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Nazm al-Qur'ān: A Comparative Study of Ishārāt al-I'jāz and Nazm al-Durar

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***Nazm al-Qur'ān: A Comparative Study of Ishārāt al-I'jāz
and Nazm al-Durar***

MA Thesis

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Foreword

This paper is a Master in MA Middle Eastern Studies. In this paper, there are Arabic terms which have been transliterated into the Latin Alphabet. To find the spelling in their original language, the transliteration chart can be used as a guideline.

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Transliteration Chart

IJMES TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM FOR ARABIC, PERSIAN, AND TURKISH

CONSONANTS

A = Arabic, P = Persian, OT = Ottoman Turkish, MT = Modern Turkish

	A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT
ء	◌	◌	◌	—	ز	z	z	z	z	ك	k	k or g	k or ñ	k or n
ب	b	b	b	b or p	ژ	—	zh	j	j				ory	ory
پ	—	p	p	p	س	s	s	s	s				or ğ	or ğ
ت	t	t	t	t	ش	sh	sh	ş	ş	گ	—	g	g	g
ث	th	ṣ	ṣ	s	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ş	s	ل	l	l	l	l
ج	j	j	c	c	ض	ḍ	ẓ	ẓ	z	م	m	m	m	m
چ	—	ch	ç	ç	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	t	ن	n	n	n	n
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	h	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	z	ه	h	h	h ¹	h ¹
خ	kh	kh	h	h	ع	ʿ	ʿ	ʿ	—	و	w	v or u	v	v
د	d	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	g or ğ	g or ğ	ي	y	y	y	y
ذ	dh	ẓ	ẓ	z	ف	f	f	f	f	ة	a ²			
ر	r	r	r	r	ق	q	q	q	k	ال	a ³			

¹ When h is not final. ² In construct state: at. ³ For the article, al- and -l-.

VOWELS

	ARABIC AND PERSIAN	OTTOMAN AND MODERN TURKISH
<i>Long</i>	ا or آ ā و ū ي ī	ā ū ī
		} words of Arabic and Persian origin only
<i>Doubled</i>	آي iy (final form ī) آو uw (final form ū)	iy (final form ī) uvv
<i>Diphthongs</i>	او au or aw اي ai or ay	ev ey
<i>Short</i>	ا a و u ي i	a or e u or ü / o or ö ı or i

For Ottoman Turkish, authors may either transliterate or use the modern Turkish orthography.

Introduction

فَأَصْدَعْ بِمَا تُؤْمَرُ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“So proclaim what you have been commanded, and turn away from the polytheists.”¹

When one of the Meccan Arabs heard the recitation of the above-mentioned verse, he prostrated on the ground. When he was asked whether he converted to Islam, he answered by saying that he did this because of the high “*balāghah*”² of this verse.³ This event is an example of how the Quran amazed its listeners by its *balāghah*. In several Quranic verses, the Quran points to its superiority by challenging the Arabs to come up with an equivalent, a part, or a small section that is similar to the Quran.⁴ Failure to do this would result in the Quran as being above human level and impossible to imitate, and thus, a miracle. The inability of the Arabs to take on this challenge established the Islamic belief that the Quran has *i’jāz*. That is to say that the Quran is a miracle, inimitable, impossible to reach its level by human capacity, and consequently, the word of God.⁵

According to the Islamic belief, the Quran is the word of God, impossible to make an equivalent of it, has a level of *balāghah* that surpasses human level and thus has *i’jāz*. In the 8th century, this concept of *i’jāz* was interpreted in two different ways by Muslim scholars. These two interpretations derive from the question whether God prevents humans from making an equivalent of the Quran, or is it the Quran that has such a level of *balāghah* that is above human capacity and impossible to imitate? The former, which is called the *ṣarfe* theory, argues that the imitability of the Quran is the result of God’s prevention. According to this view, humans are in fact able to create a work with the same level *balāghah* as that of the Quran, however, whenever one attempts to do so God prevents him from doing that. Muslim scholars such as Vāṣil ibn ‘Aṭā’ (699-748) and Abū Ishāq al-Nazzām (760-845) are the promoters of this interpretation. The latter argues that the Quran has such level of *balāghah* that humans are unable to come up with an equivalent of it. Abū ‘Uthmān al-Jāḥiz (777-869), who is a student

¹ Quran; 15:94

² *Balāghah*: rhetoric, the art of expressing a meaning in an effective and persuasive way by speaking or writing. (Look: hulusi Kılıç, “Belâgat,” in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi (Islamic Encyclopaedia)* (TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi (Centre for Islamic Studies), 1992).

³ Shihāb al-Dīn Mahmūd al-Alūsī, *Rūh al-Ma’ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm wa al-Sab’al-Mathānī*, vol. 14 (Beirut: Dār Ihyā al-Turāth wa al-‘Arabī, 2008), 86.

⁴ Quran, 2:23-4, 10:38, 11:13, 52:34, 17:88.

⁵ Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, “İ‘CÂZÜ’L-KUR’ÂN,” in *İslam Ansiklopedisi (Encyclopedia of Islam)* (TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi (Centre for Islamic Studies), 2000), <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/icazul-kuran>.

of al-Nazzām, is one of the first Muslim scholars who argued for this second interpretation. This second interpretation was later on developed by Muslim scholars such as Abū ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (873-935) and al-Rummānī (908-994) and became the widely accepted interpretation.⁶

Nazm

As the second interpretation of *i’jāz* became widely accepted, it brought with it the question of what exactly forms the inimitability of the Quran. Various views have been put to answer this question. One of these views is that the Quran contains predictions about future events (*ikhbār al-ghayb*). Although prediction of future is outside of human capacity and cannot be imitated, this view has not been accepted because not every Quranic verse makes predictions about the future. If *ikhbār al-ghayb* is the base for the inimitability of the Quran, the inimitability would be restricted to the Quranic verses that make prediction of the future. However, the Islamic belief is that the inimitability is present in every part of the Quran. Then, the aspect that forms the inimitability of the Quran should be something else.⁷ Without going into various views in this regard, the widely accepted view will be discussed here.

The widely accepted view is that the *i’jāz* of the Quran is mainly due to its high level of the so called “*nazm*”. The Arabic word “*nazm*” stems from the Arabic root of “نظم” (*nazm*), which means to put things next to each other in an order, like putting the pearls next to each other orderly on the chain of a necklace.⁸ When the concept of *nazm* is related to the Quran, it connotes the arrangement of words, sentences, verses and paragraphs of the Quran in a well-organized order and structure. Then, the view is that the Quran has such a way of ordering semantic structures⁹ that it is impossible for humans to make an equivalent of it. The Islamic Encyclopedia of the “Institution of Religious Affairs of Turkey” (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı) defines Quranic *nazm* as “*the composition of semantic structures (words/sentences) that are coherent in their indications (delālet), in a way that is rational, and in order to form eloquent and sound meanings.*”¹⁰ This definition of *nazm* encompasses the Arabic grammar (*nahw*) and also the sciences of *balāghah* (*bayān*, *ma‘ānī* and *badī‘*). Because the Arabic grammar and the

⁶ Yavuz.

⁷ Celalettin Divlekci, “HATTÂBÎ’NİN (Ö. 388) İ‘CÂZ ANLAYIŞI VE KUR’AN’IN İFADE BİÇİMİNE YÖNELİK TENKİTLERE YAKLAŞIMI,” *EKEV Akademi Dergisi*, no. 60 (2014): 100.

⁸ Muhammed al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb Al-Ta’rīfāt* (Beirut: Maktabah Lubnān, 1969), 261.

⁹ By ‘semantic structures’, I mean the minimum part of a text that contains a meaning. From small to large: a word, sentence, paragraph and a whole text are included in the definition of ‘semantic structure’

¹⁰ SEDAT ŞENSOY, “NAZMÜ’L-KUR’ÂN,” in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi (TDV Islamic Encyclopedia)* (TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi (Centre for Islamic Research), 2006), <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/nazmul-kuran>.

sciences of *balāghah* in themselves revolve around the construction of words and sentences. Since *naẓm* has been considered the base for the *i'jāz* of the Quran, the *naẓm* of the Quran has been argued to be on a miraculous level, and impossible to imitate.¹¹

There is no clear evidence of when the concept of *naẓm* was introduced. But, since it has been introduced as an opposition to the theory of *ṣarfe*, it may have started as early as the 8th century. Ibn al-Muqaffa' (720-759) is being considered as the first Muslim scholar who has introduced the concept of *naẓm*. But the first Muslim scholar who wrote a book on this matter is al-Jāhiz (777-869), where he criticizes the followers of the *ṣarfe* theory and argues that the *naẓm* of the Quran is what forms the inimitability of the Quran. According to him, the *i'jāz* of the Quran should not be looked for in its particular words or sentences, it rather reveals itself in larger semantic structures, in a Quranic chapter as a whole and in the Quran in its holistic view. Just like al-Jāhiz, al-Rummānī (908-994) points out that words in themselves convey limited meanings, but when they are interrelated with other words in a sentence, limitless meanings can be conveyed. He argues that the Quran does this in a inimitable way.

The Muslim scholar who did the most extensive study on the concept of *naẓm* is 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjānī (1009-1078). In his book "*Dalā'il al-I'jāz*", he argues that *naẓm* is the most important element in the *i'jāz* of the Quran. According to him, *naẓm* is not formed on the level of words, but in larger semantic structures such as sentences and paragraphs. The linguistic value of a given word can only be determined when it is put in relation to other semantic structures in a given sentence and paragraph. Gold and silver are not jewelry in themselves, but when made in a certain shape and put together with other jewelry stones, it acquires the level of jewelry. Just like this, words do not have any linguistic value unless they are examined with a holistic view. The *i'jāz* of the Quran is something which should not be searched for in the words, but in the way in which those words are placed in a given piece of text.¹²

It should be noted here that the purpose here with semantic structures such as "words" and "sentences" is not the phonetic pronunciation nor their textual shape, but rather the meanings that they indicate. As al-Jurjānī points out in his book *Dalā'il al-I'jaz*: meanings are first

¹¹ ŞENSOY.

¹² Kadir Kınar, "Abdülkâhir Cürcânî'nin Nazm Teorisi," *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 8, no. 13 (2006): 74.

formed in the mind, and then uttered in words and sentences. The *naẓm* (composition) of words and sentences (*lafẓ*) is preceded by the *naẓm* (composition) of meanings (*ma'nā*) in the mind.¹³

After having given this overview about the concept of *naẓm*, it still remains unclear why the Quran has a *naẓm* that is inimitable. A regular book in fact is also a collection of words, sentences, paragraphs and chapters. They collectively convey a meaning to the reader. From this point of view, any piece of text is suitable to be called as a text that has *naẓm*. What is it then that makes the *naẓm* of the Quran inimitable? Muslim scholars who argued that the *naẓm* of the Quran is the base for its inimitability did not show concretely how this concept is worked out in the Quran. Until the 15th century, the concept of *naẓm* continued in this unclarity, until the Muslim scholar al-Biqā'ī (1406-1480) wrote an extensive exegesis, interpreting the Quran based on *naẓm*.

