International Qurʾānic Studies Association
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Michel Cuypers

A Qurʾānic Apocalypse

A Reading of the Thirty-Three Last Sūrahs of the Qurʾān

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International Qur'ānic Studies Association
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Series Editor

Gerald Hawting

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Translation by Jerry Ryan



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"Form is the gateway to meaning"
Paul Beauchamp (1924–2001)

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Series Editor's Foreword

It is a privilege and a pleasure to inaugurate the International Qur'ānic Studies Association (IQSA) monograph series "Studies in the Qur'ān" with this volume by Michel Cuypers. In recent years Professor Cuypers has pioneered and championed the argument that, far from being the randomly assembled collection of disparate materials that many readers have supposed, the Qur'ān is a tightly structured text that only reveals its meanings and messages when its form is properly understood. Its form, it is argued, is revealed when it is analysed as an example of what is referred to as Semitic rhetoric—conventions of composition that shape several ancient and late antique texts composed in Semitic or related Near Eastern languages. Since there are no contemporary handbooks setting out or discussing those conventions, they have to be deduced from the texts themselves. This method of analysis was first applied in the field of biblical studies, notably by Roland Meynet, and has since been developed by Professor Cuypers and others who have applied it to different Near Eastern texts. In this work he uses it to analyse the final thirty-three chapters of the Qur'ān, which he describes as "a Qur'ānic Apocalypse."

The book, developed from a series of articles published between 1997 and 2003, was first published in French as Une apocalypse coranique in 2014, but this English version has been updated by the author to include his latest thoughts, and revision of some of those proposed in the French text. The Publications Committee of IQSA chose to begin its monograph series with an English version of the book, not merely because of the interest that this relatively unfamiliar approach to the Qur'ān has aroused, but also because it was felt tht the inevitably detailed and technical nature of some of the discussion might be more approachable in English to those readers who do not have French as a first language.

Readers will be grateful to the author for his clear and orderly presentation of sometimes complex material. To that end he has arranged that the tables which contain portions of the Qur'anic text, sometimes with parallel and variant versions, or similar material from other texts, should appear on the same page as, or on that facing, his comments on them. This will allow the reader to see the text and commentary together at a glance. Occasionally it has involved leaving some blank space on a page. He has also developed a way, exploiting the use of various fonts and styles, to show readers who may not be familiar with Qur'ānic Arabic, how the sounds, rhymes,

emphases, meanings and other ingredients of the Arabic text echo or recur in different places.

The Publications Committee appreciates the care taken by Dr. Billie Jean Collins and her colleagues at Lockwood Press to accommodate these and other features of the text. A special word of thanks must go to the copy editor for IQSA, Ryann Craig, of the Catholic University of America, who devoted so much time and attention to the text when it was still in a raw form, and then worked closely with Billie Jean after it had been sent to the press. Ryann's expertise, not merely as a copy editor but as a scholar of things Semitic, enabled her greatly to improve the text that she had received. The translation also benefited at an early stage from the scrutiny of Professor Devin Stewart of Emory University, who kindly read the entire text and supplied numerous suggestions for improvements. Finally, Professor Cuypers himself has been painstaking in reading and re-reading the proofs. Emran El-Badawi, the Executive Director of IQSA and Associate Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Houston, was as generous with financial support for this publication as he was tireless in his work on behalf of IQSA.

In retrospect, we might have chosen something a little less challenging, with regard to its formatting and translation, for the first publication in what we hope will be a long series of IQSA monographs, but we trust that the interest and importance of Professor Cuypers' work will compensate for any delay in launching the series.

Acknowledgments

This book, preceded by two others, completes a research on the rhetorical analysis of the Qur'an. Once again, we express our gratitude to the Dominican friars of IDEO and the convent of Cairo for their indefatigable and kind welcome and for their constant intellectual and fraternal support. The rich library of IDEO (Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies) and its peaceful and studious atmosphere have provided us with ideal working conditions for more than twenty-five years.

These three books would never have been born if we had not known Professor Roland Meynet and his work on biblical rhetoric. We would like to acknowledge the debt we have towards him. This meeting was the beginning of a great friendship. May he be thanked for all the attention and help he has given us during those years.

We will not mention the names of the other friends who helped us with their advice, who encouraged us, who reread the manuscripts: they will recognize themselves. We are infinitely grateful to them. However, we owe a special mention to Jerry Ryan, the translater, and our colleague Michel Le Clair who invested all his professional skills in the revision of the texts and the realization of the layout of the French edition of this last book, as well as French, English and Arabic editions of the first two books.

We thank the French Institute of Oriental Archeology (Cairo), which hosted our first articles in the Annales Islamologiques (n° 33, 1999, for Suras 99 to 104, n° 34, 2000, for Suras 92 to 98; n° 35, 2001, for Suras 85 to 90, n° 37, 2003, for Suras 81 to 84) and graciously allowed us to publish a revised edition in this book. We also thank Professors C.A. Segovia and B. Lourié for having authorized us to partially reproduce a study on Sura 96, published in the volume edited by them in memory of J. Wansbrough, mentioned in the bibliography.

