 2:273; and “pseudo-derivative paronomasia” by Cachia 1998:29):

(26:168) قَالِ إِنِّي لَعَمَلِكُم مِّنَ الْفَالِينَ *qāla innī li-‘amalikum min al-qālīn*, “He said (*qāla*) I am among those who hate (*qālīn*) what you (plura) do.”

(55:54) وَجَنَّاتٍ *wa-janā al-jannatayn*, “and the fruit (*janā*) of the two gardens (*jannatayn*).”

*Insijām* (Ar. “fluency, harmony, order”) refers to the sweetness of any phrase that flows like water; thus, it describes portions of a nonpoetic work whose rhythm is borrowed from poetry. The Qur’ān is not a poem (36:69), nor is it in meter. But certain *āyahs* include phrases that have poetic rhythms with scansion proper to well-known ancient meters, such as *al-ṭawīl*, *al-madīd*, *al-basīṭ*, and so on (with accepted substitutions for certain feet in some cases; see Wright 1967.2:358-68). In antiquity listeners expected to hear snippets of speech in poetic meter because these phrases, if they are well crafted, refined, and relevant to the context, elevate the whole work with a unparalleled, majestic beauty, though the use of an entire line of poetry was discouraged as “most unpleasant” (Quintilian, *Inst. orat.* 9.4.72). Such partial poetic lines may seem purely accidental to modern Westerners, who might suspect only specialists would recognize them in recitation. In fact, a reciter may intuitively recite a metered portion of an *āyah* with intensive passion or a poetic sensibility such that the phrase resonates in the head of a listener with distinctive force, and sometimes such a phrase becomes an “ear worm,” in a sense confirming its inherent metrical memorability.

Early Arabic poetry was defined by meter and, as in Greek and Latin poetry, was determined by the quality, or length, of the poetic syllable (rather than by a stress accent, as in English). A syllable may be short or long: The short syllable is “open” and short (that is, a short vowel only or a consonant plus a short vowel). The long syllable is either long by nature (long vowel or diphthong) or “closed” with a consonant (since two Arabic consonants cannot be pronounced together, except at the end of a line, the first of two consonants without an intervening vowel will close a syllable. Arabic consonants

include those English speakers might think of as made up of two, for example, the *sh* sound of the letter *šīn*, a single consonant (phonetic ʃ, as in English *ship*) that cannot be divided into *s* and *h*). Below, the name of the meter (and its meaning in English) and a typical scansion are provided, along with a reference in Wright's grammar; S stands for short and L for long (x marks the end of a line where the syllable quantity is not relevant). These are followed by an example from the Qur'ān along with a transliteration into English letters (letters are transliterated as written, not as sounded with Quranic assimilation, for example, in (4) "bu'dan li-" in recitation is sounded "bu'dal li-." In these transliterations, poetic syllables are shown in the following way: short syllables indicated by lowercase letters and long syllables by capitals. Spaces are added to indicate the metrical feet (and not word breaks); syllables that are created by connecting two words are joined by underscores:

(1) *al-ṭawīl* ("the long") SLL SLLL SLL SLLL (Wright 1967.2:§211).

(18:29) فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ

fa-MAN ŠĀ- | 'a FAL-YU'-MIN | wa-MAN ŠĀ- | 'a FAL-YAK-FUR

(2) *al-madīd* ("the extended") LSSL SSL SSL. . . (Wright 1967.2:§220).

(11:37) وَأَصْنَعُ الْفُلْكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا

WĀṢ-na-'I\_L-FUL- | ka bi-'Ā- | yu-ni-NĀ

(3) *al-basīṭ* ("the outspread") SLSL LSL LLSL SSL (Wright 1967.2:§215).

(46:25) فَاصْبِرُوا لَا يُرَى إِلَّا مَسْكَنُهُمْ

fa-'ĀṢ-ba-ḤŪ | LĀ yu-RĀ | 'IL-LĀ ma-SĀ- | ki-nu-HUM

(4) *al-wāfir* ("the exuberant") SLLL SLLL SLL (Wright 1967.2:§207)

(11:60) أَلَا بَعْدَ لَعَادٍ قَوْمِ هُودٍ

a-LĀ BU'-DAN | li-'Ā-DIN\_QAW- | mi HŪD<sup>12</sup>

(5) *al-kāmil* ("the perfect") LLSL LLSL SSLSL LLSL (Wright 1967.2:§206).