The first Muslim scholar who comes in mind when talking about *naẓm* is al-Biqā'ī. This is because of his extensive *tafsīr*, exegesis of the Quran, where he bases his whole Quran-interpretation on *naẓm*. As the title of his *tafsīr* "*Naẓm al-Durar*" (*tr: the composition of pearls*) suggests, he highlights the concept *naẓm* throughout his whole exegesis and points out that the composition and organization of the Quran is in itself a miracle. The exegesis of al-Biqā'ī brings some clarity to the question of how *naẓm* is being worked out in the Quran. In the beginning of each Quranic chapter (*sūrah*), he dives in the meaning of the name of the *sūrah*. Based on that meaning, he ascribes a main theme to that *sūrah*. He then interprets the verses within that *sūrah* through the lens of the main theme. Since *naẓm* is about the relation between semantic structures and their way of arrangement, al-Biqā'ī mainly focuses on the relation between verses and attempts to extract meanings in addition to the clear meanings (المَعْنَى الصَّرِيحُ) of the verses.¹⁴ Then, *naẓm* is about analyzing the way how semantic structures are arranged and how this results in various meanings in addition to the clear meaning of the verse. The next part of this thesis will dive into this matter.

¹³ Kīnar, 74.

¹⁴ Burhan al-Din Al-Biqā'i, *Naẓm al-Durar*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), 6–8.

In modern literature, one of the well-known Muslim scholars in the study of *naẓm* was Hamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī (1863-1930). According to al-Farāhī, in order to find *naẓm* in the Quran one should find the so-called “‘*amūd*”, the key idea. Every *sūrah* revolves around an ‘*amūd*, and every *ayah* within that *sūrah* is linked to that ‘*amūd*, unfolding the meaning of that ‘*amūd* from the beginning of the *sūrah* to its end. Al-Farāhī puts his method in practice in his book called “*Dalā’il al-Niẓām*” (evidences of order). Other Muslim scholars in modern period, such as Mustansir Mir and Darwīsh al-Jundī.¹⁵ This point of view does not really differ from that of al-Biqā‘ī.

Literature on the concept of *naẓm* are numerous and their number continues to increase, even a short description of them will exceed the limits of this thesis proposal. However, upon taking a general look at the studies that are made on *naẓm*, the common idea is that the verses, sentences, and chapters of the Quran are composed with a relation and an order with each other. This relation and order cannot be seen in words in themselves, but in larger semantic structures such as sentences, paragraphs and chapters.

However, there is another Muslim scholar whose method of using the concept of *naẓm* stands out from others, and yet remains unnoticed in the literature of *naẓm*. Sa‘īd Nūrsī (1877-1960), a Muslim scholar who lived in the late 19th and 20th century, wrote his book called “*Ishārāt al-I‘jāz*” (*Signs of Miracle*) during the 1st world war in the trenches. Because of the circumstances, he was able to write only a small proportion of what he originally intended to: *sūrah al-Fātiḥa* (opening chapter of the Quran) and the first 33 verses of *sūrah al-Baqarah* (2nd chapter of the Quran).¹⁶ However, this small proportion shows enough indications of how Sa‘īd Nūrsī uses the concept of *naẓm*.

¹⁵ Mustansir Mir, “Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qur’an: A Brief Review of the Idea of Nazm in Tafsīr Literature,” *Al-Bayan Journal* 11, no. 2 (December 2013): 24, <http://dx.doi.org/10.11136/jqh.1311.02.02>.

¹⁶ Saīd Nursi, *İşaratü'l-İ‘caz* (Istanbul: Envar NEsriyat, 2011), 5–6.

The first reason why Sa'īd Nūrsī stands out from others is because of how he interprets the concept of *nazm* and the way how he puts it in to practice. He interprets *nazm* through the concept of “*jazālah*”. Literally, *jazālah* means firmness and hardness. As a term in traditional Arabic literature, *jazālah* refers to the words that have a strong and hard phonetic pronunciation (*alfāz al-jazalah*). In traditional Arabic literature, it is preferred to use *alfāz al-jazalah* in contexts of conflict, anger, and fear. Whereas in contexts of love, mercy, and beauty, it is preferred to use words that have a soft phonetic pronunciation (*alfāz al-raqīqah*), which is the opposite of *alfāz al-jazalah*. The main idea with soft- and hard words is to maintain the coherence between the meaning and the phonetic pronunciation.¹⁷

However, this definition of *jazālah* is in terms of the correlation between meaning and phonetic pronunciation. What Sa'īd Nūrsī merely means by *jazālah* is the strong correlation between the meaning of a semantic structure and its way of composition. In other words, every Quranic chapter, verse and sentence has a meaning. The placement of verses, sentences and words to convey this meaning has been made in such a way that it strongly contributes to its overall meaning. To put this into an example, he mentions the second-, minute-, and hour-hand of a clock. All of them collaborate and completes each other's work in order to show a whole, the time. Likewise, the chapters, sentences and words in the Quran are selected and placed in such a way that they collaborate with each other to convey the main message of the Quran like the cogs of a machine.¹⁸

Sa'īd Nūrsī agrees with the afore-mentioned Muslim scholars on the point that *nazm* of the Quran can be identified in larger semantic structures such as sentences and on the level of *sūrah*. However, he states that smaller semantic structures also carry signs and indications of that *nazm*. As he states in the introduction of his book, “*although the beauty of something is seen in its whole and cannot be seen in its parts, the i'jāz of the Quran -which can be seen in a holistic view- can also be seen in its parts.*”¹⁹ Then, in contrast to the afore-mentioned Muslim scholars, Sa'īd Nūrsī argues that the beauty of a speech can also be seen in small semantic structures such as words, or even in syntactical formations. This view of Sa'īd Nūrsī will be put in to perspective in the following example:

¹⁷ KAZIM YETİŞ, “CEZÂLET” (TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi (Centre for Islamic Studies), 1993), <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/cezalet>.

¹⁸ Sa'īd Nūrsī, *Sözler (The Words)* (Istanbul: Envar Neşriyât (Envar Publications), 2004), 370.

¹⁹ Sa'īd Nūrsī, *İşâretü'l-İ'jâz (Turkish Translation)*, trans. Abdülmeccid Nūrsī (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Presidency of Religious Affairs), 2014), 7.

(21:46) وَلَئِن مَّسَّتْهُمُ نَفْحَةٌ مِّنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّكَ

“If they were touched by even a breath of your Lord’s torment.”

The purpose of this Quranic verse is to point out the severity of God’s punishment by showing the least amount of that punishment. Therefore, every word in this sentence must implicate fewness and littleness in their meaning in order to support this purpose. Beginning with "لَئِن", which means “if”, is a question mark for doubt (*tashkīk*) which implicates fewness when compared with certainty. Then, “مَسَّتْهُمُ” (*they were touched*) means a slight touching which points to fewness. Then, “نَفْحَةٌ”, which means a breath, indicates a whiff. The grammatical conjugation of “نَفْحَةٌ” signifies “once” (*Maṣdar al-marrah*). The meaning would then be the slight touching of a one whiff, which again implicates littleness. The nunation (*tanwīn*) at the end of “نَفْحَةٌ” signifies the indefiniteness (*tankīr*) of that breath and implicates the such littleness of that breath that it can scarcely be known. Then, “مِّنْ”, which means “of”, indicates a part and in turn implicates again fewness. Then, “عَذَابِ”, when compared to “نَكَالٍ” (chastisement) and “عِقَابٍ” (penalty) is a light form of punishment and implicates fewness. Then, رَبِّكَ (your lord), stems from the word “رَبِّ” and originally means the “sustainer” and alludes to compassion. It implicates fewness because it is used in place of words such as “فَهَّازٍ” (subduer) or “جَبَّارٍ” (all-compelling). In this way, Sa’īd Nūrsī demonstrates how the words of the Quran support each other in their meaning in order to strengthen the meaning of the sentence.

As it can be understood from this example, Sa’īd Nūrsī follows the same method as the aforementioned Muslim scholars. That is, pre-ascribing a main theme to the text and analyzing the relations between the semantic structures through the lens of that main theme. However, Sa’īd Nūrsī goes a step further by going down deeper into the level of words and syntactical structures and how that relates to the main theme of the sentence. Whereas the afore-mentioned Muslim scholars, like al-Jāhīz and al-Biqā’ī, analyzed the relations between semantic structures on the level of Quranic chapters and verses.

Until now, several points can be deduced from the explanations above:

1. Legitimacy of *naẓm*

The concept of *naẓm* has been introduced as a key aspect of the Quran's inimitability, serving as a framework to explain its miraculous nature. Since the mainstream method of Quranic exegesis relies on interpreting verses through the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, Muslim scholars felt compelled to establish the legitimacy of the concept of *naẓm*. This is evident in the works of al-Biqā'ī, who explicitly mentions pausing his writing of the exegesis *Naẓm al-Durar* due to significant criticism. The primary objection was that Quranic exegesis should exclusively follow the traditional method of using prophetic narrations. In response, al-Biqā'ī authored a separate book to refute these criticisms and solidify the legitimacy of the concept of *naẓm*.²⁰

2. Flexibility in interpretation

The traditional way of interpreting the Quran is to find the suitable narration of the prophet Mohammed and/or his companions that explains a given verse. Since the narrations give a certain way of understanding the Quran, it gives limited space to the *mufassir* (interpreter) to bring his own views about that verse,. However, the concept of *naẓm* gives flexibility to the *mufassir* since this concept is about analyzing the way of composition semantic structures and how that relates to the meaning of the verse. In doing this, a wide arena of interpretation possibilities opens up for the *mufassir*, and, this results in the following point.

3. Subjectivity in *Naẓm* as Quran's inimitability

Although the main objective is to prove the miraculousness of the Quran through the concept of *naẓm*, the work that has been put to achieve this remains subjective. Because the *mufassir* comes up with his own understanding of how different semantic structures relate to each other and how they contribute to the conveying of the main meaning. As it will become clear in the 2nd part of this thesis, different interpreters (al-Biqā'ī & Sa'īd Nūrsī) who makes an exegesis of the same Quranic verse can differ in their interpretation while basing their analysis on the concept of *naẓm*.

²⁰ NECATİ KARA, "NAZMU'D-DÜRER," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi (TDV Islamic Encyclopedia)* (TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi (Centre for Islamic Research), 2006), <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/nazmud-durer>.

Research Question

Based on the above-mentioned points, this thesis aims to argue that the concept of *nazm* provides the flexibility to come up with various interpretations in Quranic exegesis. The way how this concept is understood and employed to explain Quranic verses differs from *mufassir* to *mufassir*, which results in various interpretations. In result, the argument will be made that although this concept is argued to be the base for the inimitability of the Quran, it still remains a matter of subjectivity due to its flexibility in perception. This in result brings up the question how this concept relates to the Quran being miraculous. In other words, if every *mufassir* has his own understanding of *nazm* and his own method of employing it in the exegesis of the Quran to show its inimitability, *in what way does the concept of nazm relate to the inimitability of the Quran?*

This thesis will dive into various views of Muslim scholars who wrote about the concept of *nazm* and will try to extract ideas these Muslim scholars have in common. In this way, the thesis will attempt to find an answer to the question of how *nazm* relates to the Quran being miraculous. The thesis will also argue that, whether this concept proves that the Quran is miraculous or not, it is a matter that remains subjective. It gives the *mufassir* a wide range of interpretation possibilities, which results in the deduction of various meanings.

