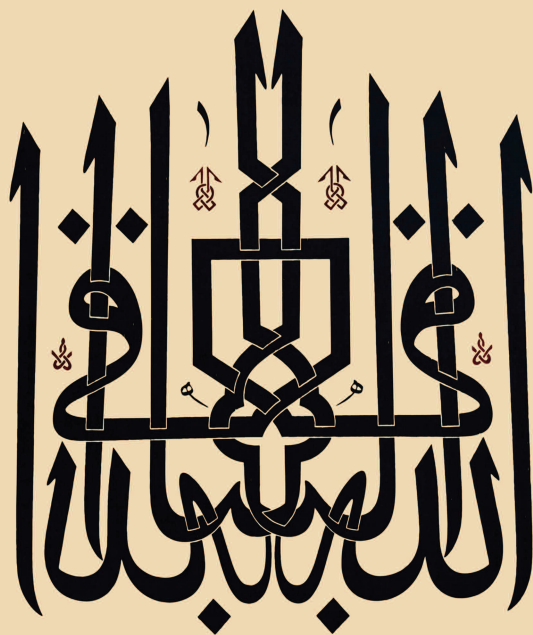


BASSAM SAEH



The

MIRACULOUS LANGUAGE

of the Qur'an

EVIDENCE OF DIVINE ORIGIN

THE MIRACULOUS
LANGUAGE *of the*
QUR'AN

Evidence of Divine Origin

BASSAM SAEH



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT
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FOREWORD

MUSLIMS ARE ENJOINED, along with the rest of humanity, to “read” and contemplate the message of the Qur’an and reflect on its origins as divine Revelation. In this fascinating study the author has endeavored to elucidate the many linguistically miraculous aspects of the sacred text, and why its beauty and perfection were utterly new and wondrous to the ears of 7th century Arabia, speechless with admiration on hearing its verses recited for the first time by the Prophet Muhammad (ṢAAS). * As masters of Arabic and so in a sense trained to hear and appreciate the Qur’an, their impression speaks volumes.

Yes, the Revelation is beautiful, in and of itself. But the Qur’an of course is so much more than this. Without exaggeration, the genius of its language, elegance, rhythm, rich imagery, fluidity, its weaving of metaphors and concepts, its many varied and previously unheard of styles and techniques of prose, as well as remarkable use of vocabulary, make it a work of eternal perfection. It immediately and powerfully impacted human intellect and behavior, spectacularly transforming the Arabic language, and bringing to the conscious of man a majestic vision, directing his attention to the highest things. It is some of these features that this work attempts to evoke and explain. The author has evidently given great thought to his subject matter, and his contribution focuses in essence on the question of what exactly makes the Qur’an linguistically miraculous?

This work is the English translation of the original Arabic abridged edition of the book entitled *Al-Mu‘jizah*, volume I, (IIIT, 2012). It is addressed to lay readers, so competence in Arabic is not essential to understand issues of morphology and other language technicalities

* (ṢAAS) – *Ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*: May the peace and blessings of God be upon him. Said whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammed is mentioned.

Foreword

discussed, although ability to read Arabic would be beneficial, if not required. In attempting to unlock the secrets of its language and composition, Bassam Saeh guides readers to appreciate the beauty of the Qur'an, to become more immersed in it, and have a clearer understanding of its structure and flow. Devoting special attention to *Sūrah al-Muddaththir* (chapter 74) to underpin his analysis, he thus brings the Revelation to life, to demonstrate that each surah has distinct features and characteristics that make it stand out uniquely within the design and sweep of the whole.

No exposition is by itself sufficient for a full understanding of the Qur'an. But this work is an indispensable companion in the quest for a better comprehension of, and a closer affinity with, the sacred text. The translation used is mainly, *The Message of the Qur'an* by Muhammad Asad, with also *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Dates cited according to the Islamic calendar (hijrah) are labelled AH. Otherwise they follow the Gregorian calendar and labelled CE where necessary. Arabic words are italicized except for those which have entered common usage. Diacritical marks have been added only to those Arabic names not considered contemporary.