(2:213) وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

WAL-LĀ-hu YAH- | DĪ MAN ya-ŠĀ'- | u i-LĀ ṣi-RĀ- | ṬIN MUS-ta-QĪM<sup>13</sup>

(6) *al-hazaj* ("the trilling") SLLS SLLS SLLS SLL (Wright 1967.2:§208).

(12:93) فَأَلْقَوْهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ أَيْ يَأْتِ بِصِيرًا

fa-'AL-QŪ-hu | 'a-LĀ WAJ-hi | a-BĪ YA'-ti | ba-ŠĪ-RAN

(7) *al-rajaz* ("the trembling") SLSL SLSL SLSL SLSL (Wright 1967.2:§204). The base is SLSL and the first syllable of any foot may substitute with a long, LLSL (as in the first foot cited here; other substitutions are also possible).

(3:200) يٰٓأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا

YĀ-AY-yu-HĀ\_L- | la-DĪ-na\_Ā- | ma-NŪ\_Ṣ-bi-RŪ | wa-ŠĀ-bi-RŪ

<sup>12</sup> Note that the long last syllable of the scansion does not appear in this Qur'ānic sample, since it appears at the end of an *āyah*, which normally has "pausal" pronunciation without final short vowels or *tanwīn*.

<sup>13</sup> This extract appears at the end of an *āyah*; see note in example (4).

(8) *al-ramal* (“the running”) SSSL LSLS SSLS LSLx (Wright 1967.2:§219): the base here is SSSL, but substitutions include LSLS.

(34:13) وَجَفَانِ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورِ رَاسِيَتِ

wa-ji-FĀ-NIN | KAL-ja-WĀ-bi | wa-qu-DŪ-RIN | RĀ-si-YĀ-TIN

(9) *al-sarī‘* (“the swift”) LLSL LSSL LSx (Wright 1967.2:§205).

(2:259) أَوْ كَالَّذِي مَرَّ عَلَى قَرْيَةٍ

AW KAL-la-DĪ | MAR-ra ‘a-LĀ | QAR-ya-TIN

(10) *al-munsariḥ* (“the flowing”) LLSL L LLSL LSx (Wright 1967.2:§216).

(76:2) إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ

IN-NĀ ḵa-LAQ- | NĀ\_L- | IN-SĀ-na MIN | NUṬ-fa-TIN

(11) *al-kaṭīf* (“the light,” or “nimble”) LSL L SSSL (Wright 1967, 2:§221).

(4:78) لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ حَدِيثًا

LĀ ya-KĀ-DŪ- | na YAF-qa-HŪ- | na ḥa-DĪ-TĀ<sup>14</sup>

(12) *al-muqṭaḍab* (“the lopped” or “curtailed”) LSL SL SSL (Wright 1967.2:§217).

(2:10) فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ

FĪ qu-LŪ- | bi-HIM | ma-ra-ḌUN

(13) *al-mutaqārib* (“the tripping,” that is, taking short steps) SLL SLL SLL SLL

(Wright 1967.2:§210). The base is normally SLS for this meter, but SLL may substitute for any foot.

(7:183) وَأُمْلِي لَهُمْ إِنِّي كِيدِي مَتِينٌ

wa-UM-LĪ | la-HUM IN- | na KAY-DĪ | ma-TĪN<sup>15</sup>

*Saj* (Ar.; pl. *asja* ‘) is commonly translated as *rhymed prose* and in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods was associated in particular with soothsayers (*kuhhān*; s. *kāhin*, as at 69:42), but the *saj* ‘ of the Qur’ān is much more than rhymed prose—it energizes the pure, natural expressions of the Qur’ān so they become rhetorically compelling and semantically dynamic and interconnected. Because it is characterized by cola (rhythmical units of an utterance spoken in a single breath, such as phrases and clauses) of similar length (for example, by counting words), morphology, and sound, *saj* ‘ can be compared with the ancient Greek and Latin figure known as *paromoiosis*. *Saj* ‘ originally referred to the cooing of pigeons, which may be why many Muslims have dissociated the Qur’ān from it, as it is “a rather humble epithet for Qur’ānic discourse” (Stewart 1990:107). Moreover, the traditional *saj* ‘ of the *kuhhān* involved a prioritization of sound over meaning, resulting in stilted phrases that are nonsensical, incomprehensible, and often downright laughable. Given the distinctively excellent nature of the Qur’ān, the preferred term for rhymes at the end of *āyahs* is *fāṣilah* (“partition, interval”), but most Western writers continue to use the term *saj* ‘.