Finally, we express our gratitude to the IQSA management, especially Professor Gabriel Said Reynolds, Professor Reuven Firestone and Professor Gerald Hawting, for inviting us to publish an English translation of the present book, as the first monograph of the collection of Quranic Studies launched by them. We also warmly thank Professor Devin J. Stewart and Ryann Craig for revising and greatly improving the English text, and Billie Jean Collins for ensuring the complex edition of this book.

Introduction

The present volume closes a sort of trilogy devoted to the exegesis of the Qur'ān analyzed according to the principles of Semitic rhetoric. The first volume, *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an* (2009), applied this method to a long *sūrah* which presents itself as a testamentary text that brings the qur'ānic revelation to a close. The second volume, *The Composition of the Qur'an* (2015), gave a systematic exposition of the method used in *The Banquet*. This, the third volume, forms a counterpart to the first since it studies the shortest *sūrah*s of the Qur'ān, which are reputed to date from the beginnings of the preaching of Muḥammad. The date, style, and content of the *sūrah*s treated in these two works differ considerably. In spite of these differences, they are structured by the same system of literary composition—Semitic rhetoric. The major characteristics of this system are set forth in the foreword. We will not go back over its history, which has been treated in the first two volumes of this trilogy, except to remind the reader that this method of textual analysis, developed entirely in the field of Biblical Studies, has proved to be perfectly adequate for studying the qur'ānic text as well as other texts of the ancient Middle East. This is why these three volumes, first written in French, were not published in a collection of Islamic Studies, but rather in the collection *Rhétorique sémitique* (Semitic Rhetoric) which combines both Biblical and Qur'ānic Studies, notably the works of Roland Meynet, the best expert in this field and the director of this collection.

This work first appeared as a collection of articles published between 1997 and 2003 in MIDEO (*Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales, Cairo)* and the *Annales islamologiques* of IFAO (Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Cairo). After a lapse of ten to fifteen years, with the acquisition of greater experience in the application of Semitic rhetoric to the Qur'ān and the opportunity to take new sources into account, it was inevitable that these articles needed revision. For certain *sūrah*s the revisions are minor; for others they are more important. The most significant new element is found at the level of the study of the relationships the *sūrah*s have with one another. Following the intuitions of the Indo-Pakistani exegete Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥi (1904–1997), we already pointed out in our articles that the *sūrah*s combine semantically by pairs. We also noticed that, at least in the short *sūrah*s, these pairs sometimes form groups of six or eight. A deeper examination of these series, in the final thirty-three *sūrah*s of the Qur'ān, has led us, in the present work, to break up this group into three sections with various subdivisions which will gradually become apparent in the subsequent discussion.

Be it within a *sūrah* or between *sūrah*s, the question remains the same: do the small textual units (verses or short *sūrah*s) manifest all their meaning when taken individually, or is it necessary to replace them in their immediate literary context to really understand them? After study, it appears that the "atomistic" reading of the text in small, isolated units—a reading that we refuse to accept for the verses—is no less invalid for the short *sūrah*s, even if these appear to have origins independent from one another. There is no doubt that the redactors who assembled the textual fragments of the Qur'ān into a book (the *muṣḥaf*) according to a certain order were guided by precise intentions. In the end, it is these intentions which the rhetorical analysis of the text enables us to discover and better understand.

Why begin this study with Sūrat al-Takwīr? The simple necessity of stopping at a *sūrah* so as not to have a book which is too thick! We admit that this is an entirely arbitrary choice. It is very possible that a future study of the *sūrah*s which precede Sūrah 81 will modify certain of our divisions: what we consider, in this volume, as the "first section" in the last thirty-three *sūrah*s of the Qur'ān could perhaps also include other *sūrahs* prior to *sūrah*s 81–92. But we think that the reference to the initial vision of Muḥammad (in Sūrah 81), the point of departure for his career as Prophet, represents a good place to begin the study of this group of *sūrah*s, a good number of which evoke other moments of his prophetic preaching.

The other well-known theme of the short *sūrah*s traditionally attributed to the Mecca period is eschatology. It completely dominates the first section to the point of becoming repetitive. The preaching keeps hammering, often with the same formulas, on the announcement of the Resurrection and the Judgment that will separate the believers from the impious. In the second section, this announcement is combined with biographical allusions which enlighten, above all, the early preaching of the Prophet. The third section, very brief, contains just two *sūrah*s, which serve as the concluding prayers of the Qur'ān.

