CONTINUITY, CONTEXT, AND COHERENCE IN THE QUR’ÂN: A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE IDEA OF NAZM IN TAFSIR LITERATURE

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Abstract

This paper looks at several works of tafsir that identify nazm, or coherence, as a significant feature of the Qur’an. The authors whose works are examined are Tabari, Razi, Biqawi, and Fardhi and Islahi—the last two, teacher and student, discussed together. It is concluded that modern tafsir, compared with traditional tafsir, is more accepting of the idea of nazm in the Qur’an, and that the Fardhi-Islahi view of Qur’anic nazm is more plausible than the views of the other exegetes studied.

Keywords: Qur’an, tafsir, nazm.

Introduction

I will begin by explaining the senses in which I use the three keywords in the paper’s main title—continuity, context, and coherence: by continuity I mean linkage between some or all the verses of a surah; by context I mean a framework of meaning which is typically created by a set of verses seen to form a cluster and which helps to determine the meaning of one or more verses occurring inside or in the vicinity of that cluster; and by coherence I mean overall, or organic, unity or coherence in a tafsir. I would like to make three points in regard to this explanation. First, it is not offered as the only possible explanation of the three terms; it is a working description intended to lay the groundwork for discussion in this paper, and will undergo qualification later in the paper. Second, the explanation suggests a certain gradation in terms of complexity, starting, at the basic level, with continuity and ending, at the highest level, with coherence, with context making up the middle. Third, the three

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keywords can be said to come under the umbrella of the Arabic word \( \text{nazm} \), which, along with its derivatives, is inclusive of them, as a few quick examples from Ibn Manzūr’s *Lisan al-‘Arab* will show: *nazamtu l-lu’lUna: jamā’tuḥū fī l-silki*, “I strung [literally, collected] the pearls on a string”; *tanāzamat tu l-ṣukhrū: talāsāqat*, “the boulders cling to, or lie next to, or are contiguous to, each other”); *al-naẓimu mina l-rukiyyi: mā tanāsāqa fiquruhū [or fiqaruhū, according to al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt]* ‘ālā nasaquin wāḥidīn,” “the word *naẓim* is used for a set of wells that have a uniform layout or have been well arranged,” that is, wells that have been dug methodically or according to a plan. Taken together, these examples clearly denote continuity and coherence. But the idea of context can also be derived from them, since context presupposes continuity and is itself presupposed in coherence. I will, therefore, use *nazm* as the mother term for the three keywords, referring sometimes to one, and sometimes to more than one, of them.

We are now ready to inquire how the idea of *nazm*—in the senses of continuity, context, and coherence—is found in *tafiir* literature. The review, a selective one, covers the works of the following authors.


The last two authors will be discussed together.

A prefatory remark about one of the key terms in the title is in order. I think it goes without saying that none of the authors on our list—and none on any other possible list—would deny, at least

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1 Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Fayruzābādī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 1048: *n-ẓ-m.*
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Theoretically, the existence or significance of nazm-as-context in the Qur'ān. As such, evidence is hardly needed to prove that, in one way or another, all our authors would invoke context to interpret, or accord preference to a certain interpretation of, this or that Qur'anic verse. I will have more to say about context later on. For now, I will focus on continuity and coherence.