<sup>14</sup> This extract appears at the end of an *āyah*; see note in example (4).

<sup>15</sup> This extract appears at the end of an *āyah*; see note in example (4).

Rhyme (and impressions of rhyme when similar-sounding endings are used) is perhaps the most common feature of *saj'* noticed by Westerners and nonnative speakers of Arabic generally. The final word of nearly every *āyah* may be pronounced with *taskīn*, that is, in pausal form (as if with *sukūn* on the last alphabetical letter; exceptions are those *āyāt* where one is required to continue reading over the *āyah* break). The result is that *saj'* permits the rhyming of syntactically nonequivalent forms (for example, a subject noun with an object noun, which in poetry normally could not rhyme).

In the Qur'ān the most common rhymes occur at the ends of *āyahs*, in a sense marking the breaks between them (hence, the name *fāṣilah*); for example, sura 53 (an-Najm) is entirely in *saj'*. But phrases within *āyahs* occasionally are in *saj'*. The *Iklāṣ* has an example of a *d* rhyme within an *āyah* as well as between two *āyahs*: (112:3-4) ﴿لَمْ يَكِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۚ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ﴾ lam yalid wa-lam yūlad / wa-lam yakun lahū kufuwan aḥad “not was He parented (yalid) nor does He parent (yūlad) / And not is anyone (aḥad) an equal to Him.” Note that *yalid* and *yūlad* both represent *saj'* rhymes (though because they are within an *āyah* there usually is no stopping in recitation to highlight them), as do *yūlad* and *aḥad*. If *yūlad* and *aḥad* were not pronounced in pausal form, however, they would not rhyme (it would be *yūlad* against *aḥadun*).

*Tasjī'* is the term used to describe the agreement in end portions of two or more *āyahs* or phrases in terms of *wazn* (often translated as “meter” but in this case refers to a word’s rhythmical pattern, which usually is equivalent to its morphology) and *rawīy*, or *qāfīyah* (“rhyme”). As in poetry the *wazn* of *saj'* involves long and short syllables, but its “metrical foot” depends on the word unit, normally equal to what is written as one word (and not the flow of syllables across word boundaries to make up iambs, dactyls, and so on), and each foot’s stress accent, which allows introductory and other unstressed words to be left out of the count. Most people who hear the Qur'ān intuitively feel that it is not simply rhymed prose, but appreciation of these “metrical” qualities is often difficult for modern people to define, in part because segments that agree may vary in length. Three elements combine in various ways to make *saj'* work: First, there must be *pariosis*, the approximate equality of a series of at least two cola (rhythmical units of an utterance spoken in no more than one breath, such as phrases or clauses) as measured by the similarity in length (the number of elements, counting words, or by some authorities syllables, in each colon) with a similarity in syntax (the order of elements need not be the same) and in stress (or accent) pattern; it is called *i'tidāl* (see Stewart, 2013, especially pp. 25-33, for a very instructive examination of this feature). The ends of the cola and *āyahs* strike the ears most prominently and here the other two elements may be present: the final words of each end portion share the same patterns of longs and shorts (*wazn*), and the alphabetic-letter rhyme (*rawīy*).

In the refined environment of the Qur'ān, in which both sound and meaning are woven together, *saj'* enhances the rhythm of prose and because of that rhythm can produce in listeners a more facile comprehension. The reason is that the strong, rhythmic element of the *wazn* of *saj'* alerts a listener to the completion of a thought; individual thoughts thus gather, grow, and become unified through the cadence of *wazn*. Quranic *saj'* is therefore much more than its rhyme, because the strength and energy of the thoughts are conveyed primarily by the *wazn*; this feature has led some commentators to dismiss the *rawīy* of *saj'* as nonessential. There is no comparable linguistic patterning available in the major Western languages.

There are several broad classifications of *saj'*, based on *wazn* and *rawīy*, since many sources indicate that only one of the two elements is required:

(1) with *wazn* and without *rawīy*: *muwāzanah* (“equally weighted”). The final words of the phrases must have the same metrical shape by syllable length (long, L; short, S) and stress accent to have *wazn*:

(88:15-16) ﴿١٥﴾ وَنَارُكُ مَصْفُوفَةٌ ﴿١٦﴾ وَزَارِبُ مَبْتُوتَةٌ wa-namāriqu maṣṣūfah / wa-zarābiyu mabtūtah, “And cushions maṣṣūfa (neatly arrayed) / And variegated carpets mabtūta (spread out)” [L-L-S; form I passive participles of geminate verbs (whose last two root letters are the same)]. The “rhyme” one feels hearing this type of *saj*’ consists only of the nonalphabetic vowel (a not counted).