The IIIT, established in 1981, has served as a major center to facilitate serious scholarly efforts based on Islamic vision, values and principles. The Institute's programs of research, seminars and conferences during the last thirty years have resulted in the publication of more than four hundred and fifty titles in both English, Arabic and other major languages.

We express our thanks and gratitude to the author, Bassam Saeh, for his cooperation throughout the various stages of production. We are also grateful to the translator, Nancy Roberts, and the editorial and production team at the IIIT London Office and all those who were directly or indirectly involved in the completion of this publication.

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May 2015



Of knowledge we have none, save what
You have taught us. (The Qur'an 2:32)

Preface

The Qur'an's Infallibility

The fact that the Qur'an is a literary masterpiece is beyond debate. The fact that it is a unique and matchless perfection of language, style, eloquence, and power, which the 7th century peoples of the Arabian peninsula had never encountered before, and have not encountered since, is also a matter beyond dispute. What is debated however is whether it is miraculous or not. In other words whether it is of this dimension or that of a divine other. Evidence of that divine authority is surfacing on multi-faceted and ever increasing levels of knowledge as humanity evolves and continues its centuries long assessment of the scripture. But for the purposes of this study, it is a particular element of the Qur'an's words, hitherto not fully grasped, which is brought to our attention attesting to the fact that it is a linguistic miracle of divine origin.

Differentiating Qur'anic language from human genius is another way of clearly stating that the Prophet was simply a channel to deliver God's final message, and that not even the most gifted minds, or those exceptionally talented in the arts of literature, oratory, and/or poetry, could produce a single chapter "like unto it" (10:38). This confident Qur'anic assertion to prove its statement false is note not only a wholly intellectual appeal and an open challenge to critics, drawing attention

incidentally to the importance of deductive logic centuries ahead of its time, but also fantastic by the sheer simplicity with which it presents this greatest of challenges.

What has been the response? Two important facts with regards to the Qur'anic challenge have stood the test of time and remain a thorny problem for those who acknowledge its linguistic authority but cannot resolve its divine origins. These are integral to any debate but often conveniently overlooked by critics:

1. Not a single mistake, of any type, has been found in its over six thousand verses (not for lack of trying).
2. Despite many historical attempts at emulation, some in outright mockery of the Prophet, and others genuine by leading authorities in Arabic (keeping in mind the Prophet's era witnessed the finest exponents of the Arabic language the world has ever seen), to this day the whole exercise has been little more than utterly futile and embarrassing.

And we are not simply referring to language at this point because whether for the first time or after countless readings one would be hard put to define any one factor that makes the Qur'an utterly unique. One of the qualifications of the Qur'an's uniqueness is inimitability, and for the purposes of this study it is the inimitability of the Qur'an's language, marking one significant aspect of its divine authorship, and hence inherent miraculousness, which is analyzed – with the express understanding of course that language is being studied to gain a deeper appreciation of the Qur'an's core message. In essence the ideas, perspectives, and world the Qur'an plunges man into, and the heightened sense of moral virtue and sincere faith – the filters of self-appraisal through which it asks man to assess his actions and very motives by – are powerfully significant in terms of the alertness with which we are to understand our reality and place in the cosmos as well as the final Judgment which is to come once the illusion of this life and all physical existence passes away.

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Throughout history, Muslim scholars have expounded on the aesthetic elements of the Qur'an's miraculous language as well as other literary factors, content, and astounding scientific verses. However, according to the author no one has tried to elucidate on what he terms a secret aspect of its language, something which due to familiarity with the Revelation we have given little thought to with the passage of time. And that secret is simply this: granted the Qur'an was revealed in the Arabic language, yet, at the same time it was an Arabic which was *new*, stunning the Arabs who first heard it. How it was new is the subject of this work.