Ṭabari

Ṭabari's Jami‘ al-Bayān fi Taḥṣīr al-Qur‘ān typifies the so-called tradition-based exegesis (taḥṣīr bi ‘l-maqbūr). Following his standard exegetical procedure, Ṭabari introduces a Qur'anic verse with the phrase al-qawlu fi qawlihi tā‘alā, then offers his understanding of the meaning of the verse, and follows this up with a series of reports, or riwāyat, prefaced with the phrase, wa-bi-nahwī ‘l-adhi qulnā qalā ablu ‘l-tawīli; dbkr mān qalā dhālika. In his exegetical explanations, Ṭabari indicates his support or preference for one riwāya-based explanation of the verse over against another, but it is obvious that he is not interested in discovering nazm-as-continuity or nazm-as-coherence in the Qur'anic text. Occasionally, he seeks to link verses with one another, but, first, his motivation for doing so is not a concern to find any nazm-relationship between verses—for, if that were the case, he would be doing so routinely or more frequently—and, second, the link that he happens to establish between verses hardly has much substance. To take an example: Q 2:30–39 tells the story of God's installation of Adam as khalīfah on earth. The passage begins with the words wa-idh qalā rabbuka, “And when your Lord said.” Ṭabari says that, according to a certain Basran scholar, the particle idh, “when,” in this verse is redundant and, therefore, dispensable or omissible (anna idh mina ‘l-hurūf ‘l-sawā’idī wa-anā ma’nāhā ‘l-hadīfu. Ṭabari rejects this view, arguing that the particle idh in the verse does have a meaning—it indicates an unknown time: wa-yadullu ‘alā majhūlin mina ‘l-waqtī. But then Ṭabari faces a problem: granted that the idh is not without meaning, why has it been used in this particular verse, since there is nothing in the preceding verses to which it may be joined by conjunction?

2 He is Abu ‘Ubayda Ma‘mar ibn al-Muthanna (728–825).
Tabari answers that, in a preceding verse (28), in which God reminds the Israelites of his blessings upon them—*kayfa takfuruna bi 'Ilâhi wa-kuntum annutun fa-âhyâkin thumma yumitukum thumma yuhyikum thumma ilayhi turja'una*—the meaning of *udhkurü* is embedded, and that the same meaning is indicated by the particle *idh* in *idha qala rabbuka* in verse 30, so that the meaning of *udhkurü*, directly or indirectly present in both verses, 28 and 30, links the two verses, God thus saying: *Remember my blessings upon you and remember when I said to the angels, “I am going to install a caliph on earth.”* It is not difficult to see that this linkage between the two verses (28 and 30) is a purely grammatical one and has nothing to do with the actual content of the verses involved.

**Râzî**

Râzî is probably the first major *mufassir* to make a relatively systematic attempt to find *naẓm* in the Qur'ân. He declares that most of the subtleties of the Qur'ân are lodged in the links and relationships between the Qur'anic verses: *aktharu latâfî izza-Qurâni mfidaatun 'l-tartibati wa-U-rawabiti.* In his *tafsîr*, known as *Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (or *Mafâtîh al-Ghayb*), Râzî frequently investigates the relationships between the Qur'anic verses as they follow one another, introducing his discussion of such relationships with several more or less fixed phrases, which, in variant forms, include terms like *ittisâl, ta'alluq,* and *naẓm.* For example:

- *išam anna 'ittisâla hâdhîhi 'l-ayati bi-mâ qablâhâ fi kayfiyyat ta'alluqi hâdhîhi 'l-ayati bi-mâ qablâhâ*

or

- *išam anna hâdhâ muta'alliqun bi-mâ taqaddama*

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7 Ibid., 2:18, at Q 2:2; 9:34, at Q 3:152.
At times Razi seems to be searching for patterns of thought or arrangement in the Qur'anic presentation. Thus, some verses may serve as a *muqaddimah* to the verses that follow; it is the Qur'an's practice to follow up *wa'id* ("threat") with *wa'd* ("promise"); and after adducing arguments in support of a certain claim it has made, the Qur'an quotes and then replies to objections raised against its claim. In general, Razi tries to see the verses or passages of a *sūrah* as connected from the *sūrah*’s beginning to its end. At times, he states his belief in the unity of a *sūrah* quite emphatically. In his commentary on Q 41:44 (*wa-law ja'alnahu Qur'ānan a'jamiyyan la-qalū law là fuṣsilat āyātuhu a-a'jamiyyun wa-a'rabiyyun . . .*), he rejects the view that this verse was revealed in response to the objection made by some, namely, Why was the Qur'an not revealed in a language other than Arabic (*law là nuzzila al-Qur'ānu bi-lughti al-Ajami*). To cite such a *sabab al-nuzūd* for this verse is, Razi says, to commit a great wrong against the Qur'an (*lajfun azimun al-Qur'āni*), for it implies that the Qur'an contains irrelevant verses, and if this indeed were the case, then how could one claim the Qur'an to be a well-ordered book (*kitāban muntazaman*), not to speak of claiming inimitability for it (*fadlan `an idḍi; dālawnīhi mujizan*?). He then remarks that this verse, like the other verses in the *sūrah*, are tied to verse 5 of the *sūrah*. Razi concludes by saying:

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11 For example, Q 3:137–138, which are a *muqaddimah* to Q 3:139. Ibid., 9:13, at Q 3:137–138.
12 For example, ibid., 2:122, at Q 2:25.
Anyone who considers the matter with fairness, shunning arbitrariness, will realize that, if we interpret this verse the way we have, the whole surah will become, from beginning to end, a single, well-ordered discourse, moving toward a single goal, and so this interpretation is preferable to the one they have presented.

Razi's own words are as follows:

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\text{Wa-kullu man ansafa wa-lam yata'}\text{assaf} \text{alima anna idhā fassarnā hādhīhi 'l-ayata 'alā 'l-wajhi 'lladhi dhakarnā šārat hādhīhi 'l-sūratu min awwalihihā ilā ākhirihihā kalāman wāḥidan muntažaman masūqān nāhwa gharādin wāḥidin fa-yakūnu hādhā 'l-tafsiru awla mimmā dhakarūhū.}
\]

Time and again, Razi exclaims how apt or beautiful such and such an arrangement of Qur'anic verses in a given place is; for example:

\[
\text{wa-man ansafa 'alima anna hādhā tartībun } \text{hasaman fi 'l-kalāmi}.
\]

Razi's approach to naẓm in the Qur'ān calls for a few observations. First, Razi views Qur'anic naẓm essentially in terms of linear connection: his goal is to show that the verses of a surah are marked by continuity. He links up the individual verses or passages of a surah as he goes through the surah, although sometimes, as we saw in the case of surah 41, he explains the connectedness of a surah with reference to a principal idea in the surah. Second, on occasion, but not as a rule, Razi invokes Qur'anic naẓm as a determinant of interpretation, as we saw in his commentary on Q 41:44. In Q 2:213 (kāna 'l-nāsu ummatan wāḥidatana fa-bāṭa'ha 'llāhu 'l-nabīyyina mubashshirin wa-mundhirina . . .), he interprets the word al-nās to mean, specifically, those who had believed in Moses, the definite article in al-nās being for 'ahd, or prior knowledge, not for istighraq, or thoroughgoing inclusion. Razi caps off his interpretation by saying: “And this view agrees with the verse’s naẓm and accords with what precedes the verse and what follows it” (wa-hādhā 'l-qawlu muṭābiqun li-naẓmi

\[\text{\textsuperscript{15}}\text{Razi, 27:133, at Q 41:44.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{16}}\text{Ibid., 27:134, at Q 41:44.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{17}}\text{Ibid., 9:61, at Q 3:159.}\]
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Also, as in the case of Q 41:44, so in some other cases, Razi rejects a verse’s alleged sabab al-nuzul if, in his view, it is in conflict with a nazm-based interpretation of that verse. Third, it would be correct to say that the focus of Razi’s nazm-based approach to the Qur’an is the verses of a surah, although in some cases he tries to establish nazm-relationships between surahs as well, by linking up the closing verses of one surah and the opening verses of the next.