(1A) with “superwazn” and without *rawīy*: *mumātil* (“similar”). Sometimes we find several words in succession matching another group of words in the next phrase or *āyah*, resulting in a “superwazn” pattern:

(37:117-118) ﴿١١٧﴾ وَءَاتَيْنَاهُمَا الْكِتَابَ الْمُسْتَبِينَ ﴿١١٨﴾ وَهَدَيْنَاهُمَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ wa-ātaynāhumā l-kitāba al-mustabīn / wa-hadaynāhumā ṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm, “And We gave the two of them the book *al-mustabīn* (that helps to make all things clear) / And We guided the two of them to the path *al-mustaqīm* (that is righteous)” [same metrical forms: *wa-ataynāhumā* and *wa-hadaynāhumā*; *al-kitāba* and *aṣ-ṣirāṭa*; and two form X participles used as adjectives complete the lines].

(2) with *rawīy*, without *wazn*: *muṭarraḥ* (“with color at the ends”):

(53:10-11) ﴿١٠﴾ مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَى ﴿١١﴾ فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَىٰ fa-awḥā ilā ‘abdiḥī mā awḥā / mā kaḍaba al-fu’ādu ma ra’ā, “So He revealed to His servant what He revealed— / Not did the [Prophet’s] heart fabricate (or distort) what he saw” [final alphabetic letter is *yā*’ (pronounced as a long *ā*)].

(2A) with “superrawīy” and without *wazn*: *luzūm mā lā yalzam* (“adhering to what is not necessary”). We commonly find “superrhymes” of more than the final alphabetic letter that are neither strained nor forced, as they might be in English if English could produce such rhymes:

(75:29-30) ﴿٢٩﴾ وَإِنَّمَا إِلَهُ الْبَشَرِ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَإِنَّمَا إِلَهُ الْبَشَرِ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ wa-ltaffat is-sāq bi-ssāq / ilā rabbika yawma’idini l-masāq, “And the leg will meet the leg (for example, as legs of corpse put beside each other for burial) / The drive on that day [will be] to your Lord” [*sīn* and *alif*, plus *qāf*].

(71:13-14) ﴿١٣﴾ وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُقُونَ لِلَّهِ وَفَارًا ﴿١٤﴾ وَقَدْ خَلَقَكُمْ أَطْوَارًا mā lakum lā tarjūna li-llāhi waqārā / wa-qad kalaqakum atwārā, “Why are you not in awe of Allah *waqārā* (with respect to His profound authority)? / When indeed He has created you *atwārā* (in various stages, forms, conditions, and so on)” [final alphabetic letters, *alif*, *rā*’, *alif* rhyme, but the two adverbial accusatives are not the same: S-L-L vs. L-L-L].

(3) with *wazn* and with *rawīy*: *mutawāzī* (“parallel”):



(100:6-7) إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ ۖ وَإِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ (٧) inna l-insāna li-rabbihi la-kanūd / wa-innahū ‘alā dālika la-šahīd, “Indeed the human being to his Lord is ungrateful / And indeed to that he himself is a witness” [*wazn*: S-S-L; final alphabetic letter is *dāl*].

(3A) with “superwazn” and with “superrawīy”: *muraṣṣa* ‘ (“decorated”):

(82:13-14) إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ ۖ وَإِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ (١٤) inna l-abrāra la-ḥī na‘īm / wa-inna l-fujjāra la-ḥī ḥamīm, “Indeed the beneficent will be in bliss / And the wicked will be in hellfire” [*wa* not counted in second *āyah*; one extra letter, *yā* ‘ plus *mīm*].

### The Use of Oral Signs in the Qur’ān

The many figures defined and alluded to above create a texture that one might compare to patterns of typically “Islamic” brocades, carpets, and architectural elements. That is, the figures’ intricacies may not be appreciated in detail all at once, but with successive viewings one may detect something different each time, while the pattern one previously had apprehended may become less apparent. Certainly, each hearing of the same text provides new observations, and new extrinsic features are recognized.