As in *The Banquet*, rhetorical analysis will take into consideration, when necessary, linguistic and grammatical data found in the Islamic exegetical tradition or in modern Orientalism. It will also sometimes be complemented by an *intratextual* study with other qur'ānic verses and through an *intertextual* study with non-qur'ānic texts belonging to the biblical or para-biblical tradition in cases in which the understanding of the qur'ānic text would seem to be enriched by this ampler literary contextualization. The overall objective remains the same: to seek to clarify the text through its context, of which there are several levels—the immediate context, which is nothing other than the rhetorical structure in which the text is inserted, the context of the Qur'ān as a whole (intratextuality), and, finally, the context of texts prior to the Qur'ān to which the latter sometimes apparently refers, explicitly or implicitly (intertextuality).

The primary aim of this book remains, however, the rhetorical analysis of the text. Given the novelty of this discipline being applied to Qur'ānic Studies it seemed better to push this analysis down to the inferior textual levels of "segments" and "pieces." It is fitting that, in a work dedicated to the rhetoric of the qur'ānic text, all the subtleties of composition be pointed out, not just on the level of the whole but likewise right down to the smallest subdivisions![1]

Cairo, May 2013

1. This volume was practically finished when we learned of the very detailed study of Angelika Neuwirth, dedicated to the short *sūrah*s, *Der Koran. Frühmekkanische Suren. Poetische Prophetie* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen im Inselverlag, 2011). We decided against integrating it into our references, for that would have implied too many changes and discussions. Like ourselves, Neuwirth combines the *sūrah*s into groups, but according to criteria other than those of Semitic rhetoric. Thus, our work is completely independent of hers. On the other hand, we have made several references to an earlier work of Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1981).

Author's Note

A Brief Description of Rhetorical Analysis

In the pages that follow, the reader will find a "glossary of technical terms" used in rhetorical analysis. But, prior to that, it seems appropriate to give a very general idea of the *method* used in this approach to the text.

Semitic rhetoric's fundamental principle of composition is *symmetry*. Hence, the essential goal of the analysis will be to locate the different types of symmetry which compose the text and to define the relationship these symmetries have among themselves and the division of the text as determined by them.

There are three types of symmetry: *parallelism* (or "parallel construction"), when the related textual units reappear in the same order (ABC/A'B'C'); *concentrism* (or "concentric construction"), when the related textual units are arranged concentrically around a center (ABC/x/C'B'A'); and *mirror construction*, when a central element is lacking (ABC/C'B'A').

When most of the terms of a symmetry match, there is *total symmetry*. When only a few terms match, there is *partial symmetry* and these terms play the role of clues of composition.

When these clues of composition appear at the beginning and the end of a textual unit, they are referred to as *extreme* or *outer terms* (this is what is traditionally called *inclusion*). When they occur at the beginning, center, or end of two symmetrical units they are called respectively, *initial*, *central* or *final terms*. When they occur at the end of a unit and at the beginning of the following unit, they are referred to as median terms (what biblical scholars call the "hook word").

The relationship among these terms can be one of *identity*, *synonymy* (in the broad sense of similar meaning), *antithesis*, *homophony* (a type which will not be found in this study), *paronymy* (or quasi-homophony, rather frequent in the Qur'ān), *assonance* (very frequent in the Qur'ān), *homography* (identically written, which is not rare in the Qur'ān if the diacritical points of the Arabic script are suppressed; these points did not exist when the Qur'ān was first put into writing).

These clues and symmetries exist in the text at different levels, which must be carefully distinguished, beginning the analysis at the inferior levels and then progressing to the superior levels:

- The *member* (termed in Greek the stich) is the first rhetorical level; in general, it corresponds to a syntagma.
- The *segment* contains one, two, or three members, never more.
- The *piece* contains two or three segments, never more.
- The *part* contains two or three pieces, never more.

It is the same for the four superior levels: the *passage*, the *sequence*, the *section*, and finally the book; each one is made up of one or several units (an indefinite number this time) of the level which is immediately inferior.

Sometimes intermediary levels need to be added: *sub-parts*, *sub-sequences* and *sub-sections*.

Lund's Laws

We should add some "laws" or ways of structuring the text to this outline of the method, and we will see the laws applied many times. They were theorized by the American biblical scholar Nils W. Lund, who published the results of his analysis of texts from the Old and New Testaments in 1930–1940. Given their importance and the number of times we will refer to them, explicitly or not, we reproduce five of Lund's seven laws here.[2]

First Law: The center is always the turning point. The center may consist of one, two, three, or even four lines.

Second Law: At the center there is often a change in the trend of thought, and an antithetical idea is introduced. After this, the original trend resumes and continues until the system is concluded. For want of a better term, we shall designate this feature the *law of the shift at the center*.

Third Law: Identical ideas are often distributed in such a fashion that they occur at the extremes and at the center but nowhere else in the system.

Fourth Law: There are also many instances of ideas occurring at the center of one system and recurring at the extremes of a corresponding system, the second system evidently having been constructed to match the first. We shall call this feature the *law of shift from the center to the extremes*.