Original and early Muslim audiences therefore responded to the Qur'an's words, sounds, rhythms etc. in a manner consistent with a deeper appreciation of its beauty and majesty. Something which our modern ears, soothed by familiarity, and despite being surrounded by all manner of dictionaries and studies, are often at a loss to capture. The author attempts to remove this veil somewhat and introduce readers to the Qur'an anew, with fresh eyes bringing to life something of this wonder.

Although the miraculous language of the Qur'an has been unquestionably accepted by Muslims, nevertheless a systematic study proving this belief through a methodical study of its language has to the best of the author's knowledge not yet been undertaken. Thus, he attempts to prove scientifically, and through comparison between the Qur'anic language on the one hand, and the language of pre-Islamic poetry, the Prophet's words (Hadith), and the language of the Arabs both past and present, on the other, that an important strand of the Qur'an's linguistic miraculousness is the fact that this Arabic was completely new.

The study attempts to empirically prove that the Arabs never knew this language before the Qur'an, and never could replicate it afterwards, while the language of the Prophet, despite its eloquence, was grasped and imitated, simply because it was first and foremost the language of a human being – one unfortunate outcome of this being the huge intermingling of genuine and forged Hadith. This has never

PREFACE

happened to the Qur'an and will never happen to it, yet another testimony of the Qur'an being the word of God.

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

Lo! We, even We, reveal the Reminder, and lo!
We verily are its Guardian. (15:9)

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The Miraculous Language of the Qur'an

Evidence of Divine Origin

INTRODUCTION

IT ALL BEGAN IN 1989 when the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies asked me to present a number of lectures to British students seeking a better understanding of the Arabic language through the Holy Qur'an. After trying to translate the meanings of the Qur'an into English for my students, I found myself drawn by their challenging questions beyond the boundaries of the linguistic traditions and conventions familiar to interpreters and linguists.

At the time I just happened to be editing a book written in the Andalusian period with a British Orientalist and friend at Oxford University's The Oriental Institute. One day my friend asked me, "Which is correct in Arabic: *mā zāla* (ما زال) or *lā zāla* (لا زال)?" Without giving it much thought, I replied, "*Mā zāla*." After some discussion, however, he insisted that *lā zāla* was correct, while I insisted on *mā zāla*. In the end he surprised me by saying, "Well, then, either you're mistaken, or God is! After all, the Qur'an only uses *lā zāla*!"

For a moment I was speechless. Then I gathered my wits and asked him in turn, "So how would you translate the verb *kāna* (كان) into English?" "Was," he replied without hesitation. "If that's the case," I continued, "then how would you translate the following phrase from the Qur'an: *wa kāna Allāhu ghafūran raḥīmā* وكان الله غفوراً رحيماً?" "And God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." He replied as confidently as before. "Where is the verb *kāna* in this translation?" I

wanted to know. But he couldn't answer me, since the only verb one can use to translate this statement is "is," which would be equivalent to *yakūnu* (يكون) or *inna* (إن) in Arabic, but not the past tense verbal form *kāna* (كان) .

The Qur'an has unique language and linguistic uses that differ from our human uses of language, both formal and informal. No one, even the Prophet Muhammad himself, has ever used the past tense verb *kāna* in the sense of "is." However, this very usage occurs 190 times in the Qur'an. When I went back to the Qur'an to verify what my Orientalist friend had said about *mā zāla*, I was surprised to find that what he had said was not accurate, and that the Qur'an uses the negative particle *mā* (ما) only with the past tense, that is, *mā zāla* (ما زال) and the negative particle *lā* (لا) only with the present tense, as in the phrase *lā yazālu* (لا يزال). Hence, we find neither *lā zāla* (لا زال) nor *mā yazālu* (ما يزال) anywhere in the Qur'an. However, the greatest surprise I encountered was the ways in which Qur'anic uses of the verb, in both its past (*zāla* - زال) and present (*yazālu* - يزال) forms, differ from our human uses of it. When we say, *mā zāla al-maṭaru yaḥṭulu*, which means literally, "the rain has not ceased to fall," the listener understands this statement to mean that it was raining earlier and that it is still raining now. The use of the expression *mā zāla* thus conveys a meaning that spans the past and the present, but not the future. This is the commonly accepted human usage of this verb. However, the past tense phrase *mā zāla* in the only two Qur'anic verses in which it occurs includes the past only. In other words, it conveys the sense of something continuing in the past, but without its having continued into the present. The verses are as follows:

فما زالت تلك دعواهم حتى جعلناهم حصيداً خامدين (الأنبياء: ١٥)

And that cry of theirs did not cease (*mā zālat tilka da' wāhum*) until We caused them to become [like] a field mown down, still and silent as ashes. (*Sūrah al-Anbiyā'* 21:15)

ولقد جاءكم يوسفُ من قبلُ بالبيناتِ فما زلتم في شكٍّ ممَّا جاءكم به حتَّى إذا هلكَ قلْتُم لن
يبعثَ اللهُ من بعده رسولاَ (غافر: ٢٤)

...it was to you that Joseph came aforetime with all evidence of the truth;
but you never ceased to throw doubt on all [the messages] that he brought
you (*mā ziltum fī shakkin mimmā jā'akum bihi*)—so much so that when he
died, you said, “Never will God send any apostle [even] after him!” (*Sūrah*
Ghāfir 40:34)

The first of these two verses means that the people continued to cry out until they were destroyed, all of which took place in the past, while the second means that the people of Joseph's time clung to their doubts concerning his message until he died. This, too, took place entirely in the past. In both these cases, the action concerned began and ended in the past, and did not extend into the realm of the present.

As for the Qur'anic use of the present-tense phrase *lā yazālu*, it includes the past, the present, and the future. Whatever action is being referred to was done in the past, is still being done in the present, and will continue to be done in the future. This semantic phenomenon is observable in the following three verses:

ولا يزالون يقاتلونكم حتَّى يردَّوكم عن دينكم (البقرة: ٢١٧)

[Your enemies] will not cease to fight against you (*lā yazālūna yuqātilūnakum*) till they have turned you away from the faith, if they can.
(*Sūrah al-Baqarah* 2:217)

لا يزالُ بُنيانُهُم الذي بنوا ريبةً في قلوبِهِم إلَّا أَنْ تَقَطَّعَ قلوبُهُم (التوبة: ١١٠)

The building which they have built will never cease to be (*lā yazālu bunyānuhum alladhī banaw*) a source of disquiet in their hearts until their hearts crumble to pieces. (*Sūrah al-Tawbah* 9:110)

ولو شاء ربك لجعل الناس أمة واحدة ولا يزالون مختلفين. إلا من رحم ربك
(هود: ١١٨-١١٩)

And had thy Sustainer so willed, He could surely have made all mankind one single community: but [He willed it otherwise, and so] they continue to hold divergent views (*wa lā yazālūna mukhtalifīn*)—[all of them], save those upon whom they Sustainer has bestowed His grace. (*Sūrah Hūd* 11:118-119)

The intellectual encounters with the Other taking place in the modern Western world are what first sparked my decision to reexamine my usual reading of the Qur'an. This reading of mine had been numbed by the perilous effect of familiarity and daily repetition, which blind us to much of what was experienced and understood by the Arabs of the Prophet's day when they received the first verses that had begun descending in succession on the Messenger of God. These early recipients of the Qur'an were shocked and bewildered by its newness, since in it they found a style that departed from everything they were familiar with. This shock and bewilderment then turned into critical questions: What's happening around me? Whatever it was, it had to be too far-reaching and critical to be nothing but the distinctive style of an emerging writer, a poet on the rise, or a would-be prognosticator.

In Volume One of this book I attempt to introduce readers to these Qur'anic secrets as gently and deliberately as possible. In so doing, I highlight the changes the Qur'an introduced into the linguistic framework of the Arabic language, prefacing each new element with a detailed explanation of its nature and types. Textual support is taken from various surahs of the Qur'an, with special attention being devoted to *Sūrah al-Muddaththir*, one of the earliest surahs, and the ways in which it clashed with Arabic linguistic conventions. Most chapters in this section partly deal with the newly emerging linguistic, grammatical and rhetorical aspects of this surah.

