



A Critique of Orientalist Objections Regarding the Qur'ān's Brevity Style: Lammens, Goldziher, and Sale

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Abstract

Research Article

Brevity (known as *ījāz* in Arabic) is the art of expressing ideas concisely, using as few words as possible while maintaining clarity. In the context of the Qur'ān, brevity is considered a miraculous and rhetorical style employed for various purposes, including facilitating easy and quick comprehension, conserving time, and concealing meaning from outsiders. Some early Orientalists have criticized the Qur'ān, arguing that its brevity has resulted in incomplete or insufficient sentences in certain verses. However, it is important to recognize that these objections were often driven by a desire to undermine the truth and authenticity of the Qur'ān's divine revelation. This research aims to explain, analyze, and critique the rhetorical objections raised by these Orientalists regarding the brevity style of the Qur'ān. By utilizing a descriptive-analytic method and adopting a critical approach, this article defends the sanctity of the Qur'ān against Orientalist misgivings and argues that it was indeed revealed by God. The article addresses the objections raised by Orientalists such as George Sale, Henri Lammens, and Ignác Goldziher regarding the rhetorical style of the Qur'ān. The author contends that the Qur'ān possesses the utmost eloquence and rhetoric. The claims made by Orientalists in this regard are influenced by their own goals, intellectual assumptions, and different notions of Islamic studies. These notions include assumptions about the Qur'ān's human origin, as well as its influence from the social environment and the culture of its time. The methodologies employed by these Orientalists in their Qur'ānic studies often exhibit superficiality, partiality, illusionism, and a lack of accurate information regarding the intricacies and nuances of the Qur'ānic language. In some cases, their motivations may even be hostile.

Keywords: Orientalist objections, rhetorical objections, brevity through succinctness (*ījāz al-qaṣr*), brevity through omission (*ījāz al-ḥadhf*), rhetorical miracle.

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Introduction

One of the primary issues in rhetorical techniques and styles involves brevity through succinctness (*ījāz al-qaṣr*) and brevity through omission (*ījāz al-ḥadhf*), which are delicately and subtly employed in Qur'ānic verses. Indeed, it is the Qur'ān's rhetorical miracle and divine revelation, coupled with its presentation of laws to organize and guide human conduct, that have established it as central to Arabic and Islamic culture, shaping scholarly and cultural discourse within the Islamic community.

In the ever-evolving tapestry of intellectual and cultural exchange between civilizations, the Qur'ān occupies a unique position as an unparalleled masterpiece of Arabic literature and rhetoric. This divine scripture, with its singular structure and miraculous language, has captivated many hearts and minds across centuries. Through a historical survey of the works of Islamic scholars on Arabic literature, it becomes apparent that the Qur'ān spurred attention towards the compilation of Arabic dictionaries, poetry, and various linguistic and rhetorical styles. This is evidenced by the contributions of notable figures in Arabic literature during the Islamic era such as al-Farrā' (d. 207 AH), Abū 'Ubayda (d. 209 AH), Ibn Qutayba (d. 276 AH), al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471 AH), and others under categories like “ma'ānī al-Qur'ān” (meanings of the Qur'ān), “majāz al-Qur'ān” (figurative speech of the Qur'ān), “muskhil al-Qur'ān” (complex phrases of the Qur'ān), or “dalā'il i'jāz al-Qur'ān” (evidence for the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān), alongside other comprehensive works during the productive centuries of Islamic thought. These endeavors bear witness to their recognition of the Qur'ān's rhetorical miracle. However, there have been individuals and groups who, due to reasons such as a lack of understanding of Arabic rhetorical and literary intricacies and the semantic complexities of the Qur'ān, failed to grasp the grandeur of its language. Among the critics, certain Orientalists, owing to their insufficient knowledge of the aesthetic and rhetorical depth of the Qur'ān, offered limited critiques and objections

challenging this divine scripture in its rhetorical and literary dimensions. Drawing upon superficial and narrow perspectives, they accuse the Qur'ān of involving structural and rhetorical problems and contradictions. This article aims to examine these objections concerning the rhetorical miracle of the Qur'ān.