Fifth Law: There is a definite tendency of certain terms to gravitate towards certain positions within a given system, such as the divine names in the Psalms, quotations in the central position of a system in the New Testament.[3]

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2. Here we reproduce Roland Meynet's slightly rewritten translation published in *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 143–144. The original text is in Nils Wilhelm Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1942), 40–41. See also Michel Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 109–131.

3. In the Qur'ān the divine name also appears in a privileged way in the outer parts and the centers of systems.

Reading Guide

The divisions of this book are those of the analysis of the text: three "sections," the first two are divided into "sub-sections," leading up to an analysis of the individual *sūrah*s.

The Schemas

At the start of the analysis of each section, a schema with a brief commentary gives an overview of the different sub-sections and sequences which comprise it.

The Rubrics

In principle, the analysis of each *sūrah* is divided into several rubrics. The text of the *sūrah* is given first, followed, if necessary, by "questions of vocabulary." Then comes the "composition," consisting of tables with explanations, next the "interpretation," and, eventually, the "interscriptural context." In this book, however, these divisions in rubrics are not systematic. For certain *sūrah*s, questions of vocabulary, interpretation, and intertextuality are intertwined with the study of composition, since the first depend directly on the latter.

Version, Language, and Translation

The text of the Qur'ān used in this book is that known as the Cairo version (1924), which has become the official "Vulgate" and the most wide-spread version.

It goes without saying that rhetorical analysis can only be applied to the original language of the text—in this case Arabic. But to avoid too heavy a presentation and, particularly, to remain accessible to any non-Arabic reader, we thought it preferable to offer the texts in English translation only. An Arabic speaking reader should be able to read this book with an Arabic version of the Qur'ān in hand. Let us clarify immediately that this translation is no more than a working tool, which follows the Arabic text as closely as possible to bring out the rhetorical particularities, at the risk of becoming an English text in need of correction. As far as possible, the same Arabic word will be translated by the same English word, at least within the same context. We have been inspired by existing translations, principally those of Richard Bell and Abdullah Yusuf Ali, because of their care to remain literal.

Hyphenation of some words in the translation indicates that these are one word in the original.

The Tables

The tables provide the qur'ānic text in which:

- The typefaces Baskerville, Arial, Arial narrow, and Garamond and the different styles (bold, italic, small capitals, capitals, etc.) indicate the relationship between matching elements.

- Each line of the rewriting is a member, preceded by a typographical sign such as /–/+/=/*/ to emphasize the relationship between matching lines, but these signs have no semantic value.
- The typographical signs are followed by the verse number for the first member of the verse under discussion and a letter of the alphabet for the members which follow, to facilitate reference to the tables in the explanations.
- Boxes distinguish those units which are linked at the level of the passage.

The tables of pieces, parts, and passages are detailed and typographically distinguish the lower levels of rhetorical units which comprise them. However, most of these divisions are not repeated in the tables for sequences and sub-sequences.

Description of Composition

In theory, the tables could demonstrate the text's composition on their own. In practice, however, it is necessary to offer some commentary on them. References to the tables are by verse number followed by the letter which corresponds to the member under discussion. The indication "2c," for example, refers to the third line of verse 2. When the commentary refers to a verse from a *sūrah* other than the *sūrah* being studied, the verse number is preceded by the *sūrah* number separated by a colon: 24:6 refers to verse 6 of Sūrat al-Nūr.

The typesetting has tried to place the tables near to their explanation, placing them on facing pages so that the reader does not have to turn the page to refer to the table. Where it has not been possible to put all the explanations on the same page, the table is repeated on the following facing page.

More than one reader will likely find the stage of composition and its commentary rather arduous. We are not presenting an essay, but rather a study that seeks to be as objective as possible (in a field where absolute objectivity is surely an illusion!) and that utilizes a presentation that is quite technical. The assimilation of the material will require some effort on the part of the reader, but he or she will progressively discover the pleasure of recognizing the qur'ānic text as a skillful piece of architecture whose elements are subtly interconnected.

Since the most important tables, however, are those of the passages and sequences, i.e., the *sūrah*s and the pairs of *sūrah*s, the reader who is less interested in the details of the composition can skip the study of pieces and parts.

A Brief Overview of the Thirty-Three Sūrahs

Before entering into detailed analysis of the *sūrah*s, it might be good to have an idea of their sequence such as it will progressively appear.

If we leave to one side the last two *sūrah*s (Q 113–114), which are a liturgical conclusion of the book, all the preceding thirty-one *sūrah*s make up two large sections.

The first section (Q 81–92) opens with an apocalyptic announcement of the Day of Judgment (Q 81). It presents the Prophet, who is not named, whose proclamation confronts the incredulity of his audience. The Prophet himself, however, has absolute certainty of the authenticity of the message he is transmitting, for this message has been revealed by a heavenly messenger who has appeared to him.