Biqā‘ī

Qur’anic nazm constitutes a leitmotif in Biqā‘ī’s Qur’anic commentary *Naṣm al-Durar fī Tānāsūb al-Ayātī wa-l-Suwar.* Biqā‘ī aims to bring out the relationships informing the sequence of the verses in the Qur’anic surahs as well as of the suras in the received arrangement of the Qur’an (munāṣabāt tariq al-suwar wa-l-ayāt). He quotes his shaykh, Abū-l-Faḍl ibn Abdallāh, who laid down “the fundamental principle for understanding the munāṣabāt of the Qur’anic verses.” The principle, as explained by the shaykh, consists in taking the following into consideration: first, the purpose for which a surah has been revealed (al-gharadu ’l-ladhi siqat lahī ’l-suratu); second, the propaedeutics called for by that purpose yahtaju ilayhi dhalika 7-gharadu mina ’l-muqaddimati), and the varying levels of those propaedeutics in so far as they stand in proximity to or at a remove from the purpose in question (fi marātibi tilka ’l-muqaddimati fī ’l-qurbi wa-l-budi mina ’l-matlubi); and, third, with discussion of the propaedeutics under way, what that purpose calls for next in terms of the need for the listener to consider the rules and corollaries that follow logically and are necessitated by balāghah (mā yahtatu ilayhi dbaliqa ’l-gharaḍu mina ’l-muqaddimati), and the varying levels of those propaedeutics in so far as they stand in proximity to or at a remove from the purpose in question (fi marātibi tilka ’l-muqaddimati fī ’l-qurbi wa-l-budi mina ’l-matlubi). Abū ’l-Faḍl, concludes: “This, then, is the general principle that controls the process of establishing connections between all parts of the Qur’ān (al-amru ’l-kulliyu ’l-muhayminu ala ’l-hukmi ’l-rahbi bayna jamī’i ajzā‘i ’l-Qurānī), and when you put it into practice, you will, God
willing, clearly see the nature of \textit{nazm} in detail—between one verse and another and between one \textit{sūrah} and another.\textsuperscript{21}

In commenting on the opening \textit{sūrah} of the Qur’ān, \textit{al-Fātiḥah}, Biqā’ī says that the \textit{gharaḍ} of the \textit{sūrah} is to affirm that praise of all kinds is due to God, who ought to be qualified with all the attributes of perfection (\textit{ithbātu istīghaqī ʿllāhi taʿāla li-jamiʿi ʿl-mahāmid wa-sifāti ʿl-kamāli}), that He alone is the owner and possessor of this world and the next (\textit{ikhtiyāsīhi bi-milki ʿl-dunyā wa-ʿl-akhirātī}), and that He alone is worthy of being worshiped and petitioned for help (\textit{wa-bi ʿstīghaqī ʿl-ibādati wa-ʿl-istīʿānātī}), being the only one worthy of being petitioned for the favor of guiding people to the path of those who will succeed and of rescuing them from the path of those who will suffer perdition (\textit{bi-ʿl-suʿāli fi-ʿl-mannī bi-izāmī širāti ʿl-fāizīnā wa-ʿl-inqādhi min ṭariqī ʿl-hālikīnā mukhaṭṣāṣan bi-dhālīka kullīhi}). All of this hinges on, says Biqā’ī, on people worshiping, out of fear and awe, God alone (\textit{wa-maddru dhalika kullīhi muraqabatū ʿyābādati li-rabbihim bi-ṣībadati}), and this is, according to Biqā’ī, what the \textit{sūrah} aims to bring into relief.\textsuperscript{22}

Biqā’ī’s theoretical statement about determining the \textit{nazm} of a \textit{sūrah} through identification of the \textit{sūrah’s gharad} raises hopes that are only marginally fulfilled in his \textit{tafsīr}. As can be seen from his comments on \textit{Fātiḥah}, his statement of the \textit{sūrah’s gharad} lacks specificity, amounting as it does to a summary or paraphrase of the entire \textit{sūrah}. After discussing the \textit{sūrah’s gharad}, Biqā’ī explains the \textit{sūrah’s} verses by breaking each verse down into shorter pieces—words and phrases—and then tries to point out the connections between these pieces. A certain adhocism informs his approach, however: instead of taking a synoptic view of the \textit{sūrah’s} verses and linking them up in light of the \textit{sūrah’s} \textit{gharaḍ}, Biqā’ī connects any two verse segments as if in isolation from the rest of the \textit{sūrah’s} verses.