Research Background

The history of the development of brevity (*ījāz*) as a rhetorical technique traces its origins to the pre-Islamic era, when speech was the primary mode of communication. However, its formalization as a literary device within the art of rhetoric emerged during the Islamic era, marked by the composition of various works on Arabic literature and rhetoric by eminent scholars. Notable among these works are *Talkhīṣ al-bayān fī majāzāt al-Qur'ān* by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 476 AH), *Asrār al-balāgha wa-dalā'il al-ījāz* by 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471 AH), *Sirr al-fiṣāḥa* by Ibn Sanān al-Khafājī (d. 476 AH), *Tafsīr al-kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl wa-asās al-balāgha* by Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH), *Miftāḥ al-'ulūm* by al-Sakkākī (d. 626 AH), and numerous other works of rhetoric and Qur'ānic exegesis that delve into rhetorical issues, with a particular focus on brevity.

Moreover, numerous works have been written in response to both Orientalist and non-Orientalist objections to the Qur'ān. These include *Ārā' al-mustashriqīn ḥawl al-Qur'ān al-karīm wa-tafsīrih* (Views of Orientalists regarding the noble Qur'ān and its exegesis) by Umar ibn Ibrahim Ridwan (1993), *al-Qur'ān al-karīm mina al-manzūr al-istishraqī* (The noble Qur'ān from an Orientalist perspective) by Muhammad Muhammad Abu Layla (2002), *Shubuhāt wa-rudūd* (Objections and replies) by Ayatollah Mohammad Hadī Ma'rifāt (2002), *Da'āwī al-tā'inīn fī al-Qur'ān al-karīm fī al-qarn al-rābi' 'ashar wa-l-radd 'alayhā* (Claims of critics of the noble Qur'ān in the fourteenth century and response to them) by Abd al-Muhsin Zayn ibn al-Matiri (2003), *Shubuhāt ḥawl al-Qur'ān wa-tafnīdihā* (Objections concerning the Qur'ān and their



refutation) by Ghazi Inaya (1996), *al-Qur'ān wa-l-mustashriqūn* (The Qur'ān and the Orientalists) by Ibrahim Iwad (2003), *Difā' 'an al-'aqīda wa-l-sharī'a dīdd maṭā'in al-mustashriqīn* (Defending the belief and sharia against Orientalist challenges) by Muhammad Ghazali (1999), and *Mustashriqān va Qur'ān* (The Orientalists and the Qur'ān) by Mohammad Mohsen Zamani (2007). However, despite various responses and critiques, no work has yet been dedicated solely and analytically to discussing Orientalist objections to the Qur'ān's rhetorical brevity.

1. Literal and Terminological Senses of *Ījāz*

The Arabic term “*ījāz*” originates from the root “w-j-z” as a gerund form of the “if'āl” pattern (Farāhīdī 1989, 6: 166). In its most basic sense, it denotes brevity in speech (Ibn Sīda 2000, 7: 525). In literature and the science of meanings (‘ilm al-ma‘ānī), brevity entails conveying meaning using the fewest possible words. This stylistic approach prioritizes succinctness and eliminates unnecessary additions and superfluous components to maximize expressive power with minimal words and phrases.

The concept of brevity is elucidated by early scholars of the science of meanings. Ibn Sanān al-Khafājī (2006, 201) defines brevity as the expression of abundant meaning with the fewest possible words, ensuring adequate conveyance of the intended meaning (Khafājī 2006, 201). Al-Sakkākī (d. 626 AH) presents a relativist view of brevity and its antithesis, prolixity or verbosity (*iṭnāb*), basing his definition on common sense: brevity is the conveyance of meaning with the fewest possible words, as affirmed by people's common sense (Sakkākī 2000, 388). Additionally, al-Zamlakānī interprets brevity as hinting at and establishing a broad meaning with few words (Maṭlūb 2011, 209). In the Qur'ān, brevity denotes the fact that God has conveyed His meanings using minimal words and sentences without sacrificing the conveyed meaning (for further details, see Ibn Abī Iṣba' al-Miṣrī 1989, 262, 268; Abū Zuhra 2000, 409).

This underscores the Qur'ān's capacity to encapsulate extensive teachings and concepts within concise language.

Furthermore, according to Arabic philologists, while *ījāz* is commonly associated with eloquent speech, its scope extends beyond the linguistic domain. As a virtue, it can be applied to any act or matter that embodies such excellence (Azharī 2001, 11: 104). This analysis underscores that brevity can function as a guiding principle, enhancing not only the eloquence and impact of speech but also the efficiency and effectiveness of all modes of communication.