The following *sūrah*s are a series of variations on the themes of judgment and the disbelief of those whom the Prophet addresses. Paradise is promised to the believers, Hell to the disbelievers. Their disbelief is essentially rooted in their attachment to riches, which makes them dishonest (Q 83) and egoistic, oblivious to the destitute (Q 89). Since they do not want to change their behavior, they reject the preaching of the Prophet as a pure lie. That will not stop God from condemning them, when the Day comes, just as He condemned the peoples before them who rejected the warnings of the prophets (Q 85, 89, and 91). In the face of these contradictions, God encourages His Prophet to persevere in the proclamation of the message and to trust in Him (Q 87–88). In passing, this proclamation is accompanied by descriptions of the agonies of Hell and the bliss of Paradise (Q 88). Paradise is promised to those who make a moral effort, which essentially consists in being attentive to those who suffer misery (Q 90), in generosity, and in detachment from riches (Q 92).

The second section is divided into three sub-sections. The two extreme sub-sections are more directly biographical. The first shows the Prophet in crisis because of the rejection of his preaching. But God comes to his aid, reminding him that He has already intervened in his life on previous occasions and promising him ultimate success, inviting the Prophet to trust in Him (Q 93, 94) and to pray in spite of the opposition of his enemies (Q 96). The authenticity of the revelation is reiterated (Q 97), or it conveys the purified religion, which consists in prayer and alms-giving, in the face of the polytheists and the People of the Book (Jews and Christians).

The second sub-section (Q 99–104) links up again with the eschatological themes of the first sub-section: the announcement of the Resurrection and

Judgment (Q 99), a new warning against riches (Q 100, 102, and 104), and promise of Paradise and Hell according to what each one has done or failed to do (Q 101, 103).

The third sub-section returns to an historical and biographical theme. Here one sees awakening of a new religious consciousness founded on the kindly intervention of God in the history of the Quraysh, the tribe of Muḥammad (Q 105, 106). This is followed by another condemnation of the rich as well as of the hypocrites, who practice a formalistic cult (Q 107). The Prophet, whom they consider a pariah, is again encouraged by God to persevere in an authentic prayer, addressed to the Lord (and not to idols; Q 108). The true religion is then firmly proclaimed (Q 109); it is this religion which will triumph, gathering the crowds into itself (Q 110), while its detractors will perish in Hell (Q 111).

Thus does the book end with a solemn proclamation of the unicity of God, the true heart of religion according to the Qur'ān (Q 112).

Abbreviations, Acronyms, References, and Quotes

ad locum	(refers to the verse commentated in a *tafsīr*)
BCE	before the Common Era
CE	Common Era
d.	death
DC	*Dictionnaire du Coran* (Bouquins, 2007)
ed.	edited by
EI[1]	*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, First Edition (Brill, 1913–1938)
EI[2]	*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (Brill, 1954–2005)
EQ	*Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Brill, 2001–2006)
IFAO	Institut francais d'archéologie orientale (Cairo)
JQS	*Journal of Qur'anic Studies*
MIDEO	*Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales* (Cairo)
n.	note
p.	page(s)
f., ff.	following page(s)
T. Ab	Testament of Abraham
T. Mos	Testament of Moses
trans.	Translation
1 En	First Book of Enoch

The abbreviations for biblical books are as follows:

Gen	Genesis	Wis	Book of Wisdom
Lev	Leviticus	Matt	Gospel according to Matthew
Num	Numbers		
Deut	Deuteronomy	Mark	Gospel according to Mark
1 Sam	First Book of Samuel	Luke	Gospel according to Luke
2 Sam	Second Book of Samuel	John	Gospel according to John
Ps	Psalms	Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Isa	Isaiah	Heb	Letter to the Hebrews
Ezek	Ezekiel	2 Peter	Second Epistle of Peter
Dan	Daniel	Rev	Revelation (Apocalypse)
Joel	Joel		

The first appearance of a Muslim author is followed by the date of his death (d.). The first year gives the date in the Hijri calendar (which begins in 622 CE) and the second that of the Common Era. For example, Fakhr al-Dīn

al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) died in 606 of the Hijri calendar or 1209 of the Common Era.

Book references are given in full form on the first citation and shortened in subsequent references; full references are also found in the bibliography at the end of the book.

Biblical quotations are taken from *The New Jerusalem Bible* (1985). The name Yahweh, however, is rendered YHWH.

Transliteration

For the transliteration of Arabic words, certain consonants are represented by a consonant combined with an *h*; *th* (pronounced like in the English word thick), *kh* (the Spanish jota), *dh* (English this), *sh* (English she). The left half ring corresponds to *ʿayn*, a hollow-sounding laryngial fricative characteristic of Arabic, and the right half ring corresponds to the hamzah, a hollow occlusive glottal sound. The *q* is an occlusive uvulo-velar sound. Certain Arabic terms and place names that are very common in English are written as they usually are: Islam, Mecca, Sunni, Shi'ah, etc., others are transliterated in plain typeface such as Qur'ān and Muḥammad. Specific terms are italicized: *sūrah*, *ḥadīth*, *qirāʾāt*, *tafsīr*, with glosses provided when necessary.