Similarly, Biqā’ī’s attempt to discover \textit{nazm} in the sequence of the \textit{sūrah}s yields mixed results. He says, rightly, that the opening \textit{sūrah}, \textit{Fātiḥah}, is connected with the following \textit{sūrah}, \textit{Baqarāh}, through the notion of \textit{huda}, “guidance”: in \textit{Fātiḥah}, one prays for guidance—

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 1:11.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 1:12.
ihdînâ ‘l-śirāt ‘l-mustaqîma—(Q 1:6), and Baqarah opens with the statement that the Qur’ān is a guidance for the righteous—hudan li ‘l-muttaqîna (Q 2:2). But this is a verbal, not a substantive, connection. One of the strangest ways in which Biqā‘i establishes nazm connections is by reference to the linguistic properties of the Arabic alphabetical characters. His view of the relationship between sûrah 19, Maryam and 20, Ţahâ, is an example. According to him, the last part of sûrah 19 suggests the possibility that Muḥammad may not come to have a large enough following, but sûrah 20 says that the exact opposite will happen, as is borne out, says Biqā‘i, by the wide span between the points of articulation of the two broken letters opening the sûrah—the head of the tongue (ra‘s al-lisān) in the case of the first letter, ta‘, and the deepest part of the throat (aqsâ‘l-ha‘lq) in the case of the second letter, ha.’

Biqā‘i claims to have broken new ground in the field of Qur’anic munāsabât or nazm: he has written a tafsîr, he says, “in an area in which I have not seen anyone having preceded me” (fi fannin ma ra‘aytu man sabaqani tlayhi). This claim is a little surprising since he quotes Zarkashi’s treatment of the issue of nazm, which includes a clear reference to Râzî as one who has dealt with Qur’anic nazm extensively.

Farâhî and Islâhî
Hamîd al-Dîn al-Farahî was an Indian Muslim scholar of the Qur’ān. An author of many books in Arabic, his principal contribution to Qur’anic studies consists in his theory of Qur’anic nazm. Farâhî enunciated a series of principles concerning Qur’anic nazm and wrote a commentary on a number of Qur’anic sûrah. His student, Amin Ahsan Islahî, who later moved to Pakistan, also made the Qur’ān the focus of his work. He developed Farâhî’s exegetical principles and applied them to the entire Qur’ān, producing a nine-volume Qur’anic commentary, Tadabbur-i Qur’ān, in Urdu.

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23 Ibid., 5:3, at Q 20:1.
24 Ibid., 1:3.
25 Ibid., 1:5-6.
Farahi is the first Qur’anic exegete to have offered a detailed theoretical argument in support of the view that the Qur’an is marked by thematic and structural nazm. He quotes Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (1445–1505) to the effect that very few exegetes have dealt with this subject because of its subtle, and, therefore, challenging nature. Farahi offers his own interpretation of the exegetes’ general indifference to nazm in the Qur’an. He says that the exegetes did recognize the existence of nazm in some parts of the Qur’an but, failing to discover nazm in all of the Qur’an, and reluctant, therefore, to declare that the Qur’an possesses nazm in some parts but not in others, and, thus, wishing to hold a consistent view about the Qur’an, thought it expedient to deny the existence of nazm in the Qur’an altogether. Farahi also sees significance in the fact that the compilatory order of the Qur’an is different from its revelatory order: Muḥammad used to arrange the Qur’anic verses and chapters in an order very different from that in which they were revealed to him, and this new order, as the reports indicate, was governed by considerations of nazm. After all, asks Farahi, if we were to assume that the Qur’an is devoid of nazm, then the Qur’anic stricture against poets (Q 26:225), namely, a-lam tara annahum fi kulli wādin yahimīna, “Have you not seen that they roam about in every valley,” would apply to the Qur’an, too, for this roaming about—hayaman—is obviously so called by the Qur’an because it lacks direction, purpose, or plan (hali l-hayānu fi kulli wādin illa l-jarayānu fi l-qawāli min ghayri maqṣidin wa-nizāmin).