In summary, in the terminology of semantics and rhetoric, brevity involves expressing an extensive meaning in a few words without compromising the conveyed meaning (Sakkākī 2000, 388; Maṭlūb 2011, 209; Ibn Abī Iṣḥāq al-Miṣrī 1989, 262, 268; Abū Zuhra 2000, 409).

2. Varieties of Brevity

There are two types of brevity in Arabic rhetoric: brevity through succinctness and brevity through omission. In the former, there is extensive meaning conveyed in few words, without any words being left out elliptically. This is one of the highest degrees of eloquence, as illustrated by the Qur'ānic verse: "There is life for you in retribution"² (Quran 2:179). This verse is so profound in its content that Arab rhetoricians have found no equivalent paraphrase for it (Ibn 'Arabshāh 2021, 1:66). In addition to Qur'ānic verses, many sayings by Imam 'Alī also exhibit this feature.

Brevity through omission involves conveying extensive meaning in few words by omitting some words without compromising the meaning, with evidence hinting at the omitted words (Ibn Ḥajja 2005, 4:44; Maṭlūb 2011,

² «وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيَاةٌ...» (البقرة/١٧٩)



205). An example is the Qur'ānic verse, “Ask the town we were in”³ (Quran 12:82), where the phrase “people of” or “inhabitants of” is elliptically omitted before “the town” (Ibn Ḥajja 2005, 4:44). Brevity through omission is also termed “omitted brevity” (*al-ījāz al-maḥdhūf*) and “omitted phrase” (*al-kalām al-maḥdhūf*) in some works (Maṭlūb 2011, 205). Some rhetoricians liken this technique to magic (Jurjānī 1982, 112). The Qur'ān is replete with prominent examples of brevity, appearing in various forms such as verbal, semantic, and judgmental brevity.

3. Orientalist Objection and Its Reply

Orientalists have raised objections to the brevity used in certain verses and short suras (chapters) of the Qur'ān, questioning its words, style, and structure. These objections will be addressed in this section.

First Objection: Existence of Disturbing Brevity in Certain Verses

George Sale has claimed that certain Qur'ānic verses consist of incomplete sentences that do not adequately convey their intended meaning. The following are examples of such verses according to his claims:

1. “*Indeed those who are faithless and bar from the way of Allah and the Sacred Mosque, which We have made for all people, the native and the visitor being equal therein—whoever intends therein of deviation or wrongdoing, We shall make him taste a painful punishment*”⁴ (Quran 22: 25).

³. ﴿وَسئَلِ الْقَرْيَةَ الَّتِي كُنَّا فِيهَا...﴾ (يوسف/ ٨٢)

⁴. ﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَيَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ الَّذِي جَعَلْنَا لِلنَّاسِ سَوَاءً الْعَاكِفُ فِيهِ وَالْبَادِ وَمَن يُرِدْ فِيهِ بِالْحَادِ يَظْلِمُ نَفْسَهُ مَن عَذَابِ أَلِيمٍ﴾ (الحج/ ٢٥)

Sale presents two objections regarding the incompleteness of this verse: (a) the term “Indeed those” is a subject without a predicate, and (b) the object of the verb “intends” is omitted (Sale 2020, 72).

2. “*And you were not at the side of the mount when We called but a mercy from your Lord to warn a people to whom no warner had come before you that they might be reminded*”⁵ (Quran 28:46).

Sale claims that this verse is incomplete because it does not adequately convey its meaning; specifically, a verb is omitted between “but” and “a mercy,” such as “you were taught.” He questions the rationale for this omission, noting that there is no evidence for it in the statement, unless one merely contends that this is a type of speech beyond human capability, thereby considering it a miracle (Sale 2020, 72-73).

3. “*So when they took him away and conspired to put him into the recess of a well, We revealed to him, [A day will come when] you will surely inform them about this affair of theirs while they are not aware [of your identity]*”⁶ (Quran 12:15).

Some Orientalists object to this verse because it omits the subordinate clause of the conditional “when” (*lammā*). They wonder why the subordinate clause is excluded, as conditional structures require both dependent and independent clauses (Zakzouk 1997, 227; Abd al-Fadi 2000).