In order to demonstrate that the concept of *nazm* is being understood differently and put in to practice in different ways, there will be a comparison of two *tafsir*-books in their exegesis of the 1st chapter of the Quran:

1. “*Nazm al-Durar*” of al-Biqā‘ī.
2. “*Ishārāt al-I‘jāz*” of Sa‘īd Nūrsī

The selection of these two books is due to the fact that their authors have put their views on *nazm* into practice while others did not. Besides this, the former is written in the 15th century while the latter is written in the 20th century, which might sketch a brief overview of how the perception of *nazm* has differed from the medieval period until the modern period.

Outline

The thesis consists of 2 main parts and a conclusion. The 1st part of the thesis will dive more in the concept of *nazm*. In this part, Muslim scholars' various views on *nazm* will be discussed. These views on *nazm* will be discussed in a chronological order and will give an overview of how the perception of this concept has evolved. The Muslim scholars whose views on *nazm* will be discussed are:

1. “*Bayān I’jāz al-Qur’ān*” (Explanation of the Inimitability of the Quran) of al-Khaṭṭābī (931-998).
2. “*Dalā’il al-i’jāz*” (Evidences of Inimitability) of al-jurjānī (1009-1078).
3. “*Nazm al-Durar*” (The Composition of Pearls) of al-Biqā’ī.
4. “*Ishārāt al-I’jāz*” (Indications of Inimitability) of Sa’īd Nūrsī.

The 2nd part of the thesis will demonstrate how the concept of *nazm* has been put in to practice in different ways by the example of the opening chapter of the Quran (*sūrah al-Fātiḥa*). As it was stated above, the book of al-Biqā’ī and Sa’īd Nūrsī will be used to showcase these different ways.

Part 1: Nazm

As it is explained in the introduction, the *naẓm* of the Quran has been argued by Muslim scholars such as al-Khaṭṭābī, al-Jurjānī and Sa‘īd Nūrsī for being the most important element that forms the inimitability of the Quran. Although the concept of *naẓm* is not a topic which has attracted extensive modern commentary, an important body of pre-modern books demonstrates that it was an issue considered by important scholars of the past. Each book that has been written in this regard by Muslim scholars from the 10th century onwards has its own perspective of understanding the *naẓm*. The first part of this thesis will dive into a selection of books which reserved substantive place for the discussion of *naẓm*. The books that will be discussed are as follows:

1. “*Bayān I’jāz al-Qur’ān*” (explanation of the inimitability of the Quran) of Al-Khaṭṭābī (931-998)
2. “*Dalā’il al-i’jāz*” (evidences of inimitability) of Al-jurjānī (1009-1078)
3. “*Naẓm al-Durar*” (The Composition of Pearls) of al-Biqā‘ī.
4. “*Ishārāt al-I’jāz*” of Sa‘īd Nūrsī

These four books will give an overview of how medieval and modern Muslim scholars interpreted the concept of *naẓm*.

Al-khaṭṭābī (931-998)

In his book “*Bayān I’jāz al-Qur’ān*”, al-Khaṭṭābī discusses the various views about the inimitability of the Quran. First of them is the *sarfe* theory²¹, which he refutes by referring to the following verse:

“Say, [O Prophet], “If [all] humans and jinn were to come together to produce the equivalent of this Quran, they could not produce its equal, no matter how they supported each other.”²²

This verse implies that the way is open for human and jinn to produce an equivalent of the Quran and that they have the possibility to take on the challenge. This is something substantially different from, as the *sarfe* theory argues, being deprived from the potential to take on the challenge. Al-Khaṭṭābī then discusses Quran’s about the unseen (*ikhbār al-ghayb*),

²¹ See [p.5](#) for explanation of sarfe theory.

²² Quran, 18: 88 (translation: www.quran.com)

such as the verses about previous and future events. The Quran includes information about the lives of previous prophets and folks.²³ It also predicts that the Byzantines will have victory over the Sassanids²⁴, that the Muslims will have victory in the battlefield of Badr and that they will enter Makka in peace.²⁵ The fact that these predictions of the Quran have come true consists another aspect of the *i'jāz* of the Quran. But, al-Khaṭṭābī does not agree that this aspect of the Quran on its own makes up the *i'jāz* of the Quran. This is due to the fact that not every *sūra* contains information about the unseen, while the Quran challenges the Arabs to come up with a similar of *any* Quranic chapter. This concludes that the information of the unseen on its own cannot be taken as a base for the *i'jāz* of the Quran. According to al-Khaṭṭābī, this does not mean that the information of the unseen in the Quran is not a part of the *i'jāz*. But because it does not exist in every part of the Quran, it is not enough to explain the *i'jāz* of the Quran.

Al-Khaṭṭābī also criticizes the viewpoint that it is not possible to understand the inimitability of the Quran. According to this view, it can be understood that the inimitability of the Quran is present since nobody could take on the challenge to come up with an equivalent of the Quran. However, it is not possible to know the essence of this inimitability. According to al-Khaṭṭābī, the reason for the existence of this viewpoint is the lack of knowledge about the Arabic language and literature. From this point al-Khaṭṭābī clarifies different degrees of speeches in terms of their eloquence to explain the *i'jāz* of the Quran:

1. *Balīgh* (eloquent) and *jazl* (hard in speech).
2. *Faṣīḥ* (fluent in articulation) and *sahl* (easy to pronounce).
3. *Rasl* (easy and gentle speech) and *ṭalk* (smooth speech without stuttering).

Al-Khaṭṭābī does not clarify in detail what he exactly means by these terms. But he points out that the Quran has combined a mixture of these three degrees of speeches. These different degrees of speeches contradict each other. Because, for instance, *jazl* means speeches that have a hard sound in their phonetics, while *sahl* refers to speeches that are easy to pronounce. The fact that the Quran has combined both these two contradicting degrees of speeches is a virtue unique to the Quran. As an example, in the 69th *sūra* (*sūra al-ḥāqqa*) -where the context is ‘The

²³ See for example: Quran; 38: 12-14, 91: 11-15, 50: 12-15.

²⁴ “The Romans have been defeated in a nearby land. Yet following their defeat, they will triumph. Within three to nine years” (Quran, 30: 2-4)

²⁵ “Indeed, Allah will fulfil His Messenger’s vision in all truth: Allah willing, you will surely enter the Sacred Mosque, in security—‘some with’ heads shaved and ‘others with’ hair shortened—without fear.1 He knew what you did not know, so He first granted you the triumph at hand” (Quran, 48-27).

Day of Judgment’ and ‘the previous folks who disbelieved and encountered the wrath of God’- the Quran uses hard-to-pronounce speeches like “*qāri‘a*” (striking disaster), “*tāghiya*” (overwhelming blast) and “*ṣār‘ā*” (lying dead). Whereas in the 76th *sūra* (*sūra al-insān*) -where the context is God’s blessings (*ni‘ma*) in Paradise- the Quran makes use of easy-to-pronounce speeches that have a soft sound in their phonetics.²⁶

The view of Al-Khaṭṭābī that these different degrees of speeches contradict each other can be clarified as follows: The Arab poets who were used to use the *jazl* type of speech (hard-to-pronounce speech) in their poetries cannot be successful in other type of speeches as they are in *jazl*. Because their poetry skills have been developed in the direction of a certain type of speech and cannot be combined with other type of speeches. Likewise, the poets who have developed their skills in *sahl* (easy-to-pronounce speeches) are not able to combine that with the *jazl*. The fact that the Quran has combined both of them has resulted in the inability of Arabs to come up with an equivalent of the Quran.²⁷

Besides this, in poetry, it adds up to the beauty of a speech if a word is selected whose pronunciation fits the theme. However, if one word is preferred over the other just because its pronunciation fits the theme while another word is more suitable in terms of its meaning, this would violate the eloquence of that speech. Then, the beauty of a speech is finding the perfect balance between words that fits the theme in terms of its pronunciation as well as words that is suitable in terms of its meaning. According to al-Khaṭṭābī, finding this perfect balance and preserving it in a whole speech is something that humans cannot do. Since the Quran, as al-Khaṭṭābī puts it, establishes this balance and also preserves it, shows that the Quran is inimitable.²⁸

By different degrees of speeches, al-Khaṭṭābī does not mean that some parts of the Quran are less in their linguistic value than others. But he argues that, depending on the context, the Quran employs a specific type of speech that fits the meaning of the verse or chapter.

²⁶ Divlekci, “HATTÂBÎ’NİN (Ö. 388) İCÂZ ANLAYIŞI VE KUR’AN’IN İFADE BİÇİMİNE YÖNELİK TENKİTLERE YAKLAŞIMI,” 103.

²⁷ al-Rummānī, al-Khaṭṭābī, and al-Jurjānī, *Thalāth Rasā’il fī I’jāz al-Qur’ān* (Cairo, Egypt: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1976), 26.

²⁸ al-Rummānī, al-Khaṭṭābī, and al-Jurjānī, 27.

After pointing out the different degrees of speeches of the Quran, al-khaṭṭābī attempts to uncover the main reason behind the inimitability of the Quran: According to al-khaṭṭābī, a speech (*kalām*) consists of three components:

1. *Alfāz*: The words, which carries the meaning.
2. *Ma‘nā*: The meaning which are conveyed by the words.
3. *Nazm*: The semantic relation (*ribāṭ*, plural of *rabṭa*), between the former two.²⁹

Nazm is the placement of each word in the right place that it deserves in the sentence. To put this into perspective, we take the following Arabic sentence as an example:

ضَرَبَ زَيْدٌ عَمْرًا (Zayd hit ‘Amr)

In this sentence, the words (*alfāz*) are the first component. Each of these words convey a meaning (*ma‘nā*), which is the second component of a *kalām*. Finally, the semantic relation³⁰ functions as the regulator between the two. For example, the word “ضَرَبَ”, being a word, is the first component, the meaning of it is “hit”, which is the second component. Now, in which position of the sentence should “ضَرَبَ” take place? And what is the relation of its meaning to the other words of the sentence? There is where the semantic relation, *nazm*, comes in place. That is to say, the meaning of this sentence is “Zayd hit ‘Amr”, this requires that the verb “ضَرَبَ” should come in the first place in the sentence, since the emphasis here is ‘hit’. “زَيْدٌ” is the subject (*fā‘il*) of “ضَرَبَ” and thus will be put in the second place. ‘Amr is the object (*maf‘ūl*) who is affected by “ضَرَبَ” and “زَيْدٌ”, and therefore, it will get the least important position in the sentence.