Farahi then discusses the notion of nazm within a sūrah and nazm between sūrahs. Key to finding nazm within a sūrah is the concept of ‘amūd, or central idea. Every sūrah of the Qur’an revolves around an ‘amūd, and all the verses of a sūrah are organically linked to it, representing, in light of that ‘amūd, a systematic unfolding of the contents of that sūrah from its beginning to its end. Farahi’s Taṣfīr Nizām al-Qur’ān contains an exegesis of fourteen relatively short...
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According to Farahi, the surah’s ‘amūd is affirmation of the meting out of recompense in the hereafter (ithbat al-jaza), the ‘amūd of the preceding surah, 50 (Qaf), being affirmation of resurrection (ithbat al-bath). 3 This ‘amūd is developed in the seven sections into which Farahi divides the surah’s verses, namely: verses 1–14, 15–19, 20–23, 24–37, 38–46, 47–51, and 52–60. The first section draws attention to the fact that such phenomena of nature as winds and rains are at times beneficial and at times harmful. As such, they point to, and may be called analogues of, reward and punishment in the afterlife, the first section referring to punishment, with the next section speaking of reward, in the hereafter. The third section supports the reward-and-punishment thesis by citing, as evidence, natural phenomena and human life. The sixth section connects the important theme of the hereafter with two other fundamental themes in the Qur’an, namely, monotheism and prophecy. The concluding section offers solace to the Prophet, telling him that his opponents will suffer the consequences of their disbelief. As can be seen, the surah’s ‘amūd, as stated by Farahi, knits the whole surah into a unity, and is itself developed quite logically, addressing, in the last section, the actual situation obtaining in Mecca in which the surah was revealed. 3

As mentioned above, Islahi applies, with additions and modifications, Farahi’s methodology to the whole of the Qur’an, producing a complete Qur’anic tafsir. He identifies the ‘amūd of each surah, usually in quite precise terms. In addition, he establishes, within the received version of the Qur’an, what he calls surah-pairs. He maintains that, as a rule, the surahs exist in pairs, surahs 2 and 3, 4 and 5, 6 and 7, and 8 and 9, for example, each forming a pair whose member surahs have complementary ‘amūds. Furthermore—and, again, within the received sequence of the Qur’anic surahs—the 114

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Farahi, Tafsir Niẓām al-Qur’an, 119.
surahs of the Qur'an exist as seven groups (as opposed to Farahi's nine groups), each group comprising one or more Meccan and Medinan surahs, with each type forming a solid bloc—the Meccan preceding the Medinan—and each surah in a group possessing an 'amūd that deals with one aspect of the group's master 'amūd. The key notion in Islahi's scheme, as in Farahi's, is that of the 'amūd of a surah, and, in another study, I hope to demonstrate, with reference to the longest surah of the Qur'an, Baqrarah, how Islahi presents, in light of that surah's mud, a strong case for organic unity in the Qur'anic surahs.

While the subject of Qur'anic nazm needs to be discussed in much greater details before it will yield more definitive results, it is not difficult to see that, within the compass of this paper and on the basis of prima facie evidence, the Farahi-Islahi view of Qur'anic nazm is more rigorous and systematic than any other author's view of Qur'anic nazm.

Conclusions

1. In this paper, I have confined my discussion of Qur'anic nazm to works of tafsīr, but treatments of nazm in the Qur'an are found in extra-exegetical works as well. A number of writers on balagah, such as Abū Sulaymān Hamd ibn Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī (319–388/931–998), Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Tayyib al-Baqillānī (338–403/950–1013), and Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Qāhir ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078), have also dealt with the subject, but their understanding of nazm in the Qur'an usually does not go beyond the notion of ideal relationship between words and meanings.