Analysis and Examination

⁵ . «وَمَا كُنْتَ بِجَانِبِ الطُّورِ إِذْ نَادَيْنَا وَلَكِنْ رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ لِتُنذِرَ قَوْمًا مَأْتَاهُمْ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ»
(القصص/ ٤٦)

⁶ . «فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا بِهِ وَاجْتَمَعُوا أَنْ يُجْعَلُوهُ فِي غِيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ لَتُنَبِّئَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَذَا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ»
(يوسف/ ١٥)



First Rationale: Rhetorical Functions in Qur'ānic Omissions

It is inaccurate and imprecise to claim that there is evidence of incomplete omitted phrases in Qur'ānic verses, as the Qur'ānic style reflects Arabic, a language known for its tendency to elliptically omit certain sentence parts. This omission is essential for crafting beauty and achieving effectiveness in appealing to human nature. Upon proper contemplation of these omissions in the Qur'ān, it becomes evident that each instance of brevity serves significant functions. Generally, in each omission within the Qur'ān, three functions or advantages emerge: expressive, intellectual, and psychological.

A. Expressive and Aesthetical Function

When an element of a sentence is omitted, it is not without reason. One motivation for this omission is to serve a technical expressive function. This expressive motivation involves brief communication, eliminating unnecessary additions, and conveying the core message succinctly. This ensures the audience can grasp the central message without tedious verbosity.

Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436 AH) articulates this motivation as follows: Arabs tend to speak tersely and omit certain parts of speech to shorten their talk, eliminate superfluous phrases, and be content with brief remarks. This practice is what is called eloquence in speech ('Alam al-Hudā 2010, 2: 498).

Scholars of Arabic rhetoric mention various reasons and motivations for this function, such as honoring and respecting, terse speech, humiliation, generalization, refraining from mentioning a certain phrase, creating Qur'ānic intervals, ambiguity, and the elimination of both fame and humiliation. These aspects involve eloquence and are discussed

elaborately in the works of early scholars (Zarkashī 1989 3: 176-87; Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1970, 14: 367).

B. Intellectual Function

Another function of the literary omission of a phrase is to encourage the audience to contemplate—an intellectual function. This is because the mind strives and becomes curious to identify the omitted element. Such omission and the subsequent mental effort require the mind to make inferences and deductions. Through intellectual struggle and inquiry, the mind will eventually discover the elliptically omitted phrase. If the omitted part were mentioned initially, the mind would be deprived of the pleasure of uncovering it and grasping the meaning.

Examples of such omission can be found in the conjunction of something to something indeterminate. There are many instances of this in the Qur'ān, indicating to the audience that there are additional points to convey beyond the conjunction itself (Ja'farī 2005, 6).

In his account of this intellectual function, al-Zarkashī states that it yields greater pleasure as the mind infers the omitted element. The more challenging it is to grasp the omitted part, the greater the pleasure will be (Zarkashī 1995, 176). Enhanced mental pleasure arises from inferring the omitted part. The more effort it takes to figure it out, the greater the pleasure one derives.

Examples of such a function can be observed in various Qur'ānic verses, such as the opening verses of *Sūrat al-Fajr*: “By the Dawn, by the ten nights, by the Even and the Odd, by the night when it departs! Is there an oath in that for one possessing intellect?”⁷ (Quran 89:1-5). Here, the dependent clause of these oaths should be inferred through reflection upon

⁷. ﴿وَ الْفَجْرِ * وَ لَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ * وَ الشَّفْعِ وَ الْوَتْرِ * وَ اللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ * هَلْ فِي ذَلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِّذِي حِجْرِ﴾ (الفجر/١-٥)



the sūrah. The motivation behind this omission is to encourage individuals to contemplate and be guided towards the answer (Shāhir Khalūf 2009, 160).

C. Psychological Function

Omitting an element of speech, such as in a lipogram, creates a unique psychological pleasure and an inner urge within the audience. Even if the audience cannot identify the omitted element, the message becomes engrained in their minds. This technique aligns with pedagogical principles, as omission breathes new life into the text, making it more dynamic. It encourages a more careful reading and a deeper understanding of the nuances within the text (Suyūṭī 2001, 2: 84).