In this regard, the figures and linguistic patterns present themselves, not as true formulas *sensu* Parry and Lord, but as formulaic analogs functionally equivalent to true formulas. In some cases, the “process of substitution is pushed to its extreme, and no key words are left to be shared in common by two” of these analogs (Monroe 1972:20). As such, they operate as one of the formulaic systems of the Qur’ān that reveal the textual substance’s original “provenance,” that is, the first environment for oral performance (cf. Bannister 2014:207). In a computer analysis of the Qur’ān using “blocks” of three Arabic bases at a time, one researcher has determined that “formulaic” material comprises up to 52 percent of the Qur’ān, an amount he reckoned “astonishingly high,” though there is not adequate evidence to conclude the work was produced in an oral-traditional manner (Bannister 2014:274f.).

Although the text is not oral traditional, the oral texture of the Qur’ān, with its myriad figures and repetitions, operates within a remarkably robust, unbroken recitation tradition. As a result, each performance, each recitation event, has kinetic, rather than static, energy that permits direct and rapid communication between reciter and listener, and that communication, to borrow from Foley, is “explosively connotative rather than restricted in focus, bristling with idiomatic implication rather than claustrophobically clichéd” (Foley 1999:xii). Because each recitation event is imbued with this dynamic communicative potential, long-time listeners (who understand the language) hear each recitation as both old and new, with the present performance interjecting fresh meaning into their understanding that enriches and encompasses all past understandings.

The formulaic system embedded in the words of the text permits a *qāri*’—intentionally or not—to convey his particular interpretation of the moment by associating highlighted formulaic patterns of his choice in performance. In other words, the *qāri*’ recites with his natural understanding, how he is thinking at the time, and the choice he makes of which formulaic segments (structures, themes or ideas, words, phrases, phonemes, rhythmic patterns) to bring to the surface to

communicate those thoughts to the listeners. Of course, this is the “normal” way spoken language works, absent a wooden, stiff, or lifeless manner of delivery. It’s also what distinguishes a first-class opera singer—the ability to use primarily the voice to communicate the meaning of a frozen text (in this case with a frozen tonal pattern as well).

The formulaic analogs of the Qur’ān do more than just convey the meaning. They, “the formulas, narrative patterns, and other units of utterance,” function, much like the *sēmata* (Gk. “signs”) that Foley (1999:27) described in regard to the Homeric epics, “not as textual ciphers but as signals potentially rife with implication, as keys to an emergent reality.” In the case of the Qur’ān, a reciter can choose one or more of these units to highlight and link with a companion of the same wording, phrasing, rhythm, or theme in the next section or sura, signaling what is to come. While no “emergent reality” (or narrative movement) is indicated, because the work is not a single protracted narrative like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, these Quranic *sēmata* may operate “proleptically,” or prospectively, to signal something that is about to come in the recitation; in addition, they may work retrospectively to connect with something the reciter also highlighted earlier in the recitation, locking a link. So, unlike Foley’s *sēmata*, the ones exploited in public performances of Quranic recitation over the nights of Ramadan are frequently heard in pairs to signal what we’ve already heard or what we will soon hear. Moreover, the reciter sometimes gives a very light stress to distinctive hapaxes, because for those who are familiar with the material, these unique words identify precisely the reciter’s current location in the text (what might be called *bookmarking*). Through this strategy of subtly highlighting select “formulas” the *qāri* unifies the material recited and makes it cohere in the minds of listeners.

For example, sura 17, al-Isrā’ (“The Night Journey”), topically has little in common with its predecessor in sequence, an-Naḥl (“Bees”). Al-Isrā’ relates the news of the journey of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem and back in a single night, and offers alternatively warnings from the tales of those who became arrogant and rejected the messengers sent to them by God and advice on good behavior to avoid similar oppression and punishment, whereas an-Naḥl celebrates the gifts from God of earth and universe and specifically describes the bee and her hive within the natural world and the health benefits of honey to humanity. Equally different in topic and tone is the sura that follows al-Isrā’, al-Kahf (“The Cave”), which contains a series of parables about the transient nature of this life, and the promise of the afterlife, starting with the story of a group of believing youth in the time of the Roman empire who sought asylum in a cave and fell asleep there. They awakened, some say hundreds of years later, to a world in which their beliefs were no longer cause for persecution.