However, if we want to emphasis that Zayd hit ‘Amr, and he did not hit someone else, in this case, it is a requirement to put the focus on ‘Amr’. Then, ‘Amr will be put in the first place in the sentence as follows:

عَمْرًا ضَرَبَ زَيْدٌ (‘Amr, Zayd hit)

²⁹ al-Rummānī, al-Khaṭṭābī, and al-Jurjānī, 27.

³⁰ By “semantic relation” of the sentence, I mean the relation of the words with each other in a sentence in terms of their *meaning*.

The semantic relation, *naẓm*, acts thus as the regulator in a sentence. It is the yardstick by which it is determined which semantic structure takes which place in a sentence. Al-khaṭṭābī refers to this last component of a *kalām* as *naẓm*. He says:

"رَبَّاطٌ لَّهُمَا نَاطِمٌ" ([semantic] relations that organizes the two)

Thus, according to al-khaṭṭābī, the third component of a *kalām* is the linkage between the words and their meanings in a given sentence.

After having laid down the three components of a *kalām*, al-khaṭṭābī goes on to point out what the pillar of Quran's inimitability is ('*amūd al-balāghah*). He refers to the eloquence of the Quran as the placement of the most proper word in the right spot in a sentence. In such a way that any replacement of that word or the change of its spot would result in the change of meaning, which in turn entails the corruption (*fasād*) of the meaning and the deletion of the eloquence, *balāghah*. Al-khaṭṭābī puts this into perspective by mentioning that there are 'words with close meanings' (*al-alfāz al-mutaqāribah*) which regular people perceive them to be synonyms (*al-ma'ānī al-mutasāwīya*), but are not. Afterwards, he clarifies his argument by bringing various examples. One example is the following Quranic verse:

الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ

"So, woe to those who are unmindful of their prayers"³¹

Mālik b. Dīnār (...-748) narrated that one day Hasan gathered him [Mālik b. Dīnār], Abū al-'Aliyya al-Riyāḥī (...-712), Naṣr b. 'Āṣim al-Laythī (...-711) and 'Āṣim al-Juḥdarī (...-750) to discuss this Quranic verse. One of them asked al-Riyāḥī how to understand the word "سَاهُونَ" (unmindful).³² Al-Riyāḥī replied: "*they are the ones who do not know whether they are in the 3rd or 4th rak'ah* ³³ *of their prayer*". Hasan responded: "*stop there! It is not like that. "سَاهُونَ" means the ones who are unmindful 'of' their prayers. Do not you see the phrase "عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ" (of their prayers)?!*"³⁴

³¹ Quran, 107: 5

³² Quran, 107: 4-5; "So, woe to those prayers, yet are unmindful of their prayers."

³³ *Rak'ah*: a term referring to a set of physical movements and verbal prayers that takes place in one prayer cycle.

³⁴ al-Rummānī, al-Khaṭṭābī, and al-Jurjānī, *Thalāth Rasā'il Fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif bi Misr, 1973), 29.

In this example, Al-Khaṭṭābī wants to draw the attention to the difference between “عن” (of) and “في” (in). According to him, Abū al- ‘Aliyya did not know the difference between the two, and therefore, understood that the act of ‘unmindful’ is something that happens *in* the prayer. However, if that was the case, the Quran would use “في” instead of “عن”. By choosing the preposition “عن” over “في”, the Quran makes clear that the act of ‘unmindful’ is something that happens outside of the prayer.

Since the pillar of *naẓm* is, according to al-Khaṭṭābī, the right selection of words and their placement in the right spot in a sentence, the knowledge of vocabulary and their meanings should be studied clearly. This brings us to the three components that are mentioned above. That is to say, in order to understand the usage of *naẓm* in the Quran, one is required to have knowledge about the vocabulary, about words with close meanings (*al-alfāz al-mutaqāribah*) and what differences they have in their meanings. One is also required to understand which meaning these words are employed for in a given sentence. For example, the word “ضَرَبَ” can mean ‘hit’ in one sentence but it can also mean ‘to put an example’ when it is used in combination with the word “مَثَلًا” (example).³⁵ Lastly, one is also required to understand what the relation is of the words are to other words in a sentence.

Therefore, al-Khaṭṭābī goes on to clarify the difference between words which have close meaning but are not the same. Such as “المعرفة” and “العلم” (knowledge). Both of them have the meaning of ‘knowing’. But, as a difference, the word “المعرفة” does not require two objects whereas the word “العلم” does. Therefore, when one wants to prove the existence of Allah, he says “عرفت الله”, meaning ‘I recognize Allah’, because recognizing has one object. But when one wants to ascribe an attribute to Allah, he says “عَلِمْتُ اللَّهَ قَادِرًا” (I know God as almighty), for ‘ascribing’ requires two objects.

In order to highlight that *naẓm* is the basis for the inimitability of the Quran, al-Khaṭṭābī brings up another perspective in to his analysis of *naẓm*. That is, the Quran includes a wide range of subjects such as the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), orders and prohibitions (*taḥlīl & taḥrīm*), telling of the unseen (*ikhbār al-ghayb*)³⁶, morals and ethics (*al-akhlāq*), prophethood (*al-nubuwwah*), judicial regulations (*al-aḥkām*), life in the world and hereafter (*al-dunyā wa al-ākhirah*), promising the believers with paradise (*al-wa‘d*) while also threatening disbelievers with hell

³⁵ See for example Quran, 39: 29)

³⁶ Unseen (*al-ghayb*): refers here to all what is hidden and beyond human perception. Such as God, the future, the life after death and the lives of previous prophets and folks which cannot be discovered by reason.

(*al-wa'īd*) and much more. Combining various subjects in a single book while preserving the unity of the message is, as al-khaṭṭābī puts it, something which is out of the reach of human capacity. When it comes to the words, the Quran combines both “hard-pronounced” words (*alfāz al-fakhāmah*) and “soft-pronounced words (*alfāz al-'udhūbah*), this while preserving the overall harmony of its pronunciation.³⁷

According to al-khaṭṭābī, humans are not able to combine all of these various subject into a single work. He gives concrete examples by mentioning the experiences of the Arabs when they heard the Quran for the first time. Such as when they could not come up with an explanation for the eloquence (*balāghah*) of the Quran but to say that it is the “*ancient fables which he [Muhammed] has had written down*”³⁸ and when they claimed that the Quran is “*nothing but magic from the ancients*”³⁹. The fact that the Arabs ascribed ‘magic’ to the Quran shows that they were in fact amazed by its eloquence and could not challenge it. For if they had been able to take on the challenge by coming up with a similar book with the same level of that of the Quran, they would certainly do it and would not ascribe ‘magic’ to it.⁴⁰ Al-Khaṭṭābī’s views on the *naẓm* of the Quran has influenced the study of the Quran and his book “*Bayān I’jāz al-Qur’ān*” has been the first work in this topic.

³⁷ al-Rummānī, al-Khaṭṭābī, and al-Jurjānī, *Thalāth Rasā'il Fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 26–28.

³⁸ Quran, 25: 5

³⁹ Quran, 74: 24

⁴⁰ al-Rummānī, al-Khaṭṭābī, and al-Jurjānī, *Thalāth Rasā'il Fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 28.

Al-Jurjānī (1009-1078)

Al-jurjānī is a Muslim scholar who is known for writing the most substantial work on the concept of *naẓm*. His whole book “*Dalā’il al-I’jāz*” (Evidences of Inimitability) revolves around the concept of *naẓm*. Although all his ideas about *naẓm* cannot be summarized here in a few paragraphs, his most important views will be outlined. In the very beginning of his book, al-Jurjānī points out the most intrinsic feature of *naẓm*: There is no *naẓm* until semantic structures⁴¹ are related and connected to each other. Meanings are not constructed by freestanding words, but by compound semantic structures. The way in which these semantic structures are organized and the relation they have with each other are what reveal the meaning. For instance, the words “زَيْدٌ” (Zayd) and “قَائِمٌ” (standing) do not provide any useful information unless the latter becomes a predicate for the former and the former a subject for the latter. The *naẓm* reveals itself when the relation of subject-predicate is established between the two words, which provides the meaning: “*Zayd is standing*”.⁴²

The basis for *naẓm* is thus the interrelation and the organization of semantic structures. But before organizing semantic structures in a text, there is another process that precedes it. That is the ordering of meanings in the heart of the speaker/writer. That is to say, *naẓm* begins first in the heart of the speaker, where the meanings are organized, and these meanings are in turn displayed in semantic structures. Semantic structures thus should be understood in terms of their meanings they carry and not in terms of sole utterances.

Having laid down the basis of *naẓm*, al-Jurjānī goes further in elaborating his views by summing up the three components that are the source of beauty in a speech: (1) the meaning itself, (2) the words that are chosen to express the meaning and (3) the way these words are strung together in a sentence (*naẓm*). These three components create the form of the meaning (*ṣūrah al-ma’nā*). In other words, the image through which the meaning is displayed. How does *naẓm* relate to these components? Al-Jurjānī points out that *naẓm* in this regard is nothing more than “*heeding the meanings of syntax*” (تَوْجِي مَعَانِي النَّحْوِ). That is to say, stringing the words together by obeying the rules of syntax (*al-naḥw*) and using its techniques to express the desired meaning.⁴³

⁴¹ By ‘semantic structures’, I mean any part of a text that contains a meaning. From small to large: a word, sentence, paragraph and a whole text are included in ‘semantic structure’.

⁴² ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Dalā’il al-I’jāz* (Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Madani, 1997), 81.

⁴³ Lara Harb, “*Naẓm, Wonder, and the Inimitability of the Quran*,” in *In Arabic Poetics* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 212–3.

Al-jurjānī's definition of *nazm*, “*heeding the meanings of syntax*”, is something that requires more elaboration here. From his definition mentioned above, it is clear that he argues that *nazm* involves the obeying of the Arabic syntax (*al-nahw*), but it does not end there. *Nazm* also entails the change and manipulation of a syntactical structure from its original shape -but without violating the rules of syntax- in order to convey a particular meaning to the addressee (e.g. listener/reader). The addressee is then required to make effort to discover the meaning that is desired to be expressed.

As an example, Al-jurjānī mentions the following Quranic verse that describes the nature of hypocrites' actions:

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الضَّلَالَةَ بِالْهُدَىٰ فَمَا رَبِحَت تِّجَارَتُهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا مُهْتَدِينَ⁴⁴

“*They are the ones who trade guidance for misguidance. But their trade did not profit, and they are not 'rightly' guided.*”

In this verse, the verb “فَمَا رَبِحَت” (did not profit) is ascribed to “تِّجَارَتُهُمْ” (their trade) and not to the ones who did the trade, “أُولَٰئِكَ” (they). Realistically speaking, the subject of the verb ‘did not profit’ are the hypocrites and not ‘their trade’. Because they are the ones who carry out the deed of ‘trade’ and they will be the ones who will make profit or loss from their trade. But on the contrary, the Quranic verse ascribes the verb ‘did not profit’ to ‘their trade’ and not to ‘they’ (hypocrites). In other words, the syntactical structure of this sentence has been deliberately changed in order to express a particular meaning to the addressee. The Quran deliberately ascribes ‘did not profit’ to ‘their trade’ in order to highlight the meaning that the actions of hypocrites, no matter from which aspect be looked at it, do not have any profit at all. It is possible that a trade does not result in the desired profit but still has some profit when looked at it from another perspective. But the trade of the hypocrites, ‘the trade of guidance for misguidance’, is a pure loss and deprived from any profit.⁴⁵

But, in order to discover that this Quranic verse expresses such a particular meaning, a process of deduction and thought is required. And this is what, as al-jurjānī puts it, gives a speech beauty (*maziyyah*). According to him, a speech that requires deduction and process of thought to be understood is a speech that has beauty. Creating a speech with beauty is not the product of only knowing the syntactical rules of the Arabic language, but also the product of skills to

⁴⁴ Quran, 2: 16

⁴⁵ Harb, “Nazm, Wonder, and the Inimitability of the Quran,” 215–16.

manipulate the syntactical structure of a sentence in order to add an extra layer of meaning to the original one, where the addressee is required to put the effort to understand the expressed meaning.