Al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, an eleventh-century scholar of Arabic rhetoric, describes this function and its effects as follows: a subtle use of brevity is an act of wonder, akin to magic. Omission is more eloquent than mention, and silence is more effective than speech. You find yourself more expressive when silent than when speaking, achieving the highest degree of eloquence by refraining from mentioning (Bāqir al-Ḥusaynī 2013, 161; Maraghi 1993, 89; Darwish 1995, 6: 561). For this very reason, Ibn Jinnī characterizes brevity and omission as Arabic courage, as they embolden speech (Suyūṭī 2001, 2: 84).

An example of this function is observed in the story of Prophet Noah in verses 36-39 of *Sūrah Hūd* in the Qur’ān: “*It was revealed to Noah: None of your people will believe except those who already have faith; so do not sorrow for what they used to do *Build the ark before Our eyes and by Our revelation, and do not plead with Me for those who are wrongdoers: they shall indeed be drowned *As he was building the ark, whenever the elders of his people passed by him, they would ridicule him. He said, If you ridicule us [today], we shall ridicule you [tomorrow] just as you ridicule us [now]* Soon you will know whom a disgraceful punishment will*

overtake and on whom a lasting punishment will descend"⁸ (Quran 11:36-39).

These verses depict two scenes. First, the divine account of the events between Noah and his people, including the destinies of believers and unbelievers among them following the construction of the ark and the onset of the storm. The second scene involves the unspoken, omitted segment of the narrative, detailing their resolve to build the vessel and gather its primary materials. These actions are pivotal to the story but are not explicitly narrated, encouraging the audience to engage their sensory and imaginative faculties to visualize them. By leaving this part unarticulated, these verses prompt the audience to actively participate in understanding this aspect of the narrative (Shāhir al-Khalūf 2009, 162).

Second Rationale: Qur'ānic Omissions not resulting in Misunderstanding

Qur'ānic styles of omission do not lead to misunderstanding. Instead, they are deliberate literary omissions that inject vitality into speech, freeing it from monotony. This is due to their methodical and rule-based nature. In cases of brevity, the omitted element can often be inferred through evidence that facilitates its comprehension. At times, this evidence not only aids in understanding the omitted part but also defines it. Both the act of understanding and the precision of definition contribute to eloquence.

Ibn 'Ashūr observes that the style of omission is prevalent in numerous Qur'ānic phrases, without compromising the meaning or detracting from

⁸. ﴿وَأَوْحِي إِلَىٰ نُوحٍ أَنَّهُ لَنْ يُؤْمِنَ مِنْ قَوْمِكَ إِلَّا مَنْ قَدْ آمَنَ فَلَا تَبْتَئِسْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ * وَاصْنَعِ الْفُلْكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحْيِنَا وَلَا تُخَاطِبْنِي فِي الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا إِنَّهُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ * وَيَصْنَعِ الْفُلْكَ وَ كَلَّمَا مَرَّ عَلَيْهِ مَلَأَ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ سَخِرُوا مِنْهُ قَالَ إِنْ تَسَخَرُوا مِنِّي مَآ فَاِنَّا نَسَخَرُ مِنْكُمْ كَمَا تَسَخَرُونَ * فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَ يَجْلُ عَلَيْهِ عَذَابٌ مُّقِيمٌ﴾ (هود/36-39)



the understanding of the intended message, as it is indicated by verbal or contextual evidence (Ibn ‘Āshūr 2000, 1: 119).

Considering all this, it is puzzling why Orientalist objections against the Qur’ān persist, claiming that its omissions result in incomplete sentences and disrupt meaning. In reality, cases of brevity through omission in the Qur’ān are motivated by various rationales and supported by verbal or nonverbal evidence, as will be elaborated in the following sections.

1. Verse 25 of *Sūrat al-Ḥajj*

The verse is as follows: “*Indeed those who are faithless and bar from the way of Allah and the Sacred Mosque, which We have made for all people, the native and the visitor being equal therein—whoever intends therein of deviation or wrongdoing, We shall make him taste a painful punishment*”⁹ (*Quran 22: 25*).

Firstly, concerning the omission of a predicate for the subject (“*Indeed those...*”), the rhetorical rationale behind this omission and brevity is supported by evidence for what is elliptical. In fact, the non-elliptical form of the verse is as follows: “*Indeed those who are faithless and bar from the way of Allah and the Sacred Mosque, we shall make them taste a painful punishment, and whoever commits a sin therein, they will also be subjected to the same punishment*” (Zamakhsharī 1987, 3: 151).