Using pairs of *sēmata* to connect an-Naḥl and al-Isrā’, for example, a reciter may lightly stress the first word of the *āyah* in an-Naḥl at 16:125 *أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ* id‘u ilā sabīli rabbika bi-l-ḥikmati wa-l-maw‘izati l-ḥasanah “call [them] to the way or your Lord with wisdom and good counsel” and later repeat the same kind of stress at the same position in al-Isrā’ at 17:11 *وَيَدْعُ الْإِنْسَانُ بِالشَّرِّ دُعَاءَهُ بِالْخَيْرِ* wa-yad‘u l-insānu bi-ššarri du‘ā‘ahū bi-l-ḥayr “Man calls [that is, prays] for evil just as he calls for good.” And within al-Isrā’ he might recite 17:93 with a special force to raise awareness of it in the ears of listeners, *هَلْ كُنْتُ إِلَّا بَشَرًا رَسُولًا* hal kuntum illā bašaran rasūlā “am I not just a human being, a messenger.” If stressed appropriately, many listeners will immediately grasp that al-Kahf is next, because 17:93 calls to mind a phrase at its end, 18:110

إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ innamā ana bašarun mitlukum “I am only a human being like you.”

A single word might be stressed, for example, in an-Naḥl at 16:69 *šifā'* (“cure, remedy,” to describe the healthful properties of honey) and again in al-Isrā' at 17:82 (where the word is applied to the Qur'ān). Or he might choose *a'nāb* (a plural meaning “grapes”) at 16:11 (or at 16:67) and repeat the stress at 17:91 on a closely related word, *inab* (a collective meaning “grapes” from the same root as *a'nāb*). The word can potentially be stressed again at 18:32 as well, and these are the only uses of the word in successive suras.

Because even individual words can be subtly stressed, just as in everyday speech, there are multiple potential *sēmata* that might connect portions of nominally disjunct passages that happen to come in sequence. Moreover, any reciter's stress on a given word or utterance unit may reflect his personal memorization strategy for keeping his place in the text. The use of single-word *sēmata* may be an artifact of community memorization, because of overlap with bookmarking, the use of hapaxes or words found in the text only a few times that are widely separated to remind the audience of the place in the text. For example, at 16:59 we hear *yadussuhu* (“he buries it”), a hapax, which is used in a description of female infanticide (the only other allusion to the practice is at 81:8-9); since this sura is well known, the bookmark might be especially useful for persons who arrive in the middle of the recitation. Sometimes, a two-word phrase is also distinctive enough to bookmark a sura, for example, the phrase *خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ* *kašyata imlāq*, “out of fear of poverty,” is used at 17:31, and a similar phrase *خَشْيَةَ الْإِنْفَاقِ* *kašyata al-infāq*, “out of fear of spending,” occurs at 17:100; the word *imlāq* is used in only one other place (6:151), and *infāq* does not appear elsewhere (although other radically related words do). Most audience members will recognize al-Kahf right from the beginning, but occasionally the rare word *juruza* (“dry or bare” referring to ground) at 18:8 is stressed, perhaps so people will pay attention because the next *āyah* introduces the first story, that of the *aṣḥāb al-kahf*, the “companions of the cave” (an obvious giveaway for the place in the text for most listeners).

It is improbable, if not impossible, that the use of individual words either as *sēmata* or as bookmarks would have been available to reciters in the time of Prophet Muhammad, and highly improbable even in the early years of Islam, after the codification of the text, because both *sēmata* and bookmarks operate within a community who have to a greater or lesser degree memorized the whole, and who expect to hear it in sequence. Moreover, a reciter does not normally “lock the link” between *sēmata* when following another reciter during an evening's recitation, nor will the same reciter stress the same *sēmata* in each year's performance. In that sense, every *sēma* exists in a potential state. There's little need for Quranic-style *sēmata* in a continuous narrative, such as Homer's epics, but bookmarks might well have been active in a community the majority of whom had memorized much of or even all the lines.

Because the Qur'ān was revealed in pieces and not every sura was necessarily first recited as a single unit, this exploitation of the formulaic material in performance today is something that developed some point time after the Qur'ān was ordered and codified into a single book. Comments from elderly participants suggest that the cohesion of the parts recited may not be the result of any current awakening or innovation in recitation; rather, it may be a natural result of many in the community hearing the work in sequence once a year every year, with its formulaic material facilitating not only memory for both reciter and listener but also comprehension of the whole. Indeed, the reciters most skilled in connecting passages using *sēmata* and in bookmarking words

or short phrases are usually the most practiced, those most attentive to meaning, those who have recited the whole for many years.