What does it mean to change or manipulate the syntactical structure of a sentence? Al-Jurjānī clarifies this point by giving plentiful examples, such as pre- and post-positioning (*taqdīm wa ta'khir*), ellipsis (*ḥadhf*), detachment and conjunction (*faṣl wa waṣl*) and other examples. Below, the example of 'pre- and post-positioning' will be mentioned. Pre- and post-positioning simply involves the change of word-order in a sentence from its original order. Such as pre-positioning the predicate (*khobar*) before the subject (*mubtada'*). The example of al-Jurjānī, which he mentions from the Quran, is as follows:

قُلْ أَعْيَرَ اللَّهُ اتَّخَذُ وَلِيًّا

“Say: ‘Other than Allah Will I take any guardian?’”⁴⁶

The regular order of the words in this sentence would be “will I take any guardian other than Allah?” (قُلْ أَلَا أَتَّخِذُ وَلِيًّا غَيْرَ اللَّهِ). But the Quranic verse pre-positions the phrase “other than Allah” (غَيْرَ اللَّهِ) before other parts of the sentence. With this pre-positioning, as al-jurjānī puts it, there is an emphasis on “other than Allah”. An extra layer of meaning has been added to the sentence, which is as follows: ‘Can there be any God other than Allah as a protector? How can one accept such a judgment?’ If the verse had been formulated with the regular word order, this meaning would not be expressed.⁴⁷

As it is shown in the afore-mentioned example, the manipulation of the syntactical structure of a sentence can add an extra layer of meaning to its original meaning. The skill to do this is, as al-Jurjānī explains it, an essential part of *nazm*. According to al-Jurjānī, *nazm* is thus not just about using the syntactical rules of the Arabic grammar in its proper way, but also the skill to change, manipulate and re-order the syntactical structure of a given sentence in order to express, stress and highlight the desired meaning. The addressee then is required to make effort in thought and analysis in order to discover the desired meaning. And that principle of ‘discovery’, as al-jurjānī argues, is what gives a speech its beauty. In other words, a speech that

⁴⁶ Quran, 6: 14

⁴⁷ Harb, “Nazm, Wonder, and the Inimitability of the Quran,” 220.

is straightforward with its meaning does not have any beauty. The more effort is required to grasp the meaning, the more beautiful and pleasurable its discovery will be.⁴⁸

The viewpoints of al-jurjānī on the concept of *nazm* has been influential in the works of Muslim scholars who followed his footsteps. Such as Sirāj al-Dīn Al-Sakkākī (1160-1229), who elaborated on the concept of *nazm* in his book called '*Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*' (*the key to the sciences*). In summary, al-Sakkākī adds more clarification on the principle of 'discovery', which al-Jurjānī came up with. It was clarified above that, according to al-Jurjānī, (1) the skill to change and manipulate the syntactical structure of a sentence in order to add an extra layer of meaning, and (2) the requirement that the addressee has to put effort to grasp the conveyed meaning are what give a speech beauty. Al-Sakkākī elaborated more on the nature of this 'extra layer of meaning'. He came up with the principle of 'correspondence with context' (*al-muṭābaqah 'alā muqtaḍā al-ḥāl*). That is to say, the extra layer of meaning which is created by changing and manipulating the syntactical structure of the sentence should fit the comprehension-degree and the situation of the addressee. Sa'īd Nūrsī developed more on this principle of 'correspondence', which will be explained later on.

⁴⁸ Harb, 226.

Al-Biqā'ī (1406-1480)

Until now, the concept of *naẓm* has been explained on the syntactical level. However, the concept has been analysed *naẓm* not only on the level of syntax and words, but also the relation between larger semantic structures. Such as the relation between sentences, between verses, between sentence-groups and between whole Quranic chapters. The relation between these larger semantic structures are called “*munāsabāt al-āyāt wa al-suwar*” (the relations between verses and Quranic chapters), which is a subcategory that is being studied in the field of Quranic studies (“*Ulūm al-Qur’ān*”). Many Muslim scholars have regarded the *munāsabāt al-āyāt wa al-suwar* as a high-standing study of field. Among these Muslim scholars are Al-Zajjāj (844-923), Ibn Fūrak (941-1015), Zamakhsharī (1075-1144) and Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī (1149-1210). Al-Biqā'ī is also one of these Muslim scholars, but, he stands out from the others because of his extensive exegesis where he puts this concept in to practice. Throughout his whole exegesis, he employs the concept of *munāsabāt al-āyāt wa al-suwar* in explaining the relations between Quranic verses and chapters, and named his book “*naẓm al-durar*”, which means ‘the placement of pearls nicely’. As the title suggests, al-Biqā'ī likeness the placement of every verse and chapter as the placement of pearls in a nice way. This shows that he regards *naẓm* as the placement of each verse and chapter on its right place and that he focuses more on larger semantic structures rather than syntactical structures.

Al-Biqā'ī praises the field of *munāsabāt al-āyāt wa al-suwar* and argues that the miraculousness (*i jāz*) of the Quran manifests in the relations between its verses and chapters. He cites various Muslims scholars to support this view. To begin with, in his introduction, he cites al-Rāzī, who points out that the utter beauty of the Quran is in the way the verses and chapters of the Quran are organized and the relations between them.⁴⁹ Abū Bakr b. ‘Arabī (1076-1148) said that the relation of each Quranic verse with its counterparts is in such a way that the Quran is like a single word with wide meanings.⁵⁰ Al-Biqā'ī stresses that this feature of the Quran is an important aspect of its inimitability. Because the Quran is revealed verse by verse in response to various questions in different occasions. Normally, this would result in a complex variety of themes in the Quran, where different type of topics would follow each other and would confuse the reader. But in contrast, as al-Biqā'ī puts it, the Quran shows a systematic relation between verses and its chapters, which results in the inimitability of the Quran. Al-

⁴⁹ Al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm Al-Durar Fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt Wa al-Suwar (Composition of Pearls in the Relation of Verses and Chapters)* (Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Kutub al-Islami, n.d.), 6.

⁵⁰ Al-Biqā'ī, 7.

Biqā'ī criticizes scholars who argue that relations between the verses and chapters of the Quran cannot be found, since the has been revealed verse by verse on different occasions. He likens them to the ones who view the star as little, but the deficiency of their eye made them view the star little.⁵¹

In the introduction of his book, al-Biqā'ī clarifies how he employs the concept of *munāsabāt al-āyāt wa al-suwar* in his exegesis. He points out that the main factor that reveals the relations between Quranic verses is the reader being aware that every chapter has a main theme. The relations between each Quranic verse will be understood if all of them are linked to that main theme. The explanation of each verse should be made in the direction of the main theme. At the beginning of each Quranic chapter, al-Biqā'ī dives into the meaning of the name of that chapter. Because his point is that the name of each chapter translates the main theme of that chapter.⁵²

A. Arslan, who wrote an article about his book *naẓm al-durar*, likens the concept of *munāsabāt al-āyāt wa al-suwar* to a human body. A human body consists of various organs, each of them put in the right place in the body, fulfilling their task and supporting each other for the main purpose, the functioning of the human body. These organs in turn also consist of cells, each of them also fulfilling their task for the functioning of the main body. Likewise, each Quranic verse and chapter functions as an organ within the unity of its chapter, each of them contributing to the meaning of the main purpose of that chapter.⁵³

Another perspective has been put by Ibn Al-Muqaffa' (720-759). He says:

*“An art of speech is like jeweler. The jeweler puts the jewelry together in a nice way makes an astonishing product that amazes people. Likewise, an artist in speech can make eloquent speech that amazes people.”*⁵⁴

This implies that the beauty of a speech does not lie in the words themselves, but in the way they are arranged in an orderly and nice manner. The material of gold or silver does not amaze people because of its material, but because of the manner how is processed into a nice shape

⁵¹ Al-Biqā'ī, 9.

⁵² Al-Biqā'ī, 18.

⁵³ Adnan Arslan, “A Study on the Science of Munāsabah in Tafsir Entitled Nazm al-Durar by Burhānuddīn al-Biqā'ī - Specific to the 30th Juz' of the Qur'an,” *The Journal of Tafsir Studies* 5, no. 1 (2021): 358–59, <https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.612502>.

⁵⁴ Arslan, 360.

and put together with other jewelry. Likewise, as al-Biqā'ī puts it, the inimitability of the Quran does not derive from the words and sentences themselves, but in the way these are put together with each other.⁵⁵

Sūra al-Naba'

Al-Biqā'ī argues that the relations between each Quranic verse and chapter can be understood only through deep analysis. He also points out that no exegesis has preceded him that puts the focus on the relations between each Quranic verse.⁵⁶ To put his views into perspective, a brief overview will be given on how he explains the 78th chapter of the Quran:

The name of this Quranic chapter is “*al-naba'*”, meaning ‘the tiding’. The main theme of this chapter is to prove to disbelievers that the eternal life is an unquestionable and indisputable truth through the things they see in this world. Therefore, the chapter is divided into two parts:

1. Actions and blessings of God in the world
2. Actions of God in the Hereafter.

The first part of the chapter sums up the actions and blessings (*ni'ma*) of God for humans that can be seen by the eye. This to emphasize that the world is a temporary residence like a guesthouse and that the blessings of God to humans are not for nothing. The second part of the chapter sums up the majestic events that will happen at the end of the world and are depicted through their worldly examples. Meaning that ‘the One who does this in the world can unquestionably do that also in the Hereafter’.

After warning the disbelievers that “*they will come to know*” “*the momentous news*” “*over which they disagree*”⁵⁷, the Quran turns the attention to what they will come to know through the depiction of God’s creation in the world.

⁵⁵ Arslan, 360.

⁵⁶ Al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm Al-Durar Fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt Wa al-Suwar (Composition of Pearls in the Relation of Verses and Chapters)*, 7.

⁵⁷ Quran, 78: 1-5

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهْدًا

“Have we not smoothed out the earth [like a bed]”(Quran, 78: 6)

The Quran draws the attention to the blessings within the earth. Therefore, al-Biqā‘ī mentions that there is container/contained relation between these Quranic verses. The earth is like a container and everything within the earth are like the contained.