2. Historically, there has been a difference of opinion on the issue of the presence of nazm in the Qur'an. According to the majority view, reported by Zarkashi, nazm is not part of the "design" of the Qur'an, since the Qur'an, revealed in installments over a period of twenty odd years, and its verses

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\[1\] For details, see ibid.
\[2\] Ibid., 11–16.
\[3\] Zarkashi, 1:37.
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occasioned by a variety of factors and dealing with a variety of injunctions, could not be expected to possess *naẓm* in any significant degree (1:37). According to the minority view, the Qur’ān is possessed of *naẓm*, significant in a limited sense. Our review of the *tafāsir* of selected writers has shown that those who believe that the Qur’ān possesses *naẓm* have understood Qur’anic *naẓm* to have taken one or more of the following forms: *naẓm* as continuity, *naẓm* as context, and *naẓm* as coherence.

3. If we divide *tafāsir* works into two categories, traditional and modern, defining, roughly, traditional works as those produced from early Islamic times to the end of the nineteenth century and modern works as those that have come into existence since the beginning of the twentieth century, we will clearly see that the idea of Qur’ānic *naẓm* has a notable presence in a few of the traditional works, but does not necessarily register a steady linear progress in the overall history of Qur’ānic exegesis. We will also notice that the notion of *ṣūrah* as a unity becomes increasingly important in the twentieth century, until it becomes a distinctive feature of modern Qur’ānic exegesis. Not only has the idea of Qur’ānic *naẓm* made notable gains in twentieth-century Qur’ānic exegetical thought, it is likely to become a fundamental premise for study of the Qur’ān in the future. A number of Qur’ānic exegetes and scholars in various parts of the Muslim world have approached the Qur’ān with this premise of *naẓm* in mind. A few names are ‘Izzat Darwazah, author of *Al-Tafīr al-Hadith*, Sayyid Qutb, author of *Fi Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, Ashrāf ‘Alī Thānāvī, author of *Bayān al-Qur’ān*, Abū Ḥātim Mawdūdī, author of *Tafhim al-Qur’ān*, and Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabātabā’ī, author of *Al-Mīzān fi Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān*. What we have called above the minority view is likely eventually to become the majority view, making modern *tafṣīr* different

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Ibid., 1:36.

from traditional taṣīr in a fundamental respect. Whether this shift in Qur’anic exegetical thought will grow to become, or will contribute along with other changes to the creation of, a sort of paradigm shift in Qur’anic exegesis will depend on how the idea is developed, and with what results. We saw that Rāzī rejects a certain sabab al-nuzūl on the grounds that it undermines Qur’anic naẓm, and it would not be wrong to say that there is a certain lack of affinity between Qur’anic naẓm and sabab al-nuzūl. Already in modern taṣīr, there is much less reliance on sabab al-nuzūl as a determinant of exegesis, and this trend is likely to grow in the future.

4. The interest taken by modern exegetes in Qur’anic naẓm can be termed part of a general interest taken by Muslim scholars today in coming to terms with the Qur’an afresh. This general interest is largely due to the particular sociocultural setting of the Muslim world in modern times. After centuries of stagnation and decadence, on the one hand, and the long, and still continuing, struggle both against the neocolonial domination of Muslim lands and against the self-doubting, obsequious Muslim mindset engendered under colonialism, on the other hand, the Muslims are going through a period of soul-searching under the twin impact of Western thought and culture and Muslim reformist thought. A significant feature of this soul-searching is scrutiny and evaluation of the traditional intellectual and spiritual heritage of Muslims, and, in this project of critical assessment, the Qur’an, the one constant and irreducible source of knowledge and inspiration for Muslims, is playing an increasingly important role as judge and arbiter of meaning. Conscious that the traditional ways of interpreting the Qur’an come laden with historical baggage of various kinds, many modern Muslim scholars in modern times attach diminished importance to several traditionally important exegetical sources and have chosen to focus on the Qur’anic text itself, studying it with a view to finding answers and solutions to questions and issues of today. In doing so, they tend to accord primacy to the Qur’anic text itself over the traditional repertoire of sources and devices for understanding that text. Viewed against this
changed backdrop, a *naẓm*-based approach to the Qur’ān, with its prospects of a more meaningful interpretation of the Qur’ān, would seem to carry great appeal for Muslim exegetes.