The impression one has, after listening to the Qur'ān recited again and again, absorbing and memorizing portions, is that such repeated listening draws out the rhetorical passages and enlivens the experience of the words as they fly into the ears. Regardless, hearing the whole in recitation by a skilled *qāri'*, any notion of "random" placement of disconnected pieces evaporates. Instead, the *qāri'* directs listeners to points on the route, like stations on a train line, placing each passage in a larger context, so each sura emerges as a coherent whole; with vocal shading each sura progresses necessarily and seamlessly to the next. Simply stated, *recitation is the key to the integrity of the Qur'ān: it is the fundamental, most basic means by which one perceives the connectedness of the Qur'ān in its totality.*

The largest problem that modern, literate people have in comprehending the Qur'ān and its coherence may relate ironically to our ability to read—swiftly, silently, and with facility, very unlike the way ancients read. Most of us are unable to retain word for word any more than a few words as we read; instead we are trained to grab the ideas expressed in a written or spoken work. We extract the concepts and discard the words. Figurative language, especially when repeated, can distract us from that concept-extracting task, which is the source of our comprehension, and so when a work uses a lot of figurative language we may ask ourselves "what is the point here?"

Oral textures that make memorization easy are both foreign and distantly ancient to our minds. Much-recited works, like the Qur'ān and Homer's poems alike, should be heard again and again, not just once, for an ideal understanding and appreciation. But we, with our "deep interiorization of print" (Ong 1988:263), prefer that, if anything is to be heard again and again, it ideally should be set to music—the music will remind us of the words, even when the words are totally nonsensical and meaningless. Our enjoyment of lyrics (even nonsense) set to music is natural, primitive, and very ancient. But paradoxically, if we take away the music, we tend to laugh at the words or fail to connect to them, perhaps because the lyricists spend less time on the concepts than on making jingly words that harmonize with the tune. In this case, we are not really experiencing the ancient world or orality; we've just substituted music for words to take us on an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual journey that the ancients had when they listened to someone speak or recite well. Ancient people, in contrast to us, retained the words to better grasp the concepts—for concepts to take anyone to a new, enhanced level of understanding they had to be well dressed in elegant words and figures. Those figures helped them visualize the concepts and move from concept to concept easily.

All these figures provide structure and patterns in the Qur'ān that determine the coherence of passages, individual suras, groups of suras, and ultimately the whole; their role as a unifying force may be greater here than in the Greek epic because of the lack of a straightforward narrative throughout the work. Moreover, all these figures were appreciated and apprehended in the early years of Islam by people who could read and write as well as those who could not; in the early literate period, writing was used to complement, to complete, and to verify and secure oral statements (Schoeler 2002:40). But although orality was the primary means of verbal expression and communication, there was no dichotomy between oral and literate. Against this backdrop of orality, the text of the Qur'ān as a much-recited work (a *qur'ān*) allows for manifold chaste and refined recitations (and interpretations) because no one recitation can draw listeners' attention to each and every figure of speech.

Reading from the page, one intuitively expects “literate” structures and “literate” texts; the “formulas” and any potential *sēmata* recede into the background unable to function as unifying elements. To some they may seem redundant or repetitious, but more often they simply get lost in the content. To remedy this, at the very least, one might do as the “Arabs do” (and ancient Greeks and Romans) and always read aloud, but until one knows the text intimately, the *sēmata* cannot readily rise into one’s consciousness.

### Final Observations

In conclusion, the Qur’ān instructs us to listen to it, but it also indicates that it is indeed a book; the Qur’ān wants us to receive it with the eye and the tongue as well as the ear (since reading at the time the Qur’ān was received meant reading aloud, moving lips and tongue). Beyond that, the recitations heard today represent unbroken links in a chain of recitations back to the beginning, so listening to the recitations of today might give us a sense of how the earliest listeners received its words. But, of course, even if we could prove the earliest recitations somehow match any recitation of today, there is a critical difference: the purpose of recitation has changed. Originally, the recited Qur’ān was meant to persuade and convince its hearers and to chastise those who turned away from it or who rejected it. Its rhetoric energized listeners to think, to believe, to follow. Today, by contrast, that urgent element of persuasion is gone. Virtually the only people now who spend time listening to the Qur’ān are those who believe; those who want to learn about it or study it almost always read it, and usually these readers listen to only a fraction of it because it all seems to sound the same. And for the majority of Muslims, who do not understand the words of the Qur’ān in Arabic, recitation is exclusively a formalized ritual act of worship. Recitation is thus reduced to a systematized chant, melodic utterances connected to the divine that may bring pleasure, soothe the spirit, or perhaps effect a supernatural change somewhere in the world. Or it may not have even those effects; in many mosques where most of the audience is not Arabic speaking, *tarāwīḥ* recitations are rarely of an entire *juz’* and breaks tend to be more frequent and longer, with a variety of speakers providing content that the audience can comprehend without difficulty.