وَالْجِبَالَ أَوْتَادًا

“And ‘made’ the mountains as ‘its’ pegs” (Quran, 78: 7)

After mentioning that the earth is made like a bed, the Quran likens the mountains to pillars, as if the earth is like a building and the mountains are its pillars. After the earth and mountains, the Quran turns the attention to the contained blessings of God.

وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا

“And created you in pairs” (Quran, 78: 8)

After mentioning the earth and mountains as God’s large blessings, which are containers, the Quran turns the attention to the contained blessings and begins with the main factor for reproduction in that container, which is the humans being created in pairs.

وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا

“And made your sleep for rest” (Quran, 78: 9)

Mentioning the blessing of sleep after the creation of humans in pairs is based on the relationship between continuity and preservation. As the creation of humans as male and female is for the reproduction and continuity of them, likewise, the blessing of sleep is given for the preservation of health of them.

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا

“And made the night as a cover, and made the day for livelihood” (Quran, 78: 10-11)

The reason why the blessing of night is mentioned after the blessing of sleep is clear. Because the most suitable and healthy time of for sleeping is the night. The night is likened to a clothe that covers the body from the eyes. Likewise, the night is a clothe that covers the human from working. After mentioning the night, it is suitable to mention the opposite, which is the daytime when humans work for their livelihood.

وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شِدَادًا

“And built above you seven mighty ‘heavens’” (Quran, 78: 12)

After mentioning the earth as a cradle and what is included in it, the Quran points out that the upside of that cradle is not left uncovered but is surrounded by a roof, meaning the sky. The Quran speaks about the firmly established seven heavens, stressing the Almighty power of God.

وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَّاجًا

“And placed ‘in them’ a shining lamp” (Quran, 78: 13)

After likening the seven heavens to a roof, the mind turns to the question if there is a lamp hanging on that roof. Then, it becomes suitable to speak about the sun, which the Quran likens to a shining lamp, subjected to provide warmth and light for the inhabitants of the earth.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً تَجَاجًا

“And sent down from rainclouds pouring water” (Quran, 78: 14)

Mentioning the pouring down of the water after the sun as a lamp that provides warmth and light, suggests that there is a connection between the two. According to al-Biqā‘ī, this connection is as follows: the earth loses its moisture due to the heat of the sun. Just as the earth needs light and warmth of the sun, it also needs water for the continuity of life. The need for water is provided by the rain that is being sent down from the clouds. Therefore, both sun and the rain are non-separable needs for the continuity of life and are suitable for being mentioned one after another.

لِنُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا

“Producing by it grain and ‘various’ plants” (Quran, 78: 15)

The combination of sun and water results in the plants coming out from the earth. According to al-Biqā‘ī, the mentioning of grains in this verse is based on a cause-effect relationship. That is to say, the sequence of the afore-mentioned two verses, the sun and the rain, are the causes of grains coming out from the earth, which is the effect. Mentioning the grain specifically while thousands varieties of fruits and vegetable come from the earth is connected to the context of highlighting the blessing of life preservation. Among thousands kinds of plants, the grain products --such as wheat and oats— are the most essential products for the preservation of life.

If the verse had mentioned fruit or vegetables instead of grain, it would have overlooked the central theme of life preservation that has been highlighted from the beginning of the chapter. The grain makes up the largest bottom of the food pyramid. Therefore, the verse divides the food into two, grains and various plants.

Up until now, the Quran mentions the sequence of blessings that God provides for the humans. Afterwards, the Quran comes to the main point that it wants to prove:

إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفُصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتًا

“Indeed, the Day of ‘Final’ Decision is an appointed time” (Quran, 78: 17)

From this verse onward, the Quran sums up the majestic events that will unfold during the Day of Judgment. According to al-Biqā’ī, the relationship maintained here is based on the culmination of two opposite emotions: love and fear. The blessings summed up in the afore-mentioned verses inspire love in the believers and fear in the disbelievers. That is to say, the afore-mentioned blessings reminds the believer of the great news for them that will come. While it reminds the disbeliever the majestic events that awaits them on the Day of Judgment.

As it is shown, al-Biqā’ī’s method of interpretation is based on the pre-conceived main theme in a Quranic chapter. The verses within that chapter are then explained through the lens of the main theme with focus on their relations with each other. Therefore, it can be said that the exegesis of al-Biqā’ī is a literary interpretation of the Quran as well as a semantic one.

By analysing how one verse relates to the other, al-Biqā’ī is able to extract additional meanings alongside the literal meaning of the verses. As it will be shown in the following paragraphs, Sa’īd Nūrsī also employs the same way of interpretation the Quranic verses. However, in contrast to al-Biqā’ī, Nursi does this also on the level of semantic structures and uses syntactical rules to extract these additional meanings.

Sa'īd Nūrsī (1877-1960)

In contrast to the former Muslim scholars mentioned above, Sa'īd Nūrsī does not discuss the idea of *naẓm* in a systematic way. His discussions about *naẓm* are spread out across his collection of books called “*Rasā'il al-Nūr*” (Letters of the Light). He *does* have a short exegesis of the Quran in which he points out that his main purpose is to prove the *i'jāz* of the Quran through its *naẓm*. Due to the ongoing WWI at that time, he succeeded in completing the exegesis of the Quran until the 30th verse of the 2nd chapter (*al-Baqarah*). He mentions in the introduction of his exegesis called “*Ishārāt al-I'jāz*” that he wrote his exegesis in the trenches of the warzone in North-Eastern Anatolia (1914-16) during the intense battle with the Russians.

Like al-Jurjānī, Sa'īd Nūrsī also understands the concept of *naẓm* in terms of using the syntactical structure to convey the desired meaning. As it was discussed under the section of al-Jurjānī, the basic idea of *naẓm* being the main factor for *i'jāz* is that the semantic structures of a Quranic speech is organized in such a way that it conveys the desired meaning at the ultimate level to the addressee. That is to say, to select the proper semantic structure and to put it in the right place with the correct syntactical form in a sentence to display the meaning that is wanted to be conveyed.

In this regard, Sa'īd Nūrsī discusses the basic principle of *balāghah*⁵⁸ (*asās al-balāghah*) in his book ‘*Ishārāt al-I'jāz*’. According to Nursi, the basic principle of *balāghah* is that every semantic structure contributes to the main meaning of the sentence. In other words, a speech that adheres to the principles of *balāghah* should not contain any semantic structure that is a waste. Each semantic structure should serve a purpose and is put in a certain position in the sentence with a certain syntactical form for a reason. This type of analysis requires a pre-conceived theme in a speech. This pre-conceived theme is deducted from the overall meaning of the speech. Sa'īd Nūrsī calls this theme “*al-maqṣad al-aṣlī*” (the main purpose). Sa'īd Nūrsī likens this ‘main purpose’ to the area where different rivers meet together (*majma' al-awdiyah*), or a pool (*al-ḥawḍ*). Each river streams to the central area where all of them congregate and form together a whole pool. Likewise, each semantic structure is like a river that streams toward the congregation point, which is the main purpose, and together they convey the desired meaning at the most ultimate way possible.⁵⁹ If one of them would be

⁵⁸ For explanation about *balāghah*, look: p.5, 2nd footnote.

⁵⁹ Nursi, *İşaratü'l-İ'caz*, 145.

replaced with another, the meaning would lose its beauty. Although the following example has been mentioned earlier, it will be showed again since it suits the context:

وَلَئِن مَّسَّتْهُمُ نَفْحَةٌ مِّنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّكَ

“If they were touched by even a breath of your Lord’s torment.”⁶⁰

The main purpose of this Quranic verse is to point out the severity of God’s punishment. The best way to do this is by showing the severity of the least amount of that punishment. Therefore, every semantic structure in this sentence can contribute to this main purpose only if all of them implicate ‘fewness and littleness’ in their meaning. Beginning with “لَئِن”, which means “if”, is a question mark for taking something into uncertainty (*tashkīk*), which points to the fewness of the punishment. The next semantic structure “مَسَّتْهُمُ” means a slight feeling, which points to fewness. Then, “نَفْحَةٌ”, which means a breath, indicates a whiff. The grammatical conjugation of “نَفْحَةٌ” signifies “once” (*maṣḍar al-marrah*). The meaning would then be the slight touching of a one whiff, which again implicates fewness. The nunation (*tanwīn*) at the end of “نَفْحَةٌ” signifies the indefiniteness (*tanakīr*) of that breath and implicates such littleness of that breath that it can scarcely be known. Then, “مِّنْ”, which means “of”, means ‘a part of the punishment’ and in turn implicates again fewness. Then, “عَذَابِ”, when compared to “نَكَالٌ” (chastisement) and “عِقَابٌ” (penalty) is a light form of punishment and implicates fewness.⁶¹ Then, رَبِّكَ (your lord), stems from the word “رَبِّ” and originally means the “sustainer” and alludes to compassion. It implicates fewness because it is used in place of words such as “فَقَاهَرٌ” (subduer) or “جَبَّارٌ” (all-compelling).⁶²

As it is shown above, Sa‘īd Nūrsī ascribes first ascribes a main theme to theme to the sentence. He deducts this main theme from the overall meaning of that sentence. From this point of view, his analysis is a literary one. After having ascribed the main theme to the sentence, he attempts to interpret the semantic structures through the lens of that main theme. In this interpretation, he analyses the syntactical form of the sentence. From this another point of view, his analysis is also a semantic and syntactical one. Just like Nursi makes a semantic analyses on the level

⁶⁰ Quran, 21: 46

⁶¹ The reason why “عَذَابِ”, when compared to “عِقَابٌ” and “نَكَالٌ”, implicates fewness of the penalty, is because the literal meaning of “عَذَابِ” is something that is ‘sweet in taste’. In most of the Quranic verses, the word “عَذَابِ” is used over other words such as “عِقَابٌ” and “نَكَالٌ”. The reason for this is, as Said Nursi puts it, committing sins in the world has a taste of pleasure, but has the outcome of penalty in the hereafter. In order to refer to both aspects of a sin, the world- and hereafter-aspect, the use of “عَذَابِ” is thus preferred over others.

⁶² Said Nursi, *Sözler* (Istanbul: Envar Neşriyat, 2008), 370.

of words, he also makes the same analyses on the level of sentences. This shows that Nursi, in contrast to al-Biqā'ī, executes the concept of *nazm* on different levels of semantic structures.

As Sa'īd Nūrsī argues that the *nazm* of the Quran reveals itself on the level of words, he also argues that the *nazm* is present on the level of sentences. One example of where he makes an analysis on the level of sentences is the 112th chapter (*sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*), which is one of the shortest chapters of the Quran. He points out that the main theme of this chapter is to prove the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*). According to him, there are six sentences within this chapter. The contents of it are organized in such a way that each sentence is an evidence as well as a conclusion in relation to its counterparts (*dalīl-natīja*). In result, this chapter contains 30 clauses within itself. To put this in to perspective, these six sentences will be summed up below:

1. "قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ" (Say! He is Allah).
2. "هُوَ أَحَدٌ"⁶³ (He is One).
3. "اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ"⁶⁴ [Allah-the Sustainer [needed by all]].
4. "لَمْ يَلِدْ" (He has not begotten).
5. "يَلِدُ وَلَمْ يُوَلَدْ" (Nor was he born).
6. "وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ" (And there is none comparable to Him).