In Volume Two, I apply the phenomena discussed in Volume One to each individual surah of the Qur'an. I begin with the shortest, most frequently recited surah, namely, *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* (1). I then deal with the last twenty surahs, beginning with *Sūrah al-Nās* (114), *Sūrah al-Falaq* (113), *Sūrah al-Iklāṣ* (112), and so on, moving back to *Sūrah al-Tīn* (95).

Despite the undoubtedly pioneering nature of the work we are embarking on, unrestrained by the longstanding tendency to obfuscate the true nature of the linguistic innovation that characterizes the Qur'an, the discerning researcher should never lose sight of the fact that no matter what objective forms or approaches it takes, any human interpretation or linguistic analysis of the Qur'an and any disclosure of its miraculousness, be it in the realm of rhetoric, language or science, is a process of weighing probabilities that necessarily remains subject to the possibilities of human error. Hence, everything we propose in this connection is no more than a sincere attempt to approach the absolute truth which, ultimately, we find ourselves incapable of reaching as long as we are dealing with the infinite, the divine, and the miraculous armed with nothing but our weak and limited capacities.

MIRACLE, OR MERE GENIUS?

All my life I have had a firm belief in the miraculousness of the language of the Qur'an. In the beginning I held this belief simply by virtue of being a Muslim even though, in actuality, I was unable to appreciate this miraculousness with my reason; I lacked the capacity to discern it clearly with the primitive means of research at my disposal. However, in the language of the Qur'an I saw captivating beauty, boundless expressiveness, eloquence, rhythm, magic and distinction. What I failed to realize was that these qualities are one thing, and that miraculousness is something else – something more profound, more unattainable, more subtle, and more beyond human reach. I had

always indulged in the hope that, once I had gained a proper grasp of Arabic rhetoric, I would be able to identify the miraculousness in the Qur'an that none of the books I had read had been able to demonstrate for me in a scientific, irrefutable manner.

The authors of such books had of course used the word "miraculousness" (*i'jāz*) in their titles. However, all these books had talked about was the Qur'an's eloquence, splendor, beauty, and precision of expression. All of these are features that we might find, to one degree or another, in works of literature produced in various languages and by various peoples of the world. One can easily think of numerous geniuses who have held the world spellbound with their literary, intellectual and artistic creations. But whatever description such creations might merit, none of them can rightly be described as miraculous. Why, then, do we insist on singling out the Qur'an alone for this description? And where is the miraculousness in the Qur'an if miraculousness is defined as that which surpasses human capacity? Taken all together, the various features of these noble creations might well border on the miraculous. However, even these would not be sufficient to demonstrate, in irrefutable scientific fashion, the miraculousness whose existence we hope to discover and demonstrate.

Later in my life, after graduating with a Bachelor's Degree in Arabic, I was faced with the same unanswered question. I then completed a Masters Degree, followed by a Ph.D. in Arabic Literature. Again, however, I still found myself unable to see the miraculous aspect of the language of the Qur'an despite the fact that, from my own perspective, at least, I had become literary researcher and critic well practiced in the arts of language and literature.

As I searched for the basis of my faith in the Qur'an's miraculousness, I was constantly faced by a methodological dilemma, namely, how to reconcile within myself the Muslim and the researcher. Or, more simply put, how was I to reconcile religious sentiment with its capacity for give and take and my inborn faith in the miraculous nature of the Qur'an and the truth of Islam and its scripture, with

airtight, abstract scientific analysis whose verdicts are unaffected by emotion, faith, individual interpretations or preconceptions? Where lie the nebulous, elusive boundaries between human genius on one hand, and on the other hand, divine miracle proven by scientific facts and figures the verdicts associated with which have nothing to do with personal preferences, changeable human attitudes, conjectures, probabilities and expectations?