Secondly, concerning the omission of the object of the verb “intends,” the rhetorical rationale behind this omission is generalization and broadening of the scope. Considering various alternatives, the sentence

⁹ ﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَيَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ الَّذِي جَعَلْنَاهُ لِلنَّاسِ سَوَاءً الْعَاكِفُ فِيهِ وَالْبَادِ وَمَن يُرِدْ فِيهِ بِالْحَادِ يَظْلِمِ نَفْسَهُ مَن عَذَابُ أَلِيمٍ﴾ (الحج/٢٥)

becomes wide in scope, encompassing anything that is intended (Ṭabrisī 1992, 3: 44; Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1970, 14: 367). The preposition “*bi*” in “*bi-ilḥād*” (literally, “by deviation”) means “with,” while “*bi*” in “*bi-zulm*” (literally, by oppression or wrongdoing) denotes the cause. This observation further supports the inference of the omitted predicate in “Indeed those...” (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1970, 14: 367). Such usage is commonplace in Arabic. Consequently, subordinate clauses of conditional sentences (employing Arabic conditional devices like “*law*,” “*lawlā*,” “*lammā*,” and “*idhā*”) are often omitted, leaving the interpretation to the audience. This omission not only amplifies the potency of speech but also bolsters the efficacy of its components (‘Abd al-Tawwāb 1995, 151).

2. Verse 46 of *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ*

The verse is as follows: “*And you were not on the side of the Mount when We called out [to Moses], but [We have sent you as] a mercy from your Lord that you may warn a people to whom there did not come any warner before you, so that they may take admonition*”¹⁰ (Quran 28: 46).

In this verse, following the practice of brevity, the agent of “sending,” which serves as the subject of “mercy,” is omitted. “Mercy” is cited as the reason for dispatching the Prophet to warn and guide the people. The elliptical form could be expressed as follows: “But we made it known to you and revealed it to you as a mercy from your Lord to warn a people...” (Ma’rifat 1990, 5: 458). Furthermore, the phrase “*but a mercy...*” contrasts with “you were not...” Additionally, there is a shift from the preceding context where God is referred to as “We” (plural speaker) to the third person, indicating God’s grace upon the Prophet (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1970, 16:50). Hence, this omission does not disrupt the conveyed meaning.

¹⁰ . ﴿وَمَا كُنْتُمْ بِجَانِبِ الطُّورِ إِذْ نَادَيْنَا وَ لَكِنَّ رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ لِتُنذِرَ قَوْمًا مَّا أَتَاهُمْ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ﴾
(القصص / ٤٦)



3. Verse 15 of *Sūrah Yūsuf*

The verse is as follows: “So when they took him away and conspired to put him into the recess of a well, We revealed to him, [A day will come when] you will surely inform them about this affair of theirs while they are not aware [of your identity]”¹¹ (*Quran 12:15*).

In this verse, the dependent clause of “when” is omitted, where the elliptical phrase is evidenced by the context that Joseph’s brothers bothered him (Zamakhsharī 1987, 2:449). The reference to bothering was omitted to highlight its significance. Thus, a part of a verse may be omitted to create subtle ambiguity and underscore the importance of the omitted part. This enhances the impact of the speech, resonating deeply with the audience, an effect that could not be achieved if it were explicitly stated. For instance, the following verse depicts the elevated status of the inhabitants of Paradise by omitting the conditional device in its syntactical structure to emphasize their inner urge and passion (Shahbāzī 2013, 63). Another example is verse 73 of *Sūrat al-Zumar*: “Those who are wary of their Lord will be led to paradise in throngs. When they reach it, and its gates are opened...”¹² (*Quran 39: 73*). Here, the subordinate clause of “when” is omitted to imply the greatness and significance of Paradise, suggesting that Paradise is indescribable and immeasurable. The last phrase literally translates to “and its gates...” and is a circumstantial or status clause (*al-jumlat al-ḥālīyya*), hence translated as “while its gates...” This means they arrive in Paradise while its gates are already open to them. The next sentence in the verse refers to “keepers” (*Khazana*) of

¹¹ . ﴿فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا بِهِ وَ أجمعُوا أَن يَجْعَلُوهُ فِي غِيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ وَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ لَتُنَبِّئَنَّهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَذَا وَ هُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ﴾
(يوسف/ ١٥)

¹² . ﴿وَ سَبَقَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا حَتَّى إِذَا جَاؤَهَا وَ فَتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَ قَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ﴾ (الزمر/ ٧٣)

Paradise, indicating angels entrusted with protecting Paradise (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1970, 17: 298).