For example, if "هُوَ اللَّهُ" is taken as the starting point, the others become its conclusion as follows:

1. هُوَ اللَّهُ ، فَهُوَ أَحَدٌ (He is Allah. Then, He is One).
2. هُوَ اللَّهُ ، فَهُوَ صَمَدٌ (He is Allah. Then, He is the Sustainer).
3. هُوَ اللَّهُ ، فَهُوَ لَمْ يَلِدْ (He is Allah. Then, He has not begotten).
4. هُوَ اللَّهُ ، فَهُوَ لَمْ يُوَلَدْ (He is Allah. Then He was not born).
5. هُوَ اللَّهُ ، فَهُوَ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ (He is Allah. Then, there is no comparable to him).

⁶³ The word "هُوَ" (He) is here the noun, "اللَّهُ" (Allah) is its predicate. The word "أَحَدٌ" is the second predicate of "هُوَ". Therefore, the same "هُوَ" is mentioned in the second point.

⁶⁴ The word 'sustainer' here does not reflect the complete meaning of "الصَّمَدُ". It means the one who is self-sufficient and is needed by all.

According to Sa'īd Nūrsī , the same formulation can be constructed for each of the six sentences, whereby five clauses will emerge from each of them. Then, as Sa'īd Nūrsī puts it, 30 (5×6) clauses can be concluded from this short chapter.⁶⁵

Just like in the interpretation of the verse about God's punishment, Sa'īd Nūrsī begins with a pre-ascribed theme to the chapter, which is the oneness of God, and interprets the verses in the direction of that theme. Only this time, he applies this method on the level of sentences and not syntax. Just like al-Biqā'ī, Sa'īd Nūrsī was able to extract additional meanings from the verses analyzing their relations between each other. As it will be seen in the next part of this thesis, the main difference between al-Biqā'ī and Sa'īd Nūrsī is that al-Biqā'ī strictly looks into the relations between verses, whereas Sa'īd Nūrsī applies it on the level of syntax as well as sentences and verses.

⁶⁵ Nursi, *Sözler*, 372.

Sūra al-Fātiḥah

This part of the thesis will dive into the question of how al-Biqā'ī and Sa'īd Nūrsī exercised their views on *nazm* in the exegesis of *sūra al-Fātiḥah*, the first Quranic chapter. It serves as a specific and concrete example of how the concept of *nazm* has been analyzed and put in practice in various ways by different Muslim scholars from different periods, while agreeing on the point that *nazm* reveals the inimitability of the Quran.

The *sūra al-Fātiḥah* will be divided into its seven verses. In each verse, the exegesis of both al-Biqā'ī and Sa'īd Nūrsī will be discussed and compared.

Main theme

From the outset of *sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, al-Biqā'ī makes clear that the main factor for understanding the relations between Quranic verses (*munāsabāt al-āyāt wa al-suwar*) is to have an eye on the main theme and to extract meanings on the base of that main theme. If one does so, the *nazm* of the Quran will reveal itself to the reader. According to him, one way to find the main theme of a Quranic chapter is to look in to the meaning that is embedded in the name of that chapter (*ism al-sūrah*). Afterwards, linking that meaning with the content of the chapter will establish the main theme of the chapter.⁶⁶

Based on this method of analysis, al-Biqā'ī begins by exploring the various names of *sūrat al-Fātiḥah*. Among these names are “*al-ḥamd*” (praise), “*al-shukr*” (thanksgiving), “*al-du'a*” (prayer) and “*Umm al-Qurān*” (mother of Quran). According to al-Biqā'ī, all these names center around 'humans' mindfulness of their God'—that is, directing their attentions to God and making them aware that God is the only one worthy of worship. Just as the names of *sūrat al-Fātiḥah* point to this central theme, its content also center around the same theme by attributing to God praise (*al-ḥamd*), thanksgiving (*al-shukr*), ownership (*al-mulk*) of the Day of Judgment and the worth to be worshipped.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Al-Biqā'ī, *Nazm al-Durar*, 1:18.

⁶⁷ Al-Biqā'ī, 1:18.

Since the central theme is ‘humans’ mindfulness of their God,’ everything else (e.g., the names and content of *sūrat al-Fātiḥah*) should be seen as a means (*wasā’il*) to support that central theme. Although this theme is evident in every verse, as al-Biqā’ī puts it, each verse approaches it from a different angle and perspective. In other words, every verse contributes to the main theme from its unique perspective, helping to convey the overarching message.⁶⁸

Sūrat al-Fātiḥah: 1

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

“*In the name of Allah—the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful*” (Quran, 1: 1)

To connect this verse with the main theme, al-Biqā’ī provides preliminary statements that lead to the composition of the above-mentioned verse. These preliminary statements are as follows:

The only way to make humans aware that God is the only one worthy of worship (main theme) is by letting them know that He alone is the Creator and that His power and knowledge encompass everything. This awareness is made possible through the sending of messengers and the revelation of scriptures to humanity. Consequently, the main goal of God’s messengers and His books is to guide humans to the right path—the path that God desires for them. This right path requires humans to worship their Lord and to adhere to the way that pleases Him.⁶⁹ Remaining steadfast on this path is only achievable by considering His commands and prohibitions in every action. Therefore, the *Basmala*—the invocation of God’s name—is placed at the beginning of the Quran and as the starting point for every deed, serving as a guide for humans to remain on the right path in all their actions.⁷⁰

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the main theme functions as a guide in al-Biqā’ī’s interpretation of the verse mentioned earlier. To bridge the gap between the main theme and the verse, al-Biqā’ī introduces preliminary statements that act as a chain linking the main theme to the verse. In essence, the main theme is to make humans aware that God is the only one worthy of worship, while the first verse serves as an invocation of God’s name.

⁶⁸ Al-Biqā’i, 1:22.

⁶⁹ “*I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me*” (Quran, 51: 56).

⁷⁰ Al-Biqā’i, *Nazm al-Durar*, 1:22–23.

Since *nazm* pertains to the composition of semantic structures and their relationships with one another, al-Biqā'ī examines the connection between the main theme and the invocation of God's name. He formulates his reasoning to explain the relationship between the two.

The gap between the main theme and the verse provides a space where the interpreter exercises freedom to develop their interpretation and derive meanings through personal reasoning. In this way, as argued in the introduction (see p.12), the concept of *nazm* allows flexibility in the exegesis of a given verse. This flexibility, however, also introduces subjectivity, as the interpretation is shaped by individual reasoning. A similar approach can be observed in Sa'īd Nūrsī's method of interpretation, albeit with some differences.

Sa'īd Nūrsī shares a similar method with al-Biqā'ī in that he formulates a main theme. However, unlike al-Biqā'ī, who focuses on *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, Nūrsī applies his approach to the Quran as a whole. He identifies four main themes in the Quran: the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), resurrection (*hashr*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*), and righteousness (*'adālah*).⁷¹

The reasoning behind these themes stems from the human condition within existence. Humans come into this world, dwell temporarily, and eventually depart—like a traveling caravan stopping briefly at a resting place before continuing its journey. According to Sa'īd Nūrsī, this transient state raises the most fundamental questions in human history:

1. *Where did we come from?*
2. *Why are we here, and how should we live?*
3. *Is there life after death?*
4. *Who is our leader?*⁷²

These questions align closely with the core inquiries of philosophy, except for the fourth, which Nūrsī likely included based on his theological perspective. He argues that the four main themes of the Quran provide answers to these essential questions. Furthermore, he posits that these

⁷¹ Nursi, *İşaratü'l-İ'caz*, 13.

⁷² Nursi, 14.

themes are not only central to the Quran as a whole but are also embedded within almost every semantic structure of the Quran.⁷³

In order to demonstrate that these four themes are present in almost every semantic structure of the Quran, Sa'īd Nūrsī elaborates on the *Basmala* and extracts meanings that support these themes:

The *Basmala*—meaning ‘in the name of God—contains the excluded imperative verb “قُلْ” (‘say! [O prophet]’), which is called ellipsis in Arabic language. Because, in the Arabic language, every preposition—in this case “ب” requires a verb with which it connects for the formation of a complete meaning. The fact that there is no mention of a verb in the *Basmala*, implies that there is an ellipsis of a verb. Since the *Basmala* is a phrase which its invocation is recommended at the outset of every deed, the imperative verb “قُلْ” (say!) should be hidden in its beginning. The first addressee of this imperative verb is the prophet Mohammed. Because he is the first addressee of the Quran. Since the prophet is ordered here to invoke the *Basmala*, it refers directly to the theme of prophethood.

The *Basmala* also refers clearly to the theme of the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*). Because it orders to begin every deed in the name of God. Besides this, the prepositioning (*taqdīm*) of the “ب” expresses an emphasis on the name of God. The meaning would than be ‘only in the name of God..’, which in turn refers to *tawḥīd*.

The *Basmala* contains the two names of God. Namely, *al-Raḥmān* (the most compassionate) and *al-Raḥīm* (the most merciful). The former refers to the all-encompassing grace of God in the world. In this regard, it implies the justice of God in his favours to all beings without making distinction. Consequently, the name “*al-Raḥmān*” points to the theme of justice.

Al-Raḥīm means the mercifulness of God and refers to the theme of resurrection (*al-ḥashr*). However, mercy is not apparent in the world. Because all beings arrive to the world, benefit from the favours of God and pass out. If mercy were to abandon creatures that die never to be revived, leaving them aimless and neglected, it would no

⁷³ Nursi, 15.

longer be true mercy. Then, there should be another place where the absolute mercy manifest. That place is the Hereafter where all beings will be resurrected to.⁷⁴

As it can be seen clearly, just like al-Biqā'ī, Sa'īd Nūrsī begins his exegesis with pre-identified main themes. These main themes lay down the basis for the interpretation through the perspective of *naẓm*. As it has been argued above, the semantic gap between the main theme and the verse is the area where the freedom of interpretation is being exerted. For example, one of the main themes of the Quran, as Sa'īd Nūrsī puts it, is *tawhīd*, oneness of God. In order to showcase that this theme is present in even small semantic structures, Sa'īd Nūrsī explains how the preposition “ب” relates to the theme of *tawhīd*. The preposition “ب” is being interpreted in the direction of that theme in order to bridge the gap between the theme and the verse. As it was argued in the introduction (see p.12), this is where the interpreter finds the freedom to come up with his own analysis of the verse.

Sa'īd Nūrsī differs from al-Biqā'ī in that he ascribes these themes not only to *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, but to the Quran as a whole. The second point of difference is that Sa'īd Nūrsī goes down to the level of smaller semantic structures, such words and prepositions.

Sūrat al-Fātiḥah: 2 & 3

أَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

All praise is for Allah—Lord of all worlds, the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful.