Then came the third phase of my academic life, when I came face to face with the urgent and bewildering question: Wherein lies the miraculousness (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'an's language? In posing this question, I used the word "miraculousness" in its true, original sense, not merely in the sense of genius, eloquence, distinction, precision and beauty. I began to wonder whether the word "miraculousness" had lost its real significance for us, having reverted to being nothing but some term whose original significance we no longer recalled or recognized, and which no longer meant anything to us but superiority, excellence, or brilliance.

WHAT DID THE TERM *I'JĀZ* (MIRACULOUS) MEAN TO EARLY ISLAMIC THINKERS?

Muslim scholars from both earlier and later periods undertook thorough and tireless studies of what they referred to as the miraculousness of the Qur'an (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān*). Such studies dealt with three main areas:

1. ***The aesthetic or rhetorical aspect of the Qur'an:*** Studies dealing with this aspect of the Qur'an's language set out to demonstrate that the Qur'an is an aesthetic miracle in its language and arrangement. The first scholars to develop this theme include al-Jāḥiẓ (255 AH/869 CE), Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Rummānī (374 AH/984 CE), Muḥammad Ibn Yazīd al-Wāsiṭī (306 AH/918 CE), Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (323 AH/934 CE), Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (395 AH/1005 CE), al-Khaṭṭābī (378

AH/988 CE), Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī (404 AH/1013 CE), al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Asadābādī (416 AH/1025 CE), ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (474 AH/1078 CE), Ibn Abī al-Iṣbaʿ (654 AH/1256 CE), Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (751 AH/1350 CE), and others. However, beauty remains a relative phenomenon which, as such, is subject to debate, and the standards relevant to which may differ from one individual to another, one society to another, and one era to another. Hence, it needs to be recognized that if virtually any Western, non-Muslim linguist adopted the same approaches and methods adhered to by Muslim scholars in their study of the Qurʾan, he would be led to conclude that geniuses the likes of Shakespeare, Dante, Rousseau and Goethe were also gods.

2. **The expressional aspect:** Studies dealing with the Qurʾan's expressional dimension aim to show that the Qurʾan is a linguistic miracle based on its precision of expression. Authors of such studies discuss the subtle distinctions among Qurʾanic terms, structures and expressions which, although they appear to be alike, are not actually so. Such terms, structures and expressions, which came to be known among scholars as *mutashābih al-Qurʾān*, were pointed out by al-Jāhiz in his book *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*. Reference was also made to them by al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār in his book, *Mutashābih al-Qurʾān*, by Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Iskāfī (d. 420 AH/1029 CE) in his book entitled *Durrat al-Tanzīl wa Ghurraṭ al-Taʾwīl*, by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH/1209 CE) in *Asrār al-Tanzīl*, by Maḥmūd ibn Ḥamzah al-Kirmānī (d. 505 AH/1111 CE) in *Al-Burhān fī Tawjīh Mutashābih al-Qurʾān*, and others.

3. **The scientific aspect:** Contrary to popularly held belief, this theme began to appear quite early in the written Islamic tradition. Early Islamic scholars, and later scholars as well, attempted to demonstrate the miraculous nature of the Qurʾan based on the fact that it speaks of cosmic realities and natural phenomena that were not discovered