In the verse under discussion, the acts of Joseph's brothers are omitted to signify that they are too abhorrent and hideous to be mentioned. The omission of the subordinate clause following "when" suggests that the speaker remains silent when referring to what the brothers did to Joseph, indicating an unspeakable event out of utmost remorse. This silence effectively conveys the gravity of the brothers' actions. Once this implication is understood, the speaker proceeds with narrating the rest of the story. Such omissions are common in Arabic literature, as they spare the listeners from hearing the details of the cruel deeds inflicted upon the innocent child.

It is unbearable to hear what was done to this innocent child, who was a future prophet and the son of a prophet. Joseph did nothing to warrant such punishment from his own brothers, who knew how much their father loved him. Their jealousy drove them to endanger Joseph and grieve their honorable father, Prophet Jacob, for his beloved son, thus downplaying the gravity of such a heinous crime in their eyes (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1970, 11: 99).

Third Rationale: Loss of Rhetorical Nuances in Translation

The Orientalist objections to such omissions in the Qur'ān may stem from the loss of relevant rhetorical functions in most translations of the text, as many such intricacies are lost in translation. These objections often arise because Orientalists frequently rely on translated versions of the Qur'ān. Although some of these nuances are not communicable due to structural differences between languages and indeed count as untranslatable, in some cases, emphasis or hyperbole can be reflected in translation. Therefore, the translator must have a full command of the target language to communicate at least some of those subtleties. For instance, in *Sūrah*



Muhammad, “When you meet the faithless in battle, strike their necks...”¹³ (*Quran* 47:4), the gerund form “striking” (*ḍarb*) is used to imply an imperative form (*iḍrabū* = strike). This underscores the intended message (Zamakhsharī 1987, 4:316). Such intricate functions of omission are often ignored in most translations.

The view espoused in this article is that George Sale has cited various verses of the Qur’ān to claim the existence of incomplete sentences. However, this is far from the truth, as the Qur’ān employs Arabic rhetorical styles where brevity through omission and elliptical omission of parts of speech are key techniques. These techniques add subtlety to the speech and engage the audience’s mind with various dimensions of the message. This is a common style in Arabic literature, with major expressive, intellectual, and psychological functions. The objectors have overlooked these nuances. The cases of omission in Qur’ānic verses, which they cite as evidence for their claims, are all motivated by specific rhetorical rationales and thus do not disrupt the meaning.

Second Objection: Environmental Impact on Brevity and Verbosity of Qur’ānic Suras and Verses

The significance of the issue of brevity in the Qur’ān becomes evident when we recognize that, by criticizing this rhetorical method, the Orientalists aim to question the expressive and linguistic miracle of this scripture.

Ignác Goldziher (1910, 10) says:

The change in Muhammad’s prophetic character unavoidably left its mark on the style and rhetoric of the Qur’ān. ... Such a chronological

¹³ . ﴿فَإِذَا لَقِيتُمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَضَرْبَ الرِّقَابِ...﴾ (محمد/٤)

distinction is on the whole justified by a critical and esthetic examination of the Qur'ān. To the Meccan period belong the revelations that express the creations of the Prophet's fiery tumult in a visionary style, in speech that flows from his very soul. In these he has no sword to rattle... In the Medinese revelations, the primal prophetic power gradually goes slack. At times they sink to the level of everyday prose, their rhetoric rendered colorless by the commonplace character of the matters with which they have to deal. (Goldziher 1981, 10-11)

Lammens is another Orientalist who raises the issue of the difference between the literary styles of Meccan and Medinan verses, emphasizing that the latter exhibit a lower literary level than the former, as they are closer to ordinary Arabic prose:

In spite of all this, there is no occasion for surprise in the fact that the Qoran, especially the Medinese Suras with their more polished phrases, less interspersed with ellipses and acoluta than the pre-Hijran ones, has served as the standard for fixing the rules of national grammar. (Lammens 1968, 41)