ا	*a*	ز	*z*	ق	*q*
ب	*b*	س	*s*	ك	*k*
ت	*t*	ش	*sh*	ل	*l*
ث	*th*	ص	*ṣ*	م	*m*
ج	*j*	ض	*ḍ*	ن	*n*
ح	*ḥ*	ط	*ṭ*	ه	*h*
خ	*kh*	ظ	*ẓ*	و	*w*
د	*d*	ع	ʿ	ي	*y*
ذ	*dh*	غ	*gh*	ء*	ʾ
ر	*r*	ف	*f*		

**Hamzah* may be written on its own (ء) or on a letter "chair" (أ / إ / ؤ / ئ)

Glossary of Technical Terms

1. Terms Signifying the Rhetorical Units

Very often, in works of exegesis, the terms "section," "passage," and especially "piece" are used unequivocally. Here is a list of terms which, in the present methodological exposition, signify the textual units at each successive level.

The "Inferior" (Non-Autonomous) Levels

Apart from the first and second (term and member) the units of inferior levels are formed of one, two, or three units of the preceding level.

Term — The term usually corresponds to a "lexeme" or a word that belongs to the lexicon—noun, adjective, verb, or adverb.

Member — The member is a syntagma, or a group of "terms" linked closely together syntactically. The "member" is the minimal rhetorical unit (corresponding to the Greek "stich"). Sometimes the member can include only one term.

Segment — The segment counts one, two, or three members. There are uni-member segments ("monostichs"), bi-member segments ("distichs"), and tri-member segments ("tristichs").

Piece — The piece counts one, two, or three segments.

Part — The part counts one, two, or three pieces.

The "superior" (Autonomous) Levels

They are all formed of one or several units from the previous level.

Passage — The passage, the equivalent of the exegetes' "pericope," is formed of one or several parts.

Sequence — The sequence is formed of one or more passages.

Section — The section is formed of one or more sequences.

Book — The book is formed of one or more sections.

Sometimes it is necessary to use intermediary levels such as the "sub-part," "sub-sequence" and "sub-section"; these intermediary units have the same definitions as the part, sequence, and section.

Side — The side is the part of the text which precedes or follows the center of a construction; if the center is composed of two parts, the side corresponds to each of the two halves of the construction.

2. Terms Signifying the Relation between Symmetrical Units

Total Symmetries

Parallel Construction

A figure of composition in which the elements in paired relations are arranged in a parallel manner: ABCDE/A'B'C'D'E'. When two parallel units frame a unique element, we talk about parallelism to indicate the symmetry between these two units, but the whole—the superior unit—will be considered as a concentric construction: A/x/A'. "Parallel construction" can also be described as "parallelism," which is the opposite of "concentrism."

Mirror Construction

A figure of composition in which units in a pairwise relationship are arranged in an anti-parallel or "mirror" manner: ABCDE/E'D'C'B'A'. Like the parallel construction, the mirror construction has no center; like the concentric construction, the related elements correspond to one another as in a mirror. When the construction contains only four units, the term "chiasm" is also used: AB/B'A'.

Concentric Construction

A figure of composition in which the symmetrical units are arranged in a concentric manner: ABCDE/x/ E'D'C'B'A' around a central element—which can be a unit of any level of textual organization. "Concentric construction" can also be described as "concentrism," which is the opposite to "parallelism."

Partial Symmetries

Initial Terms

Identical or similar terms or syntagmas which mark the beginning of symmetrical textual units; anaphora in classical rhetoric.

Final Terms

Identical or similar terms or syntagmas which mark the end of symmetrical textual units; epiphora in classical rhetoric.

Outer Terms or "extreme terms"

Identical or similar terms or syntagmas which mark the outer parts of a textual unit; inclusion in traditional exegesis.

Median Terms

Identical or similar terms or syntagmas which mark the end of a textual unit and the beginning of the unit which is symmetrical to it; "linking word" in traditional exegesis.

Central Terms

Identical or similar terms which mark the centers of two symmetrical textual units.

For more detail see Michel Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur'an* and Meynet, *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric*.[4]

The Principle Rules of Rewriting

- Within a member, the terms are generally separated by blanks;
- Each member is generally rewritten on a single line;
- The segments are separated by a white line;
- The pieces are separated by a broken line;
- The part is marked off by two fine lines; it is the same for sub-parts.
- Within a passage, the parts are framed (unless they are very short, such as an introduction or conclusion); potential sub-parts are disposed in contiguous frames;
- Within a sequence or sub-sequence, the passages, rewritten in prose, are arranged in frames separated by a white line;
- Within the sequence, the passages of a sub-sequence are arranged in contiguous frames.