Yet for the minority who understand the Arabic or read along with a translation the recitations do not sound the same, from page to page, reciter to reciter, year to year. The subtle differences may require a discipline to listen longer and more frequently to live performances. But in so doing, one might discover the linguistic, grammatical, structural, and rhetorical figures that hold the text together and that serve to convey a privileged understanding to those who know the meaning and listen again and again. For them, the Qur’ān is reinterpreted each year through the agency of a *qāri’* while the recitations satisfy the soul of the *ummah*, or nation, and unify it, albeit fleetingly. In a sense, the nightly recitations of Ramadan re-reveal the Qur’ān and re-unite the assembled listeners. For this audience at least, the contemporary reciter, to paraphrase Parry, succeeds only in so far as he reconstructs that community of thought through which Prophet Muhammad made himself understood to those who heard him.<sup>16</sup> The urgency of the message may be lacking for this audience, but so is its novelty—these listeners receive the message through bi-

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<sup>16</sup> Parry (1971:3) wrote, the “philological criticism of Homer is only of value to the extent that it succeeds in reconstructing that community of thought through which the poet made himself understood to those who heard him.”



modal means of verbal comprehension listening and reading), so their understanding is immediate, direct, and enhanced, and thus arguably as close as one can get to the urgency of the original recitations, however divergent they might have been from what we hear today.

Again, a comparison can be made with Homer's epics through history. The fictionalized poet of the *Odyssey*, Demodokos, is blind (*Od.* 8.64), so cannot see the audience response; like *tarāwīḥ* reciters, he had to sense it and adapt his recitation to what he sensed. From Homer's description of an audience contemporary with the poet, we know the nobles of the Phaiakians had pleasure in the recitation, while for Odysseus, who had lived through some of the events described in the poem, it brought tears. Moving to a period when a written text had begun to circulate, we still have little evidence of what audience members were feeling when they attended Panathenaic festivals. There is no handbook on the rhapsodic art that might provide clues about audience "participation" or audience input and reaction, or on their shared individual and communal experience and how they processed these events.

At some point in time rhapsodes apparently also began to explain the Homeric words in their own hexameters or in prose (based on comments by Ion, a rhapsode; Plato, *Ion* 530c); the reason for this may have been to provide a break or to show off a rhapsode's skill. Or perhaps because the words of Homer were inspired by a divinity (Plato, *Ion* 530b), they had some kind of oracular mystery that needed explanation. In mosques today with large audiences of Arabic speakers, there is a tendency to include some *tafsīr* ("explication") on the nightly *tarāwīḥ* recitation, though this practice is not uniform across such mosques nor consistent even within mosques that incorporate *tafsīr* into the breaks; the reason for this is that the individual speakers invited for each evening's break are usually free to determine the topics of their speeches. When a speaker does talk about the evening's recitation, a large proportion of the audience may be distracted by other activities altogether—because the attendees usually already know the meaning, such speeches are not considered important. For this group of listeners, the Qur'ān is in a coded idiom (*sensu* Foley 1999:27) whose "words" (that is, figures, formulas, and other units of utterance) are potential *sēmata* that both reinforce each individual's memorization of the text and unify that text in their minds. Furthermore, the *sēmata* unify the community of listeners, at least in the moment of recitation, and this experience contributes to their desire to return year after year.

This may explain in part why, regardless of how later performances were conducted, a recited Homer remained popular, with Greeks reading and memorizing the poems and attending an annual Panathenaic festival even hundreds of years after the end of Athenian domination of the region. Finally, it seems reasonable that regular, sustained effort applying bimodal verbal comprehension skills to the ancient Greek epic (that is, reading and listening, with some memorization) may be richly rewarding, regardless of how different reconstructed phonology and recitation techniques may be from the original.

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