until long after the appearance of the Qur'an itself. If these writings weren't so haphazard and unscientific, they would be virtually unsailable. Unfortunately, however, most of the contemporary scholars who have treated this theme have done little more than made fools of both themselves and their readers. They demonstrate no specialized knowledge of the miraculousness they purport to demonstrate, nor do they present their case in an academic fashion, since their writings are devoid of any documentation or quotations from Western scholarly writings and research relating to the scientific phenomena being referred to. Early scholars could be excused to a great extent for their failure to make reference to such sources, and they were actually more systematic than their modern counterparts. Early Muslim thinkers had mastered the scientific disciplines and discoveries of their day. In fact, they were the primary authorities on such matters, as human civilization at that time was being written from right to left. Muslims spoke, and the world listened. The Muslim world dictated, and the rest of the world wrote. Today, by contrast, things are precisely the opposite. The centers of academic and scientific research, discovery, innovation and decision-making have moved to the other side of the world, and civilization is being written from left to right. The first Muslim scholars to write on the theme of "scientific miraculousness" (*al-i'jāz al-ilmī*) were al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn Surāqah (d. 415 AH/1023 CE), al-Māwardī (d. 450 AH/1058 CE), al-Ghazālī (d. 505 AH/1111 CE), al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ (d. 544 AH/1149 CE), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzi, Ibn Abī al-Faḍl al-Mursī (d. 655 AH/1257 CE), and Dāwūd al-Anṭākī (d. 1008 AH/1599 CE). Later Muslim writers to take up this theme include al-Iskandarānī (d. 1307 AH/1889 CE), Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (d. 1320 AH/1903 CE), and Tantawi Jawhari (d. 1359 AH/1940 CE). The writing movement on this topic picked up speed in the twentieth century, resulting in the publication of a series of books dealing with what has been termed the numerical miraculousness (*al-i'jāz al-adadī*) of the Qur'an. One of the earliest books in this category was *Al-I'jāz al-Adadī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* by Abd al-Razzaq Nawfal,

which came out in the early 1970s. In his book, Nawfal includes long lists of the “pairings” (*al-mathānī*) on which the language of the Qur’an is based. We find, for example, that the words meaning “night” (*layl*) and “day” (*nahār*) occur the same number of times in the Qur’an. Similarly, the words referring to paradise (*al-jannah*) and hell (*al-nār*) occur equal numbers of times, and words referring to angels (*malā’ikah*) and demons (*shayāṭīn*) occur equal numbers of times. He even notes that the word for “month” (*shahr*) occurs exactly twelve times in the Qur’an, while the word for “day” (*yawm*) occurs exactly 365 times. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzi was the first to draw attention to this linguistic mystery in the Qur’an in the context of discussing the term *mathāni* in *Sūrah al-Zumar* 39:23, which speaks of the Qur’an as “a divine writ fully consistent within itself (*kitāban mutashābihan*), repeating each statement [of the truth] in manifold forms (*mathāniya*) – [a divine writ] whereat shiver the skins of all who of their Sustainer stand in awe...”¹

As for this book, it will focus exclusively on what I consider to be the truly miraculous aspect of the language of the Qur’an, namely, its newness. It is a newness that is not limited to a word here or an expression there. Rather, it encompasses the language of the entire Qur’an from beginning to end: vertically and horizontally, linguistically and rhetorically, on the level of words, particles, structures, and expressions; in terms of formulations, rhythms, images, and explanations, and with an intensity the likes of which no human being could have produced or even approached. Yet despite this linguistic newness the Qur’an preserved the foundations of the Arabic language and was eminently comprehensible to the people who heard it. Indeed, not only did they understand the Qur’an despite the newness of its language; they were unspeakably impressed by it.

The MIRACULOUS LANGUAGE of the Qur'an



THIS study illustrates why the language of the Qur'an is miraculous, unique, and evidence of its divine authority. The author compares the language of the Qur'an with the language of pre-Islamic poetry, the Prophet's ﷺ words (Hadith), and the language of the Arabs both past and present, to demonstrate that although the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic it was at the same time an Arabic which was entirely new. Original and early Muslim audiences viewed this as miraculous and responded to the Qur'an's words, sounds, rhythms etc. in a manner consistent with a deeper appreciation of its beauty and majesty which modern ears, trained by familiarity, and despite being surrounded by all manner of dictionaries and studies, are at a loss to capture.

The author attempts to remove this veil and present the Qur'an to readers as if hearing it for the first time, to bring to life something of this wonder. In doing so he guides readers to appreciate the beauty of the Qur'an, to become more immersed in it, and have a clearer understanding of its structure and flow. Devoting special attention to Surah *al-Muddaththir* (chapter 74) to underpin his analysis, Saeh thus brings the Revelation to life, to demonstrate that each surah has distinct features and characteristics that make it stand out uniquely within the design and sweep of the whole.



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