For the rules of rewriting see Cuypers, *Composition*, ch. 6 and Meynet, *Treatise*, ch. 4, 187–229.

4. Roland Meynet, *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

FIRST SECTION
The Announcement of the Day of Judgment
(Sūrahs 81–92)

Sūrahs 81–114 form three sections (Q 81–92, Q 93–112, and Q 113–114). The first section has two sub-sections (Q 81–84 and Q 85–92), the second has three sub-sections (Q 93–98, Q 99–104, and Q 105–112) while the third is a small section, the length of a single sequence (Q 113–114).

The two sub-sections of the first section are arranged as follows:

- The first is made up of four *sūrah*s which form two pairs of *sūrah*s; in rhetorical terms, two parallel "sequences" each of which has two "passages" (or *sūrah*s): Sūrahs 81–82 // 83–84.
- The second contains eight *sūrah*s, arranged in two parallel sequences, each one containing two sub-sequences composed of two passages or *sūrah*s: A (Q 85–86), B (Q 87–88) // C (Q 89–90), D (Q 91–92)

First Sub-Section: Sūrahs 81–84

Sequence 1: Sūrahs 81–82
Sequence 2: Sūrahs 83–84

Second Sub-Section: Sūrahs 85–92

Sequence 3: Sūrahs 85–88:
Sub-sequence: Sūrahs 85–86
Sub-sequence: Sūrahs 87–88
Sequence 4: Sūrahs 89–92:
Sub-sequence: Sūrahs 89–90
Sub-sequence: Sūrahs 91–92

The first section (Q 81–92, "The Proclamation of Judgment") is essentially a variation on the theme of the Resurrection and Judgment.

The second section (Q 93–112, "The Advent of an Arab prophet"), whose form is concentric, takes up the theme of Resurrection and Judgment in a central sub-section framed by two sub-sections, biographical in character, evoking some key moments of Muḥammad's prophetic career.

The third section consists of two short prayers which close the Book (Q 113–114).

FIRST SUB-SECTION
(Sūrahs 81–84)

A. Sequence 1 (Sūrahs 81–82)

1. Sūrat al-Takwīr, "The Darkening"

[1] When the sun shall be darkened, [2] and when the stars shall be dimmed [3] and when the mountains shall be moved [4] and when the she-camels ten months with young shall be left [5] and when the wild beasts shall be driven together [6] and when the seas shall be made up to boil, [7] and when the souls shall be paired [8] and when the female child buried alive shall be asked: [9] "For what sin was she put to death?" [10] and when the scrolls shall be spread open [11] and when the sky shall be stripped away, [12] and when Hell shall be heated up, [13] and when the Garden shall be brought near, [14] [each] soul shall know what it has presented. [15] But nay! I swear by the stars moving, [16] running and fading away, [17] by the night when it departs, [18] by the morning when it breathes, [19] verily, this is the word of a noble messenger, [20] endued with power, beside the Master of the throne established, [21] obeyed on high, trustworthy. [22] And your companion is not one possessed: [23] he saw him on the clear horizon; [24] and he is not about the mystery miserly. [25] And this is not the word of a banished demon! [26] So where are you going? [27] This is nothing less than a reminder for all people, [28] for whoever among you wishes to go straight. [29] And you will not so wish except as God wills, the Lord of all people.

This *sūrah* is thought to be of the Meccan period; it is listed as seventh according to traditional chronology, eighteenth according to Régis Blachère.[1] Two textual units can be clearly distinguished: an apocalyptical scene (1–14) and a warning attesting to the veracity of the mission of the Prophet (19–29), introduced by a series of oaths (15–18).

1. Régis Blachère (trans.), *Le Coran: Traduction nouvelle* (Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve, 1947–1950), II.36.

Composition

a) The First Part (1–14)

It is composed of twelve brief subordinate temporal clauses, introduced by *idhā* ("when") and followed by the main clause (14). The verses, most of them made up of nine syllables, are assonant and given a ternary rhythm. It might seem useless to look for a supplementary composition to this textual unit other than its simple and regular poetic structure. However, the verses are not all parallel in the same way: if the synonymous parallelism of verses 1–2 or the antithetical parallelism of verses 12–13 is evident, this is not the case in other verses. What, for example, are the abandoned camels (4) doing right after the apocalyptic scene of mountains in flight (3)? Why do the bubbling seas, an image similar to that of the mountains in movement, only appear three verses later? Why does the question of verse 9 interrupt the rhythm of the twelve clauses?[2] Rhetorical analysis furnishes an answer to these questions. It will group together verses 1–14 into two "sub-parts": the first (1–10) describes the cosmic cataclysm, followed by the judgment of souls; the second part (11–14) announces the coming of the new world of retribution (Hell and Paradise) for each soul.