In what follows, the author addresses these claims:

First Reason: Difference between Qur'ānic Styles and Rhetoric

The shift in the styles of Meccan and Medinan verses has nothing to do with changes in the Prophet's character. This is a requirement of linguistic rhetoric and eloquence, necessitating verbal shifts according to changes in context. For instance, when outlining the rulings of inheritance, it is inappropriate to use emotional or epic tones. Conversely, when discussing the Day of Resurrection and its stages, the tone must soften stubborn hearts. Similarly, talking about God's glory or the greatness of the universe demands a distinct style from that used in stating the rulings of marriage



and divorce. This variation is an example of adapting rhetoric to suit varying circumstances and contexts.

Second Reason: Short Meccan Suras and Verses as Cases of Brevity

Contrary to what some have assumed, the shortness of Meccan suras and verses does not imply that they reflect the characteristics of their degraded social environment. Instead, this brevity is an example of rhetorical succinctness, demonstrating the intellectual maturity of the audience, for whom brief remarks and hints are sufficient. In contrast, when addressing those with lower mental capacity, elaboration is necessary. This explains why most Meccan suras are short, while most Medinan suras are long (Zarqānī 2006, 1: 210). Eloquence requires consideration of the audience's condition, necessitating different approaches when speaking to individuals with varying levels of mental capacity (Amin Shīrāzī 2014, 193).

Third Reason: Presence of Brevity and Verbosity across Meccan and Medinan Sūrahs

The objections raised by Orientalists aim to cast doubt on the divine and sacred origin of the Qur'ān. However, their claims regarding the length of suras face numerous counterexamples. For instance, there are long suras in the Meccan period, such as *Sūrat al-An'ām*, and short suras in the Medinan period, such as *Sūrat al-Naṣr*, which begins with “*When Allah's help comes with victory*”¹⁴ (*Quran 110:1*). Thus, their claims lack universality. However, their argument could be acceptable if they refrain from claiming universality and simply assert that the majority of these chapters follow such patterns. Nonetheless, this assertion fails to establish the conclusion they seek (Zarqānī 2006, 1: 210).

¹⁴. ﴿إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ﴾ (النصر/ ١)

Selected View

A primary focus of Orientalist study regarding the history of the Qur'ān revolves around Meccan and Medinan chapters and verses, with attempts to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Qur'ān. However, this perspective is flawed because the differences in style between Meccan and Medinan chapters do not constitute a valid objection to the Qur'ān. These shifts are not reflections of the Prophet's characteristics or the social degradation of the time of Qur'ānic revelation. Instead, they align with the demands of eloquence, which necessitates adaptation to varying contexts. Therefore, we should not anticipate uniform literary styles in the Qur'ān. For instance, discussions of the horrors of the Day of Resurrection, God's glory, and rulings of marriage and divorce may require different tones, including emotive language. Additionally, the brevity of Meccan suras and verses may indicate the higher intellectual capacity of Meccan inhabitants compared to those of Medina.

In light of this, the assertions put forth by Orientalists concerning specific Meccan verses and suras do not serve as critiques of the Qur'ān's rhetorical style. Rather, they underscore the maturity of the audience and the deliberate use of effective techniques, such as brevity, in Qur'ānic verses.

Conclusion

The style of brevity involves using fewer words to convey meanings, a miraculous rhetorical characteristic of the Qur'ān that indicates its divine origin. Certain Orientalists and critics, such as George Sale, Lammens, and Goldziher, have cited specific Qur'ānic verses where brevity is employed to raise objections about their supposed incompleteness. However, the claims made by Orientalists are flawed both in their foundation and in their methodology. When considering rhetorical rules in Arabic literature, it becomes evident that these objections to the conformity of the Qur'ān to



rhetorical styles are inaccurate. Moreover, the verses under discussion possess various expressive, intellectual, and psychological functions that went unnoticed by the objectors. The Orientalists' claims regarding the supposed incompleteness of the Qur'ānic sentences under study, as well as the differences in literary styles between Meccan and Medinan suras and verses, where brevity through succinctness is used in the former, are unfounded. In all these cases, there are motivations behind the use of brevity, which do not disrupt the eloquence of the Qur'ān.

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