(Quran, 1: 2-3)

According to al-Biqā'ī, the praising of God is followed by the reason why He deserves such praise: being the Lord of the worlds. This means that “God deserves all praise because He is the Lord and Sustainer of all worlds.” Al-Biqā'ī highlights an evidence-conclusion relationship between these two phrases. Furthermore, since “to sustain” means “to support and keep something alive,” it necessitates the attributes of being “compassionate” and “merciful.” Without these qualities, one cannot truly sustain anything.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Nursi, 15–16.

⁷⁵ Al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-Durar*, 1:27.

As can be seen, al-Biqā'ī connects the phrases within these two Quranic verses by establishing reason-based relationships between them. Through this approach, he seeks to demonstrate that the composition of the Quranic verses and phrases is grounded in strong logical ties, thereby supporting his view that the *nazm* (composition) of the Quran is the foundation of its inimitability.

Similar to al-Biqā'ī, Sa'īd Nūrsī employs the same reasoning by asserting that praising God is the necessary result of summing up all His favours under the names “الرَّحْمَنُ” (the Most Compassionate) and “الرَّحِيمُ” (the Most Merciful). Furthermore, since one of the names of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* is *Umm al-Qur'ān* (Mother of the Quran), the phrase “الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ” (all praise is for Allah) connects to the opening of four other Quranic chapters, which also begin with the same phrase. Each of these chapters highlights one of the four main favours of God.⁷⁶

Sa'īd Nūrsī's analysis demonstrates that he perceives the concept of *nazm* not only in terms of the relationship between adjacent verses but also from a broader perspective, considering how a single verse relates to the entirety of the Quran.

Furthermore, according to Sa'īd Nūrsī, the phrase “الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ” (all praise is for Allah) is placed at the outset of the Quran based on the principle of presenting the purpose of something before explaining its essence. This is because, without a purpose, something is rendered meaningless.⁷⁷

Sa'īd Nūrsī relates the plurality of “الْعَالَمِينَ” (“worlds”) to the belief that “the world” is not limited to human perception. Instead, it encompasses numerous other worlds, ranging from atomic particles to celestial bodies, all of which are under God's lordship. Furthermore, Nūrsī highlights why the regular plural form “الْعَالَمِينَ” (worlds) is used here instead of the broken plural form “عَوَالِمٍ” (worlds). In Arabic, regular plurals typically denote intelligent beings, such as humans. Although “the worlds” are not inherently intelligent beings, the regular plural form “الْعَالَمِينَ” has been chosen to express this concept.

As discussed in the section on al-Jurjānī (see pp. 23–25), the manipulation, alteration, and reordering of a sentence's syntactical structure to emphasize a particular meaning is a fundamental principle of *nazm*. In this context, the choice of “الْعَالَمِينَ” over “عَوَالِمٍ” represents a deliberate syntactical adjustment. According to Nūrsī, this choice conveys a deeper meaning:

⁷⁶ Nursi, *İşaratü'l-İ'caz*, 19.

⁷⁷ Nursi, 19.

it suggests that “the worlds” are likened to intelligent beings because, like such beings, they also worship and praise God.⁷⁸

In the following verse, Nūrsī explains that the composition of the two names, “الرَّحْمَنُ” (the Most Compassionate) and “الرَّحِيمُ” (the Most Merciful), connects to the preceding verse by reflecting the two components of lordship (*al-rubūbiyyah*): providing benefit and preventing harm. The name “الرَّحْمَنُ” corresponds to the former, as it denotes God’s overarching favors, while “الرَّحِيمُ” relates to the latter, highlighting God’s mercy in preventing harm. Since these two names are intrinsically linked to the concept of God’s lordship, Nūrsī notes that they follow the phrase “Lord of all worlds.”⁷⁹

As demonstrated above, Nūrsī employs the concept of *nazm* by analysing how different semantic structures relate to one another and uncovering the meanings these relationships reveal. Through this approach, he highlights the Quran’s meticulous organization in conveying meanings through its interconnected semantic structures. In this context, it can be argued that Muslim scholars like al-Biqā’ī and Sa’īd Nūrsī regarded *nazm* as the foundation of the Quran’s inimitability, as it reveals the interconnectedness of verses and their strong semantic relationships.

Sūrat al-Fātiḥah: 4

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

“*Master of the Day of Judgment*” (Quran, 1: 4)

In interpreting the above-mentioned verse, both al-Biqā’ī and Sa’īd Nūrsī address the question of how this verse relates to its preceding counterpart. Beginning with al-Biqā’ī, he connects this verse to the preceding one by reasoning that being compassionate and the sustainer of all worlds inherently requires ownership over them. Without true ownership, one cannot exercise control or sustain them. Thus, this verse is closely tied to the preceding two verses.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Nursi, 21.

⁷⁹ Nursi, 21.

⁸⁰ Al-Biqā’i, *Nazm al-Durar*, 1:29–30.

According to Sa'īd Nūrsī, the Day of Judgment is the inevitable result of God being Compassionate and Merciful. Without an eternal life after death, God's Compassion and Mercy toward His creatures would lose their meaning. Eternal life is necessary to fully realize and reflect these divine attributes.⁸¹

Nūrsī also explains why God is referred to as the "Master of the Day of Judgment," even though He is the Lord of all worlds. He clarifies that the Day of Judgment is when everyone will witness God's ultimate power and might. In this world, God operates behind a veil, making it difficult for humans to clearly perceive the power and will driving the events of existence. However, on the Day of Judgment, this veil will be removed, and it will become evident to all who the true doer behind every event is. Thus, the most fitting attribute for God in this context is "Master of the Day of Judgment."⁸²

Furthermore, Nūrsī interprets the word "يَوْمٌ" (the day) as an indication of one of the evidences for the Day of Judgment. He explains that the passing of days points to months, years, and even larger time cycles. Just as the second-hand of a clock proves the existence of the minute- and hour-hands, the passing of days serves as an indicator of the completion of the greatest time cycle: the arrival of the Day of Judgment.⁸³

As concluded from the above explanations, the interpretations of both al-Biqā'ī and Sa'īd Nūrsī focus on uncovering the connections between Quranic verses and phrases, linking them together through their meanings. This approach is also evident in their exegesis of preceding verses. By doing so, they emphasize the Quran's meticulously constructed meanings, arguing that such a level of coherence and eloquence cannot be replicated by human effort.

In this regard, the concept of *nazm*—whether at the level of verses, phrases, words, or syntax—centers on the idea that the Quran exhibits an unparalleled structuring of meanings. The semantic structures within the Quran are intricately interrelated, reinforcing its overarching message and highlighting its inimitability.

⁸¹ Nursi, *İşaratü'l-İ'caz*, 22.

⁸² Nursi, 22.

⁸³ Nursi, 22.

Conclusion

The concept of *nazm* has been a central element in both classical and modern Muslim scholarship to understand and explain the inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Quran. Through the works of Muslim scholars from the classical and modern period, the concept of *nazm* has evolved into a framework of analysing Quran's eloquence (*balāghah*). This conclusion will summarize the perspectives of Muslim scholars on *nazm*, how they used it in their exegesis and how it relates to the *i'jāz* of the Quran.

Views on *nazm*

1. **Al-Khaṭṭābī (931–998)** emphasized that *nazm* is about the unparalleled organization of words and meanings. The Quran combined contradictory linguistic features, such as soft and hard phonetics while maintaining the harmony. According to him, the placement of words in the Quran are coherent in such a way that even a minor change would disrupt the intended meaning, demonstrating its inimitability.
2. **Al-Jurjānī (1009–1078)** advanced the concept of *nazm* by focusing on syntactical structures and their manipulation to convey deeper meanings. His notion of "heeding the meanings of syntax" involved reordering or altering sentence structures to emphasize specific themes, requiring readers to engage in a process of discovery. This process, according to al-Jurjānī, is what gives a speech beauty and eloquence. sets the Quran apart as inimitable.
3. **Al-Biqā'ī (1406–1480)** extended *nazm* to larger semantic structures, such as the relationships between verses and chapters (*munāsabāt al-āyāt wa al-suwar*). He argued that every chapter of the Quran has a central theme and that every verse revolve around that central theme, supporting the meaning of the theme. His exegesis demonstrates how the interconnectedness of verses reveals additional layers of meaning, further supporting the Quran's coherence in meaning structuring.

4. **Sa‘id Nūrsī (1877–1960)** diverged from earlier scholars by emphasizing the *naẓm* present not only in sentences and chapters but also in individual words and syntactical structures. He demonstrated how the Quran achieves precise meanings through minute linguistic details, such as word choice, grammatical conjugations, and syntactical arrangements. Nūrsī’s holistic approach highlighted the Quran’s ability to convey profound messages through its intricate structure, reinforcing its claim of divine inimitability.

Use of *naẓm* in exegesis

The application of *naẓm* in Quran exegesis varies among Muslim scholars, yet their common feature is that they focus on uncovering the coherence between semantic structures on the level of Quranic verses, phrases and words. The common idea is that the Quran has strong meaning structuring, strengthening the central message that is conveyed.

- **Al-Biqā‘ī** applied the concept of *naẓm* systematically by identifying a central theme in each chapter and interpreting its verses through their relation to that theme. His approach provides a thematic approach to the interpretation of the Quran.
- **Sa‘id Nūrsī**, on the other hand, analysed the concept of *naẓm* both on the level of verses as well as individual words and syntactical structures. In this, he demonstrates how even the smallest semantic structure of the Quran contributes to its overall message. His analysis combines thematic, semantic and syntactical analysis, providing a multi-layered understanding of the Quran.

***Naẓm* as flexibility in interpretation**

As it is argued in the section of “*sūrat al-Fātiḥah: I*” (see p.37), the use of *naẓm* provides also the flexibility to come up with meanings from own reason. This flexibility stems from the gap between the central theme and the verses, where the interpreter focuses on discovering the relation between a given verse with that of the central theme. This process of discovering the relation requires one to deduct additional meanings from the verse that contributes to the theme of the chapter. This demonstrates how well-structured and cohesive the Quran is of meaning-structuring, which brings to the following point of the *i‘jāz* of the Quran.

***Nazm* as the *i jāz* of the Quran**

It can be concluded that the the concept of *nazm* relates to the inimitability of the Quran in that it uncovers its unparalleled organization and coherence in terms of sound meanings at every semantic level—words, sentences, verses and chapters. This conclusion can be deduced from the various viewpoints of Muslim scholars on *nazm* in the 1st part, and from the Quranic interpretations of al-Biqā‘ī and Sa‘īd Nūrsī. They share the view that no human speech can reach this level of coherence, where even the smallest semantic structure has an aspect that contributes to the overall message. Furthermore, the subjectivity of how *nazm* is understood and used in the exegesis of the Quran reveals the flexibility and richness of the Quranic text. Different Muslim scholars who use the *nazm* extract various meanings and engage with the Quranic text in their own way, which suggests that *nazm* not only relates to the *i jāz* of the Quran, but also to the point that it inspires various reflections and analysis.

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