The first sub-part (1–10) is composed of three pieces (1–2, 3–6, 7–10): the first evokes the cosmic cataclysm in the heavens, the second the cataclysm on earth, while the third sets up the judgment.

The First Piece (1–2)

This is a simple synonymous bi-member segment: in the heavens the lights (the sun and the stars) go out, darkening the day as well as the night.

[1] When	the sun	*shall be darkened*,
[2] and when	the stars	*shall be dimmed*,

The commentators give two main meanings to *kuwwirat* (1): "will be rolled up" or "darkened." Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) points out that, in this case, the two meanings come together: for if the light of the sun is rolled up, like a turban or a cloth, the sun becomes dark by that very fact.[3]

2. Richard Bell points out: "v. 8, 9 fall a little out of form, but there is no reason to suspect that an addition has been made," *The Qur'ān: translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh, T.&T. Clark, 1960), II.638.

3. Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1968), *ad*.

The Second Piece (3–6)

Three segments are arranged in a concentric manner ABA': two parallel uni-members (3 and 6) frame a bi-member (4–5). Since the latter two are equally parallel, the four members are found to be arranged in a mirror (ab/b'a').[4]

A – [3] and when	THE MOUNTAINS	shall be moved,
B = [4] and when	*the she-camels ten months with young*	shall be left,
= [5] and when	*the wild beasts*	shall be driven together,
A' [6] and when	THE SEAS	shall be made up to boil,

In A-A' the natural elements, mountains and seas, are put in motion.

In B the animals, both domestic (camels) and wild, are threatened by death: camels on the point of giving birth (in their tenth month) are abandoned by their guardians, who take flight; the wild beasts gather together under the effect of the terror, ready to let themselves be killed (according to an interpretation attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās).[5]

4. By considering the parallelism between verses 3 and 6, Friedrich Rückert (d. 1866) in his poetic translation of the Qurʾān, placed verse 6 after verse 3. But in so doing, he destroyed the rhetorical chiasm! See Rückert, *Der Koran in der Übersetzung von Friedrich Rückert*, ed. Hartmut Bobzin with explanatory remarks by Wolfdietrich Fischer (Würzburg: ERGON, 2000), 455.

5. Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, *ad.*

The Third Piece (7–10)

A – [7] and when	the souls	SHALL BE PAIRED,
B = [8] and when	the female child buried alive	shall be asked:
= [9] "For what sin		was she put to death?"
A'– [10] and when	the scrolls	SHALL BE SPREAD OPEN,

Like the preceding piece, this one is also composed of three segments arranged concentrically (ABA'). The judgment is presented in three moments: the appearance of the resurrected before the Judge (7), the interrogation (8–9) and the testimony (10).

The first segment (7), a uni-member, introduces the souls who have been brought together. The second segment (8–9) announces the interrogation concerning a particular case—that of a young girl who had been buried alive in accordance with a barbaric pre-Islamic custom.[6] The central placement of this segment and its interrogative form draw the attention of the listener/reader to this particular case. The polemical intention addressed to pagan listeners is evident. The third segment (10), also a uni-member, brings forth documents of proof: the sheets on which the deeds of people are written.

The outer segments are in the plural and use verbs which connote a certain opposition: whereas the souls are brought together (literally "coupled," *zuwwijat*) the sheets on which the deeds of the good and the evil are registered are "unfurled." For the commentators, the coming together of souls signifies either the assembling of the good with the good and the evil with the evil or the reunification of souls with their bodies at the moment of the resurrection.

6. There is another allusion to this custom in Q 16:59. Blachère believes that it is possible that the feminine *al-maw'ūdah* (the sacrificed female) refers to the soul (*nafs)* and would therefore designate "the criminals who, on the Day of Judgment, will have to answer for their wicked deeds," *Le Coran*, II.37–38, n. 8.

The second sub-part (11–14) could be considered as a piece formed by three segments. But since it is parallel to the first sub-part (see the following page) and thus is placed at the same level of composition, we will also consider it as being composed of three pieces—but very abridged pieces—a phenomenon of abbreviation frequent in Semitic rhetoric, in which the second element of a parallelism is often much shorter than the first.

– [11] and	WHEN	the sky	shall be stripped away,
= [12] and	WHEN	***Hell***	*shall be heated up*,
= [13] and	WHEN	***the Garden***	*shall be brought near*,
+ [14] shall know		[every] soul	what it has presented.

The first piece (11) is the length of a uni-member segment. The sky disappears, taken away like a blanket or a skin stripped from a beast.

In the second piece (12–13), the length of a bi-member segment, Hell and Paradise appear. The third piece, the length of uni-member segment (14), is the main clause of all the temporal subordinates which precede it (1–13). It returns to the theme of the judgment of souls (7–10) but under the aspect of retribution: once the soul is in Hell or Paradise it will be presented with evidence of the good or evil it has done.